

The Royal University of Fine Arts, East-West Center, and University of Hawai'i Program in the Archaeology and Anthropology of the Kingdom of Cambodia, 1994–1998



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IN 1992, THE EAST-WEST CENTER and the University of Hawai'i created the "Indochina Students Initiative," an effort to bring students from Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia to Honolulu for academic training. Students need not have been admitted to an academic program nor to classified undergraduate or graduate standing; they could come for short-term workshops or for bachelor's, master's, or doctoral studies. Between 1992 and 1994, two sets of students from Laos completed sessions in agricultural and social sciences training at the East-West Center (EWC) and the University of Hawai'i (UH). In early 1994, Judy Ledgerwood joined the staff of the East-West Center and agreed that students at the Royal University of Fine Arts, Cambodia, where she had recently taught, would be especially appropriate for intensive training in archaeological method and theory, with the intention that the students would return to Cambodia and lead the reconstruction of its archaeological and heritage management program. The president of the East-West Center, Michael Oksenberg, with the advice of Terry Rambo, set aside funds sufficient for a major training program. President Albert Simone of the University of Hawai'i committed UH faculty time and facilities to the program. From an initial meeting of Drs. Rambo, Ledgerwood, and Griffin came the program that has trained many of the best students from more than three years of Royal University graduates. Indeed, six graduates of the first graduating class since 1975 were the first to travel to Hawai'i. One, Bong Sovath, is completing his master's degree and moving to doctoral studies in the fall of 1998.

In 1994, the EWC/UH initiative began the realization of the long-standing dream, originally articulated by Wilhelm G. Solheim II, of undertaking intensive training of a cadre of Southeast Asian students. The Kingdom of Cambodia was

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selected as the most promising and most appropriate scene of the training. The country had only recently opened to Western assistance and had completed the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) supervised elections. Professor Chuch Phoeurn, one of three French-trained archaeologists who survived the Khmer Rouge holocaust, was named vice-rector of the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) and dean of its Faculty of Archaeology. A committed prehistorian, he aimed from the beginning to have his students gain graduate training and to develop research into the prehistory of Cambodia, moving beyond simply a concentration on Angkorian studies. The creation of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and the appointment in 1993 of the Honorable Nouth Narang as minister further assisted in the revitalization of the Royal University.

Professor Chuch visited the University of Hawai'i in early 1994 to discuss the student initiative. He favored a long-term program that would bring sets of students to Honolulu for intensive training in English language and in both archaeology and cultural anthropology. During the summer of 1994, Griffin, Ledgerwood, Chhany Sak-Humphry of the Department of Hawaiian and Indo-Pacific Languages, and William Chapman of the Department of American Studies at UH visited Cambodia, interviewed students from the RUFA's first graduating class in archaeology, and selected six for EWC/UH support. In addition, the UH team visited Siem Reap and the Angkor Archaeological Park, as well as Angkor Borei in Takeo Province to the south of Phnom Penh. The latter site was to prove the ideal location for research and training of RUFA students.

The Honorable Nouth Narang, Minister of Culture and Fine Arts, escorted the initial group of six students to Hawai'i in September 1994. With his blessing and support, an intensive training program began. After one academic year, four students completed their studies and returned to Cambodia and to the first season's training in excavation methodology at Angkor Borei (Griffin, Stark, and Ledgerwood 1996).

Angkor Borei (Dega 1996; Stark 1998; Stark et al., this issue) is an ancient city in southern Cambodia, situated on a canal tributary to the Bassac and Mekong Rivers. Considered by many Cambodians as the founding location of the Khmer people (Ledgerwood 1996), the site, or city, likely encapsulates the transition from prehistory into protohistoric times, as well as providing the foundation for the flowering of the Angkorian period, during which Khmer civilization flourished over a region far greater than today's kingdom.

The goals of the summer 1995 excavations at Angkor Borei were largely limited to training students. Second, an initial and necessarily minimal understanding of the archaeological characteristics of the city was sought. The team, led by Griffin, Ledgerwood, and Chuch, took the Hawai'i-trained students, plus four newly recruited students from RUFA, to the site. Michael Dega and Kyle Latinis, graduate students at UH, were site supervisors and instructors in excavation, data management, and mapping. Nancy Dowling, an art historian at UH's Department of Art, began study of the brick foundations of possible temple platforms, and Carol Mortland, an independent anthropologist now with the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center, assisted in the archaeological research. Miriam Stark joined the operation that summer as she was about to begin her appointment as assistant professor at UH in the Department of Anthropology. Jefferson Fox, of the East-West Center, initiated the Geographic Information System (GIS), taking his

Global Positioning System (GPS) hardware, thus enabling the correlation of transit mapping and satellite locational data, and the production of the first map.

