

Prei Khmeng style



The Prei Khmeng temple was in a village 13 km northwest of Siem Reap, Cambodia. Aside from its completely ruined temple, Prei Khmeng is an important prehistoric occupation site that pre-dates the foundation of the temple. Recent research by the French--Cambodian team revealed Iron Age domestic occupation as well as inhumation burials. The burial assemblage provides evidence of regional trade and mortuary wealth differentiation. Bio-archaeological examination of the individuals interred at the site reveals intentional dental carving.

This research shed light on this important epoch in prehistory, a juncture between the prehistoric and proto-historic periods in Cambodia, which was a time of substantial socio-political transformation.

It is assumed that In the early 20th century the 2 carved stone lintels were moved to the National Museum of Phnom Penh where they were photographed and later studied by French scholar Gilberte de Coral-Rémusat who established an iconographic style classification in her benchmark book published only in 1951: She defined *the Prei Khmeng style* (1951: 42) for 1 lintel dated from the beginning of this 7th century on which the *makara* had disappeared from lintels and replaced by flowers or leaf's composition (made of leaves, (named "Fleurion in French) at the end of the arc previously reserved to the monsters that turn inwards under the shape of entwined leaves.

The medallions, smooth without figures are replaced by a vegetal bunch of leaves with one sticking out vertically. The decoration of leaves appears on reduced scale also on the arch from which small leaves are born and the small leaves enlarge between garlands (into a *floron*). The convergent dynamism typical of Sambor's lintels is suddenly replaced by a static balance of all elements. The first picture of these lintels was given wrongly by de Coral-Rémusat (See below) of two lintels is different lintels de Coral-Rémusat, 1951 : plate VI) and it is not clear which is the main type (holotype) of the style (ifig.14 or fig.15). See below.

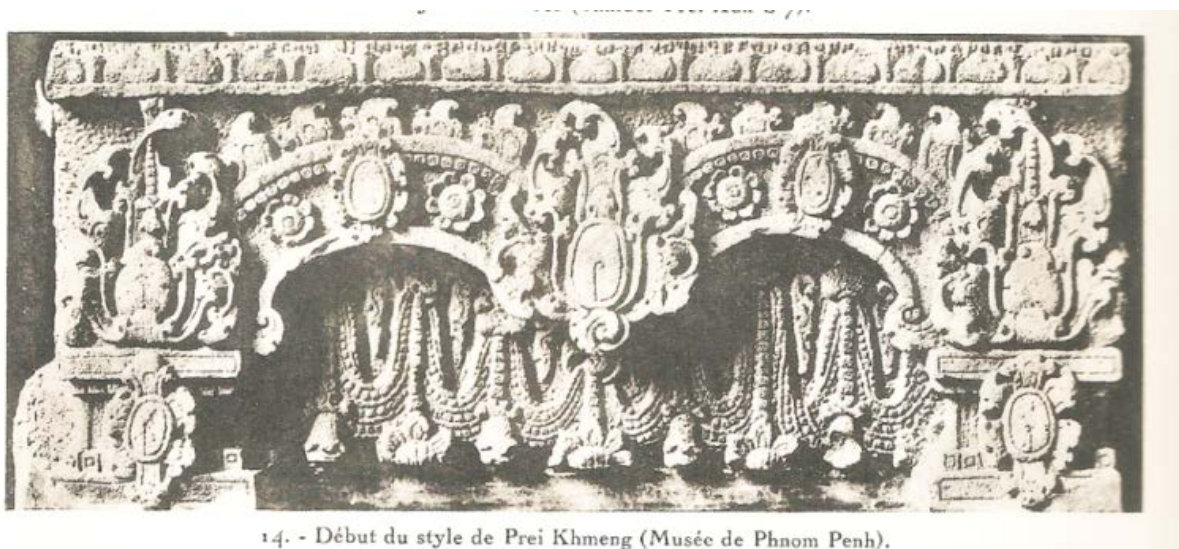
The definition of this style is one of the imprecision existing in the Cambodian definition of styles, the most evident being the Prei Khmeng style that Madame de Coral-Rémusat considered part of the evolution of Sambor Prei Kuk. On page 120 of her book, she placed The Prei Khmeng style in the second half of 7th together with Kompomg Prah' immediately after the SamborPrei Kuk style of the first half 7th century but earlier than the Kulen style.

