

The temple of the Kompot cave

The plane to the north of Kompot has rock pinnacles outcropping from the rice paddies, no longer from the higher sea level as millenniums before. These outcropping pinnacles have many caves occupied by early Cambodians and later transformed into religious shelters in the 7th century. We must be ashamed, at present, of having allowed the systematic destruction of these caves and rock outcrops characterising the landscape and containing religious shelters, by French Cement Companies blowing up by dynamite the mountain in the interest of that powerful French company. The lime they extract is optimal for the making of good cement. The cave described here is the only one with a complete temple, therefore of considerable archaeological value.



Kompot - Another cave with a realistic statue of a meditating monk while Prah Thorani is coming out from a small cave.



Kompot - This is the best cave shrine to northwest of Kompot. It is the only one containing a Hindu Shrine (or temple) and still in good preservation condition.



Kompot - The inner sacred display, in reverence to the top of the stone *linga*.



Kompot - The lintel carved on white plaster of the brick lintel is now lost. The style with a large *makara* regurgitating a thick arc with circular decoration indicates, in my opinion, the age of Sambor Prei Kuk. In the area, there are several other caves, even larger that are destroyed for the production of cement (also by a French Company). Another cave, handsomely illustrated by Jacques-Lafond2007:97 has inscriptions mentioning king Bhavavarman (634 only date) and king Jayavarman I (657-681) who reigned in the second half of the 7th century.

Kompot - limestone outcropping pinnacle containing caves employed since early times



The limestone outcropping amongst cultivated areas.



Kompot - A sacred landscape was put together by local people using all the cement statues they could find at that time. (crocodile, worshipers and a small guardian)

Conclusion

After examining 23 Cambodian temples of the 6th-9th centuries, I present here a view of the philosophy of styles and an attempt to clarify any interpretation of the "styles" concept, starting from the art of the Preangkorian Period in Cambodia (see Table 1).

My work is exclusively on the iconology of Khmer Preangkorian lintels, their styles and evolution and is the first such study since 1951, the date of the publication of Mme Gilberte de Coral-Rémusat's pioneering work on Khmer art, its great moments and evolution, that is also the benchmark for the study of styles and their evolution. However, in her work, the concept of style was more that of putting together images of a certain century and seeing if they belonged to an iconographic "style" and as much as possible the exact age, with references to the ruler and socio-economic conditions.

In addition to the interpretation of existing "styles" I have attempted to clarify the iconographic and possibly historic boundary of the Preangkorian-Angkorian periods and tentatively propose a date at 875-880 CE, rather than the 802 date of the main esoteric appointment of Jayavarman II as the king of kings (Chacravartin). My work concludes with a general overview of early Khmer art and its development.

The final topic is the facing of modern techniques of which the results were proposed by Jean-Baptiste Chevance and Damian Evans from the revolutionary way to look at Khmer history based on the grid visible from the aerial scanning of the Kulen with the Lidar tool. I am very grateful to these two scholars to open my eyes to the obscure Kulen, but I must add that the iconography does not change. In all historical research, is the interpretation that counts and evolves.

Scholarship

I named my research "Preangkorian iconography" which should be corrected to "Preangkorian iconology" because it is based on the study of a larger program to which the lintels belong. According to Gombrich '(1972) iconology (the science of imagery) involves the reconstruction of the entire program, and therefore encompasses more than a single text. It is contained within a context that requires the cultural and artistic setting (elements defining the style, time, and place, within the context of politics, religion and culture of the period).

However, scholars of Khmer culture were always talking about the term *iconography* instead of *iconology*, and I continued the tradition by still using the old name, although I followed pure iconology for the main steps of my work. Iconography is identifying *what* images are, while iconology is *why* the images were created and what they mean

Fortunately for Cambodia, the tourist invasion brought new money which increased the budget for restorations, but little space was left for researchers to work on theoretical and historical issues, creating instead several specialists in new technologies (LIDAR and aerial photography) that will require archaeological excavation to improve their theories.

Unfortunately, with the tourist invasion of the archaeological spaces, many famous scholars turned to write beautiful guidebooks for tourists, thus avoiding developing new ideas and stop 'making discoveries' by repeating the discoveries of the old masters in epigraphy. iconology and in the art of ancient Cambodia.

The concept of art as the product of self-motivated artists was ignored and would have probably been incomprehensible to any ancient Khmer not trained in reading images and their meaning. The kings and certainly their *Gurus* must have understood the meaning of the command they made. Reading art and understanding its function is a study above all else.

Some scholars of Khmerology have forgotten that iconography has been the basis for understanding, *inter alia*, Khmer history and dynastic genealogies. Now, my interest in iconology makes me look at the organization of visual events (images) in cooperation with the date of the temple's creation, and preferably with inscriptions, the political, religious and social organization of society at that time.

My research in visual storytelling in Khmer Art starts from the origin of the Khmer empire around the 6th century. I must clarify what I intend by visual storytelling or visual narrative: It is the telling of a story with images. A narrative is usually an open-ended event, with a beginning and an end, both of which could be indefinite, unrolling in time (past, present, future) or complete in itself, and narratology identifies how a story is illustrated and makes sense.

It is assumed that the viewer takes an active and creative role in the dialogue with the artwork (visual narrative) to re-invent the experience that the images communicate to them.

Khmer Art's periods or "styles" contributed to understanding the dynastic sequence through the centuries.

SEE Table 1 on next page. *This table is based mainly from ideas of several scholars, starting with de Coral-Rémusat 1951, JACQUES 1999 AND DAGENS 2003.*

A chronology of the Preangkorian to Angkorian Period is hypothetical because the definition of a style is too arbitrary and reflects fluctuating human activities undefinable in time by straight lines, in a single time box, as in the above table.

In Table 1 I have arranged the names of lintels of the assumed age into a structure of the Preangkorian, previously based on epigraphy and the reign of the king following the traditional view of 20th century scholars (Claude Jacques (1999: 30-32). The first two layers of the Table were inserted from Miriam Stark (*Collapse...* published in 2006).

Iconologic chronology of the Preangkorian

Table 1

PERIOD	STYLE	TEMPLE	KING	AGE century
IRON AGE				Before 500 BC
Proto- HISTORIC	unknown	Unknown or O'Ceo Maha Rosei Hanchei Cell Sambor N.17 Cell.	Probably several rulers	500 BC- 600 CE
EARLY PREANGKORIAN	Preangkorian		Probably kings of the Bhavapura dynasty	600-700 CE
PREANGKORIAN	<i>Vat Phu Phnom Da Angkor Borei</i>	Wat Phu Phnom Da A.borei Phnom bayang (616-635) Han Cei N.17 Cell Sambor	Bhavavarman and Citrasena?	Late 6 th - late part of 8 th century
	<i>Thala Borivat Sambor Prei Kuk</i>	Thala borivat Sambor Prei Kuk [Stung trong] Banteay Prei Nokor (598-?) Prasat Prei Srei	Ishanavarman Jayavarman II Indravarman I	Early 7 th to 9 th centuries
	<i>Prei Khmeng</i>	Prei Khmeng Prasat Andet	Indravarman I	8 - 9 th centuries
	<i>Kompong Prah</i>	Kompong Prah Ak Yum Phum Prasat	<i>various</i>	7 th – 9 th centuries
	<i>Kulen</i>	Stern's 16 lintels	Jayavarman II	9 th century
	<i>Trapeang Phong Kok Po</i>	Trapeang Phong Prasat Kok	Indravarman I	Middle-End 9 th to 10 th century
	<i>Bakong towers Prah Kô Neang Kmau</i>	Bakong towers Prah Kô	Indravarman I ? Jayavarman II	c. 875 iconographic End of Pre- Angkorian
875 CE. boundary to ANGKORIAN	<i>Prah Kô Lolei</i> (same parts)	Lolei, Neang Khmau Phnom Krom Phnom Bok of <i>Bakheng</i> style	Indravarman I Yashovarman I	End 9 th -10 th century

Some authors have compiled a list without justifications.

5-6 th century	Angkor Borei-Phnom Da – iconography un-researched till now (Southeast Cambodia)
6-7 th century	Thala Borivat, (northeast Cambodia)
6-th century	Sambor Prei Kuk
7 th century	Kulen
end 7 th - 8 th c.	Prai Khmeng
9 th century	Preah Ko
9 th century	Bakeng
10 th century	Koh Ker
10 th century	Pre Rup

The philosophy of style

The concept of style applied to iconology produces “art style” which is the basic tool for the iconographic study of Khmer art. It was introduced in 1951 by M.me Gilberte de Coral-Rémusat on the features of specific archaeological elements of Cambodian temples (lintels and pediments).

