

FIG. 4  
My Son E1 pedestal, 7th century.



FIG. 5  
Sambor Prei Kuk, temple S2,  
7th century.



womb chambers of the contemporary temples of India, which contain only the primary object of devotion resting directly on the stone floor, some of the temples of Champa featured a large elaborate pedestal upon which the *linga* or other central image rested. My Son E1, the earliest extant temple, contained one of these pedestals (fig. 4 and fig. 10, for another example), which was carved with reliefs of ascetics set in niches.

These pedestals, often with motifs found also on the exterior base of the Cham temple, are distinctive in their realization, even if the decorative motifs adorning them may be akin to the decor found elsewhere in Cham art, and their form deserves attention. Nothing comparable exists in Indian temples. Still, Indian influence is apparent in the reliance on Indian texts and in certain of the motifs. Pierre Baptiste has pointed out that textual references in the *Silpashastras* emphasize the importance of the seat of the god, endowing the base, or support of the god, with almost as much importance as the god itself.<sup>16</sup> The Cham may have taken the texts very literally, and as a result, placed greater emphasis on the bases than had been done in India. Yet the prominence given the pedestals suggests they were chosen either because they conformed with some practice in the indigenous religion and were reworked in this Hindu-Buddhist context, or that influences from somewhere other than India have been incorporated.

The closest parallel with a temple of contemporary date for the My Son E1 altar is at the Cambodian site of Sambor Prei Kuk (Kompong Thom Province). Located inland near the Mekong River, Sambor is in the vicinity of the overland trading routes that wound over the mountains and down the rivers of Cambodia, routes which connected coastal Champa to the hinterland and the borders of (present-day) Cambodia.<sup>17</sup> This early Khmer trading center supported numerous temples that French archaeologists cleared and partially restored in the early part of the twentieth century. One small temple (numbered S2 by the French), which according to an inscription originally held a silver image of the bull Nandi, faces a larger Shaivite temple. It is notable for its large platform with a stone dais supported by four pillars that dominates the small interior space of the Nandi temple, a configuration that suggests a temple within a temple, a theme explored by Baptiste, who draws parallels between the My Son E1 pedestal, which may have had a wooden baldachin constructed above it (fig. 5). The pedestal itself was carved during the same period as the My Son E1 pedestal. Yet stylistic similarities do not explain why either the Khmer or the Cham emphasized this particular element of the temple. While the answer may lie in Indian texts, as Baptiste suggests, the reasons for the choice may lie elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>

Given the Chinese and Vietnamese presence bordering the northern Champa territories, one must consider their influence, but a source does not seem to exist. The Malay world, of which the Cham, as Austronesian peoples, were a part, is another possibility, as they share religious practices, such as a reverence for ancestors. Island cultures less affected by the Indian religions and still following indigenous beliefs, and with whom the Cham had continuing contact, may provide clues. Some of the Indonesian islands retain practices today that may relate, though nothing exactly comparable exists. A great deal of importance, however, is placed on tombs, or on platforms where ancestor figures were placed. East Sumba provides an example, as nobles were privileged to erect stone tombs (a flat slab like a table on four stone legs) and a commemorative carving (*penji*) shaped like an unfurling fern.<sup>19</sup> Stone platforms have also traditionally been constructed for images of ancestors.<sup>20</sup>