The Prei Khmeng lintel has an arc as a large and flat ribbon, with a row of pearls or glass beads on the upper edge; on the arc/ribbon, there are 3 bunches of leaves with one sticking out vertically typical of the style. From the arc/ribbon descend collars of beads (glass or pearls) separated by straight rows of smaller pearls terminating in lotus buds.

In the lintel's iconography, starting from Prei Khmeng onwards, there seems to be a search for the elegance of vegetal elements rejecting all human figures to allow the "vegetation invasion" (de Coral-Rémusat) with lintel abstract simplicity generated by the beauty of natural large leaves (Phum Prasat). The dynamism of Sambor is replaced by a static balance of the element of Kulen until Phum Prasat.

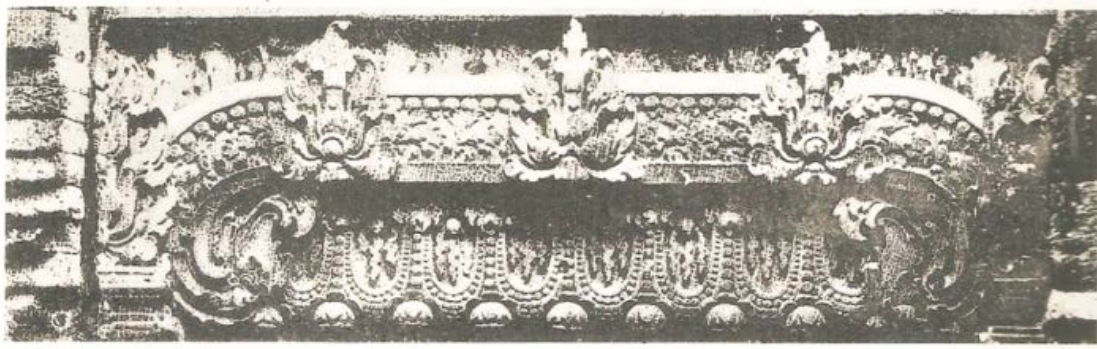
The lintel must have the arc as a flat horizontal ribbon made of flowers and leaves with small bubbles at the edges (chain of pearls or glass?). On the arc there are 3 or more bunch of leaves with the central one sticking out vertically, at a regular distance, and both ends of the arc ends in small scrolling rolls decreasing in size. No kala and no makara.

The definition of the Prei Khmeng style has created many problems insofar 2 different lintels were presented by de Coral-Rémusat that in my opinion is a gross lack of clarity in any scholar when creating a new style. Here below is shown the original picture for comparison, and concerns with the methodology of style.



14. - Début du style de Prei Khmeng (Musée de Phnom Penh).

Gilberte de Coral-Rémusat, L'Art Khmer, 1951. The upper picture (**Plate VI, fig 14**) is a lintel of the Sambor Prei Kuk style having the same undulated arc with large medallions and pearls collier hanging from the arc, but no *makara*. *kala* or *naga*. When the *makara* is present, it is out-looking. The lintel of fig.14 is thus not representative of the Prei Khmeng and must be expelled from the style.



15. - Fin du style du Prei Khmeng (Phnom Basset, porte Est).

Plate.VI, fig.15 shows an entirely different lintel is that with the flat arc looking like a ribbon made of flowers with small bubbles at the edges (pearls?). On the arc, there are 3 or more bunches of leaves with one sticking out vertically, at regular intervals, with the arc ending in a small rolling scroll decreasing in size.