Art styles facilitate the identification of the evolution steps of specific decorative elements (lintels and pediments), from one style to another, from that of one lintel of one temple to the lintel of another Preangkorian temple. Although lintels were abandoned and replaced by pediments and plastered walls, the concept of style continued to be used in Angkorian architecture.

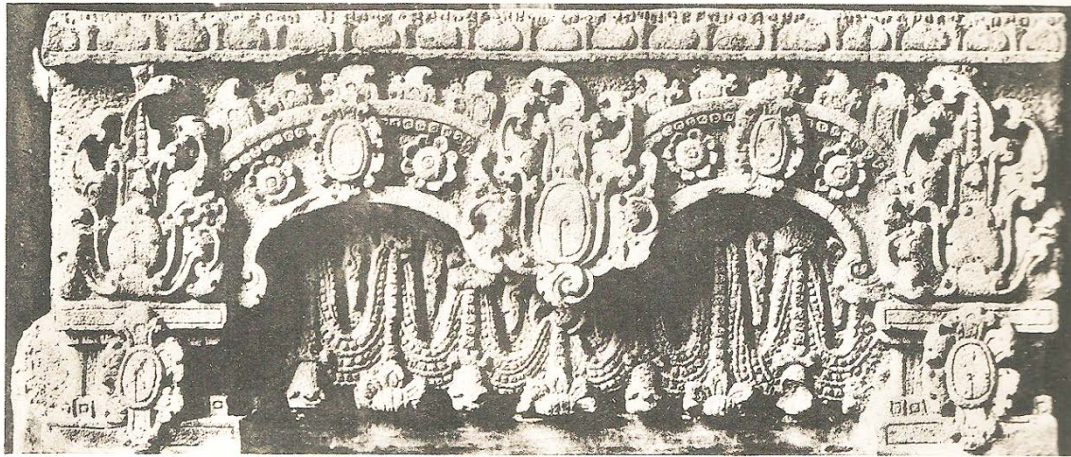
The research of Gilberte de Coral-Rémusat started around 1930 and was published only in 1940. Her definitive work *L’art khmer et les étapes de son evolution*, published in 1951 established the chronology of Khmer art which is still in use. More comments on the concept of style are presented in the following page.

The criteria for defining a ‘style’ in Art are unscientific and subjective, therefore open to debate. The problem of styles is better resolved by research in iconography combined with epigraphy, which means the study of images (iconography) combined with the study of words (epigraphy).

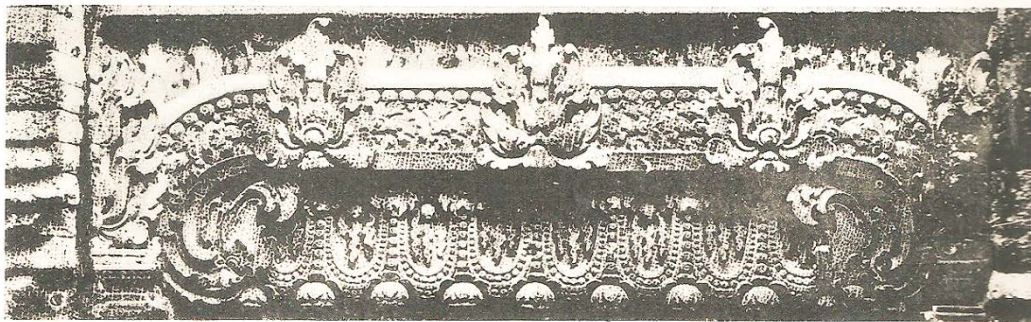
I like to think that style was used as a sort of ‘container’ (box or barrel) in which all the decorative elements of a Khmer temple were inserted, the way any decorative elements are arranged to fill the space of a lintel, or pediment, or wall at a specific time. These sorts of ‘containers’ are filled by authors following what they can recognise as important at the time such as the layout, in association, when possible, with the information from inscriptions providing the temple ‘s date.

The problem arises when some scholars, based on doubtful historical evidence, determine the dates of kings for which there is no official record. This polemic extends to all Preangkorian art because lintels were badly defined or forced by a scholar to fit the general historical structure of the period (from the 7-10th centuries) such as the end of the Kulen style, which by itself is a difficult style that cannot be made to fit into a single ‘container, the 802 CE date.

An unfortunate example of misreading the composing elements of a style is that of the Prei Khmeng style when the creator M.me de Coral-Rémusat used two lintels that in my opinion have different elements: in the typical Prei Khmeng style the arc is straight terminating in involute curls, there are no medallions which are replaced by a bunch of leaves with one large at the top, different arrangement of hanging bead’s chains and different makara when present. The first lintel of (Fig.14) by de Coral-Rémusat can be attributed to the Sambor Prei Kuk style while the other (Fig.15) is of the typical Prei Khmeng style.



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



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

In the Preangkorian there is only one inscription, and styles were created on the lintel which was the only space for information and was carved in various ways. In the Angkorian Period, the pediment was much larger presenting more space for visual narratives.

Meyer Shapiro (1950) believed that style is the constant form and sometimes the constant element, and quality of expression in the art of an individual or a group. My definition of style consists of looking in great detail at the way (the *maniera*) in which the most important elements are arranged in a harmonious layout that can be easily identified and is different from the previous or following styles. A clear and comprehensive naming of the provenance of the lintel is also necessary.

Example: a lintel from Sambor Prei Kuk, Tower S.1 over the northern false door. The extraordinary temple of Prah Kô in Hariharalaya, the capital city of king Indravarman I, was dedicated by him on 25 January 880 to his predecessors and wives (Jacques, 1999: 195). It includes 6 towers decorated with a fine lime mortar paste to make them more real, hardening with time but becoming fragile and heavier with water humidity causing the sliding down of the wall.

Kulen – Reclassification of Kulen styles

Table 2

TEMPLE	MAIN FEATURES	SUGGESTED STYLE
<i>Khun Slap</i>	Arc with medallions	late Sambor Prei Ku
<i>O'Paon</i> <i>Kraham II</i> <i>Kaki</i> <i>Rup arak</i>	Vegetation arc bending until becoming a bow ow, central images on a quashed <i>kala</i> Kaki: further thinning of the arc, central <i>ala</i>	Analogies with Prei Khmeng
<i>Damrei KRAP</i> <i>PHNOM SROUC</i> <i>BOS NAK</i> <i>Kraham I</i>	Rich decorative elements, central deity, small <i>makara</i> , vegetal arc ending in large involute scrolls.	Kulen 1
<i>DON MAS</i> <i>NAL TA</i> <i>THMA DAP</i> <i>PR.ANLON</i> <i>KHUN SLAP GOPURA</i> <i>PR RUP ARAK</i> <i>PR.CREI</i>	Rich decorative elements, central deity, small <i>makara</i> , vegetation arc ending in large involute scrolls. PREANKORIAN ARC WITH SIMPLE VEGETATION, THE ARC HAS THE FORM OF A BOW	Kulen 2
TRAPEANG PONG KOMPONG PREI PRASAT ANDET TRAPEAT PONG	Each with it's their characters See text	The last 2 are possibly Post-Angkorian

In principle, a single lintel must be used in the definition of a style. To achieve this, a system can be adopted from the science of zoology. In a lintel representing a style. Allowing modest variations of the characteristics (images, layout) but under control avoiding the evolution into the next style.

The idea of a single lintel representing a group is not possible for the 16 lintels of Stern 1938 because the group is far too heterogeneous and several styles could be unveiled. I have maintained the name “Kulen style” in Table 2 after the description of Kulen decorative arts, for a discordant population of lintels, dividing them into 3 groups of Kulen styles, true until the discovery of new archaeological excavations to confirm the interpretation of the Lidar.

Workshops

In some periods of Khmer art history workshops (ateliers in French) were so large that they must have had a position of power, authority and wealth to support and direct the sponsorship contracts and commitments established for the works. For instance, during the Preangkorean period, workshops flourished at Sambor but disappeared during the Kulen episode only to discretely reappear from the Prei Khmeng period onwards.

During the period of the beginning of Bakong's works, there was no contemporary artistic decorative industry. Thus in the late 8th and early 9th century the making of lintels was associated with the existence of a powerful king, Indravarman I. At Hariharalaya there must have been several workshops, well-known for having specialist skilled workers including experienced men, from architects to builders, carpenters, and quarry labourers, entirely nameless and slave workers. Other workshops had artists

specialising in the face of figures, carving vegetal convolution and germinations, other artists only in figures (Kala and makara and Garuda). There must have been a sort of geologist able to provide sites where building rock (laterite) of good quality could be excavated and which were the best rocks (sandstone) for carved ornamentation. We do not have proof of the presence at Kulen of a bronze foundry, all tools being imported by Bagan (Prah Khan of Kampong Sway).

