

Transition to the Pre-Angkorian period (300–500 CE): Thala Borivat and a regional perspective

Piphal Heng

Archaeological data over the past two decades have contributed to our understanding of the transition into the historic period in Southeast Asia and rebutted outdated models of externally stimulated complex polity formation. This article investigates the transition into the Pre-Angkorian period 300–500 CE based on a model constructed using archaeological data from Thala Borivat, Cambodia. Data from Thala Borivat suggest a pattern of continuity where smaller proto-historic settlements may have become incorporated c.300–500 CE into larger ones which became major Pre-Angkorian centres. This phenomenon coincided with evidence of increasing inter- and intra-regional interaction following the proto-historic period. This article argues that the model can be used to reinterpret the pattern observed in major Pre-Angkorian centres in the Mekong Delta and northeast Thailand. This pattern is complemented by the spatial correlation between the chronometrically-anchored ceramic traditions in proto-historic and early historic period Cambodia that suggests the continuity of local communities. Spatial correlation between prehistoric sites and inscriptions recording Pre-Angkorian elites, particularly the poñ, mratañ, and kings provides similar patterns of continuity between the elites of the late proto-historic to the Pre-Angkorian periods.

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Scholars working in the Lower Mekong Basin continue to debate the organisational mechanics behind the transition from the prehistoric to the historic period in Southeast Asia. On the one hand, Chinese accounts, local oral traditions, a thick Indic imprint in the region's developing art and architectural traditions, artefacts, and strings of early Southeast Asian rulers named in local inscriptions suggest that mainland Southeast Asia's earliest states arose primarily through external influences associated with 'Indianisation'.¹ On the other hand, there is a growing body of archaeological information that outlines the indigenous development of social stratification in mainland Southeast Asia. This latter data source offers the potential to evaluate incomplete and contradictory historical evidence on which earlier historical models were based.² Archaeology is a valuable strategy to fill this information gap, and more work has been done in the last 15 years than at any time since Louis Malleret's excavation at Oc Eo during the early 1940s.³

Recent archaeological attention to proto-historic societies in peninsular and northeast Thailand, Cambodia, and southern Vietnam illustrates that these 'late prehistoric' societies were more involved with the international trade network than previously assumed.⁴ While communities in proximity to the South China Sea have produced the greatest evidence of inter-regional interaction, archaeological evidence now exists for a series of complex proto-historic mainland Southeast Asian societies that preceded the sixth and eighth century CE 'Indianised' polities. Scholars still puzzle over the degree to which this bridging period was characterised by gradual indigenous change or by rapid externally-generated transformations. Paul Wheatley argues that local aspiring elites selectively adopted Indic ideas, which slowly became institutionalised in early Southeast Asian societies.⁵ Monica Smith suggests two phases of contact between India and Southeast Asia corresponding with the pre- and post-fourth century CE, and that 'Indianisation' occurred during the second phase.⁶ This study examines the nature of social and power relations among proto-historic societies, within the crucial timeframe of 300–500 CE, prior to the adoption of Indian religious ideologies in the Lower Mekong Basin and the Mun River Valley — now part of northeast Thailand, Cambodia, and southern Vietnam — circa fifth to sixth centuries CE. The data explored here comprise mostly of known ceramic traditions from Thala Borivat and

1 George Coedès, *The Indianized states of Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1968); Michael Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia: The 7th–8th centuries* (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for Unesco; Toyo Bunko, 1998).

2 Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*; Oliver W. Wolters, 'Again a cultural matrix', in *History, culture, and region in Southeast Asian perspectives*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell SEAP, 1999), pp. 107–25.

3 Louis Malleret, *L'archéologie du delta du Mékong*, vols. 1–3; *L'exploration archéologique et les fouilles d'Oc-Éo* (Paris: EFEO, 1959–62).

4 Charles F.W. Higham, *Early cultures of mainland Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: River Books, 2002), pp. 224–31; Béatrice Bellina and Ian Glover, 'The archaeology of early contact with India and the Mediterranean world, from the fourth century BC to the fourth century AD', in *Southeast Asia: From prehistory to history*, ed. Ian Glover and Peter Bellwood (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), pp. 68–88.

5 Paul Wheatley, 'Urban genesis in mainland Southeast Asia', in *Early South East Asia: Essays in archaeology, history, and historical geography*, ed. Ralph B. Smith and William Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 295.

6 Monica L. Smith, "'Indianization' from the Indian point of view: Trade and cultural contacts with Southeast Asia in the early first millennium C.E.', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42, 1 (1999): 1–26.

Angkor Borei and the corpus of Pre-Angkorian inscriptions. However, the Pre-Angkorian temples and the Thala Borivat lintel style is not part of the focus of this article.

Recently collected archaeological data from Thala Borivat are compared with materials from previously documented known proto-historic sites in Cambodia, northeast Thailand, and southern Vietnam to examine the transition from prehistory into the Pre-Angkorian period (fig. 1). The proto-historic communities in Stung Treng appeared along the Mekong River by at least the second century BCE, and display evidence of interaction with the Mekong Delta populations as part of a regional trade network that moved ceramics and beads over four centuries. Soon thereafter, Thala Borivat settlements concentrated around a few nuclear zones, which are also the loci for the area's earliest brick religious architecture and inscriptions that name specific founders/ancestors as kings. That some of these brick temples were built atop previous proto-historic burials suggests continuity in local populations, and a transformation from ancestor worship into the later Indic-related religious institutions.

This article offers new perspectives on the Pre-Angkorian period by reporting findings on the proto-historic period from the Thala Borivat Archaeological Project, and argues that these data support a model of indigenous development of the proto-historic complex polities preceding the subsequent 'Indianised' polities in the region. Archaeological patterning at Thala Borivat and other proto-historic sites in Cambodia and northeast Thailand also suggests the possibility that proto-historic

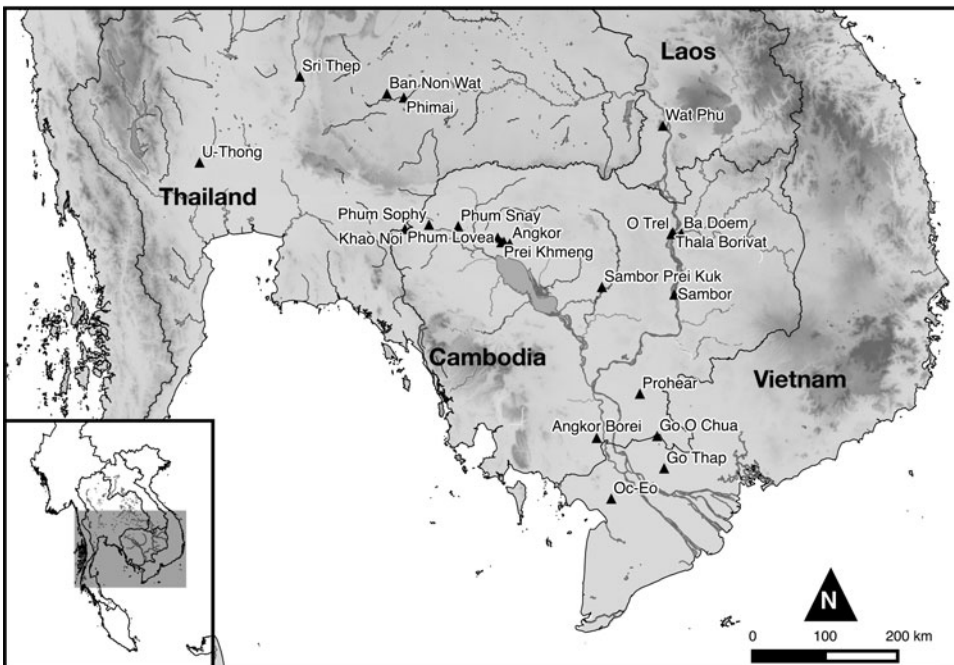


Figure 1. Major archaeological sites mentioned in this article

elites throughout the Lower Mekong region bore some relationship to the *poñ-mratāñ* elites named in seventh and eighth century CE inscriptions. By the sixth through eighth centuries CE, the few proto-historic centres that remained occupied in central, southern and northern Cambodia became pre-eminent regional centres of the Pre-Angkorian period. The settlement nucleation, shared ceramic traditions, and regional interactions of the late proto-historic period as well as their continuity into the Pre-Angkorian period offers a new model for reinterpreting the archaeological evidence acquired from the Lower Mekong region and the Mun Valley. This model also offers new insights into the dual processes of elite consolidation of power and the adoption of Indic ideologies over the multi-century period whose end-point was marked by the establishment of the Angkorian state from the ninth to fifteenth centuries CE.

