Banteay Chhmar Conservation & Training Project

Second International Conference on Banteay Chhmar
Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia
8-10 August 2009

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Conference hosted by
Governor of Banteay Meanchey, His Excellency Oung Oeung

Conference supported by
Global Heritage Fund
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Conference Overview

The Second International Conference on Banteay Chhmar was held August 8th – 10th at the sites of Banteay Chhmar and town of Sisophon in Banteay Meanchey Province in Cambodia.

This second conference followed a highly successful first conference held in August 2008 where scholars from all disciplines assembled in the Grand Hotel Siem Reap to discuss the future of Global Heritage Fund’s (GHF) plans for the conservation and repair of the Banteay Chhmar Temple complex.

This Second International Conference focused on site conservation, master planning, historical scholarship, and community-based tourism development. Over 190 people attended the site visit to Banteay Chhmar and the conference hosted by the Governor of Banteay Meanchey, His Excellency Oung Oeung, and co-hosted by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MCFA).

The Banteay Chhmar temple complex was built at the end of the 12th Century. It is an outpost of the better-known Angkor Complex which was part of the great Khmer Empire that extended between present day Vietnam and Thailand. The location of Banteay Chhmar is North of Siem Reap – the road between Siem Reap and Sisophon has recently been upgraded and it takes approximately 1 hour 30 minutes. Thanks to the Governor, the damaged secondary road to Banteay Chhmar has been upgraded especially for the conference, reducing the original journey time by one hour between Sisophon and Banteay Chhmar to 1 hour thirty minutes.

The Banteay Chhmar complex consists of a main temple complex over surrounded by a moat measuring 750m by 850m and occupies a total area of approximately 12 sq Km. Its location is in what appears to be an arid part of the Khmer Kingdom encouraged the development of an ingenious hydrological system for the collection of water and the filling of a large (baray) or reservoir which formed an extension to the East of the temple complex. The temple was built by the great king Jayavarman VII, who was responsible for most of the major temple complexes in Angkor today.

Among Banteay Chhmar’s unique features are the galleries of bas reliefs sculpted on a 750 meter long sandstone wall enclosing the temple complex. The structures within this Enclosure Wall consisted of a complicated variety of tower shrines, courtyards and linking corridors most of which have collapsed. Like these Angkorian structures, Banteay Chhmar was built of sandstone with laterite used as a core building material. Recently the original quarry has been identified just across the border along with a series of feeder canals which brought water from the Dangrek Hills – the watershed and border between present Thailand and Cambodia, as well as the sandstone to the site. All of these topics have been addressed in the Conference.
Day 1 – August 8th, 2009 – Banteay Chhmar

The first day of the Conference was intended as a site visit to Banteay Chhmar and an opportunity to view progress at the Banteay Chhmar Conference. H.E the Governor arrived with a truck load of fifty rare turtles which were destined to be released in the moat around Banteay Chhmar. The turtles had been confiscated from poachers trying to sell them across the border to Thailand. The VIP guests had the privilege of releasing these magnificent specimens into their new environment.

The GHF Banteay Chhmar team, along with GHF’s new partners Heidelberg University, the South Asian Conservation and Restoration Agency (SACRA), and the Community Based Tourism Project (CBT) in Banteay Chhmar, planned a special tour through the temple complex highlighting the various activities that the GHF team had accomplished during its start-up year, using a collection of posters describing the work that had already been undertaken. Six bases on the eastern side of the temple were selected and the following topics were displayed.

1. MAPPING & SURVEY ACTIVITIES: A display of new maps that were under development by the GHF Banteay Chhmar team was on view and archaeologist Mey Ra explained the team’s discoveries especially relating to the history of hydrology in the region.

2. ARCHAELOGICAL EXPLORATION: Archeologist Kim Sothin seconded from the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts described the archaeological activities he and his team were undertaking. He explained that ALL archaeological activities were related to understanding the temple structure and were not specifically reaching the temple’s history.

3. 3D DIGITAL SCANNING AND DATA BASES: Architect Dr. Pheakdey who has just received his doctorate from Heidelberg University has returned to Cambodia to work with the GHF team and to expand on his thesis. He describes the program to record the stones of Banteay Chhmar with a view to aiding not only in the reconstruction of certain elements such as sections of the bas-reliefs or some of the face towers, but also in creating in virtual reality the overall plan of the Banteay Chhmar temple complex.

4. STRUCTURAL ASSESSMENTS, REPAIRS AND CONSERVATION: Architect Han Ritha, seconded from the Ministry of Culture & Fine Arts who is in charge of the conservation and repair of damaged structures, explained the techniques that are being tested to prepare some prototypical examples for repairing, conserving or reconstructing the bas relief walls and arcades.

5. SACRA STONE CONSERVATION UNIT: Lon Nary Chief Conservator of SACRA both explained and demonstrated stone repair and conservation techniques that are being used in the conservation and repair of the Bas Reliefs.