Characteristic Prei Khmeng lintels

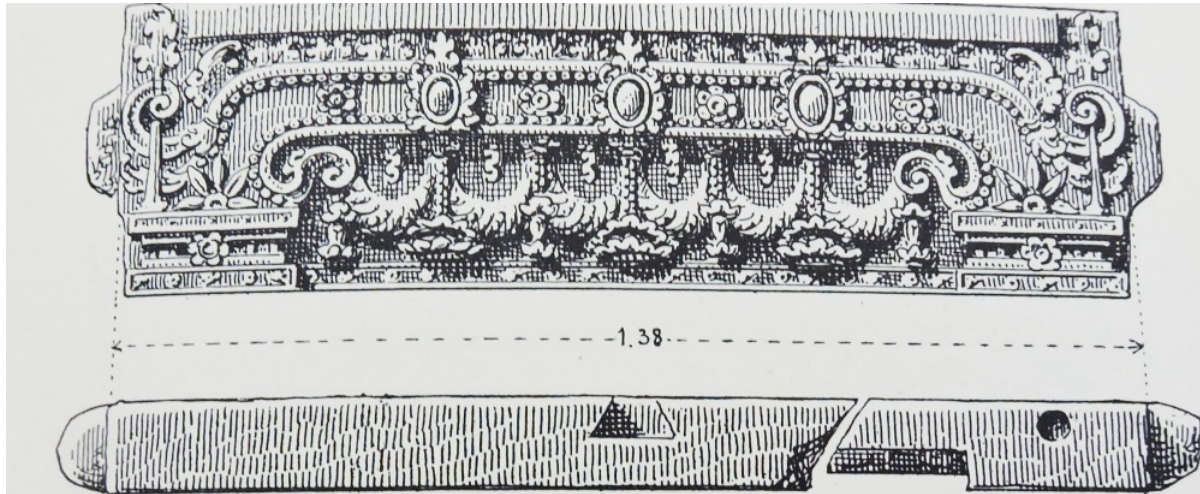


Fig. 23. — Prei Ček. Tour principale. Linteau (à terre).
Éch. : 0 m. 08 p. m. 1^o Face ; 2^o Plan : à gauche, dessus, à droite, dessous.

Prasat Prei Cek. Parmentier 1956: 17 and 98, excellent plate XXXV lintel and fig.9.23,36. This lintel has preserved small medallions indicating that it has evolved from the Sambor Prei Kuk style.



Reussei Reliek, my picture from 2004, is the same as above, but dirtied by time. It is a lintel identical to the one in de Coral-Rémusat 1951 on Table VI, Fig.15 (see page 28)



Near Reusse Reliek the shrine in Prei Khmeng style has been sinking for centuries. Over the door is the most characteristic lintel of the Prei Khmeng style reproduced on the next page.

The early examples of the style are in Tower S of Sambor Prei Kuk, over the false doors. They have coarse elements: the flowers over the arc that has become a ribbon and a thick series of beads (Pearls, glass?). There are no *kala* or *makara*, the thick arg curls on itself, that lies on the capital of the colonettes.

Two lintels of Sambor Prei Kuk, Tower S.1 false door, show the new different style of lintels without *makara*, they belong to the style of Prei Khmeng.



Reussei Reliek - The northwestern area, is probably the best example of the Prei Khmeng style represented here to show the evolution of layouts and of styles.

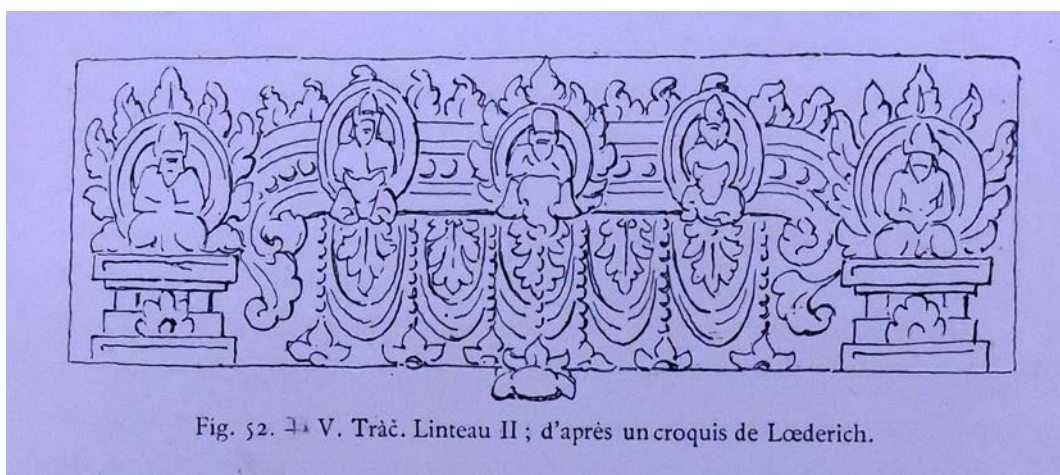


Fig. 52. 4 V. Tráč. Linteau II ; d'après un croquis de Loederich.

