

# ANGKOR FROM A SIAMESE POINT OF VIEW.

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I wish first to thank the President and Committee of the Siam Society for giving me the honour of addressing you to-night, and also to thank all, whether members or friends of the Society, for their kindness in coming to hear me. I hope my effort will not make you regret your decision in coming, and, if I should go so far as to give you any satisfaction, that indeed would be most gratifying.

The reason why I chose the subject of the Angkor Monuments for my address tonight is that last November I was able to visit Angkor, through the kind help of the French Government and her officials both of the Bangkok Legation and in Cambodia, and also of the members of the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient. My hosts arranged for me to see probably all the important monuments of Angkor. After seeing them one begins to wonder at the striking connection with our own, and hence I have undertaken to address you tonight.

These monuments, however, have been exhaustively treated by Western scholars, from both their historical and archaeological standpoints—much more so than I should ever be able to describe them myself. Besides, most of you will no doubt have seen pictures and plans of these famous monuments already, and a good many will also have read the various works thereon. So that it will not be necessary for me to repeat here the results that have been reached by western scholars. I shall, with your leave, treat the subject entirely from the point of view of an Oriental, and especially that of a Siamese who professes the same religion and follows the same manners and customs as the Cambodians.

The word "Angkor", as used by western scholars, is identical with the Sanskrit "Nagara", a city; the town is called "Nagor

Thom" by the Cambodians, and "Nagor Luang" by us Siamese, all meaning "the Great City" or "the Capital", because it was once the capital of the ancient Khmer. In its time it was known as "Yasodharapura", because it was built by King Yasovarman in the 7th century of the Christian Era. The so-called Angkor Monuments are scattered about both in the citadel and outside, just as our monasteries are here. Originally there must have been names to every one of them, but as they became ruined and deserted, they gradually lost their identities. The names by which they are now known are mostly local modern names. In many cases the French have only recently discovered their original names, such for instance as Bayon, the most important of the Angkor Monuments, which has only lately been identified with "Yasodharagiri" (the Hill of Yasodhara); and another sanctuary near the Royal Palace, which has hitherto been called "Bapuon", has been identified as "Suvarnagiri" (The Golden Hill). However, these will probably, like "Angkor", continue to be known by their more familiar names, which have been so long in use.

In dealing with the history of these Khmer monuments, it is well to bear in mind the origin and history of this famous race. According to researches, the Peninsula of Indo-China was inhabited by three different races, more or less resembling one another ethnologically as well as philologically. One was the Môn, or Talaing, inhabiting the borders of the Bay of Bengal and the southern part of the valley of the Irawadi; another, Lao or Lăwā, in the valley of the Menam, spreading right up beyond the plateau to the East; and a third, Khmer or Khôm, in the low lands of the South-East near the extremity of the Peninsula. Even before the dawn of the Christian Era, there had been Indian colonists settling in Indo-China, some of them perhaps as long ago as the seventh or eighth century before Christ. They were probably traders who came and went away after having made their living, and then there would be others who settled down for good. There were in all likelihood two distinct streams of immigration; one coming from Central India by an overland and sea route along the coast of the Bay of Bengal as

far as the river Salwin, and thence, penetrating the range of mountains to the east, crossing the Menam and finally reaching Cambodia from her Western boundary ; and the other coming from Southern India by the sea route, passing Sumatra and Java, entering the Mèkhông and settling down in Cambodia, eventually reaching the Lao country to the north.

Owing to their superiority of culture over the indigenous races, the latter in time came to adopt the Indians as their teachers and model. It is through this that the three races came to profess Indian religious and use Indian customs and manners, and even acquire some branches of their knowledge. In the countries of the Môn and Lao, it has not been ascertained whether Indians ever came to the position of rulers, but with the Khmer they attained sovereignty by intermarriage with the ruling families and hence we have Khmer Kings of Southern Indian blood ruling the country from the 6th century A.D. It was these monarchs who built the famous monuments in Khmer territory. When the Khmer spread their influence over the Lao, they established Colonies and erected monuments further and further into Lao territories. This process continued until Khmer power waned towards the eleventh century A. D., owing to the invasions of the Burmese and Môn at first, and then to the rise of Siamese power in the Menam valley. The Siamese finally conquered the Khmer in the 14th century. The succession of events being such, it will, therefore, be readily seen, that all Khmer monuments date back to one continuous period, that is, from the sixth to the twelfth centuries A. D. And yet they were numerous. So far as have been discovered, they now number about 600 in Cambodia alone; and 180 in Siam and French Laos; some made of stone, some of laterite, and some in brick or mixtures of the three; and they all belong to the above-mentioned period of 600 years.