6. CBT’s ACTIVITIES & COLLABORATION WITH GHF: Tath Sophal, the Coordinator of the CBT now working for the GHF team established their presentation in the Banteay Chhmar Visitor Centre where they displayed the various activities they have developed for visitors. Various local crafts were also on display that will be made available for tourists on payment of a donation.

All guests returned to Sisophon for a dinner hosted by H.E. the Governor.
Day 2 – August 9th, 2009 – Sisophon

The Conference commenced in the morning with formal speeches from the Governor Excellency Oung Oeun, who welcome all the participants and gave a brief introduction to his Province; H.E. Kim Sarith Secretary representing the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MCFA) who described the MCFA’s involvement in the Banteay Chhmar Project; Dr Helen Jessup the President of Friends of Khmer Culture and a contributor to the financing of the Conference spoke saving and protecting a nations cultural assets.

There were a further three contributions from the MCFA describing the work the ministry had recently undertaken, the significance of the nomination of Banteay Chhmar to the World Heritage List and the programs that the MCFA were planning to undertake at Banteay Chhmar in collaboration with the GHF Banteay Chhmar Project.

Representing GHF, John Sanday, GHF’s Field Director, set the scene for further discussions on the work being undertaken at site of having the ambition, following the signing of an agreement with the MCFA of “Protecting” the unique Banteay Chhmar Temple Complex and carefully “Integrating” the local community into the project. In this way GHF is engaging with the local community with a plan to train them to manage and monitor the historic structures and, along with the commune and the CBT, to protect the site from unplanned development and a threatened invasion of mass tourism.

The main body of the Conference commenced with Banteay Chhmar seen in a larger context with a series of papers concentrating on the historic road network from Angkor and Banteay Chhmar’s connectivity with Angkor; There was an interesting paper dealing with settlements, landscapes and water management in a regional context, with interesting comparisons with the Hydrology of Angkor and Koh Ker. Another paper discussed Banteay Chhmar as a cosmogonist representation giving details of research that had been undertaken to obtain a clearer picture of the satellite temples and shrines which led to the creation of new research programmes and a publication of a map specifically identifying the heritage points most of which were hitherto unknown.

In the session concentrating on the interpretive reconstruction of Banteay Chhmar two papers were of particular interest. One concentrated on the 3D restitution to the 4th Dimension of the Banteay Chhmar complex. The paper described previous research into the chronology of construction of the temple complex with particular reference to the face tower shrines – GHF is investing funds to continue this research. Approaching the problem from another angle the paper on Modular 3D modelling of the Banteay Chhmar temple presented a much clearer overview of the planned research to be undertaken using state of the art electronic equipment to record the stone blocks and, as aptly described by one of the German Professors “… to eventually solve the jigsaw puzzle” of reassembling the structures and bas reliefs of Banteay Chhmar.

The art historical session produce some excellent presentations on the Hevajra sculptures of which there are examples in Banteay Chhmar. Once again the art historians have provided the GHF team direction on specific areas of significance in the temple complex.
Day 3 – August 10th, 2009 – Sisophon

Of the two remaining Sessions on the third day, the concept of Banteay Chhmar a “living Site” was discussed. Examples of how to protect the site were described and the need for a master plan was highlighted. A paper on the local people of Banteay Chhmar explained that unlike the Historic Site of Angkor, the local population of Banteay Chhmar was of a more recent origin. Nevertheless these newer communities were seen as the monitors and protectors of the temple complex and its environs if they were properly guided as to the significance of both. The final paper was about the plans for the Community Based Tourism (CBT) project that the GHF has recently taken under its wing as an important extension of its mission in Banteay Chhmar.

Between sessions there was lively discussion drawing out some of the major practical concerns relating to Banteay Chhmar’s planned expansion to meet the anticipated influx of tourists using the new road from Siem Reap and MCFA’s plans to develop a Masterplan and a nomination to UNESCO’s World Heritage List. At present the Banteay Chhmar Village and Commune with a population of 13,000 has 4 hours of electricity from a privately run generator and has only water pumped from the moat to various households or collected in buckets for use in the poorer households.

The conference ended with the tabling of a list of recommendations from the floor and a great vote of thanks to the hosts H.E. Governor Oung Oeun and his staff to the sponsors, Friends of Khmer Culture, GHF US and UK and to the tireless organizer Joyce Clark and her team.

Conference Recommendations

The Conference recommends that the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MCFA) pursue, as a priority, the creation and elaboration of a Master Plan for the Safeguarding of Banteay Chhmar in consultation with all stakeholders, including the local communities, the concerned Provincial departments and agencies, the National ministries, the international non-governmental organizations, and the tourism sector. The Master Plan will support the Cambodian government’s request to the Director General of UNESCO to nominate the site to the World Heritage List.