Workshops existed only with the sponsorship of powerful, royal, important political and religious men, wealthy people, etc. This was the case with the Hariharalaya temples and decorations built by Indravarman I who had also initiated the Bakong works, while at Kulen sponsorship was almost nil. In the history of the art of the world, the relationship between sponsorship and art production has been fundamental. In Asia, the most brilliant example is that of Asoka, who started to sponsor columns, followed by building some of the best Buddhist complexes in Asia. Power and sponsorship are the main contributors to the birth of art.

Unfortunately, the poor or absent sponsorship during the Kulen period did not allow free decoration of the temples, and the absence of workshops caused single artists to become disoriented and confused, therefore continuing the repetition of the same elements but with sparks of creativity inventing new ones, without a coherent trend. When Stern's lintels are compared with the lintels of Hariharalaya they are less vibrant for example than the lintels of P.Kô which reflect the creativity and elegance of Khmer artists when sponsored by a king, Indravarman I about 880CE.

The main objectives of my iconographic research on the Khmer Preangkorian d were satisfactorily completed until 2022 when I had the chance to read some of the most exciting research performed on Kulen by Jean Baptiste Chevance and Damian Evans in the period 1917-23 and published on many periodical magazines and a book by Evans. Fortunately, they are also all available on the Internet.

The invention of pediments.

Pediments mark the need in the mind of Cambodian artists to have (create) more space for carving always more complex visual narratives. Coincidentally, their invention correspond to the boundary of the Preangkorian-Angkorian because it was the first instance of changes in architecture becoming grandiose, with pediments and the almost total abandonment of lintels which dominated in the Preangkorian. The earlier examples are the very degraded pediments discovered at Phnom Krom and Phnom Bok, shown in the two pictures that follow.

The invention of the pediment marks a psychological change in the use of images because more space than that of lintels was needed for visualising myths and legends. From a decorative tool it was discovered that images could be assembled to create visual narratives if the larger space of pediments was available.



Phnom Krom, the pediment of the central tower, coetaneous to that of Phnom Bok



Phnom Bok – Central tower with a degraded pediment carved over the empty lintel, both unfinished (9-10 century).

The Origin of Khmer Art

To understand the origin of Khmer art of the Preangkorian I thought it was going back in time, in the region of the “Cambodian Mekong Delta (Now in Vietnam). The history of the Mekong Delta culture was investigated in many sites, of which the most relevant was named Oc Ceo where people settled from the 2nd century Before CE.

The French archaeologist Luis Malleret did excavations at Oc Ceo in 1944 discovering, besides the foundations of brick monuments, an array of precious materials, artefacts in gold, silver, bronze, precious and semiprecious stones, Roman coins transformed into gold medallions. There was also prehistoric pottery with Indian influence (Tingley 2009: 108) leading to the assumption of a direct correlation between late prehistoric cultures with India through the Bay of Bengal. Amongst the ruins of monuments were found terracotta tiles with the face of a monster (*kala*) and other larger decorative elements of an animal with a large human body (torso, shoulders and arms) but the face of a lion with a curly mane that Nancy Tingley identified as *Simhamukha* (lion face) (2009 : 234).

Detail of these and other ornaments are described and illustrated by Nancy Tingley is in the collection of the Museum of the Arts of Ancient Viet Nam of which items from catalogue number 25 to 31 are particularly interesting to this research. For example, item 25 is, the terracotta tile with the image of a *kala* or of a lion and item 31 wonderful terracotta architectural decoration with a friendly face of a lion, this face could correlate only with that of lions at the entrance of the tower C1 of Sambor; they are unique not repeated after this location. other terracotta artefacts imply the existence of kiln for refined pottery

These terracotta ornamental items associated with ceramics needed local industries trading with the rest of Southeast Asia and a social well-being, a first indication of a culture that probably evolved into that of Angkor Borei and later Sambor Prei Kuk.



Museum of Arts of Ancient Vietnam. The face of a *kala* on a terracotta tile and the image of a terracotta element remind that of a mythic lion. (Courtesy of Nancy Tingley).

Yves Manguin and Vo Si Kai resumed exploring OC Eo in 2004 unquestionably a major cultural development in the late prehistoric occupation of the delta which when associated with major commercial navigation to Angkor Borei with shallow draft boats.



Sambor Prei Kuk. LEEFT - The face of a *kala* repeated at the base of a pedestal. RIGHT - the face of a lion carved at the base of a "Flying Palace" layout.



Sambor Prei Kuk. The face of a Kala carved at the centre of the undulated arc of a lintel

From Angkor Borei, settlements were progressively transferred north to the more profitable sites for rice cultivation, one of which was Sambor Prei Kuk on the Sen River.

Angkor Borei was occupied since at least the 4th century. More than at Oc Eo, the making of Angkor Borei required energy in the construction of large brick embankments, monuments and canals and finally temples one with a statue of Vishnu. Bricks were not invented before Oc Eo and functioned as the solid base to support wooden buildings; At Angkor Borei the water management, besides canals covered water tanks or ponds and even a baray.

The inscriptions of Phra Kuha Luon of 674 CE, a record that Angkor Borei became the capital of a king (Rudravarman)

Increasing social complexities developed in the delta and Angkor Borei required a central administration and the emergence of a social elite,

The Chinese records suggest a smooth transition between the last king of the delta states and his successors, as well as the novelty of dynastic succession, starting from Bhavavarman located near Ishanapura (Sambor) and his brother Mahendravarman. In the 7th century, the people of the Mun Valley to the north (in modern Thailand) developed social complexity on wealth from rice, salt and iron.

After my brief into the history of the cultures in Southeast Asia (SEA) before the Preangkorian Period. A look at the artefacts of OC Eo invites us to assume that the architectural decoration (tiles and lion) are the ancestor original elements that developed later at Sambor Prei Kuk. I regret not having information on decorative elements in the temples or buildings of Angkor Borei.

Some scholars have attributed to the Angkor Borei Period the small ashrama Maha Rosei on the hill of Phnom Da hill, a problematic location because the monument may have been built somewhere else and then transported piece by piece to Phnom Da. As it is now the shrine has a strong Indian influence in the double internal sanctuary and externally a roof decorated with kudus. The lintel seems unfinished over a carved series of glass or pearl chains; therefore it does not give key elements.

The terracotta tile and the large lion's face may be seen to be reproduced at SamborPrei Kuk 4 but on different media. AT Sambor they are parts of a large architectural program, especially the lintels the only archaeological elements carrying decorative elements. Oc Eo and Angkor Borei are the crucibles of the art of early SEA culture from the 4th to the 6th centuries and of the society that produced it.

The visual culture of Oc Eo and particularly the architectural terracotta decoration (kala and Simha (lion), find their equivalent at Sambor carved in sandstone lintels the most proficient space for images and stories display. As I have shown in the first part of my research, The layout changed rapidly into styles. These terracotta elements are not the markers of the evolution of Khmer art. they simply indicate the continuation of a society requiring a visual culture from the 4th to the 7th century and that evolved in architecture and its decoration, with devotional temples becoming more frequent.

At Sambor or Ishvarapura, the artist evaded into a mythological celestial dream: the “Flying Palaces” delicately carved on the walls of the polygonal brick temples, as well as on Sambor’s towers of the Sacred Area. The decoration of temples required lintels with visual narratives such as a festival, in honour of Shiva.

Prasat Tao (S group) had extraordinarily large and complex narratives (that I reconstructed from lintels of the National Museum), a ritual dance for Shiva and another with the dance of inebriated worshipers accompanied by a full orchestra with their instruments and probably a representation of a procession for the anointment of a king.

Personal view

Considering the recent discoveries in the area of Angkor Borei, and the monuments of Sambor Prei Kuk, It is believed in a pre-existing culture (probably from the 5th to early 6th centuries) which in turn was influenced by the culture of Oc Eo. This satisfies my doubts about the sudden appearance of the mature art of Sambor Prei Kuk.

The existence of Pre-preangkorean settlements has been amply demonstrated by the work of Myrian Stark on Pre-angkorian settlement trends in Cambodia’s Mekong delta. Dr. Stark created a team of Cambodian students and of international collaborating scholars.

Sambor remains in any way the first and only concrete evidence of the early Khmer culture, the Preangkorean. Sambor Prei Kuk represents the cradle of Khmer art and of the development of a visual narrative that will be rediscovered later at Prah Kô in the late 9th century. and that reappear at Banteay Srei reliefs from the end 10th century because they have a unique place in the conceptual and artistic evolution of art in Cambodia, which from Sambor Prei Kuk matured at Prah Khô and Lolei and from them to all the Angkorian Period.

The absence of narratives happened in the Preangkorian Period which was a time of political instability possibly from the 7th century until the rule of Indravarman I (877-886).

