

HISTORY OF KHMER ART

THE PRE-ANGKORIAN PERIOD

(2nd half of the 6th century – beginning of the 9th century)

Phnom Da Style (514-600)

Sambor Prei Kuk Style (600-650)

Prei Khmeng Style (635-700)

Prasat Andet Style (657-681)

Kompong Preah Style (706-800)

(THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD)

Kulen Style (802-875)

THE ANGKORIAN PERIOD

(9th century - 1431)

Preah Ko Style (875-895)

Bakheng Style (893-925)

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Baphuon Style (1010-1080)

Angkor Vat Style (1100-1175)

Bayon Style (1180-1230)

THE POST-ANGKORIAN PERIOD

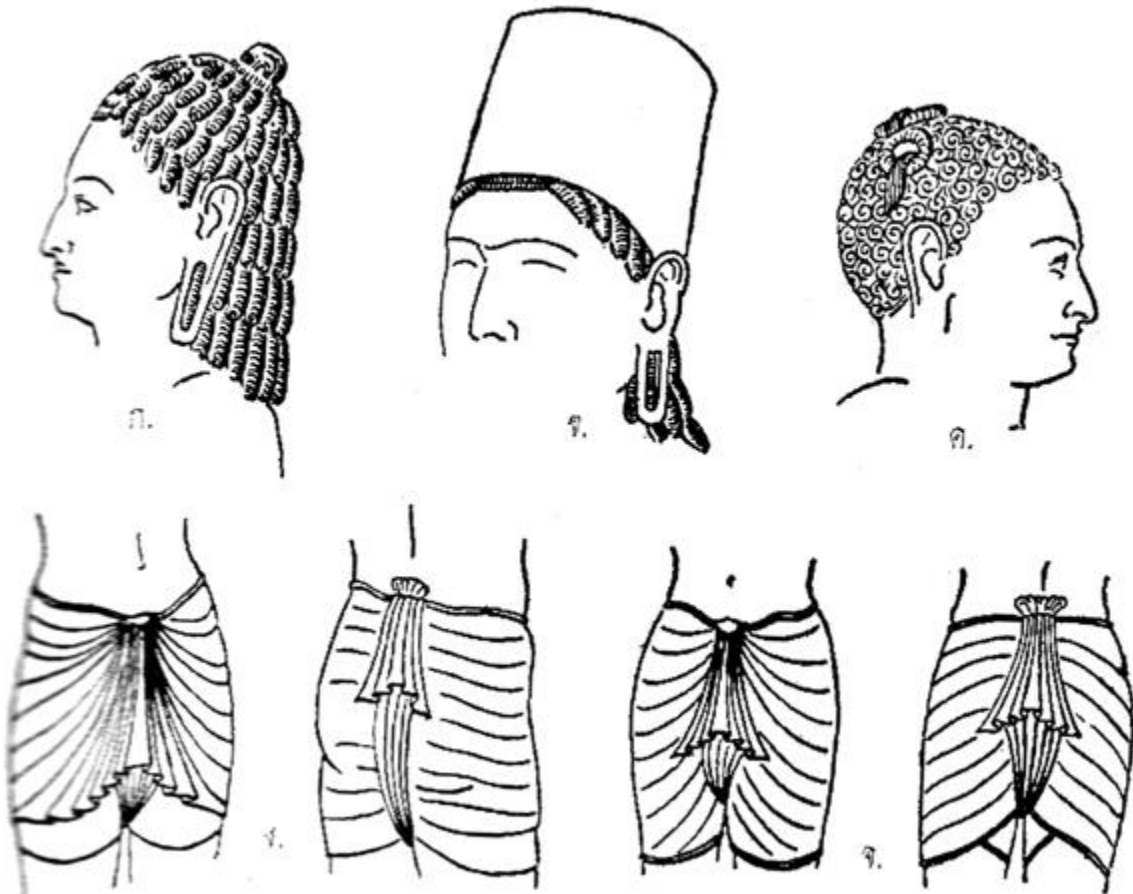
(1431 - the present)

THE PRE-ANGKORIAN PERIOD (2nd half of the 6th century – beginning of the 9th century)

It is generally accepted that this period begins with the fall of Fu-nan and ends, not with the founding of Angkor, which did not take place until the last years of the 9th century, but with the introduction (in the first half of the 9th century) of the rites upon which the kingship of Angkor was to be based. The oldest (Buddhist) images are no earlier than the middle of the 6th century. The somewhat later (early 7th century and period following) Brahminic monuments already exhibit some of the traditional features of Khmer architecture. There exist only a few fine examples of Pre-Angkorian art. This period marks the beginnings of the Khmer world, in which a distinct personality gradually affirms itself, while globally remaining under foreign influences. The belief in the cult of the 'god-king', do not as yet exist. Nevertheless, the art of this period lays down the basis for sculptural symbolism, and inaugurates architectural forms which will be reused and later improved upon. Pre-Angkorian statuary witnesses an Indian influence, but anatomical representation is less dramatic. Sculptors used a support arch for figurative representations with many arms. Stone sculpture is characterized by its delicacy of execution, as well as its respect for plastic and anatomical form.

Phnom Da Style (514-600)

Sculpture: Evolution of statuary from high relief to free-standing sculpture. The works display typical Indian movement of the torso, often with a support arch to provide stability.



