



MAY
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fao Casa gazette

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- THE COLOSSEUM

- CUBISM

- IL POTERE MAGICO DELLE PIETRE

- THE ENIGMA LIVES ON IN SIEM REAP

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ART & CULTURE

6 **The Colosseum: Where history happens before your eyes and under your feet**
by Martina Pisani

8 **Cubism: Breaking away from traditional art**
by Dr Fahmi Bishay

ACTIVITIES

12 **Echoes**
di Enrica Romanazzo

SAPERI & SAPORI

14 **Il potere magico delle pietre**
di Enrica Romanazzo

16 **Acquamarina in Valtellina!**
di Sefora Farinacci

TOURISM

20 **Living Vicariously Through the Naga: The Enigma Lives On in Siem Reap...**
by Alexia Maria Di Fabio

ACTIVITIES

26 **Provence on the road with StarTrekK**

POEMS

28 **"Mamma"**
"12 Maggio"
by Armando Bettozzi

CULTURE

30 **Library New Books**

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FOOTBALL WOMEN	<i>Ms R. Nettuno</i>	56742
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TABLE TENNIS	<i>Ms B. Killerman</i>	55552
TENNIS	<i>Ms A. Gabrielli</i>	53012

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THE COLOSSEUM: WHERE HISTORY HAPPENS BEFORE YOUR EYES AND UNDER YOUR FEET



by **Martina Pisani**

Graduated in Oriental Languages and Civilizations, specialized in Japanese culture and language. She loves photography and writing as hobbies

An ancient monument more famous than the Colosseum is hard to find in the entire world. The erection of the symbol of the city of Rome, anciently called Amphitheatrum Flavium (The Flavian Amphitheatre), began under the emperor Vespasian in 72 AD and was completed in 80 AD by his successor, Titus. Under the reign of Domitian (81 AD - 90 AD) some modifications were made to the building. Its original name derives from the Flavian Dynasty in which merge all the accomplishments of the three emperors. It is during medieval times that the current name was given. The Colosseum was raised near a huge Nero's bronze statue 35-meter tall, a colossus indeed, whose base was destroyed during the Fascist Era. Even though the name of the Colosseum is usually associated with its great dimensions, the present name of the Amphitheater derives from the fact that it was located next to that colossal statue.



The Colosseum was built mainly to entertain the population. In the Colosseum battles between gladiators were held, also reproducing hunting and killing scenes (called venationes from the Latin word venatio, “animals hunt”) of exotic beasts, which were captured and brought to Rome from the edges of the Roman Empire.

Most of the interior of the monument has collapsed. The arena, previously made by removable planks of wood covered by sand, has been destroyed by the hand of time. In recent times a small part of the ancient floor has been rebuilt so as to make visible what was anciently hidden under it: the undergrounds. Probably the most fascinating part of

the Colosseum, the undergrounds are an intricate maze. Here is where gladiators waited until the battle began. As the undergrounds were located 6 meters under the arena floor, they were almost dark. The only source of light consisted in torches hanging on the walls. The equipment representing different historical battles was built and preserved here, as well as the weapons and other instruments used during the fighting.




Some parts of the undergrounds were used to host cages to keep the animals until it was time to unleash them against the gladiators. A system of lifting devices was used to lift men and beasts separately on to the arena floor allowing the audience to assist at spectacular entrances making them roar with surprise. By using your imagination you can hear the screaming voices of the public of the Amphitheater yelling the names of their favorite gladiator fighting on the dusty floor of the arena as if you were there in person.

The entire show was thought up, planned and organized in detail to the full enjoyment of spectators. While the undergrounds are the most captivating part of the Amphitheater, surprises do not end here. It is possible to visit the rebuilt portion of the arena and the Belvedere as well to catch a sight of the Colosseum from every angle.





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CUBISM: BREAKING AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL ART



by Dr Fahmi Bishay

Dr Bishay is an FAO retiree and a senior consultant in agricultural policy analysis and sustainable economic development. A writer and an artist. This is his self-portrait

Introduction

During a recent trip to France, in late January 2019, I visited a Cubism exhibition at Pompidou Centre in Paris. The exhibition showed a large number of world class masterpieces of cubism art. This article highlights the meaning, origin and evolution of the art with a few examples of cubist works by Gauguin, Picasso and Braque.

The Meaning and Origin of Cubism

Cubism art is the process of breaking away from the traditional, classical and iconic art by using geometrics and abstraction in art. Cubism emphasized the flat, two-dimensional surface of the picture plane. It rejected the traditional techniques of perspective, foreshortening, modeling and chiaroscuro. It claimed that theories of art represent limitations to art and nature. Cubist artists were not bound by form, texture, color or space. They developed a new painting style that showed fragmented objects with their several sides seen simultaneously. Cubism was the first style of abstract art.

