

PhD thesis summary

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Costumes Carved in Stone in Banteay Srei
An Analysis of the Figural Depictions at a Tenth-Century Shaiva Sanctuary

Pécs
2019

The objective of my doctoral dissertation was to conduct a comparative iconographic analysis of the types of clothing, jewellery (and other adornments) and hairstyles worn by the figures depicted on the carvings (bas-reliefs and statues) of Banteay Srei, a temple erected in honour of *Shiva* in the Angkor region in the tenth century, during the flourishing Khmer Empire. The unique place that the complex of buildings at Banteay Srei occupies among the monuments of Angkor and within the region's chronological order, the incomparable wealth of detail in the ornamentations carved at the site, and the exceptional subject matter of their bas-reliefs have, for a century now, provided researchers of history, epigraphy, the history of religion and art history with ever more intriguing questions.

Subject

In early Angkorian temples, within each individual site, the human figures depicted on the walls were shown wearing more or less identical clothing; in Banteay Srei, however, there were several substantially different types of clothing (and other aspects of attire) in evidence in the carvings – this change formed the starting point of my investigation. My primary aim was to find explanations for the similarities and differences that manifest themselves in the sculpted attire.

Having directly observed the bas-reliefs at Banteay Srei, which largely confirmed the system of categories first established by Jean Boisselier (*La statuaire khmère et son évolution. Publ. EFEO, 37, 2, Saïgon. 1955.*), I later saw the female figures on a pediment from Banteay Srei which is now in the Musée Guimet in Paris, and realised that their garments could not be easily sorted into any of Boisselier's categories; this prompted me to look for further clarification. Professor Claude Jacques drew my attention to the fact that this question had not yet been formally explored. I therefore decided to concentrate my research on the temple complex at Banteay Srei.

This paper presents the results of a comprehensive examination of the unique features of the predominantly figural bas-reliefs found at the monument, carried out using a research method concentrating on the themes of the carvings and on the attire depicted in them, much of which is to be regarded as without precedent. The backbone of the research was provided by a database systemising the attire visible in the figural bas-reliefs, derived mostly from on-site research and documentation.

Field work and methodology

During my field work at Banteay Srei, carried out between 2013 and 2014 and lasting six months in total, I surveyed all the human figures visible *in situ* at the temple complex, numbering more than 500 in all, recording the details both photographically and in precise written descriptions. Having first divided the figures into male and female groups, I sorted the clothing, jewellery and hairstyles into different categories, which formed the basis of my database; I then added to the database not only the figures from the artworks observed *in situ*, but also those from other sculptures from Banteay Srei, both bas-reliefs and in-the-round statues, which are presently in public collections. I compared the types of attire depicted in Banteay Srei with those visible in depictions from other temples built in the tenth or early eleventh century, which I also visited in person. In addition to my own field work, I utilised all the available sources dealing with the archaeological excavations at Banteay Srei and with its architectural and artistic analysis, including the hand-written work diaries maintained by the builders and art historians engaged in the restoration of the site (*Journal de Fouilles. Région d'Angkor, Cambodge. 1909–1955*). In order to analyse the carvings that are now missing from the temple complex (as well as those that are now damaged), I relied on the archive photographs held by the EFEO in Paris.

The database I created, which forms the basis of my research, is an unprecedented attempt to deal with the attire worn by all the figures depicted in an Angkorian sanctuary complex. With the help of this database, I was able to interpret the depictions not only in terms of their formal categorisation, but also with regard to iconography, their position within the architecture and their narrative context. Compiling and analysing the catalogue proved to be a methodologically extremely complex process of examination, which can be developed in several directions in the future, and applied for research into other sanctuaries in Angkor.

My research started off from my unresolved iconographic and semantic questions. In order to interpret the costumes visible in the bas-reliefs, I considered it necessary to examine them against their cultural and religious background, from their spatial architectural position, and within the narrative context. I analysed how the depicted themes developed, the traditions they were based on, the way they were handed down and transformed from age to age and from place to place, and how they influenced each other. I was interested in the extent to which form and content altered in parallel with one another, and the ways in which old forms acquired new meaning, and vice versa. Questions also arose in connection with the mutual influence between different cultures, and with regard to different forms of archaisation.

