

Chapter 3: Door Elements on the Central Sanctuary of Western Prasat Top Temple (Monument 486)

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1. Introduction

Based on our recent research and restoration of the three-tower temple complex of Western Prasat Top, new information has been revealed and identified. The discoveries relate to an evaluation of the stages of construction for all three towers. Former estimates considered construction to have occurred in only two phases: the earlier laterite base thought to be from the late-9th or early 10th centuries; and, a later three sandstone-tower structure. Having now dismantled and reconstructed these three towers, we have found that they were likely built in five separate stages.

Stage 1:

This stage is represented by the laterite base that was probably constructed in the late 9th to early 10th centuries, according to inscription K.576 (1). The inscription names Çrī Samaravikrama, the maternal uncle of king Yasovarman I (889A.D- 910 A.D), who dedicated the temple to Vishnu. The original tower was thought to be built of brick (2) on a three-level laterite platform-base. A single-door on the eastern side of the sanctuary was decorated with grey sandstone colonnettes and a lintel. At a later point in time, this tower collapsed, but some parts remained on the base. The whole laterite base remained in its original position (Fig.1).

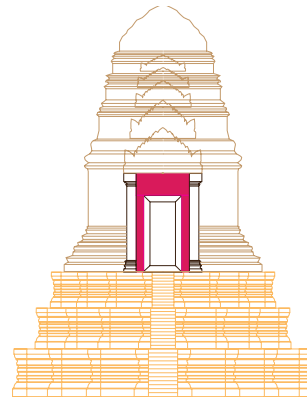


Fig. 1 Reconstruction image of Stage 1

Stage 2:

When the former sanctuary presumably collapsed a new grey sandstone structure (Fig.2)—the currently visible sanctuary— was built over the original laterite base. The structure was again a single tower, but with four sets of stairs placed at each cardinal direction. The elements of the door frames and decorative blocks, such as colonnettes and lintels, were made of red sandstone. The sanctuary was constructed with four doors open to each cardinal direction. Two of the door frames were made of red and pale-yellow sandstone blocks. The other two were made of grey sandstone. These door frame blocks seem to be reused stones. All four doors were also accompanied and decorated with red sandstone colonnettes and lintels.

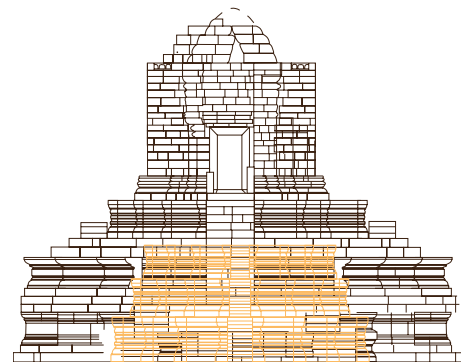


Fig. 2 Reconstruction image of Stage 2

The upper pediments, or frontons, were decorated with a sitting Buddha (in the Bhumisparasa mudra position) and figures typical of the style of the Post-Bayon or Post-Angkor periods.

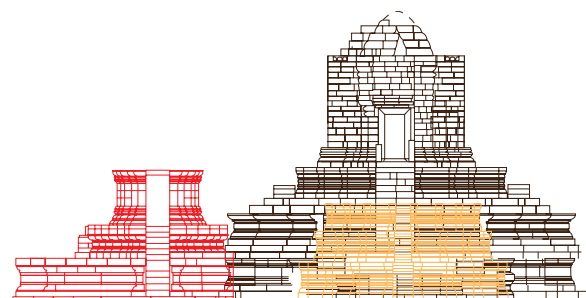


Fig. 3 Reconstruction image of Stage 3

Stage 3:

The southern sandstone sanctuary (Fig.3) was constructed over the southern staircase of the central sanctuary built in Stage 2. After we dismantled the upper sanctuary and conducted an excavation of the fills inside this structure, we revealed that this tower was built on top of the southern stairs of the main, central tower (3). However, this southern tower has only one open door, with the other three being false doors. This southern tower has no colonnette or lintel, but does have four pediments with a seated Buddha image set up in the four cardinal directions.

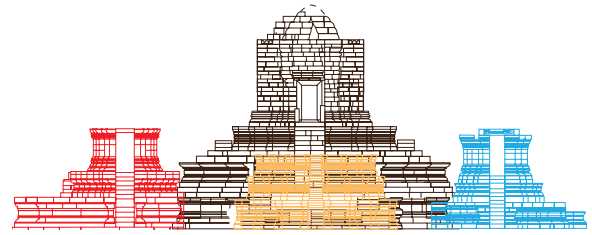


Fig. 4 Reconstruction image of Stage 4

Stage 4:

A northern sanctuary (Fig.4) was built on the northern side of the central sanctuary. The dismantlement of this tower's platform revealed that the lower part of the earlier northern staircase of Stage 2 was cut and removed. Then, the third (i.e., lowest) platform of the northern sanctuary was added and connected to the third platform of the central sanctuary. Archaeological excavation beneath this Stage 4 tower revealed an underground brick chamber (4) which was cube-shaped and filled with sand. There were different types of metal fragments, glass beads and human (?) bones mixed in this sandy soil. Results from C14 analysis provides an estimated date for this northern sanctuary as around the end of the 14th to the beginning of the 15th centuries (5).

