

Angkor Wat: Sound & light Show

Cambodia

A SOUND AND LIGHT SHOW to be held regularly at Cambodia's ancient monuments of Angkor Wat has been approved by both Cambodian prime ministers, who instructed producers that all of the shows need to be approved by the Ministry of Culture.

The prime ministers also asked the producers to tone down neon-coloured lighting effects, and include Cambodian music and history. Co-prime minister Hun Sen was reported to have told *Phnom Penh Post* that if the colours were misrepresented, the people would, in 100 years, become unaware of the real colours of Cambodia.

Inspired by the portrayal of the colours of wind in the Disney movie 'Pochantas', co-prime minister Prince Ranariddh said, "We have to show the colours of the stones. The *apsaras* moving out of the stones."

The imminent shows in one of the most famous sites of Southeast Asia have raised concerns about preservation of temples and the historical accuracy of the presentation. David Green, of September Films (London), who will be the show producer, assured that there would not be drilling or bolting into the stones, with "safe" staircases erected over them. He added that lights and speakers would be covered with nylon cups to prevent damage to the stones.

The show, in the languages of Khmer, English, French, Japanese and Mandarin, will commence with French naturalist Henri Mouhot's "rediscovery" of the temple in 1860. King Suryavarman, who ordered the Angkor monuments built, will be re-enacted as himself, and as god Vishnu, spirit reincarnate of the king. Green also said that French composer Michel Legrand would do the music.

Other parts of the show will exalt Angkor Wat as the greatest temple on earth, touching on its mysteries, and history of wars, invasions and lootings. Green revealed that viewers will be guided on a 'walk and stop' show, beginning at the main entrance and concluding in front of the lake where they will be seated in a grandstand for the finale. Three one-hour shows will be planned for up to 500 people per performance each night.

Source: *Phnom Penh Post* (Nov. 17-30, 1995 pp. 1)

Artifacts return to Cambodia

A NUMBER OF ARTIFACTS which had been stolen, smuggled or trafficked out of Cambodia have been returned to the country. Recently, in March 1997, two pieces in America that had been stolen from ancient Cambodian temples were given back. It included a 10th-century sandstone head which had been on display at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and said to have been taken from a temple in the 1940s. A visitor at the museum recognised the sandstone head as one of a hundred missing Cambodian art objects catalogued by the International Council of Museums.

The second artifact, which was in the private collection of an American, is an 11th-century head of a Buddhist statue which was believed to have been stolen in 1985 during Cambodia's occupation by Vietnamese troops.

Campaigns by the Cambodian government and international organisations have found encouragement in the return of seventeen artifacts in the past year and a half. A booklet, distributed to museums, law enforcement agencies and auction houses, is part of a worldwide effort

initiated in 1992 by UNESCO to stop the billion-dollar-a-year smuggling.

Some believed that the idea of returning missing art objects is catching on. The returned objects also included one which the US customs had seized, one from the private art collection of British millionaire David Knight, and thirteen from Thailand.

In September 1996, Thailand returned thirteen ancient artifacts to Cambodia in what was hailed as a "historical event of cultural co-operation on the protection of cultural heritage of Southeast Asian region".

The two neighbouring countries had been at loggerheads for six years over the status of the priceless objects recovered in Thailand.

"I hope that we could come up with something very unique, we share so much culture, there should be more than co-operation," Roland Eng, Cambodian ambassador to Thailand was reported to have said during a handover ceremony at the National Museum, Bangkok.

Senior officials, of Thailand and Cambodia, who were present at the event expressed the possibility of a formal agreement to end smuggling of cultural artifacts between the two countries.

Deputy Education Minister Pol Lt Chaowarin Lathasaksiri revealed that the government of Thailand realised the importance of eliminating illicit trafficking in artifacts. He said that while the government have been trying to protect its own heritage, it was at the same time aware of the need to protect and safeguard the cultural heritage of neighbouring countries.

The saga concerning the thirteen ancient objects began in 1990 when officials of Thailand's Fine Arts Department, together with police, raided Lek Art Gallery in Bangkok. They seized numerous objects, including thirteen large Khmer statues of giants and deities. Experts traced the objects to the 12th century (Bayon period), and classified them as having been trafficked out of Cambodia.

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Angkor: Archaeological Fieldwork and Documentation Programme

IN A FURTHER development on the "Archaeological Fieldwork and Documentation Programme" to be co-ordinated by SPAFA and APSARA (Autorite pour la Protection du Site et l'Amenagement de la Region d'Angkor), Mr Ros Borath (Director-General of APSARA), and Mr Jean-Christophe Simon (of Conservation D'Angkor) met with SPAFA Centre Director, and senior staff on 30 January 1997 to discuss the implementation of the planned project (to be carried out in Siem Reap, Cambodia, where the popular ancient monuments of Angkor are situated).



Ros Borath
(Director-General of
APSARA)



Jean-Christophe Simon
(of Conservation D'Angkor)

SPAFA Centre Director, Dr Ruang Charoenchai, began by affirming the commitment of the Centre to assist APSARA in implementing the programme, which will be partly supported by financial assistance from the SEAMEO-Japan Trust fund. The discussions, taking place in SPAFA's Centre, focussed on a proposed "pilot" training programme for archaeologists and cultural re-

sources management professionals in Cambodia.

While aimed at providing training in archaeological fieldwork and methodology, the programme will also

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Prolonged legal proceedings which ensued, and the difficulties in authentication delayed the return of the artifacts. In March 1995, Cambodia faxed through its evidence, following which the two governments agreed that the smuggled antiques would be sent back to Cambodia upon authentication of the letters of evidence.

In June 1996, the Thai Cabinet decided to return the thirteen objects to Cambodia to maintain neighbourly relations, and to demonstrate its sincerity in stamping out smuggling between the two states.

There has been calls for Thailand to approach the problem with sincerity, and the Cambodian authorities even publicly blamed its neighbour for providing a smuggling route.

However, according to Michel Tranet, Undersecretary of State in Cambodia's Ministry of Culture, Cambodia must do its part to halt the illicit trade. Thailand, Cambodia and

Laos are all victims, he said, placing the "ultimate blame" on collectors and museums in the United States, Europe and Japan.

Tranet also pointed out that although the deployment of a special motorcycle-riding Heritage Police has to a great extent prevented thefts at the 12th-century temple complex of Angkor Wat, Cambodia's most famous tourist attraction, looting continues at numerous smaller ruins scattered around the country which are unprotected from looters. The ancient monuments in the north-western province of Siem Reap remain the most tempting targets for thieves.

It is believed that two smuggling routes out of Cambodia - one by sea and the other by land - enable the theft, smuggling, and sale of Khmer art to become a lucrative enterprise.

According to a recent *Bangkok Post* report, the sea route allowed smugglers to transport the priceless art works by local trawlers from Koh Kood, an island off southern Cambodia. The stone treasures were

towed in fishing nets under water by trawlers before being put into cargo ships for delivery to Singapore.

The route by land involved carrying the works of art across the Thai border in Surin or Aranyaprathet provinces. Truckloads of these artifacts, in all sizes, were seen at the border about every week, with Ta Phya in Aranyaprathet being the most popular route for the transportation.

Sadly too, some of these ancient treasures which dated back to the ninth century were damaged as they were smuggled out. When removing these art work of stones from monuments, particularly lintels, they were sliced to reduce their massive weight. By the time these objects reached the Thai border, many of these priceless masterpieces would have been broken into sections.

Keen to expand their collection and display, art museums and collectors around the world are partly responsible for this flow of cultural heritage out of the countries of origin, and for the damage to these valuable works of art. ■