# Sunset Over Ancient Civilization

A large, long painting. Lots of detail. The kind of scene that can only be depicted in a painting, rather than a photograph, just because there's so much detail and yet everything is in focus. We don't know where to look. The barrage of information overwhelms us. We try to make out what is going on, what has brought this scene together.

We take a step back, and what we see is a crowd of tourists watching the sunset. They are situated on the side of a large, ancient structure. Few will recognize this structure — the ancient temple-mountain Phnom Bakheng, in Angkor, Cambodia, built as a Hindu temple in the 9th century, later rebuilt as a Buddhist temple, and today, a popular destination for tourists to watch the sunset after a long day exploring Angkor Wat and the rest of the ancient city below. Few will, but this hardly matters. What matters is that it's an ancient structure, and that it's a tourist destination. Half the tourists sit, and the other half stand because there's not enough room for everyone to sit. Almost everyone (though the general impression is that it is in fact everyone) has their cameras or camera phones out, all facing the sunset. Trying to capture the perfect shot of this daily occurrence, from a temple they'll never see again.

There are more people than we can count. They wear white t-shirts, and pink t-shirts, lime green t-shirts, panama hats, baseball caps, backpacks backwards over their bellies, cardigans and sweatshirts tied around their waists, khaki vests, fanny packs, huge camera cases that look like huge canteens… They're all interchangeable, all tourists are. Interchangeable, and yet, individuals. Depicted in detail rather than as a blur. Depicted not as the crowd in the background watching the game, but as the crowd in the foreground, as the players themselves.

The red sun to the left, across the burning sky, over the darkening green and the tourists and their shadows on the temple, and over the temple's stone towers, pine-cone towers, spiky sea cucumber towers, porcupine bishop towers, studies for the Petronas towers, and their shadows hinted…

But there's more. A surprise for the viewer who searches the painting a little longer. A baby. In a little carrier pouch that the baby's mother wears in front. The mother is standing and, like everyone else on the west side of Phnom Bakheng at this hour — everyone in this painting — is watching the sunset. Everyone but the baby, that is. Everyone is facing the sun but this baby, who is perched against his mother's chest, facing his mother, and facing all that's behind his mother because, and only because, he has no power to turn around and see what's behind him, what everyone else is looking at. Instead, he watches his mother watch the sunset. Or perhaps, he is watching everyone, the whole crowd of tourists behind his mother, watch the sunset. Or perhaps, the viewer imagines, he is not watching anybody, but is rather more interested in the ancient temple itself, the temple everyone is watching from. The temple they have all come to see, but have already forgotten, distracted by the sunset.

The viewer checks again, studies each tourist. And it is confirmed. The baby is the only one.