Structure of the Paper

I. In the first part of the paper (Chapter 2-8) I present an overview of all the historical, epigraphic, religious historical, architectural and art historical knowledge that has accumulated in connection with Banteay Srei over the last ninety years.

- I present the arrangement of the sanctuary area and the different buildings and building types. Here I also delineate the questions concerning the history of construction at the temple, the functions of particular buildings, and the date – subjects that have occupied scholars dealing with Banteay Srei for several decades.
- Based on the available written sources and on classification according to art historical style, a relative chronology of when the different sanctuaries and other buildings of Angkor were constructed can undoubtedly be put together, but due to periodic conversions and reconstructions, it is often difficult to determine when a given building was originally founded. Eleven stone-carved inscriptions have been discovered at Banteay Srei, written in Khmer and/or Sanskrit. A few of these inscriptions also feature dates, although they refer to different periods of construction, separated by centuries. At Banteay Srei this relative profusion of extant inscriptions causes problems for researchers, for the dates given in them are up to several centuries apart from each other, presumably because the temple was reconstructed more than once. According to the available written sources, Banteay Srei was founded in 967 CE, so from a historical perspective, the temple clearly fits into the chronological system of Angkorian monuments. However, assuming that the building was indeed converted during its history, perhaps on several occasions, then our investigation must start out from the fact that the bas-reliefs presently visible on the walls of the complex cannot be proven to originate from the tenth century, neither stylistically nor iconographically.
- Thanks to the inscriptions, we know the name of the founder of the sanctuary, and several family members. Jayavarman V (968–c.1000) king granted his high priest and Guru Yajnavaraha permission to found a temple in Ishvarapura, located relatively far from the capital city of the day. Written relics occasionally hint at how cultured and knowledgeable Yajnavaraha was, at the donations made by his siblings and at the buildings they initiated, yet we cannot be sure which branch of Hinduism the high priest followed, nor do we have precise information concerning the architectural and artistic rules that were adhered to when the temple complex was designed.
- I explain how difficult to determine precisely which text was referred to during the design of any given temple, including those located in present-day India. The spatial arrangement and architectural proportions in evidence at Banteay Srei indicate that classical models were followed. The particular rulebooks used when Banteay Srei was created have not yet been identified, although it is beyond a doubt that regulations from India were applied, as demonstrated by the floor plans and by the compositions of the decorations adorning the walls of the buildings. In view of the fact that previous researchers into Angkorian art have, based on written sources and architectural characteristics, concluded that the *Manasara* texts must have been known within the royal court in the tenth century, I began my own examinations by comparing the attire worn by the different figures in the bas-reliefs with the requirements specified by these regulations.

- There are no written sources to prove which form of Hinduism was practised by the designers of Banteay Srei, but in the late 1930s, based on epigraphic analysis, specifically the use of certain words in the inscriptions, George Cœdès conjectured that the people responsible for the design were probably familiar with the texts of the *Pashupata* school. Despite the relatively early publication of these epigraphic findings, nobody since then has looked into the possibility that signs of the architectural and artistic traditions of *Pashupata* Shaivism may be present at Banteay Srei. During my research, I compared the subject matter of the narrative reliefs at Banteay Srei with parallels from India, and by analysing their content, I attempted to prove that the principles of the *Pashupata* school are indeed present at Banteay Srei.
- In addition to the chronological systemisation of Angkorian architectural history, the history of art in the region is also divided into a series of consecutive style periods. Within the chronological and evolutionary system of style periods devised by art historians, Banteay Srei is regarded both as an independent style category and as an independent style period. According to the motif-based stylistic classification devised by Gilberte de Coral-Rémusat and Philippe Stern, and later refined by Jean Boisselier, Pierre Dupont and Mireille Bénisti, the Banteay Srei style was around for a few decades in the mid-tenth century. In my paper, I argue that, although the artistic styles are unquestionably linked to particular historical periods, and can therefore be dated accordingly, the fact that they come after each other in consecutive order does not necessarily mean that their characteristic features have to be interpreted as the result of consequential, continuous development.

