

1 Map showing the location of Koh Ker in relationship to Angkor.
Courtesy of *Heritage Science* and Etsuo Uchida, Waseda University, Japan

Celebrating Khmer Cultural Heritage: Archaeology, Research and Restitution to Cambodia

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Photographs by the author unless stated otherwise

IN RECENT YEARS, there have been a number of unprecedented cases involving various large sandstone sculptures being returned to the Kingdom of Cambodia. These cases have not been merely random, but can all be linked to one particular temple, Prasat Chen, located in Koh Ker, a 10th century capital situated 80 kilometres north-east of Siem Reap in Preah Vihear province, founded by King Jayavarman IV in 921 (1). The impetus for the restitution to Cambodia of these cultural treasures was a series of events, starting with the extensive fieldwork carried out at the Koh Ker site by Eric Bourdonneau, a French archaeologist and historian of the Paris-based *École française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO), in 2009–2010. Through his detailed analysis of the significance of the Koh Ker site, the particular function of some of its major temples and his identification

of particular groups of statues, Bourdonneau became instrumental in the restitution process that followed.¹

The catalyst was the publication by Sotheby's New York of their March 24th, 2011 auction catalogue. On the cover featured Lot 27, a "highly important sculpture of an athlete", that was described as follows: "If one could choose only one sculpture to represent the glory of Khmer art, this figure could fulfill such a challenge". Indeed, this magnificent and imposing statue (height 158.4 cm), carved with exquisite detail, such as the subtle indication of facial hair and furrowed brow, and depicted in a dynamic pose, received considerable attention from Khmer art specialists and collectors. The intricately patterned ceremonial cone-shaped crown, the short finely pleated *sampot*, the torso decorated with armlets, bracelets and necklace, all pointed



2 Pedestal with feet of Bhima statue, *in situ*, Gopura I West, Prasat Chen. Photograph courtesy of Eric Bourdonneau, 2009, and photograph Norton Simon Art Foundation (M198015S1)



3 Pedestals of three Pandava brothers, *in situ*, Gopura I West, Prasat Chen. Photograph courtesy of Eric Bourdonneau and the French Archaeological Mission at Koh Ker/EFE0

to the almost identical twin, the “Temple Wrestler” or *dvarapala* statue (height 156.8 cm), in the collection of the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena, California. While making a trip to Koh Ker in 2007, Simon Warrack, a British stone conservator engaged by the German Apsara Conservation Project (GACP) at Angkor Wat, had noticed two pedestals at the west entrance pavilion of Prasat Chen, with only the feet remaining after looters had hacked off the statues at the ankles. In his preliminary research, he digitally matched the “Temple Wrestler” statue with one of the pedestals, without knowing its true identity. After seeing the same pedestal (length 103.5 cm) in 2009, Bourdonneau made the connection and identified the Norton Simon statue as Bhima (2).

The auction of the “athlete” statue, acquired in 1975 by a Belgian collector from Spink & Son, the London auction house, was not to be. Just a week before the auction, Bourdonneau learned by chance about the upcoming New York sale, which compelled him urgently to prepare a report,² that was sent to the Phnom Penh office of UNESCO on March 20th, 2007. This crucial information was immediately communicated to the Cambodian Ministry of Culture. Sotheby’s received a letter from Madame Tan Theany, Secretary General of the Cambodian National Commission for UNESCO, which stated “that this statue was illegally removed from the site”. She asked Sotheby’s to facilitate its return. The lot was withdrawn on the actual day of the auction. However, Cambodia’s request for Sotheby’s to return it as stolen property was rejected on legal grounds. As far as I am aware, this was the first time a formal complaint about looting had been lodged by a Cambodian official accompanied by a firm request for the return of an important item of national and cultural heritage. A 1925 French colonial law, which declared that all antiquities from Cambodia’s temples are part of its national domain and the exclusive property of the State, remains applicable today, despite Cambodia becoming an independent country in 1953.

After the Khmer Rouge period and the occupation of Cambodia by Vietnam from 1979–1989, the late King Norodom Sihanouk was extremely concerned about the protection of Angkorian cultural heritage. Shortly after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords on October 23rd, 1991, which marked the official end of the Cambodia-Vietnam War, Cambodia accepted the Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in November the same year. The king requested that Angkor be added to the list of World Heritage sites; his request was granted in 1992.³ Incidentally, the Koh Ker site has since 1992 been on the Tentative List, submitted by Cambodia to UNESCO, indicating that it is considered outstanding cultural heritage.

