



Fig.4: Pre Rup, Brāhmāṇī, east side, north wing of southwest shrine, stucco. Photo: A.J. Gail

Mātrkās at the Pre Rup Temple, Angkor

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At the heart of Angkor is a pyramidal temple called *Pre Rup* (Fig.1), 'turn the (dead) body', dated in the year 961 CE. On four sides of a stela there are no less than 298 stanzas in Sanskrit. As usual the inscription starts with an invocation of gods (st.1-5)¹ before praising the merits of king Rajendravarman (st.6-267) and his foundations (st.268-281).²

The temple is crowned by a square platform carrying five temples that are placed according to the Indian *pañcāyatana* scheme, viz. one temple at the centre and four side shrines on the corners of the platform³ (Fig.2a). In contrast to the Indian arrangement, where the rear two side shrines are opened to the same direction as the main temple and the two front shrines



Fig.1 : Pre Rup temple from south, Angkor, 961 CE
sandstone. Photo: A.J. Gail

are opened towards the main axis, here all five shrines are opened to the east⁴ (Fig.2b). In the centre of the temple is the *liṅga* Rajendra-bhadreśvara. The author compares the four cult images (*arcā*, scil. in the four side shrines) of Gaurī (Umā), Śairi (Viṣṇu) and Īśvara (Śiva⁵) with four mouths of Śiva (*āsyaiś caturbhiś Śambhor*, st.277). (Evidently, the poet has the image of a *caturmukha-liṅga* in his mind). Then follows the enumeration of the respective images: 1. Rajendravarmeśvara, 2. Rajendra-viśvarūpa (Viṣṇu), 3. Girijā (= Gaurī or Umā), 4. Rajendravarmadeveśvara (st.278-281) (Fig.2b). A precise position is mentioned only for the first image. The Rajendravarmeśvara stands in the southeast (*agni-diś*, st.278). Coedès thinks that Umā is placed in the southwest, based on the following reason: "Il est à peu près certain que l'image d'Umā était placée dans la tour du sud-ouest, car les panneaux de celle-ci sont décorés de figures féminines dans l'une est

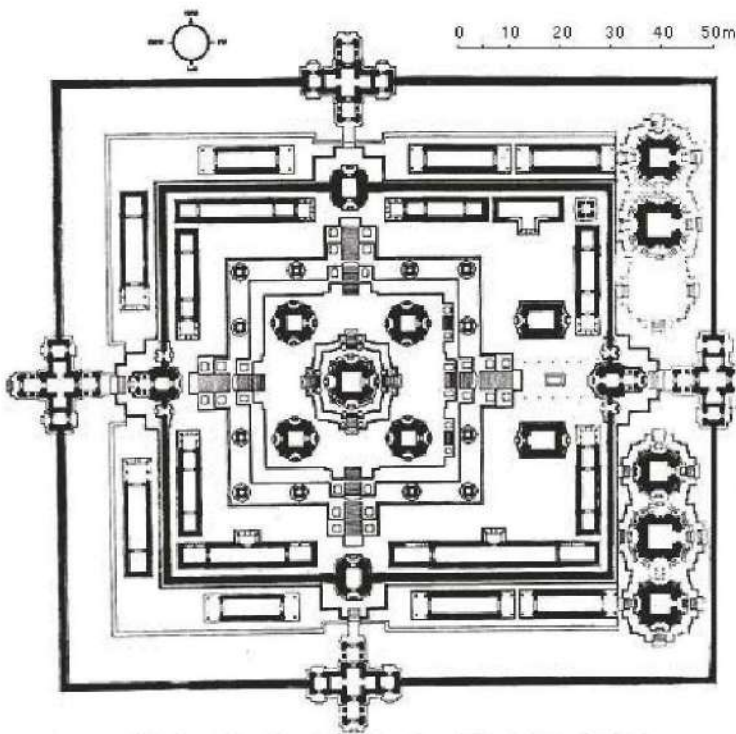


Fig.2a : Pre Rup temple, plan (after Glaize 1934) exhibiting the uppermost shrines. Photo: theangkorguide.com

Fig.2b

Sequence of cult images according to Pre Rup inscription proceeding from the southeast shrine *pradakṣiṇavat* to the northeast shrine: (SE) Rajendravameśvara (Śiva), (SW) Rajendravivāruḥa (Viṣṇu), (NW) Girija (Umā), (NE) Rajendravameśvara (Śiva)