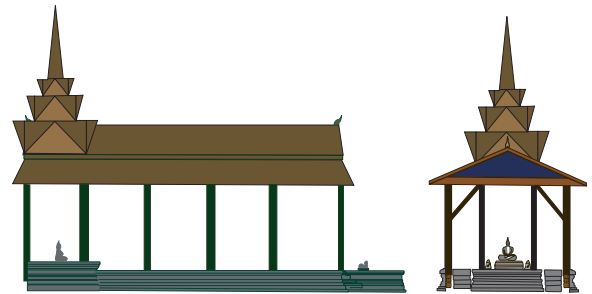


Fig.5 Proposed visualisation of the Buddhist Terrace

Stage 5:

A Theravada Buddhist terrace was added to the east of the central sanctuary. This Buddhist terrace probably contained a sheltered wooden structure covered by brown glazed roof tiles 6.

The phasing of the temple complex at Western Prasat Top is very complicated. Another problem concerns the red sandstone elements of the door-frames. There are some questions related to this point:

- Did they belong to the former 9th to 10th century temple?
- Were they part of another temple around the site when the grey sandstone elements were recycled to build the Stage 2 sanctuary? Or,



Fig.6 Eastern door frame (during reconstruction)

•Were they made at the same time as the grey sandstone sanctuary's construction?

These questions are still not yet explainable. However, we can research and make observations on the red sandstone elements.

2. The Stone Elements of the Central Sanctuary

We can classify the elements of the doors of the central sanctuary into three types: door frames; colonnettes; and, lintels.

2.1. Door Frames

There is a total of 16 door frames—four for each direction of the central sanctuary. These door frames are mostly made from red or pink sandstone blocks, except for the lower frame of the southern door and the upper frame of the northern door, which are made of grey sandstone blocks. The sizes and heights of these door frames are different.

2.1.a. Eastern Door Frame (Fig.6)

The eastern door frame blocks are completely made of red or pink sandstone. There are in total four blocks, such as the: lower frame; vertical right frame; vertical left frame; and, upper frame. Both vertical frames were almost the same height and thickness. The lower frame was short in length and thickness, but its width was bigger than the vertical and the upper frame. The inner side had two holes cut into it for the wooden door jambs and door. The upper frame is longer than the lower frame. Originally, the north-west edge of this frame was already broken before it was installed on the vertical frames. These four frames seem to have been produced and installed together in the original period of construction since, when we reinstalled them, the connection points were also almost fixed in shape.

2.1.b. Western Door Frame (Fig.7)

There are also four door frames made of red sandstone blocks. The vertical right and left frames have the same heights, widths and thickness. The lower frame is a little thinner than the other, but is wider. The thickness of the upper frame is not equal to the southern and northern parts. There is a problem with this western door frame. When we reinstalled the four parts together, we found that the upper-south edge of the frame did not fit, while the other three edges fit well into position. There is a small gap between the southern edge of the upper frame and the upper edge of the southern vertical frame. This could be an original mistake or evidence for reused frames from different collections.

2.1.c. Southern Door Frame

There are four blocks of the southern frames. The vertical right, vertical left and upper frames are made of red or pink sandstone, but the lower frame is made of grey sandstone. This might indicate that the three red



Fig.7 Western door frame (during reconstruction)



Fig.8 Northern door frame (during reconstruction)

sandstone frames were made at the same time and the grey one added when the old one (i.e., red sandstone) was either broken or disappeared. Additionally, the grey sandstone is very big and thick but its quality is poor and fragile. It had already broken into many small pieces before we dismantled it. One problem has been observed with this door. When we reinstalled these four frames, we found that the left vertical frame and the upper frame were not fixed in position. The upper frame is about 2cm out of alignment, forming a crooked line.

2.1.d. Northern Door Frame (Fig.8)

There are five blocks in this frame. The vertical frames are made from red sandstone of the same sizes. The lower frame is made of two blocks of pale-yellow sandstone. These two lower blocks seem to be remade or reused to connect with the vertical frames, because their tenons are not fixed to the mortises of the vertical frames. The problem is related to the size of the mortises, which are bigger than the tenons. So, the constructors had to add a block or keystone for fixing the space or gap of the tenons and mortises. Actually, we found a small block of laterite inside this space. Also, the western block of these lower frames had broken at the edge and was originally fixed by adding another piece. The upper frame was made of grey sandstone, similar to the lower frame of the southern door. This grey sandstone block is very poor and fragile. It broke into parts, but these parts can be repaired and used again.

2.2. Colonnets

There are a total of eight colonnettes: two for each direction of the central sanctuary. According to the old photos of the EFEO archives, in 1924 (EFEO_CAM01477, 01484, 01489, 01496), all these colonnettes were in their original places and positions. After that, the tower was damaged by trees and people. The eastern, western and northern parts of the tower collapsed and the colonnettes broke. In 1994, four broken blocks of the colonnettes, two from the north and two from the east, were collected and preserved in the Conservation d'Angkor (Inv.312, Inv.332, Inv.333a and Inv.333b). In October 2020, we applied to recover these blocks for installing back to their original positions. These eight colonnettes are not the same size. The colonnettes of the east and west doors are the same cross-section dimension (0.185m x 0.185m), while the colonnettes of the north and south doors are bigger and longer (0.22m x 0.22m).



Fig.9 A part of the Colonnette from the eastern face



Fig.10 Colonnette from the western face



Fig.11 Colonnette from Southern face



Fig.12 A part of the Colonnette from the northern face

2.2.a. Eastern Colonnets

The two colonnettes of the eastern door are made from red sandstone, measuring about 1.7m high and 0.185m wide. The colonnettes are roughly rectangular in shape with the lower part carved with four corners while the body is carved into a heptagonal (7-sided) shape. The two long sides connect to the door frame and wall, while the other five are decorated with motifs. The southern colonnette is decorated on three sides only. The northern colonnette is decorated on five corners.

