

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. ■

include research-oriented excavation to recover evidence of the cultural evolution of ancient Angkor.

The project team will systematically sample the Angkor Archaeological park by test excavating a number of archaeological borings/sondages over a period of 3 months.

Mr Simon, acting as an adviser to APSARA, suggested communicating with the two Japanese teams, and one French group, presently working in Angkor sites, to find out where they obtain equipment, and other matters, to minimise the capital cost for the training/fieldwork.

He also recommended that participating archaeologists, architects, and other field workers are trained, and that agreement is reached on the basic techniques in conservation to avoid damage to the valuable remains.

Mr Pisit Chaorenwongsa (SPAFA's Senior Archaeology Specialist) proposed that allowances/stipends be given to students/trainees on the programme to encourage them to commit their time and energy, and not be distracted by economic concerns.

Mr Ros Borath emphasised the importance of the objective to collect data, and called for more attention to be given to it in the programme.

The major objectives of the project are: investigation of Angkor's cultural stratigraphy; analysis of associated parameters such as flora, fauna, and the environment to evaluate Angkor's development; establishment of a database on all the evidence obtained from excavations, and production of an annual or seasonal excavation report.

It was agreed during the meeting that the tentative date for implementation of the programme would be between September and October 1997.

Educational and Cultural Partnership: Nova Scotia and SPAFA

The Honourable Robert S. Harrison, Minister of Education and Culture for Nova Scotia, Canada, visited SPAFA Regional Centre on March 6, 1997. He was accompanied by Mr Robert Eagle, Director of Research Services, Technical University of Nova Scotia, and Educational and Cultural Industries representatives Mr Daniel Brennan, Executive Director of Marketing, and Ms Ava Czapalay, Marketing Co-ordinator.

The team from Nova Scotia was visiting Thailand to forge partnerships with various institutions in the promotion of science, education and technology.

SPAFA Centre Director Dr Ruang Chareonchai introduced SPAFA's senior staff, Centre's activities, and its completed SEAMEO-CIDA programme of co-operation with the Canadian government. After which, the Honourable Robert S. Harrison spoke of how institutions are engaged in the "traditional struggle", the "endeavour that needs public support". He said that when SEAMEO put an additional responsibility on SEAMEO centres to find ways to obtain outside support, it really forces the Centres to be creative.

"One of the ways in which Canada, and our own province in particular, is attempting to address this need is in the area of cultural tourism," said the Minister. "It is very easy to see, from a distance, that a centre like this [SPAFA] could contract with member countries very quickly, to begin teaching how to fully capitalise on the cultural tourism market that is growing in the world - with all but a slight shift away from your core competences to the kinds of marketing initiatives that are occurring worldwide that countries would gladly pay for because of the returns on their investment in smart marketing and learning experiences in cultural tourism."

He pointed out that there are ways that cultural centres can cope with the particularly difficult demands of finding income to support themselves. The "challenge", he said, "could be overcome, and fun to do so, too."

"I have no way of knowing whether SEAMEO Centres can form partnerships with places like Nova Scotia. We have our own cultural events, rather significant world-class events, and SEAMEO presence at those events will be possible to [arrange]," he said. "We have museums that are also digitalising their collections, marketing those collections, certain techniques, and certain products. We have universities that specialise in performing/theatre arts and archaeology; again endeavouring to solve some of the problems that you are solving half the world away."

If it is possible for SPAFA to formalise a partnership with a province like Nova Scotia, there are a number of ways in which that partnership will benefit both the SEAMEO Centre and its member nations, and also our province," the Minister explained. "I cannot begin to list them all, but having gone through the overview, many of the things you are confronting are things that we are confronting in my home province, by universities, by museums, by tourism, by culture. By sharing, perhaps, we can learn from each other."

Dr Ruang, in response to the Minister's views on cultural tourism, touched on the impact on and threats