¹Eric Bourdonneau, *Nouvelles recherches sur Koh Ker (Chok Gargyar): Jayavarman IV et la maîtrise des mondes*, Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot, 2011, Vol. 90, no. 1, pp. 95–141.

²Eric Bourdonneau, “Un trésor du patrimoine cambodgien en vente à Sotheby’s: la statue monumentale du ‘Duryodhana bondissant’ au pavillon d’entrée II ouest du Prasat Chen de Koh Ker” (March 20th, 2011). Report for UNESCO.

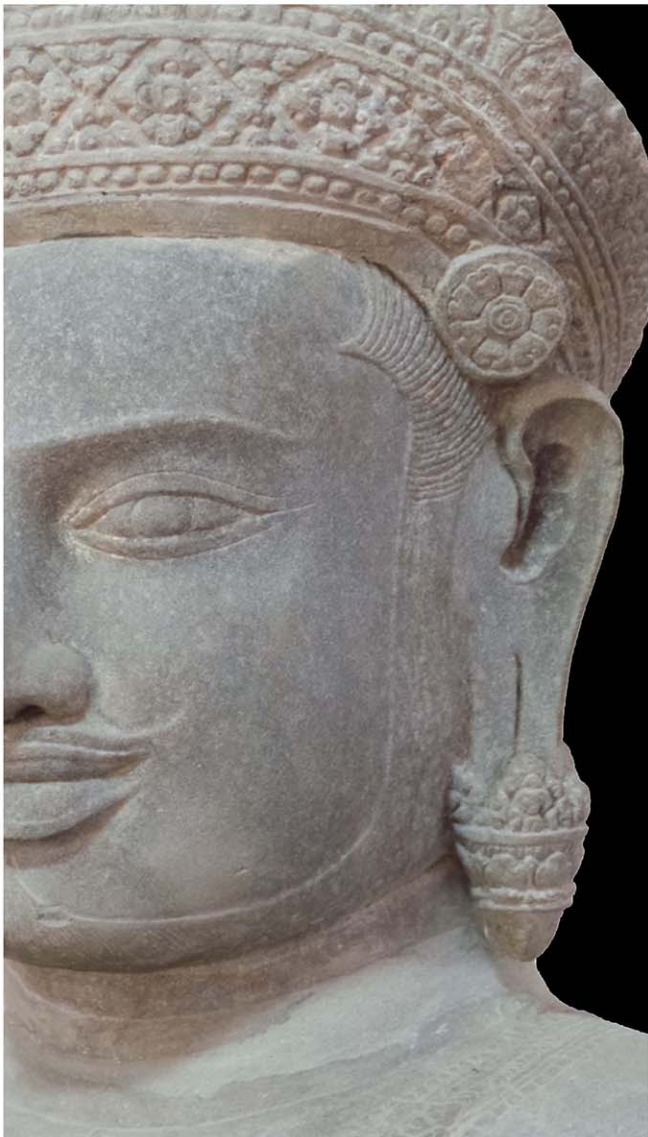
³Between 1993 and 2004, Prince Norodom Sihamoni was appointed Ambassador of the Kingdom of Cambodia to UNESCO, the United Nations cultural body based in Paris.



4 Statues of the three Pandava brothers, note the chisel cuts at the ankles made by looters. The two statues on the left, the twin brothers Nakula and Sahadeva, the youngest of the five Pandava brothers, were formerly in The Metropolitan Museum of Art; the headless statue on the right was found in the depot of the Conservancy at Siem Reap. Currently on display in the Phnom Penh National Museum



5 Nakula, one of the Pandava. Currently in the Phnom Penh National Museum. Photograph courtesy of Emily Mount



6 Detail of Nakula's head, one of the Pandava. Decorative pattern on crown is similar to the pattern of pediment rims at Banteay Srei

By way of background, the 1970 UNESCO Convention was the first international instrument dedicated to the fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural property. It requires State Parties to the Convention to adopt preventive measures, control the movement of cultural property, return stolen and illicitly exported cultural property and promote international co-operation. The United States has been very proactive in returning stolen artefacts to Cambodia, as demonstrated in 1997 when the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art returned a 10th century head of Shiva after it was discovered on a list of looted objects from Angkor prepared by the EFEO.⁴ In 2010, seven ancient sandstone sculptures, recovered by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials during a 2008 raid in Los Angeles, were also handed over to Cambodian officials.

