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SPECIAL ISSUE: CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:
COLLABORATION, ENGAGEMENT, AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN
FIELD RESEARCH



De-exoticizing Cambodia's archaeology through community engagement*

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ABSTRACT

French colonizers introduced archaeology to Cambodia with the emphasis on the restoration of Angkor monuments. The Cambodian public's perception of archaeology as a field of the exotic, populated exclusively with international researchers, is fuelled by misconceptions of the discipline. Public awareness is hindered by the lack of heritage education outreach and human resources, and the excessive focus on Angkor. In this paper we argue that the recent increase in the visibility of archaeology through its expansion beyond the Angkor region, public outreach efforts, the rise of social media, and dedicated community engagement has helped de-exoticize Cambodian archaeology and make it meaningful to communities beyond other archaeologists, looters, or hired labourers for international research. Community members participating in archaeological research can serve as valuable mediators who convey the objectives of archaeological research and its *raison d'être* to their communities as part of the process.

KEYWORDS

Public archaeology; capacity building; heritage management; colonial archaeology; Cambodia

... the nature of archaeological research is shaped to a significant degree by the roles that particular nation states play, economically, politically, and culturally, as interdependent parts of the modern world-system (Trigger 1984, 356)

French colonists introduced archaeology to Cambodia with a focus on restoration of Angkor monuments. The nineteenth century was a troubled period for Cambodia, where internal power struggles and occupations by regional rivals Siam and Vietnam decimated socio-political stability, demography, and economy across the country. The French protectorate in 1863 quickly followed a decade of peace and ended the tributary relationship between Cambodia and its neighbours (Chandler 2008, 141–85). The introduction of archaeology coincided with colonial efforts in modernizing and rebuilding Cambodia, largely to facilitate and increase tax revenues. Colonial officials and the Cambodian elites considered archaeology and restoration as a means to rebuild Cambodia to its former glory (e.g. Edwards 2007; Abbe 2015; Falser 2015b). The efforts also provided legitimacy to the French protectorate as saviour of the lost civilization of Angkor. The political aspects of archaeology's top-down approach oversaw the secularization process of Cambodian temples to create outdoor museums. This process, paired with the lack of public engagement, continues to shape public perception of archaeology as an exotic discipline incompatible with Cambodian traditional

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practices. This paper explores the relationship between the public and archaeology through the latter's history and practices of heritage secularization and research as well as through the responses from both parties to site destruction. We argue that incorporating public perceptions and worldviews through community archaeology provides a constructive venue for future research and helps to de-exoticize archaeology in the public perception.

Cambodia's archaeology

A colonial beginning

The nineteenth-century publication of French naturalist Henri Mouhot's travels in Angkor inspired a series of colonial explorations of Cambodia's monuments by French colonial officials (e.g. Doudart de Lagrée and Villemereuil 1883; Garnier 1885; Pavie 1898). Cambodia's archaeology officially began under the French protectorate (1863–1953) with a series of inventory surveys and removal of statuary for colonial exhibitions in Saigon and Paris (e.g. Garnier 1885; Aymonier 1900, 1901, 1904; Lajonquière 1902, 1907, 1911; Baptiste 2018). Provincial French protectorate residents collected statues from temples located within their administration. Many of these objects were eventually sent to the Musée Khmer in Phnom Penh and later transferred to the current National Museum (Abbe 2015, 132–37). This statuary removal was not without controversy. King Norodom equated statuary removal to the destruction of Cambodian laws, customs, and religion; however, no action was taken against such removal (Edwards 2007, 127). Cambodians continue to patronize many of the same temples that the colonial explorers and conservators deemed 'abandoned' or neglected (and consumed by forests). Some of these monuments, especially Angkor Wat, were living Buddhist temples while others were abodes of powerful spirits (Neakta) with whom forests and temples are traditionally associated (e.g. Ang 1995; Thompson 1998; Luco 2013; Warrack 2013). Colonial understandings of temple 'abandonment' contributed to desacralize the living aspects of Angkor in French plans to create an archaeological park, reflecting contemporary European conservation ethics (Edwards 2007; Falser 2013; Murphy 2018). These efforts included relocating Cambodian inhabitants and an entire Buddhist pagoda located in the Angkor Wat enclosure (Miura 2011a, 132–37; Luco 2013, 260).