It is believed that cubism was born in Paris by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque at the beginning of the 20th century. They were the masters of Cubism and the developers of this new form of art. However, it can be argued that the origin of cubism dates back to much earlier times: It was found in ancient primitive art works such as in African sculptures (Figure 1).

The cubist artists of the early Twenty Century were perhaps inspired by those ancient works.

From Cézanne and Gauguin to Picasso and Braque

Paul Cézanne paved the way to cubism by his lesson to the younger artists in France. He wrote: "Treat nature in terms of cylinder, the sphere and the cone". Paul Gauguin must have also inspired the cubist artists by his primitive art works in Latin America (Figure 2).



*Figure 1. Artist unknown.
A mask from Gabon
Pompidou Centre in Paris*



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At the early 20th Century, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque developed the cubism art by inventing a new kind of art. They invented a new visual and conceptual language. The traditional concepts of perspective were replaced by volumes, cubes and flattened patterns into planes and facets. Their initial experimental works were spread to other artists, in particular: Fernand Leger, Juan Gris and Henri Laurens. Their cubism experiment was, thus, transformed into an art movement.



Figure 2. Paul Gauguin. *Oviri, (obstacles)*, (1894)
Museum d'Orsay, Paris

Picasso: The Father of Cubism

Pablo Picasso was the most prominent cubist and the father of the cubism school. Of his outstanding and rich heritage of art works, he produced thousands of cubist paintings. One of his cubist masterpieces was his painting: *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*, (The Ladies of Avignon), (Figure 3). This painting highlights some of the key elements of Picasso's new school of cubism: the subject is eclipsed in favor

of a complex formal composition; and following on Cézanne's famous painting of *Les Baigneuses (The Bathers)*, Picasso's figures are integrated into the background of drapes, thus flattening the painting's perspective. In 1909 Picasso produced a series of paintings and sculptures of his fiancée: Fernande Olivier, (Figure 4).

Here we can see how Picasso replaced perspective and volume by flat frontal painting; shapes in those works were suggested by interlinked facets and structural lines.

Braque: A Master of Cubism

Along with Picasso, Georges Braque was a master and a great contributor to the cubism art. Of his many cubist masterpieces, Figure 5 shows his painting of a woman. On explaining this painting, Braque wrote: "I could not present a woman in all her natural beauty. I haven't the skill. No one does. I must, in consequence, create a new kind of beauty, the beauty that appears to me in terms of volume, line, mass, weight, and through that beauty, I interpret my subjective impression. I want to expose the Absolute and not merely the artificial woman". Figure 6 shows another cubist masterpiece by Braque.



Figure 3. Pablo Picasso.
Les Femmes d'Alger, (O. J. R. M.)
(The Ladies of Avignon)
(1906-1907)
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York



Figure 4. Pablo Picasso.
Portrait of Fernande Olivier
(1909) Frankfort Museum



Figure 5. Georges Braque.
Grand nu, 1907-1908
Pompidou Centre, Paris



Figure 6. Georges Braque.
Broc et Violon. (Broc and Violin).
(1909-1910)
Kunst Museum, Basel,
Switzerland

Cubist paintings cover a variety of subjects, such as: letters, musical instruments, bottles, pitchers, glasses, newspapers, still lifes, the human face, the human figure and abstract figurations.

Concluding Remarks

The Cubism art was inspired by Cezanne, Gauguin and ancient primitive art such as African sculptures, and developed by Picasso and Braque at the early 20th century. Since then, it has been followed up by many an artist, and thus became an art movement. Cubism and abstract art are subjective in nature where artists express their feelings, emotions, characters, colors, geometry and whatever personal passions they experience. This perception of subjectivity in cubism is vividly highlighted by Braque. He wrote: *“New means new subjects. The aim is not to reconstitute an anecdote fact, but to constitute a pictorial fact. To work from nature is to improvise. The senses deform, the mind forms. I love the rule that corrects emotion.”*

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ECHOES

di Lorenzo De Liberato e diretto da Stefano Patti

Un'originale rappresentazione teatrale che ha catturato la mia attenzione in un'ora di spettacolo talmente intensa da sembrare brevissima



di Enrica Romanazzo

Sostiene e promuove da anni le attività della FAO STAFF COOP. Nel contempo segue ed organizza eventi in difesa dell'ambiente e per la valorizzazione del territorio salentino.

