

Intangible Heritage of Prey Lang

Kuy and Khmer sacred sites

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Knar Temple



Krala Peas Village, Tbeang Meanchey District, Prey Vihear Province. Knar temple was an important site of the early Khmer empire. It was built over several centuries by different kings starting with King Jayavaraman III in the tenth century, with major reconstructions by Suryavaraman I and Jayavaraman V. The exact relationship between Khmer Monarchs who built the temple and the Kuy population who lived in this forested area is becoming more clear through new archeological work. As the Khmer empire declined the temple, like many others in the region, remains alive and Kuy populations for centuries consider it a site where powerful chthonic energies can be channeled through ancient relationships with "neak ta". The kings claimed this place of "neak ta" power, and local elders note that the temple is also imbued with Buddhist power ("baramey" in Khmer). Kuy villagers report interdimensional snake entities that sometimes make themselves visible in the area, and are careful not to disturb the site. It's reputation for holding chthonic and Buddhist power also keeps the loggers away. People regularly

come to pray ("bon sron") at the temple and also give offerings ("sien") to cultivate social relations with the power at this place.

2

Lok Ta Stier Shrine



O Kak village, Tbaeng Meanchey District, Prey Vihear Province. Lok Ta Stier is a locally important entity of the land ("neak ta") that people in surrounding villages have been socializing with and honoring for several decades. The energy from this entity has been known for several generations but disappeared from its former site. It reappeared when two young women were digging wells in the area during the Khmer Rouge era. Ta Stier sometimes takes the form of snakes or a rare white eel and has been looking over surrounding villages since the end of the Khmer Rouge era when people began giving offerings.

3

Lok Ta of the Eight Directions



The eight-headed entity that resides in this place is a long-term social agent among the Kuy people of Brome and Mlu Prey. This neak ta is understood as having eight heads that watch the eight directions from its position at the confluence of a series of roads that have long been used to Kuy to travel between villages, hunting sites and local streams. Travelers through the forest stop to communicate their activities and travels, giving an offering in the hope that they will be looked after as they traverse the forest hunting and collecting resin. A yearly festival is still held at this site and the entity often visits village celebrations through a local medium. The forest surrounding the site is now badly degraded and difficult to access due to it being captured for private property. Villagers attribute sickness and misfortune to this neak ta, who is disturbed by the forest clearing.

4

Lok Ta Jas Srok



Lok Ta Jas Srok has resided in this place and for generations the people of Bro Me have cultivated social relationships here in the hope of having their health and prosperity protected by this powerful entity of the land. Like all neak ta, Jas Srok is considered to be "the master of land and water" and has been helping to cultivate prosperity among those who celebrate and make offerings at the place. Those who clear land or harvest crops without cultivating this social relationship, risk sickness or misfortune.

5

Lok Ta Tma Roklang



In the Kuy village of Anlong Phe, Lok Ta Tma Roklang is a powerful entity of stone located deep inside the Prey Lang Forest. At this site there can be found rocks of every colour ("tma roklang" in Kuy) and Kuy hunters had long known of the power of this place. Several generations ago, when Kuy first came to settle Anlong Pe village, they performed a ceremony to bring rocks from this place into the village. They built a shrine where they could celebrate with lok ta Tmor Roklang in the village and ask for protection and prosperity.

6

Loak Ta Keav Spirit



Kes village, Kao Sompeay commune, Siem Bouk district, Stung Treing province. Lok Ta Keav is an old and powerful entity with whom people in Kes and Dong villages, on the edge of Prey Lang, have had social relationships for generations. This particular lok ta is extremely powerful and protected people from danger during the civil war period (Khmer Rouge mortars never landed on the village), but also causes sickness and death when people in the village do not follow the rules. Lok ta keav's tiger travels interdimensionally, and is often seen under the hut outside of Kes village. When lok ta is displeased, the tiger might slip into the village to eat cattle or pigs. Lok ta's displeasure comes from transgressing rules related to proper resource use and harmonious social relationships-- punishing those who grab land without asking and also those who commit adultery or cheat and lie.

7

Trapeang Thom Spirit



Kes village. This entity resides in a swamp surrounded by Tnong trees on the eastern edge of the village. This neak ta is deeply entangled with the power of

the swamp and they share a name, trapeang thom. Trapeang means pond or swamp in Kuy and Khmer. The large old Tnong trees there are protected by this powerful force, and people trying to cut them report that their chainsaws or axes just bounce off the hard bark. There have also been cases of people dying or being injured when trying to fell trees in the area. Several years ago three people in a logging party died when their tractor overturned nearby, and other loggers have been crushed to death by trees falling in the area.