

ROMNGOAP DAI

Ways of living and farming on
sacred ground on Phnom
Kulen

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Research Aims

For several years now I have documented the state of resilience of traditional beliefs on Kulen mountain.

This research explored how Cambodian animism (*apai jomnua*) អបិយជំនឿ is interpreted and negotiated in terms of the sacred topography of Kulen.

Specifically, how do residents navigate an often invisible sacred landscape upon which human land clearance can accidentally occur?

And, what are the associated spiritual risks of trespass, and how is trespass resolved?

Research Methods

Semi-structured
interviews with 58
villagers over 6
weeks

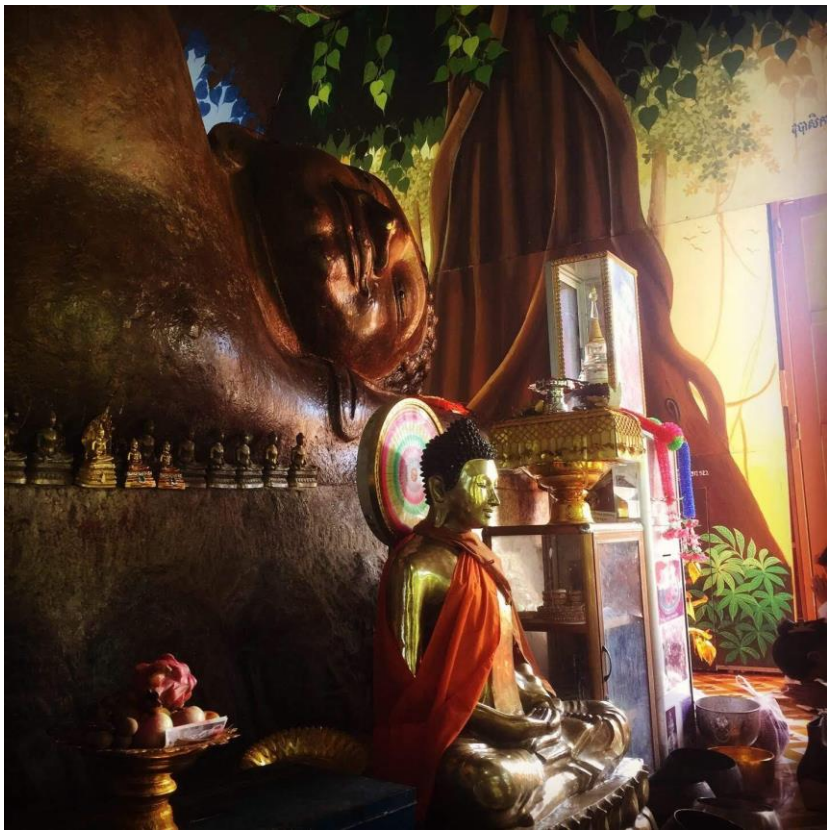
Participant
observation in 2
spirit rituals



PART I

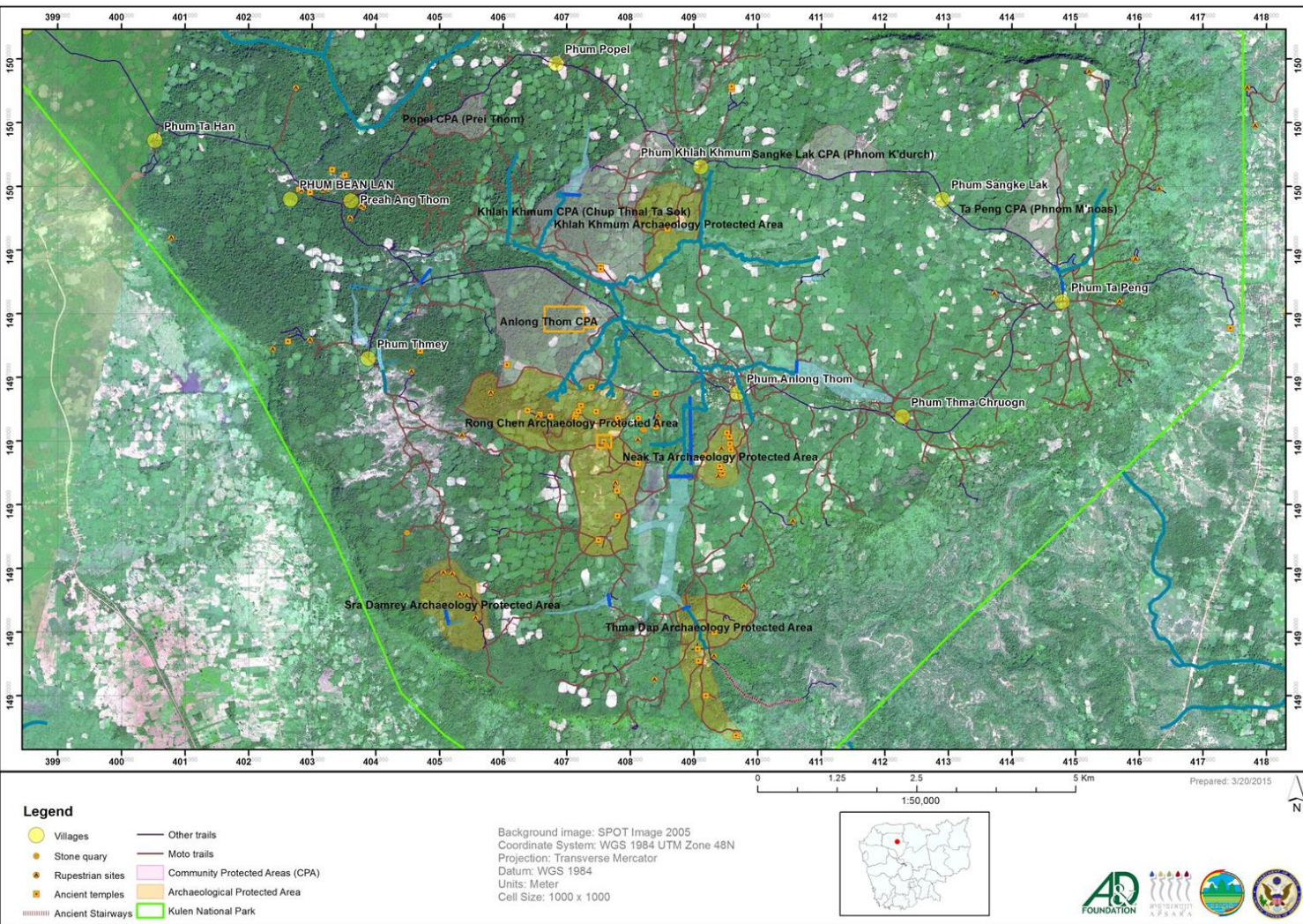
Spirits, their places,
and the rules of
engagement