Most Khmer monuments are in the form of sanctuaries. Some are Buddhist, whilst others are Brahmin. The styles of architecture and decoration originated in India, but were later modified by skilled artists so as to create finally an altogether independent Khmer style. Once brought into being, this Khmer style was

disseminated everywhere. Monuments as far away as in Siam were modelled in the style of Angkor, diminishing of course in size and proportion, or else copying merely one or other sections of the great sanctuary. Khmer monuments are, therefore, easy to recognise anywhere. They are all fine and imposing.

When we visited the monuments, some of my friends as well as myself, were able to take a few photographs, some of which, together with other photographs taken from other places, were made into lantern slides, which Mr. R. Wening has kindly undertaken to operate on the screen for us to-night. The first picture (Plate I) will show you examples of decoration; one almost pure Indian in style, while the second is a Khmer development thereof.

The best monuments from an architectural point of view are situated in the neighbourhood of Angkor. With your permission, I shall remark upon these as they appear on the screen.

Bayon, the great temple in the centre of the citadel (Plate II), is a Brahmin monument of the Sivaite Cult. It was built in the 9th Century. The idea underlying the whole structure seems to me more beautiful than that of all the other monuments. The dome with human faces is imitated elsewhere, such as on the top of the city and monastery gates, but they abound in Angkor only. A curious point worth drawing your attention to is that, although Bayon was a beautiful conception as a whole, yet an architectural mistake was made in that, while the central dome was being built, it was discovered that the foundations were unable to bear its weight. A terrace was therefore built in between to support the dome, and in this connection several smaller domes were also added. Some of the original entrances had to be stopped up and a flight of steps came into being in rather an unsuitable locality. All these alterations are still noticeable. Owing, perhaps, to its intricacy of construction, the Khmer architects did not seem to have again attempted such structures, but developed another style altogether, as may be seen in pictures of Angkor Wat (Plate III).

Now Angkor Wat is a Hindu monument of the Vishnuite Cult. It is situated to the South of the city, and is perhaps the largest of

the World's monuments in existence. It is, moreover, the best preserved of Khmer monuments. Angkor Wat was built in the later period of Khmer civilisation, about the 12th century A. D. From an architectural point of view, it cannot be said that the builders of this group of sanctuaries invented anything new; on the other hand you can see there adaptations from various other older monuments. And yet Angkor Wat is extremely imposing. The style, even though an adaptation, is magnified in proportion and the whole produces a splendid effect.

Of Buddhist sanctuaries there exist several considerable monuments, but none as yet so well cleared and restored as Bayon and Angkor Wat. I was able to see one of fine workmanship, which, whatever its original name was, is now known as Ta Prohm, which you can see yourself on the accompanying picture (Plate IV).

Although these monuments were built for different religions, some Buddhist, some Hindu, yet in examining their decorative art it is quite impossible to distinguish between them. It must have been more difficult to evolve themes of decoration from purely Buddhist traditions, there being no such great epics as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana which lend themselves so splendidly for such purposes. Some of you who have been here to see old Siamese book-cases in the National Library here will no doubt recollect that their decorations are mostly inspired by the Ramayana. One is inclined, therefore, to surmise that the ancient Khmer must have felt the same influence of Hindu traditions, which moreover went beyond religious realms proper, in that they were also utilised for the decoration of secular constructions, such as the stone bridge over the moat of Angkor Thom, which represents the story of the Purānic churning of the ocean (Plate V).

This kind of bridge, which has been found crossing the moat in five places, is very fine and imposing. There are also some others, as entrances into monasteries, but of course modified in size.

There is another very fine sight, which originally must have been called the "Mānasa Lake" (สระในตาด), but is now known as "Neak Pean", because there are two big stone serpents (Nāga) around an island in the middle of the lake.

This tank is rectangular, with an island sanctuary in the middle. The water thereof is regarded by the people as holy, and bordering its four sides are buildings for the sick who go there for the water cure. On the roof of each building is a hole through which the Brahmin priests pour down holy water from the tank: the hole communicates with four openings inside in the shape of the mouths of a lion, a horse, an elephant, and a human being. Illustrations of methods of treating invalids with the water are executed in bas relief outside these buildings.