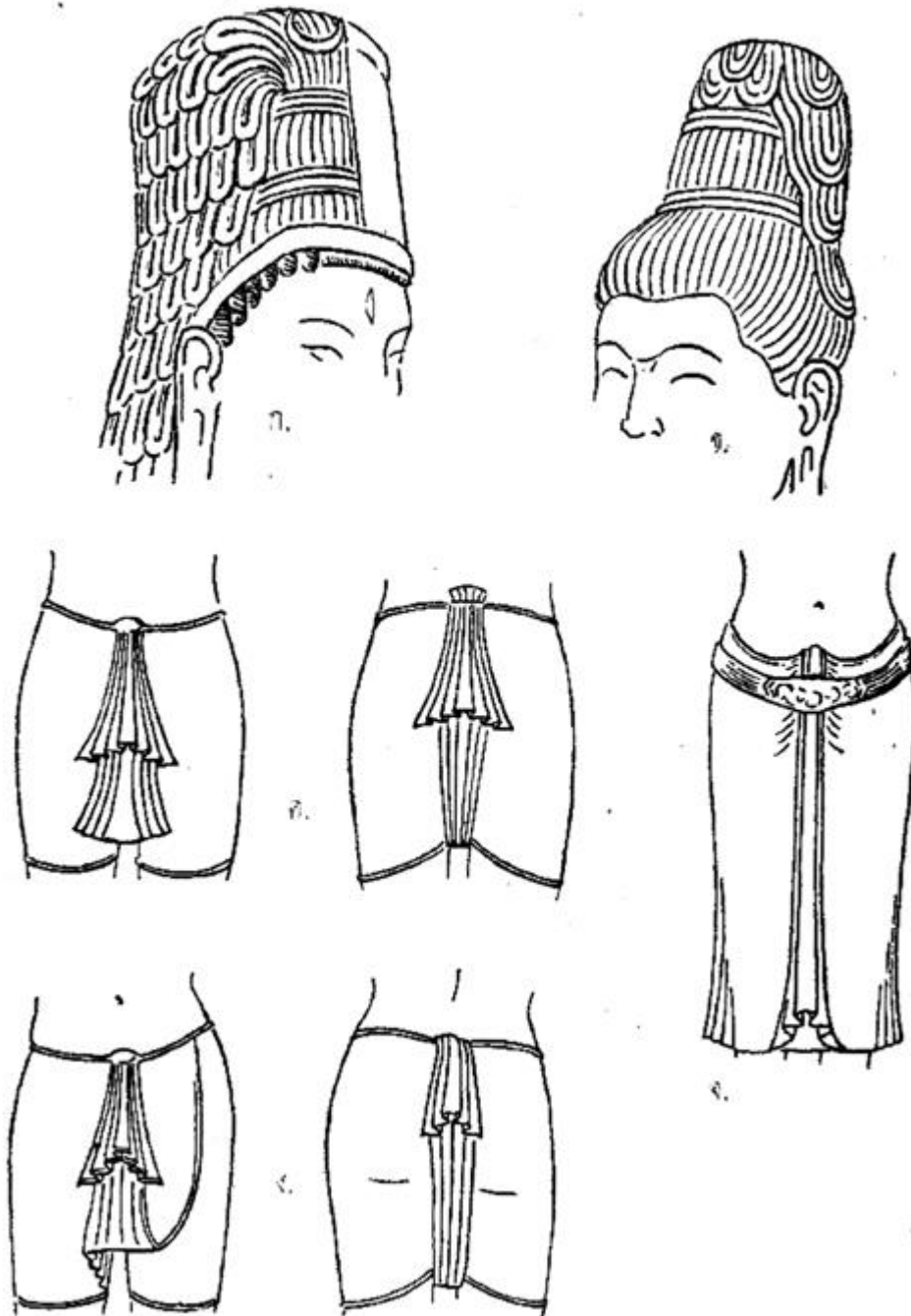
Architecture: The architecture of the sixth century is almost unknown. Brick terraces were found at Angkor Borei dating from the Funan period. No other remains have been found in Cambodia to date.



(Left)Avalokiteshvara, Guimet, Paris (Right)Vishnu, National Museum of Cambodia

Sambor Prei Kuk Style(600-650)

Sculpture: The statuary presents little evidence of sensuality or eroticism and is rather modest. The statuary is modeled with great sensibility. Temple decoration is mostly composed of bas-reliefs.



Architecture: The basis of Khmer architecture is the sanctuary (Prasat). This sanctuary can be found either isolated or in groups (very often 5 sanctuaries), it is composed of individual elements such as lintels, columns, pediments and decorative panels. The temples are sometimes octagonal, square or rectangular.

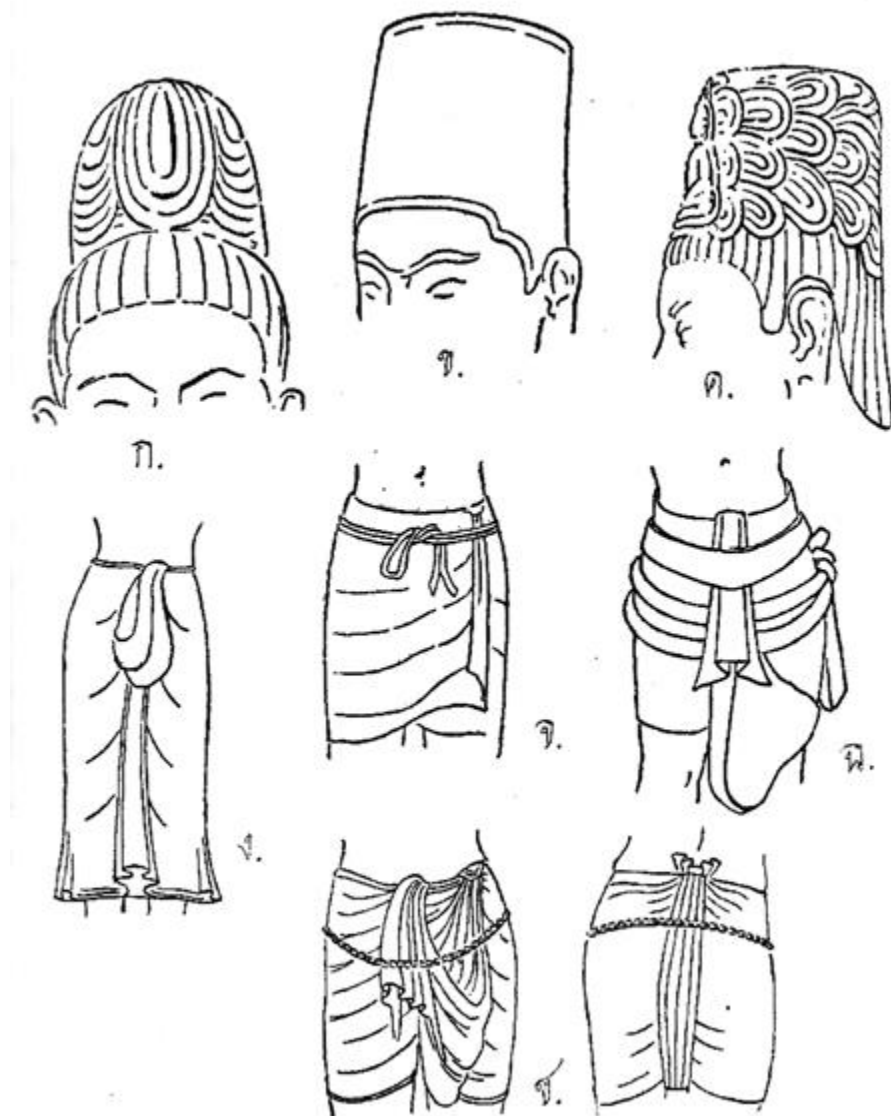


Devi, Sambor Prei Kuk, National Museum of Cambodia

Prei Khmeng Style (635-700)

Religion: Shivaism and Mahayana Buddhism . An inscription (791) was found in Siem Reap, which mentions the image of the bodhisattva Lokeshvara. It is supporting evidence of the existence of Mahayana Buddhism in Cambodia.

Sculpture: The sculptures are generally smaller than the previous styles. The support arch is still present.



Architecture: This style witnesses some changes in architectural decoration, in continuity with the Sambor Prei Kuk style.