Historical perspectives on Pre-Angkorian polities

This discussion uses a preliminary chronology for the Pre-Angkorian period that draws from archaeological, epigraphic, and art historical data. Although art historical and historical data are simultaneously applied to understand the Pre-Angkorian period, archaeological data such as settlement systems, ceramics, and other materials are rarely included. This research bridges these disparate and divergent data sources to provide a holistic perspective on the transition into the Pre-Angkorian period. The chronometrically-anchored Angkor Borei (AB) ceramic chronology links technologically discrete ceramic traditions to three basic phases with a date range beginning c.500 BCE (AB Phase I: 500–200 BCE) and ending c.600 CE (AB Phase III).⁷ Angkor Borei is one of the earliest Pre-Angkorian centres located in the Mekong Delta, a substantial distance from Thala Borivat (c.380 km by river), yet it provides the best sequence from the proto-historic to Pre-Angkorian periods. Well-dated ceramic traditions, including ‘Phimai Black’ and buffware uncovered from other excavated sites in Cambodia and Thailand, are also used in this analysis. Epigraphers have attributed a substantial number of inscriptions, in both Sanskrit and old Khmer, to the Pre-Angkorian period.⁸ Date ranges for dynastic reigns and the inscription locations are based on previous work by Michael Vickery and other scholars as well as the Interactive Map of Khmer Archaeological Sites (CISARK) database.⁹ A large corpus

7 Bong Sovath, ‘The ceramic chronology of Angkor Borei, Takeo province, southern Cambodia’ (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Hawai‘i, Manoa, 2003); Shawn S. Fehrenbach, ‘Traditions of ceramic technology: An analysis of the assemblages from Angkor Borei, Cambodia’ (M.A. thesis, University of Hawai‘i, Manoa, 2009); Miriam T. Stark, ‘Pre-Angkor earthenware ceramics from Cambodia’s Mekong Delta’, *Udaya: Journal of Khmer Studies* 1 (2000): 69–90; Miriam T. Stark, ‘Angkor Borei and the archaeology of Cambodia’s Mekong Delta’, in *Art and archaeology of Funan: Pre-Khmer kingdom of the Lower Mekong Valley*, ed. James C.M. Khoo (Bangkok: Orchid, 2003), pp. 87–106.

8 George Coedès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vols. 1–8 (Hanoi and Paris: EFEO, 1937–66); George Coedès, ‘Etudes cambodgiennes: 25, Deux inscriptions sanskrites du Fou-Nan; 26, La date de Kôh Ker; 27, La date du Bâphûon’, *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient (BEFEO)* 31, 1–2 (1931): 1–23; Claude Jacques, ‘Le pays Khmer avant Angkor’, *Journal des savants* 1, 1 (1986): 59–95.

9 Coedès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*; Jacques, ‘Le pays Khmer avant Angkor’; Judith M. Jacob, ‘Pre-Angkor Cambodia: Evidence from the inscriptions in Khmer concerning the common people and their environment’, in Smith and Watson, *Early South East Asia*, pp. 299–318; Judith M. Jacob, ‘Sanskrit loanwords in Pre-Angkor Khmer’, *Mon-Khmer Studies* 6, 6 (1977): 151–68; Philip N. Jenner, *A chronological inventory of the inscriptions of Cambodia*, Southeast Asian Paper 19, rev., 2nd ed.

of art historical research on the Pre-Angkorian period has established a series of relatively well-dated lintel styles.¹⁰ The four successive lintel styles associated with this period, i.e., Thala Borivat, Sambor Prei Kuk, Prei Khmeng, and Kampong Preah, are suggested to begin around the seventh century CE and end in the eighth century CE. Only the first one is mentioned here because it dates to the beginning of the Pre-Angkorian period and is associated with early kings, including Bhavavarman I or Mahendravarman or Isānavarman.

Inscriptions and early rulers

The early historic period Mekong Basin is recorded in the Chinese accounts as containing multiple polities.¹¹ Funan (in the Delta) and Zhenla (north, along the Mekong) were the two largest polities, and Zhenla later succeeded in becoming the dominant Pre-Angkorian state by the seventh century CE. Based on Khmer language inscriptions, Vickery argues that the title *poñ* represents the matrilineal local elites prior to the political centralisation that we associate with the Pre-Angkorian period, and later disappears completely from Angkorian-period inscriptions. *Poñ* were hereditary owners of rice fields, ponds, and roads within their communities. It is possible that early Pre-Angkorian kings inherited the same title as indicated by *poñ* Śivadatta, a son of Isānavarman and brother of Bhavavarman II.¹² Vickery argues that the Khmer term *poñ* refers to the Funan rulers (*fan*). Another common title was the *mratañ*, which was likely awarded by the king. The *mratañ* were associated with political positions in addition to ownership of topographical features such as ponds and rice fields. *Mratañ* also occurred with the *poñ* as donors to temples and may have been a title awarded to Brahmans in the Pre-Angkorian period.¹³ In one instance,

(Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1982); Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*; Seam Long, *Dictionnaire du Khmer Ancien (d'Après les Inscriptions du Cambodge du VI^e-VII^e siècles)* (Phnom Penh: Toyota Foundation, 2000); Saveros Pou, *Dictionnaire Vieux Khmer-Français-Anglais = An Old Khmer-French-English Dictionary = Vacanānukram Khmaer Cās-Pārāmñ-Qañles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004); Roger Billard, 'Dates des Inscriptions du Pays Khmer', *BEFEO* 93 (2006): 395-428; Saveros Pou, *Nouvelles inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 4 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011); Sotheara Vong, *Pre-Angkor inscriptions of Cambodia 1*, 2nd ed. (Phnom Penh: Royal University of Phnom Penh, 2010); Sotheara Vong, 'Recently discovered new inscriptions from Pre-Angkorian Cambodia in Stung Treng province', *Saṅgama Sāstra Manussa Sāstra* 46, 76 (2011): 26-40.

10 Mireille Bénisti, 'Notes d'iconographie khmère: III. Au sujet d'un linteau de Sambor Prei Kuk', *BEFEO* 53, 1 (1966): 71-5; Mireille Bénisti, 'I. Les linteaux dits de Thala Borivat', *Arts Asiatiques* 118 (1968): 85-101; Mireille Bénisti, 'Aux confins des styles de Prei Khmeng et de Kampong Preah', *Arts Asiatiques* 23, 1 (1971): 93-116; Jean Boisselier, *Le Cambodge: Manuel d'archéologie d'Extrême-Orient, Asie du Sud-Est, tome 1* (Paris: Picard, 1966); Robert Dalet, 'Recherches archéologiques au Cambodge: Note sur les styles de Sambor Prei Kuk, de Prei Kmen, de Kompong Prah et du Kulên', *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises* 19 (1944): 7-83; Pierre Dupont, 'Les linteaux khmers du VII^e siècle', *Artibus Asiae* 15, 1-2 (1952): 31-83.

11 Lawrence P. Briggs, 'The ancient Khmer Empire', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 41, 1 (1951): 1-295; Coedès, *The Indianized states of Southeast Asia*; Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*; Michael Vickery, 'Funan reviewed: Deconstructing the ancients', *BEFEO* 90-91 (2003-4): 101-43; Michael Vickery, 'What and where was Chenla?', in *Recherches nouvelles sur le Cambodge*, ed. François Bizot (Paris: EFEO, 1994), pp. 197-212; Oliver W. Wolters, 'North-western Cambodia in the seventh century', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 37, 2 (1974): 355-84.

12 Jacques, 'Le pays Khmer avant Angkor'; Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*, pp. 190-205.

13 Pou, *Nouvelles inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 4, p. 16.

K.114/698 CE, a *poñ* was the son of a *mratāñ*, which suggests that the *mratāñ* title was awarded to the *poñ* family. Our earliest documented knowledge of the *mratāñ* title dates to 611 CE, with the earliest dated Khmer language inscription (K.600, Angkor Borei). The importance of the *mratāñ* title continues into the Angkorian period, but references to *poñ* (and presumably to individuals bearing the *poñ* title) are no longer found in Angkorian-period inscriptions. The matrilineal practice, however, continued to be an important aspect of the Angkorian temple elites, of which the most famous case is the Sdok Kak Thom family of K.235/1052 CE.

Chinese accounts suggest that by 240 CE a series of local rulers/kings in the Delta with the family names ‘Hun’ and ‘Fan’ expanded their domain across much of peninsular and central Thailand, as well as southern Vietnam.¹⁴ Contemporary and later inscriptions inform that the temple institutions related to Hindu–Buddhist religions were already established by the time of Jayavarman of Funan (c.470–514 CE) and his son, Rudravarman (c.514–5xx CE). By c.550–600 CE, there was a series of inscriptions left by Bhavavarman I (c.550–600 CE) and Citrasena-Mahendravarman (c.600–616 CE). Vickery calls these rulers the ‘Dangrek chieftains’. K.53 indicates that Gambhīreśvara was the main god of Bhavavarman I’s reign.¹⁵ Thus, the locations of all the inscriptions mentioning Bhavavarman I, Mahendravarman, and god Gambhīreśvara (excluding K.749/674 CE from Ak Yum) suggests that their sphere of influence would have stretched as far south as K.53, near Ba Phnom, north to Khon Kaen, west to Sri Thep and Banteay Mean Chey, and as far east as the Mekong River.¹⁶ Figure 2 highlights the locations of the inscriptions bearing Pre-Angkorian kings’ names, from Jayavarman of Funan to Jayadevī (680–725? CE).