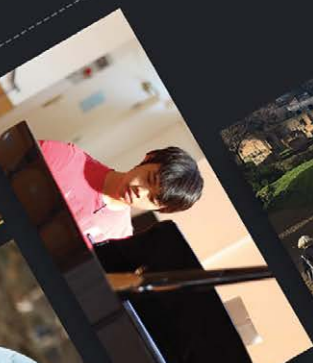
Sono stata invitata da Umberto Papadia (nostro insegnante di Pizzica, musicista ed artista a 360 gradi) a questo interessantissimo spettacolo (al Nuovo Teatro San Paolo con cui Umberto collabora) di cui vi voglio raccontare perché merita per la particolarità del tema trattato, la bravura degli attori (Stefano Patti e Marco Quaglia) e la qualità del testo di Lorenzo De Liberato. Un capolavoro che, riproposto in Inglese, ha debuttato persino nella Grande Mela. Trattasi di un thriller ambientato in uno scenario post-apocalittico con un'impostazione registica quasi cinematografica. Il tutto si svolge intorno ad un tavolo, in un confronto diretto tra un giornalista ed un carnefice, che sviscerano tematiche come la Fede, la Politica, l'Economia, il Potere. Il confronto è su un futuro distopico: in un'immaginaria società accadono fatti spaventosi su una terra divisa in grandi blocchi governativi. Non esiste la democrazia come la conosciamo, né l'umanità come la intendiamo oggi. Efficacissimo è il testo per la semplicità con cui è impostata un'analisi politica impietosa che allude a guerre, crisi economiche, cambiamenti climatici, distruzione e quindi problemi per l'umanità creati ad arte dai potenti per poter poi offrire costose soluzioni a loro personale profitto. Gli inquietanti temi vengono trattati con una semplicità strutturale molto incisiva che esalta l'impeccabile drammaturgia, e che a mio avviso valorizza soprattutto la bravura e la forza di Marco Quaglia, che, nel ruolo del misterioso, folle, diabolico ECOH, propone un'interessante interpretazione di un moderno "cattivo". La sua recitazione stupisce ad ogni parola, pausa, smorfia, contrazione muscolare attraverso le quali l'attore delinea il profilo perfetto del soggetto assetato di potere..... Lo svolgimento dei dialoghi sembra suggerire quanto la voglia di potere sia frutto di un disagio personale, affettivo, che affonda le radici nella mancanza di attenzione e di amore subita durante l'infanzia. La disabitudine al coinvolgimento emotivo, e quindi la totale mancanza di empatia verso altri individui, il distorto bisogno di percepire ammirazione che induce il soggetto ad un sentimento esagerato della propria importanza e l'idealizzazione del proprio sé, emergono nella sua impeccabile interpretazione come evidenti sintomi di un disturbo narcisistico che si manifesta con l'uso di una forma di egocentrismo patologico, con l'espressione di un egoismo profondo di cui tali soggetti sembrano non essere consapevoli, e le cui conseguenze sono tali da produrre in loro significative difficoltà relazionali e affettive e quel che è peggio, in alcuni casi... disastri sociali. Il dialogo culmina in una sorprendente rivelazione che non intendo svelare per non rovinare il finale a chi fosse interessato ad assistere a questa originale rappresentazione teatrale che ha catturato la mia attenzione in un'ora di spettacolo talmente intensa da sembrare brevissima...



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Il Potere Magico delle Pietre

Quando vedi una pietra che giace nel letto secco di un fiume, quando una gemma sfaccettata incastonata in un anello ti fa sognare, quando il tuo sguardo è attratto dalla luce di un cristallo, significa che sei in balia dell'Antico Potere delle pietre. Le Pietre e la loro Magia ti stanno interrogando.....scegli tu la risposta giusta



di Enrica Romanazzo

Sostiene e promuove da anni le attività della FAO STAFF COOP. Nel contempo segue ed organizza eventi in difesa dell'ambiente e per la valorizzazione del territorio salentino

Quando i primi esseri umani si accorsero che nelle pietre che avevano intorno era racchiusa una potente energia capace di dare forza e conferire potere, cominciarono ad usarle come amuleti, sotto forma di piccoli oggetti da portare al collo per scacciare forze maligne e contrastare il male. Tanto da arrivare ad adorarle come divinità, e offrirle in sacrificio o interrarle nei campi per aumentarne la fertilità. Le pietre erano considerate strumenti magici perché ritenute capaci di trasmettere i loro poteri e la loro energia.

LA MAGIA DELLE PIETRE ESISTE DAVVERO?

