

Heritage, history and heterotopia at Angkor Wat

Review of:

The second volume of Michael Falser, *Angkor Wat: A Transcultural History of Heritage*, Berlin/Boston Walter de Gruyter, 2020, Two Volumes, 1150 pp, approx.1500 photos/maps/illustration/sketches/notes, epilogues, bibliography, index, \$198.99, ISBN 978-3-11-033572-9/ e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-033584-2

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Angkor Wat is the world's largest stone monument and a precious gem in the history of world architecture. Across a 200m wide moat, the majestic sacred complex of elegant towers, decorated all over with delicate and stirring relief carvings, has remained active since it was erected in the early decades of the twelfth century but its meaning has constantly shifted. French archaeologists learnt from inscriptions that it was built by a great warrior king Suryavarman II (r. 1113-1149), a devotee of Viṣṇu. The temple is identified as Campeśvara in the newly found Khmer inscription.¹ Suryavarman II is recorded fighting for years as far away as modern Hanoi and modern Thailand's borders with Burma, but he died peacefully in Angkor and received a state funeral, where the younger brother who succeeded him gave him pronounced the posthumous title Paramaviṣṇuloka ('gone to the world of Viṣṇu'). After his death, the temple was apparently referred to by his posthumous name Viṣṇuloka/Biṣṇuloka.² The current name Angkor Wat ('temple of the city') derives from the Middle Khmer period and is found in the seventeenth century inscription from one of the gallery walls of the temple.³ For centuries it has always been referred to by this name by local people, whose oral history retained little of the historical detail exposed by the French specialists.

A lot has been written on the temple since the late thirteenth century when a Chinese traveller Zhou Daguan spent a year in Angkor and wrote an invaluable and amusing eyewitness account. His first descriptive accounts were penned in his text

¹ Claude Jacques, 'Inscription K. 1297 and the fragility of our historical knowledge', paper given at EFEO Paris in April 2016.

² The name 'Biṣṇuloka' appeared especially in the inscriptions of the sixteenth and seventeenth century on the Southern gallery of the temple in K. 298-2 above the portrait of the king. See Saveros Pou, 'Textes en kmer moyen. Inscriptions modernes d'Angkor 2 et 3', *BEFEO* 70, vo. 57, no. 1, 1970:111. Saveros Pou, 'Inscriptions modernes d'Angkor 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16a, 16, et 16c', *BEFEO* 59, no. 1, 1972:239.

³ Inscription IMA 27, dated 1583 śaka (1661 AD) mentions a monk named *Samdec Preah Muniyakusal*, who came to pay homage at 'Preah Angkor Wat'. See Saveros Pou, 'Inscriptions modernes d'Angkor 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33', *BEFEO* 60, no. 1, 1973:209, also published by APSARA and Centre for Khmer Studies, 2013.

'A record of Cambodia – the land and its people'⁴ after his return to China. After this, the descriptions of Angkor are rare and unclear. The oldest royal chronicle dating to the end of the sixteenth century is vague about the place. More precise descriptions of Angkor come in the late sixteenth early seventeenth century in Spanish and Portuguese travellers' accounts. In the sixteenth century the great temple was dedicated to the Buddha and gradually became a Buddhist pilgrimage centre. The first map of Angkor Wat was drawn by a Japanese pilgrim in the seventeenth century. Angkor Wat's global reputation was accelerated in the second half of the nineteenth century as a result of a series of European missions, especially, after the claimed 'discovery' of Angkor by Henri Mohout, a French naturalist who visited the site in 1860 and wrote about it in Parisian journals. Soon, it occupied its rightful place among great monuments of the world.