Fig.2b : Pre Rup temple, distribution of images A.J. Gall

purvue d'une tête de laie (IC I, p.76)." [Translation AG: It is almost certain that the image of Umā was placed in the southwest tower, since its panels are decorated with female figures one of whom is equipped with a saw head]. This argument, however, seems to be misleading, since, in this case, the enumeration of the images would start in the southeast (Śiva shrine), would jump either to the northwest shrine or to the northeast shrine (Viṣṇu), would then proceed to the image of Umā in the southwest (Umā shrine), and would end with the second Śiva shrine in the northwest or northeast. Such an enumeration, however, is not probable. In general, we should expect a clockwise continuation (*pradakṣiṇavat*), here starting from the southeast shrine. In this case the female deities on the wall of



Fig.3 : Camuṅḍā bracket, Nārāyaṇa temple Bhaktapur, 2nd half of 17th century CE, wood Kāthmandu valley. Photo: A.J. Gall

the side shrine in the southwest would not belong to a Śiva shrine but to the Viṣṇu shrine, namely the second shrine of the series (Fig.2b).

Females (*śakti*) do not necessarily belong to a Śiva shrine as we know from Indian and Nepalese temples.⁶ The magnificent Nārāyaṇa temple in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu valley, exhibits eight Mātṛkās on the curved brackets (Gail 1984, p.51, Taf.XLVIf.). The most impressive among them is the seventh one, Cāmuṇḍā (Fig.3). Here, on the platform of the Pre Rup, a Vaiṣṇava affiliation of the females is not far-fetched, since the foremost (*ādyā*) Śakti mentioned in the fifth stanza of the inscription is *Nārāyaṇī*, Śakti of Bhagavat (Viṣṇu).⁷ Below we will come back to this important invocation of Nārāyaṇī.

Eight females surround the southwest side shrine of the Pre Rup pentad. Only two of them offer *prima vista* the chance of identification. The female on the northern wing of the eastside is three-headed (imagined as four-headed) and can be identified as *Brāhmāṇī* (Figs.4 and 5). Roveda's label *Sarasvatī*⁸ is unlikely, since Sarasvatī is never imagined and depicted as a three-headed deity. Our interpretation is conclusive since the fifth goddess (southern wing of the west side) is the boar-headed *Vārāhī* (Fig.6). Even in cases, when the sequence of mother deities is changed, the position of *Brāhmāṇī* as the first and *Vārāhī* as the fifth *śakti/mātṛkā* remains fixed. Here is an example *in situ*: the right shrine of the triple temple of Āṃvān, Rajasthan, is devoted to Śiva (Gail 2001, p.29f.). The series of Mātṛkās, interrupted by Viṇādhara Śiva, runs as follows: *Brāhmāṇī*, *Vaiṣṇavī*, *Māheśvarī*, Śiva, *Kaumārī*, *Vārāhī*, *Indrāṇī*, *Cāmuṇḍā* (Figs.7 and 8).⁹ Since vehicles are altogether missing and attributes destroyed, the other Pre Rup mothers can be identified only by their regular position in the sequence: after *Brāhmāṇī* (Fig.5) follow *Māheśvarī*, *Kaumārī*, *Vaiṣṇavī*, *Vārāhī* (Fig.6), *Indrāṇī*, *Cāmuṇḍā*.¹⁰

Who is the *eighth mātṛkā*, who wears a crown and filigree pendants? (Fig.9). In Nepal we observe a similar constellation of mother deities surrounding a square temple as in this Pre Rup shrine. In the Kathmandu valley the eighth Mātṛkā is *Mahālakṣmī*, a cruel goddess with Śaiva affiliation¹¹ (Fig.10). In our case, however, *Mahālakṣmī* can be ruled out, since she would underline such a Śaiva affiliation, we have, however, to do with a Viṣṇu shrine (see above). Moreover, *Mahālakṣmī* is never mentioned in a Khmer inscription.¹² In the Pre Rup inscription *Nārāyaṇī* is praised as the one, who took shape (*mūrttā*, scil. in the daughter of Yaśodā) and who is the foremost and natural Śakti of Bhagavat (Viṣṇu).¹³ She seems to be a suitable candidate for the eighth Śakti of the series.