Le gemme hanno sempre affascinato l'uomo, che ha attribuito ai loro diversi minerali particolari virtù e significati occulti. Nell'antico Egitto, ad esempio, le gemme non avevano solo funzione ornamentale ma erano considerate oggetti mistici e indispensabili per ottenere successo, fama, fortuna...la malachite con cui gli antichi



Egizi usavano dipingersi le palpebre, serviva a proteggerli dal sole e a disinfettare gli occhi grazie alla presenza del carbonato di rame presente nella pietra. In passato, le pietre erano riconosciute per le loro proprietà "terapeutiche" come appare in antichi manoscritti, contenenti indicazioni di come venivano utilizzati preparati a base di pietre preziose triturate.

Nei testi dell'Ayurveda indiana leggiamo che le perle venivano ridotte in polvere per farne elementi curativi delle rughe, del fegato ed anche della menopausa. In India, in tempi antichi, si celebrava persino un rito simile a quello del battesimo cristiano, durante il quale al neonato veniva assegnata la sua pietra

astrologica, che l'accompagnava poi per tutto il cammino della sua vita. **Ametista, Agata, Acquamarina per cominciare con la "A maiuscola"**...alcune pietre sono fonte di calore e forza per superare i momenti bui. Altre sono associate alla pace, al coraggio e alla stabilità, o simbolo di purezza dei sentimenti, altre sembrano essere un vero antidoto contro le affezioni psicosomatiche, in quanto tali da placare ansia e nervosismo e produrre un vero effetto calmante, soprattutto sulle donne... Le pietre dure, da tempo utilizzate in oreficeria perché belle nel loro aspetto e colore, luminose e preziose, incastonate in anelli e collane, sono soprattutto uno scrigno di virtù e di proprietà. La loro energia naturale si trasmette al solo contatto con la mano. Sembra proprio che il potere delle pietre sia reale ed estremamente efficace. Impariamo a conoscerne le benefiche proprietà e a servircene.



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ACQUAMARINA....IN VALTELLINA!

L'acquamarina è una gemma che ci fa spaziare attraverso mondi



di Sefora Farinacci

specialista in analisi delle gemme, perle e diamanti e titolare della Sefora Gioielli a Roma

Il nome di acqua marina deriva dal latino acqua di mare e gli antichi marinai sostenevano che la gemma avesse il potere di calmare le onde, di domarle tenendo i marinai al sicuro. Nasce da qui la sua valenza di talismano. In seguito le sono stati attribuiti innumerevoli altri poteri: quello di proteggere i matrimoni (era usanza regalare un'acqua marina alla sposa, per proteggere l'unione); si credeva che questo berillo (dal greco antico "beryllos" gemma verde-blu) proteggesse i soldati in battaglia. Tutte le pietre di colore blu/azzurro, rendono chi le indossa estremamente affascinante, invincibile, amabile e particolarmente brillante nella conversazione.



LA VAL CODERA: una "gemma" preziosa, incastonata nell'arco alpino, ricca di attrazioni naturalistiche ed enogastronomiche

L'Acquamarina, ci conduce, attraverso i giacimenti italiani, alla scoperta di una zona del nostro paese particolarmente interessante, sia sotto il profilo naturalistico che enogastronomico.

La Val Codéra, tra le zone di estrazione del minerale berillo, della varietà acquamarina, è una delle più suggestive ed amate in provincia di Sondrio, ancora preservata dall'accesso degli autoveicoli per la mancanza di una strada percorribile. Una leggenda narra che Dio, dopo aver fatto il mondo, si ritrovò con un mucchio di pietre avanzate: le cosparses un pó alla rinfusa e queste pietre crearono la valle, il cui nome, infatti, deriva da "cotaria" e quindi da "cote", cioè masso. Una valle la cui asprezza, non priva di angoli sorridenti e gentili, è un elemento essenziale del suo fascino.

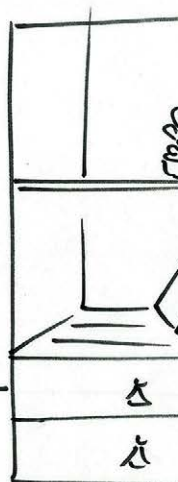
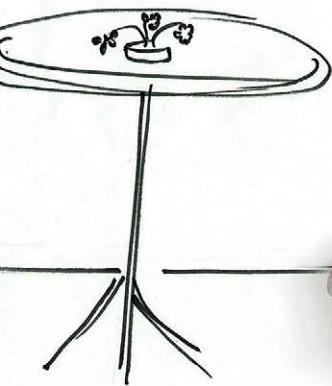
È una valle unica, nell'intero arco alpino, almeno per un aspetto: se abbiamo modo di risalirla interamente, fino al bivacco Pedroni-Del Prà (m. 2600), al cospetto del suo circo terminale, potremmo, in qualità di escursionisti, riposare in uno

