

The Monumental Architecture of Po Ramé in Ninh Thuan Province, Vietnam

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1. Introduction to Ppo Romé - Monumental Architecture



Ppo Romé reigned the kingdom of Panduranga-Champa (1627-1651). He was a monarch with substantial merit and the Cham venerate him for that reason.

He is also especially well known for his developments in the field of irrigation, such as constructing the public works of the following:

- Ca Tieu dam (Banâk Katéw)
- Chavin dam (Banâk Caping)
- Maren dam (Banâk Marén)
- *...and so forth!*

1.1. Architecture of main temple (Kalan, figure 1a, 1b)



Figure 1a. The body of Ppo Romé temple
(Source: H. Parmentier, 1918).

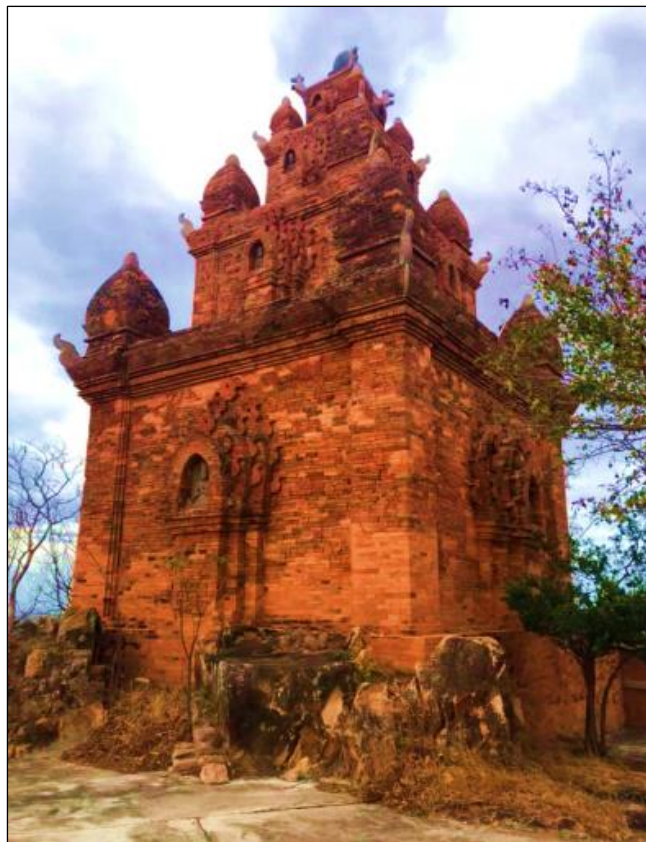


Figure 1b. The body of Ppo Romé temple
(Source: Quang Van Son, 2020).

The main temple is shaped as a square surface and the base of the temple is a block-brick foundation built upon a rocky hill. The temple door opens to the east, as with all such Cham and Champa constructions.

- Linga:
- Nandin:
- Homkar:

This is an important style, since it is not only the last sample of the classical architectural artistic movements of Champa, but it is also a bridge into the early-modern and modern forms of Cham art, of which precious few samples remain today. The sculptural formulations of 'Ppo Romé style' found at the site provide a similar bridge between Champa and Cham arts.

1.2. Sculpture

1.2.1. Statue of Po Ramé



Figure 2. Statue of Ppo Romé's King.

The 1.2 m tall-stone statue of Ppo Romé, is kept inside the temple as an altar site. It is predominantly a carved bas-relief embossed body, which occupies the lower and middle portion of a stele and resembles a mukhalinga-like construction.



Figure 3. Katé festival in Po Ramé temple.

(Source: Quang Van Son, 2019).

1.2.2. Statue of Queen Bia Su Can:

The statue of Queen Bia Su Can is on the left of the interior of the Ppo Romé temple (figure 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d). Bia Su Can was an Ede wife of Ppo Romé who jumped upon a funeral pyre in a sati-like fashion, as a sign of her devotion to Ppo Romé. This also ensured her place nearby him in the temple and, very likely, lines of inheritance. Figures 5a, 5b and 5c were stolen in 1994, 2007, and 2014 respectively – perhaps by Vietnamese looters – but quickly replaced.