In April 2012, United States officials filed a suit against Sotheby's in a Manhattan federal court to confiscate the "athlete" statue on Cambodia's behalf. Meanwhile, The Metropolitan Museum's curatorial department started to review the museum's own Khmer art collection. Two distinctive life-size 10th century sandstone figures, described as "kneeling attendants", had been prominently displayed since 1994 guarding the entrance to the Southeast Asian galleries. Between 1987 and 1992, the two heads were first donated separately, with the bodies following at a slightly later date, without much of a provenance, or ownership history attached to them. However, senior officials from The Met went to Cambodia on a fact-finding mission after receiving pictures showing the pedestals *in situ*, from which the "kneeling attendants" had been coarsely chiselled (3).

At the Phnom Penh office of UNESCO, Bourdonneau's illustrated report was discussed, as well as reports that suggested the statues had still been intact *in situ* in 1970. Koh Ker is a remote, almost impenetrable jungle site and an access road was built only after 1965: the first mention of looting at Koh Ker dates to 1967. The Cambodian documentation proved that the two Metropolitan Museum statues had been removed from Prasat Chen and smuggled to Thailand during Cambodia's civil war in the 1970s. The size and weight of these sandstone statues would have made this a well-planned major logistical operation, requiring heavy-duty equipment.⁵ Considering this additional information, Thomas P. Campbell, the director of The Met, announced the decision in May 2013 to initiate repatriation of the two statues.

That same year, the Government of Cambodia was to host the 37th annual session of the World Heritage Committee, which consists of representatives from twenty-one countries and is responsible for implementing the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. At the opening ceremony on June 16th, 2013, the two life-size statues, identified by Bourdonneau as Sahadeva and Nakula, brothers of the warrior Pandava clan, were officially handed over by Emily K. Rafferty, President of The Metropolitan Museum, to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen (4, 5, 6). UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova hailed this historic voluntary restitution as "an expression of strong ethical and moral behaviour that provides an example of good practice to other museums and collectors [...] UNESCO is honoured to have contributed to this restitution, which is, I believe, a move towards greater respect and mutual understanding."

⁴ *One Hundred Missing Objects: Looting in Angkor (Cent objets disparus: Pillage à Angkor)*, ICOM, in collaboration with EFEO, 2nd edition, Paris: ICOM, EFEO, 1997. ISBN 92-9012-034-4. Thanks to *Looting in Angkor*, the first issue in the series *One Hundred Missing Objects*, published in September 1993 (and 1997), eight Khmer objects appearing in this work have been found and successfully returned to Cambodia since 1996, and are now exhibited at the National Museum, Phnom Penh. Volumes of the *One Hundred Missing Objects* series have been widely distributed to police and customs authorities, museums, art dealers and auction houses, as well as other organisations fighting the illicit traffic in cultural property, http://archives.icom.museum/list_thanks_angkor.html.

⁵ Another site which has suffered looting is Banteay Chhmar, one of the largest Khmer complexes built outside of Angkor, commissioned by King Jayavarman VII, the late 12th–early 13th century Khmer ruler. The site, located only 17 kilometres from the Thai border, is renowned for its beautiful bas-reliefs. In the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge period, Banteay Chhmar fell victim to extensive looting by companies of soldiers, who plundered and delivered antiquities to order. It was placed on the World Monuments Fund's Watch List from 1998–2002. In 1999, looters dismantled two large sections from the south segment of the western gallery wall and stole unique sandstone bas-reliefs of multi-armed *lokesvaras*. Only a serendipitous encounter with the Thai police saved them. Caught at the border, the looters were forced to turn over the 117 pieces comprising the stolen reliefs, which the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts determined would be best safeguarded in the National Museum, Phnom Penh.