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scenario che dista almeno otto ore di cammino dalla più vicina automobile. Il che ci regala uno straordinario sentimento di sospensione da tutto quanto ci può ricondurre alla civiltà, o meglio, alla sua forma presente. Conosciuta per le sue favolose discese, gustosi formaggi e centri benessere in montagna, è una valle per gli amanti del trekking e del buon cibo. Se ne apprezzano infatti anche gli alimenti e i vini. La Valtellina è infatti una zona della Lombardia dove vengono prodotti anche grandi vini rossi come l'Inferno e il Grumello. La produzione di vino in Valtellina ha una storia antichissima e pare che già le prime popolazioni di passaggio nella valle dell'Adda - dai Celti ai Romani, fino ai Longobardi - avessero iniziato a sfruttare le proprietà uniche del territorio per la viticoltura: clima mite, sole garantito dall'esposizione a sud (la Valtellina corre infatti orizzontalmente, da ovest a est), le possenti Alpi a proteggere da venti e umidità, il Lago di Como a temperare il clima. Cosa volere di più?

Al resto ci ha pensato il lavoro dell'uomo, tanto prezioso quanto faticoso, nell'erodere terreno alla montagna per convertirlo in vigneto, realizzando quei terrazzamenti e muretti a secco che caratterizzano il fianco della montagna da Ardenno a Tirano. Sono questi sacrifici che hanno fatto ottenere ai valtelinesi il riconoscimento di viticoltura eroica e conferito ai suoi prodotti - i rinomati vini valtelinesi - caratteristiche e proprietà uniche al mondo. Accanto a Valtellina Superiore DOCG, Rosso di Valtellina DOCG, Inferno, Grumello e Sassella, è con ogni probabilità lo Sforzato a fregiarsi del titolo di vino valtellino più ricercato. Lo Sforsat (Sforzato in dialetto locale) deve il suo nome e la sua peculiarità al metodo di produzione da cui lo si ricava da secoli. L'abbinamento dello Sforzato a tavola coinvolge selvaggina e cacciagione, ma questo vino si sposa bene anche con il formaggio stagionato e stravecchio. L'aspetto con cui si presenta il più famoso vino valtellino è un tipico colore rosso rubino, che può tendere a tonalità granata con l'invecchiamento. Un felice accoppiamento cromatico con l'azzurro intenso di acquamarina.

Caratteristiche dell'acquamarina

L'acquamarina è un membro della famiglia dei berilli, è la varietà blu chiara di questo minerale, e deve il proprio colore caratteristico alla presenza di tracce di ferro. Nella scala di Mohs, la durezza è pari a 7.5/8. Il berillo, può presentarsi con diverse colorazioni: verde, cioè il più noto smeraldo; giallo ovvero eliodoro; rosa, ossia la morganite. Il berillo è un silicato relativamente raro e cristallizza in rocce ignee e metamorfiche in diverse parti del mondo. Tra le più importanti zone di estrazione, c'è lo stato del Minas Gerais in Brasile. Le gemme più belle in assoluto, sono state estratte nel corso degli ultimi due secoli, nelle miniere immerse in un panorama assolutamente unico nel suo genere, racchiuse fra montagne, fiumi, colline e foreste.

Sempre in Brasile, merita una citazione la qualità Santa Maria di questo meraviglioso berillo, che prende il nome dalla zona nella quale viene estratto, appunto Santa Maria di Itabira e che si caratterizza per il colore intenso,

profondo e particolarmente brillante. Altra zona estrattiva per eccellenza è il Pakistan; le gemme estratte in questa zona, composta da inospitali montagne e verdissime e fertillissime vallate, sono chiamate “water clear” e sono caratterizzate dal loro colore azzurro chiaro. Altre miniere si trovano anche in Kenia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Zambia e Mozambico, per quanto attiene al continente Africano, mentre alcune zone di estrazione interessanti si trovano negli Stati Uniti (Colorado e California nella zona di San Diego), in Cina, in Myanmar, in Russia e in Ucraina. Quindi l’acquamarina è una gemma che ci fa spaziare attraverso mondi e realtà diverse. Tra i regali famosi dei quali questa pietra fu protagonista, ricordiamo quello del governo Brasiliano che nel 1936 donò alla First Lady degli Stati Uniti, Eleanor Roosevelt una meravigliosa acquamarina di taglio rettangolare, blu scuro, del peso di ct. 1,298: la più grande di due pietre sfaccettate ricavate da un grezzo del peso di 1,3 kg. Oggi questa meravigliosa gemma è ospitata nel Franklin D. Roosevelt Museum a New York, nel cuore di Hyde Park.