Figure 5a. Statue of Queen Bia Su Can (Source: Van Mon, 1992).



Figure 5b. Statue of Queen Bia Su Can (Source: Quang Van Son, 2007).

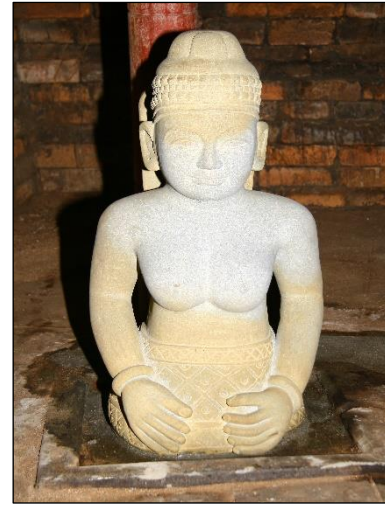


Figure 5c. Statue of Queen Bia Su Can (Source: Dong Van Nhuong, 2008).

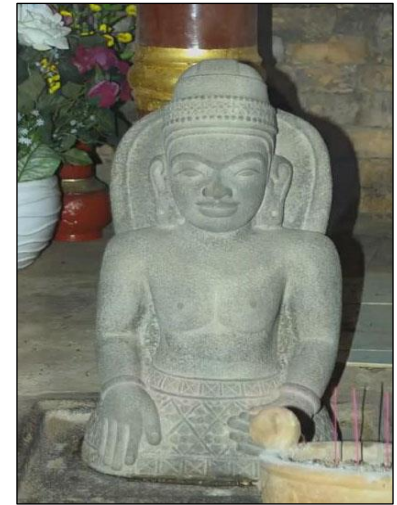


Figure 5d. Statue of Queen Bia Su Can (Source: Dong Thanh Danh, 2018).

1.2.3. Statue of Queen Bia Su Cih:

Behind the main temple, to the southwest, there is a smaller, much newer construction. Inside, we may find the statue of Bia Su Cih (figure 6a, 6b). This statue had been stolen in 1993 and 2011, although it has now been restored. The hands of Bia Su Cih are also crossed in front of her abdomen in a meditation pose, although she seems to hold a long, rolled lotus. A hat that bends gently forward rests on her head, while she wears a *sarong* that is decorated like Bia Su Can. Her ears are also pierced, while she too wears bracelets. In her case, however, we find the chest and stomach have *Akhar Thrah* Cham script written upon them.

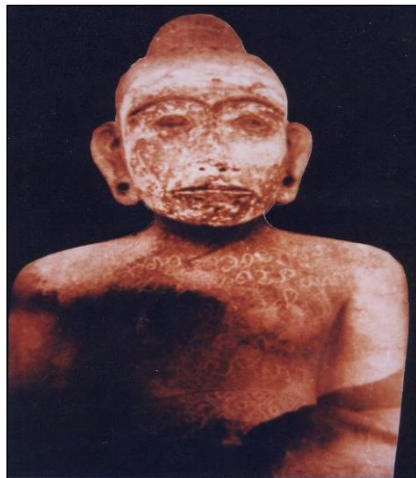


Figure 6a. Statue of Queen Bia Su Cih
(Source: Van Mon, 1992).



Figure 6b. Statue of Queen Bia Su Cih
(Source: Quang Van Son, 2007).



Figure 7. Cham dignitaries are celebrating
spiritual possession of the statues
(Source: Dong Van Nhung, 2008).

1.2.4. Nandin cow (god)

According to Hindu understandings, Nandin is the steed of Shiva. Hence, we find Nandin statues at many Champa sites. Some sources suggest that this was a manifestation of the god in a previous life and this is the reason that the Nandin became the mount of the god in this life. In the conception of the Cham Ahiér community – which practices a highly localized form of Hinduism – when individuals die, Nandin may carry their essence into the next realm. Hence, it is not a surprise that we find the statue of the Nandin in the heart of the temple and on the top of the roof in four manifestations, facing four separate directions, but also outside the temple as well.



Figure 8a. Nandin cow (female) in Po Ramé temple
(Source: Dong Thanh Danh, 2018).