8 Statue of Balarama, who instructed both Bhima and Duryodhana how to use the mace in combat. One of a group of nine statues originally in the western *Gopura*, Prasat Chen. Sold at auction in 2009, the restitution was facilitated by Christie's in June 2014. Currently in the National Museum, Phnom Penh. Photograph courtesy of Emily Mount



7 Detail of Balarama, originally sold by Christie's in 2009. Photograph courtesy of Emily Mount



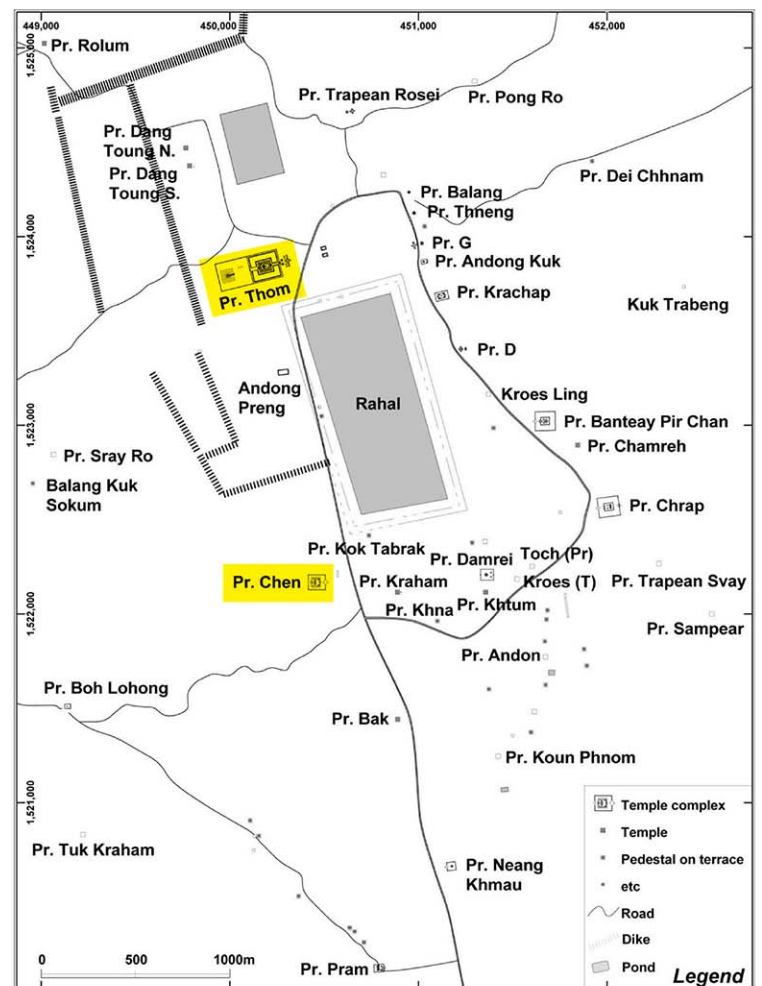


9 Deinstallation of the temporary exhibit, "Returned Statues to Cambodia", at the National Museum, Phnom Penh. Opened on October 1st, 2014, the exhibition was sponsored by UNESCO, Royal Government of Cambodia and the Embassy of the United States, Phnom Penh, and organised with the scientific collaboration of the EFEO. Duryodhana (left) facing Bhima (right), Balarama in the background



10 Deinstallation of the three-month temporary exhibit, "Returned Statues to Cambodia", at the National Museum, Phnom Penh, which opened on October 1st, 2014. This was the first time that five 10th century sandstone warriors were together since they were plundered from the remote jungle temple, Prasat Chen

On May 15th, 2013, the *New York Times* published an article titled "From Jungle to Museum and Back?", including a very informative diagram of the Prasat Chen temple, based on Bourdonneau's research, indicating the original location of six statues currently held by Sotheby's and in the collection of US museums which, besides The Met, included the Norton Simon Museum, the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Denver Art Museum. The other US museums were now under pressure to follow the example set by The Met, in compliance with the International Council of Museum's (ICOM) Code of Ethics for



11 Map showing the distribution of temples at Koh Ker. Prasat Thom, dedicated to Shiva, is north of the 1200 m long and 600 m wide reservoir known as Rahal. Prasat Chen, dedicated to Vishnu, is located south of the reservoir. Courtesy of *Heritage Science* and Etsuo Uchida, Waseda University, Japan

Museums. The effects of The Met's high profile, widely published action started to gain momentum. By December 2013, Sotheby's settled the Manhattan court case, offering to facilitate the return to Cambodia of the "athlete" statue, now identified as the warrior Duryodhana from a key episode in the Mahabharata epic. After being confronted with Bourdonneau's reports, prepared for UNESCO and the Government of Cambodia, each of the other US museums began to re-examine their records and sent staff members to Cambodia to verify evidence on the ground. It was undeniable that the various statues were homogenous in style and characteristics.