The epigraphic data (K.151) suggest a region-wide territorial system was in place by at least 598 CE in which rulers of different territories, sometimes referred to as *pura* in inscriptions, claimed allegiance to Bhavavarman I.¹⁷ Some of these territories have been identified while others are being further researched (e.g., Indrapura of K.151, Saṃlāy of K.349). This territorial system became clearer by the time of Íśanavarman and his successors. Were Íśanavarman, Citrasena-Mahendravarman, and Bhavavarman I *poñ* prior to their accession to power? Hiranyavarman of K.359 from Stung Treng and K.1041 from Khon in Laos seems to claim his family prestige through his mother, a sister of Bhavavarman I. This matrilineal practice was common to the *poñ* of the Pre-Angkor period as explicitly shown by the Āḍhyapura family of K.53. Was Hiranyavarman’s family, including Bhavavarman I, a *poñ*-ship family? Although archaeological data cannot directly resolve these genealogical riddles, they can inform on the location and tempo of change in key centres throughout the Lower Mekong region, where one of the key archaeological sites is Thala Borivat.

14 Coedès, *The Indianized states of Southeast Asia*; Briggs, ‘The ancient Khmer empire’; Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*; Vickery, ‘Funan reviewed’.

15 Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*, pp. 330, 332.

16 Piphall Heng, ‘Chronology of Sambor Prei Kuk: The capital of Pre-Angkor Cambodia’ (M.A. thesis, University of Hawai’i, Manoa, 2009).

17 George Coedès, ‘Études cambodgiennes. 38. Nouvelles précisions sur les dates d’avènement de quelques rois des dynasties angkoriennes’, *BEFEO* 43 (1943): 12–16.

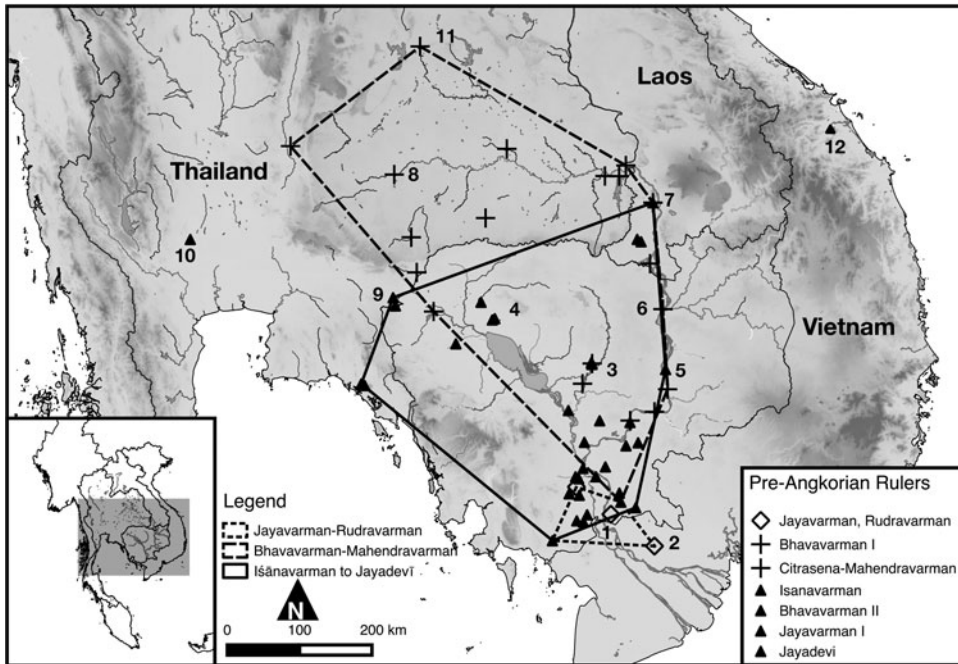


Figure 2. The Pre-Angkorian rulers: 1. Angkor Borei, 2. Go Thap, 3. Sambor Prei Kuk, 4. Angkor, 5. Sambor, 6. Thala Borivat, 7. Wat Phu, 8. Phimai, 9. Khao Noi, 10. U Thong, 11. Khon Kaen, 12. Mi-Son (©Phiphal Heng)

Notes: a. Both zones of Jayavarman-Rudravarman and Bhavavarman-Mahendravarman overlap on K.53; b. *Isanavarman's* zone presented here does not include K.964 (10), possibly, a Mon king and C.96 (12) of Campā's *Prakāśadharma*, and both claim to be *Isanavarman's* grandson

Archaeological perspectives from Thala Borivat (Stung Treng province, Cambodia)

Growing archaeological data sets on the Mekong Basin provide comparable perspectives to this historical narrative. If the Chinese accounts are reliable, then the earliest records of the *fan/poñ* rulers in the Delta were within the transition period from the proto-historic to the early historic period. In the archaeological records, the reduced ceramic horizon (*sensu* Shawn Fehrenbach), including Phimai Black, of the proto-historic period continued until c.300 CE in Angkor Borei and later until c.400 CE at Phum Snay.¹⁸ The early transition in the Delta may have been associated with the rise of the early historic polities of Funan. The distribution of the reduced ceramic horizon from central Thailand across Cambodia represents the intra-community interactions of the proto-historic period through shared ceramic

18 Fehrenbach, 'Traditions of ceramic technology'; Dougal J.W. O'Reilly, 'A preliminary report on the excavation of a late prehistoric cemetery in northwest Cambodia', *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association (BIPPA)* 24 (2004): 129–32; Yoshinori Yasuda and Phoeurn Chuch, *Preliminary report for the excavation in Phum Snay 2007* (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2008).

technological traditions.¹⁹ The distribution of the fine orangeware horizon in the Mekong Delta and to the north in Phum Snay and Thala Borivat suggests an intensification of north–south interactions by at least 300 CE. This period coincides with the Chinese account of ‘Funan invasions’ c.200–300 CE, and the ceramic and historical chronologies mesh nicely, as shown in [table 1](#).

The Thala Borivat community and its eponymous archaeological site is located at the confluence of the Mekong, Se San, and Se Kong rivers, about 45 km south of the Khon Falls at the Laos–Cambodia border (see [fig. 2](#)). Some scholars have assumed that Thala Borivat was an early Pre-Angkorian capital before power moved south to Ísánapura (Sambor Prei Kuk).²⁰ The region clearly lies within the domain of the ‘Dangrek chieftains’ based on the distribution of the Dangrek inscriptions of Bhavavarman I (550–600 CE) and his brother, Mahendravarman (600–616 CE).²¹ Thala Borivat’s brick architectural tradition and associated Thala Borivat lintel style have been relatively dated to c.550–637 CE ([fig. 3](#)).²²

Dissertation field research on the Thala Borivat Archaeological Project involved three phases from 2011 to 2014, covering an area of c.35 sq. km. Field-based data collection strategies included topographic mapping, surface collection, sample coring, and test excavations. Despite at least two episodes of heavy looting in the area (1980s, and 2011–13), our survey identified eight burial sites and more than seventy brick architectural features (foundations) in the region ([fig. 4](#)). The surface collection process concentrated on areas within 1 km of the Mekong and the Se San, where extensive looting (for gold ornaments, and glass and stone beads) and road construction activity (to quarry laterite) has destroyed at least eight burials but produced surface materials that reflect buried deposits and established our provisional site chronology. The results from eight 1 by 2 m test units, placed across the Thala Borivat region, establish chronometric sequences complementary to the chronology produced by surface collections presented in [table 2](#).

This archaeological survey of Thala Borivat (TB) suggests that proto-historic communities appeared in the area by at least 200 BCE. By 300 CE, there is evidence of fine orangeware from the Mekong Delta as well as stone and glass beads found in proto-historic and early historic sites across Cambodia, suggesting inter- and intra-regional interaction. From c.500 CE, there is evidence of fine buffware ceramics and *kendi*, all of which characterise the Pre-Angkorian period. The data suggest that some proto-historic sites show evidence of continuity over five centuries into the

19 Fehrenbach, ‘Traditions of ceramic technology’, p. 149.

20 George Coedès, ‘Etudes cambodgiennes’, *BEFEO* 11, 3–4 (1911): 391–406; George Coedès, ‘Etudes cambodgiennes’, *BEFEO* 18, 9 (1918): 1–28; Paul Lévy, ‘Thala Bōrivāt ou Stu’ñ Trèn: sites de la capitale du souverain khmer Bhavavarman Ier’, *Journal Asiatique* 258 (1970): 113–29.