Parmentier 1927



This excellent lintel is exhibited at the Musée Guimet of Paris (2006). It is a curious variety of the Prei Khmer style (not remembering the museum label) by having a curved arc instead of straight with 2(3) bunches of leaves. The arc rolls on itself at both ends. Anomalous in this lintel is also two warriors riding small hairy elephants or the mixed animal *makara* with the head of small elephants and the fur of a lion (perhaps similar to *Gajasimha*), ridden by their *mahud*. At regular distances, the arc has a bunch of leaves with a pointed tuft in the central upper part instead of a single one.



At the **National Museum of Phnom Penh**, there is also this unusual lintel because under the arc with three pseudo medallions was carved the large image of Vishnu reclined on Ananta holding a long lotus stem emerging from his stomach terminating in the god Brahma sitting on a plinth. The slightly curved arc has 3 images replacing medallions. Common to the late Sambor Prei Kuk, the absence of *makara* or other similar motif indicates the presumed "Prei Khmer style". The provenance of this lintel is uncertain, but Boisselier indicated (1942) from Tûol Baset, near Battambang, but a temple that disappeared completely in time.



At the **National Museum of Phnom Penh** there is also a Vishnu lintel similar to the previous one, with the complete image of Vishnu on Ananta but with a Brahma image very clear. My photograph has cut out the figures carved at the side of the lintel but visible as a robust bunch of leaves curled inwards curled in Boisselier 194 it is possible to see a large shrine-shaped

image of a seated guardian or deity. This renowned scholar indicated also that the now forgotten provenance is that of **Tûol Baset**, assumed of the date 655CE. (Courtesy picture of the lintels from theNational National Museum of Phnom Penh 2004)

In 1942 Jean Boisselier assumed that the lintel with the reclined Vishnu provined from the Khmer temple **Tûol Baset** (in the Battambang province, the temple was now destroyed). On the great stylistic and iconographic analogies with a lintel of the Cham temple of Mi'Son E-1 of the middle 7th century, precisely the 655CE. This consideration is based on the fact that the Cham prince Vikantravarman from Cham father and Khmer mother had royal geology which allowed him to call to his country Khmer artists on the occasion of his wedding celebration in 655CE. For commenting I like to say that the arc over the figure of Vishnu is a different carving size.

On the assumption that the *Prei Khmeng style* (second half 7th century) occurs soon after the Sambor Prei Kuk *style* (first half of 7th), as It was decided by some 20th-century scholars, rather than being contemporaneous, probably the style was an evolution of the Sambor Prei Kuk style, considering the famous lintels with images (see here pages 27-30) found at Sambor, From my interest in visual narratives, the two lintels with Vishnu described above introduced the first example of Visual narrative because showing the myth when Vishny sleeping on Ananta was awakened to participate to the *Churning of the Ocean of Milk*, the objective was reached (immortality).

Visual Narrative lintels of Sambor Prei Kuk



Sambor Prei Kuk. lintel with human figures under the arc large and the figures of strong lions replacing the medallions of the Sambor style, the medallion of the curved arc contains flowers. There are no makaras, only lions. This scene was interpreted as a Shivaite ritual.



Sambor Prei Kuk. lintel with human figures under the arc large and the figures of strong lions replacing the medallions of the Sambor style, The central figure is that of Garuda with strong power grabbing the arc and a snake in his left arm. his nose or beak is missing, in between the medallions, the curved arc contains flowers. There are no makaras, only lions. This scene was interpreted as a Shivaite ritual.



Sambor Prei Kuk, outside the unlocked old conservation shack (2002). Men worship the central figure holding the stick of command. This fragment of lintel has the typical Prei Khmeng arc-ribbon decorated with flowers and with small medallions of flowers. Below the arc is a scene of men around the central figure holding a mace, with 3 worshipers kneeling to his right.

In the early 20th century, some Cambodian scholars managed to remove the 2 lintels and transport them to the National Museum of Phnom Penh where they were photographed and later studied by French scholar Gilberte de Coral-Rémusat. She defined the *Prei Khmeng style* (1951: 42) as one lintel dated to the beginning of this 7th century on which the *makara* is replaced by a large flower made of large leaves at the end of the arc, space previously reserved for the display of jewellery.