In order to have an overview of early Khmer art I searched, first of all, for a lintel that could be of an ‘art style’ created for the lapse of time from the 5th to early 6th century on the assumption that the culture of the Oc Eo expanded through communities that occupied the Mekong Delta from about 300.BCE. Its success was due to sea trade making cultural connections.

Khmer art starts with some construction in perishable materials, followed centuries later, by the small monuments of the Maha Rosei (Phnom Da), the Hanchei Cell on the Mekong and the N.17 cell of Sambor Prei Kuk (North of Kampong Cham) and perhaps, all made in stone monoliths probably in the 6th century (my observation were made before the research by Miriam Stark was available).



Sambor Prei Kuk Cell N.17



Hanchei Cell

I assume that Cell N17 of Sambor and the Hanchei small cell are older in time and style than the early 7th-century polygonal brick temples of Sambor and Phnom Bayang. There is the history of Wat Phu which raises the theory of the origin of the Khmers from the North; unfortunately, I could not study the symbolism of the terraces of this complex Hindu temple (because I did not have information from the results from recent developments by the Laotian Academy and the Lerici Institute expedition of 1980-1998 financed by UNESCO).

The other important early settlement was probably the outpost of Thala Borivat in Northern Cambodia, on the Mekong to the West of the Khon rapids but miles to the South of Wat Phu, and which is assumed to have been made by the same kings of the Ishvarapura dynasty of Sambor Prei Kuk. History is confused as to who created Phnom Da and the larger settlement of Angkor Borei probably around the 5-6th century.

Khmer visual art begins in the 7th century with the lintels of Thala Borivat, stylistically preceding those of Sambor Prei Kuk. There is also another little-known community to the south of Thala Borivat, the one from Shambupura-Mekong demonstrated by sparse remains in the area of modern Cratié, which was ruled by a family not related to the dynasty of the Khmer of the Sambor Prei Kuk Culture.

Few inscriptions mention by name rulers of the period in which Khmer art culture was born. Understanding the Preankorian shortly before and shortly after the 802 CE. date is the source of innumerable theories. It is considered an immobile pillar of the Preangorian, while on the contrary 802 is only a date related to Jayavarman II. Before this, the Chinese Annals report the royal dynasty of King Citrasena-Mahendravarman and his descendants (Ishanavarman I) were based at Sambor Prei Kuk. renowned according to the Chinese for the carving of "Flying Palaces" (as described in the first part of this study 1/4).

The feature which characterizes Preangorian iconography is the importance exclusively given to lintels because the colonettes that Stern eventually declared more important but which were fragile and rarely found intact. Noticeable is the architectural absence of pediments, a situation that will be reversed in the art of the Angkorian Period. Presumed tentative of having, pediments were made when shallow recesses were carved over the lintels of the brick temple's walls, as at Prah Kô and the Bakong Towers. The most surprising exception is the discovery at Sambor Prei Kuk of three large lintels with narrative scenes (I have described them accurately in Part 1), which are from the middle 7th century, and for the first and last time present in early Preangorian.



In the **Sambor Prei Kuk** archaeological park, polygonal brick temples are spread in the forest, all with carved images of "Flying palaces".

he kings (if any) of the 6th and 8th centuries are unknown except for queen Jayadevi mentioned in a rare inscription of 713. Much later there is the famous inscription of Sdok Kak Thom (K.235) of 1052CE which inform us that around 800 or 802 CE. Jayavarman came from Java (not Indonesia but Champa modern Laos) to free Cambodia from Javanese(?) oppression (??) and he anointed himself Chakravartin in a magic ceremony-ritual performed by his brahmin, becoming thus the "king of Cambodia's kings". Other cults were performed (probably later according to Vickery 2002) such as that of the Devaraja and the cult of linga. From the inscription, we know that soon after this ceremony, in 802-803 Jayavarman II transferred himself and his court to Hariharalaya where his relationship with his contemporaneous king Indravarman I is unknown.

A great many assumptions were made about Jayavarman II at Kulen and which buildings he may have built. There are no inscriptions indicating which, where and when Jayavarman II constructed any temple. This deficiency confuses the reconstructions of Khmer art history, which started to be published at the end of the 19th century and throughout the 20th (all the lintels described by Stern in 1936 are discussed in detail in Part 1 of my research). About Jayavarman II after the Kulen episode, I put forward the assumption that he may have sponsored monuments being built by other Kings in the region of Hariharalaya: starting from Indravarman's gigantic pyramid-temple of Bakong, followed by the temple of Preah Kô dedicated to his ancestors, and the temple of Lolei in the Eastern Baray completed by king Yashovarman I (son of the energetic Indravarman I). Like other scholars, I use Jayavarman to fit into my theory.



In architecture, the first pyramid temple was at Ak Yum existed before it was submerged by the creation of the Western Baray. The temple of Ron Chenr on Kulen is not a pyramid temple but a few terraces topped by laterite slabs laid on the part of the underlying conical hill. The most important temple of this type is the Bakong, which was terminated in the late 9th century.

The steps of **the Ak Yum** pyramid temple as seen in 2002

The history of the Khmer Empire is the history of power, and the little we know of Khmer Art could have been an art of royal command. This is demonstrated when the power of the kings of the Bhavavarman dynasty encouraged the impressive construction of the Sambor Prei Kuk and its art. Two centuries later, the power of king Indravarman and his son Yashovarman enabled them to sponsor temple construction and decoration at Hariharalaya and Angkor.

The meagre Preangkorian Art evolved and expanded in the Angkorian Period when myths and religious narratives (*Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and the *Puranas*) reached Cambodian artists starting from the exceptional Banteay Srei (built by members of Khmer aristocracy at the end of the rule of king Rajendravarman (994-968), carved with great subtlety, soon followed by the reliefs of Prasat Kravan built during the reign of king Rajendravarman; it became the definite starting point of the art of the Angkorian Period.

Foreign influence on Khmer art can be perceived in early Preangkorean lintels inspired by Indian models which were drastically reshaped, dispelling the superficial concept of full Indianisation put forward by early 20th century scholars. Indianisation was a process of expansion and local modification of Indian culture (with the glamour and radiance of the Indian epics) propagated via trade routes over land and sea. It was not a process of colonization.

In the 7th or even 6th centuries CE. in Cambodia there was a sudden surge in creativity, featuring the concept of the 'Flying palaces' which are difficult to explain unless Indian influences are taken into consideration. The carved 'Flying palaces' reflect the social and religious hierarchy of figures, with the patrons placed higher than other participants in the celebration, and minor elements of society (female figures with high conical hats) relegated to the middle or lower levels and the presumed cellar (basement?) for servants and slaves.

After this sudden innovation, vitality and creativity of Sambor Prei Kuk, early Cambodian art and culture came to an impoverishment due to the lack of sponsorship by the rulers although in the literature it is written that the arrival of Jayavarman straightened the situation. However, we do not know who he ruled and when. The new culture was poor, bringing sparse mediocre art, dominated by the "vegetal invasion" (a term coined by de Coral-Rémusat), when the lintel layout was filled with leaves and flowers, entirely avoiding human figures, and instead favouring the ugly face of the kala monster generally deeply carved at the centre of the arc.



Sambor Prei Kuk, – A lintel typical of the style with medallions on the arc which seems vomited by two *makara* monsters, deeply carved with a man figure on the tongue. The lintel seems light and joyful



Kulen - Prasat Anlon Thom (Stern 1937). This Kulen lintel shows a controlled cool vegetal layout, in contrast to that of Sambor Prei Kuk, which was probably carved one century before. The central face of the *kala* is part of the arc decoration



Sambor Prei Kuk, In a polygonal brick temple, a “Flying palace”, was carved with a convivial scene in the top frame (as a pediment) and a seated king in the middle room, flanked by two (female) attendants.



Sambor Prei Kuk - A reconstructed row of winged beings working hard to make the palace fly.



Sambor Prei Kuk, The middle room of the flying palace seems to be reserved for rituals. In this palace, the figure in the central room of a “Flying palace e” may be a Hindu priest playing ritual bells.

Cultural conditions seem to have stabilised at Hariharalaya where the Preangkorian Period ends with the lintel layout that I defined as my “Special Lintel” of Prah kô, followed by others of the same layout at Lolei and later by the variety of Koh Ker (921-944), the ecstatic visual narrative of Banteay Srei (961-100) and the complex symbolism of Phnom Bakheng (989 923).

M.me de Coral-Rémusat (1951) believed strongly in the Javanese influence in Khmer art which she believed to correspond in part with the “Central Javanese Period” in Indonesia. However any reference to Java 1 (footnote 1) is doubtful because Borobudur was not completed by 850CE at the time of Sambor as well the other Hindu temple of Prambanan in Java. Her theory of identifying the Khmer kala with the Borobudur kala is arbitrary.