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LIVING VICARIOUSLY THROUGH THE NAGA: THE ENIGMA LIVES ON IN SIEM REAP...



by Alexia Maria Di Fabio

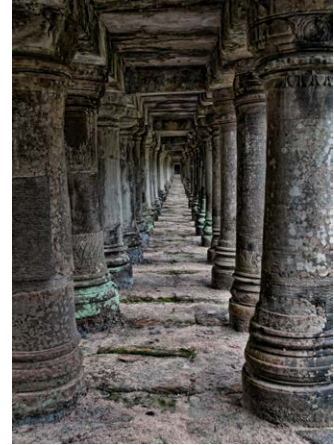
With an international academic background in the area of communication and international affairs, she currently works as an editor within FAO

Ensclosed in the rainforest and steeped in centennial mythology, lies the province of Siem Reap, home to the variegated archaeological extravaganza embodied by Angkor, the old seat of the Khmer Empire. Once shrouded in mystery, this verdant area is dotted far and wide with architectural wonders, however a particular quartet of magisterial temple complexes, open to the public today, accounts for much of its widely deserved mystique: Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, Preah Khan and Ta Prohm.

The historical promenade through Cambodian history could not begin at a better place than Angkor Wat. After a brisk, vertiginous walk over the frontal moats and their tall lily pads by way of the “floating” bridges, Angkor Wat starts etching its “mountainous”, verdigris contours on the horizon, in all its pomp and pageantry. Some tall palm trees here and there, wandering rhesus monkeys, endless meters of loggias reflecting over the water, and monks clad in orange walking back and forth, act as merely the castellated gateway and battlements to King Suryavarman II’s main, multi-storey building and its five signature turrets set against a perennial twilight sparkle.

Given the magnitude of this World Heritage structure, it would take more than one afternoon to visit it properly. Suffice it to say, to this day Angkor Wat is the largest standing religious building in the world. Still and all, its essence is to be found primarily in a threefold enigma. First of all, it is *per se* rather puzzling that Angkor Wat should be originally consecrated to none other than the Hindu divinity Vishnu. Today, Angkor Wat is both Hindu and Buddhist, but considering that Hinduism is not as geographically widespread as Buddhism from India eastwards and that it is an older religious philosophy, it begs a more in-depth question as to what exactly happened. Hence, the (originally and equally) Hindu *Ko Samut Teuk Dos* legend, also known as *Samudra manthan* (in Hindi); in other words, *The Churning of the Ocean of Milk*.

According to this founding epic, *Devas* (Gods) and *Asuras* (Demons) were forever at war to dominate the world. Ever more tired and running out of the strength, the *Devas* asked Vishnu for help. As a token for his help, Vishnu asked the *Devas* to search for Amrita, the Sacred Elixir of Immortality, from the depths of the cosmos. However, because the task was so difficult, the *Devas* were forced to ally with their antagonists, the power-voracious *Asuras*. Using Mount Meru as the pivotal point and the King of the *Nagas* (snakes), Vasuki, as a churning device, both factions placed themselves at different extremities of the Naga and started pulling, while many treasures emerged from the Ocean of Milk. In time, the *Asuras*, being closer to the head of the Naga, were eventually poisoned by the fumes it exhaled, only managing to save themselves when *Amrita* was delivered to them by a divinity emerging from the *Ocean of Milk*. This episode did not go unnoticed by the *Devas*; they promptly informed Vishnu, who managed, in turn, to steal back *Amrita* and hand it to the *Devas*, so that they could reign supreme and banish the *Asuras* to hell.





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This legendary tale represents the second enigma of Angkor Wat, and is virtually “unlocked” in the impossibly beautiful bas-reliefs stretching along the 49 meters of the east gallery, a grand spectacle where what could have been remnants of muted pink, ochre, and terra-cotta hues can still be slightly discerned by the naked eye between carvings. Also unlocked within Angkor Wat is the third enigma, whereby a Naga princess wed the First King of Ancient Cambodia, giving rise to the Cambodian people or Khmer. In this respect, Angkor Wat has various massive balustrades in the shape of the seven-headed Naga, each head representing the seven “races” of the Naga people.

A recurring theme in the Angkorian temples, the seven-headed Naga is part and parcel of Khmer cosmology, as are the Apsaras, the celestial dancing creatures whose main purview included entertaining royalty and divinities on earth with their perfunctory expressions.



The hypnotic tour through Khmer chronology continues between Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom, where a short pit-stop to the Baksei Chamkrong temple gives us a taste of what would seem to be yet another enigma. According to various “conspiracy” theories, there are uncanny stylistic similarities between the Mayan Pyramid of the Great Jaguar (in Tikal, Guatemala) and Baksei Chamkrong! Clearly, the knowledge and discoveries acquired thus far on the matter are not enough to reframe history, so to say; nonetheless this testament to the universal aspect of human imagination makes for some quite fascinating journeys!