Figure 8b. Nandin cow (male) in Po Ramé temple
(Source: Dong Thanh Danh, 2018).

1.2.5. *The Linga,*

The *linga* form is very popular in Champa and Cham sculpture. *Mukhalinga*, *mukhalinga*-like, *linga*, and *linga*-like sculptures can be found in archaeological samples from across the epochs. Linga – being linked to the worship of linga-yoni structures – is indeed popular across Southern Asia. Here, ‘their beliefs are associated with the myth of their mother and the worship of the *yin*; they consider the woman's vagina to be the source of all creation. Besides the mother god, there is also a male god, represented by a phallic-shaped stone slab...’

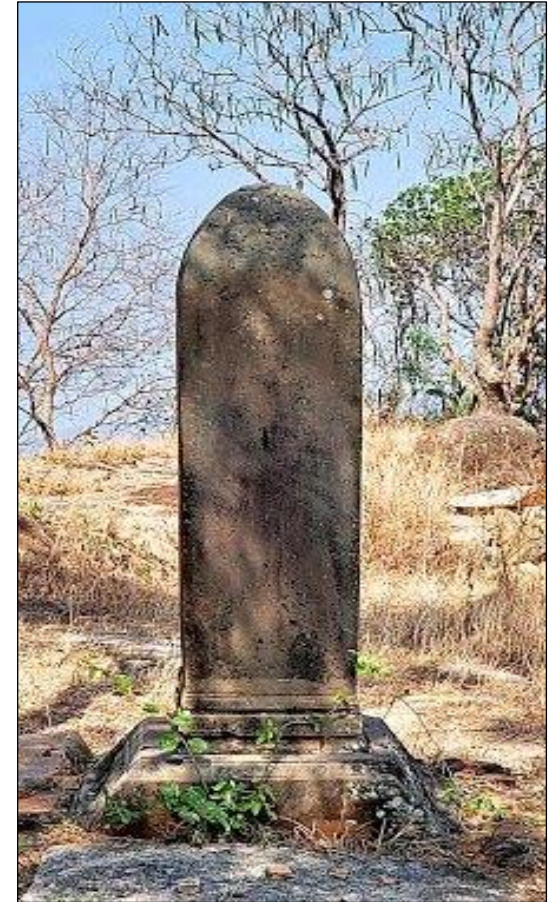


Figure 4. Linga at Po Ramé Temple.

1.2.6. *Kut*

Kut are a special form of epitaph. They are generally unmarked and associated with particular clan lineages. They are concentrated entirely in Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận provinces. They do not appear to be associated with older Champa temple sites, leading to the hypothesis that they might have originated from early-modern religious adoptions of Shiva-like worship, which would parallel the appearance of similar stones in Tamil Nadu during earlier historical epochs and was likely a local adoption of earlier Śaivite practices from Champa.



Figure 9. Kut outside the main temple
(Source: Quang Van Son, 2017).

2. Present conservation and its orientation

2.1. *Current conservation status*

We have found that the portions of the Ppo Romé temple that appear to have been restored have been completed with units chiseled directly into the original body of the temple, before new bricks and cement adhesive were attached. Our concern is that with the natural wear of the elements; these sections will decompose quickly, taking portions of the original structure with them.

Another nearby case for us is the restoration of the Hoa Lai temple.

In 1995, restoration was funded and granted to the Department of Museum Conservation. The project attempted to repair the footprint of the temple first, then built a guard house, and erected a fence surrounding the site. However, during the process, the office in charge of restoration, the Department of Construction in Ninh Thuận province, was wantonly negligent in their work.

They paid no attention to attempting to maintain as much of the original structure as possible and destroyed much of it during the restoration process. Many portions of the monument were broken and much of the ornamental carving was lost. Of course, we accept that restoration work is an extremely difficult process, particularly when we want to maintain the beauty of the original site for the sake of an active indigenous religious community.

2. Present conservation and its orientation

2.1. Current conservation status

In the case of the Ppo Romé temple, like Mỹ Sơn, a portion of the original structure was damaged by the bombs of the Second Indochina War. The main temple was severely damaged, as bricks in the arch of the eastern door collapsed, the anthropomorphic statues were destroyed, the foundation was cracked dangerously, and decorative detail work was damaged. The main entrance to the east was lost and the statues from the second level were lost.