In June 2014, almost a year after the official handover by The Met, the Sotheby's statue and the companion Norton Simon statue, now properly identified by Bourdonneau as the warrior Bhima, were received by Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sok An in a grand ceremony at the Council of Ministers in Phnom Penh. This event included an additional statue, recently identified as Balarama that was originally sold by Christie's in 2009. After its identification by Bourdonneau as part of the Prasat Chen group, Christie's was able to facilitate its restitution (7, 8).⁶

The return of each object of Khmer artistic cultural heritage has been welcomed back to Cambodia in a most ceremonial and respectful way. It is clear that these statues are not mere sandstone objects, created in ancient times when the Khmer kings favoured Hinduism. They are actually regarded as live personae from the ancient Indian epics, to be treated with the utmost reverence. Unlike any Western museum practice, the reception ceremonies involve Buddhist blessings, offerings of flower petals and garlands and the presence of the heavenly *apsara* dancers, traditionally associated with Angkor temples and court ceremonies. To celebrate the return of these masterpieces and as testimony to the successful international co-operation, the National Museum, Phnom Penh, with the scientific collaboration of the EFEO, organised a temporary exhibition, titled "Returned Statues to Cambodia", which opened on October 1st, 2014. Anne Lemaistre, the UNESCO Representative in Phnom Penh, stated that the returned statues "form one of the greatest returns of art pieces in the history of illicit art trafficking" (9, 10). The latest chapter in the US restitution of cultural heritage to Cambodia occurred between May 2015 and March 2016. The Cleveland Museum of Art returned the statue of a kneeling Hanuman, the Hindu monkey god (acquired 1982), and the Denver Art Museum returned a headless statue of Rama (acquired 1986), identified by the quiver, both originally part of a Ramayana narrative scene in the eastern entrance building of Prasat Chen.

I will now examine in more detail the vast ritual complex of Koh Ker, built between 921 and 944, and the significance of the Prasat Chen temple within the royal city. To date, the remains of seventy-six temples, mainly constructed from laterite, sandstone and brick, have been confirmed in the Koh Ker area. From epigraphic evidence, we know its Khmer name, Chok Gargyar, a toponym, describing a forest of koki trees (*Hopea odorata*). Early French explorers, such as Harmand, Delaporte, Aymonier and Lajonquiere, described discoveries at the Koh Ker capital site from the late 19th century onwards. Henri Parmentier undertook some pioneering work, building on this body of information. His 1939 book, *L'Art Khmer Classique*, has



12 Prasat Thom, Koh Ker. The Prang or stepped pyramid rises 36 m and was originally the base for a 4 m tall *linga* at its top. Inscriptions record the exact time of its consecration: Wednesday, December 12th at 8:47 in the year 921

helped to identify and establish a more accurate classification of both the temples and the decorative style of Koh Ker. Using these resources, archival photographic documentation and his own archaeological findings at Koh Ker, Eric Bourdonneau has come to a deeper understanding of the significance of the brief Koh Ker era of King Jayavarman IV (reigned 921–941) and his capital that eclipsed the magnificence of Yaśodharapura-Angkor during its short existence of just twenty years. The building of the king's new capital, away from the traditional geopolitical centre at Angkor, was probably necessitated by a power struggle after the death of King Yasovarman, his two sons ruling until 928.

It was constructed on a grand scale over 81 square kilometres: the remains of seventy-six temples have been confirmed in the area, complemented by a well-planned hydraulic system, which included the centrally located Rahal *baray*, or reservoir (11). Jayavarman IV associated himself with the god Shiva, as indicated by the large *linga* originally placed atop the five-tiered stepped pyramid state temple, Prasat Thom, located at the northern part of his capital (12). Remnants have also been found of an imposing ten-armed statue of the dancing Shiva Nataraja, master of the three worlds (*Tribhuvaneshvara*), originally located in the entrance structure of Prasat Thom. Other structures nearby held *linga* as well, giving the city its other name: Lingapura. At this temple mention of the cult, *kamraten jagat ta raja*, equivalent of the Sanskrit *devaraja* of later inscriptions, is found for the first time. Through this ill-defined cult, the king came to be viewed as ritually divine.