2.2.b. Western Colonnets

The two colonnettes of the western door are made from pale-yellow sandstone, measuring about 1.74m high and 0.185m wide. The colonnettes have broadly rectangular shapes, with the bottom part having square-shaped profile while the body is heptagonal. Two long sides are connected to the door frame and wall while the other five are decorated with motifs. These



Fig.13 Eastern lintel

two colonnettes are decorated on five sides. We have found that these two colonnettes were made or brought from the same place, but the southern colonnette was broken and cut at the lower part and finally added a new connection before installation.

2.2.c. Southern Colonnets

The two colonnettes of the southern door are made from light-red sandstone, measuring about 1.86m high and 0.22m wide. The east-side colonnette is rectangular, with the lower part being four cornered while the body is heptagonal. The west-side colonnette is eight sided. Normally, two long sides are connected to the door frame and wall while the other five are decorated. These two colonnettes are decorated on five sides.



Fig.14 Western lintel

2.2.d. Northern Colonnets

The two colonnettes of the northern door are made from light-red sandstone, measuring about 1.81m high and 0.21m wide. The colonnettes are rectangular, the lower part being four cornered but with a heptagonal body. Two long sides are connected to the door frame and wall while the other five are decorated with motifs.



Fig.15 Southern lintel

2.3. Lintels

There are four lintels in the central sanctuary. Three of them—the south, east and west—are made of red sandstone, while the north lintel is made from pale-yellow sandstone. However, the outside surface of the northern lintel was applied with a red-coloured coating. These four lintels were recycled for this central sanctuary since the installations of these lintels did not conform with the usual directions of the gods.



Fig.16 Northern lintel (under reconstruction)

2.3.a. Eastern Lintel (Fig.13)

The eastern lintel is made of red sandstone measuring 1.47m long, 0.4m wide and 0.49m high. The northern side is straight while the southern side retains in its original edge measuring 0.07m long, 0.29m wide and 0.20m high. The north-west edge of the lintel originally broke and disappeared before dismantlement. The front face of the lintel is well designed with stylistic decorations between the Pre Rup to Banteay Srei styles. The middle part of the lintel shows an image of the god sitting on a horse. He is the god Kubera who controls the north direction.

2.3.b. Western Lintel (Fig.14)

The western lintel is made of red sandstone. The original length of this lintel is not clear because it was cut into three. The middle part was stolen in 1994, and the other two parts (right and left) were collected and preserved in the Conservation d'Angkor. The sizes of these two blocks are about 0.50m long 0.41m wide and 0.42m high.

2.3.c. Southern Lintel (Fig.15)

This lintel remained in place before dismantling. It is made from red sandstone measuring 1.32m long, 0.465m wide and 0.425m high. The middle part is designed with an image of the god sitting on the lion, carrying a stick or sword in his right hand that could be Ketu.

2.4.d. Northern Lintel (Fig.16)

According to an old photo by the EFEO, this lintel remained complete, but was probably destroyed and cut into pieces before 1994. The middle part was stolen. We have found and collected the broken pieces for repair. This lintel is made of pale-yellow or yellowish-grey sandstone measuring about 1.57m long, 0.39m wide and 0.52m high. It is bigger than the other three lintels of the central sanctuary. The remaining parts show an ear of the elephant. If we compare it to the old photo, we know that the middle design was an image of the god

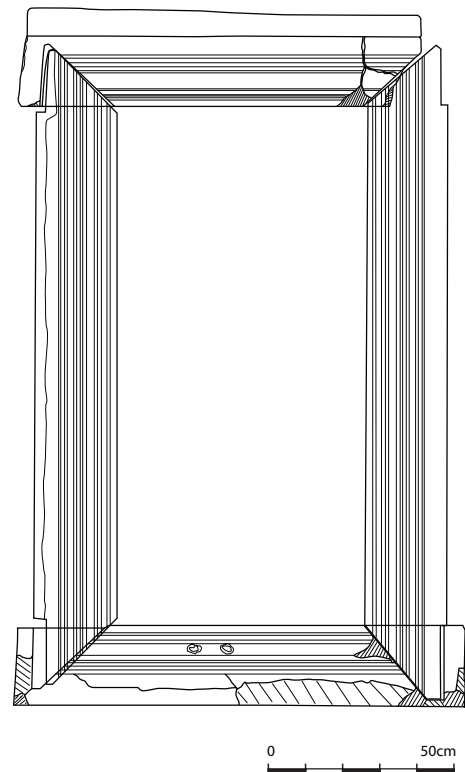


Fig.17 Drawing of the eastern door

sitting on an elephant. This god is Indra who controls the eastern direction.

3. Problems

We know that the central sanctuary was built in the second stage after the collapse of the former tower (Stage 1) probably collapsed. The complete structures, and the decorated pediments, relate to the Buddhist temple, especially to the Post-Bayon or Post-Angkor periods. But the door frames and their elements seem to belong to another temple and were re-used for this later, visible sanctuary. This causes problems in understanding this event. Were these elements made at the same time to the central sanctuary? If not, when and where did they belong? We can check with these block elements.

3.a. Door Frames

Every set of door frames for each direction had problems of gaps when assembled. This suggests that they were not made together at the same time, or from the same group or set. Normally, a set of door frames (four blocks) would be cut to a certain size and angle, when compared with other temples. The tenons and the mortises also match together.

3.a.a. Eastern Door Frame (Fig.17)

The reinstallation of the eastern door's frames revealed a problem in the height of the north-vertical frame. There is gap between the vertical and the lower frame, hidden behind the colonnette. The space was originally filled with small blocks or chips of sandstone and they were stabilized well.

3.a.b. Western Door Frame (Fig.18)

The western door frame installation has three edges that are fixed perfectly but in the upper-south edge, there was a gap. It could be said that the three frames (two vertical and one lower) were from same, or original, set while the upper frame was from another set. However, these four frames could be used to set up together. There could be another reason for a mistake in cutting the upper block during construction of this western door frame.

