Face tower with broken lintel over stone doorway at Ta Prohm

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This "face tower," characteristic of temples constructed by the Buddhist Khmer king Jayavarman VII, was constructed later than the main temple of Ta Prohm at the western outer gate. This particular tower is recognizable, and distinguished from the dozens of other similar towers with huge smiling faces at Angkor Thom's Bayon temple, by the slanted broken lintel stone over the doorway. Several visitors can be seen walking along the path under the doorway, which is considered safe for passage.

Ta Prohm was built as a double-moated, royal monastery during the reign of Jayavarman VII at the end of the twelfth century. As a Mahayana Buddhist, the king dedicated the monument to his mother envisioned as a "bodhisattva" or saint of compassion. The images of Buddha himself were removed from the temple by later rulers, probably including Jayavarman VII's successor, Jayavarman VIII, who was a Hindu. During this period in Southeast Asian history, Hindu gods and Buddha images were often worshipped side-by-side although some rulers showed clear preferences.

When French explorers first discovered the overgrown buildings at the ancient capital of Angkor in the late 1800s, much of the area was completely covered by forest. In particular, the roots of strangler figs, kapok, and banyan trees aggressively encompass the Angkor structures.

This small site was deliberately left unconserved by French archaeologists to create a sharp contrast with their painstaking reconstruction of the temples in the Angkor Wat complex. At present, the temple is only conserved to prevent further building collapses and to clear passage for visitors. Even these two goals require considerable labor and forest management.

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