Phnom Kulen is a highly sacred site and the site of the ancient city Mahendraparvata
ភ្នំគូលែន គឺជាតំបន់ដែលជាទីសក្ការបូជាដ៏សក្តិសិទ្ធិមួយ និងជាទីក្រុងបុរាណ មហិន្ទ្រព័ត

Map of the south end of the Kulen hills



Spirits, known and unknown

Village guardians and their shrines

Spirits hosted by mediums

Spirits encountered in the wild

អ្នកតាថែរក្សាភូមិ និងព្រះភូមិរបស់គាត់

អ្នកតាបានចូលសណ្ឋិត អ្នកចូលរូប

អ្នកតាដែលមាននៅតាមព្រៃ

@ L Arensen



Sample from Index of Spirit Names

Over a five year period, three student research projects on local beliefs were carried out under my supervision at the School for Field Studies. This data was combined with this summer's findings to create a working index of spirits known and named by mountain residents.

Khmer Name	Transliteration	Location of Spirit	Type of Spirit
អ្នកតារក្សា	Neak Ta Reaksa	Anlong Thom	Protector spirit of the wat
តាបក្សវត្ត	Neak Ta Ta Baksa Wat	Anlong Thom	Protector spirit of the wat
តា សូត្រ	Neak Ta Sot	Anlong Thom	Temple spirit
អ្នកតាប្រាសាទក្រហម	Neak Ta Prasat Krahom	Anlong Thom & Kla Kmom	Angkorian Temple Spirit
អ្នកតាប្រសាទតាសិត	Neak Ta Prasat Ta Sut	Prasat Ta Sut	Angkorian Temple Spirit
ម្រេញគង្វាល	M'renh Kongvil	Anlong Thom	Forest spirit category
អ្នកតាកំពង់ទឹក	Neak Ta Kampong Tuk	Anlong Thom	Spirit of a spring
តា គង់	Neak Ta Kung	Anlong Thom	Spirit of large pond
អ្នកតាព្រៃព្យក្រយក្សមា	Neak Ta Prei Preak Yeak Meah	Anlong Thom	Mountain spirit demon
ព្រះកព្វ	Preah Kapu	Anlong Thom	Spirit of a spring
តា លាស់	Neak Ta Ta Loah	Anlong Thom	Village guardian spirit (<i>mjas srok</i>) of Anlong Thom
Please write	Neak Ta Kung & Yei Mao	Anlong Thom	Village guardian spirit (<i>mjas srok</i>) of Anlong Thom



Two *neak ta* shrines in Sangke Lak,
October 2020



Bisecting or 'hitting against' sacred objects and sites disturbs the spirits.

Diagram drawn by participant

ការធ្វើកាត់ រឺ “ការធ្វើបុកចំ” លើវត្ថុ និងតំបន់ដែល
ស័ក្តិសិទ្ធិ ធ្វើអោយវាខាន់ដល់អ្នកតា។

នេះគឺជារូបដែលបានគូរដោយអ្នកចូលរួម។



និមិត្តរូបនៃសុបិន្ត: ទារក ត្រី និង ភ្លើង

Dream omens: babies, fish and fire



Considering termite mounds,
stumps, streams, cliffs, fallen trees
and *sampeau loan*

ការយល់ឃើញពី ដំបូកកណ្តៀ គល់ឈើ អូរ ជ្រោះ ដើម
ឈើ ដែលបាក់ និងសំពៅលូន

Considering ancient inscriptions,
ancient roads, spirit roads and
canals, and tombs.