Turning now to the royal palace at Angkor Thom, there are several things worth seeing. One of them is the high terrace in front of the palace on the northern side (Plate VI).

It is not exactly known to what use this terrace was put. It is now called "the Palace of the Leper King." There was a Khmer King, according to tradition, who became a leper because of a curse from a Brahmin priest, and on this terrace there happened to be a stone effigy of Siva, one arm of which was discoloured. It came, therefore, to be regarded as a statue of that king, and hence the terrace received its name. On close examination, however, one finds that the sides of this high terrace are sculptured with tier after tier of different kinds of beings; the lowest having Nāgas, the traditional inhabitants beneath the earth, and then giants and again Garudas and so on until we finally reach gods and goddesses on high. There is an opinion that this might have been intended as Mount Meru, the abode of the gods with Siva as their head. Professor Coëdès thinks that it might have been used as the place for royal cremations, since such places are still called "Meru" in Siam to-day.

In the royal precincts there is a bathing tank for the use of royalty. It is not very big, but the borders and steps into the water are wonderfully carved.

As to the residence itself of the Khmer Kings, there is to be found no stone edifice likely to answer this purpose. I believe they preferred living in wooden houses, as in Siam. Both at Sukhōdaya and at Ayudhya, the royal residences proper were built of wood. Originally only monasteries were built of brick and stone, but later

on we find halls of audience of the same materials. Not until the 17th century do we find royal residences of brick.

There were some objects in Angkor that seemed to me rather curious and inexplicable, for example, the Terrace of the Leper King. Near its base are to be found additional constructions enlarging the base by about two metres. The original carving was not removed outside, but was instead covered up and new carving was made on the sides of the enlarged base. This is as yet unaccounted for (Plate VII).

Again there is another remarkable thing at the sanctuary of Bapuon near the palace of Angkor Thom. Originally there was a stone road leading from a highway to the sanctuary, about 150 metres in length. A stone bridge of about two metres high was subsequently erected above the whole length of the road, to be filled up again with earth and transformed into yet another road above the first. Why such a process should have been adopted is still also unaccounted for.

Again, inside the walls of the royal palace, there is a thick layer of earth about two metres deep, evidently a later addition. Vestiges of construction, both before and after the addition of earth, still remain.

It is, therefore, possible that all these corroborate the story that in days of yore there was a big flood at Angkor Thom, which necessitated the removal of the whole court therefrom for a period of more than 60 years. This flood might perhaps have been the cause of all these alterations.

Another remarkable feature are the sanctuary steps. Buddhist monuments can be distinguished from Hindu in that, whereas the former whatever their general magnitude may be, are always constructed on an ordinary level, the latter, however, are generally raised in tier after tier of plinth, to be crowned finally with the sanctuary on top. I may cite Lobburi as an example. Here you will find the Mahādhatu monastery on an ordinary level, and not far away the Sāl Sūng, a Hindu sanctuary, raised on tiers of plinth. An explanation has been put forward that the Hindu believes that his god

is still living, and likes living on mountain tops, whilst the Buddhist merely regards his temple as a memorial of the Great Teacher who has been long since dead. These Hindu sanctuaries, besides being raised on tiers of plinth, are not easy of access because their steps are narrow and high and rather dangerous (Plate VIII).

This question of the steps has often been a subject of discussion among visitors to the monuments of Angkor, in-as-much as these sanctuaries, some of them being of the utmost importance, must have been the frequent resort of a great many people from the king and the higher nobles downwards. Why was no thought taken of the danger and risk of mounting the steps? A solution has been put forward that the steps were made steep and narrow to prevent an undue enlargement of their base, which would injure the perpendicular effect of the ensemble; another is that it was the intention of the builders to impress upon frequenters the sanctity of the place by necessitating going upon all fours in ascending and descending. There is so far no agreement as to which is the right solution of the problem.

Of the materials for building, namely brick, laterite and stone, or mixtures of either, one would be inclined at first to believe that brick was the earliest in use, because it was easy to make and easy to handle even with only comparatively few workmen. As their resources and power increased, the Khmer probably began to adopt laterite which was more durable. At the height of their power, when they could obtain workers by tens of thousands, they graduated into stone which would last and could be carved in as beautiful a manner as they wished. But on examining the inscriptions it will be found not to be the case, since all three materials are mentioned as being employed in one and the same period. So probably the means and inclination, and not the age, were the determining factors. In the case of stone monuments, such as Angkor Wat, plain stones were set up in position first, the carving being done afterwards, whilst the engraving was left to be done last of all.