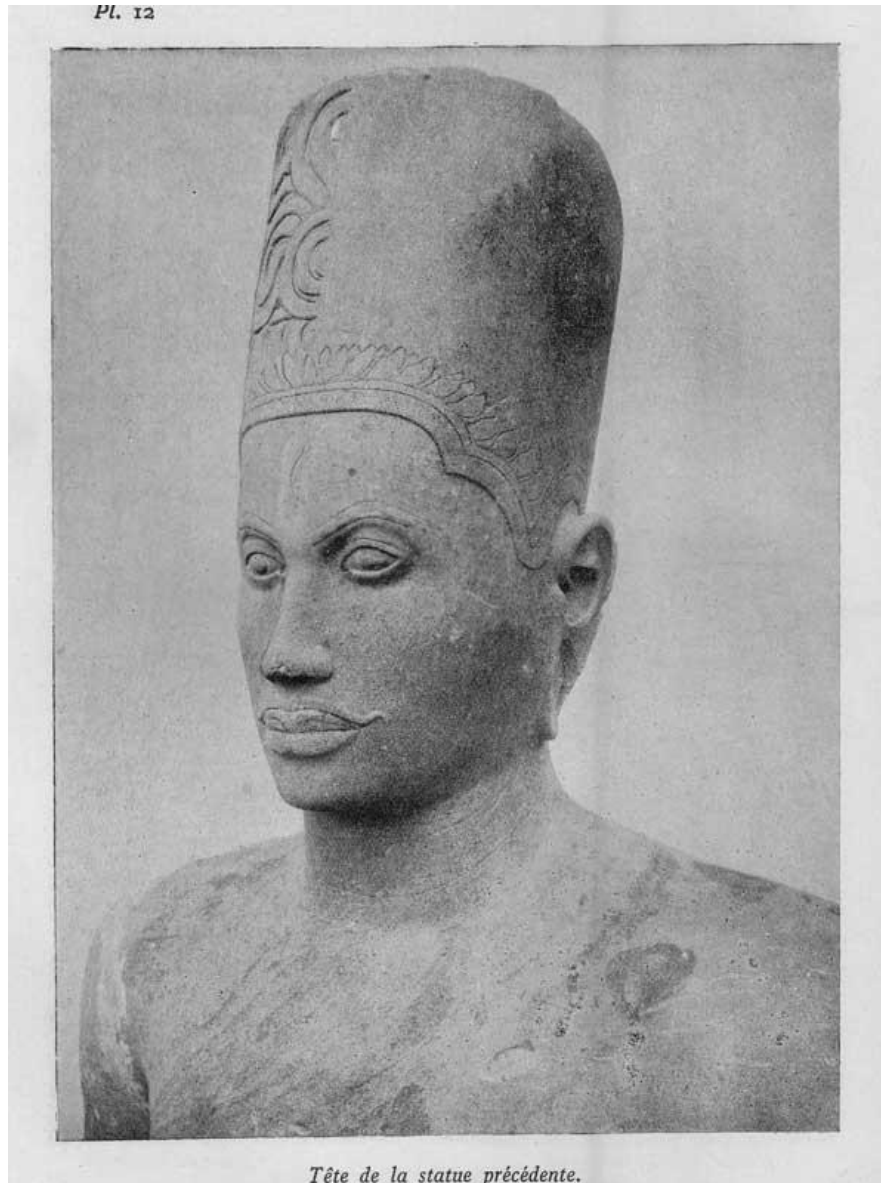


Avalokiteshvara, Guimet, Paris

Prasat Andet Style (657-681)

Religion: Shivaism and linga cult, Mahayana Buddhism loses influence among the people.

Sculpture: Artistic representation codes change; the search for delicacy and slenderness witness great sharpness of observation. Hindu sculptures are carved in the round. The linga is increasingly represented.



Harihara, Prasat Andet, National Museum of Cambodia

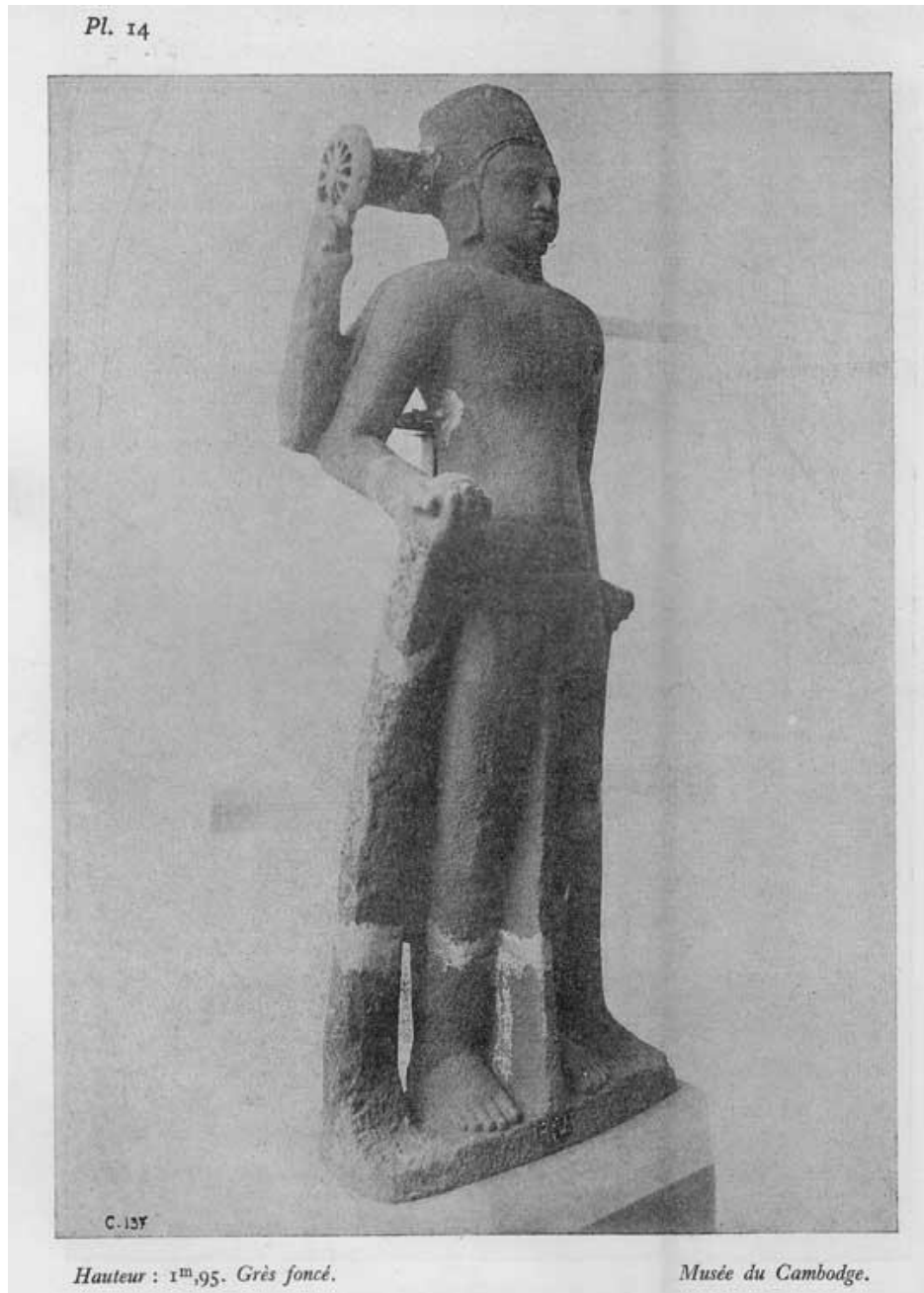
Architecture: This style has no specific characteristics of architectural decoration.