21 August M. Barth, *Inscriptions sanscrites du Cambodge* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1882); George Coedès, ‘Etudes cambodgiennes’, *BEFEO* 11; Jacques, ‘Le pays Khmer avant Angkor’; Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*, pp. 71–82.

22 Bénisti, ‘I. Les linteaux dits de Thala Borivat’; Dalet, ‘Recherches archéologiques au Cambodge; Dupont, ‘Les linteaux khmèrs’; Lévy, ‘Thala Bōrivāt ou Stu’ñ Trèn’; Hiram W. Woodward, *The art and architecture of Thailand from prehistoric times through the thirteenth century*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 44–5.

Table 1: Angkor Borei (AB) ceramic chronology compared against historical records

Date	Diagnostic ceramic	Funan	Zhenla
Phase I: 500–200 BCE	Reduced ceramic horizon	Iron Age communities	Iron Age communities
Phase II: 200 BCE–300 CE	Reduced ceramics Orange-slipped ware and Vat Komnou wares Cord-marked carinated ware	Hun rulers: <i>Hun-t'ien</i> and <i>Hun-p'an-houang</i> Fan rulers: <i>Fan-che-man</i> , <i>Fan Kin-cheng</i> , <i>Fan Chan</i> , <i>Fan Chang</i> , <i>Fan Siun</i> (240–285? CE) Invasion of other polities International trade	Vassal of Funan
Phase III: 300–600 CE	Fine buffware kendi Fine-paste ceramic	Jayavarman (c.470–514 CE) Rudravarman (514–5xx CE) Foundation of Hindu–Buddhist temples	<i>Devanika</i> (?) <i>Sarvabhauma</i> <i>Viravarman</i> <i>Bhavavarman</i> & <i>Citrasena</i> (550–600 CE) Foundation of Hindu temples Comprises territorial vassals to the kings (K.151, K.349N)
Phase IV: 600–800 CE	<i>kendi</i> Red-slipped or painted ceramics	<i>Poñ</i> and <i>mratañ</i> in Khmer inscriptions Citrasena- Mahendravarman (600–616 CE) Isānavaraman (616–637 CE) Bhavavarman II (637–652 CE) Jayavarman I (652–680 CE) Jayadevi (680–725? CE)	

Pre-Angkorian period while others were abandoned. This phenomenon — of continuity from proto-historic to early historic archaeological occupation — is particularly clear in the well-documented region of Thala Borivat (TB Phase II: c.300–500 CE), to which this article now turns.



Figure 3. Thala Borivat style lintels: 1. New lintel uncovered near Sala Prambuon Lveng during the 2012 field season. 2. New lintel found buried near the main complex of Ba Doem in 2011 and unearthed by villagers in 2013

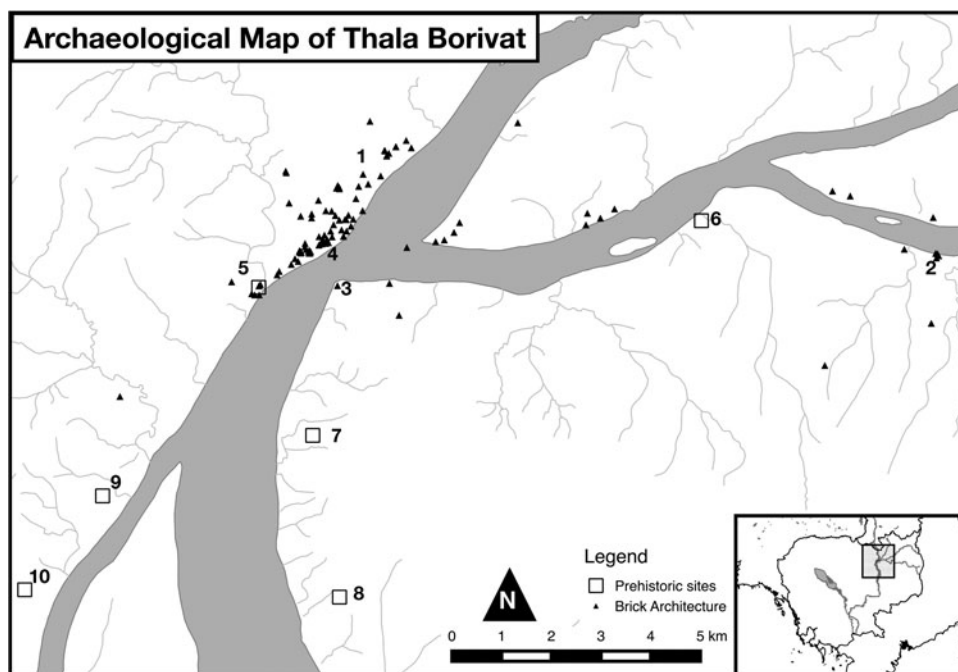


Figure 4. Archaeological sites in Thala Borivat. 1. Preah Ko, 2. Ba Doem, 3. Ba Chong, 4. Sala Prambuon Lveng, 5. O Trel, 6. O Khlong, 7. Tuol Neakta Kang Memay, 8. Tuol Khtum, 9. Tuol Ansang, 10. Tuol Meas

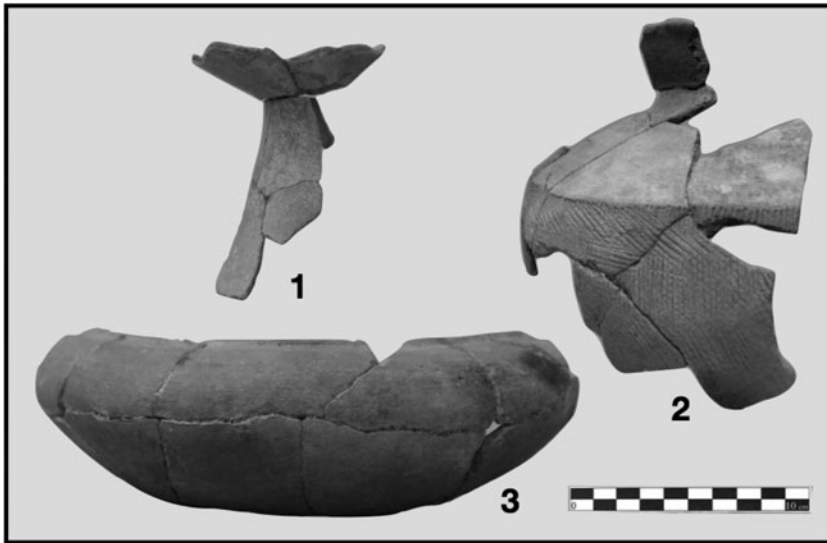


Figure 5. Grave goods from Unit 8 at Tuol Neakta Kang Memay: 1. Pedestalled bowl, 2. Cord-marked carinated pot similar to three others found from Wat Kumnou (Angkor Borei), and 3. Bowl similar to those found from the Iron Age sites in northeast Thailand and north-west Cambodia

Thala Borivat in regional perspective

It is evident that inter-regional proto-historic interaction networks set the stage for greater settlement nucleation by TB Phase II around pre-existing large sites. Based primarily on settlement patterns and mortuary assemblages, Charles Higham argues that the proto-historic communities in the Mun Valley of northeast Thailand were chiefdoms.²³ Previous ceramic studies might support this claim for widespread interactional networks by the late centuries BCE.²⁴ The shared aesthetic of the reduced ceramic tradition represents some degree of interaction between the proto-historic communities in central and northeast Thailand and Cambodia. Organisational changes associated with the transition from the reduced ware tradition in AB Phase II c.200 BCE–300 CE (and seen in the Wat Kumnou cemetery) overlap with the Chinese records of the Hun and Fan who ruled Funan.²⁵ The distribution of fine orangeware, mostly restricted to the Mekong Delta, from Angkor Borei to Thala

23 Higham, *Early cultures of mainland Southeast Asia*, p. 229.

24 Fehrenbach, 'Traditions of ceramic technology'.

25 Rona Michi Ikehara-Quebral, 'An assessment of health in early historic (200 B.C. to 200 A.D.) inhabitants of Vat Komnou, Angkor Borei, southern Cambodia: A bioarchaeological perspective' (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawai'i, Manoa, 2010); Michael Pietruszewsky and Rona Ikehara-Quebral, 'The bioarchaeology of the Vat Komnou cemetery, Angkor Borei, Cambodia', *Journal of Indo-Pacific Archaeology* 26 (2006): 86–97.

