

Why and how angkor wat was built history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Angkor Wat, a symbol of pride for Cambodians appearing on their national flag, is located approximately 5.5 km north of modern day Siem Reap in Cambodia. With the amazing scale, it is considered the largest religious architecture in the world and also declared by UNESCO as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. As a result; it is no surprise that Cambodia has definitely become a very popular destination in South East Asia. By the way, there is not only its size but also incredibly wonderful sculptures and bas-reliefs around that would reveal the power and civilization of the ancient Khmer empire and the beliefs behind it.

Angkor Wat is the greatest masterpiece of Khmer architecture. It was built as a state temple and capital city during the 12th century by Suryavaram II, Khmer Emperor, while the Khmer civilization was being powerful. There are some hypotheses of the reasons to build the Angkor Wat as the follows;

Dedication to Vishnu, the Hindu god

In the past time, there were two great religions from India accepted by the Khmers which were Hinduism and Buddhism, but in the Angkor periods, they adopted the Hinduism as an important role of the empire.

As the residence of gods and the higher skills of craftsmen, sandstone was used as the main building material. With this mega project, there were lots of workers and professional workers used for various jobs such as doing the masonry, heaving the sandstone, preparing the blocks and pillars, doing logistics and carving. The workers would be unskilled men, farmers or slaves but stonemasons and sculptors were professional workers. Therefore; the total numbers of them are hard to estimate. However, Terri Paajanen(2007)

<https://assignbuster.com/why-and-how-angkor-wat-was-built-history-essay/>

state that Angkor Wat took 37 years to complete with a work force of more than 50, 000 men.

Numerous stones were carved with high-class craftsmanship to illustrate the gods and the deities. Even though Visnu, the preserver of the world, was the main deity, the work of art showed that Khmer people also paid homage to all the Vedic gods and goddesses. The walls of the outer gallery were covered in bas-relief carvings which was about 800 m long and 3 tiers high. The bas-relief carving of this temple was the highest quality. The stories in it were the scenes from Hindu epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata in Khmer style, and some important incidents of Khmer history. Furthermore, it showed the aesthetics and intelligence of Khmer artisans through their art work.

Emperor funerary object

Angkor style is the classical one of the Khmer architecture. The towers were designed like the lotus buds. The central tower was the tallest and largest of the surrounding 4 towers. This was shown that Hindu cosmology was used as a symbolic representation of Khmer architecture imaging a perfect world in geometrical harmony. Debopriya Bose (n. d.) discuss that the Angkor Wat was built using the two fundamental plans of Khmer architecture: the Temple Mountain and the Galleried Temple. According to the Temple Mountain plan, the temple is depicted as Mount Meru, the abode of Hindu gods. The wall and moat enclosing the temple represent mountains and oceans respectively. And Martin Gray (n. d.) discuss that Angkor Wat is a symbolic representation of Hindu cosmology. Consisting of an enormous temple symbolizing the

mythic Mt. Meru, its five inter-nested rectangular walls and moats represent chains of mountains and the cosmic ocean.

Besides the concept of cosmic ocean, the moats, dikes, and large reservoirs were also necessary to agriculture and everyday life of Khmer people. There are two large Barays in the east and the west. The first one was 7.5 km long, 1.83 km wide and 4-5 m deep with holding over 55 million cubic meter of water. And another was almost twice larger with holding up 123 million cubic meter of water. They keep the water and obviously help to prevent floods from heavy rainfall during the Monsoon season. And they are also help irrigating water to the farmland during the dry season. Therefore; Khmer people could cultivate crops and rice two to three times in a year.

According to the structure, although the construction consistently followed the basic principles of Khmer architecture such as the rectangle layout, temple mountain and cosmic oceans, there were a different concept from other temples built in the same time. This place faced the west instead of the east. Debopriya Bose (n. d.) discuss that some believe that this deviation from the usual orientation of Khmer temples towards the east, is because it is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, who is associated with the west direction.

However, some other scholars believe that orientation towards the west direction reflects Suryavarman II's desire to use the temple for personal funerary purpose. The Ancient Web(n. d.) discuss that Orthodox archaeologists sometimes interpret the temples of the Angkor complex as tombs of megalomaniacal kings yet in reality those kings designed and constructed the temples as a form of service to both god and their own subjects.

Devaraja belief

Eleanor Mannikka(1996) state that the relationships among architecture, political and spiritual authority, and the cosmos. Angkor Wat is both a Hindu temple to the god Vishnu and a royal foundation whose patron, Suryavarman II, promoted the intersection of god (deva) and king (raja) central to the authority of his Cambodian Angkor dynasty. And the Ancient Web(n. d.) discuss that both Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism played an important role as the political, religious and philosophical pillars of Khmer Civilization by which the king was revered as the god-king or deva-raja. This ideology enabled the king to rule over the country as an absolute monarch with sovereign spirituality over his people, and thus enhanced the unity of the kingdom. Successive kings were able to mobilize large manpower to serve the army, to maintain extensive irrigation system and to build numerous massive temples.

The devaraja, or divine king, Suryavraman II, believed himself to be an incarnations of Vishnu on earth. This belief also influenced expanding to Southeast Asia. Consequently, the Angkor Wat was built not only by serving concurrently as a temple for Vishnu and a place for king, but also displaying the great power of the empire. Although it was abandoned in the later centuries, it remains documenting records about the spread of Hinduism to Southeast Asia and the ability of Khmer emperor to gather people sufficient to build a memorial thing with an extraordinary scale.

In conclusion, with those assumptions and evidences, they are shown that Hinduism is the most influencing belief of constructing Angkor Wat. In

addition, what we have known is not only the reasons why Angkor Wat was built, but also the peak of Khmer political and military authority in that era. Angkor Wat represents the center of what was once a very powerful Khmer empire that had the large area covered Indo-China from the 9th to the 13th century. Otherwise, it is like all great empires, the Khmer ultimately weakened in the 15th century. But still, they left some incredible and outstanding monuments, as well as an abundant sculptures and carvings in sandstone as a great symbol of beauty and sanctity.