While Shiva was the main deity at Prasat Thom, Vishnu (Preserver of the Universe) took on a secondary or complementary role in Prasat Chen, which, according to epigraphic evidence, belongs to the king's foundation temples (13, 14). The remnants of an eight-armed cosmic Vishnu

⁶Eric Bourdonneau, "The Duel between Bhima and Duryodhana and the Sculpted Group of the Western *Gopura* I of Prasat Chen at Koh Ker" (Summer 2012, in collaboration with Phin Samnang/APSARA). Report for UNESCO.



13 Central towers of Prasat Chen, constructed of laterite with sandstone lintels and entrance frame. Prasat is a Khmer term meaning “palace”, used to describe a walled temple complex



15 Remains of Vishnu statue, originally inside the central tower of Prasat Chen



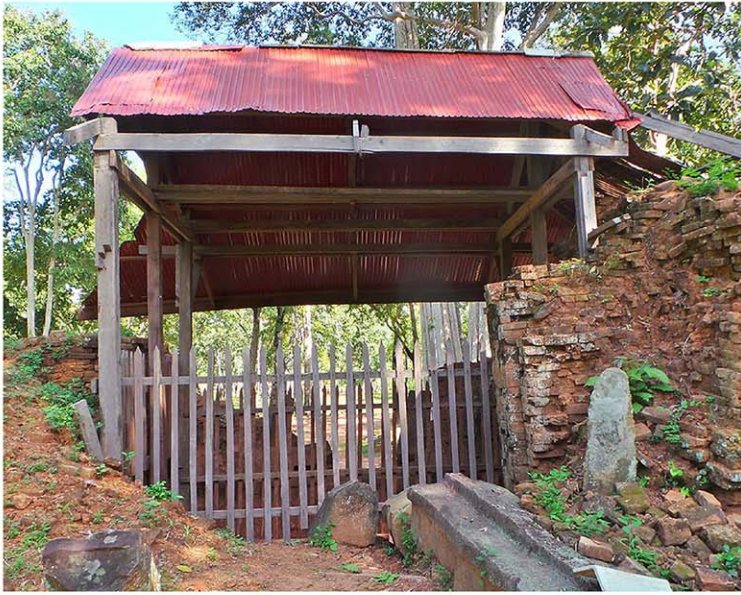
14 Lintel of Prasat Chen south tower featuring Garuda, Vishnu's mount or *asana*

statue have been found near the central tower of Prasat Chen (15). According to Professor Etsuo Uchida and his team from Waseda University, the sandstone for the architectural elements and statues did not come from Mt. Kulen, as in Angkor, but was quarried locally.

The most intriguing aspect about Prasat Chen is the original set of statues (painted in ancient times), which filled the interior of the eastern and western entrance towers (*Gopura*). These were arranged in large-scale theatrical scenes depicting key moments of the ancient Hindu epic stories, Mahabharata and Ramayana. Eric Bourdonneau calls these displays “narrative iconography” that represent a unique moment in the religious and artistic history of ancient Cambodia. In 2009, the EFEO started a new research programme in Koh Ker, focusing on the remains of sculptures and investigating the location of the looted

objects. Through his extensive research and knowledge about Khmer history and culture, Bourdonneau has been able to deduce which statues formed part of the two three-dimensional tableaux by comparing them to identical scenes depicted in bas-relief on two pediments of Banteay Srei, the well-known 10th century architectural gem of slightly later date.