Most archaeological research from 1908 to 1972 was conducted by the Conservation d'Angkor as part of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO). Substantial conservation and research funding from 1908 to 1954 came directly from the Cambodian government and its Khmer elites with *corvée* labour and donations funnelled through the Société d'Angkor (Edwards 2007, 141). Even after independence in 1953, Cambodia entrusted EFEO with conservation, restoration, and archaeological research responsibilities at Angkor, along with direction of the National Museum (previously, Musée Albert Sarraut) in Phnom Penh. Conservation d'Angkor's work concentrated primarily in the Angkor Region, while a few minor projects took place in Sambor Prei Kuk, Memot, Bayang, and Asram Maha Rosei [Reussei] (see Albrecht et al. 2000; Heng 2012; Malleret 1959; Mauger 1936, 1937).

Archaeological training

No formal advanced archaeological training was offered to Cambodians during the French colonial period. The Faculty of Archaeology was established in 1965 as part of the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) (Carter et al. 2014; Muan 2001, 319–30; Stark and Heng 2017). The RUFA Archaeology program was designed to produce staff for the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MoCFA) regional offices, where staff documented and conserved archaeological sites outside the Angkor region (Pich Keo, pers. com. 2014). Some EFEO members also trained RUFA Archaeology students in ethnology, art history, history, epigraphy, and conservation. Cambodian archaeology students participated in a series of fieldwork projects (notably excavations of the prehistoric Laang Spean site in Battambang Province with Roland Mourer). Other students studied Buddhism with André Bateau, art history with Madeleine Giteau, and epigraphy with Claude Jacques (e.g. Choan and Sarin 1970;

Faculté Royale d'Archéologie de Phnom Penh and Bareau 1969; Mourer and Mourer 1970; Pich Keo and Chuch Phoeurn, pers. com. 2014).

The onset of the Second Indochina War interrupted Cambodian archaeology and heritage management. The encroaching war on Cambodia forced French Angkor Conservator Bernard-Philippe Groslier to leave the country in 1972 (Drège, Bernon, and Josso 2003, 31; Clémentin-Ojha and Manguin 2007, 60–61, 101). These institutions remained closed during the subsequent Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979), where most archaeological professionals perished under the regime. A handful of surviving archaeologists were placed in charge of the Conservation d'Angkor, the National Museum, and the Royal Palace Museum in the post-Khmer Rouge 1980s. Pich Keo was reinstated as director of the Conservation d'Angkor, a position he held from 1972–1975. Urgent tasks included clearing trees and monitoring looting in the Angkor Archaeological Park, targeted by looters after 1979. Many statues were collected and stored at the Conservation d'Angkor, the Royal Palace, and the National Museum in response to rampant looting. Local Khmer populations considered some of these statues sacred, including Preah Ang Kok Thlok, a seated Buddha statue located to the west of Bayon, and Ta Reach, an eight-armed Vishnu of Angkor Wat's western gate. Unbeknownst to many, administrators placed cement replicas of these images in the temples to protect the original objects from looting (Pich Keo, pers. com. 2014).

The Faculty of Archaeology reopened in 1989, using the pre-Khmer Rouge era curriculum taught by a handful of surviving archaeologists. The 1990s saw Cambodia's archaeology revive with assistance from various international projects including EFEO, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, University of Tübingen (Germany), a sustained UNESCO training program (1997–2005), as well as other conservation projects in Angkor (Thomson 2007; Marui 2010; Heng and Phon 2017). In 1992, Angkor was awarded UNESCO world heritage status under the management of APSARA (Autorité Pour la Protection et l'Aménagement de la Région d'Angkor), which attracted multiple international conservation projects (Ang et al. 1998; Vann 2002). These projects have provided capacity building for RUFA students and recent graduates to participate in their fieldwork and created a new generation of archaeologists with diverse theoretical and methodological approaches to archaeology and conservation (Stark and Heng 2017). The research projects, some of which are Cambodian-run, associated with the post-war RUFA have also expanded outside of Angkor to other parts of Cambodia. The following sections outline approaches to public engagement from the beginning of archaeology to the contemporary practices.