She seems to have gone further than the Sdok Kok Thom inscription by writing that Jayavarman II arrived from Java, presumably carrying sparks of Java’s art and culture. However, this requires veracity of the Sdok Kak Thom inscription, a doubt raised occasionally by some scholars (Vickery and myself) [footnote 2]

Only from later inscriptions (10-11th centuries), great importance was given, to Jayavarman II. It is hoped that new inscriptions to be found at Kulen would confirm giving to Jayavarman II position in history that he deserves.

After the Kulen socio-political- ‘crisis’, there were signs of art rejuvenation and originality that can be seen in the lintels of the Prei Khmeng style, the lintels and general decoration of the temples of Kompong Prah and Trapeang Pong of the 7th to 9th centuries. It was mainly Indravarman I and his son Yashovarman I that worked at expanding Hariharalaya which probably span over some Jayavarman II attention. The entire Kulen style was born before the arrival in Cambodia of the figure of Jayavarman II, with whom modern historians became overly concerned.

Much has been written on Jayavarman II, but nothing directly concerning the making of art because his known contribution to it is nil. Doubts on Jayavarman II started when Coèdes got involved in a long argument about the Shailendras and Java's economic situation that may have caused Jayavarman to leave Java and return to Cambodia. Coèdes believed that the return took place in the year 800 CE which is impossible because he was only named king (Chakravartin) in the year 802, a fact that required many years (10 or 20) of political activity before becoming accepted.

With the adoption of the Devaraja rite and the establishment of a state religion in the form of the Shivaite cult of the linga, Jayavarman II revolutionised previous conditions. It is assumed that the royalty wanted to continue the full Brahmanical religion, while people preferred to continue with the 'cult of the ancestors' practised for centuries before and adopted by some kings. Jayavarman II started the dynastic history of the Angkorian time with his anointment to Chakravartin (king of kings) implying the conquest or submission to him from existing "kings", which at that time were not kings but princedoms, and landowners. It became the backbone of Cambodian history.

Sometimes in his life, Jayavarman II planned to build Mahendrapravarata as his capital city on Mount Kulen, with the royal palace, houses for the court and courtiers, the state temple, and others. Khmer Art changed before the creation of the 'Kulen style' because it had already changed at Sambor Prei Kuk and the evolution of lintels into the Prei Khmeng style.

At the time when Jayavarman II reached Hariharalaya (802-803?) only the moats around the future Bakong pyramid were being completed. It seems that Jayavarman II had a particular interest in the site and lived there for about 34-35 years, in time to see King Indravarman I and his followers have an intense planning activity to build the temples of Prah Kō and start the Lolei which was completed by King Yashovarman I.

Vickery (2002: 59) concluded that we should forget about Java and the Sdok Kak Thom inscription in connection with Jayavarman II. It makes sense to assume that this charismatic, and dynamic man started his political activity around 770 or 780, and his career at Kulen was probably true although we don't know how important is the date 802, except for his coronation.

Innovations in Preangkorian art derived from Indian architecture, combined with the Khmer ingenuity in modifying Indian decorative elements, as clearly illustrated in the style of Sambor Prei Kuk, and later at Prah Kō and Lolei of Jayavarman II time. However, unravelling the problem of Kulen as a "unique style" was achieved when, in support of his theory, Stern at last introduced the decorative elements of colonettes (rarely found intact at Kulen). They are the key element for defining the unity of the Kulen style and the transition from Preangkorian to Angkorian.

For iconography, the most noticeable change that happened from Preangkorian to Angkorian art was not in "styles" but by the creation and decorating of pediments on which visual culture could start to expand from modest innovations (Phnom Bock and Phnom Krom) to the extreme of Banteay Srei and the complexities of Angkor Wat narrative reliefs.



Kompong Prah. One element of the vast temple complex



Trapeang Pong. The main tower emerges from the vegetation bordering many ponds, originally parts of a moat.

The Boundary between the prehistoric and historic Preangkorian and the Angkorian period

Based on iconography, I draw the end of the Preangkorian period with the “Special Lintel” of Prah kô of circa 875-80.CE. It was followed in the Angkorian Period with the complex symbolism of Phnom Bakheng (989-923CE), the extravaganzas of Koh Ker (921-944CE), and the ecstatic explosion of the visual narrative of Banteay Srei (961-1000CE). My tentative age for the boundary is confirmed by Boisselier (1960) who draws it at 875, which he also made to correspond to the end of the Kulen period.



PrahK ô. The “Special lintel” - the first with a narrative scene.

I understand that my boundary of Preangkorean to Angkorean is based on visual narrative is a boundary as many others. For example, if a hypothetical carbon dating is possible for the Kulen’s ceramics to be discovered in the Hariharalaya royal palace, the boundary would be different.

Piphal Heng performed research with his team in the Thala Borivat area that is suggesting the boundary from prehistoric to historic Preangkorian happened from circa the 4th to the 6th centuries. The smaller proto-historic settlements which became incorporated in c.300–500 CE into larger ones became major Preangkorian centres, as those on the Mekong (Wat Phu, Thala Borivat) and to the south (at Sambor Prei Kuk) and further down at Angkor Borei).

Based on my purely iconographic research I add that these Preangkorian centres each had their type of art, reflected in “styles” through the 6th to 8th centuries, which are a small piece of information for the models initiated by M. Stark in the dynamics of the development of premodern complex societies in detail for their origins in the region in Angkor Borei and to the north of Thala Borivat which Piphal Heng makes both parts of the Mekong organization based on lowland/upland economies.

The enormous cultural gap between Preangkorian to Angkorian corresponding to a time of explosive growth of intelligence in architecture and its decoration as it happened at Prah Kô and Lolei. The change in 875CE precedes by a few years the transfer of the capitals from Hariharalaya to Yashodharapura in the Angkor region, in 907CE.

To draw the boundary I thought it better to stay away from arguments between scholars of history and stay only on iconography. Therefore between Sambor Prei Kuk and Prah Kô, I started by looking at the layout and presence of a monster (makara) at Sambor Prei Kuk and some exceptional narratives carved on the lower half of lintels, but mainly of the first type of narratives with human or mythological figures. I conclude that the boundary is firmly traced with the first lintel of Prah Kô which I named the "Special lintel" because it shows the first attempt to make visible images and stories that spark a (narrative) celestial myth in the fantasy of the viewer. Unfortunately, we do not know the date when the temple and lintel were built, but it is assumed towards the end of the 9th century, but stylistically the lintel could have been carved around 975-980CE before the consecration of the Lolei temple in 993.

Other scholars want to trace the beginning of the Angkorian period (end of Preangkorian) to 802 CE with the coronation date of Jayavarman II on Mount Kulen. The date 875CE is acceptable by all scholars because by 875CE Indravarman made Hariharalaya his capital. This kingdom covered all of modern Cambodia, with expansion to the east causing conflicts with Champa.

During the following Angkorian Period, temples became progressively larger with more space for expression (pediments and walls), a phenomenon never seen before. In my previous publications, I followed the chronological subdivision in periods (styles) of French scholars supported by inscriptions and their dates reported by Jacques (1999: 10-11), which in turn derived from the works of Coedès and Vickery.

About boundaries dates, we have to go back to the inscriptions followed by an interpretation as that of Claude Jacques (1972 BEFEO 59) as follows:

George Coedès dissociated 802 from the accession to the throne on mount Mahendra (Jacques, 1972: 210). The Sdok Kak Thom inscription shows him in different cities where he sojourned and his city gives some importance to the title of a universal king (Chakracartin) that he already conquered and ordered a "supplementary rite" to make hereditary the title. The first kingdom of Jayavarman II had been Indrapura or somewhere else except the Kulen which was accessed only for his appointment of king of all the Khmer kings, some pre-existing princedoms. Following the writing, by Claude Jaques (1972: see below) it seems that Jayavarman II may have been crowned ruler in 724 CE. on Mount Kulen (Jacques, 1972: :211), not in 802 CE. and that the ceremony mentioned in the Sdok Kak Thom is that of Chakravartin followed by his definitive settling of Jayavarman II in Hariharalaya. There are only two distinct ceremonies (not more): one his arrival in 770 CE. to free Cambodia from Java (?) subjugation; the second the date of his consecration to chakravartin in 802 CE. supreme king of the Khmer Land on Mahendraparvata and performed by the first brahmin Shivakaivalya, while the second brahmin Hiranhyadana was the creator of the Devaraja ritual. The distance (between the two dates) is acceptable possibly because Jayavarman II was in Amarendrapura city which he had founded and did not go to the Kulen at the moment. After all, he was taking possession of Vyadpura, Sambupura and Aninditapura; he was an able conqueror, despite difficulties in the unification of the Khmer Land, and centres around Angkor and left traces everywhere he passed by. He laid the foundations for the Khmer empire.