Prasat Kraham



pictures from the Internet ("Hallo Angkor" and "beyond Angkor")

Originally the Kraham Temple complex included three temples built in the late 8th century of red bricks and with the main doors opening to the east. Today after an apparent intensive "restoration" the site is reduced to a stunt of a temple in an open and deserted space. Time has depleted any kind of decoration although a lintel may have been preserved at the National Museum (excavated by Stern in 1936-38). Not much information exists on this temple.

The *somasutra* in the *Kala* shapes was at Sambor Prei Kuk, here is in the *makara* shape with an elephantine head with raised trunk.



A *makara* used as *somasutra*

Trapeang Pong



Trapeang Pong - The Kala looks like it is biting the *makara* and terminates in large outlooking faces. Below the kala face, there are pending leaves, involute and with lateral leaflets.



The lintel of the northern side of the tower, in original condition, before restoration (first page)



A series of plaster circles with Garuda



the image of a girl at a false window.



The northwest tower



The first *apsara* of Khmer art



the base of a colonette

Banteay Prei Nokor



Banteay Prei Nokor - The main tower **That Thom** with its West face showing a false door and with an unfinished lintel

The temple. The few notes from this temple's group are written in Parmentier 1926, pages 104-107. The group of 3 towers had a rampart of about 2.5 kilometres square, originally surrounded by a moat because it may have been a royal city, possibly of Bhavavarman in the 6th century. The towers are aligned North-South, facing East, placed on the same terrace elongated following North to South. What remains of the northern tower is a pile of earth and bricks, the leftover materials used for the construction of the nearby modern pagoda. The other two towers are fairly well preserved, under restoration in 2002. I was able to see the decoration of the temple, surrounded by a basic frame, a false door in bricks with traces of a pediment slightly carved on the tower's bricks. It seems that the central (north tower by now) was restored several times judging by the different brick colours. The southern tower has only a false door to the east and a door to the south and a sandstone lintel deposited behind the southern door during the current restoration. The lintel is eroded and polished by time but has enough features to allow the attribution to the Prei Khmeng style (7 century).



The global view of prasat That Toc with Prasat That Thom at the back. To the right is a modern pagoda. There were working on the restoration started in 1879 -2002



The lintel seems to be of the Prei Khmeng style.

Prasat Andet



Prasat Andet – The tower at the top of the stairs of the Buddhist vihara.



Prasat Andet – The tower at the flank of the vihara.



This Preangkorean shrine only has a door to the east which is the back of the Buddhist vihara built in the second part of the 20th century. The tower door has round columns and a decorated cubic base, a large arc now as a ribbon has 3 general bunches and nothing. Below we can see. tree The features indicative of Prei Khmeng style



Prasat Andet - This damaged lintel for loss of carved area and its support are typical. The remaining elements are typical of the Prei Khmeng style. It seems that the layout of the arc in the Prei Khmeng style.



Prasat Andet - There are archaeological ruins to be unravelled at Andet.

Phum Prasat

Also for this, a temple of the 7th century, the typical lintel of this style one is from the west doorway of Phnom Basset (destroyed by an American bomb) and another preserved at the Musée Guimet coming from the Prasat Phum Prasat, a temple easy to visit now.



Extremities of the lintel with a strong curl of leaves like that of a flower (*floron* in French) at the centre.



The lintel over a door is composed of a horizontal row of curled leaves, with buds between the capitals of the colonettes. (2003) Phum B Prasat (2003) Typical lintel with the invasion of vegetal decoration. The arc is very thick and emergent from the other vegetal elements and has a leaves knot spread over the centre pre-announcing the space that will be dedicated to figures



The West face of the tower has a shrine at each level Eastern face of the tower with access door

According to de Coral-Rémusat (10512: 42) at a certain time of the Preangkorian, some temples had lintels carved with a “vegetal invasion”, which is best visible on the lintel of Phum Prasa. During this Preangkorian period, all lintels reached a new stage with the arch that becomes entirely covered by vegetation and rolling-up leaves that thickens at the extremities.



The arc is made of thick leaves ending in a rolled scroll.
No *kala* or *makara*.

The cylindrical colonettes are decorated with floral rings or foliage

The first lintel that Coral de Remusat used for a style following Prey Khmeng was from Phnom Basset, at the time still existing, although very incomplete. She decided to replace it by capturing the lintel of Prasat Phum Prasat which is perfect, with a thick arc covered by foliage, striking for its simplicity and purity. it was considered the new style.