The results of the 1995 research were initially reported in a manuscript submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (Griffin, Ledgerwood et al. 1996) and incorporated into an article by Stark et al. (this issue). Suffice it to say that a preliminary map of the entire walled city was achieved and several excavations placed within looters' pits probed the site's stratigraphy. The distribution of surface features and scatters of artifacts were noted, as was the overall site integrity. The task of coring throughout the site to obtain environmental information was undertaken by Dega, Latinis, and their students. The work of the students also permitted the selection of the members of the next group for UH training. Two of the first set were chosen to return for more intensive study: Bong Sovath and Chhan Chamroeun.

To better expose both American and RUFA team members to Cambodian archaeological sites, an extended field trip was made to Kampot, on the southern coast. There we inspected sites attributed to the Palaeolithic by an earlier generation of French scholars, and we reported the ongoing destruction of the sites due to the mining of the limestone cave site Kbol Romeas (Griffin et al. 1996). The peace and order situation prevented visiting the much sought after Neolithic sites in Kampong Cham Province reported by Groslier (1966) or other known prehistoric sites.

Bong Sovath and Chhan Chamroeun led three new students to Hawai'i in the fall of 1995. Again they studied English, archaeology, and anthropology. In the spring of 1996, the Honorable Vann Molyvan, Minister of State for the Supreme Council of Ministers, visited Hawai'i, accompanied by Ang Choulean, the leading Cambodian ethnologist, and John Sanday of the World Monuments Fund. These meetings coincided with the Honolulu venue of the Association for Asian Studies annual meeting and the gathering of the East Asia Archaeological Network (EAAN). The University of Hawai'i Center for Southeast Asian Studies also brought to the meetings two representatives, Ha Van Tan and Trinh Cao Tuong, of the National Institute of Archaeology in Hanoi, Viet Nam. The result was a series of papers, discussions, and debates concerning the nature of the archaeology of Indochina, as seen at two symposia. "Funan Period Archaeology in the Lower Mekong Region" was organized by Miriam Stark for the EAAN, and "Progress and Prospects for the Archaeology of the Lower Mekong Region" was a session held later at the East-West Center. These two sessions brought the issues of Angkor Borei's relationship with Oc Eo, to the south in Viet Nam, into sharp focus and went far to inform about the ongoing excavations in the lower Mekong region.

In the 1995–1996 academic year, the Henry Luce Foundation awarded Ledgerwood and the East-West Center a major grant to continue support of the Cambodian students. This grant added to the East-West Center funds, ensuring a successful return to Angkor Borei and the initial support of students able to advance to classified graduate student standing.

In the summer of 1996, more training and intensified research was completed at Angkor Borei (Stark et al., this issue). James Bayman joined the team, and Miriam Stark assumed directorship of the excavations at the site, founding the Lower Mekong Archaeological Project (LOMAP). Griffin and Dega managed

the team's visit to Memot, Krek, and other locations in Kampong Cham, where the circular, mounded sites reported by Groslier are found. Back at Angkor Borei, additional mapping, deep test excavations, and ceramic data collection were achieved. Chhan Chamroeun led excavations at a brick foundation structure, suggested as perhaps a temple platform. Bong Sovath assisted in the placement of the deep excavations and the recovery of archaeological data, including datable material. Fox and Ledgerwood continued their research into changing land-use patterns and flood-recession rice in the region, as introduced in the 1996 report to the Ministry of Culture (Ledgerwood et al. 1997). In the same report, Dowling summarizes her art history activities concerning Angkor Borei; Dega, Khun, Chamroeun, and Kou (1997) accompanied the above report with a summary of their survey and excavations in Kampong Cham, following the Angkor Borei field season. Finally, in September, Dega and Mortland read papers at the International Conference on Khmer Studies at the University of Phnom Penh, reporting the program results (see also Dega 1997). Dega and Mortland were fortunate to be presented to Their Royal Highnesses King Sihanouk and Queen Monique at the conference reception.

During the 1996–1997 academic year, Bong Sovath began classified graduate studies. Tea Van continued special studies with funding from the Asian Cultural Council and in May was admitted to the graduate program. In the spring semester, Stark was the lead instructor for the Center for Southeast Asian Studies in the offering of a graduate course on historic preservation in Southeast Asia. Assisted by Chapman, she brought to UH several scholars from Hawai'i, the mainland United States, Asia, and the Pacific. Of special importance was the associated UH Center for Southeast Asian Studies conference on Cultural Resource Management and Preservation, at which the Honorable Nouth Narang gave the keynote lecture. The conference was a concrete expression of the commitment of the program to the immediate and long-term needs of Cambodian heritage preservation.