It is recommended that the Master Plan include:

1. Further zoning giving due consideration to the Temple complex within the larger region, highlighting other Angkorian and pre-Angkorian vestiges, the significant pre- and proto-historic sites spread throughout the region, as well as the extensive ancient and modern regional road and canal networks. It is evident that the Ministry should request a second Royal Decree to address these concerns and those listed below.

2. The creation of a Banteay Chhmar Documentation Center to centralize and make accessible all documentation, including photographs, drawings, and graphic information related to the site.
3. The establishment of training programs for Cambodian students and young professionals in association with all local, provincial, national and international research, conservation and development initiatives.

4. The establishment of efficient means for communication, to continue the collaboration between the concerned international, national, provincial and local representatives.

5. The establishment of water, sewer, and electrical power supply infrastructures capable of sustaining the anticipated significant increase in tourism and associated local community development. The design of water supply and sewerage infrastructures should be based on thorough investigation of historic systems, the regional watershed and ecology, and groundwater investigations. It should give special attention to contemporary settlements around ancient infrastructures northwest of the temple site.

6. The strengthening of ongoing Community-Based Tourism initiatives and the development of complementary activities, including intangible culture (music, dance, theater, etc.) to assist local residents and broaden the regional benefits to the surrounding villages.

In the interim, it is recommended that the following urgent measures be taken by the relevant local, provincial, national, and international representatives, agencies, departments and organizations:

1. Confirm the complete removal and clearance of any mine or military ordinance in and around the site.

2. Take immediate measures based on the 2006 Decision of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, and other relevant legal decisions, to prohibit any physical improvements—including privately constructed housing, commercial buildings, and cell towers—which negatively impact the physical and visual integrity of the site.

3. Implement the construction of a bypass road from Sisophon to Uddar Meanchey in order to alleviate traffic on the present road running along the southern and eastern moats.

4. Prohibit the access of all vehicles, public and privately owned, to restrict and regulate any transportation to the temple beyond the moat.

5. Develop a Risk Map to insure the protection of the Temple from further damage by falling trees, while maintaining the integrity of the forest environment. This will assist the emergency consolidation of the site’s most fragile elements while appropriate long-term conservation measures are developed.

6. Undertake an inventory of all artifacts originating from Banteay Chhmar so that it is possible to understand and appreciate its full glory and contribution to Khmer culture and history.
Above: From L-R - GHF Banteay Chhmar Project Director John Sanday, H.E. Banteay Meancheay Governor Oung Oeung and GHF Banteay Chhmar Project Assistant Director Kousum Sarun. First Day of Banteay Chhmar Conference, August 8th, 2009 Banteay Chhmar

Above: Traditional dancers, Banteay Chhmar, August 8th, 2009
Above: Banteay Chhmar villagers watching Conference site tour, Banteay Chhmar, August 8th, 2009

Above: H.E. Banteay Meancheay Governor Oung Oeung releasing a turtle into the moat, Banteay Chhmar, August 8th, 2009
Above: H.E. Banteay Meanchey Governor Oung Oeung welcoming everyone to the Banteay Chhmar Temple, Banteay Chhmar, August 8th, 2009

Above: Press and Conference participants, Banteay Chhmar, August 8th, 2009
Above: Presentation by archaeologist Kim Sothin, Banteay Chhmar, August 8th, 2009

Above: Presentation by GHF Architect Dr. Pheakdey Ngounphan on the collaboration between GHF, MCFA and Heidelberg University on 3D modeling, Banteay Chhmar, August 8th, 2008
Above: Presentation by GHF CBT Coordinator Tath Sophal in the Banteay Chhmar Visitor Center on the work of the Banteay Chhmar CBT to H.E. Banteay Meancheay Governor Oung Oeung, Banteay Chhmar, August 8th, 2009

Above: Traditional dancers at the Conference welcome dinner, Sisophon, August 8th, 2009
Above: Introductory remarks given by GHF Banteay Chhmar Project Director John Sanday at the Provincial Conference Center, Sisophon, August 9th 2009

Above: The Second International Conference on Banteay Chhmar, Provincial Conference Center, Sisophon, August 9th 2009
Above: Talk by GHF CBT Coordinator Tath Sophal and GHF UK Manager James Hooper on GHF’s community development work at Banteay Chhmar, Provincial Conference Center, Sisophon, August 9th 2009

Above: Awards of thanks given to the major Conference organizers, including (l-r): Joyce Clark, Vice President, Friends of Khmer Culture; H.E. Ok Sophon, Director General, MCFA; Michael Tomlan, Chair, GHF Senior Advisory Board; John Sanday, GHF Banteay Chhmar Project Director; H.E. Banteay Meanchey Governor Oung Oeung; Helen Jessup, President, Friends of Khmer Culture.