During this time lintels reached a new look due to the progressive invasion of vegetal elements (leaves, branches with leaves, lotus) and the disappearance of the *kala* head. *makara* still exists at the end of vegetal branches, mixing with it.



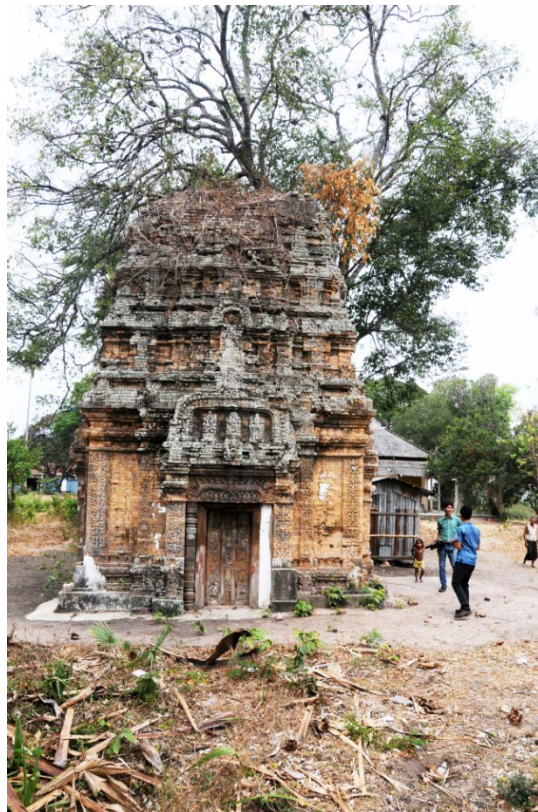
Fig. 45 and Fig.46 - Prasat Phum Prasat. No pediments but a curved terminal of the tower, perhaps with images of some Gods, as in India.

Kompong Prah

Kompong Prah (7th century) style. The temple is located in the Sangkae district in Battambang Province. Not much was known of this style and its temples, but it was considered to be post-Sambor Prei Kuk of the 7th century, but pre-Kulen period dating from 635 to around 700 C. The style is very badly supported in the literature.

M.me de Coral-Rémusat mentioned briefly that this style is very poor in decorative elements (1951: 42 and 118) and established **the Kompong Prah style** for most of the 7th century. She noted that it was touched by "the vegetal invasion" low in the inspiration that it precedes the surprising renaissance of the Kulen style. The lintel illustrated to represent this style is not from the actual temple of Kompong Prah (I doubt she ever visited it) but from a very damaged lintel (Plate VI- fig.16) from the western door Phnom Basset (totally damaged by bombs in 1964), and of Phum Prasat (plate VII fig.1). Having studied these temples in Part 1 of 4, I conclude that only her fig.16 of Plate VI resembles the lintel that I have photographed but not that of Phnum Prasat. The lintels of Kompong Prah are all composed of vegetal elements (leaves) attesting to the "vegetal invasion" of Remusat.

Kompong Prah is the first temple with pediments after the unique 3 of Sambor Prei Kuk with narrative stories (see my description in the Sambor chapter). The Kompong Prah pediments were coarsely carved with images of 3 large towers with a ribbon-looking frame with the sides composed of small spheres. The lintels were with a complete vegetal arc which terminated at both ends with robust inward coiling leaves. Another peculiarity of these temples is the Indian *kudus* carved at each level of the tower.



Kompong Prah - The two aspects of this style are shown in these lintels from 2 separate towers. The two well-preserved towers, the left one is taller than the other. Besides the door with colonnettes and lintels, the striking novelty is the massive pediments carved with 3 towers, the central bigger than the other 2, the palace of Shiva with Vishnu and Brahma. Along the layer of the tower are images of *kudu* shallow carved.



The face in the kudu has flames or horns all around, perhaps that of a local deity or the Sun. This sort of *kudus* reappears at the top of the tower's decoration.



This pediment with 3 towers is unique amongst the temple studied here. The outer edges of the pediment are composed of rows of lotus buds. The 3 towers look real, with doors, pediments and a barrel-shaped tower flanked by 2 smaller towers.