3.a.c Northern Door Frame (Fig.19)

The upper frame of the northern door and lower frame of

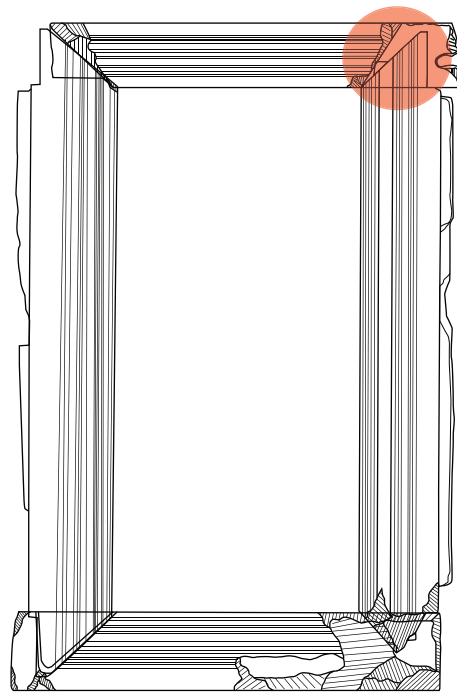


Fig.18 Drawing of the western door (red indicates unstable position)

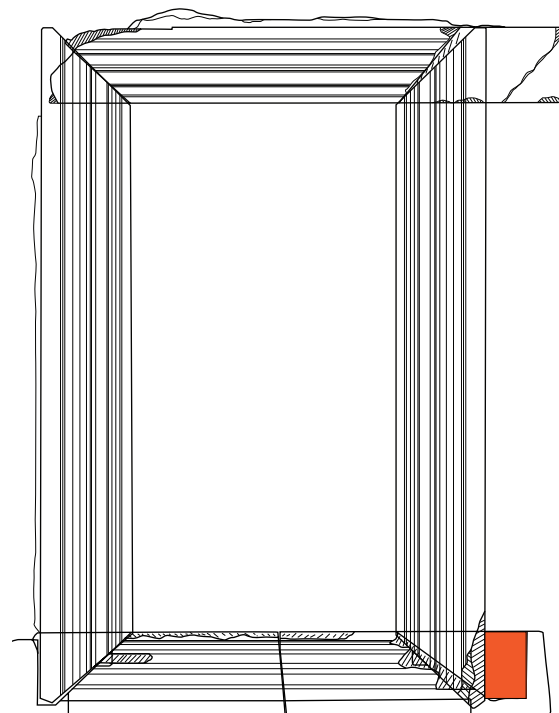


Fig.19 Drawing of the northern door (red indicates the position where it was broken before the restoration)

the southern door were made of grey sandstone blocks while the other is made from red sandstone. These two grey frames are bigger and thicker than the other frames. This indicates that these two grey sandstone frames were newly made to add to the broken red sandstone frames. The upper frame of the northern door, the block cut and set up on both vertical frames, had a decorated side that was chiseled and sloped to the eastern side to match the heights of the colonnettes and lintel. Another point relates to the lower frame of the northern door. There is normally a single block on the lower frame for each door, but the lower frame of the northern door has two blocks. Also, the southeast corner of the western block was broken before it was installed. This is known from the additional piece of stone added to the broken edge. One more problem concerns the mortise of the western block: the hole is bigger than the tenon of the vertical frame. Another block of laterite was inserted into the space of the mortise to stabilize the vertical frame.

3.a.d Southern Door Frame

The lower frame of the door was made of grey sandstone while the other elements were red sandstone. This would indicate that the lower frame was new. It is thicker but very fragile and poorer in quality than the others. It broke into many pieces. After dismantlement, this lower frame block could not be reused. We decided to replace it with a new block. The western vertical frame is a little taller than the eastern vertical frame. However, we can fix this problem by cutting the hole of the lower frame a bit deeper than the eastern side.

3.b. Colonnettes

There are eight colonnettes in this sanctuary. But they are not the same sizes or heights. The colonnettes of the eastern door and western doors are the same size but different heights. The colonnettes of the southern and northern doors are also the same size but bigger than the eastern and western doors. However, the corners of all these colonnettes are not the same sizes or numbers. Normally, the colonnettes are divided into three main parts: head, body and bottom (Fig.24). The colonnettes of the eastern, western and southern doors retain their original sizes and parts. The colonnettes of the northern door cut the head-part to conform to the height of the door frames. Interestingly, we have found that the southern colonnette of the western door was repaired before installation. This was confirmed when we dismantled it. The lower part was probably, and accidentally, broken but another piece measuring about 38cm high (Fig.20) was added. The original



Fig.20 Colonnettes from the western door- southern side

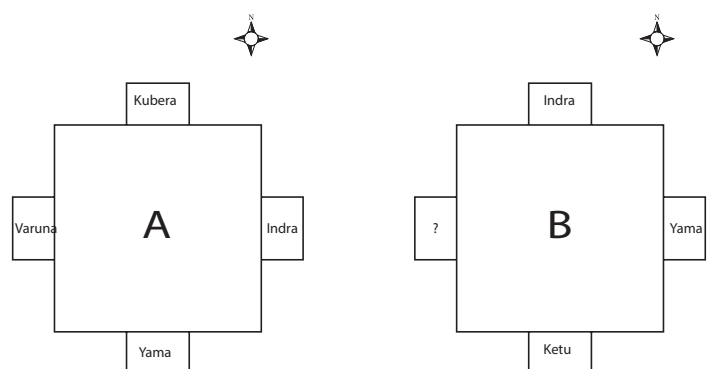


Fig.21 Arrangement of lintels decorated with Hindu Gods: A. regular direction. B. Western Prasat Top

part had a hole cut into the bottom, while a new block was chiseled with a tenon for inserting into the hole of the old colonnette.