There is one curious fact that no Khmer religious monuments, whether large or small, were ever completed. I first noticed this in



the case of Khmer monuments in Siam, such as those of Bimai, where one can easily recognise the traces of non-completion. Other monuments bear the same testimony. I made further observations at Angkor Wat with the same results. I then recollected an old tradition with us here in Siam that whoever builds a monastery should leave something to his posterity to complete, otherwise he, too, completes his own life! We may possibly, then, have got this idea from the Khmer, though of course the formation of such an idea is not likely before a nation has spent the energy of its life. The more likely reason is that these monuments were conceived on such a grand scale, that they necessarily took more than a single life-time to complete. Therefore the construction of a monument would conveniently pass through three probable stages, first, just enough would be built for sacrificial purposes; then exterior carvings would be added if the builder were still living; last of all, the interior engraving more often than not would be left to a later generation to complete.

Another remarkable feature of the Angkor Monuments is that all the more important ones changed in their religious symbolism. Some were at first Hindu, but afterwards were converted to Buddhist purposes, whilst others originally Buddhist became Hindu. You can see alterations in the carving plainly enough. Why so? One would perhaps think that at one time or another there were religious changes by force, somewhat in the same way as the Church of St. Sophia at Constantinople became a Moslem Mosque. But I do not think this could have been the case because no vestiges of religious persecutions or fighting are to be found in Khmer history. In the inscriptions of the Khmer Kings, we find monarchs professing one of these religions in preference to the other, or even both simultaneously, but the outstanding fact is that there never existed any hostility between the two at all. I believe Professor Finot, the President of the *École Française d'Extrême Orient*, is right in thinking that whilst Buddhism, which is after all simply a code of morality, appealed to the greater number of people, Hinduism with its codes of temporal laws and customs would be the instrument of

government and more generally the religion of the Administrators. For this reason, each having its own sphere of action, the two religions had no cause for antagonism. The case of Siam to-day may be cited as an example, though much modified in many respects. With the ancient Khmer the case was probably the same. A king would resort to Buddhism for spiritual matters, whilst he would strictly follow the precepts of Hinduism in affairs temporal, such as in Coronation Ceremonies, or those connected with Swinging and the Commencement of Ploughing, the like of which you have most likely seen here year by year. In the Hindu monument of Bayon, I noticed a statue of a Bodhisattva, and in Buddhist places were also to be found statues of Vishnu riding on his Garuda, in just the same way as you can see them on the gable of the Chapel of the Emerald Buddha in the Grand Palace at Bangkok. All these tend to show that the two religions flourished side by side; whether the priest belonged to the cult of Vishnu or Siva, or was a member of the Buddhist Sangha, the injunction to his congregation must have converged upon the same theme—respect and loyalty to the Sovereign, who in one case would have been an incarnation of the Deity, and in another a Bodhisattva, i. e., a future Buddha. The connection between the Sovereign and the Deity can be further illustrated by the fact that at Angkor Wat, which was built in honour of a Vishnuite King, who after death became deified and known as Parama Vishnuloka, there was once a statue of Vishnu in the main sanctuary representing the monarch. Whilst treating of the subject of the dead, I beg to digress for a moment in order to mention a monument which I saw, called the Baksēi Čamkrō—(Plate IX).

This is not a very important monument; but it struck me at once as being very similar to the place for setting up the mortal remains of royalty in this country. It was in the form of tiers—three in number—one upon the other, with an urn on top, such as you may have already seen in Bangkok yourselves. A fact which may, however, not be generally known among you, is that it is the custom here for the dead body of a prince to be clothed in the traditional apparel of a divine being and to be then placed in the urn, which is thus

perhaps a survival of a Brahminical custom formerly in use among the ancient Khmer.

I have explained already that Buddhism flourished side by side with Hinduism, each pursuing its own way. Probably at times, when a monument fell into decay, no matter of what denomination it may have been, some benefactor came forward and restored it according to his taste and denomination, which would account for the phenomena of Buddhist sanctuaries becoming Hindu, and vice versa. Such an example may be cited in Siam. At Sukhōdaya there used to be a Hindu sanctuary called Sivāya, which has now become the Buddhist monastery still called Wat Sri Savāy; and later still, a Christian Church built by Phaulcon at Lobburi has now become Buddhist. Anyhow it must never be concluded that these changes could have been due to any form of religious persecution.