Archaeology and public perception

Conventional Cambodian approaches to conservation and archaeological heritage management are top-down from the colonial to post-colonial periods. France's 'mission civilisatrice' focused on monument restoration and preservation and re-invented Khmer art in an Angkorian style as means to preserve Cambodia's identity and to restore Cambodia to its glorious past (Edwards 2007; Abbe 2015, 131; Falser 2015b). The Conservation d'Angkor, the École des Arts Cambodgiens, the National Museum in Phnom Penh (NMC), and Wat Po Veal in Battambang were founded by the protectorate and Cambodian governments (Dauge 1997, 169; Clémentin-Ojha and Manguin 2007, 223–224; Abbe 2015). Public involvement was done through paid labour, museums, and later through public education.

Suspicion that archaeologists collude with local officials to loot treasure thrives among the Cambodian public for several reasons: large-scale statuary removals for safekeeping, restricted access to regional museum and storage facilities, and lack of communication between communities and archaeological professionals. For instance, a court poet, Suttantaprija In (1967, 87), who accompanied king Sisowath to Angkor in 1909, claimed that Jean Commaille, director of the Angkor Conservation, looted statues made of gold and silver allegedly stored in the Angkor Wat central tower. Similar suspicion and accusations continue today. In 2017, villagers in Kampong Chhnang barred officials from taking a statue to the local repository (Soth and Reddick 2017).

Cambodian kings, Khmer elites, and French colonials worked together to establish Angkor Conservation and the National Museum, with little public knowledge. This lack of knowledge-dissemination to the public continues to cause public suspicion that archaeology and conservation are means that French and the Cambodian elites use to loot heritage. Additionally, the secularization of the Angkor Archaeological Park, the outdoor exhibit of the lost civilization and its picturesque ruins, has continued to affect the relationship between communities and conservators (e.g. Miura 2001, 2002, 2005, 2011a; Luco 2005, 2013; Warrack 2013; Falser 2015a, 2015b). The foregoing begs the question of how Cambodians see institutional research and conservation in the context of non-institutional looting. Is it a question of who has the right to benefit from antiquities?

Looting and public education

Until recently, most public engagement with archaeology in Cambodia was through looting and heritage destruction. Looted sites and artefacts through the media not only trigger countermeasures from state institutions and archaeologists, they also inform the public about heritage. Since the 1880s, colonial archaeologists have reported small scale looting at various sites including Samrong Sen, Stung Treng, and Angkor Borei (Aymonier 1900; Lajonquière 1902; Parmentier 1927). Large-scale looting occurred mainly during the conflict period (1970–1998) when statuary and wall carvings were smuggled out and populated private collections and museums in other countries (e.g. Lafont 2004; Davis and Mackenzie 2014; Mackenzie and Davis 2014; Hardy 2015). Poverty, lack of education, and a weakened connection with the prehistoric past—particularly to prehistoric sites—are major factors in Cambodia's heritage destruction. Education in Cambodian perception covers both formal education as well as morality and tradition, reflecting its history in Buddhist temples. Informal interviews (conducted during archaeological fieldwork in northwest, central, and southern Cambodia between 1997–2005) suggest that Cambodians often regard looters as having low morals and antagonistic attitudes to the Cambodian spiritual cosmology. The untimely or painful death or poverty of such individuals is attributed to the revenge of the spirits. But wealth and power during an unstable period generally supersede morality or superstition (Lafont 2004, 61–66). The desecration of religious beliefs during the war along with 'ritualcide,' the prevention of religious practice by the Khmer Rouge (LeVine 2010; Ledgerwood 2012), contributed to desacralizing ancient statues and temples, a catalyst to rampant looting across Cambodia. Furthermore, the focus on heritage promotes education to revolve around large temples like Angkor Wat or Bayon while smaller and rural temples receive less attention.