On its part, Angkor Thom, the last capital city of the Khmer Empire, boasts a masterpiece triad of its own, the first of such being King Jayavarman VII’s exquisite 350-meter long Terrace of the Elephants. Once a royal platform to salute his military forces, this terrace features intricate carvings of lions, elephants and Garudas, the bird-like creatures pertaining to Hindu, Buddhist and Jain mythology, and stalwart nemesis of the Nagas. Located just off the Royal Square is the Terrace of the Leper King. Although there was a king with leprosy in Cambodian history, the name derives mainly from the erosion found on the statue of Yama, the God of the Underworld, carved within this site. This terrace might have been used for funerary/cremation rites.

Perhaps the most distinctive temple in Angkor Thom is the “baroque” Prasat Bayon. Entering through the South Gate, one is confronted with nothing short of yet another enigmatic vision, as 200 towering giant faces (four per tower) look down on you with their seraphic smiles and sphinx-like countenances. Although it is

unclear whether the faces depict Lokeshvara (the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion) or King Jayavarman VII, the two hypotheses do not necessarily exclude each other. While the bas-reliefs within the temple, portraying military scenes and other mundane events, are also worthy of note, the deeply rooted “intimidation/awe” deriving from the “scoping stares” remains the main highlight of the Bayon. For all we know, they might have been –and still are- quite a bulwark against the evil eye, if anything!

The eternal voyage of the Naga continues in the Neak Pean and Preah Khan temples, located north of Angkor Thom. Upon first impressions, and having to cross a long walkway on swampy waters before reaching the former, it is hard to believe that there might be a temple at the end of the glittering trail. However, Neak Pean juts out from a central sacred pool (believed to represent the mythical Lake Anavatapta and to have healing powers), surrounded by two “underwater” sculptures of the Naga. As regards the latter temple, it is the proof that nature (usually) claims –or ravages, in this case- back its own! At any rate, not even this inevitable and “vengeful” predicament has managed to cover up the ineffable magic of Preah Khan, home to Jayadevi (a sister-wife of King Jayavarman VII), among others. Moss, lichen and ferns slowly brush over the rubble and rickety beams framed by quasi-trompe

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loeil flourishes, while a vast array of delicate carvings, reliefs and friezes, not to mention the standing library ruins and stupa illuminated by the sun, complete this eerie, albeit paradoxically idyllic, setting on the green.



The encroaching nature and weathered look of Preah Khan, however, is solely a prologue to

the real devouring power of the forest subsequently witnessed at Ta Prohm, the culminating phase of this open-air museum survey. As soon as Ta Prohm's ruins are approached, the elusive footpaths give way to a stunning portrait of luxuriant foliage and creeping vines that lift as if they were deep-green shutters following each occasional waft of wind. Here, the Nagas and Apsaras have relinquished their leading roles to the true main protagonists, tetramelacea (*tetrameles nudiflora*), *ficus strangulosa* and *ceiba pentandra* (kapok), names that, given their peculiarity, would seem those of gods, but actually refer to gigantic trees.

Their imposing barks have literally taken over the temple complex, coiling up the ruins like the Nagas themselves... or is it that the trees are living vicariously through the Nagas and viceversa? Alas, not even Lara Croft could have possibly deciphered this last enigma, bound to live on for the centuries to come! But, like Lara Croft's alter-ego, we shall return...





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PROGRAM

DAY 1: Departure from Rome and arrival for Castellane, High Provence at 8:00 am- meeting at Bar Antico Casello (Via Tiburtina, 954 - Rebibbia Metro Station) for departure. Stops during the trip for lunch. 6:00 pm - arrival at Castellane, accommodation in hotel and, for those who wish, visit to the charming medieval village of Moustiers-St.Marie built on the rocks. Dinner at St.Moustiers-St.Marie and return to the hotel at Castellane for overnight stay.

DAY 2: Trekking among Verdon Gorges and kayaking on the river. Breakfast at the hotel and collection of packed lunch. 8:00 am - departure by bus and arrival to Chalet de La Maline for starting trekking on the Martel Trail till Chalet La Palud. More specifically: The Martel Trail: 13km, uphill height 190m/downhill 300m; about 6 hours; difficulty: E. 3:00 pm - Bus transfer to Aiguines for kayak rental. 4:00 pm - Kayaking from Plage du Galetas, Aiguines, paddling through the Verdon Gorges. Return to the hotel, dinner in Castellane and return to the hotel for overnight stay.