In conclusion, I follow the dates tentatively suggested by C. Jacques (1972, BEFEO 59).

New discoveries

Concerning the new not imaginable recent discovery made by two scholars of Khmer history and culture; **dr. Jean Baptiste Chevance and dr. Damian Evans**. After a century of traditional archaeology (fieldwork and published research) a new cutting-edge technology rewrites the history of the early Khmer culture.

Furthermore, I repeated my concern about Jayavarman II, Kulen and doubts about the Sdok Thom Kak inscription in my *World of Khmer Mythology* of 2013: 141-42. Unfortunately, at that time many French scholars did not like reading English books.

I have been stunned by the research of two contemporaneous experts on Cambodia archaeology, Dr Jean-Baptiste Chevance and allied assistants, paired with Dr Damian Evans (2017-2019) about Mount Kulen, where they discovered the remains of an 'Invisible kingdom'. Their research was conducted with high-tech LIDAR laser surveys from helicopters which revealed the presence of 'a lost city' far more sophisticated than ever imagined— royal palaces, temples, water systems, roads and ordinary dwellings. This infrastructure is possibly *the* birthplace of the "great Khmer civilization" that dominated most of Southeast Asia from the 9th to the 14th centuries.

I may disagree with the last bombastic statements but I recognise an entirely new phase in the archaeology of Cambodia. It has to be seen how the results (interpretations) of new technologies will balance with the existing historical record and traditional investigations, particularly in epigraphy and iconography, my area of research for more than 25 years.

It is undeniable that Chevance and Evans's discoveries gave a great contribution to the history of the development of Khmer Culture, starting from their unravelling of the 8th-century existence on the Kulen Mountain of a very extensive grid with roads, canals and temples for an unestimated large population. This was also the first city-state parcelled city outside Angkor which Damian Evans studied with particular attention in conjunction with Angkor Wat.

I disagree with most of their focus in the writing on some aspects of their discoveries, starting from the definition of Civilization. I got the impression that they wrote under the echo of having their imagination ignited by such exciting results of the Lidar and repeated helicopter exploration prospect of discovering an early 20th century lost city, the ultimate dream of any archaeologist.

Dr Chevance assumes that the Rong Chen temple, which he assures to be the first pyramid temple of Khmer history, is not so because the first is Ak Yum at the southeast edge of the Western Baray preceding Ron Cheng, an unfinished and incomplete ruined temple consisting now of a large number of laterite slabs laid on the ground of a conical hill. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Rong Chen was the sacred temple (more sacred than any other temple?) where Jayavarman's personal brahmin performed the ceremony to appoint him Chakravartin together with other titles. We only have the epigraphic evidence that Jayavarman became king of kings in 802CE. Chevance's narrative continues by taking the 'sacred pyramid' of Rong Chen as the centrepiece of a palace uncovered by excavation (?) meaning that the site was the royal palace of a royal city with numerous temples (?) and neighbourhoods, indicating that a royal court was located on the Kulen plateau. Mount Kulen became the sacred Mahendraparvata "metropolis" at an unspecified date. All these beliefs were later confirmed by the LIDAR overflights, but I argue about how far goes their interpretation.

The two scholars wrote that the significant infrastructure in Phnom Kulen is the first engineered landscapes gridded and parcelled neighbourhoods "and the key to understanding the transition from the pre-Angkorian to Angkorian which includes innovations in urban planning, hydraulic engineering and socio-political organization that would shape the course of the region's history for the next 500

years”(Chevance et al, 2019: 1305). Mount Kulen indicates that it was not merely a vacant ceremonial centre (Chevance et al, 2019:1318).

The two Authors write that at Kulen there was a substantial population living in “an extensive, well-defined, built-up area’ supporting life at the *Mahendraparvata*. Chevance did not indicate precisely where the *Mahendraparvata metropolis* is located on the Kulen plateau, although It may be deduced from the plan presented by Evans or I assume it was expanding around the Rong Chen temple. There is no direct evidence of this only a later inscription indicating that thousands of people were needed in comparison with the people needed in comparison the maintenance of the single temple of Ta Prohm. It is thus possible that a very large number of people lived in parcels in their houses of perishable materials.

I read with great interest Chevance and Evans in some of their joint papers or in isolation and noticed among a lot of exciting ideas that the transition from the pre-Angkorian to the Angkorian period can be traced by innovations in urban planning, hydraulic engineering and sociopolitical organization. Unfortunately, that period seems to have been bad, only with Jayavarman I (first) attempting to control the poor situation. Lidar data revealed that Kulen’s population didn’t engage in terraced rice farming in their mountain metropolis—which meant that they almost necessarily relied on slash-and-burn agriculture at the edge of the metropolis. It would have depleted the soil rapidly, causing deforestation probably contributing to the decline and fall of the city.

Furthermore, to support the idea of the transition from the pre-Angkorian to the Angkorian period I do not see evidence of the phase corresponding to Jayavarman II and absence on the Kulen or when the king was already at Hariharalaya. In other words, I cannot see in the Kulen lintels anything special to justify the definition of a single clear “Style of Kulen”, but a mixture between styles: the Sambor Prei Kuk style and the Prei Khmeng style pre-existing at Sambor. Looking at my Table 3, I would call my middle group “Kulen style”.

After all, the Kulen area was not under authoritarian governance until the arrival of Jayavarman II in 802CE. after which we ignore the conditions. Concerning the arts (lintels), this is a dark period of little or no sponsorships resulting in an ‘impoverishment of the arts’ (de Coral-Rémusat 1951: 43), loss of originality and homogeneity in the carving of lintels (and some colonettes). Therefore I assume that the artists were fewer than before, many worked in isolation with a lack of support from workshops. Alternatively, it cannot be denied that 19 temples (16 with lintels studied by Stern in 1938) had been built by the indigenous people of Kulen with Hindu beliefs before the arrival of Jayavarman II. It is unreasonable to draw a boundary between 2 significant parts of Khmer history on undocumented new social conditions without considering also the development of the arts in detail. (sculpture, decorative carving in temples, art styles, ceramics, etc). After all, 802 is only a number and we are all working on assumptions which rise preconceptions.

Chevance and Evans expressed the opinion that beyond the Angkor region, few cities are defined by the presence of enclosing walls. In the Khmer Preangkorian, from the sixth to eighth centuries AD, there are only a few examples. One is that of Ishavarapura, the city of Sambor Prei Kuk, followed by the very little studied Prei Nokor where the stones of the city wall were used in the late 19th century to build a new Pagoda. They are much smaller in scale than Mahendraparvata and without an internal grid. Chevance concluded that Mahendraparvata marks an important point of departure from previous city planning because beyond the walls there is also a grid, representing thus the first large-scale ‘grid city’ elaborated in the Khmer world.

The most extensive example of a city with grids is that of Angkor Wat, and the other powerful example is Angkor Thom. Jayavarman VII, with massive linear axes and internal frameworks (Gaucher. 2017). a model for gridded cities of which there is unambiguous evidence (Evans 2016).

I conclude that the cutting-edge techniques used by Chevance, Evans and their teams on Kulen, are a remarkably early experiment in interpreting formal urban planning and the creation of an urban model, which in our case first developed on the mountain plateau, sparsely inhabited at the time and not widely adopted straight away. *Mahendraparvata* has the grid of a city similar to that of Angkor Wat therefore immediately recognizable as Angkorian (Chevance et al, 2019:1319).

The model would eventually be adopted in the low-lying floodplains of Angkor. It seems to me that as recognised by the two scholars, a large number of people was needed for the functioning of the land parcels, probably by the thousands. There is no inscription mentioning a large religious establishment at Kulen (apart from the 18th century Buddhist monastery). I also assume that the local people had no time for agricultural tasks which were possibly provided by the fertile Angkor plains, before becoming a prototype for high-density urban centres at the height of the Khmer Empire (Chevance et al, 2019: 1317, 1318). At Mahendraparvata people, on top of daily chores in the land parcels defined by the grid they received, there were more people, including many hermits and possibly more than thousands of slaves for digging roads, bridges and long canals and workers in carries to extract construction stone, and the maintenance of this infrastructure.