3.c. Lintels

There are four lintels that were used for each door. These lintels are not the same size. Generally, a single tower was designed with regular and equal sizes of doors and elements. But in this central sanctuary, we have observed that every element seems to be reused with irregular sizes or placement (i.e., directions). The confusion with these lintels is related to the functions and directions of the god-images designed on the lintels. Normally, the lintel decorated with the image of a god sitting on an elephant must be Indra and positioned in the east. But in the central sanctuary of Western Prasat Top, the Indra lintel was placed on the northern door. This is wrong. It was probably the mistake of the constructors who did not take an interest in the former function, and meaning, of the lintel. Also, the eastern lintel shows the god Kubera, who controls the northern direction, but it was placed over the eastern door. The southern lintel presents an image of the god sitting on a lion that could be Ketu, who is rarely sculpted on lintels in Khmer art. Normally, the god who controls the southern direction is Yama, sitting on a buffalo.

Lintel of Western Prasat Top



Lintel of Banteay Srei



Fig.22 Comparison of lintels at Western Prasat Top and Banteay Srei

4. Art and Style Study

To find the answers to these problems, we must firstly focus on the study of art and stylistic relations. This can be done for the art of lintels and colonnettes. Former study of these lintels was done by French scholars and their primary conclusion was referred to as the Banteay Srei style. Potentially, there are similar items or designs on lintels, colonnettes and door frames that can confirm this art style.

4.1. Lintel (Fig.22)

- Absent of the original upper edge (1)
- Absent of the original lower edge (2)
- Bow arcs appear from the central medallion outward, created as Hamsa (swan) tails (3)
- Presence of lion heads spitting out a



Fig.23 Comparison of colonnettes at Western Prasat Top and Banteay Srei

cluster of flowers (4)

-Garlands of flowers spiralling like snail shell (5)

-Tied ring as Makuta (crown) at the ends of bow arcs in the central point (6)

4.2. Colonnets (Fig.23)

There are some similarities of the colonnettes at Western Prasat Top temple and Banteay Srei temple.

-Most colonnettes have seven sides or corners

-The Colonnets are divided into three parts: heads, bodies and bottoms.

-The Heads are designed with multiple rings decorated by lotus-petal and fish-egg motifs.

-The bodies are divided into three parts such as: ½ ring, and two ¼ rings decorated with multiple motifs.

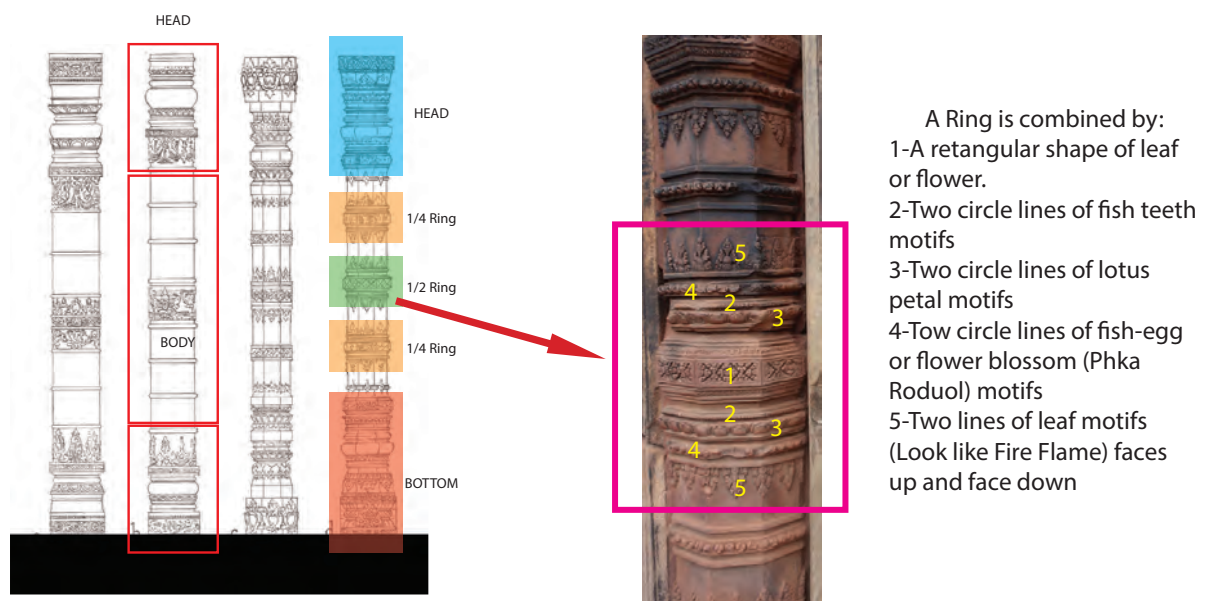
-The ½ rings are normally created by a rectangular motif of a flower associated with two lines of flower blooms, and two lines of fire-leaf (face down and face up) motifs.

-The heads and bottoms are decorated with the same motifs.

-The lower parts of the bottoms are square shaped and decorated with images of figures praying in Kudu designs.

5. Conclusion

This article is a preliminary study of various elements. Further research will help to confirm the origin of these stone blocks. We need more evidence to ensure the absolute determination for the construction of the red sandstone elements as well as the whole structure of the central sanctuary. However, there is currently little information that we can use to identify these red sandstone elements.



(Black Drawing: J. Boisselier (1966), Le Cambodge, Tome I, Paris, p.161.)