Kompong Preah Style (706-800)

Religion: Hinduism

Sculpture: Human sculpture is stylized. On the walls of temples, some isolated figures appear (Javanese or Cham influences).

Architecture: The "temple mountain" structure seems to appear at this time (Ak Yum).



Vishnu, Kampong Preah style, National Museum of Cambodia

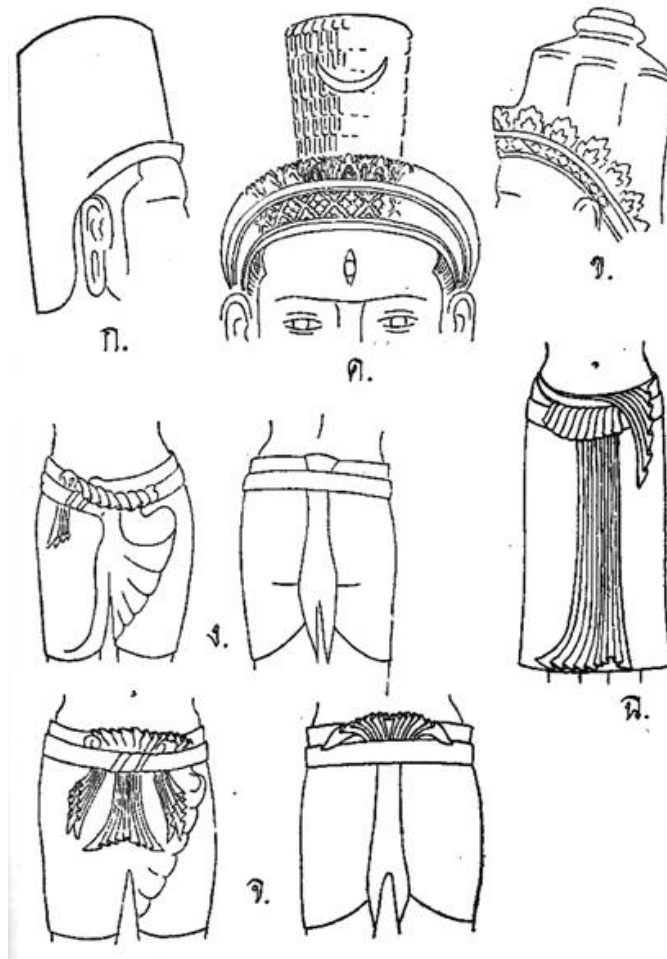
Kulen Style (802-875)

Jayavaraman II unified the country and declared the Khmer kingdom secure. Mahendraparavata (present-day Phnom Kulen) and Hariharalaya (present-day Roluos) were the central cities of Jayavaraman II.

The Kulen style is a transitional style which commenced in the Pre-Angkorian period and concluded in the Angkorian period.

Religion: Hinduism, cult of Shiva, God-King (Cakravartin).

Sculpture: Becomes more formalized and less natural. The body of the statue is solid and the chest cleaved. The face is square and the weight balanced on the left leg, with the right leg set slightly forward. The supporting arch is no longer necessary. The first headdresses, the symbols of royalty become characteristic of the Angkorian period.



Architecture: Brick sanctuaries with stucco are found at some locations. Most sanctuaries are isolated. Appearance of the "mountain-temple". The architecture and some elements of decoration show influence from Champa (Temple of Damrei Krap) and from Java.



Vishnu, Kulen style, National Museum of Cambodia

THE ANGKORIAN PERIOD (9th century - 1431)

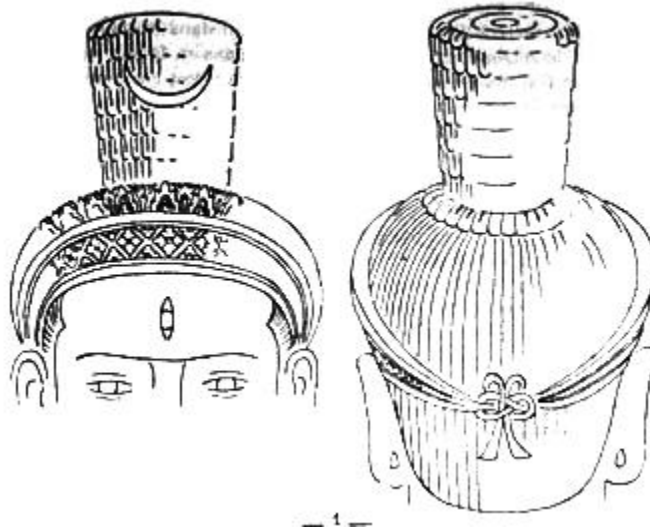
The productions of the first half of the 9th century (Kulen style) mirror the transition from Pre-Angkorian to Angkorian art very faithfully. The latter was soon dominated by royal patronage, which inspired the building of great complexes even before the founding of Angkor (Preah Ko, Bakong) and imposed a particular style upon most of the buildings founded during this period.

Preah Ko Style (875-895)

Roluos is situated slightly inland to the north of the Tonle Sap Lake and became the capital.

Religion: Hinduism, Shivaism, reinforcement of the God-King cult.

Sculpture: The deep stucco relief is deeply carved, with a play of sumptuous arabesques over a plain background. The sandstone bas-relief makes its appearance at Bakong, along with the first narrative frescoes. Sculpture is highly stylized, and the modelling somewhat coarse. The Garuda-Naga pattern appears, along with the representations of various divinities.



Architecture: Brick is still used for construction. At Roluos, the Bakong is the first sandstone "mountain-temple" in the history of Khmer architecture. Preah Ko groups six brick towers on a raised terrace.



(Left) Shiva, Preah Ko style, National Museum of Cambodia (Right) Vishnu, Preah Ko, National Musum of Cambodia

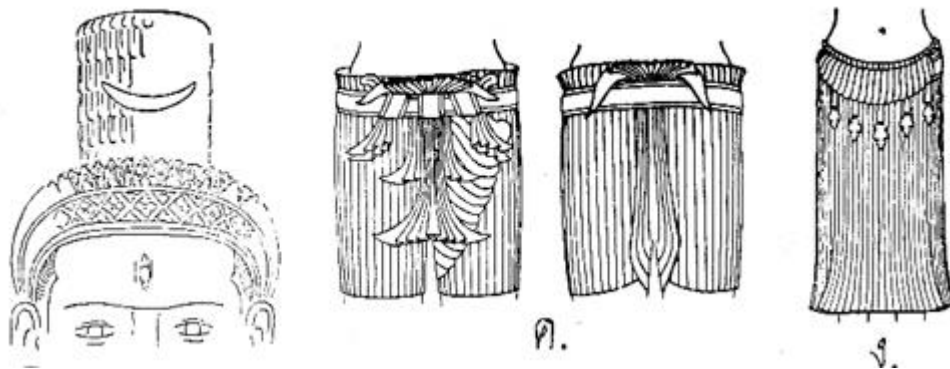
Bakheng Style (893-925)

This period marks a very important event in the life of the Khmer Kingdom. King Yasovaraman (889-900) founds the first Angkorian capital, with Phnom Bakheng as its centre.

