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Post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, Archaeology in

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Introduction

Archaeology in Cambodia has grown exponentially since the end of the Khmer Rouge period and the establishment of the Paris Peace Agreement of 1991. Several institutions are responsible for overseeing this growth including the APSARA Authority, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MOCFA), the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), and more recently the Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC). This entry discusses the roles these institutions have played in the revival of archaeological research in Cambodia, Cambodian perspectives on the advance of archaeology in their country, and suggestions for future goals of archaeological research in Cambodia.

Historical Background

Cambodian arts and culture were reinvigorated in 1953 when Cambodia received independence. One focus of this period was an attempt to understand and define "modern Khmer culture" (Daravuth & Muan 2001). In 1965, the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) was established in Phnom Penh as the first truly Cambodian university and included a Faculty of Archaeology

staffed by Cambodian instructors that had studied and trained in France (Daravuth & Muan 2001). By 1971, plans were made for the construction of a large conference hall and space for a library, classrooms, and research center on an expanded Royal University of Fine Arts campus (Key 2001 [1971]). Unfortunately, these plans were not implemented due to the civil war and the fall of Phnom Penh to Khmer Rouge soldiers in 1975. Only three Cambodian archaeologists in Cambodia survived the Khmer Rouge period (Griffin et al. 1999).

Key Issues

As archaeology in Cambodia was reestablished, it was recognized that government bodies overseeing archaeological patrimony were needed. Additionally, training of new archaeologists was necessary to provide human resources for these institutions.

Archaeological Patrimony: The APSARA Authority

The APSARA (Authority for the Protection and Safeguarding of the Angkor Region) Authority was born out of a need to protect and conserve the sites in the Angkor region following the Khmer Rouge period (for a detailed history on the formation of APSARA, see Choulean et al. 1998; Chau Sun 2006). Just one year following the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements, the Angkor region was conditionally inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The sites within the “Perimetre de Protection” included Angkor Wat, the Bayon, Roluos, Banteay Srei, and others. The listing was provisional provided that Cambodia meet several conditions. These were fulfilled in 1995, and Angkor was inscribed permanently on the World Heritage list. In the same year, the APSARA Authority was established by royal decree and was tasked with the management and protection of the region of Angkor and Siem Reap. As Angkor was becoming a major tourist destination, APSARA primarily focused on preventing illegal construction projects.

However, it was also important that APSARA become increasingly autonomous, in order to provide “the institutional structure vital for nurturing the Cambodian expertise required for managing the site over the longer term” (Winter 2007: 51).

Currently, the APSARA Authority describes their mission as “Protecting, maintaining, conserving, and improving the value of the archaeological park, the culture, the environment, and the history of the Angkor region as defined on the World Heritage List” (APSARA Authority 2005). The APSARA Authority contains several departments that oversee these various concerns. These include two departments dealing with Monuments and Archaeology, the Department of Angkor Tourism Development, the Department of Urbanization and Development of the Siem Reap and Angkor region, a Department of Demography and Development, and a Department of Water and Forest Management. Archaeological research and conservation of monuments is undertaken collaboratively between the APSARA Authority and various international organizations. All international projects must include training of Cambodian students as part of their project as well as collaboration with APSARA staff and experts.

As Cambodia’s popularity as a tourist destination increases, APSARA has had additional challenges in managing tourism and development in Siem Reap, as well as interacting with the local population, while also following their initial goal of protecting and conserving sites. Recent archaeological research shows that the Greater Angkor Region is approximately 1,000 sq km, much larger than the initial zones included in the World Heritage listing (Fletcher et al. 2007). These additional archaeological features, which include mounds, channels, and water features, are often found in rural areas where people live and work. Several thousand people also live and work within the archaeological park itself. The rapid expansion of Siem Reap as a tourist center has also had environmental consequences especially relating to water management, which has become a new priority (Munthit 2008). Growing numbers of tourists are increasing the wear and tear on the

stone and brick monuments, which has led to the closing off of some areas of temples. As tourist numbers increase, the APSARA Authority will continue to see their responsibilities grow. In turn they will have to balance protection, conservation, and research of the archaeological sites under their purview while also managing the needs of the local community and facilitating the needs of tourists, whose dollars are so crucial for the Cambodian economy.

Archaeological Patrimony: The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MOCFA)

The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts is the other main body responsible for the protection and research of archaeological sites in Cambodia. MOCFA was established by royal decree in January 1996, and its primary responsibilities include the development of culture and fine arts as well as promoting Cambodia's diverse cultural heritage. Archaeological oversight falls under the General Department of Cultural Heritage and four subdepartments: Archaeology and Prehistory, Antiquities, Museums, and Preservation and Conservation of Ancient Monuments. MOCFA is responsible for all archaeological sites in Cambodia except for the sites located in Siem Reap province and the sites located in the region controlled by the National Authority of Preah Vihear in Preah Vihear province. These include archaeological sites such as temples, and pagodas, as well as ancient mounds, bridges, canals, water reservoirs, and roads.