Recent efforts by both national and international projects to solve the heritage destruction crisis often concentrate on heritage education and heritage economy. These include on-site presentation during an excavation, heritage education campaigns, site museums, poverty reduction, and community empowerment projects through tourism. The incentive for such approaches is to raise awareness among the local communities—particularly school students, local officials, and monks—of the values of heritage. The common themes reflect heritage as the source of the Cambodian nation (equating looting with treason), that heritage is imbued with supernatural power described in Angkorian imprecations that form part of stone inscriptions, and that heritage has economic value to help alleviate community poverty through tourism. Poverty-reduction initiatives involve fostering a sustainable local economy through agricultural diversification and/or the tourist industry (e.g. Sullivan and Mackay 2008; O'Reilly 2014; ADF 2016; Hang Peou, Tianhua, and Philippe 2016). These projects have been supported entirely by international funding agencies, such as the Friends of Khmer Culture, Center for Khmer Studies, Ford Motor Foundation, and the US Embassy. Emboldened with support from international scholars and funding agencies, well-trained archaeologists in Cambodia have experimented with another solution to vandalism: the site museum. The site museum functions as both a repository for looted and excavated artefacts as well as an education centre and tourist attraction, infusing extra income to the local economy and possibly putting a stop to looting. Current site museums include Memot, Angkor Borei, Svay Chek, Phum Snay, Kok Patri (open site museum), Tani, and Sre Ampil (government-sponsored museums are excluded).



Heritage organizations target local communities in these many and varied efforts, but rarely focus on looters themselves. Looting commonly involves complex networks of outsiders, middlemen, and buyers, sometimes with military protection (Lafont 2004; Mackenzie and Davis 2014; O'Reilly 2014). These site museums remain closed year-round, due to lack of sustainable human resources and funding to either staff the museum or engage neighbouring communities and students. Only Angkor Borei remains successful, due to its proximity to Phnom Penh and its role as a local government institution. This site and museum are the only options for tourists visiting the nearby temples of Phnom Da and Asram Maha Reusei. Artefacts housed in the Angkor Borei museum are second only to those displayed by the National Museum in exhibits on the Funan civilization of the Mekong Delta. Additionally, the Angkor Borei museum has been incorporated into the local MoCFA district office, which has provided full-time personnel since the museum's opening. Other museums have not received the same support because they are located far from MoCFA regional offices and outside of the tourist attraction area. Local visitors are mostly students and their teachers; the remainder of the community remains unfamiliar with the museum and its purpose.

Local site museums across Cambodia rarely function as more than storage sites due to a lack of sustainable financial and/or governmental support. The top-down approach to heritage preservation, such as a secular museum or artefact warehouse, has been less effective in reaching the general public. Temples and their statues are living objects of worship providing communal spaces for reunion and celebration. Pagodas traditionally played an important role in curating these objects, as it is the only suitable place for an object embodying supernatural power. The perception of archaeology and conservation as exotic activities have disengaged the public from the disciplines. Incorporating Cambodian perceptions of heritage into preservation projects could yield more successful outcomes. The following sections highlight the different perceptions of heritage and possible solutions.

Conservation in antiquity

Angkorian Khmers associated heritage with religious practices and ancient objects with spirituality back to the Angkorian period. A 10th-century inscription of K.111 described the restoration of ten Buddha statues, including a Lokesvara (Coedès 1954, 6:195–211). The 16th- and seventeenth-century inscriptions at Angkor Wat described how royal patronage supported the completion of the northeast gallery bas-reliefs and restored its nine towers (Thompson 2004, 205). Other inscriptions from this period detail religious merit associated with the restorations of Buddha statues, some of which have been documented by modern conservators (Warrack 2013). The period between the 14th and 17th centuries saw the modification of Angkorian and (rarely) pre-Angkorian temples to accommodate Theravada Buddhism; these include the transformation of the Wat Nokor central tower into a stupa (Parmentier 1916; Giteau 1967; Polkinghorne, Pottier, and Fischer 2013; Leroy et al. 2015).