This style marks an important step in the evolution of Khmer art; sculpture appears more powerful, and detached from previous iconographical influences.

Religion: Hinduism, God-King, Trimurti (Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu)

Sculpture: Is characterized by geometrical forms and austerity, particularly in the faces, that are now idealized. The attitude of the statues becomes fixed, and the pose is strictly frontal. Carving is deeper and stylization begins. The medium increasingly is sandstone which is handled with an extraordinary precision and lightness, as dictated by the new material.



Architecture: The "temple-mountain" becomes larger with Phnom Bakheng, built at the summit of a natural mountain.



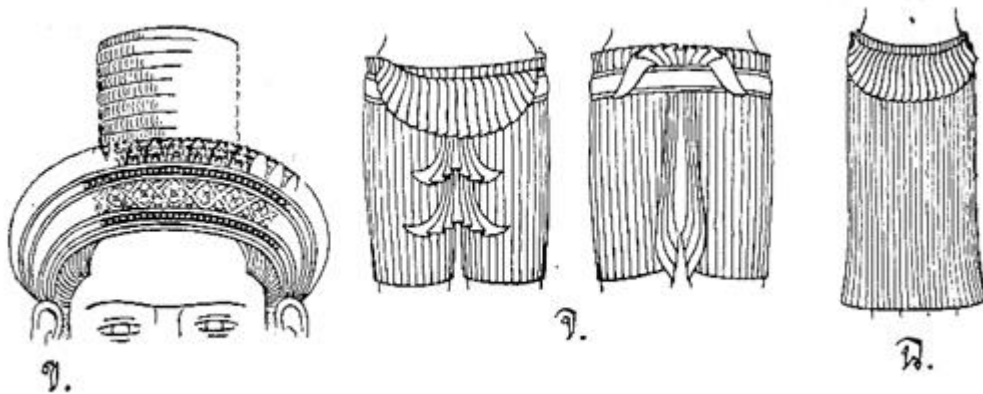
Devi, Bakheng style, Guimet, Paris

Koh Ker Style (921-945)

The Koh Ker site is 100 kilometers northeast of Angkor. It was the capital of King Jayavarman IV.

Religion: Hinduism, Shiva and linga cults.

Sculpture: Statuary is almost always on a large scale and conveys a sense of power and grandeur which overrides anatomical truth. The statues show dynamic force and movement which is unexpected in Khmer art.



Architecture: The "temple-mountain" rises to considerable heights, with long halls, and almost certainly roofs of timber that enrich the architectural composition. The construction of the 30 meter-high pyramid at Koh Ker and extremely sophisticated bas-reliefs on brick at Prasat Kravan.



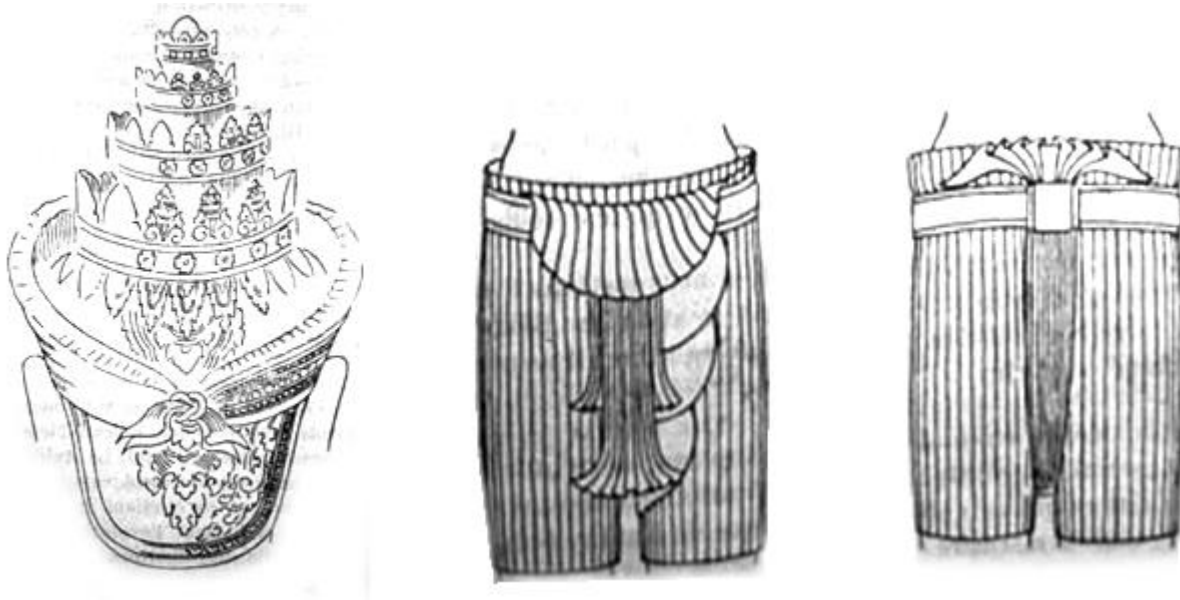
Brahma, Koh Ker style, Guimet, Paris

Pre Rup Style (944-967)

The capital was moved from Koh Ker back to Angkor.

Religion: Hinduism, God-King cult, Buddhist renaissance (Mahayana)

Sculpture: Statuary is formalized with increased frontality and simple decoration.



Architecture: Improvement on innovations from the previous style. Buddhist temples were constructed (Prasat Bat Chum).



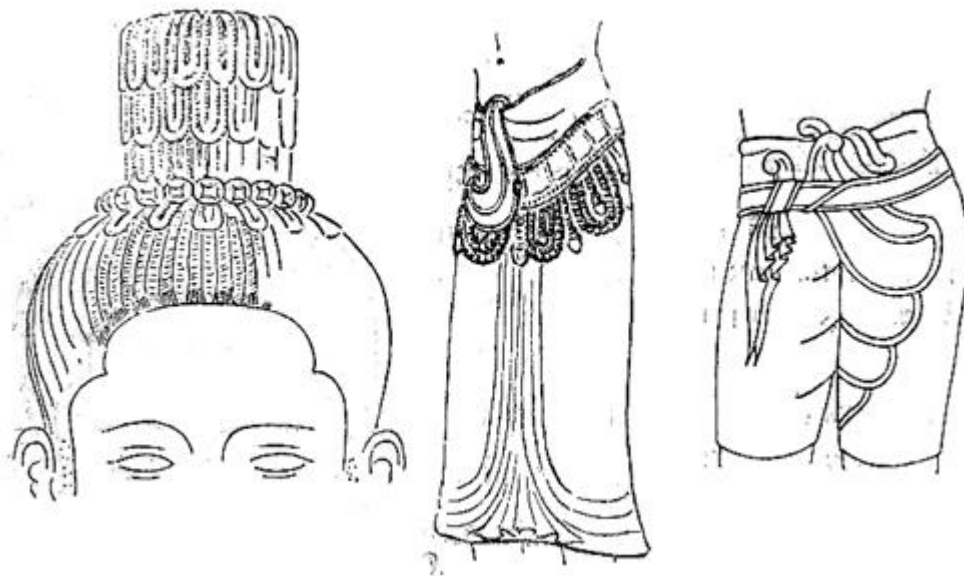
Vajimukha, Pre Rup style, Guimet, Paris

Banteay Srei Style (967-1000)

Banteay Srei was built by a dignitary, rather than the King.