Table 2: Provisional Thala Borivat (TB) chronology

Phase/Date	Phase Name	Diagnostic material	AMS date of each test unit	Cross-correlation with other sites
TB I c.200 BCE – 300 CE	Proto-historic	Pedestal bowl (Unit 8), Orange-slipped ceramics (Unit 7, surface), cord-marked carinated earthenwares (Unit 8, surface), bronze artefacts, and beads (surface, interview)	U7: 54 ± 57 BCE U8: 175 ± 45 CE U6: 282 ± 52 CE	Angkor Borei, Phum Snay, Prohear
TB II c.300 CE – 500 CE	Early historic	Fine buffware and other sand-tempered ceramics	U9: 324 ± 64 CE U6: 461 ± 70 CE U1: 484 ± 55 CE	Angkor Borei, Phum Snay
TB III c.500 CE – 800 CE	Pre-Angkorian	Borivat style lintels, inscription K. 359/ <i>Bhavavarman I</i> , various <i>kendi</i> forms, and red-painted ware	U2: 574 ± 35 CE U10: 712 ± 52 CE U2: 717 ± 52 CE	Sambor Prei Kuk
TB IV c.800 CE – 1500 CE	Angkorian	Stoneware (Choeng Ek, Brown-glazed, Green-glazed), Chinese ware (Yuan celadon, Song white porcelain)	n/a	Angkor
TB V c.1500 CE – 1900 CE	Post-Angkorian	Thai (Suwanakhalok), Chinese ceramics (Ming–Qing blue and white porcelain)	n/a	Angkor

Borivat and Phum Snay, may represent intra-regional interaction. The transition from the reduced ware tradition to fine-tempered buffware and other ceramic traditions likely occurred later in most regions. These regions were outside of the Delta, to the north, where a series of smaller polities, including Zhenla, emerged during the third century CE. Despite similar pottery styles, including pedestalled dishes and bowls commonly found in proto-historic sites across northeast Thailand and Cambodia, the absence of a clear reduced ware tradition in Thala Borivat suggests that the proto-historic communities here may have transitioned into the early historic

period around the same time as Angkor Borei or only slightly later (fig. 5). By 500 CE, many of these areas shared similarities in their ceramic traditions, particularly the increased number of buffware and *kendi*, as well as the names of rulers with Indic religious associations starting to appear in the inscriptions. This evidence suggests that increased interactions between the proto-historic and early historic communities coincide with or possibly stimulated the rise of the Pre-Angkorian state.

Proto-historic data from Thala Borivat are scarce due to looting. Surface surveys suggest that the proto-historic communities lived along the major river systems, likely exploiting the floodplain and rivers for agriculture, fisheries, and as communication routes. Looting in these sites provide a rough estimate of site size ranging from 1 ha to 4 ha. The most heavily looted sites are the largest (O Trel: 4 ha, O Khlong: 2 ha or larger) and are reported to have contained more gold and bronze artefacts and beads than smaller ones that were less attractive to looters. Our excavation in O Trel supports this claim: Unit 6 (a 1 by 2 m trench) produced more than 30 beads in comparison to other sites that produced little to no beads. This suggests that additional work might uncover variations in proto-historic Thala Borivat inhumations, which date between 100 BCE and 300 CE (table 2).

The spatial relationship between proto-historic artefacts, particularly the chronometrically-anchored ceramic traditions and Pre-Angkorian temples, elucidates the pattern of continuity and discontinuity of this region. The Thala Borivat field investigations indicated that larger proto-historic sites in the area were located closer to TB Phase III brick temple constructions, and agglomerate into what might be two Pre-Angkorian communities: the Thala Borivat and Ba Doem complexes. Brick fragments associated with temple construction lay in disturbed deposits atop the Unit 6 burial feature at O Trel with an associated date of 461 ± 70 CE, and three Pre-Angkorian brick structures (two of which had Thala Borivat style lintels), are located within the 4 ha area reported to contain burials. This site, like others in the region, has fine buffware ceramics that Mekong Delta populations also used. Preah Ko or Prasat Boran, the temple with Bhavavarman I's family inscription and Thala Borivat style lintels, is 3 km to the east.²⁶ This TB Phase III temple cluster is c.3 sq. km in area, and contains various forms of *kendi* commonly associated with the Pre-Angkorian period. Surface artefacts from the second-largest proto-historic site of O Khlong do not include TB Phase III ceramics, although examples of the latter have been found 1.2 km to the east. Similarly, the Pre-Angkorian temples are located within c.1.5–5 km from O Khlong, which suggests that the proto-historic communities of O Khlong may have been incorporated into the later temple complexes. Other smaller proto-historic sites do not have a TB Phase III component and are located farther, c.5 and 7 km, from the current known temples. The Thala Borivat data produce a model that suggests smaller proto-historic sites were absorbed into the larger ones, between 300–500 CE, to become a nexus of the Pre-Angkorian centres. This model likely correlates with the transition into the Pre-Angkorian period. Similar trends of smaller sites becoming incorporated into larger settlements likely occurred in the Delta, such as at Bit Meas and Prohear in Prei Veng, where the Pre-Angkorian temples and inscriptions are located relatively further away (20–40 km) from these

26 Henri Parmentier, *L'art khmèr primitif*, vol. 1 (Paris: EFEO, 1927), pp. 214–29.

sites. Prohear is unique in that it shares many similarities with Angkor Borei until AB Phase II, or c.100 CE, and yet it did not become a large centre with a temple in the later sequence.²⁷ The CISARK database suggests that the closest stylistically and epigraphically datable Pre-Angkorian temples are located c.30 km from Prohear, one example being the Ādhyapura family inscriptions near Ba Phnom. In the Angkor region, the well-known site of Phum Lovea does not contain evidence of Pre-Angkorian temples,²⁸ whereas another set of proto-historic and early historic sites — Go O-Chua (southern Vietnam), Wat Kumnou, Prei Khmeng, and Koh Ta Meas — indicate that Pre-Angkorian temples were built atop, or very close to, the proto-historic burials, similar to those in Thala Borivat and in the Angkor region.²⁹

A parallel trajectory can be observed in a number of proto-historic sites in northeast Thailand (figs. 2 and 6). The proto-historic communities of the Mun Valley in northeast Thailand were possibly absorbed into the large, pre-existing proto-historic sites that later became Pre-Angkorian centres. Many proto-historic sites have been identified within the Mun Valley system, however, not all of them became large centres during the Pre-Angkorian period.³⁰ Ban Non Wat provides evidence of rich grave goods during the time when Angkor Borei was flourishing in the early centuries CE, yet it does not contain evidence contemporary with the Pre-Angkorian or Dvāravatī periods. Archaeological surveys of the Phimai region place the transition from the proto-historic to historic periods within the Classic Phimai Phase (c.200 BCE–300 CE) and Late Phimai Phase (c.300–600 CE).³¹ Though the ceramic sequences of the two periods were not well understood at the time, David Welch notes close similarities between ceramics in the Phimai region and Angkor Borei, rather than the Dvāravatī ceramics.³² Welch argues that by the Mueang Sema phase (600–1000 CE), as the general proto-historic site size decreased, some sites were abandoned in the Mun Valley. Only some large moated sites continued to function as local centres

27 Andreas Reinecke, Laychour Vin, and Sonetra Seng, *The first golden age of Cambodia excavation at Prohear* (Bonn: DAI, KAAK, 2009); Fehrenbach, 'Traditions of ceramic technology'.

28 See O'Reilly and Shewan, this vol.

29 Bernard Philippe Groslier, 'VII. La cité hydraulique angkoriennne: Exploitation ou surexploitation du sol?', *BEFEO* 66, 1 (1979): 161–202; Christophe Pottier, 'Under the Western Baray waters', in *Uncovering Southeast Asia's past: Selected papers from the 10th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists*, ed. Elisabeth A. Bacus, Ian C. Glover and Vincent C. Piggott (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006), pp. 298–309; Christophe Pottier et al., *Mission archéologique franco-khmère sur l'aménagement du territoire angkorien (MAFKATA): Rapport campagne 2006* (Siem Reap: EFEO, 2006); Reinecke et al., *The first golden age of Cambodia excavation at Prohear*; Miriam T. Stark, 'The transition to history in the Mekong Delta: A view from Cambodia', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 2, 3 (1998): 175–203; Miriam T. Stark, 'Pre-Angkorian settlement trends in Cambodia's Mekong Delta and the Lower Mekong Archaeological Project', *Journal of Indo-Pacific Archaeology* 26 (2007): 98–109; Miriam T. Stark et al., 'Results of the 1995–1996 archaeological field investigations at Angkor Borei, Cambodia', *Asian Perspectives* 38, 1 (1999); Miriam T. Stark, 'Some preliminary results of the 1999–2000 archaeological field investigations at Angkor Borei, Takeo province', *Udaya* 2, 1 (2001): 19–36.

30 Higham, *Early cultures of mainland Southeast Asia*, pp. 169–227.

31 David J. Welch and Judith R. McNeill, 'Settlement, agriculture and population changes in the Phimai region, Thailand', *BIPPA* 2 (1991): 210–28.

32 David J. Welch, 'Archaeology of northeast Thailand in relation to the Pre-Khmer and Khmer historical records', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 2, 3 (1998): 205–33.