These are few examples of Cambodian temples as living sacred spaces. The creation of Angkor Park and the secularization of Cambodian temples and statuary were sources of conflict between archaeology and the public that persist to this day. It is unclear to what extent the Cambodian elites of the early twentieth century knew of the scope and measure associated with heritage conservation when they intentionally excluded Wat Phnom, the royal mausoleum at Oudong, and the Royal Palace (all viewed as sacred places for the royal family), from the first heritage inventory (Clémentin-Ojha and Manguin 2007, 82). Was desacralization the main reason for this exclusion? Similarly, in heritage management and museological practice today, archaeologists and conservators rely on storing artefacts in the museum or repository for safeguarding. Villagers, however, regard heritage (artefacts and temples) as having supernatural power, the source of rain and protection and subjects of reverence, which should be left in situ or deposited in spirit houses or pagodas to avoid misfortune. Contemporary Buddhist and spirit rituals are being held in association with temples (Figures 1 and 2). Visitors may encounter flowers and incense being offered to statuary in Cambodia's museums.

During the 1980s, villagers from around Angkor were allowed to worship statues of their Neakta collected for safeguarding at the Conservation d'Angkor during the New Year festival (Pich Keo, pers. com. 2014).

These examples suggest that the value of heritage is not necessarily its age, but rather its perceived supernatural power or the role it plays in ritual engagements between people.

Recent urban and infrastructural development

Rapid economic development since 1995, including population growth and urbanization, also shape the Cambodian public's view of archaeology and heritage management. Economic and population growth have contributed to urban and rural expansion into previously unoccupied lands (Neef and Touch 2012; Neef, Touch, and Chienthong 2013). From 1998 to 2017, the total population of the country has increased by 38%. During the same period, the population of Phnom Penh grew around 63%, while the urban area expanded around 80% (Baker et al. 2017; The World Bank 2018). Archaeological sites including Cheung Ek and Sre Ampil have fallen prey to this phenomenon (Phon 2002, 2011; Phon et al. 2013; Voeun 2015). Similar trends occur around Angkor where the urban centre has expanded into the archaeological park due to the booming tourist industry (Fletcher et al. 2007; Winter 2007b; Ourng et al. 2011; Miura 2011b; Gillespie 2013). Nonetheless, the heritage management framework that undermines the living aspects of Angkor continues to affect the livelihoods of the communities located within the protection zone. This practice involves limitations on house construction, modifications, and land tenure in ancient villages as well as access to ritual activities in Angkor as the government considers these communities to be relics of the past subject to preservation instead of development (e.g. Gillespie 2009; Luco 2013; Miura 2005, 2011a).

Infrastructure construction, plantations, land grabs, and the lack of legal protection result in the destruction of many archaeological sites. One development aspect involves demolishing old Buddhist pagodas to replace them with newer, larger ones. Efforts by archaeologists to curb this practice produce mixed results. This recent trend extends beyond Angkor and reinforces the public perception of archaeology and heritage management as anti-development. From prehistoric burials to pre-



Figure 1. A Buddhist Kathina Ritual in front of Prasat Lolei in 2017 (credit Ou Kongkea).



Figure 2. The Neakta ceremony inside the main hall of Prasat Wat Athvea in 2016 (credit Ou Kongkea).

Angkorian and Angkorian centres like Angkor and Angkor Borei, to the demolition of decades-old Buddhist pagodas, the antagonistic relationship between the public and preservation continues. The previous sections identify secularization, the top-down heritage management approach, lack of public access, and development as the main reasons hindering public engagement with archaeology. In the following sections we argue that Cambodia's archaeology remains a colonial and top-down activity, largely due to a lack of public involvement because of the current practice in Cambodian archaeology.

Legacy of colonial archaeology and future direction of Cambodia's archaeology

Archaeology following the colonial period often serves nationalist agendas (Trigger 1984, 358–60). Cambodia's relationship with archaeology is complex as it remains a colonial invention associated with the 'mission civilisatrice' to return to the glorified Angkorian past. Colonial restoration efforts at Angkor represented the restoration of Cambodia itself through international recognition. Post-colonial Cambodia adopted colonial archaeology as a mean to restore itself, as opposed to a nationalized archaeology in response to colonialism, as seen in Vietnam (Glover 2004, 68–69). Archaeology in Cambodia is considered an elite and foreign enterprise rooted in elite and government circles. The UNESCO intervention in Angkor helps cement this perception through involvement with dozens of international projects presenting their ground-breaking work. This association explains the public view that archaeology, heritage management, and history are exotic practices. Thus, Cambodian archaeologists and conservators are often regarded as working for the foreigners, and inferior to their international partners. Can Cambodia's archaeology be decolonized to embrace a genuinely Cambodian worldview while addressing archaeological inquiries?