ការយល់ឃើញពី សិលាចារឹក ផ្លូវបុរាណ ផ្លូវ
អ្នកតា ប្រឡាយ និងផ្លូវ

@ Clemens Porikys



Diagnosing a spirit-caused illness

Physical signs often involve *jok buas*, ចុកក្អែក៖ a twisting gripping sensation in the belly

Illnesses may not respond to biomedical treatment

ជំងឺដែលមិនអាចព្យាបាលតាមបែបជីវវេជ្ជសាស្ត្របាន

Various village ritual specialists may be consulted to ascertain the cause of a spirit illness, including a diviner, *kru bol* គ្រូបូល, a medium, *kru jol rup*, គ្រូចូលរូប and a Pali chanter, *krus sdos* គ្រូស៊ីន្ត្រី៖

The *niak* នាគ under the earth:
interpreting disaster

នាគនៅក្រោមដី: បកស្រាយថា មាន
គ្រោះមហន្តរាយ



Discussion 1:

We are happy to take questions from the audience but we also want to ask our Cambodian attendees or others with similar beliefs this question:

Are lowland beliefs in your home village about sacred objects or sites--like the termite mounds, the ancient roads, and the streams--similar or different to these beliefs?

PART II

Solving sacred trespass:
mountain solutions



Hau brahling
ceremony for a
woman who had a
soul taken by an
angry forest spirit,
October 2020

ពិធីសែនព្រេនដើម្បីហៅ
ព្រលឹងស្រ្តីម្នាក់ ដែលត្រូវ
បានយកទៅដោយសារ
តែអ្នកតាព្រៃខឹង -- តុលា
២០២០





Complexities and community

Around twenty villagers participated in the ceremony.

Multiple ritual specialists participated in diagnosing and intervening in the woman's plight.

Here, a *kru sdos* [blowing guru] chants in Pali to protect the village medium before she invites the wild spirit into her body. The village diviner waits nearby with ritual instruments to call the soul home.

Singing the soul home

ណាឡើយ មកទទួលអើយ យករូបយករាង
ទាំងអស់ហើយ ឱមនុស្សលោកអើយ ត្រឡប់វិញ។
អ្នកមកផ្លូវណា ដើរអោយល្អ មនុស្សលោកកុះករ
ទទួលក្រៃ មានប្រខាន់ប្រាំ ចាំអោយច្បាស់អើយ
ម្ចាស់ថ្លៃអើយ ត្រឡប់ អោយអស់ អើយឡើយ។
អ្នកចាំទទួលរូបទាំងអស់ តាជូនដោយស្មោះ អស់ទៅហើយ
ថ្ងៃ ១៥រោច ចម្លងឡើយ ឱមនុស្សលោកអើយ ចាំទទួល។
ទទួលអោយល្អ អោយអស់ចិត្តអើយ



@ L Arensen

Seeking safety: raising a spirit house by a fatal accident site

ស្វែងរកសុខសុវត្ថភាព៖

ការឡើងព្រះភូមិនៅ ទីតាំងដែលមានគ្រោះ ថ្នាក់ដ៏

ធ្ងន់ធ្ងរបាន កើតឡើង



A new spirit shrine is inspected by a mountain medium and local authorities, January 2020

A mountain medium
channeling a forest spirit
dances to the new spirit
house, January 2020

អ្នកចូលរូបម្នាក់កំពុងបញ្ចូលរូប អ្នកតាព្រៃ
វាថ្វាយក្នុងពិធី ឡើងព្រះភូមិថ្មី -- មករា
២០២០





ព្រះភូមិនៅតាមជួរ សំរាប់អោយ
អ្នកតា ដែលបានដាក់ឈ្មោះថ្មីអោ
យថា លោកតាសុខ ត្រូវបានអ្នកភូមិ
ថែរក្សាជាប្រចាំ។

The roadside shrine for the newly named Grandfather Safety is tended regularly by local villagers.

@ L Arensen

Discussion

How does the land-based spirituality of many Kulen residents impact upon land use, particularly development and forest clearance for agriculture?

តើ ដែនដីដែលមានវិញ្ញាណរបស់ ប្រជាជនគូលែនជា ច្រើននេះ ជះឥទ្ធិពលយ៉ាងដូចម្តេចខ្លះលើការប្រើប្រាស់ ដីធ្លី ជាពិសេសលើការ អភិវឌ្ឍ និងការកាប់ព្រៃឈើ សម្រាប់ធ្វើ កសិកម្ម?



A Few Thoughts

On Kulen, a sacred landscape cannot be simplistically equated with a protected one.

Many members of the spirit world were considered mobile and open to human invocation.



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Thank you for your attention!

អរគុណសម្រាប់ការចូលរួម!

Questions for us?

តើអ្នកមានសំណួរទេ?

Questions for audience:

-Does your birth village have *kru bol* and *kru sdos*?

-Do they have similar roles in interpreting the spirits' affect on people in the current era?