II. In the second part of the paper (Chapter 9-11) I focus on the general features and style of attire in Angkor and the costumes depicted on the carvings of Banteay Srei.

- I present in general the costumes of Angkor, but also specify their modern-day parallels and the possibility that items of attire have been handed down through the generations. Gillian Green, in her comprehensive monograph on textiles (*Traditional Textiles of Cambodia. Cultural Threads and Material Heritage*, Bangkok, 2003), was among the first to examine the so-called historical textiles visible in the bas-reliefs, although her attention concentrated less on the clothing and more on the patterns in the materials used for curtains, window coverings, parasols, saddle covers, and so on. Thanks to her work, we now know substantially more about the possible historical origins of the textile-producing traditions still followed in Cambodia today, although there is still copious room for further research into this area. Based on my own observations, I have supplemented Green's results in order to present the types of modern-day clothing that might conceivably have originated in Angkor.
- I give a description and analysis of the categories I established in order to compile the database containing the items of attire worn by figures depicted in Banteay Srei. The noticeable differences in the costumes visible on the walls of Banteay Srei were remarked upon by Boisselier in his summary work of 1955, but nobody to date has come up with a satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon. My observations tally with the findings of my predecessors, in that bas-reliefs featuring different types of attire in the same composition do not appear elsewhere in Angkor until a good century or so after 967 CE, with the earliest examples found in Baphuon.
- My questions pertaining to the Banteay Srei style as an independent artistic category, to its possible parallels and to its dating, are also presented based on the analysis of the carved costumes.

III. In the third part of the paper (Chapter 12-20) I focus on the reliefs and statues found in Banteay Srei. I present my results in classifying the carved lintels and pediments based on their compositional features. By analysing the reliefs I make thematic comparisons between Banteay Srei and some Indian Pashupata sanctuaries as well as other Angkorean Temples.

- Some of the bas-reliefs at Banteay Srei can be described as narrative reliefs, because of their compositions. Uniquely among tenth-century Angkorian temples, Banteay Srei features a bas-relief in which two consecutive scenes from the same narrative are depicted within a single composition.
- I present all the narrative bas-reliefs in order, starting from the sanctuary towers and moving “from inside to outside” through the enclosures, passing around the individual buildings in accordance with the *Pradakshina* (clockwise circumambulation). At the end of each section I list the Angkorian sanctuaries where thematic parallels can be found. During my analysis of the bas-reliefs, I present the types of attire and jewellery visible in them in accordance with the categories given in my database. I also state how frequently the different types of attire appear, as a proportion of the total.
- I also present the non-narrative reliefs at Banteay Srei, with my focus on the attire visible in them. The clothes, hairstyles and jewellery worn by the male and female figures flanking the doorways of the sanctuary towers merit special attention, because these figures are representative of the distinctive Banteay Srei style, which is only typical of this complex. I consider it highly likely that the clothing in which the male and female figures are “dressed” reflects the actual clothing people wore at the time – since these figures played a less significant role in the mythology, there were no fixed iconographic stipulations governing their appearance.
- I propose a new way of categorising the lintels and pediments that contain – among other types of carving – narrative reliefs, based on their form.
- Based on the floor plan and on the thematic arrangement of the depictions, I compared Banteay Srei with the *Pashupata* temples of South India. Based on the depictions that typically feature in Indian *Pashupata* temples, I tried to find equivalents on the same theme in the bas-reliefs of Banteay Srei. The thematic comparison resulted in countless parallels, and also a significant new finding: the identification of a hitherto “unknown female deity” on the Easter lintel of the Southern Library building.
- My attempt was to find possible analogies between the depictions found at Banteay Srei and those visible on other monuments in Angkor, based on the style and design of the attire. I also deemed it necessary to examine how closely the choice of subject matter in the bas-reliefs at Banteay Srei matched or differed from the themes identifiable at other monuments built at approximately the same time.
- My thematic comparison produced a host of themes that are typically found in Angkorian temples from the tenth century, but are absent from Banteay Srei. It is conceivable that the bas-reliefs were destroyed over the centuries, but consideration should also be given to the possibility that such depictions were created when the sanctuary was first built, but later removed or replaced, for some unknown reason, during a later conversion.
- My hypothesis is that the floor plan of the inner enclosure as it exists today might have come about during a later reconstruction, which altered the structure of the temple complex compared with its original, tenth-century design. This is another perspective from which it is necessary to examine the depictions that indicate the *Pashupata* tradition, as revealed during the thematic comparison.
- As a digital supplement to my dissertation, I attach my catalogue, which lists the details of over 500 figural depictions, indicating their location within the temple complex, their pose or posture, their attributes and other distinguishing features, their clothing, their hairstyles and/or headdresses, and their jewellery and other adornments.