Fig.24 Model of motif classification of colonnettes

1. Did they belong to the former 9th to 10th century temple?

It is certain that these elements did not belong to the former 9th or 10th century temple. Why? If the temple had collapsed, it would be expected that damage would also have occurred to these elements. Also, they could not be removed or changed from one to another direction, especially the lintels. The northern colonnettes too were not cut to the same heights as the door frame.

2. Were they part of another temple around the site when the grey sandstone elements were recycled to build the Stage 2 sanctuary?

This is possible. There are temple ruins around Angkor Thom that had already collapsed. Some of the elements, such as doors, were made from red sandstone. One example is Prasat Sralao or Sraloa temple, located about 3km away in the north-west wall of Angkor Thom. For a single tower temple with four doors, the constructors should make the doors the same sizes, including widths and heights. But these door frame blocks are always different (See details of frame drawing Fig.24 to 35).

3. Were they made at the same time as the grey sandstone sanctuary's construction?

Only two blocks of grey sandstone, the upper frame of the northern door and lower frame of the southern door, were probably made to replace the missing or broken red sandstone frames.

4. Do these red sandstone elements belong to Banteay Srei temple?

Some structures at the Banteay Srei temple complex had already collapsed and some elements, such as door and window frames, lintels, colonnettes and pediments were removed or have disappeared from the temple. However, this is just a preliminary idea about the red sandstone elements. Future research will provide more information to help confirm these problems.

References

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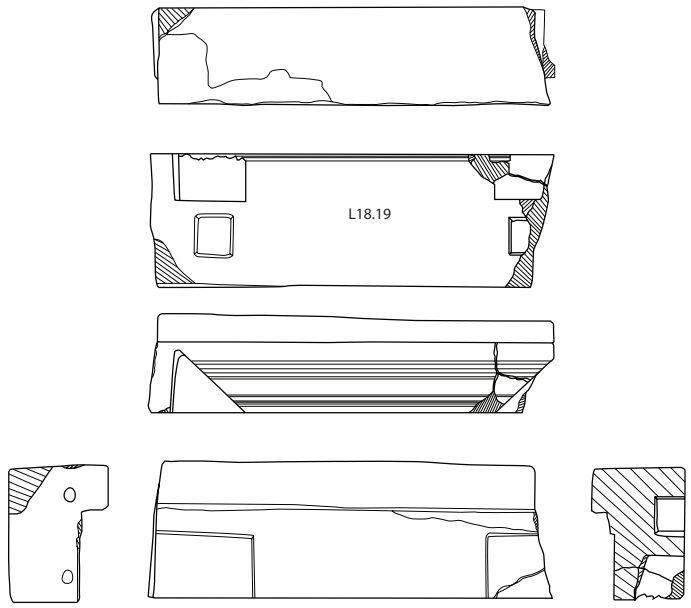