A minimum of training and research was undertaken during the summer of 1997. Griffin, Dega, and Tea collected a series of brick samples from platform foundations and the Angkor Borei city wall for purposes of thermoluminescence dating. Examination of ongoing destruction of the archaeological remains was also made. Stark was able to inspect the city in detail to plan future field research and develop funding and visited sites linked to Angkor Borei by canals, using aerial photographs as guides. She also inspected ceramic collections made by RUFA and National Museum personnel. Ledgerwood and Fox completed more research on the canal systems adjacent to Angkor Borei. Griffin, Dega, and Tea inspected and cored a site in the Krek region after a brief survey of Sambor Prei Kuk, the capital site dating to the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. Further work was terminated by political unrest in Phnom Penh. Fortunately, neither Bong nor Tea was precluded from returning to studies in Hawai'i, both with East-West Center support.

In February 1998, Dega returned to Cambodia to assist the RUFA and a German team led by the Drs. Albrecht from Tubingen University. He assisted in conducting a RUFA field school in Krek at a Neolithic circular, mounded, moated site, collecting an initial set of data for his doctoral research, for which funding is now requested of the National Science Foundation. The summer of 1998 saw no excavations, training, or other studies, since the national elections

dominated peoples' concerns. Instead, the meeting of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association, held in July in Malacca, Malaysia, provided an intellectual forum for nearly everybody interested in the region to debate their issues. Bong and Pheng Sitha of the Faculty of Archaeology, RUFA, attended the meeting, joining Stark and Douglas Comer of the (U.S.) National Park Service in developing the outlines of a future management plan for preserving the Angkor Borei region. Griffin carried a draft proposal for funding the plan development to Phnom Penh in November 1998.

The research results to date are reported in the present volume. Stark et al. reports the substance of the research, including analyses undertaken in Honolulu by herself and her students. Fox and Ledgerwood report their conclusions concerning flood-recession rice and other land-use practices. Dowling continues her close-grained analysis of Angkor Borei statuary, arriving at important conclusions concerning their dating and their relevance to archaeological issues.

The future of the East-West Center, University of Hawai'i, Royal University of Fine Arts program is strong, with efforts and emphases changing to meet new demands. We plan to increase the number of graduate students in the Department of Anthropology at UH. We understand that RUFA faculty and students also favor UH faculty serving as visiting professors in Phnom Penh. Plans are now being put into place that would foster such a relationship. Funding is limited; likely, the practice of groups of students on one-year study visits will be replaced by classified graduate students and by sending instructors to RUFA. Stark has returned to Angkor Borei in January 1999 with extramural funding. RUFA students will continue to be involved, as researchers and as students in a special field school. Dega hopes to complete doctoral research on the Neolithic sites of Kampong Cham in early 1999. Dowling and Griffin are designing research aimed at understanding the possible temple structures of Angkor Borei. Griffin is also working toward the long-term development of a Geographic Information System for Cambodia, and toward EWC/UH involvement with the general archaeology of Cambodia. Discussions are under way and funding is being sought for participation in the study of sites ranging from the late Pleistocene through the Angkorian period. Cooperation among Cambodian scholars and those of several foreign nations seems especially fruitful and feasible. Specialists from Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Australia, and the United States seem sensitive to a new era of collaboration instead of competition. With young Cambodian professionals now studying in Hawai'i, Germany, France, and Japan assuming positions of authority, the monumental task of managing the kingdom's heritage seems ever more only a matter of time. The future must include continued enhancement of the Royal University of Fine Arts and the National Museum, the premier institutions charged with producing the scholarship, resources, and personnel that will place the heritage of Cambodia in its rightful place.

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ABSTRACT

The East-West Center and the University of Hawai'i in 1994 joined the Royal University of Fine Arts, a division of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, Kingdom of Cambodia, in a program to train graduates of the Royal University's Faculty of Archaeology. Three sets of students have spent an academic year in Hawai'i; two students are now classified graduate students at the University of Hawai'i. Training and research at the ancient city of Angkor Borei, in the upper Mekong Delta, have extended over three field seasons. The Ministry and the University of Hawai'i archaeological team continue training and research at Angkor Borei and at Neolithic sites in Kampong Cham Province. KEYWORDS: Southeast Asia, Cambodia, Angkor Borei, archaeology, field training.