

## Shaiva Temples in Cambodia

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Siva worship in Southeast Asia has been recorded from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, and the oldest known Linga in Southeast Asia has been found in present day Vietnam in the Mi Son group of temples. Inscriptions date it to 400 CE; it is known as the Siva Bhadresvara.

Funan, (the predecessor to the kingdom of Cambodia) was, according to tradition, found by a Brahmin called Kaudinya who married the local Naga Princess. The capital of this kingdom was near the mountain, Ba Phnom, where the Shiva Linga was worshipped. Throughout the history of Cambodia, Pre-Angkor and later, the cult of Siva worship continues. Even during times of Buddhism as state religion, the presence of Brahmin priests, supervising the court rituals continues to this day.

As such the temples found in Cambodia are to a large extent Siva temples, though the presiding deity now in all is Buddha.

The history of Angkorian Cambodia begins with Jayavarman II in the year 802 CE. According to accounts by Arab traders, the Maharaja of Java had led an expedition against Cambodia, decapitated its king, and kept members of his family captive.

The inscription of Sdok Kok Thom (11<sup>th</sup> century) tells of the return of King Jayavarman II from Java to reign in the city of Indrapura. The inscription gives an account of the king taking as his royal priest a Brahmin scholar named Sivakaivalya. Then the inscription records the king moving his capital to Kuti (present day Banteay Kdai), then to Hariharalya (where we have the Ruluos group of temple), next to Amarendrapura, and then to Mahendraparvata.

It was at Mahendraparvata that a Brahmin named Hiranyadama came to serve the king, "This Brahmin was learned in the magical sciences and performed a ritual to ensure that the country of the Kambujas would no longer be dependent on Java and the king would be a Cakravartin. The Brahmin performed the rites according to the Vinashikha Tantra and established a Lord of the Universe (Devaraja) who was the king. He taught the sacred ritual to the Lord Sivakaivalya, who along with his family became the chief priests of the Deveraja cult."

Afterwards, according to the inscription, the King returned to Hariharalaya with the Deveraja, and there he resided till his death.

According to this inscription it has not been clear as to what was the Deveraja? Most historians, however, seem to be in agreement that in all probability it was a Linga placed on a pyramid, or tower, as the Vinashikha Tantra, was a part of the earlier Sadashiva Sutras. Unfortunately as the texts are lost to us in India and only one commentary on the text exist in a museum in Nepal, the actual ritual is not explained.

There is hope that with excavations of the city of Mahendraparvata more inscriptions may be found which would throw light on this.

Hariharayalaya is associated with the Ruluos group of temples, this area lies 15 km south-east of Siem Reap. The temple of **Preah Ko** is assumed to stand on the site of the royal palace and according to tradition is known as the funerary temple of Jayavarman II, as after his death he was given the name of “Parmesvara”.



Figure 1 Central Tower at Preah Ko

This is a small brick temple with 6 towers, 3 Nandi bulls face the first 3 towers, and the doorways of these towers carry inscriptions. The middle tower is dedicated to “Parmesvara”, The Supreme Lord, which is also the name for Siva and the posthumous name for Jayavarman II. The towers on either side are dedicated to Rudresvara and Prithvindresvara. These three divinities were the names of Siva and also the grandfather and uncle of King Indravarman I who was a successor of Jayavarman II and built this temple. The towers behind were dedicated to the queens of these kings, deified as goddesses.



Figure 2 Nandi.

This is one of the few temples where Siva is not signified by a linga. It is a charming temple, with intricately carved lintels.

The second temple in this group is the **Bakong**, the first significant mountain temple. It was built in 881, the state temple of Indravarman I, and has 5 tiers and the linga dedicated to Siva as Sri Indresvara. It was in a bad shape and was reconstructed in the 1930s by Maurice Glaize.



Figure 3 Bakong.

Built of Sandstone, it has 5 tiers that represent the realms of nagas, garudas, rakshasas, yakshas and finally Maharajas. There are steps going up each axis. There are faint traces of the bas reliefs that decorated each tier, and only one remains, on the south side of the fourth tier.



Figure 4 Bas relief on the 4th tier.

The temple is surrounded by a moat and covers a large area, and has another moat (which is dry) enclosing the inner area. There are Gopuras at cardinal points. The sanctuary tower is 15 meters high, and of a later date, only the base of the sanctuary dates from the time of Indravarman I. The lintels are of the finest in Khmer art. Carvings of Dvarpalas and Devetas flank the doorways. The statues of elephants on the tiers are damaged as are those of the Nandi bulls before the steps. There is now a Buddhist sanctuary on the grounds and a statue of Buddha in the main tower. It is still a temple in use with the local villagers making offerings.

The third temple in this group is that of **Lolei**.



Figure 5 Finely carved pediment on remaining tower.

Lolei was built on an island in an artificial lake, work was started on it by Indravarman I but after his death it was his son Yasovarman I who completed the project, before he moved his capital to Angkor, where he built the city Yashodharapura.



Figure 6 Inscription on doorway.

The temple has 4 towers, laid asymmetrically. The original plan might have been similar to Preah Ko, but the foundation Steele mentions only four gods. The condition of one tower is bad and

one has collapsed. The lintels and dvarapalas are in bad condition though some repair has been done. There was an ashrama on the site.

Today the area has been more or less taken over by a Buddhist sanctuary.

**Banteay Srei** is one of the most beautiful Siva temples, a real gem! Built by a minister of Rajendravarman, who later went on to become the tutor of King Jayavarman V, it lies at the foot of the Kullen Mountains.

The Linga is dedicated to Tribhuvanamahesvara (Siva, Lord of the three worlds), which is also the name of the temple.



Figure 7 Pediment with Ravana shaking Mount Kailasa.

This temple is built of unusual pink sandstone and is known for its exquisite carvings. The pediments and lintels show scenes from the Mahabharata, Uma and Maheshwara and Narasimha.

It has three sanctuary towers and a mandapa. The central sanctuary is dedicated to Shiva, the northern one to Vishnu, there was also one dedicated to Durga. There was a statue of Siva with Uma which is now in the Phnom Penh museum.

This temple was discovered by the French, and is famous as Andre Malraux who was heavily in debt came here to carry away some notable sculptures from this temple and was arrested in the attempt. He went on to become the French Minister of Culture!



Figure 8 Devata on the south sanctuary.

These mountain temples dedicated to Siva are unusual in that we do not have anything comparable in India. The architecture and ritual associated with these temples is based on Saiva texts which travelled from India but are lost to us. But, to quote from G. Coedes “The expansive power of their culture and the dynamism of their civilization, of which the Indians seem never to have been completely conscious, manifested themselves in all the countries to which they emigrated.”

#### Also read

1. Temples of Cambodia <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Temples-Cambodia.aspx>
2. Pictures of Banteay Sri <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Banteay-Sri.aspx>
3. Pictures of Preah Koh <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Preah-Ko.aspx>
4. Pictures of Angkor Watt <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Angkor-Watt.aspx>
5. Pictures of The Bayon <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/The-Bayon.aspx>
6. Historical ties with S.E. Asia <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Sri-Lanka,-South-East-Asia-1.aspx>
7. Space and Cosmology in Indian Temples-Angkor Watt <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Space-and-Cosmology-in-Indian-Temples~-Angkor-Watt-1.aspx>
8. Harmonious blend of Hinduism, Shinto, Buddhism strains in Japan <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Harmonious-blend-of-Hinduism,-Buddhism,-Shinto-strains-in-Japan-1.aspx>
9. Pictures of Saiva Temples in India <http://www.esamskriti.com/themes/Shiv-Temples.aspx>