In connection with the above, I wish to draw your attention to a certain contention found in many works on Angkor by western scholars, who attribute the ruin of these mighty cities and monuments to the Siamese invasions of Cambodia, almost implying that those monuments would have remained in perfect condition even to these days, had it not been for us. After seeing them, I could not help wondering whether after all they would have so remained even if there had been no Siamese invasion. One must not forget that the Cambodians changed their capital more than ten times. But, even if Angkor had remained their Capital without interruption down to the present day, I still doubt if they would have been able to preserve those monuments in good condition. In Bangkok to-day, in what one may call a period at the height of prosperity, we are nevertheless unable to keep even in fair condition all our sanctuaries—even though they are far fewer in number and smaller in every way than those of Angkor. As I have shown above, when explaining the apparent changes in the religion of these monuments, there was need already, while the Khmer power was still flourishing, of repairs. How much more so would have been the case when Khmer power waned and declined. Even the Cathedral of St. Paul's in London, built long after Angkor, is in need of repairs, and I see in

the papers that a big subscription of over £250,000 is being started. It makes me think of the ways and means wherewith Bayon and Angkor Wat could have been kept even in fair condition, not to mention other monuments, of which Angkor Thom itself possesses something like thirty or forty.

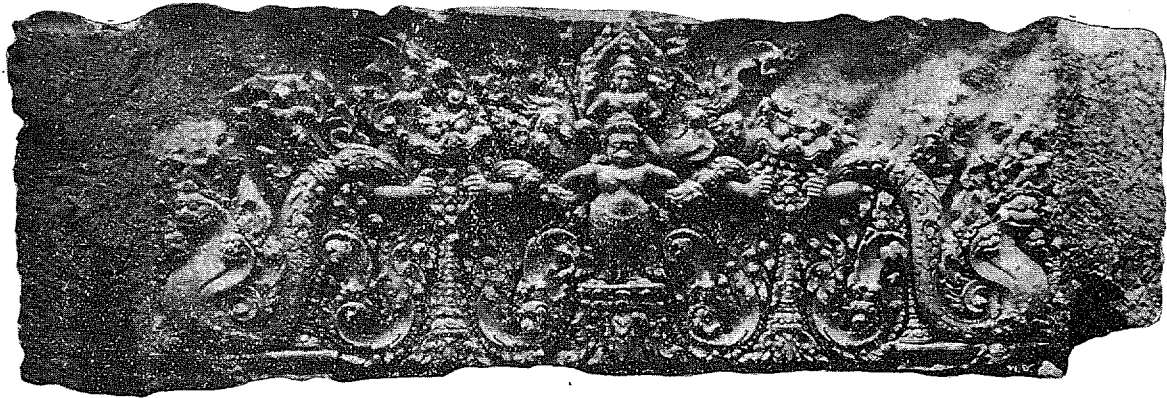
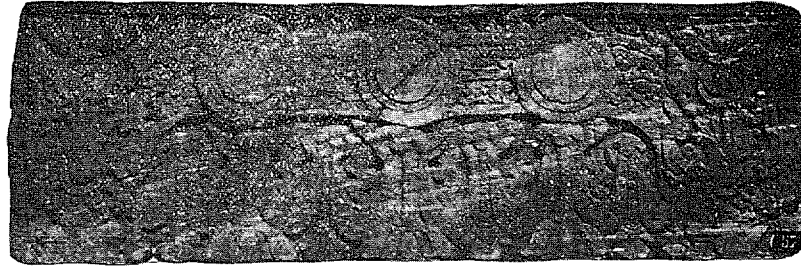
In any case, I think we all owe a debt of gratitude to the French for trying their best to clear and to preserve those monuments for us, as a result of which, I am sure, we shall be able to study more of them as time goes on.

Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to thank you all again for the patience you have shown in listening to me to-night. I shall now conclude my lecture.