Fig.25 Eastern door - upper frame

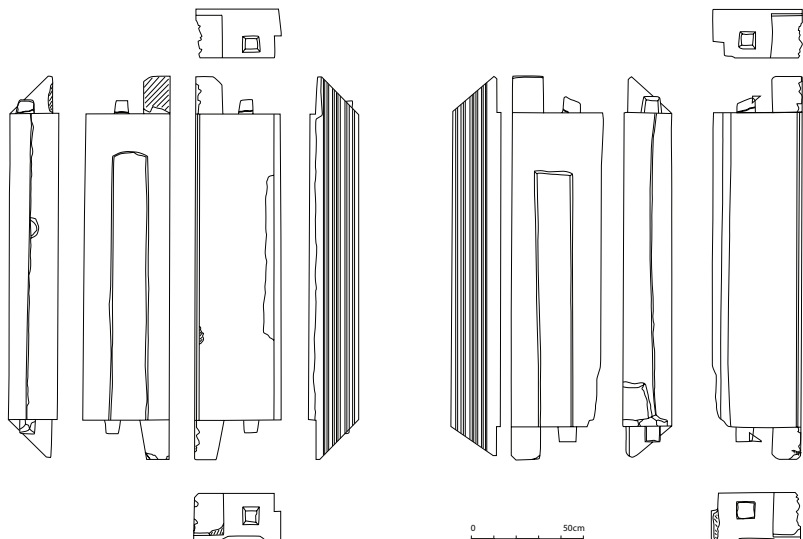


Fig.26 Eastern door - vertical frame

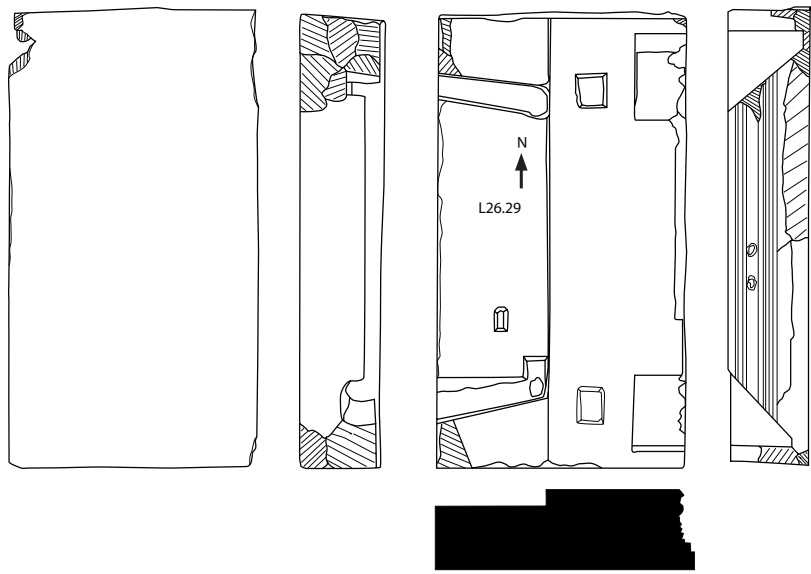


Fig.27 Eastern door - lower frame

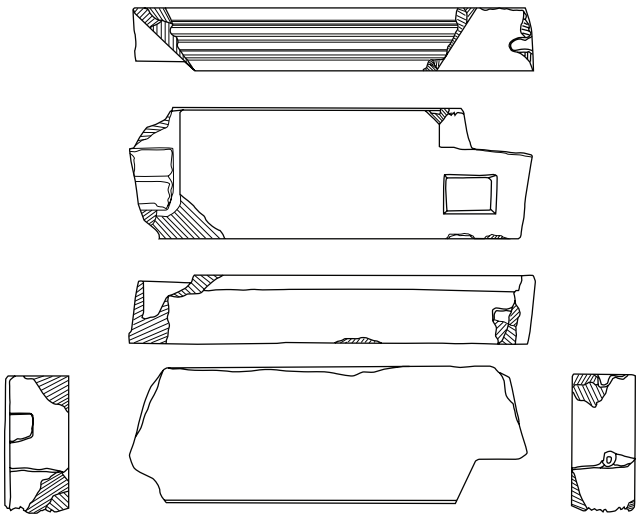


Fig.28 Western door - upper frame

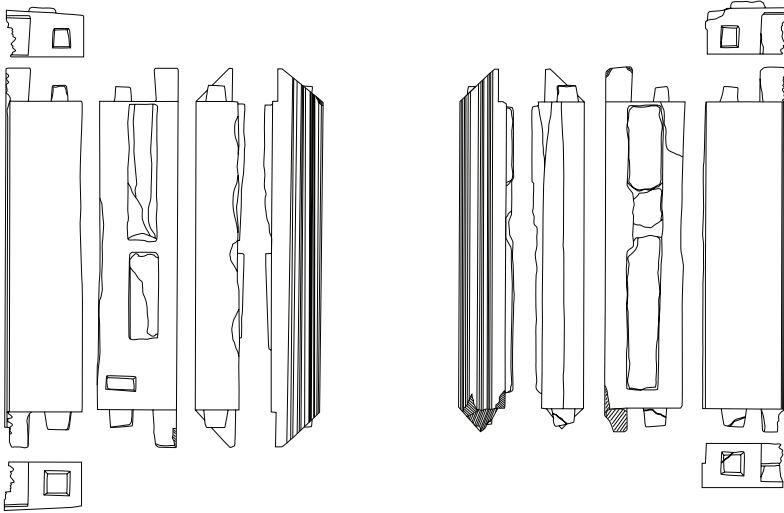


Fig.29 Western door - vertical frame

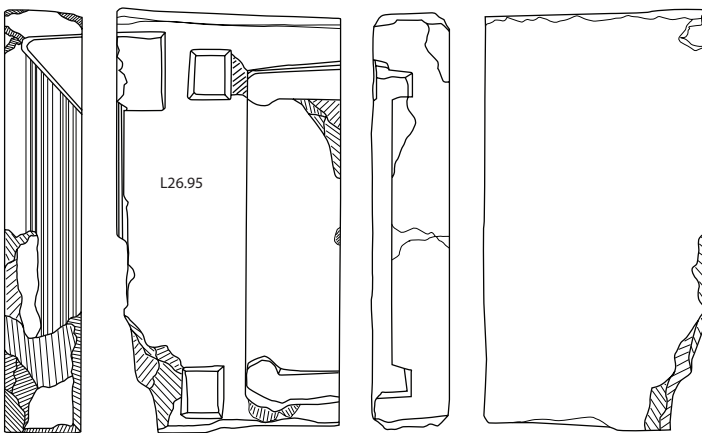


Fig.30 Western door - lower frame

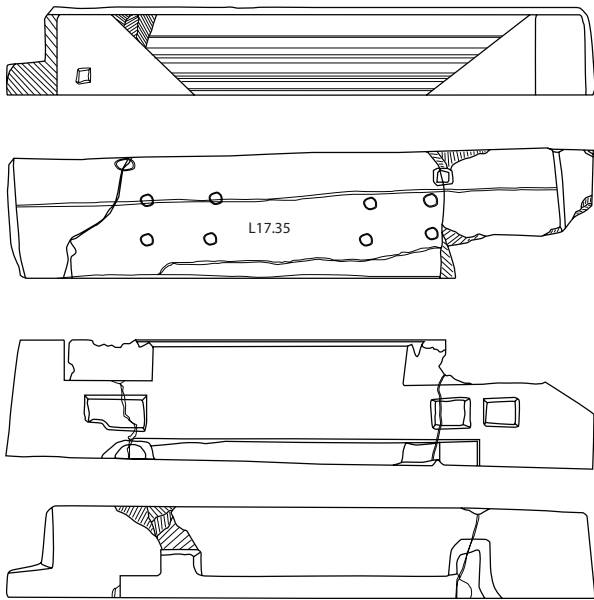