Fig.5 : Pre Rup, Brāhmānī, detail. Photo: A.J. Gail



Fig.6: Pre Rup, Vārāhī, west side, south wing of southeast shrine, stucco. Photo: A.J. Gail



Fig.7:Saptamātṛkās, detail from left:Brāhmānī,Vaiṣṇavī Māheśvarī,Kaumārī,Śiva,Vārāhī,Tripletemple,Śivashrine Āṃvān,10th centuryCE,sandstone,Rajasthan.Photo:A.J.Gail



Fig.8 : Ibidem, Saptamātṛkās, detail from left: Kaumārī Śiva, Vārāhī, Indrānī, Cāmuṇḍā, Gaṇeśa. Photo: A.J. Gail

To date not a single scholar identified the Pre Rup females with the *aṣṭa-mātrkās*,¹⁴ although this identification is inevitable in the light of the remnants of iconographical features and both textual and pictorial parallels from India and Nepal. The female goddess did not play a major role in Khmer religiosity, in truth the Indian Śāktism did not exist in Angkor,¹⁵ Durgā functions as a side goddess in Śaiva contexts, she never appears as the cult figure of a main shrine. All the more, any certain indication of a worship of female deities can be helpful to add to our knowledge about the role of the *mātrkās* in Khmer Hinduism. Here we have sure indications of a set of (eight) Mātrkās as part of a *Vaiṣṇava* side shrine that formed, for his part, the component of a Śaiva complex. There is no final proof that the eighth goddess (Fig.9) is indeed Nārāyaṇī, but her pictorial appearance would perfectly correspond to her importance expressed in stanza 5 of the Pre Rup inscription.



Fig.9: Nārāyaṇī(?), Pre Rup, north side, east wing of southwest shrine, stucco. Photo: A.J. Gail



Fig.10 : Mahālakṣmīstrut, Tantric Gaṇeśa temple Pāṭan, 1605 CE (see Gail 1988:11) wood, Kathmandu valley. Photo: A.J. Gail

Notes & References

1. Remarkable is the eminent position of Brahmā after Śiva (st.1-2) and before Viṣṇu (st.4). His importance seems to be corroborated by many outstanding images of Brahmā in Angkor and underlines the suspicion that the Khmer preserved a position of Brahmā that he had lost in India.
2. For more details see Coedès ICI, pp.73-142 = K.806.
3. From India we know two different types of *pañcāyatana* structures: one type is distinguished by five temples that are devoted to the same deity, the other one combines the worship of a central deity with the worship of four other deities. Example: the central temple is devoted to the worship of Śiva, the other four to the worship of Viṣṇu, Durgā, Gaṇeśa and Sūrya. This type of *pañcāyatana-pūjā*, directed towards five different deities, trademark of the *Smārtas*, is not practiced by the Khmer.
4. My deceased student Falk Reitz had written a PhD thesis on the matter that remained unpublished, malheureusement.
5. Two images of Śiva by evidence of stanzas 278-281.
6. See Gail 1984, p.51 and Gail 2001, p.67.
7. By Coedès she is interpreted as Vaiṣṇavī (ICI, p.106 n.1).
8. Roveda 2005, fig.10.99.
9. The Seven Mothers on a lintel from Trao Treang, who are described by K. Bhattacharya (1961, p.143f.), are equipped with their individual vehicles. Although the set reads from right to left, the *classical* sequence is preserved, Varāhī is the fifth Mother.
10. In India Cāmuṇḍā would appear emaciated. The Khmer depict emaciated ascetics, they avoid emaciated bodies of deities.
11. Mallmann 1963, p.155f.; Gail 1988, pp.7-10, Taf. IXf.
12. The latter argument, however, is not a strong one, since several Mātṛkās are not mentioned in the inscriptions (see n.14).
13. *sādyā śaktir akrtrimā bhagavato nārāyaṇī* (st.5). The sens of *akrtrima* (*verbatim*: not artificial) is not really comprehensible by me.
14. Glaize 1944 (repr.1993), p.203; Roveda 2005, p.345; Petrotchenko 2013, p.126; Dagens 2013, p.194, mentions mother deities from Banteay Srei that are unknown to me. The devatas flanking the doors of the south and north tower function as dvarapalikas (Jaques/Held 1997,

photos 48, 54, 60; Bourdonneau 1999, p.51f.). The author says p.194 that the mothers are "totalement absentes de l'iconographie". However, Indrāṇī is mentioned (IC I: 32 and 35) and here, as we have seen, Nārāyaṇī.

15. "... le Cambodge est esté à l'écart du grand courant śākta qui place la Déesse sur le même plan que Śiva et Viṣṇu." (Dagens 2013, p. 182).

Abbreviations

EFEO = École française d'Extrême-Orient

IC = *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, see Coedès 1937-1966

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