Collaborative archaeology

Archaeology operates within and is influenced by its socio-political context. Theory within the discipline maintains that heritage is socially constructed, shaped, and reshaped by various stakeholders with different goals, values, and worldviews (e.g. Trigger 1984; Colwell 2016). The current socio-political and economic realities in Cambodia embrace international cooperation through UNESCO; heritage is living sacred space, national identity, and pride, and recently, heritage is a driver of economic growth where the tourism industry contributed 32.4% to Cambodia's GDP in 2017 (OECD 2018, 198). The restoration of heritage has been associated with peace, political stability, economic growth, and territorial integrity. In fact, a similar process occurred during the 16th century associated with the re-establishment at Angkor as the political centre and the restoration of Angkor Wat by post-Angkorian monarchs (Thompson 2004, 205). Undoubtedly, this association has been favourable for Cambodia's international politics in that these disciplines bolster Cambodia's territorial claims against neighbouring countries, and legitimize successive governments from the French Protectorate, Khmer Rouge, and the post-Khmer Rouge Vietnamese-backed government, to the current government (Wagener 2011; Luco 2013; Locard 2015; Falser 2015b; Heng and Phon 2017; Stark and Heng 2017).

Recent methodological and theoretical inquiries in collaborative/public or community archaeology could provide viable frameworks for the future of Cambodia's archaeology (e.g. Acabado and Martin 2020; Acabado, Martin, and Datar 2017; Ang, Loooram, and Chimalapati 2020; Atalay 2012; Colwell 2016; Lertcharnrit and Niyomsap 2020; Nicholas et al. 2011; Stark 2020). The practice of collaborative/community archaeology is variably defined by the local socio-political contexts of the research (Thomas 2017, 17–18). Collaborative archaeology strives to incorporate stakeholders' concerns, worldview, capacity building, outreach, and alternative heritage management strategies into the overall research design. Individual and community involvement help decolonize archaeology (González-Ruibal, González, and Criado-Boado 2018). Ethical heritage engagement with all stakeholders is considered a human rights issue, by which the 'authorized heritage discourse' put forward by the government and/or selected group of experts is being decentralized or democratized (e.g. Ireland and Schofield 2015).

Since the 'mission civilisatrice' is entrenched in the Cambodian perception, the best way to accommodate collaborative archaeology is to modify it to incorporate local ways of heritage consumption into archaeological research and heritage management. This approach may convince the public that archaeology not only seeks to address academic problems but also shares the public's perspectives on heritage. The following sections offer suggestions on the future directions of Cambodia's archaeology.

The 'mission civilisatrice' and adaptation to Cambodian heritage consumption

Cambodian archaeology may be a relic of colonialism, but Khmers have viewed Angkor as sacred since its 12th-century CE establishment (Groslier 1985; Thompson 2004). Archaeologists and heritage specialists acknowledge this sacred quality. Many projects embrace blessing rituals that involve monks or achar (priests) from neighbouring pagodas to open and close their excavation and restoration projects (e.g. Lewis 2017; Wallace 2018). A successful example is the restoration of Ta Reach, an eight-armed Vishnu of the Angkor Wat western entrance. The Khmers regard Ta Reach as the most powerful spirit in Siem Reap, whose function is that of protector and wish granter (Warrack 2013). Worshippers offer flowers, incenses and food offerings, clothing, live or dead animals (mostly chickens and pigs, live turtles and, in one case, a baby crocodile found in the moat), and a traditional music band performance. The last offering is rare today because a permit is required. The restoration of this statue is seen by the local villagers as the returning of the soul and power, which by extension brings prosperity to the worshippers.