We usually think of large architectural monuments as constantly representing the art, politics and religious beliefs of a period but Falser wants to show how the meaning of a major building is not fixed but shifts over time. Following Michael Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia', popularized in 'Des espaces autres' ('Of other spaces') and 'Les hétérotopies', Falser investigates the multi-sited, transcultural nature of Angkor Wat's heritage that is interwoven in its multiple Angkorian, French, Middle and modern Cambodian and other Asian representations. He argues that following the original erection of the capital of the Khmer Empire, a number of heterotopias were constructed in a variety of ways in colonial France, in post-Angkor Siam, in India, in twentieth century Cambodia and, continues even today.

Volume I investigates the French colonial involvement in the process of exchange between the real Cambodian temple on the ground in Angkor and its reel restored life as envisioned in colonial France. Falser talks of the 'translation' of Angkor Wat in France and towards the world through huge plaster casts taken directly from the temple walls, from stunning sacred statues taken into museum collections and in propagandistic colonial exhibitions from 1867 until 1937.

Volume II focuses on the post-seventeenth century history of Angkor Wat in Cambodia from 'jungle find' to European visitors to global icon. It examines the multi-sited and multi-layered view of the monument over the years through colonial archaeology, Cambodian independence, politically unstable years of the war in neighbouring Vietnam, the politics of its eventual inclusion in the World Heritage List of UNESCO and now a Living Heritage site. The main theme of this volume is 'back translation' where the representations of Angkor Wat in France created certain aesthetic experiences that were re-applied to the original site in Cambodia.

In the first chapter IX (1-151), challenging the colonial French narrative of salvaging abandoned Angkorian temples, Falser argues that Angkor was never lost to the Cambodians as they always knew it and probably thousands of them were living and farming around the temples when the first French visitors came to the temples. Despite Cambodia's independence from France in 1953, the ousting of Sihanouk in a coup in 1970 and the re-entry to the park after the Khmers Rouges

⁴ Peter Harris (trans). *Zhou Daguan: A Record of Cambodia: the land and its people*, Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2007.

disaster twenty years later the French narrative of ‘salvaging’ the forgotten Angkorian temples remained constant and is here critically re-evaluated by Falser.

Scientific research about the French post-colonial formation of the Angkor Park still remains somewhat fragmentary given the inaccessibility of many French documents and the EFEO’s reluctance to publish in depth on its own institutional history. Today, most of our knowledge of the Angkor Park is primarily based on the reports of various international work teams, on UNESCO conference proceedings and international meeting reports and on the work of the Khmer Angkor Conservation Agency called APSARA. By meticulously researching the findings of the daily reports, personal diaries, and ongoing archaeological, architectural, conservation/restoration practices of the French archaeologists and conservators Falser presents a shifting pre-colonial, French-colonial and early postcolonial history of the Angkor Archaeological Park between 1860 and 1975. He strives throughout to remove the colonial historical lens that imported the aspirations of the French scholars who enthused about Angkor and ‘Khmerology’ as their predecessors had about Egyptology under Napoleon.

Part one and two of this chapter focus largely on the creation of Angkor Archaeological Park in Siem Reap. Charles-Émile Bouillevaux (1850), his son Henri Mohout (1860) and Louis Delaporte (1873) were the early French explorers in the region. Through the publications of journal articles, spatial descriptions, illustrations, maps and plotting of some of the temples in relation to each other, they exposed the grandeur of Angkor. After these initial visits, the number of French visitors/researchers working on the ground increased and gradually archaeological research in Indochina was institutionalized. The Archaeological Mission of Indochina was created in 1898 and eventually became the *École Française d’Extrême-Orient* (EFEO) in 1901 focused on scientific studies of Indochina. The next thirty years, saw a surge in guidebooks and graphic maps of the Angkorian temples that were primarily made for the Western tourists. Tourism served two purposes for the French — to show foreign visitors how Angkor was in good hands and to generate foreign exchange for conservation and economic development.



Figure 1: Commaille’s bungalow on Angkor Wat’s central passageway, depicted in Salaun’s 1903 report *L’Indochine*.