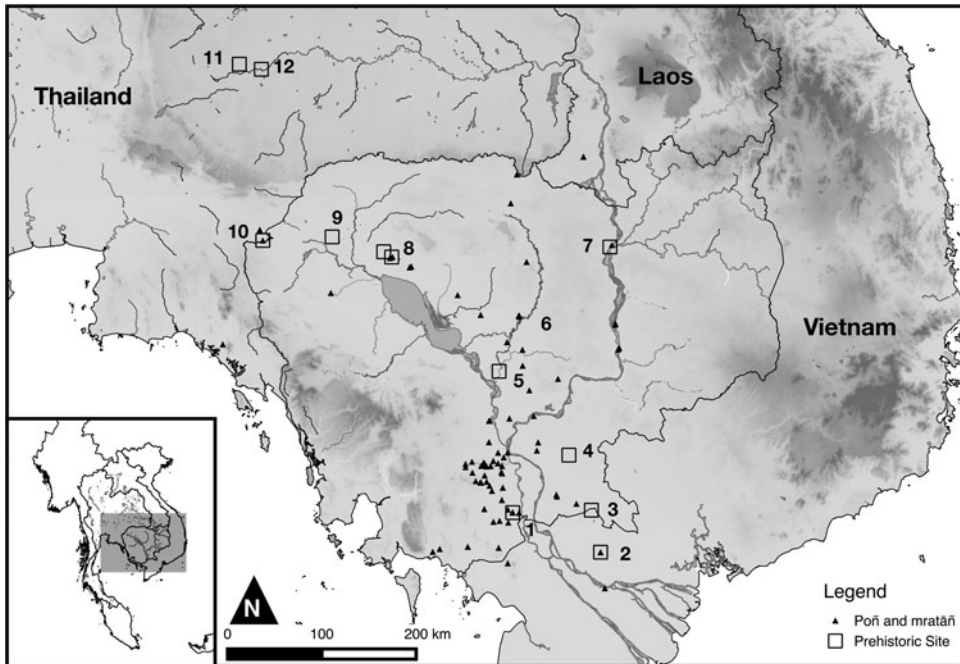


Figure 6. Major prehistoric/proto-historic sites and *poñ-mratāñ* inscriptions. 1. Wat Kumnou (Angkor Borei), 2. Go Thap, 3. Go O Chua, 4-. Prohear, 5. Samrong Sen, 6. Sambor Prei Kuk, 7. Thala Borivat, 8. Koh Ta Meas, Prei Khmeng, Lovea, Angkor, 9. Phum Snay, 10. Khao Noi, 11. Ban Non Wat, 12. Phimai

in the later period, similar to the pattern observed at Thala Borivat.³³ Prasat Phimai itself was likely an important Pre-Angkorian site bearing an inscription, K.1106, from Citrasena-Mahendrarman, and was built atop a proto-historic burial.³⁴ Caitlin Evans, Nigel Chang and Naho Shimizu argue that the settlements of this area tend to cluster closer to the Mun River by the late proto-historic and Pre-Angkorian period, probably in order to exploit the floodplain and communication routes in a manner similar to Thala Borivat. Phimai and Mueang Sema evolved from medium-sized proto-historic sites to become ‘proto-cities’ or large riverine outposts during the Pre-Angkorian and Dvāravatī periods.³⁵ Higham and Rachanie Thosarat also note the presence of a proto-historic burial near one of the structures at Khao Noi, an important Pre-Angkorian centre within the territory called Jyeṣṭhapura.³⁶

33 Ibid.: 224.

34 Sarah Talbot, ‘Before Angkor: Early historic communities in northeast Thailand’, *Journal of the Siam Society* 91 (2003): 75; Sarah Talbot and Janthed Chutima, ‘Northeast Thailand before Angkor: Evidence from an archaeological excavation at the Prasat Hin Phimai’, *Asian Perspectives* 40, 2 (2001): 179–94; Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*, p. 75.

35 See Evans et al., and also Murphy, this vol.

36 Charles Higham and Rachanie Thosarat, *Prehistoric Thailand: From early settlement to Sukhothai* (Bangkok: River Books, 1998), p. 193.

The archaeological data in northwest Cambodia from sites like Phum Snay, a large proto-historic necropolis dating to c.400 BCE–500 CE, provide similar patterns to the northeast Thailand sites.³⁷ The ceramic traditions from this area indicate similarities with contemporary sites in northeast Thailand, and possibly other regions, including the Mekong Delta. The reduced ceramic horizon associated with the early phase represents some degree of proto-historic interaction across the Dang Raek Mountains. In the other direction, a *kendi* from Phum Snay, very similar to the AB Phase II example of fine orangeware, with an associated date of 160 ± 85 CE, represents interaction with the Delta at a later phase.³⁸ Despite the small skeletal sample size, the grave goods imply that Phum Snay was a society based on gender division, and that prestige goods were possibly limited to a few individuals.³⁹ By 300–500 CE, some burials included buffware *kendi*, which suggests greater interaction with other Pre-Angkorian period regions.⁴⁰ However, there is scarce evidence of the succeeding Pre-Angkorian period after 500 CE in Phum Snay. The CISARK database does not show significant Pre-Angkorian temple remains in the surrounding area. Phum Snay's proto-historic communities may have been incorporated into other, nearby Pre-Angkorian centres (such as Mongkol Borei c.23 km away) where the inscriptions and temples are located (see [figs. 6 and 7](#)).

The proto-historic communities in these areas may have been absorbed into the later Pre-Angkorian centres of Amoghapura, Bhimapura (Battambang), Cakraṅkapura (K.60/626 CE), Jyeṣṭhapura (K.506/637 CE and K.1150), and other unknown centres of northeast Thailand and northwest Cambodia.⁴¹ Proto-historic communities in the south may have been incorporated into various Pre-Angkorian centres such as Ādhyapura, Vyādhapura, Dhanvipura (Ta Kev), Rudrapura (southern Vietnam), and others.⁴² The patterns of the Pre-Angkorian 'large and small settlement clusters' identified with the middle Mekong and Se Kong rivers and their tributaries in Laos are comparable with the Thala Borivat settlement patterns.⁴³ Although we need more data on the proto-historic period, epigraphic and architectural data related to the Pre-Angkorian kings, including Citrasena-Mahendravarman and Thala Borivat style lintels, provide many similarities to the findings at Thala Borivat.

37 K.M. Domett and D.J.W. O'Reilly, 'Health in Pre-Angkorian Cambodia: A bioarchaeological analysis of the skeletal remains from Phum Snay', *Asian Perspectives* 48, 1 (2009): 56–78; O'Reilly, 'A preliminary report on the excavation of a late prehistoric cemetery', pp. 129–32; Yoshinori Yasuda, *Water civilization: From Yangtze to Khmer civilizations* (Tokyo: Springer Japan, 2013); Yasuda and Chuch, *Preliminary report*.

38 Fehrenbach, 'Traditions of ceramic technology', p. 138; Dougald O'Reilly, Kate Domett and Pheng Sytha, 'The excavation of a late prehistoric cemetery in northwest Cambodia', *Udaya* 7 (2006): 207–22; Yasuda and Chuch, *Preliminary report*, p. 33.

39 Domett and O'Reilly, 'Health in Pre-Angkorian Cambodia'.

40 Fehrenbach, 'Traditions of ceramic technology', p. 153; Yasuda, *Water civilization*; Yasuda and Chuch, *Preliminary report*.

41 Though K.60 is found in Prei Veng, most inscriptions from the Pre-Angkorian and Angkorian periods place Bhimapura and Amoghapura in northwest Cambodia.

42 Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*, pp. 321–415.

43 Michel Lorrillard, 'Pre-Angkorian communities in the Middle Mekong Valley (Laos and adjacent areas)', in *Before Siam: Essays in art and archaeology*, ed. Nicolas Revire and Stephen A. Murphy (Bangkok: River Books, 2014), pp. 187–215.

