

denotes love. A white lotus portends purity. But what about the color blue? A blue lotus possesses the most powerful symbolism of all. A blue lotus indicates that knowledge and wisdom have conjoined to prepare a path to enlightenment where secrets are revealed.

Outside of these religious themes, much about the exact pre-Angkor cultures that made this ring still remains a mystery to scholars. We know that kings and government leaders controlled separately-ruled areas within the region. The only surviving written first-hand accounts of the region, from a few Chinese emissaries who traveled there, give us a clear picture of the importance of gold within this culture. The emissaries describe rulers who sat on elaborate thrones, wearing crowns carved with golden flowers, gold earrings, golden belts and precious stones. Gold bowls full of aromatics were carried by their large staff. The walls of the throne room were decorated with gold flowers. The entire ruling pavilion shimmered with gold. Our lotus ring of enlightenment may have adorned such a court.

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Over time, most of the regional rulers of the pre-Angkor period were conquered. In their place, a great empire arose. This dominion was called the Khmer Empire. But this was no ordinary empire. The Khmer grew to a historic size, and the mysteries of Angkor, its capital city, became the stuff of legend.

Take one look at a picture of Angkor and your imagination might be whisked away to scenes of iconic Hollywood movies about lost cities full of ancient treasure. There is a reason for this. Angkor is where *Tomb Raider* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* were filmed. But Angkor is not just a fictional lost place. It was a real forgotten city, succumbed to a jungle and the great strangler roots that grew over and around it after it was mostly abandoned for over three hundred years.

When I think of a lost city, I do not think of a metropolis. Yet, that is exactly what Angkor was. Angkor was the largest city in the world. Its population neared one million, which meant, at its peak, one in every thousand people on earth lived there. Angkor's land mass was the size of Los Angeles. Angkor had over two thousand temples. Its largest temple, Angkor Wat, remains the largest religious center in the world, over four times the size of the Vatican City in Rome. The engineering and architectural design of Angkor was arguably more impressive than anything built in ancient Greece. Angkor was not just a city in a jungle, it was an alpha metropolis, and it was immense.

Locals called it Yashodharapura, which meant "glory bearing city." The mandate given to the city's architects was to recreate heaven on earth. The city was literally constructed to mirror what the Khmer believed the world of the gods looked like above. The preparation that went into planning the building of the structures of Angkor is incredible in its scale and staggering in its detail. Every stone, every statue, and every archway were measured and angled with a specific intent. All corners of Angkor were mapped out and designed with a special purpose.