Religion: Hinduism and Shivaism

Sculpture: The decoration is as rich and confident as the narrative scenes. The ornamentation reflects a perfect mastery of sculpting, and a new fluidity. The lintels show signs of borrowing from earlier styles (Preah Ko), and their decoration usually has an anecdotal element. The face of the statues retain the characteristics of the Koh Ker style, but appear more delicate. Reddish sandstone is used.



Architecture: The temple of Banteay Srei was built on a raised platform.

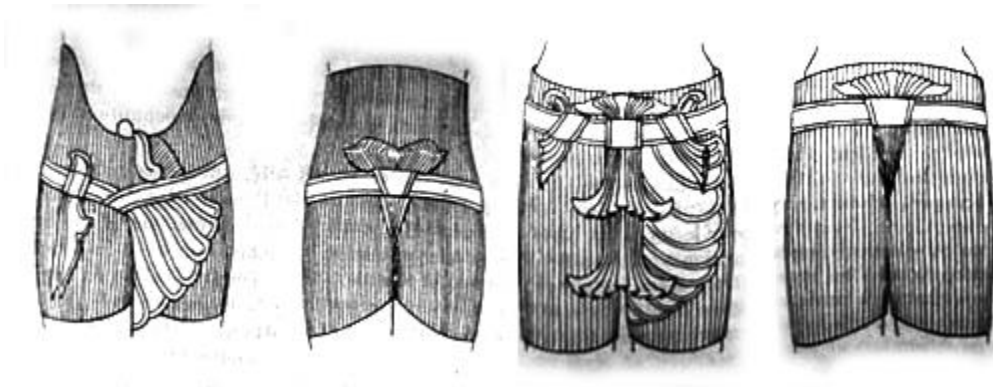


Avalokiteshvara, Banteay Srei style, Guimet, Paris

Khleang Style (965-1010)

Religion: Hinduism, Buddhism.

Sculpture: Little notable evolution in this style, apart from simplification. The statues inherit some modelling of earlier periods, but in a less rugged form.



Architecture: The finer details seem to show the influence of the Banteay Srei style.

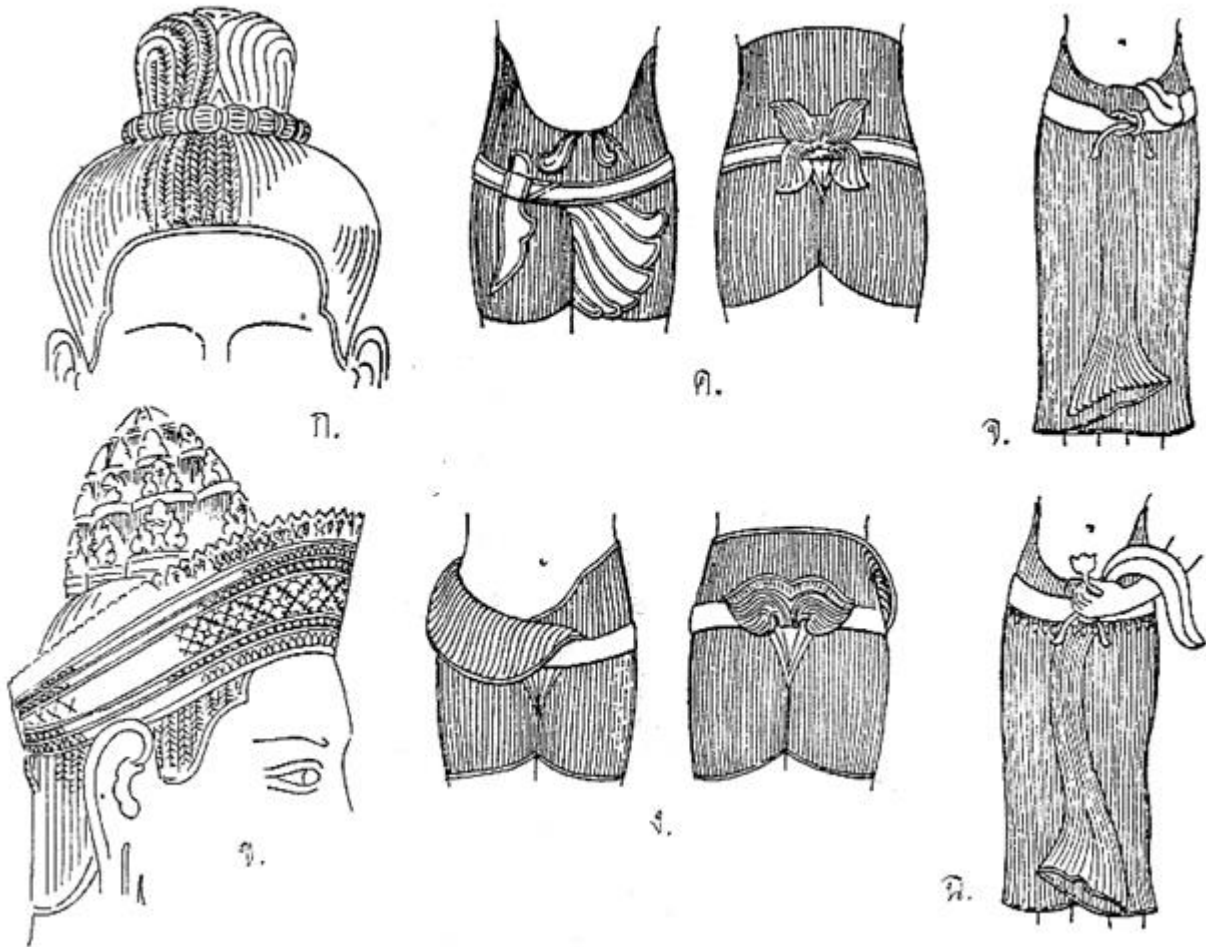


Vishnu, Khleang style, Guimet Museum, Paris

Baphuon Style (1010-1080)

Religion: Hinduism, Shiva cult, Buddhism is tolerated.

Sculpture: This style is deeply innovative, harmony and search for perfection are its fundamental characteristics. Shapes are elegant and fluid, the expressions of faces soft, yet inner strength and natural forms are evident. Decoration and figurative ornamentation are abundant, every available space is sculpted.



The bronze Vishnu is one of the masterworks of bronze Khmer statuary, as much for its beauty as for the technical tour de force that is represented by the casting of such a large statue.