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Plate I

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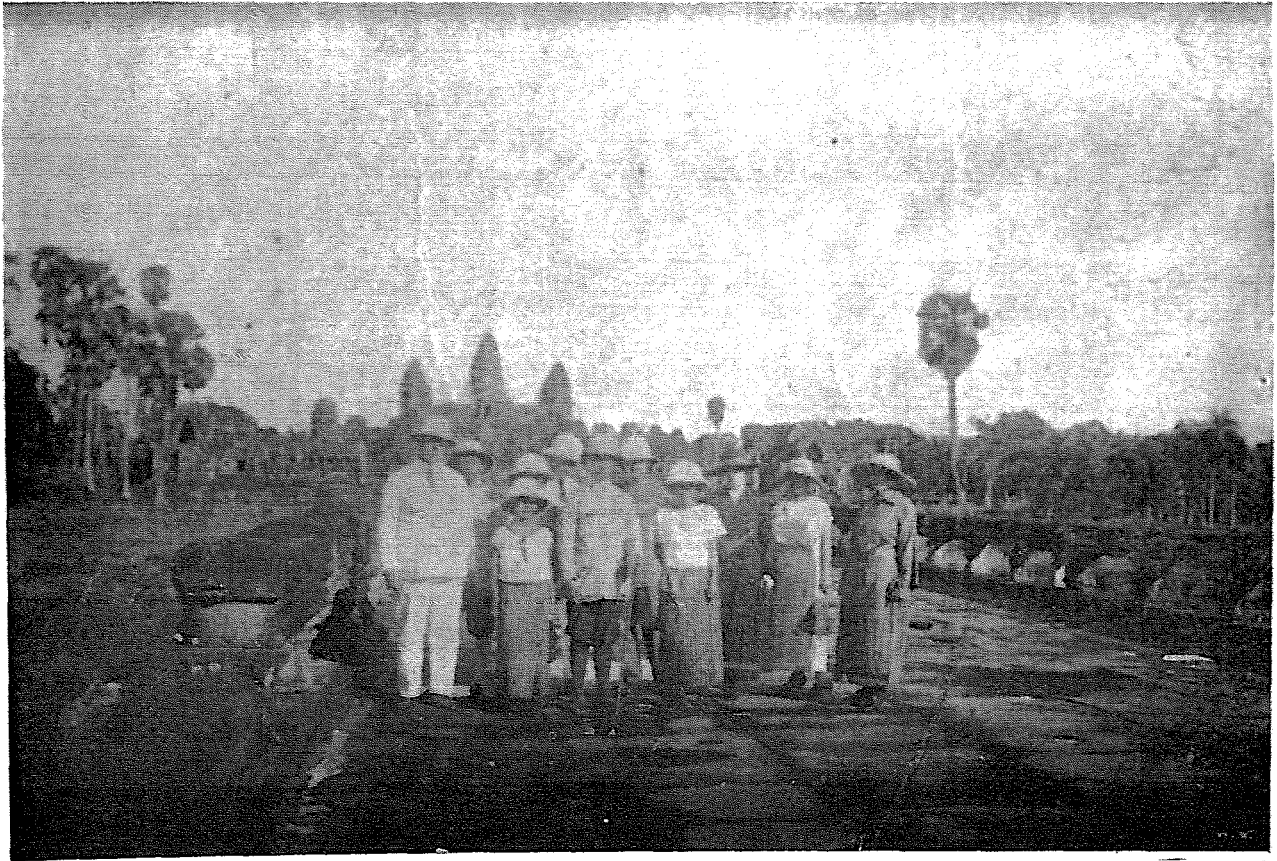


