

Bas relief showing Hindu deities riding bull over doorway at Banteay Srei Temple

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This sandstone bas relief characterized by detailed floral scrolls shows a male and a (now headless) female Hindu deity riding a bull. A protective monster face (known as a kala) appears below the bull. The carving appears over a doorway on the south annex at Banteay Srei Temple.

Banteay Srei is a Hindu temple dedicated to the god Siva that was built during the tenth century A.D. It was constructed by Yajnyavaraha during the reign of two Khmer kings whom he served as councillor: Rajendravarman and Jayavarman V. The name Banteay Srei means "Citadel of Women."

Classical Khmer kings promoted the idea (known as "devaraja") that there was an intersection of the ruling king and a validating god, usually the Hindu god Siva. Their temples thus often portray the ruling king as the god, whose shrines are within a monument on earth that models the design of the cosmos and heavens.

Banteay Srei is an early classical Khmer temple that is noted for the small scale of its buildings and their exquisitely fine carvings. Because the sandstone used here was of a more durable variety than the stone used at the main Angkor sites, it allowed for a precise, wood-like style of bas-relief carving, which also has retained greater preservation over the centuries. The Banteay Srei site also contained many free-standing statues of deities and guardian spirits. Most of the originals are now removed, either by thieves or for museum preservation.

The style of the buildings, abstract motifs, and bas-relief carvings depicting Hindu epic scenes is described by Southeast Asian art historians as partly archaic, but also sometimes progressive in terms of where classical Khmer temple art would lead. Overall, Banteay Srei is considered a small but precious jewel among the Angkor kingdom temples.



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