Architecture: Monuments take inspiration from all the preceding styles, as seen in the Baphuon temple.



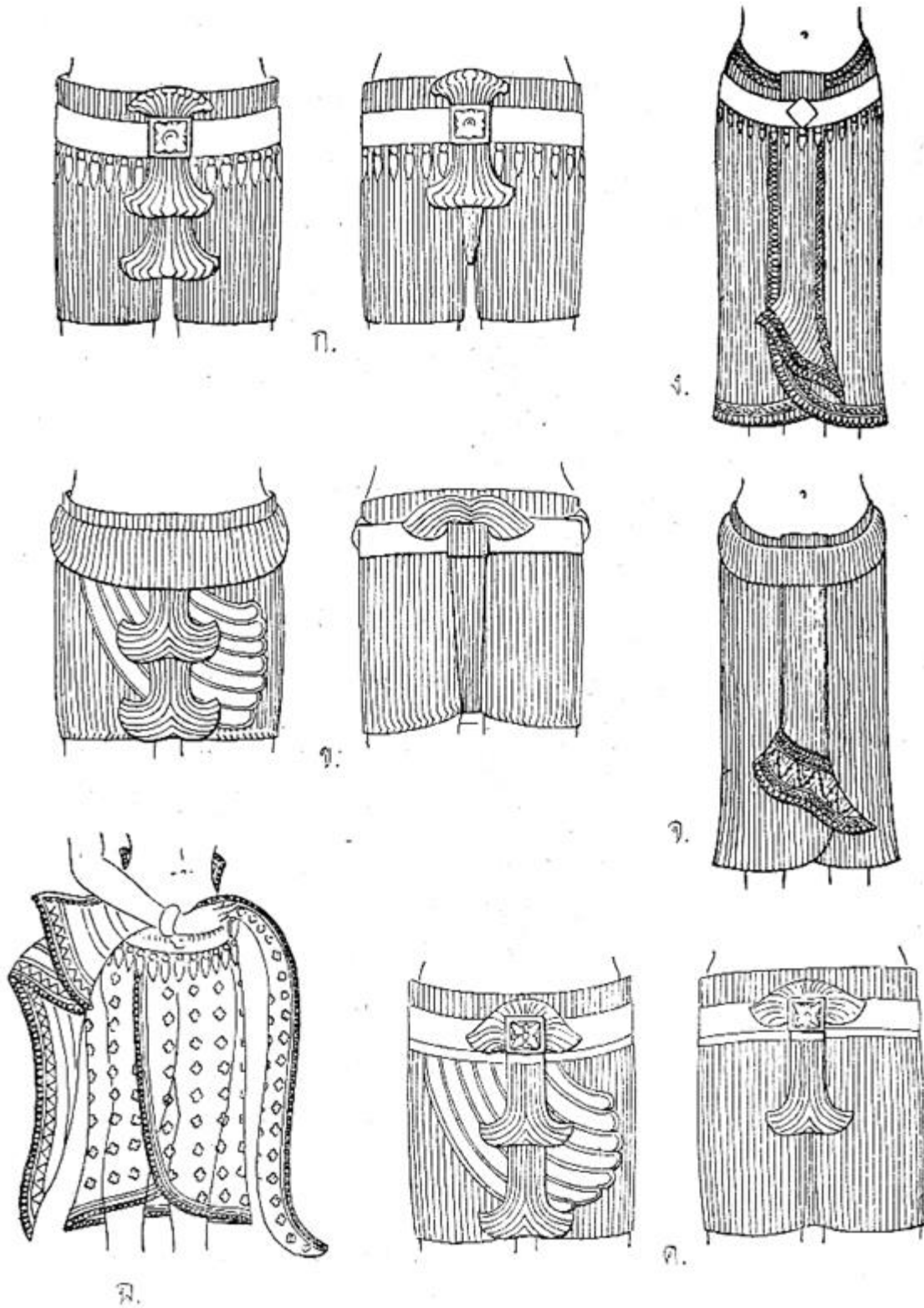
Vishnu, Baphuon

Angkor Vat Style (1100-1175)

This style corresponds to the apogee of the classical age, it extends the Baphuon style: harmony, perfect mastery of materials, equilibrium, perspective science, quality of decoration and composition. Use of previous architectural elements continues in a multiple and varied way, leading to a new symbolic and functional significance.

Religion: Hinduism, and mostly Vishnuism under the reign of Suryavarman II.

Sculpture: The statues of Angkor Vat break from the grace of the previous style, with a return to a frontal and rigid posture. The repeated use of characteristics from earlier styles reflects the conservative nature of Khmer sculpture of this style.



Architecture: The architecture is at its apogee with Angkor Vat.



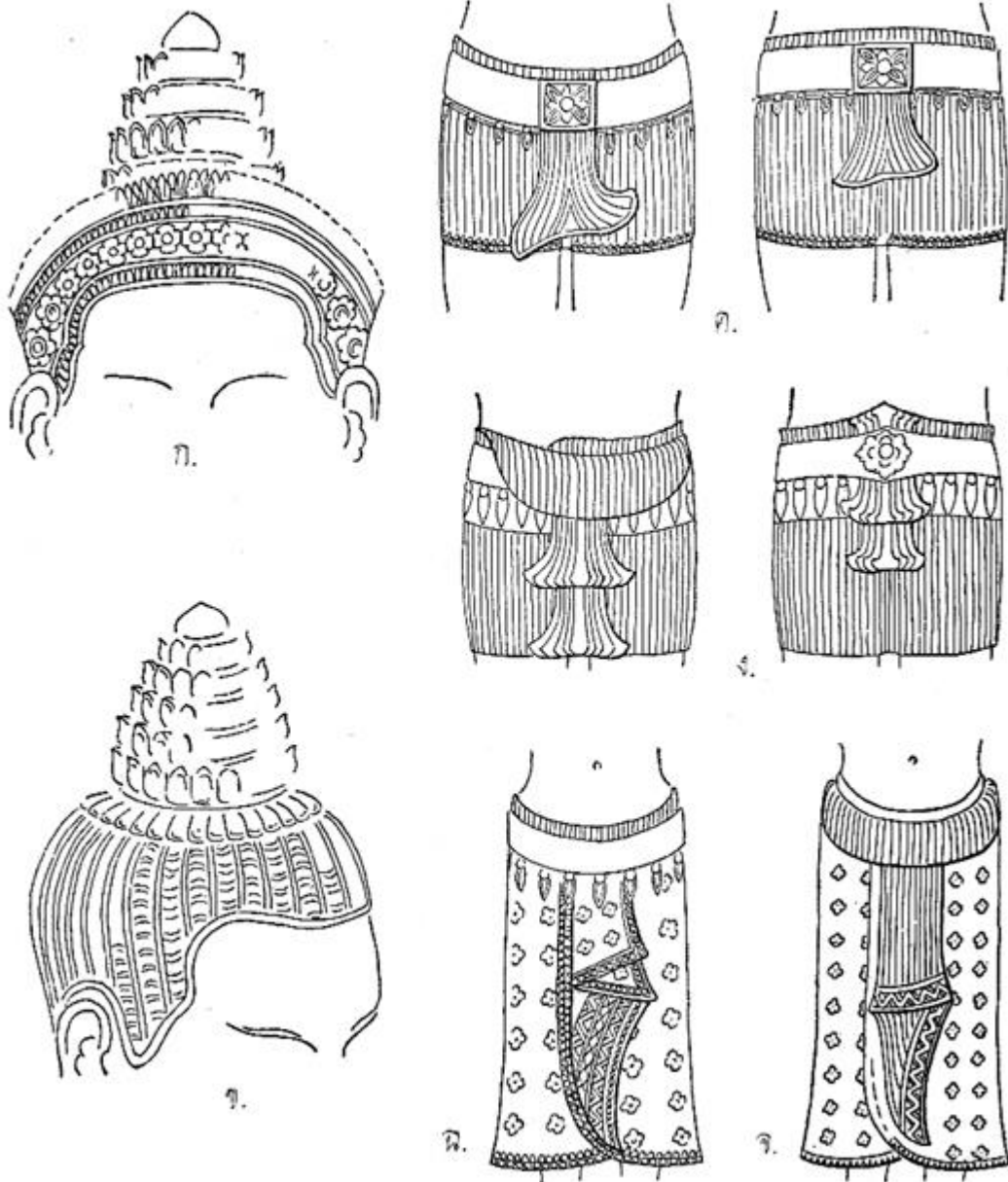
Vishnu, Angkor Vat style, National Museum of Cambodia