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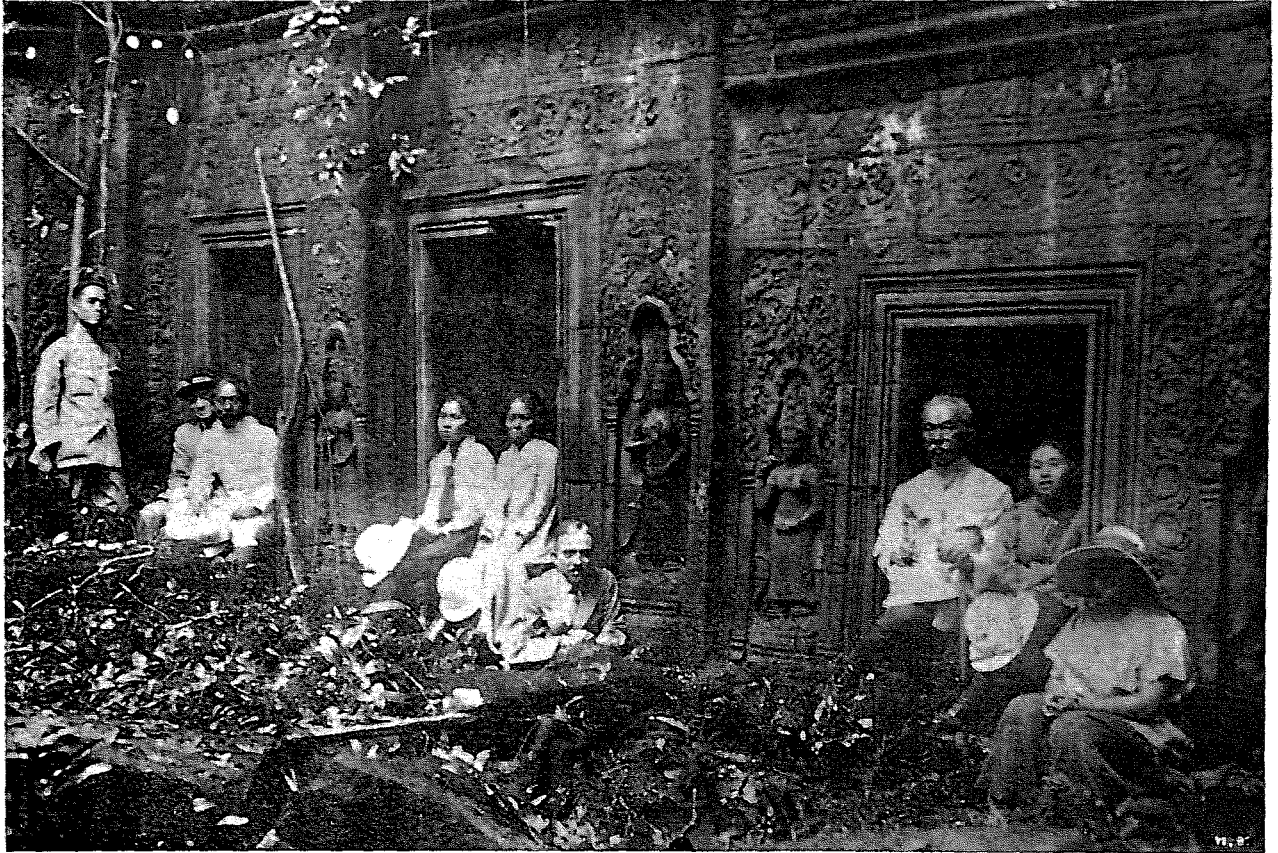
a. Pure Indian Decoratïon.      b. Khmer Decoration.



The Temple at Bayon.



The Main Temple at Angkor.