The historical story (remembered by the two scholars) concerns king Jayavarman II who, soon after his coronation in 802CE, abandoned his early gridded capital of Mahendraparvata, the “centre of power of the Khmer Empire” to descend with his court to Hariharalaya in Rolous, the capital city of another king, Indravarman I. I find it difficult to understand this historical event logically because of the absence of data on Jayavarman’s life. Contemporaneously the abandonment of his city and most of its population, Kulen did not become a vacant ceremonial centre but continued to be considered a sacred mountain and it was never completely abandoned (Chevance et al, 2019:1318). Late epigraphic evidence indicates that Jayavarman II consecrated sculptures on the river bed at Kabal Spean¹. Several assertions that in the history of Cambodia, Mahendraparvata was the first urban model developed on the Kulen mountain, and that was the prototype for high-density urban centres at the height of the Khmer Empire” (Chevance et al, 2019: 1317, 1318). This is only an assumption being made before the publication of ground excavation results, fundamental evidence of archaeology. Sambor may have been the model on which Angkor was later planned, considering that Angkor was the real “seat of power of the Khmer Empire.” I analyzed the Kabal Spean iconography in one of the papers on my khmerimagery site on the Internet Facebook which I will update soon.

Chevance and Evans assumed that the architecture and art of Phnom Kulen, indicates the development of a unique style during the 9th century in temples with lintels and colonettes and that statuary progressed to a unique and new “Kulen style”. This is true certainly for sculpted statues but not for temple decoration. My analysis of the iconography of the Kulen lintels photographed by Stern did show a heterogeneous status (of 3 groups at least) that can't justify the “unique style” mentioned by Chevance and Evans when they refer to lintels and colonettes typical of the “Kulen style” and that this style does illustrate a transition from the previous pre-Angkorian styles to the future Angkorian and post-Angkorian styles. I disagree with this assumption because according to iconography the boundary occurs at Hariharalaya, independently from Mahendraparvata, around the year 875CE. Furthermore, their

¹ Sambor Prei Kuk was not only the centre of the arts being Ishvanapura, the first true capital with enclosure walls and moats, but it was also a noticeable religious centre. People of the well-being society built their brick temples of a polygonal base with at least one wall decorated with “Flying palaces”. Later a sacred zone was defined with 3 towers characterized by a series of lintels of different designs. Nowhere else in the Preangkorian, there was such a cultural agglomeration. From Oc Eo to Angkor Borei (where I architectural decorative elements I have to research) to Sambor there were centuries of cultural development. At Sambor the number of religious temples and realistic vitality of the lintel’s components were of richness not found until the Angkor Wat Period and persisting in it. Therefore Sambor Prei Kuk stands out as the centre of the origin of Khmer art.

statement involves the meaning of “style²”. I assume that the reason why Stern 1938 was unable to choose one of the 16 lintels as the representative of the “Kulen style” because there are of 2 or 3 different styles amongst the lintels he discovered.

Evans called rightfully the attention to Phnom Kulen being the oldest site of the ancient quarrying industry, which developed on a very large scale and was recently scanned with Lidar (Evans, 2017). revealed numerous ‘localized pits with high stepped surfaces’ forming a complex network of stone exploitation.

Comments

1. The immense power of what Chevance and Evans discovered and wrote is beyond the grasp of most scholars. Fortunately, most of their writings is available on the Internet.
2. The Angkor period is commonly understood to start in 802 CE with the proclamation of Jayavarman II as the *chakravartin* (universal king). The date does not have any other meaning, therefore the boundary of Preangkorean and Angkorian periods must be based on art elements such as ground information (from excavations), architecture or iconography and styles.
3. Phnom Kulen represents one of the most significant ceramic production centres within the Khmer kingdom
4. Jayavarman II did not have any visible influence on the Khmer art of Mahendraparvata period, It is important to look at Claude Jacques's 1972 publication entirely dedicated to Jayavarman II (BEFEO 59,1972: 193-220).
5. The Sdok Kok Thom inscription was not written to the glory of the king, but for a family of important servants and dignitaries, particularly the glory of the brahmin Shivakaivalya, high servant of Jayavarman II. This inscription does not give a single date on Jayavarman, but the later inscription (K598) of Traspean Run mentions simply that in 802 CE. king Jayavarman established the residence on Mount Mahendra.
6. Coedès dissociated 802 from the accession to the throne on mount Mahendra (Jacques, 1972:210). The Sdok Kak Thom inscription shows him in different cities where he sojourned and his city gives some importance to the title of the universal king that he already had, and ordered a “supplementary rite” to make hereditary the title. The first kingdom of Jayavarman II had been Indrapura or somewhere else except the Kulen which was accessed only for his appointment of king of all the Khmer kings, some pre-existing princedoms. Following the writing, by Claude Jaques (1972:see below) it seems that Jayavarman II may have been crowned ruler in 724 CE. on Mount Kulen (Jacques (1972 ::211), not in 802 CE. and that the ceremony mentioned in the Sdok Kak Thom is that of Chakravartin followed by his definitive settling of Jayavarman II in Hariharalaya. There are only two distinct ceremonies (not more): one his arrival in 770 CE. to free Cambodia from Java (?) subjugation; the second the date of his consecration to Chakravartin in 802 CE. supreme king of the Khmer Land on Mahendraparvata and performed by the first brahmin Shivakaivalya, while the second brahmin Hiranhyadana was the creator of the Devaraja ritual. The distance (between the two dates) is acceptable possibly because Jayavarman II was in Amarendrapura city which he had founded and did not go to the Kulen at the moment. After all, he was taking possession of Vyadpura,

² that I have analyzed the concept of “style” in the conclusions of my Preangkorian Iconography of the Preangkorian.

Sambupura and Aninditapura; he was an able conqueror, despite difficulties in the unification of the Khmer Land, and centres around Angkor and left traces everywhere he passed by. He laid the foundations for the Khmer empire.

In conclusion, the dates tentatively suggested by C. Jacques (1972, BEFEO 59) are:

about 770 arrival (or return) to Cambodia

770-780 control of Aninditapura Sambupura

780-802 installation to hari and other kingdoms above ment

780 790 ascents to be the king of these cities (Indrapura conquered in 724 and from that moment he ruled on earth till 724CE.(K598)

around 800 return to the Angkor region and installation on mahendra mount

800 return to the Angkor region and transfer to mount Mahendra where in

802 Jayavarman I is nominated to chakravartin, and invention of the title devaraja, protecting from Java

803-834 New installation at Hariharalaya where he dies in 834 or little before, when 84 years old

NOTE. All dates are approximate, except 802 and this hypothesis may be followed by others. Dupont reached the opposite conclusion

Iconography facing Lidar. Iconography cannot change because images (carved on lintels or pediments) do not change; it will continue to evolve. Iconography may adapt to the revolutionary interpretations of the recent Lidar survey of Kulen. However, new kinds of Lidar or different filters will probably change in the future. Boundaries are always based on human interpretation of scientific data.

Bangkok 28/02/2023

APPENDIX

Kala, makara and naga iconology in Khmer Preangkorian

The representation of mythological monsters became standard in many temples of the 9th century that I consider of the end of the Preangkorian(880) perhaps because an Indian-inspired art manual may have been used by artists from circa 800 CE in the region.

Kala

In Khmer art, usually, the kala is depicted as a skull with bulging eyes and 2 horns. We have seen that it starts to appear at Oc Ceo and centuries later Sambor Prei Kuk carved on the walls of cell N17 monolithic cell older than the towers.

In general, scholars have attributed a too important role to the kala image in the history of Khmer Art. It is an error of Coral Remusat who wrote (1951) repeatedly that the kala entered Khmer history with Jayavarman II coming from Java and influencing thus Cambodian art with the image of kala, mistakenly taking as proof the kala carved at the Borobudur temple over small shines with Buddha statues that were completed around 850 thus after the Khmer invention, where the kala are abundant after 800CE. Phantasy is the assertion that Kala was brought to Cambodia by Jayavarman II, who surely had many more important decisions to care.

To demonstrate the Indonesian influence on Khmer art, M.me de Coral-Rémusat repeatedly said that the Indonesian kala/kirtimukha of the Borobudur was copied in Khmer art and that the kala had been brought to Cambodia by Jayavarman II. To demonstrate her theory, she published an image of Borobudur (Plate VIII, fig.21) which is a painted design over a niche containing a statue of Buddha, not a carved decoration but a painting done after at the end of construction. Possibly, the kala of the 7th century N.17 shrine and was not evidenced at her time.

In iconography, the Kala of Prasat Trapeang Pong (in the Siem Reap area), a temple of early 9th century, has figures of kala biting with its 4 sharp teeth the centre of the arc made of leaves and flowers. In this temple, it is believed to appear the most characteristic image of the kala.



Oc Ceo- kala (courtesy Nancy



Sambor Prei Kuk cell N.17



Sambor Prei Kuk - monument around C1

Kulen, Damrei Krap Examples of the *kala* biting the middle of the arc in a lintel of Damrei Krap(Kulen). The *Kala*'s head resembles the skull of some imaginary monster with bulging eyes and two bent horns.