Bayon Style (1180-1230)

Buddhist art is at its height, and Buddhist themes prevail, though Hindu legends are still represented. This style is monumental, aesthetics shows a clear return to realism.

Religion: Buddhist preponderance (Mahayana).

Sculpture: Iconography is more varied, symbolism gains in importance and the first scenes of contemporary daily life appear. Towards the end of the 12th century, Khmer art also produce portraiture. This fragment of a statue (left) is thought to be an image of King Jayavarman VII.



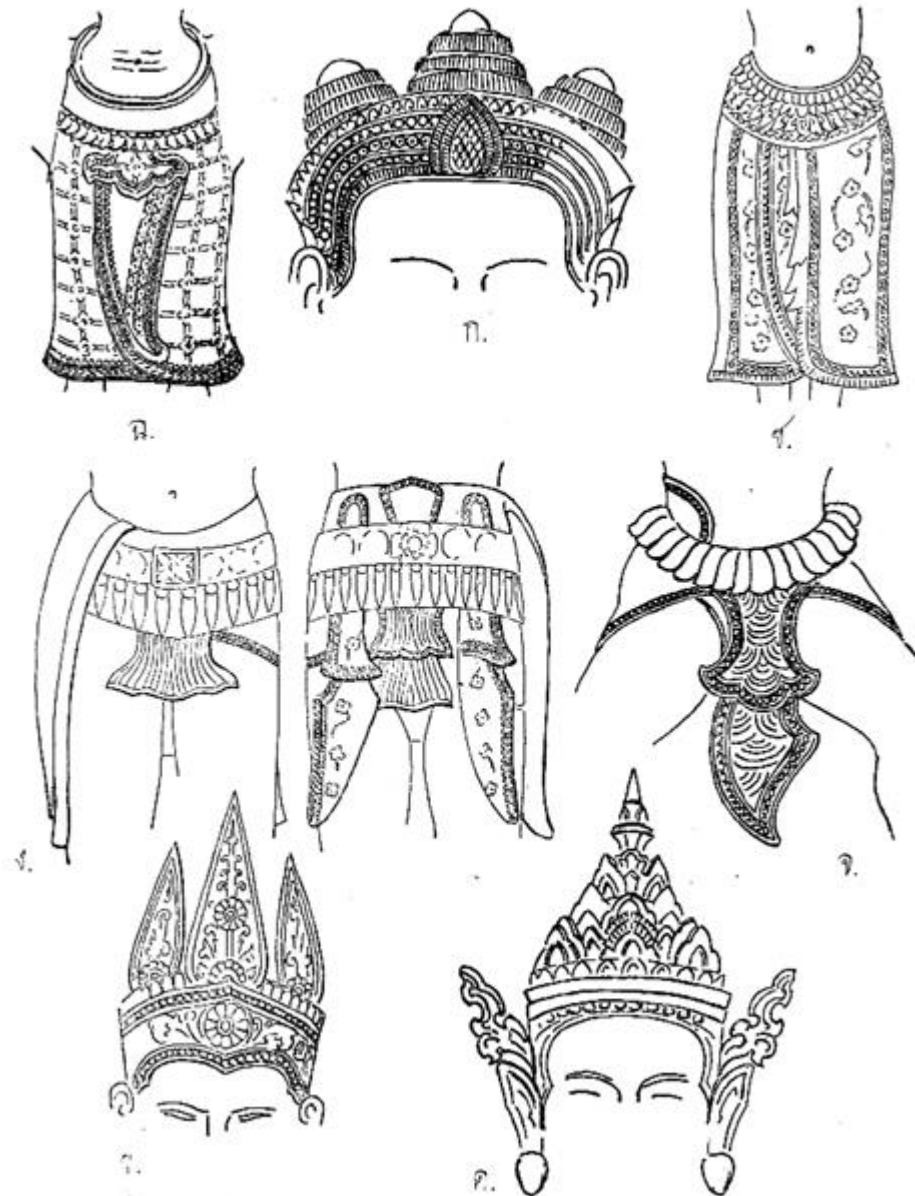
Architecture: In architecture, huge level temple complexes evolve, rendered more and more complicated by endless additions. At the beginning of the second phase of the style the avenues of giants and devas make their appearance at entrances to temples and the city of Angkor Thom. The entrance gates and the associated towers are carved with faces. The Bayon remains a unique temple mountain with its circular central tower and its forest of some 54 subsidiary towers carved with benignly smiling visages. The last buildings of this period become more and more complex, and their structures are less readable.



(Left) Avalokiteshvara, Bayon (Right) Prajnaparamita, Bayon

THE POST-ANGKORIAN PERIOD (1431 - the present)

With the collapse of centralized power and management at Angkor, the transition between Angkorian and post-Angkorian art can be read in the light of wars, political upheavals and a migratory existence that resulted in a use of less permanent materials (wood instead of stone) and a lack of artisans.



The progressive adoption of Theravada Buddhism provoked deep changes in all forms of Khmer art. Siamese (Thailand) influences from the Ayutthaya Kingdom, as well as influences from Champa, are also obvious. New types of buildings are erected, sculpture obeys new conventions, and the previous monuments are often modified. The greatness and all-powerful influence of the reign of Jayavarman VII are replaced by a sense of restraint and humility in sculpture. An impression of peaceful power emanates, particularly from the representations of Buddha. Nonetheless, Khmer art retains its unique characteristics.

Tevoda Gallery

Thailand

www.tevoda.com

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