Practicing such rituals has precedent: the head monk of Wat Changkran Taproh (Phnom Penh) funded the restoration of the Tep Pranam Buddha (Angkor Thom) in 1950. Henri Marchal, the

conservator, was so impressed by both the celebration ritual and charity that he sent a letter with photographs of this Buddha restoration to the International Buddhist Brotherhood, the Maha Bodhi (Conservation d'Angkor 1950). Recent examples include the restorations of Banteay Chhmar's Avalokitesvara bas-reliefs by the Conservation d'Angkor, funded by a Cambodian elite charity. A sandstone altar consisting of a candle and incense holder and a large bowl of water have been placed in front of this bas-relief to receive blessings. The restoration of the monumental Buddha statues of Preah Chatumukh in Preah Khan of Kampong Svay in 2018 was also funded by a charity headed by another Cambodian high-ranking official (Figure 3). In both cases, religious merit has been the driving factor. This practice had its roots at least since the 16th–seventeenth century CE, of which the best example is the restoration of Angkor Wat by a post-Angkorian monarch in 1577 CE (Thompson 2004, 204–5).

Consumption of sacred space and nation building

It is within this sacred aspect that Cambodians engage with archaeological sites, from collapsed bricks from temple structures, to a large temple complex like Angkor. Political stability and economic growth have attracted Cambodians from other provinces to Angkor during the major festivals such as the Khmer New Year and the Festival of the Dead (Pchum Ben). Picnics, site seeing, worshipping, bathing in the river or the Baray, playing games, driving, exercising, chatting with friends, or visiting newly restored temples in Angkor are forms of heritage consumption among the Cambodians (see also Winter 2007a). Outside of the occasional visits to the temples, in late afternoon, local people from Siem Reap snack, picnic, exercise, or drive around in Angkor with friends and families. Areas around the Angkor Wat moat and the Royal Plaza in Angkor Thom have become popular hot



Figure 3. Preah Chatumukh in Preah Khan Kampong Svay after restoration in 2018 (credit Mang Vally).

spots for such activities. Recent regulations, however, citing sanitation and the dying grass lawn, have prompted people to go elsewhere (e.g. Apsara National Authority 2017; Mom 2017; Pech 2019; Sen 2019). The practice again reflects the conservation framework of a 'picturesque' archaeological park dictating the relationship between people and heritage. Similar practices also affect tourism and local communities in other world Heritage Sites (e.g. Bourdeau, Gravari-Barbas, and Robinson 2017).

The 'mission civilisatrice' reinforces a complicated relationship between archaeology and the public and continues to shape the course of modern Cambodia. For instance, the inspiration of the Angkor period under the government of the late king, Norodom Sihanouk, in the 1960s marked a period of peace and stability, which most Cambodians regard as a golden age in recent memory (Ross and Collins 2006; Ross 2015). The late king's portrayal of Angkor in films and magazines is another form of civilizing mission or political propaganda; yet it received a warm reception among Cambodians. A recent example is the 'Angkor Sangkranta,' a major New Year event in Angkor organized by the ruling party's Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia (e.g. Pengly 2015; Cheap 2016; Meyn 2016; Chea 2018). Founded in 2013, this event aims to showcase Cambodia's culture, to attract international and national tourists, and most importantly, to project political stability and economic growth. It hosts a series of exhibitions featuring the traditional martial arts, chess competitions, processes of temple restoration, a larger-than-life sized chapei (two-string guitar), etc. A suit of Guinness World Records also challenged during this event. In 2015, the largest synchronized mass dance (Madison) was performed and the largest sticky rice cake was baked. And in 2018, weavers produced the world's largest hand-woven scarf. These spectacles, strategically placed in front of Angkor Wat, both boost Cambodian's national pride and place their country on another world stage, adding to Angkor's World Heritage status.

Angkor is both national symbol and pilgrimage centre, a living heritage that continues to be shaped by contemporary socio-political contexts. The Khmers continue to interact with their heritage and its surrounding landscape through both sacred and secular activities. These interactions with, and experience of heritage, should thus be cultivated and transformed, not dictated, to raise awareness among the public.

Media and public outreach

The romanticized paintings of Angkor championed by Louis Delaporte remain influential among Cambodian artists and audience. Artistic reconstruction helps to bridge Cambodian and international audiences' imagination of the past, as academic research is often too alien to the public. For instance, the 3D animation of daily lives in Angkor and lidar animations of 'lost cities,' continue to receive incredible national and international media coverage (e.g. Lawrie 2014; Chandler and Polkinghorne 2016; Dunston 2016; Chandler et al. 2017; Wallace 2018). Just across the street from the open-site museum of Kok Patri lies a major tourist attraction to Siem Reap: the Cambodian Cultural Village, a miniature version of Cambodia (e.g. Ollier and Winter 2006, 3–5). This facility features different customs and traditions in Cambodia through replicas and a wax museum, and is popular among both local and international visitors. The opportunity to experience their living culture, not a lost one, with a live performance and a complete temple, draws in many Cambodians.