Furthermore, erosion damaged the third and fourth levels of the temple, while most of the original stone pillars at the corners of the temple were lost.

They repaired damaged old bricks and replaced them with ‘restoration bricks’. They replaced some of the decorative motifs on the main body of the temple, such as flame motifs, anthropomorphic images, and created statues to replace the original terracotta figures that had been damaged or lost.

They also poured concrete to reinforce the foundation of the temple, placed adhesive in the cracks of the temple, and used steel bars around the temple body to reinforce the structure.

2. Present conservation and its orientation

2.2. *Orientation of preserving the heritage*

Based on our analysis, local conservation work on the Ppo Romé temple needs to be carried out in the spirit of international conventions, emphasizing preservation of as much of the original elements of the temple as possible and the value of the original religious relics. Additionally, such conservation work ought to be carried out in accordance with the values of the intangible heritage of contemporary Cham indigenous culture. These values are especially important to keep in mind if the structure is to be restored with contemporary scientific methods [14, 15, and 16].

Based on our research we have created the following recommendations as a conservation plan:

- a. Surveying the area carefully with scientific methods, measuring each portion of the temple, confirming existing damage, and assessing the status of relics.
- b. Exploring and excavating the surrounding archaeological site in the vicinity of the main tower as we suspect that several aspects of the area may be found in the earth below, especially within relatively closed proximity to the footprint of the original temple structure.

2. Present conservation and its orientation

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- c. Developing the approach to tourism in the area working with community leadership and provincial governance, as well as our previously proposed more centralized study of Champa culture. In parallel, we need to train local specialized officials from the Cham community to propagate knowledge to research centers in country and internationally. This will greatly aid conservation work.
- d. Carefully selecting a method to remove plants, weeds, and moss growing around the existing structure in a sustainable fashion that avoids the use of polluting chemicals, as much as possible, while also accepting that local community members desire to have methods to clean the area and prevent decay from plant growth.
- e. Developing a master plan with general layout of the overall relics based upon a scholarly understanding of Champa and Cham aesthetic values. Additionally, solidifying foundations according to the results of new restoration methods developed during the survey phase and restoring any remains that have been discovered during excavation.
- f. Raising funds for the restoration from individuals, collectives, communities, local governance, national governance, and international sources, for the sake of the restoration of the monumental architecture.
- g. Taking on another phase of research, before restoration begins, to carefully and critically analyze construction techniques, temple architecture, sculpture, artistic style and so forth; to restore the temple in better form rather than the fashioned Hoa Lai temple case and the previous restoration completed at Ppo Romé temple.

3. Conclusions

Firstly, we must pay attention to the fact that local Cham communities only open the temple during specific times of the year and specific hours. This practice must be followed, rather than the local Vietnamese practice of opening the doors whenever it seems there may be tourists.

Secondly, while we are aware that there must be a synergy between the developments of tourist sites and local practices, we strongly encourage practices to keep in mind values of sustainable development as much as possible. This includes minimizing the impact of foot traffic and also preventing the buildup of pollution, specifically litter from visitors.

Next, the process needs to work collaboratively with the development of local education programs, such that local communities, including Vietnamese and Raglai communities, in Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận province, become aware of the importance of these local, national, and international heritage sites from a young age. This will help promote local respect for these precious sites, along with the respect for Cham cultural norms dictating behavior for visitors of these sites.

Fourth, we strongly emphasize that a key practice that should be abandoned is the burning of joss stick incense at the temple, especially by Vietnamese and international visitors. Burning this type of incense produces a large amount of smoke, impacting the interior of the temple, damaging wood and brick structures. Additionally, it is not in accordance with Cham Ahiér religious prescriptions. The Ppo Romé temple is a valuable architectural work. There is a distinct need to research this site with contemporary archaeological and historical methods, to better develop reasonable plans for conservation. *Finally*, this research gives us further trajectories to better understand the complexities of Cham and Champa culture, history and art to support coming conservation plans accordingly.

Thank You!