In 1952, a 2.87 metre tall statue of two wrestling monkeys was removed from the eastern pavilion by Jean Boisselier, director of the National Museum, to be safeguarded in Phnom Penh (16, 17, 18). Because of its size and weight, transport by ox-cart took nearly two years. This statue represents the focal point of an episode from the Ramayana epic, known in Cambodia as the Reamker. It is the story of fraternal conflict between two rival monkey kings, Valin and Sugriva. His throne usurped by Valin, Sugriva enlisted



16 Remains of the brick entrance structure, Gopura 1 East, Prasat Chen



17 Two of the three pedestals uncovered in July 2014, Gopura 1 East, Prasat Chen. Pedestal of the Rama statue on the right, smaller pedestal of Laksmana on the left



18 Two of the Pandava brothers, formerly called "kneeling attendants" at The Met. Statue of fighting monkey kings, Valin and Sugriva, Gopura 1 East, Prasat Chen, in the background at the National Museum, Phnom Penh

the help of Rama, one of the manifestations, or avatars, of Vishnu. In the ensuing fight, Valin is shot in the back by an arrow from Rama (19). The Koh Ker statue of Rama is the very same one that ended up in the collection of the Denver Art Museum, thereby losing its cultural context. The statue of Hanuman, the Hindu monkey god and devoted servant of Rama, formerly in the Cleveland Museum of Art, is also an integral part of this scene. One of its earrings and matching broken pedestal were discovered on location. A fifth character, the statue of Laksmana, the younger brother and companion of Rama, is still missing, and most likely in a private collection.⁷

The western structure (*Gopura*) of Prasat Chen contained, perhaps, the most remarkable group of nine sculptures, representing a key episode from the Mahabharata: the culminating point in the Battle of Kurukshetra, the deadly fight between Bhima, one of the five Pandava brothers, and Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas. The fact that only pedestals were found here shows the scope and scale of the systematic looting in the late 20th century, which deliberately destroyed the integrity of the artworks and thereby their identities, as we have seen from the generic names given by museums.

Comparing a similar bas-relief scene from Banteay Srei (20), it is thought that three of the four Pandava brothers, who are assisting their brother Bhima in battle, were located on the north side at Prasat Chen. These are the two Metropolitan Museum "kneeling attendants" statues and one headless statue found in storage at the Siem Reap Conservancy. On the south side, Bourdonneau identified four spectators, including Krishna, Balarama and Yudhishthira, the chief of the Pandava army. Balarama (the statue, whose return was facilitated by Christie's) was the teacher of both Bhima and Duryodhana, instructing them how to use the mace in combat. Under Bourdonneau's

⁷Eric Bourdonneau, "Sculpted Groups of the Eastern Gopura I in Prasat Chen (Koh Ker, Cambodia) and Khmer Art Collections of American Museum: *The Duel between Valin and Sugriva* & *The Fight between Narasimha and Hiranyakasipu*. A preliminary report" (September 2014, in collaboration with EFEO and APSARA).



19 Scene from the Ramayana epic—the fight between Valin and Sugriva, depicted on the eastern pediment of the *Gopura II West*, Banteay Srei, *in situ*



20 Scene from the Mahabharata epic—the battle between Bhima (left) and Duryodhana (right) on the final day of the battle of Kurukshetra—depicted on the western pediment of the *Gopura II West*, Banteay Srei. National Museum, Phnom Penh

direction, 3D visualisation techniques were used to recreate the original arrangement of statues within their historical architectural setting (21).⁸

The Banteay Srei bas-relief depicts the exact moment in the story when Duryodhana jumps into the air, while Bhima leans backward, gathering momentum to swing his mace at his opponent. At Prasat Chen, the early 10th century artists faced the challenge of not only depicting motion, but also suspension. While Duryodhana has his two feet firmly placed on the pedestal, it is the swinging movement of the pendant attached to the pleated *sampot* garment, which suggests him leaping fiercely into the air, his face slightly turned downwards. The active stance of Bhima, face slightly turned upwards, is expressed by his tensed arched back, his bent legs and his step backwards preparing to break Duryodhana's thighs with a violent blow from his mace. The superb detail of Bhima's toes extending beyond the edge of the pedestal is the quintessential expression of this dynamic movement (22). When the footless

statue of Bhima was on display at the Norton Simon Museum, it could never have been appreciated to the fullest, as the meaning of his pose would only have made sense if positioned facing his opponent, Duryodhana. From an artistic perspective, the group of sculptures illustrates an ambitious departure of previous adopted conventions and demonstrates how the sculptors of Koh Ker aspired to introduce an innovative element of movement to express the intense action in one of the most revered Indian epics.