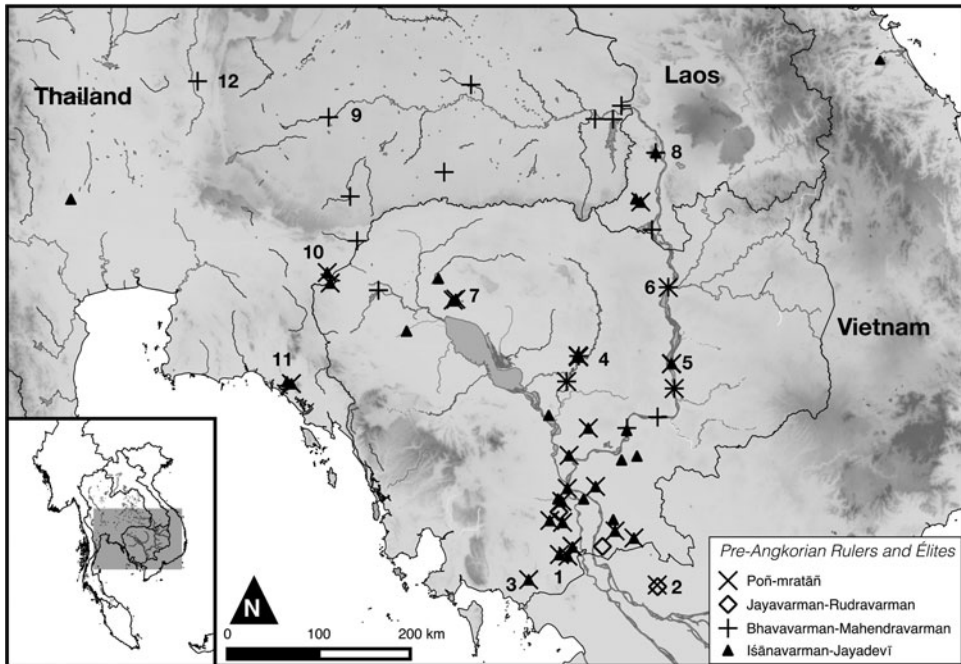


Figure 7. *Poñ* and *mratañ* and Pre-Angkorian rulers' inscriptions. 1. Angkor Borei, 2. Go Thap, 3. Kuhear Luong (K.44 mentions Jayavarman I and Rudravarman), 4. Sambor Prei Kuk, 5. Sambor, 6. Thala Borivat, 7. Angkor, 8. Wat Phu, 9. Phimai, 10. Khao Noi, 11. Wat Sabab, 12. Sri Thep

The missing link

Archaeologists and historians question whether these documented proto-historic communities formed discrete and autonomous 'chiefdoms', or whether they instead constituted larger but loose-knit polities under the rule of individual *poñs*. Higham's analysis of Ban Non Wat's mortuary patterning (in northeast Thailand), which includes significant wealth differentiation, inspired him to associate particularly rich burials with chiefs. Sarah Talbot's earlier work at Phimai also supports a 'proto-*poñ*' model of political organisation.⁴⁴ Noted here is the proximity of these proto-historic sites to provenienced Pre-Angkorian inscriptions (figs. 6 and 7), which suggests a relationship between proto-historic and Pre-Angkorian occupations and, possibly, the continuity of the proto-historic elites as the Pre-Angkorian *poñ*.⁴⁵

Michael Vickery asked: '[D]id the *fan* chiefs become *varman* kings, or did some other groups completely replace the *fan*, using the title *-varman* as their claim to superior status?'⁴⁶ If *poñ* were local Funan elites that the Chinese called *fan* prior to the Pre-Angkorian period, when Sanskrit titles such as *-isvara* or *raja* were adopted, then

44 Higham, *Early cultures of mainland Southeast Asia*, pp. 224–30; see also Higham, this vol.; Talbot, 'Before Angkor'.

45 Jenner, *A chronological inventory of the inscriptions of Cambodia*; Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*.

46 Vickery, 'Funan reviewed': 118.

their chronology fits well with the transition period or early historic period (table 1). If local elite groups were replaced by outside groups, we would expect to see a drastic change in burial practice and ceramic technology. However, based on the archaeological data presented earlier, there is no evidence of population replacement. Both ceramic technology and burial goods at sites like Angkor Borei and Phum Snay suggest gradual change and continuity from the proto-historic to the Pre-Angkorian periods. The question should then be: Did the elites of the proto-historic polities, i.e., *fan* or *poñ*, consolidate their power to become early kings and distinguish themselves from their competitors by taking up Indic names and titles? It is difficult to distinguish a clear relationship between the early *poñ* and the early kings due to inadequate data, such as a lack of precise dates. Also complicating the inference that *poñ* became kings is the fact that the inscriptions are in Sanskrit while another Khmer title for king, *vrah kamratāñ añ*, was already in use by Isānavarman (c.616–37 CE). Whether Isānavarman's predecessors had the same title is unclear, as there is no reference to the *poñ* title being used by the Pre-Angkorian kings.

However, the spatial correlation between the inscriptions mentioning *poñ/mratāñ* and the Pre-Angkorian kings and proto-historic sites is striking (figs. 2 and 6). If each inscription mentioning a Pre-Angkorian king is assigned a 1-km-radius zone of influence, then at least 38 *poñ-mratāñ* inscriptions, dated between 611 CE and 713 CE, lie within this 1-km-radius zone (table 3).⁴⁷ The *poñ* and *mratāñ* category is further subdivided into inscriptions mentioning *poñ & mratāñ*, *poñ*, and *mratāñ*. The zone assigned here is hypothetically based on the settlement patterns along the Mekong (including Thala Borivat and Sambor), where most sites are located within 1 km from the bank.⁴⁸ This suggests that the sphere of interaction along the main route lies within the 1-km radius, even though the length of these settlements is generally much longer. The assumption here is that a king's name might have been heard of or known within a minimum of a 1-km zone, radiating from the inscription mentioning that name. In fact, there is not much difference between 500 m, which produces 30 inscriptions, and 2 km, producing 39 inscriptions. All inscriptions are within the same date range, except those within the 500 m-radius, which excludes Isānavarman's predecessors, but includes Jayavarman of Funan. Similar approaches have been applied to other epigraphic data, for example, the relationship between the Angkorian kings and exemptions granted to temple foundations based on inscription locations, and the relationship between the locations of 'nodes' denoting the words for 'road' in the inscriptions to study the Angkorian road networks.⁴⁹

47 The number is derived by double-counting K.44 (re-counts both Jayavarman I and Rudravarman) and K.54 (relates to K.53 of the Adhyapura family, who trace their prestige back to Rudravarman). I also accept Coedès' reconstruction of K.5 at Go Thap that a king's name starting with a J- (the rest is broken) was Jayavarman of Funan, then his inscription shares the location with K.6 of a *poñ* and *mratāñ* and K.8 of a *mratāñ* dating to c.700–800 CE. See Coedès, 'Etudes cambodgiennes', *BEFEO* 31.

48 For an overview of general Khmer settlement patterns, see Miriam T. Stark, Damian Evans, Rachna Chhay, Piphah Heng, and Alison Carter, 'Residential patterning at Angkor Wat', *Antiquity* 89, 348 (2015): 1439–55.

49 Eileen Lustig, Damian Evans and Ngaire Richards, 'Words across space and time: An analysis of lexical items in Khmer inscriptions, sixth–fourteenth centuries CE', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38, 1 (2007): 1; Eileen Lustig and Mitch Hendrickson, 'Angkor's roads: An archaeo-lexical approach', in

Table 3: The *poñ-mratāñ* inscriptions located within a 1 km-zone of the inscriptions mentioning the Pre-Angkorian kings

King	<i>poñ</i> & <i>mratañ</i>	<i>poñ</i>	<i>mratañ</i>	Total	%	Inscriptions
Jayavarman	1	1	0	2	5	K.6, K.8
Rudravarman	0	2	0	2	5	K.44*, K.54*
Bhavavarman I	0	1	1	2	5	K.155, K.1287
Citrasena-Mahendravarman	1	1	0	2	5	K.926, K.927
Isānavarman	4	6	3	13	34	K.22, K.24, K.54*, K.73, K.90, K.427, K.438, K.502, K.600, K.607, K.709, K.939, K.1029, K.1250, K.28
Bhavavarman II	2	3	0	5	13	K.21, K.79, K.505, K.506, K.1150
Jayavarman I	4	5	0	9	24	K.38, K.44*, K.49, K.127, K.129, K.493, K.561, K.726, K.1224
Jayadevi	0	0	3	3	8	K.749, K.753, K.904
Total inscriptions	12	19	7	38	100	* Double count

Figure 7 illustrates the spatial configuration of the 38 *poñ* and *mratañ* inscriptions that are located within a 1-km zone of inscriptions mentioning the Pre-Angkorian kings, supporting the evidence of multi-generational relationships between the Pre-Angkorian kings and the *poñ*, as shown by K.53. This pattern suggests that the Pre-Angkorian kings may be related to the *poñ* themselves since they appear around the same timeframe, c.500–700 CE. The co-occurrence of the *poñ-mratañ* and Pre-Angkorian kings' inscriptions at four proto-historic sites that became Pre-Angkorian centres (Go Thap, Wat Kumnou, Phimai, and Khao Noi) suggests the continuity of proto-historic and Pre-Angkorian elites. If the Pre-Angkorian temples are used as an index of continuity, then the list is currently growing to include Thala Borivat (O Trel), Prei Khmeng, Koh Ta Meas, and Phanom Wan. Though other proto-historic sites are not associated with any known direct evidence of the Pre-Angkorian period, some Pre-Angkorian inscriptions are located within 30 km from these sites. For example, Phum Snay is located c.23 km from K.213 of Bhavavarman I. Prohear and Bit Meas are c.30 km from K.53/667 CE of the Āḍhyapura family which served multiple kings beginning with Rudravarman of Funan. This set of proto-historic sites were probably incorporated into the later Pre-Angkorian period centres (e.g., Bhimapura [Battambang], Jyēṣṭhapura in the north and Āḍhyapura [Prei Veng] in the south) a similar pattern to that observed

Connecting empires and states: Selected papers from the 13th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists, ed. Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz, Andreas Reinecke and Dominik Bonatz (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), pp. 191–208.

in Thala Borivat. From the Delta to the north, the inscriptions mentioning the *poñ* and *mratañ* are located atop proto-historic sites such as Go Thap (K.6 and K.8), Wat Kumnou (K.600/611 CE), and Khao Noi (K.506/637 CE and K.1150/Bhavavarman II 638–52 CE). Other proto-historic sites that bear no direct evidence of the Pre-Angkorian period are nonetheless located within a 35-km radius of the *poñ/mratañ* inscriptions.