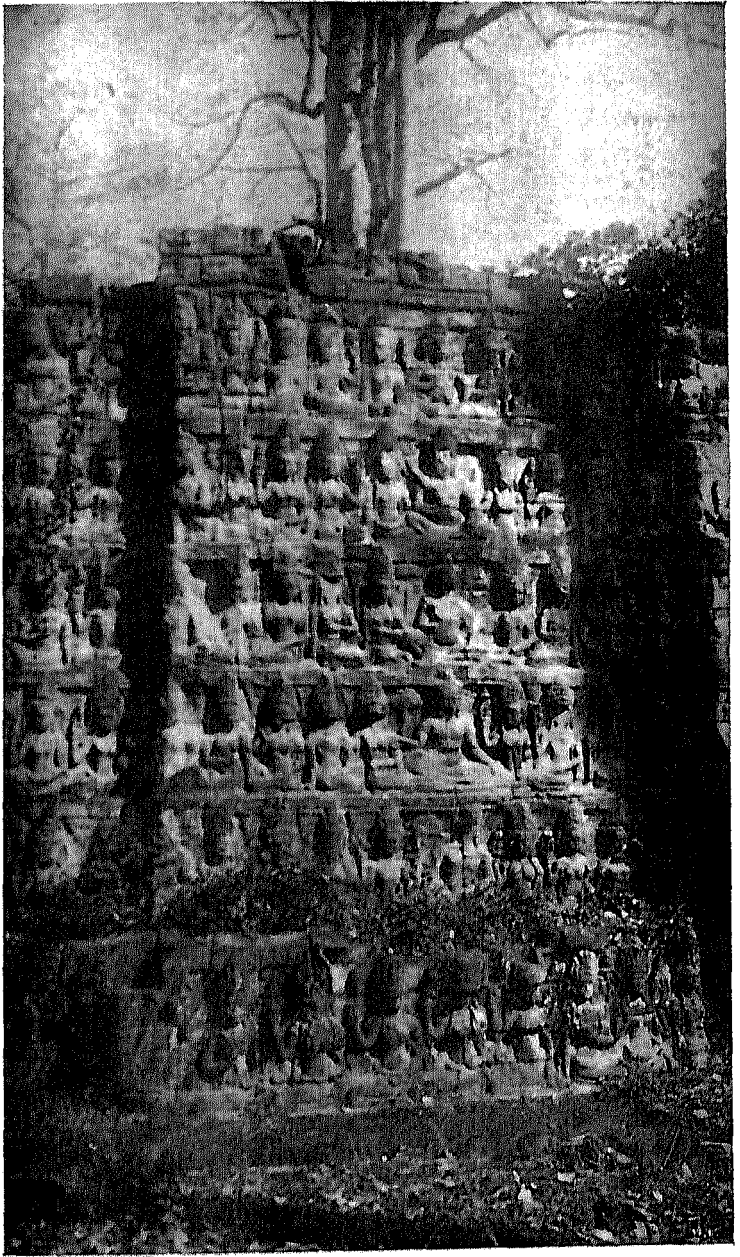


The Sanctuary of Ta Prohm.

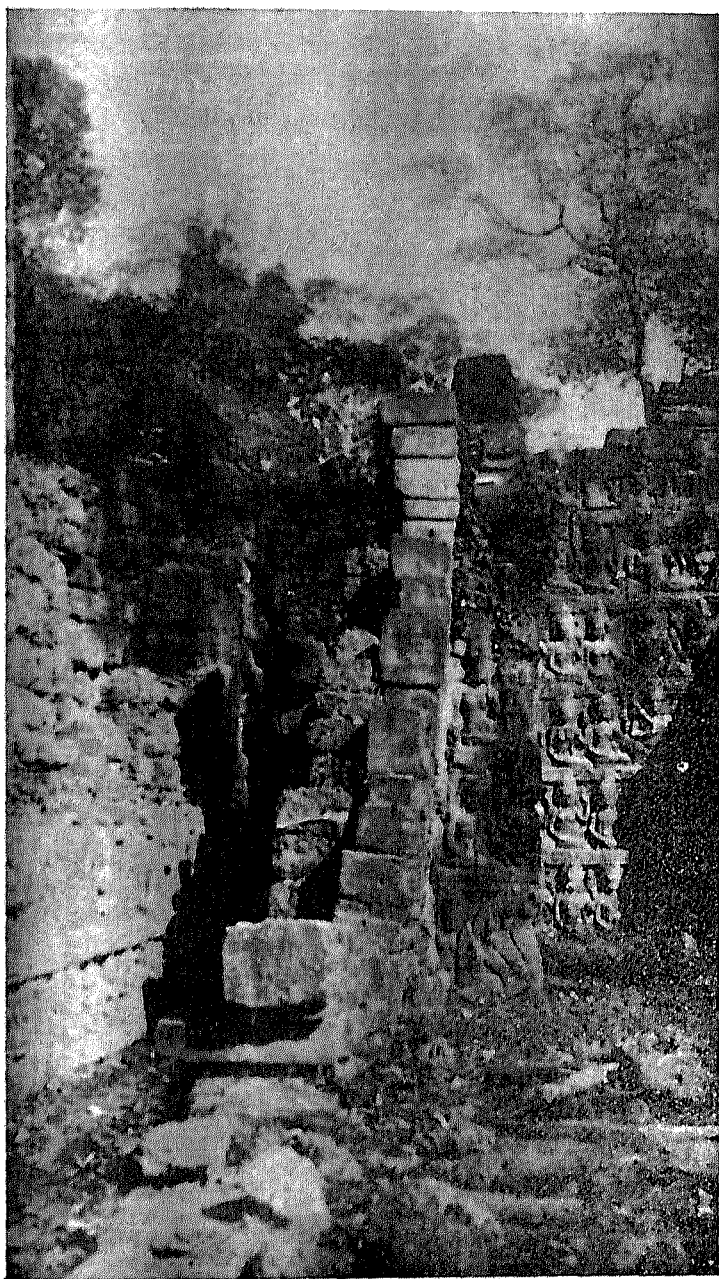




The Stone Bridge over the Moat at Angkor Thom.



The Terrace in front of the  
Royal Palace at Angkor Thom.



The Terrace of the Leper King.

Plate VIII



The Steps at the Sanctuary of Bapuon.