Was the removal of cultural property from Cambodia by the French colonialists, in the late 19th–early 20th century during the French Protectorate, any different from the actions of the 20th century looters, which resulted in wilfully damaged statuary without a cultural context? By contrast, the removal of statues or architectural elements during the colonial era did not involve cutting up or breaking up statuary. Since the objects were ultimately deposited in French museums, such as the Musée Guimet, the objects served to demonstrate the beauty and significance of Khmer art.⁹ The purpose was never financial gain, as with the trafficking in antiquities, but instead represented an attempt to advance knowledge regarding Khmer history, culture and art through the active research programme of multiple generations of dedicated members of the EFEO.¹⁰

This persistent pursuit of knowledge has actually facilitated the recent restitution of these cultural treasures to Cambodia. For example, the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, Cambodia's leading historical and archaeological museum and the new home of the restituted statues, was designed by George Groslier (1887–1945), its first director, and inaugurated in 1920 in the presence of H.M. King Sisowath: it is truly the result of French cultural and academic endeavour. Today, museum visitors are greeted by the imposing sandstone statue of Garuda, one of the top eighty treasures in their collection, which once graced the causeway of Prasat Thom at Koh Ker. After the restoration process of the six restituted statues is finished, most of the Prasat Chen sculptures will once more be reunited in their original spatial arrangement.

In conclusion, the restitution of Cambodian cultural and heritage treasures by the various American museums and auction houses mentioned above is closely tied to archaeological excavations at Koh Ker initiated in 2009, and further conducted in 2012 and 2014 respectively. These continued excavations, carried out by APSARA (Authority for the Protection of the Site and Management of the Region of Angkor) and/or EFEO, confirmed not only the hypothesis published in Bourdonneau's article in 2011, but also yielded more pedestals, which allowed further identification and location (for example, the Balarama statue at Christie's). These findings, documented in Bourdonneau's reports, communicated to UNESCO and the Government of Cambodia, subsequently facilitated the restitution process of the unique masterpieces of Khmer sculpture from Prasat Chen. Kong Vireak, director of the National Museum, has stated that between 1996 and 2014, Cambodia received a total of 350 repatriated antiquities, which were looted from its temples. On various occasions, Prime Minister Hun Sen and Deputy Prime Minister Sok An have stressed the central role of heritage preservation in the national reconstruction and economic development of the country. Therefore, these important acts of restitution are part of the ongoing process to restore the cultural soul of Cambodia.



21 Reconstruction of the duel between Bhima and Duryodhana, western *Gopura*, Prasat Chen, Koh Ker (concept and research: Eric Bourdonneau/EFEO; modelling Grez Production)

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⁸For a 3D digital reconstruction of the placement of the sculptures in the western *Gopura* of Prasat Chen (concept: Bourdonneau/EFEO, creation: grezproduction.com), see <http://www.efeo.fr/base.php?code=808>.

⁹The 7th century head of Harihara, a fusion of the Hindu gods Vishnu (Hari) and Shiva (Hara), discovered in the late 19th century at Phnom Da by the French colonial administrator, Etienne Aymonier, entered the collection of the Musée Guimet in 1889. In early 2016, it was returned (on a five-year loan) and reattached to the body of Harihara, acquired in 1944 by the National Museum of Cambodia. The Musée Guimet statue of the dancing goddess, Uma (height 1.35 m), was discovered in Prasat Kraham, Prasat Thom, by Louis Delaporte, the first French explorer to reach Koh Ker, in 1873. It was shipped to France



22 Pedestal with feet of Bhima, remnant of garment pendant and octagonal scar of original mace tip, *Gopura* I West, Prasat Chen. Photograph courtesy of Eric Bourdonneau, 2009, and the French Archaeological Mission at Koh Ker/EFEO

with other sculptures as well as casts. Originally discovered by Henri Parmentier in the 1920s, the recently excavated sculptural fragments (ankles, feet and pedestal) from the Koh Ker site were sent to France on loan for a restoration project of the statue in 2017.

¹⁰The EFEO was founded in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) in 1898 as the Mission archéologique d'Indo-Chine before changing to its current name in 1900. Its main missions are defined as "archaeological exploration, collection of manuscripts, preservation of monuments, inventorying of ethnic groups, linguistic studies, and the study of the history of all Asian civilizations from India to Japan". See <http://www.efeo.fr/base.php?code=200>

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