DAY 3: Luberon Regional Park, Lavender Route, trekking at Roussillon's Colorado. Breakfast at the hotel and collection of packed lunch. 8:00 am - departure by bus to the Plateau of Valensole, across the Lavender Route. Along the route stops will be made in locations such as: villages, lavender distilleries, lavender honey beekeepers, local marketplaces and wine cellars. Lunch. Departure by bus to Lagarde D'Apt and walk among lavender fields for about 2km. Transfer by bus to Roussillon's Colorado for a spectacular 2km trekking. Back on the bus for dinner and hotel accommodation in the surroundings for overnight stay.

DAY 4: Abbey of Senanque, kayaking on the River La Sorgue up to Fontaine-de-Vaucluse; Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape wine tasting in an eighteenth century wine cellar. Breakfast at the hotel and collection of packed lunch. 8:00 am - departure by bus, stop at the Cistercian Abbey of Senanque, Vaucluse, totally surrounded by lavender fields. By bus again until the village of Isle-sur-le-Sorgue for kayak rental and paddling up to Fontaine-de-Vaucluse,

the most powerful water source in France. Lunch close to Fontaine.

By bus to Chateaufort-du-Pape, one of the most famous wine regions in the world, and stop at Domain de la Solitude cellar for wine tasting and visit to the XIX century wooden barrel canteen. By bus to Arles, dinner and overnight stay at the hotel.

DAY 5: Camargue Ornithological Park, photographic safari, St. Marie-de-la-Mer, Saline de Giraud, horse-riding across the dunes. Breakfast and collection of packed lunch. 8:00 am - departure by bus towards Camargue to visit Point de Gau Ornithological Park, walking for a few kilometers and closely watch pink flamingoes and other wild animals such as white horses, black bulls, beavers, snakes, storks, herons, water blackbirds, etc. Back on the bus until the sea village of St.Marie-de-la-Mer for a walking tour and then horse rental to ride across the dunes. Back at the hotel by bus, dinner in Arles and overnight stay.

DAY 6: Cassis and boat tour at the National Park of Calanques. Breakfast at the hotel. 8:00 am - departure by bus to Cassis' harbor for a 2-hour boat tour among Calanques rocks and turkish bays. Lunch at Cassis and free time to visit the village and/or beach time for a swim. By bus to Le Canet for dinner and overnight stay at the hotel.

DAY 7: Departure for Rome at 8 am, expected arrival around 7pm.

The above program may be changed according to weather conditions or local road restrictions.

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- Rental of kayaks, canoes, horses or trekking equipment (if mandatory).

Minimum number: 7 people

Extras:

- Kayak rental at Verdon Gorges: € 15 per person.
- Entrance at Roussillon's Colorado: € 3 per person.
- Canoe rental at Isle-sur-la-Sorgue: € 20 per person.
- Entrance at Camargue Ornithological Park: € 8 per person.
- Horse rental for dune rides: € 24 (1 hour), € 45 (2 hours)
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e m'arimbàrza nfra la bocca e er còre;
é dolce che piú dolce nun c'è gnènte:
è er nome de la vita e de l'amore.*

*La sola che te vede e che te sente
sippuro stai distante ore e ore
è mamma tua che, amorevorme
te tira su co gioia e co dolore.*

*Davanti all'occhi sui 'gni fijo è bbèllo
e lei pe lui è pronta a dà la vita
fuss' anche solamente un trovatello.*

*Finchè pòi chiamà "mamma" è sempre festa,
ma puro quanno se ne sarà ita...
quer nome ce l'avrai pe sempre in testa!*

Armando Bettozzi

A mia madre

12 Maggio

*Vaga un profumo sparso per l'aria
or che al mattin si schiudono i fiori.
Vola, dalla torre campanaria,
argenteo suono a addolcire i cuori.*

*Porta un pensiero e io lo raccolgo.
Dice di angeli scesi dal cielo...
Ora a te penso, e un fiore ti colgo
e nel dartelo, amor ti rivelo.*

Armando Bettozzi

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Cornwell, Bernard	Gallows Thief	Reilly, Mathew	The Four Legendary Kingdoms
Cornwell, Bernard	Vagabond	Robb, J.D.	Connections in Death
Goodwin, Rosie	The Little Angel	Young, Robyn	Brethren
Grisham, John	The Reckoning		

<French>

Barreau, Nicolas	Trente-trois fois mon amour	Foenkinos, David	Deux soeurs
Bussi, Michel	J'ai dû rêver trop fort	Leduc, Frank	Le chaînon manquant
Collette, Sandrine	Les larmes noires sur la terre	Masse, Manuel	L'affaire Dunkel
Colombani, Laetitia	La tresse	Mathieu, Nicolas	Leurs enfants après eux

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