Kulen, Damrei Krap Examples of the *kala* from a degraded lintel.



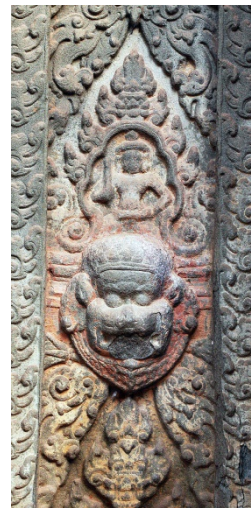
Kulen lintel of Prasat Khraham, Kulen
The *kala* face (resembling a child) is squashed under the weight of the heavy vegetal scrolls at the end of the lintel. This lintel is exceptional, found only on a Kulen temple.



Kulen - Detail from a Stern's picture 1938- Lintel now at Musée Guimet with the image of a typical squashed *kala*



Trapeang Pong - This is the most popular and classic Kala, with its arc of flowers, used as a model for most lintels to come.



Prah Kô - Monstruous face of a *kala* on various nobs of false doors of the temple.

At Kulen and other temples, the figure of the *kala* appears squashed by the weight of a shrine it has to sustain often is a group of figures or a simple one. It has the arms bent to support the extra weight. The best example is at the Musée Guimet. This exceptional lintel comes with a Harihara's temple, with typical *kaka* and divergent *makara*. On the arc two athletic figures are running away from the central mythological figure of an unidentified god. The *makara* seem to have the "*wong yen*" a chain of pearls hanging from the mouth's end The *makara* to the left shows C.



Prah Ko – At the centre of the arc is a *kala* devouring what looks like a human figure,s holding them firm with the *kala* arms

I found it particularly rewarding to examine the look of the **Prah Kô** *kala* (pictures below). Plaster was commonly used in the Prah Koh temple (Hariharalaya) for the decoration of the lintels more than in any other Preangkorian temple. Characteristic were the repeatedly moulded images of a *kala* with a very large beard (?) or hairstyle (?) containing the figure of a dancing boy of unknown origin and meaning. Elsewhere in these temples plaster was artistically used for representing birds and a prancing lion. Probably the plaster decoration of Prah Kô has allowed what I believe to be over-decoration (as in the Western Art Baroque). For the first time, the *kala* shows his arms and hands always grabbing something.



Kala **Preah Khô** stucco/plaster applied moulds



Preah Khô, same



Lolei. This friendly *kala* must be satisfied to eat tender leaves because the juicy human figure is escaping from his head

Makara

Originally in India *Makara* was a huge mythical sea animal with the body of a crocodile, shark and dolphin. It is the vehicle of the Varuna the god of the Ocean. As at Ellora, *makara* was essential in the design of the frame of pediments. Modifying completely the Indian models, Khmer artists carved *kala* and *makara* as horrifying mythic elements of lintels over the door of a temple that perhaps their king never saw. It is assumed that in the 7/8th centuries kings did not yet understand that temples were centres of creation and diffusion of art models and that their spreading functioned to glorify capital cities. All this was a hidden form of glorification of the royal power of a centralised empire. The basic decoration allowed after all the styles and an artistic evolution through centuries.

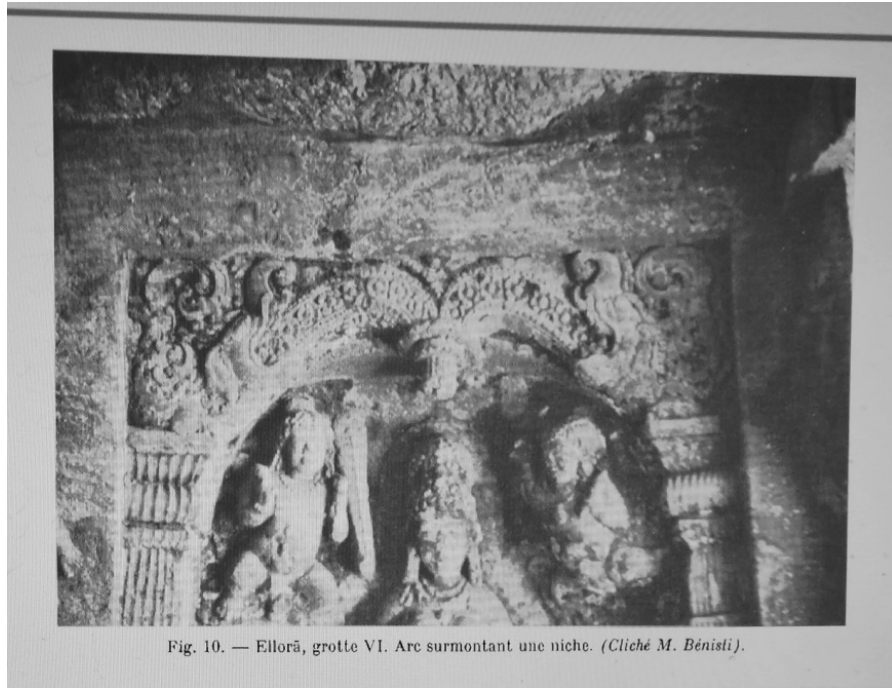


Fig. 10. — Ellorā, grotte VI. Arc surmontant une niche. (Cliché M. Bénisti).

In her study on early Cambodian art, Mireille Benisti used abundant Indian references. at Ellora, the monsters carved on the top pediment with *makara* is of the 6th century., before Cambodia where the oldest is at Sambor at least a century later.

The belief that the Kulen *kala* and *makara* are essential components of the Kulen style is unsupported. Stern photographs show that of 16, the *Kala* and *makara* occur 3 times on 16 lintels (see table 2). in the Harihara temples, the *makara* is often carved with a body of a not marine animal composed of a small elephant head, the mouth and teeth changing from those of a crocodile to those of a lion, the head of an elephant with erected trunk and small tusks, all of the varying size. In some carvings, it seems that the *makara's* trunk becomes the body of the rider who looks riding on itself. This body transformation occurs also in Rajendravarman (944-968) lintels of East Mebon.



Makara – Lolei. From aggressive to decorative

Concerning the *makara* presumed rule of the head convergence/divergence is variable in all Preangkorian lintels of Khmer art, even in at Kulen.

The most striking examples of *makara* are those on all the lintel of Sambor Prei Ku, in deep carving giving high relief results.



Sambor Prei Kuk.Typical makara of the lintels, with all its characteristic



Sambor Prei Kuk lintel – LEFT-Makara from of the many lintels of ground of the temple. To black and white picture is of a RIGHT - lintel of the Musee Guimet.



Lintel in the Preil khmeng style still with a very funny **makara** looking more like a family pet than a mythic monster of the Musée Guimet but I did not have lime to copy the label. The rider wears a crown with naga, armlets, and necklace and has regained bulging eyes, horns and reminder of his elephantine mix, also tusks



4c. Makara of triangular lintel's corners



Images of that crossbred figure (**Prah Ko and Lolei**) that has 4 legs the head of an elephant riding his own trunk that transforms into the elephant heads. The elephant itself Practically it is an elephantine figure riding himself. It stands on the capitel of the colonnette.. This monster will reappear in temples of Ragendravarman with the head of a man not an elephant.



Lolei – LEFT. *Makara* still with the original lion body of an elephant head with elevated trunk the man that it is riding the monster is totally separate from it. - RIGHT. The elegant elephantine *makara* is difficult to identify because its lion's tail seems to transform into large foliage part of the filling space attitude of Lolei iconography (a sort of Eastern Baroque).



Musée Guimet, Paris. - The *makara* head as it will appear on most Angkorian temples



Lolei. this picture shows the *makara* having the lion's body(eroded and lost) but the face of Garuda with a sharp beak. It is surprising to see the transformation makara-Garuda and if it wants to indicate some mythological fact. Perhaps as a return to Hindu iconography or possibly that the lintel with Garuda alluded that he was guarding Vishnu.,

Garuda

In the temple of Prah Kô appears a large size mythic bird Garuda, covering most of the lintel with his open wings. In other lintels, Garuda is carved in the tentative to unite two parts of the arc with his wings. at Lolei the head of Garuda with his large beak replace the head of Kala. This representation is unique to the end of Hariharalaya area temples and also in iconography.



It is interesting to see the Prah Ko “sweet” Garuda holding the arc together or covering the lintel with his plumes, becoming suddenly the dark, frightening Lolei Garuda with dark menacing head.



Lolei - it is only the large beak that transform a naga into Gauda



Lolei. this picture the *makara* has ther lion's body(eroded and lost) but the face with the Garuda's beack.It is difficult to transformation naga-Garuda wanted to inficate somy mythological fact. Perhaps as return to Hindu iconography or possibly that the linteol with Garuda alluded that he was guarding Vishnu,

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