One of the primary goals of the MOCFA is the broad promotion of archaeological research. Local archaeologists are encouraged to collaborate with foreign institutions and researchers to conduct survey, excavation, and restoration and preservation projects. The MOCFA is also concerned with documenting all archaeological sites on land, as well as those underground and underwater, in order to highlight their importance for Cambodia's national cultural heritage. Recently, more than 4,000 archaeological sites have been documented, mapped, and zoned in a collaborative project between MOCFA and the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO) (Bruguier et al. 2007). Some of these sites have

also been excavated or restored in collaborative projects with local experts and international researchers through external financial support. Prior to starting such projects, MOCFA requires the collaborative organizations to create an agreement clarifying the project plan, its schedule, and budget. The MOCFA also emphasizes the importance of heritage education, as the education of local people, officials, police, monks, and students is key to protecting cultural heritage in Cambodia. In this vein, some sites are slated for development as tourist attractions, and the MOCFA intends to open as many provincial museums as possible.

In addition to these smaller sites, the MOCFA is currently preparing documents for UNESCO and the World Heritage Commission to submit Sambor Prei Kuk to be included on the list of World Heritage sites. If accepted, a Sambor Prei Kuk Authority would be created as a separate unit within the MOCFA. Other sites slated to be nominated for World Heritage status include the Banteay Chhmar temple complex, the temple of Preah Khan of Kompong Svay, Beng Mealea and Koh Ker temples, Phnom Chisor temple, and the site of Angkor Borei. While the MOCFA does not have direct control over the other World Heritage sites of Angkor and Preah Vihear temple, it does work closely with both APSARA and the National Authority of Preah Vihear.

Despite the progress made in recent years, the MOCFA still has many challenges related to the destruction of archaeological sites and illicit trafficking of cultural property. Recently, the acquisition of land by powerful businessmen and institutions has caused the destruction of many archaeological sites. Furthermore, local people often do not understand the importance of preserving sites, which can also lead to looting. Unfortunately, the MOCFA does not have enough resources to address all of these problems or investigate crimes. Additional difficulties include assessment and cultural valuation of various art objects, as there is not enough equipment to appraise the materials. Looting, stealing, and illegal trafficking of art objects in Cambodia are problems that make the protection and conservation of sites and objects complicated.

Archaeological Training: The Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA)

The Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) has played a central role in producing new archaeologists, both before and after the Khmer Rouge period. Although RUFA was reopened in 1980, the first courses offered were only in the School of Fine Arts. It was not until 1989 that RUFA was awarded its full university status and the Department of Archaeology was reopened by its surviving alumni, including professors Chuch Phoeurn and Pich Keo. However, the department faced a great challenge due to limited human resources. The curriculum was based on prewar coursework, which included classes on Khmer history, epigraphy, art history, ethnology, and archaeology. Other courses were focused on civilizations and cultures directly related to Cambodia, such as Indian classical languages and art history, and other Southeast Asian cultures and civilizations including the Cham, Javanese, Burmese, and Thai. Also critical to the curriculum were study trips to major archaeological sites, consultation with national and international experts, as well as internships with various conservation organizations and archaeological institutions.

With funding from the Toyota Foundation via UNESCO from 1995 to 2002, the Department of Archaeology drastically improved its human resources by adding national and international experts to the faculty (UNESCO 2002). Graduates of the 1994 RUFA class and junior faculty members were assigned as teaching assistants for each major topic. It was hoped that these teaching assistants and junior scholars would gradually replace their international professors and reduce the department's reliance on foreign assistance. However, this hope was not realized, as the department lacked funding to maintain a large faculty after UNESCO ended their assistance in 2002. Fortunately, one unexpected and positive outcome of the project was the production of a series of highly competent Cambodian archaeologists, who were students of the UNESCO-funded faculty. Students who earned their degrees from 1995 to 2002 have filled positions in most of the cultural resource management institutions in Cambodia, such as MOCFA, the

APSARA Authority, the Royal Academy of Cambodia, and other archaeological and conservation projects. Additionally, several students have continued their education by earning doctoral degrees at institutions in Cambodia and abroad.

Currently, RUFA is beginning to renovate and expand their existing facilities in order to provide more classroom, lab, and library space. Additionally, a group of scholars are working to develop a core curriculum for archaeology students. Despite these developments, RUFA continues to struggle with a lack of funding to support faculty and provide resources for students. Many RUFA alumni have volunteered to offer part-time classes or conference talks to current students. Despite the efforts of dedicated faculty, staff, volunteers, and alumni, RUFA needs additional financial support in order to provide adequate resources for its students and teachers. In spite of these challenges, a new generation of archaeologists has gradually increased and is able to respond to the demand for archaeologists and conservators in institutions such as the MOCFA, APSARA, and Preah Vihear authorities. Since the opening of the twenty-first century, more and more Cambodian archaeologists have gradually risen from field workers and trainees to become collaborators and colleagues in various international institutions in Cambodia and abroad.