Whatever ‘Indianisation’ describes, the timeframe of these *-varman*, their power consolidation, and the extent of their temple institutions overlap with the fine buffware horizon from c.500 CE, fitting into Monica Smith’s post-fourth-century date for the second period of contact between South and Southeast Asia.⁵⁰ Art historical evidence associated with the distribution of conch-on-hip Viṣṇu-vāsudeva images in Southeast Asia also fits this timeframe.⁵¹ In the Delta, this process coincided with the appearance of *-varman* (e.g., Jayavarman and Rudravarman, c.450–550 CE) in the inscriptions and its equivalent in the Chinese records. The major archaeological records from Angkor Borei associated with complex sociopolitical systems, such as the city wall and canal systems linking other regions, all predate this timeframe.⁵² The buffware horizon is widespread across mainland Southeast Asia and many buffware pieces have been found within Pre-Angkor era polities such as Dvāravatī and Campā.

Archaeological data from Thala Borivat, Phimai, Khao Noi, Prei Khmeng, and Koh Ta Meas indicate that complex proto-historic societies already existed prior to the references to Pre-Angkorian rulers described in sixth to eighth century inscriptions. The rich burial goods from Prohear and Bit Meas, c.500 BCE to 100 CE, suggest that a complex sociopolitical system already existed in the Delta.⁵³ For Zhenla in the north, individuals bearing the *-varman* title are only known in retrospect from Bhavavarman I and Citrasena’s inscriptions, referring to their father as Viravarman, who may have been a contemporary of Rudravarman of Funan (c.514–550? CE). Whether Viravarman ever had the status of a king is subject to debate.⁵⁴ The appearance of fine buffware in Phum Snay may coincide with Rudravarman of Funan or Bhavavarman I, who left an inscription (K.213) approximately 23 km from there. It is also possible that Bhavavarman I and Citrasena-Mahendravarman were consolidating power among different *poñ*-ship polities in northeast Thailand, southern Laos, and Cambodia. Figures 2 and 6 illustrate the hypothetical zone created by connecting the locations of Bhavavarman and Mahendravarman inscriptions, which overlap the distribution of the proto-historic

50 Smith, ‘“Indianization” from the Indian point of view’. See also Stark, ‘Pre-Angkor earthenware ceramics’; Stark, ‘Some preliminary results’; Fehrenbach, ‘Traditions of ceramic technology’; Shawn S. Fehrenbach and Michael Glascock, ‘Chemical compositional analysis of late prehistoric to early historic earthenwares from five sites in Cambodia’, paper presented at the Society of American Archaeology Annual Meeting, Sacramento, 1 Apr. 2011; Vickery, ‘Funan reviewed’.

51 Paul A. Lavy, ‘Conch-on-hip images in peninsular Thailand and early Vaiṣṇava sculpture in Southeast Asia’, in Revire and Murphy, *Before Siam*, pp. 153–73.

52 Stark, ‘Some preliminary results’; Paul Bishop, David C.W. Sanderson and Miriam T. Stark, ‘OSL and radiocarbon dating of a Pre-Angkorian canal in the Mekong Delta, southern Cambodia’, *Journal of Archaeological Science* 31, 3 (2004): 319–36.

53 Reinecke et al., *The first golden age of Cambodia excavation at Prohear*.

54 Jacques, ‘Le pays Khmer avant Angkor’; Vickery, *Society, economics, and politics*.

reduced ceramic horizon. Similarly, there is continuity from the later proto-historic burials to the period associated with Bhavavarman I's family in Thala Borivat. The early transition from proto-historic to early historic ceramics in Angkor Borei (c.200 BCE–300 CE) may relate to a similar process of power consolidation among these *fan/poñ* rulers. Figure 2 illustrates Jayavarman's and Rudravarman's zone by linking inscriptions referencing their names, which overlap with the fine orangeware horizon of the Delta. The spatial relationship between proto-historic sites, *poñ-mratāñ* inscriptions, Pre-Angkorian temples, and the gradual transition and distribution of three ceramic traditions (reduced ware, fine orangeware, and fine buffware) all suggest the continuity of communities from the proto-historic to Pre-Angkorian periods.

Conclusion

This article explores the transition from proto-historic into the early historic or Pre-Angkorian period using comparative archaeological and historical data, and compares these general patterns against that data from the Thala Borivat region. Thala Borivat archaeological data, while not unique, offer new evidence of continuity from the proto-historic to the early historic or Pre-Angkorian period. From at least between c.1000–100 BCE, a series of prehistoric communities were located along the Mekong and the Se San rivers near Thala Borivat. Most of the sites are burial grounds, whose sizes suggest a site hierarchy clustered around the larger centres of O Trel and O Khlong. Reports from looters and the intensity of looting in both the latter sites imply that they contain more wealth (such as gold, bronze, and beads) than the smaller sites. Both sites produced sherds belonging to the fine orangeware tradition, likely from the Mekong Delta, which suggests long-distance interaction possibly via the river system. The Pre-Angkorian brick architecture or structures with Thala Borivat style lintels were built atop the largest proto-historic burials at O Trel. At O Khlong, the second largest site, the Ba Doem complex and other smaller temples are located nearby. There is no evidence, however, of a Pre-Angkorian temple being located close to the smaller proto-historic sites. It is argued that by c.300 to 500 CE, large proto-historic sites became much larger, possibly by absorbing smaller ones, and after 500 CE they were centred around a temple cluster such as Thala Borivat and Ba Doem. The model constructed based on the Thala Borivat archaeological data explains similar trends in northeast Thailand and the Mekong Delta, where only some of the proto-historic sites became Pre-Angkorian centres with brick monuments built on or near them, while other sites provide no evidence of continuity.

No direct historical evidence links proto-historic elites with Pre-Angkorian elites, in part because the former did not leave a documentary record. A substantial gap also characterises the transition from the last known *fan* of Funan (285 CE) and the first appearance of *poñ-mratāñ* in inscriptions (the earliest dated Khmer inscription is 611 CE). However, continuity and gradual change characterise the ceramic technology at both Angkor Borei and Thala Borivat. The overlapping location of proto-historic sites, Pre-Angkorian inscriptions mentioning *poñ* and *mratañ*, and those mentioning the Pre-Angkorian kings also suggest the same pattern of continuity and gradual change.

It is argued here that a series of proto-historic complex societies or chiefdoms, likely associated with *poñ*-ship, predate references to 'Indianisation'. The shared reduced ceramic tradition of the proto-historic communities across modern-day

northeast Thailand, Cambodia, and southern Vietnam suggests that they were already in contact. The transition period in the Mekong Delta coincides with the distribution of fine orangeware, which overlaps the distribution of inscriptions mentioning Jayavarman and Rudravarman of Funan. As intra- and inter-regional interactions increased, smaller proto-historic communities were absorbed into larger ones and eventually became Pre-Angkorian politico-economic centres. The locations of the early Zhenla kings Bhavavarman I and Citrasena-Mahendravarman overlap with the reduced ceramic horizon of the proto-historic period. This pattern may be associated with the consolidation of the Pre-Angkorian kings at the expense of other proto-historic societies. The timeframe also accords with the distribution of the fine buffware horizon and the formation of Pre-Angkorian regional centres. The association with ‘Indianisation’ occurred at a later stage and coincided with the expansion of rulers with Indian religious associations and their temples. The construction of the Pre-Angkorian temples atop some of the proto-historic burials also implies such continuity, possibly suggesting a merging of ancestral worship practices with Indian religious traditions. The co-occurrence of *poñ-mratāñ* inscriptions with proto-historic and Pre-Angkorian sites also suggests the continuity of elites and local communities. Likewise, the co-occurrence of the Pre-Angkorian kings’ inscriptions with both the *poñ-mratāñ* inscriptions and the proto-historic sites suggests that some of the regional elites, who declared themselves kings, were consolidating their power among these proto-historic communities to form larger and more complex Pre-Angkorian polities.