

Spring 2023 Arts of Asia Lecture Series  
Global Connections: Asia and the Arts in the Second Millennium of the Common Era  
Sponsored by the *Society for Asian Art*

## **Miraculous and Threatening Waters in Mainland Southeast Asia**

Forrest McGill, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

February 17, 2023

### **Beneficent uses of water**

Drinking (if pure)

Nourishment of crops

Transport, both real and symbolic

Cleansing and purification

Lustration and solemnizing oaths and

donations

### **Threats of water**

Poisoning (if impure)

Flood

Drowning

### **Names and terms**

Baray (Khmer)= reservoir or tank

Lake Anavatapta (Sanskrit) Anotatta (Pali) Important lake in Buddhist sacred geography

Earth Goddess who wrings her hair to flood Mara's forces (Thai: Mae Thorani [=Sanskrit: Dharani], Burmese: Wathundaye [=Sanskrit: Vasundhara])

Vessantara (Pali) Vishvantara (Sanskrit) The Buddha in an immediately previous life as a prince who perfects the virtue of generosity by giving away everything dear to him

### **For further information**

*Jungle Atlantis*, BBC two-episode series, 2014. (Good, in spite of title). Available on BBC Select (\$4.99/month) in Prime Video. Discusses and illustrates, among other subjects, the city of Angkor's elaborate water-control systems and how their deterioration partly as a result of extreme climate events led to the city's decline. Includes interviews with noted archeologists and other experts.

*A Temple Saved from the Waters*, "relates the major stages of the restoration work carried out by the École française d'Extrême-Orient and the Cambodian authority APSARA (Authority for the Protection of the Site and the Development of the Region) from 2013 to May 2018." 1 hour 17 min. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNu-\\_9XPU3Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNu-_9XPU3Y)

Feneley, Marnie, Dan Penny, and Roland Fletcher, "Claiming the hydraulic network of Angkor with Viṣṇu: A multidisciplinary approach including the analysis of archaeological remains, digital modelling and radiocarbon dating: With evidence for a 12th century renovation of the West Mebon," *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 2016, 9. 275-292. 10.1016/j.jasrep.2016.06.031. Available online.

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Mithen, Steven J., "The hydraulic City: Water Management by the Kings of Angkor, AD 802-1327," in Steven J. Mithen and Sue Mithen. *Thirst : Water and Power in the Ancient World*. Phoenix, 2013.

Pattaratorn Chirapravati, "Phra Mae Thorani: The Earth goddess in Modern Thai Buddhism, with appendix by Trent Walker, in *Decoding Southeast Asian Art : Studies in Honor of Piriya Krairiksh*. River Books, 2022.

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Roveda, Vittorio. *Images of the Gods : Khmer Mythology in Cambodia Thailand and Laos*. River Books, 2005.

Stark, Miriam. "From the Mekong to the Tonle Sap: Water Management and Cosmology in Cambodia's Ancient States" in Stephanie Rost, *Irrigation in Early States : New Directions*. University of Chicago Press, 2022.

Sumet Jumsai. *Naga: Cultural Origins in Siam and the West Pacific*. Oxford University Press 1988. Quirky and not reliable in a lot of details, but has interesting ideas and illustrations.

Translation of the Vessantara Jataka:

Cowell, Edward B. and W. H. D. Rouse, *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births : Translated from the Pāli by Various Hands*. Vol VI. Cambridge University Press, 1907 (and other editions and reprints. Can also be found online in full text.)