Archaeological Training: The Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC)

In addition to RUFA graduates, Cambodian scholars with advanced degrees are needed to train, teach, and lead research projects. With this goal in mind, the first government-sponsored master's and doctoral degrees were established in 2002 in the Department of Archaeology in the Institute of Culture and Fine Arts at the Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC) in 2002. The goals of the program include the management and development of archaeological research, the collection and preservation of research finds, the documentation and distribution of research findings, and the expansion of cooperative relationships with other institutions, ministries, and

Post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, Archaeology in, Fig. 1 Cambodian archaeologists working at the Choeung Ek Kiln site (Photo by Kaseka Phon)



national and international organizations related to archaeological research. During the first phase of this program, five master's and doctoral candidates were selected for training after a rigorous examination.

The program has now moved into the second phase, in which graduates of the program will focus on research with government support. One graduate has already completed his Ph.D. and two others are Ph.D. candidates. Several research projects have already been completed, including the Sre Ampil project (discussed below), mapping and excavation at the Choeung Ek Kiln Site, and most recently a project entitled "Archaeology Research and Management at Prasat Trapeang Prasat" funded by the Royal Government (Fig. 1). Conservation work is currently being conducted at Trapeang Prasat, an important yet unstudied temple located near the Dangrek Mountains in Udor Meanchey province, to preserve the historical and archaeological integrity of the site for future generations (Fig. 2). Conservation of this site will hopefully increase national and international tourism to the region and will provide an important benefit for the local economy.

Since 2002 RAC has organized national and international conferences with the joint support

of the Royal Government and international institutions. In 2014, RAC, in collaboration with the MOCFA, the APSARA Authority, the National Authority of Preah Vihear, the National Committee of World Heritage, and other NGOs, will host the 20th Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association Congress in Siem Reap. In the future, the Institute of Culture and Fine Arts at the RAC will extend its research projects by seeking funding from both the Royal Government and other resources and expand its international relationships with joint research projects and additional international conferences.

International Perspectives

Currently, Cambodian archaeologists are working to define their role in shaping archaeological research in their country. Since Cambodia has reopened for archaeological research, there have been many international research institutions working in Cambodia. Cambodian archaeologists have had many opportunities to join these projects and gain experience for their future careers. However, these projects are often run and directed by foreigners, and Cambodians are

Post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, Archaeology in, Fig. 2 Cambodian archaeologists from the Royal Academy of Cambodia working at the temple of Trapeang Prasat (Photo by Kaseka Phon)



often only hired as research assistants. In many cases, the research findings, archaeological materials, and results remain under the control of the director of the project. Under these circumstances, Cambodian archaeologists are not always equal collaborators.

It is for this reason that opportunities for Cambodian-led research projects and in-country training, such as the RAC advanced degree program discussed above, are so important. One successful Cambodian-led project is the Sre Ampil project, a 2-year program funded by the Center for Khmer Studies with archaeologists and students from RUFA and RAC. Cambodian archaeologists and students conducted excavations at the site of Sre Ampil and worked with local villagers to construct a site museum, which includes both artifacts from excavations and objects donated by villagers (Fig. 3). The Sre Ampil archaeological site will also be used as a permanent field training site for RUFA archaeology students and possibly for students in anthropology and tourism studies from other universities (see Phon & Phon 2009). Another step forward in the process of increasing indigenous archaeological research is the establishment of the Khmer Archaeological Society (www.khmeras.org). This Cambodian-led NGO established by Mr. Phon Kaseka seeks to preserve past and present cultural heritage, including the



Post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, Archaeology in, Fig. 3 Cambodian archaeologists examining a temple foundation at the site of Sre Ampil (Photo by Kaseka Phon)

heritage of minority groups such as the Cham and Kuoy. In this way, Cambodians are beginning to take a leadership role in the practice of archaeology in their country.

Future Directions

Archaeological research in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia has made great strides since the country reopened for archaeological research in the 1990s. Nevertheless, there are still several areas where improvements can be made. First, it is recognized that many archaeological sites in Cambodia are still vulnerable to looters or development. Cultural resource protection and education and implementation of heritage law is lacking in Cambodia. Therefore, a focus on archaeological site preservation and salvage excavations is needed. Furthermore, local involvement and education is a crucial aspect in protecting against site destruction. As part of this goal, it is important to continue with the construction of site museums for the display of artifacts collected at the site. Retention of cultural treasures by the communities in which they are found is good for reinforcing cultural identity, local morale, the economy, and the education of villagers and tourists who will jointly support the museums. This is currently an important goal of the MOCFA, and several local site museums have already been constructed. Site museums and the recognition of important sites outside the Angkor region would also reduce problems related to over-visitation of the principal sites in Angkor. Tour agencies currently neglect other areas in the country where there is tourism potential. Tourism development at these would attract national and international visitors to spend time in other parts of Cambodia beyond Angkor and increase tourist dollars. It is also hoped that training programs for students at RUFA, RAC, and other universities would allow them additional opportunities to practice their skills and assist with job placement after graduation. Lastly, it is essential that Cambodian archaeologists continue to develop relationships with other international scholars, especially those in other Southeast Asian countries. Hopefully, with increased in-country education and training, Cambodian archaeologists, in partnership with foreign collaborators, can lead the way toward achieving many of these objectives.

Cross-References

► [Cambodia: Cultural Heritage Management](#)

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