The typical entrance to the sanctuary has a new style lintel vaguely similar to others from monuments of this period (7th century) but is considered the lintel defining the style of Kompot Pra



False doors on the sides of the temple, each having a different decoration, but always the same lintel



The picture to the left illustrates a door with the lintel removed/stolen. To the base of the door's side, pillars present heavily carved figures at the base of a well-decorated pilaster, but its legs are missing and replaced later with a block of cement.

The picture to the right shows the other with the image of a sitting deity with some point elongated forms at the back: It would be surprising to have a Mucalinda protecting Buddha image carved in a Hindu temple of the Preangkorean time.

Preah Kok

Not having found the temple name mentioned amongst the ruins around the Bakong temple we believe them to be in existence when the workers on Indravarman I started to dig out the moat of the temple. Some old books contain the reference that was made of several tours around the precinct of the temple that will become the pyramid state temple with a huge linga (gold?) on the top shrine over the fifth level. These temples were considered the precursors of the Harihara religious compound to come. In these multiple incertitudes. we decided to call the Prah Kok the temple around Bakong. We know that a Pah Kok exists somewhere else in Cambodia but the ruins around Bakong Towers. Our Pra Kok is also from the 8th century.

In the period 1999-2002 sparse tower ruins were hidden in the bush that had grown around them. Some towers had been used as dwellings by the locals for their protection from the wind and had walls blackened by fires. The tower's bricks were used as construction material during the ages by the local people.

I could only visit a tower reduced to a standing wall and a pile of bricks on the floor. I describe here only one tower that was hidden by a thick low brush. The tower at the northeast corner of the road going around the Bakong perimeter does not have any interesting decorative elements. Apparently, according to de Coral-Rémusat, (1951 :121) these temples, together with Trapeang Pong compose a unique group of the middle to the end of the 9th century. I understand that at least two of these unchartered towers have been fully restored by a Cambodian team under the supervision of APSARA.



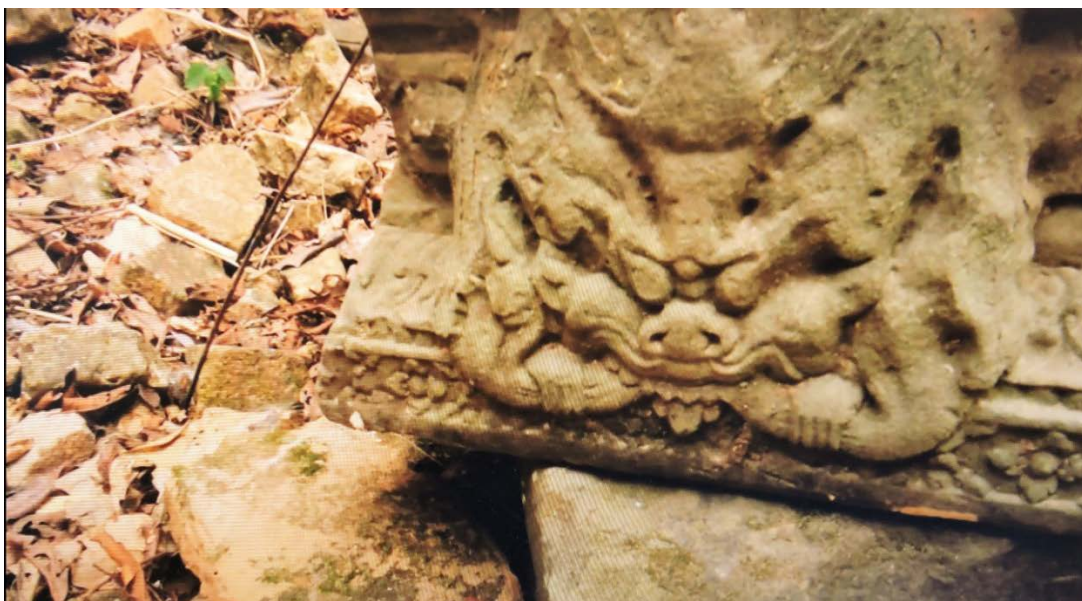
Preah Kok - A Wall burned by the time and fire of locals.



Preah Kok - A standing brick wall, there remains a door pillar decorated with Behind interweaving leaves and flowers.



Preah Kok - A *kala* at the centre of a destroyed lintel fell to the ground.



Preah Kok -Detail of a *kala* presumably belonging to a pillar at the base of a colonette.