Fig.31 Northern door - upper frame

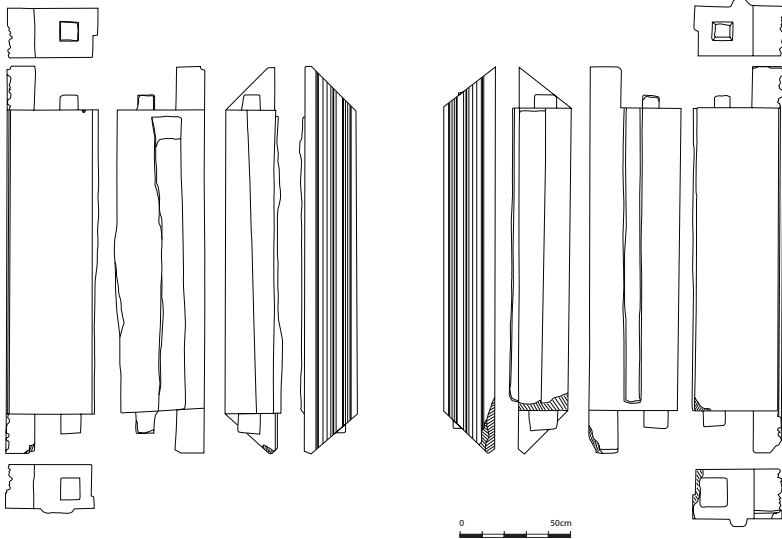


Fig.32 Northern door - vertical frame

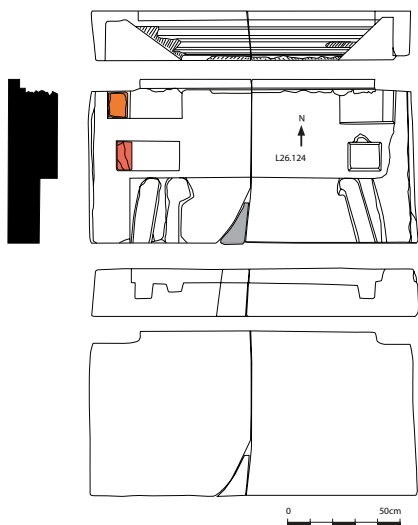


Fig.33 Northern door - lower frame

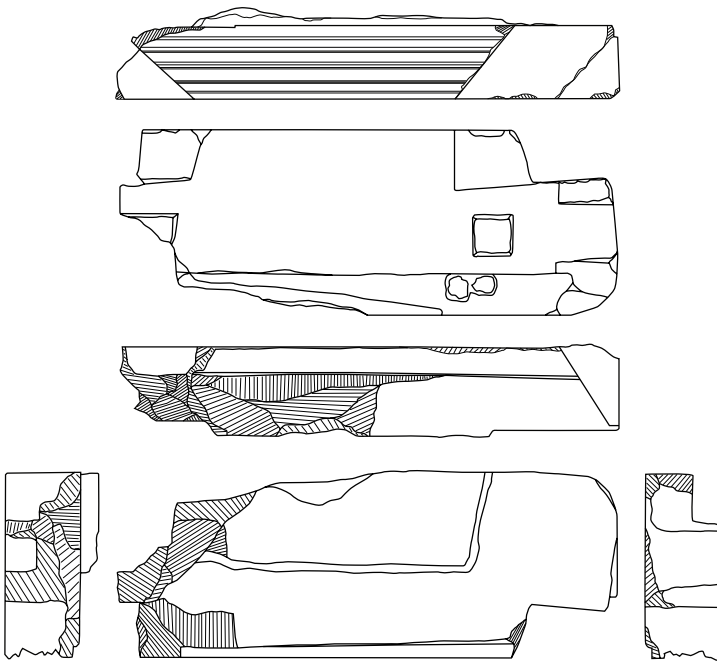


Fig.34 Southern door - upper frame

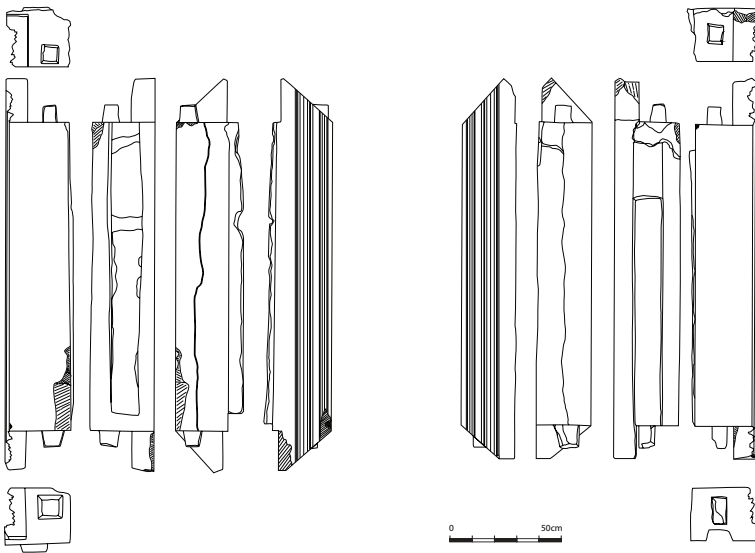


Fig.35 Southern door - vertical frame

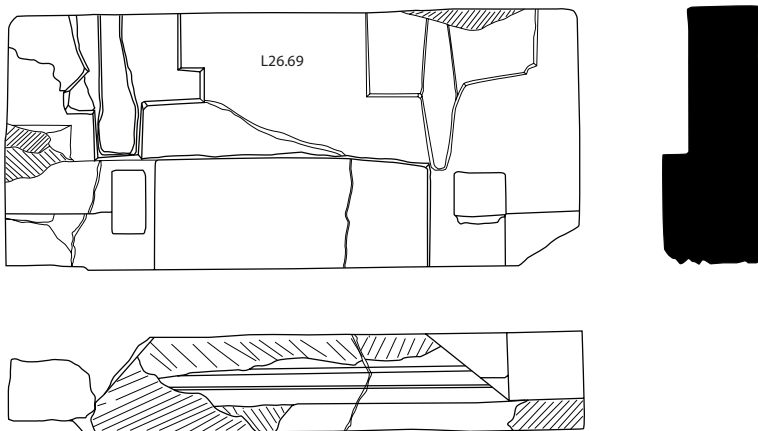


Fig.36 Southern door - lower frame