Summary

My paper was intended to address four main issues pertaining to certain questions that have arisen in recent times:

1. The variety of attire seen in the bas-reliefs, which is unprecedented in the early period of Angkorian art, and the reasons explaining this variety;

The database compiled in order to carry out an analytical examination contains – based on my on-site observations and their documentation – all details related to the clothing and jewellery, attributes and poses of the figures depicted. Creating the catalogue enabled me to determine the frequency of the individual costumes, items of jewellery, hairstyles and head-dresses, and to examine where they are located within the sanctuary. My analysis not only resulted in statistical data, but also facilitated an assessment of the connections between the different items of attire and the “rank” of the characters wearing them within the mythological hierarchy, that is, the way in which the attire “designates rank”.

Adapting the system devised by Jean Boisselier, I sorted the male attire into five types, replacing the previous three categories. I contend that when several different types are visible within the same composition, the difference can be attributed to the need to designate different rank. The extremely special type 3 male sampot, which is typical only of Banteay Srei, shares parallels with certain pre-Angkorian sampots, but I could find no trace of anything similar on the walls of later buildings. The loincloth, categorised in this paper as type 4, is depicted on certain specific characters visible in the bas-reliefs, following the mythological text extremely consistently

I classified female attire into two types. I examined their differences in comparison with the rules set forth in the *Vastu Shastra*, and searched for parallels in both earlier and later monuments. From the results of the database, I found that the *type 2 female sampot*, which is typical only of Banteay Srei, is worn only by the goddess *Durga*, by the *apsara Tilottama*, and by *devatas*, of lower rank in the hierarchy. Apart from the role of this *sampot* as a designator of rank, it is perhaps reasonable also to argue that this female *sampot* reflects the actual fashion at the time the bas-reliefs were made, while following the Indian regulations pertaining to – among others – the goddess *Durga*. It is easy to imagine that, while the iconographic rules in force (and in the public consciousness) at the time dictated that goddesses be dressed in the – by then – “classical”, traditional pleated *sampot*, the *devatas* could be depicted with less adherence to the regulations, so either the sculptors were at liberty to shape their appearance as they wished, or perhaps the scholar priests who provided the spiritual background for the work instructed the artists to dress these characters in a more “secular” style.

There are a few types of head-dress, hairstyle and jewellery visible at Banteay Srei which differ from those seen on earlier monuments. Moreover, the existence of obvious differences between such features is a new phenomenon, compared with previous periods in Khmer art history. The discrepancies between the types of jewellery and other adornments depicted within a sanctuary, or even within a single composition, are – as with the clothing – demonstrably used as a means of signifying rank or mythological role.