The controversial demolition of a 70-year-old vihara in Kampong Thom by the local monks attracted harsh public backlash on social media (Rinith 2017). Nonetheless, the outcome of this backlash is the country-wide registration of old pagodas and required demolition approval from MoCFA (Inter-ministerial directive number 01SRC dated 15 November 2017 issued by MoCFA and Ministry of Cult and Religion; Communiqué issued by the National Monk Committee number 032/20SNKC dated 17 January 2020). Perhaps one of the best solutions to this problem is to follow part of the 'mission civilisatrice' and art aesthetic introduced by George Groslier (Muan 2001; Abbe 2015). This involves convincing the public that an international conservation and restoration standard is the best



Figure 4. Restoration team of Wat Moha Leap in 2007 (credit Khom Sreymom).

approach to restore their temples and culture. The recent MoCFA's restoration of Wat Moha Leap, a 100-year-old pagoda in Kampong Cham, could serve as a role model for such an approach. The restoration concept was to reveal the original structure and designs by exposing the original gilded gold leaves and replacing missing parts (paint or wooden structure) with the same or similar materials (Ang, Ngov, and Seang 2018) (Figure 4).

In a similar way, hiring of local labourers by the research project, a continuing tradition from the Conservation d'Angkor, has been the most successful component of public outreach in the form of participation. Their initial suspicion (that archaeologists look for gold and other treasure) is challenged upon realization that the most common artefacts are seemingly useless ceramic sherds, bones, and charcoal, and that excavation is a slow and careful process costing more than the market value of the artefacts collected. Curious villagers are more likely to approach laborers, who may be their trusted neighbours, to ask about the project, instead of talking to outsiders. These labourers help bridge the information gap between archaeologists and the communities.

Lastly, TV, radio, newspaper, and social media's recent coverage of ongoing excavation has been generally well-received among the public. This is especially important for those who are illiterate and acquire news through TV. For example, the airing of the excavation of the prehistoric site at Kbal Spean (co-directed by Sophady Heng) on national TV has become so influential that the term 'excavation' is now understood to be a very slow process different from 'digging' for loot. Similarly, media coverage of recent legal cases in the United States, particularly against Sotheby's International Realty, has nourished awareness within the Cambodian media and public (e.g. BBC 2014, 2016; Mashberg and Blumenthal 2017; Touch and Sassoon 2017). Social media has become the main public outreach in Cambodia where, in 2018, over 6.8 million people (about 42% of the nation's population) have access to Facebook (Fuentes 2018). Cambodian politicians and governmental ministries, including MoCFA and APSARA, continue to disseminate their information through Facebook. It is through this platform that news of excavations, 'new' temples, and

restoration and heritage destruction are widely shared. Social media provides another approach to reach the public.

Conclusions

Relationships between heritage and the Cambodian public have always mattered, and colonial perceptions continue to structure Cambodian archaeology. Engagement with communities would offer a more sustainable and fair strategy to the top-down approach to heritage management as well as to archaeology and secularization of heritage that characterizes contemporary Cambodian heritage management. Lack of adequate public communication and involvement exacerbate the situation. While this approach has been beneficial to the construction of modern Cambodia, the political and economic relationships between Cambodians and their government has changed. The top-down approach is no longer suitable for contemporary Cambodia as it does not meet the needs of the Cambodian people nor of their heritage sites.

In this paper we argue that incorporating public perspectives into the archaeological research and heritage management framework will attract greater public involvement. These include incorporating into research and management frameworks Cambodian perceptions of sacred heritage and secular interaction with heritage localities. This incorporation is necessary to maintain meaningful bonds for Cambodians between the past and the present and promises to offer a shared goal between archaeologists and the public. This approach helps to de-exoticize archaeology as solely a foreign or elite enterprise and offers a sustainable framework that forges collaboration between the public and local and international archaeologists.

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