2. The place occupied by Banteay Srei in the chronological order of artistic styles, and its comparability with other sites dated to the same period;

Beginning in the 1920s, the system of artistic style categories of the Angkorean monuments was devised by Stern, Parmentier, Coral-Rémusat and their colleagues, and ever since then, the scientific community has striven to place every relic in the right place. During my examination, I have also used the scientifically accepted stylistic and chronological system as the basis for comparing buildings with one another. My own investigations, comparing certain elements of artistic composition and the items of attire depicted, do indeed support the existence of a Banteay Srei style category, but they do not confirm its supposed place within the accepted chronological system based on stylistic evolution. Rather, they seem to corroborate the theory put forward by Martin Polkinghorne, which is that each style should be recognised as the outcome of a collaborative effort between the founder/commissioner, with his own programme and intent, the spiritual collaborators, and the artistic schools, all of whom can be associated with a particular sanctuary, temple complex or region. During

my comparison between the items of attire depicted at Banteay Srei and those visible at sanctuaries erected at the same time or regarded as precedents according to Boisselier's system, I came across several instances that contradict the linear or chronologically based theory of art historical evolution, which has hitherto been widely accepted. In my paper I prove that the stylistic tradition of attire depicted on buildings classified within the Pre Rup period, immediately preceding that of Banteay Srei, cannot have been inherited from the Koh Ker period that precedes it chronologically. Precedents for the costumes depicted in Pre Rup can be demonstrably identified among monuments from the Bakheng period, although this cannot be described as a unified style, because there are clear differences when comparing the female attire portrayed in the different sanctuaries. I therefore determine that the Pre Rup attire follows not the tradition of Koh Ker, but that of Bakheng, based in particular on the similarities observed in the sanctuary of Phnom Bok. The chronological order, therefore, cannot be demonstrated in the style of costumes. In my opinion, a thorough examination of the types of attire shows that the theory of consecutive and continuously developing artistic styles in Angkor needs to be reassessed, and replaced with a system of styles that depends primarily on workshops or on artistic schools. During my analysis of the bas-reliefs, I have postulated that the unique male and female clothing and hairstyle found only in Banteay Srei may be representative of the typical fashion at the time the sanctuary was built – at least typical in the region where the carvers came from (which could have been India or another region). Many of the elements, such as the female hairstyle (*keshabandha*) and the looped, bar-shaped and disk-shaped ear-rings, have clear precedents found in India.

3. The contradictions connected to the date when Banteay Srei is believed to have been constructed, and the uncertainties surrounding its ground plan;

The date when the temple complex of Banteay Srei was founded is known, for it is recorded in the written sources. We do not, however, have any information concerning how long construction work on the site continued. The year of foundation stated in the inscription almost certainly does not refer to the date when the entire complex of buildings was erected, but more likely indicates when the statue housed in the central sanctuary tower was inaugurated. Further inscriptions that survive on the walls feature dates that are up to several centuries apart from the year of foundation, and the most reasonable answer to the questions that arise during an analysis of the art historical style of the sanctuary is that the complex was later rebuilt or converted. The buildings can be examined in their present condition, but as an embodiment of an iconographic programme, there is justification in wondering if this programme was later amended, perhaps as additional buildings were constructed, or if the change came about as certain existing bas-reliefs and statues were replaced; reconstructing the process by which these changes took place would be extremely difficult using the presently available sources.

The possibility that Banteay Srei was constructed in two or more stages is raised by the epigraphic data, and this is supported by an examination of thematic analogies for the bas-reliefs, in particular the narrative reliefs. In this paper I have presented the results of my thematic analysis of the bas-reliefs, pointing out the similarities and differences between the choice of subject matter at Banteay Srei and that found at other temples erected in the Angkor Empire in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Certain themes that one might otherwise expect to be portrayed seem to be missing from the images at Banteay Srei, while others, in particular those centred on *Shiva*, are found only here, and at no other tenth-century temple. That is to say, the choice of subject matter is not at all typical of those generally found in Angkor in the mid-tenth century.

Assuming that the temple complex was reconstructed at some point – or that changes were made during a long and drawn-out period of construction – I have put forward the hypothesis that what is now known as the second enclosure was originally planned and built as the inner sanctuary area (together with the present-day second eastern and first western gopuras, the latter of which was later converted into a sanctuary), and only later divided by constructing a new enclosure wall and the present-day first eastern gopura, surrounding the innermost group of buildings. Further architectural and targeted archaeological investigations would be needed in order to confirm this hypothesis.

4. The hypothetical influence on Banteay Srei of Pashupata Shaivism, hitherto based only on epigraphic observations:

I extended by thematic comparison to include the subject matter most typically portrayed in the Indian temples of *Pashupata* Shaivism. I found that almost all of the depictions that typically feature in the narrative programme of *Pashupata* temples are present on the walls of Banteay Srei, even if the original Indian rules governing the appearance of the characters were not necessarily fully adhered to by the sculptors. This therefore confirms the hypothesis, hitherto resting solely on epigraphic analyses, of a link between the founder of the temple (or one of his successors) and the *Pashupata* movement of Shaivism. The decorations found in the inner enclosure at Banteay Srei share thematic parallels with *Pashupata* monuments built in Central India around the same time or earlier. My investigations, however, also revealed a contradiction: the written sources suggest that the influence of the movement was present in the tenth century, when Banteay Srei was founded, yet a thematic comparison with other Angkorian temples leads me to conclude that the *Pashupata* themes depicted at Banteay Srei only became widespread in Angkor in later centuries. It cannot be ruled out, therefore, that the founding priest, Yajnavaraha, and his circle, adjusted the design and construction of the sanctuary in line with the rules of *Pashupata* Shaivism, during a series of changes to the original plan. This is an area of research that I intend to investigate more deeply in future.

In addition to my general findings relating to the four main issues, I have also presented some other results concerning the interpretation of the bas-reliefs at Banteay Srei. During my work, I examined the bas-reliefs and statues also in terms of composition and content, as a result of which I have made the following clarifications in connection with the identity of certain figures and with the choice of subject matter in the narrative reliefs, which first appear in Angkorian art at Banteay Srei:

- While comparing the narratives of *Pashupata* depictions with those in Banteay Srei, I identified a goddess who was hitherto unidentified. In my opinion, the figure visible on the eastern lintel of the south library is almost certainly *Annapurna*, an avatar of *Parvati* and an important character in the story of *Shiva and Parvati* playing dice.
- Based on the *Pashupata* analogy, I could confirm the finding of Vittorio Roveda that the northern lintel of the north sanctuary tower depicts *Shiva and Bhringi* and not Krishna and a demon.
- Basing my conclusion on the assumption that the different forms of attire signify different ranks, I have identified *Krishna's* charioteer in the scene of *Krishna Killing Kansa* on the north library pediment as *Akrura*. In the *Khandava Forest* scene on the other pediment of the same building, I have identified what I believe are two demons or *asuras*, which corroborates Claude Jacques's interpretation of the story depicted in the bas-relief.
- I have suggested that one of the female figures on the south library pediment depicting *Shiva Burning Kama to a Cinder* is *Kama's* consort, *Rati*, basing my assumption on the details of the story.
- An important new observation from the same pediment concerns the scene of healing visible in the lower section, which is not mentioned in any of the previous literature. Further research is necessary to explain the scene.
- Prompted by the epigraphic and historical research being conducted by Claude Jacques into the nature of the library buildings, I argue that the ascetics or *rishis* depicted on the pediments of the south library are not only there because of their connection to the narratives in question, but also – and even more so – because they refer to the building's presumed function as the place for guarding the holy fire.

In the interests of setting my findings about Banteay Srei in the broader context, I deem it necessary to conduct analyses, following a similar methodology, of the figural bas-reliefs at monuments erected in the eleventh century.

My future objective is to commence this task at Baphuon, by carrying out the on-site survey and documentation of all the mythological figures (presumably numbering in their thousands) that are depicted on the walls of this enormous sanctuary complex, and by comparing the results with my findings so far.

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