Source: Salaun 1903, between 321-22. (Falser, Vol. 2: 24-figure IX.9)

In 1908 the first appointed conservator, Jean Commaille conceptualised archaeological work in the Angkor Park while keeping potential tourists in mind. His efforts were mainly focused on Angkor Wat and the Bayon. The placement of a small wooden bungalow in 1909, right opposite the entrance of Angkor Wat, and the relocation of existing monasteries that blocked the view from the bungalow, was clearly planned to afford picturesque perspectives of the temple (fig. 1).

Slowly, the network of local temples, monasteries and connecting paths that were initially indicated on the early French mission maps disappeared from the newly prepared tourist maps. By the end of 1913, Angkor was popularised by the French as an ultimate goal for international travellers. In less than a decade, from a patchwork of individual temples, it was transformed into one coherent reserve creating the clear circulation routes among the temples, with improving infrastructure and detailed guidebooks. Detailed descriptions about the sunrise, sunset spots, full moon watching, elephant rides or 'Apsara' dances inside Angkor Wat planned the visitors' days. To create touristic landscapes and picturesque ruins even the vestiges of encroaching forests were retained at Ta Prohm temple in order to suggest the experiences of the first western pioneers in the nineteenth century.

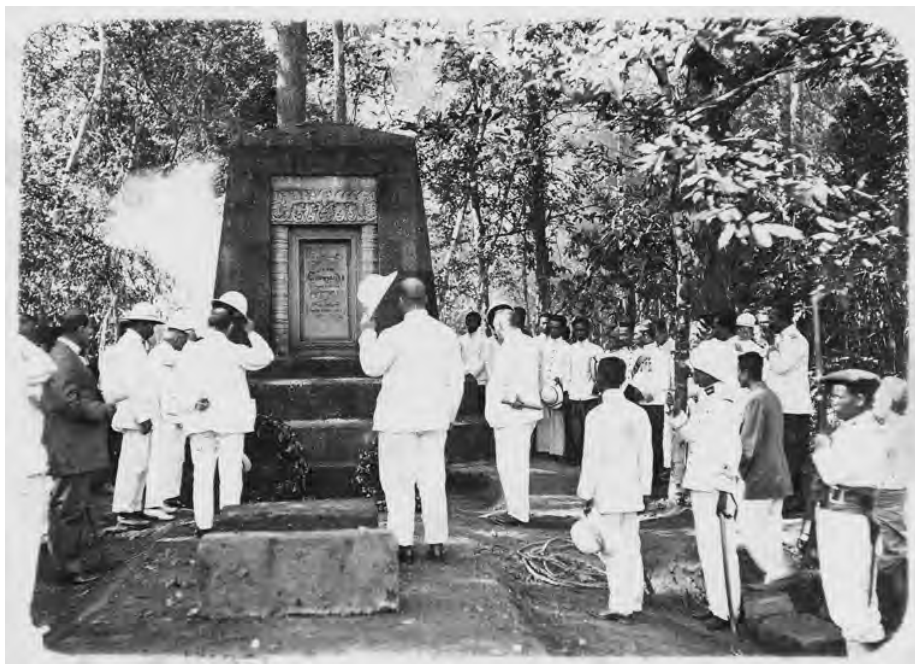


Figure 2: Jean Commaille's tomb near the Bayon temple. Source: © EFEO Archive, Paris. (Falser, Vol. 2:38 -figure IX.19)

Gradually, the process of transforming the Angkor Park into what Falser calls a 'dead archaeological icon' began. In this process, he points out how 'inside' and 'outside' were defined. European agents were placed in charge of the surveillance, everyone except a European with an interest in painting, drawing, photography, filming was obliged to request special permission. To take care of the growing tourism, hydrofoil air planes were introduced to take off from Phnom Penh that landed in the moat of Angkor Wat. While opening the 'dead archaeological' site

for westerners, the living site of regional Buddhist veneration was ignored. Interestingly, even off the beaten path, tourist tours did not mention the local population, the villages in the complex, their produce, their daily lives, the monks or the pagodas. Indigenous living culture was pushed aside. But Jean Commaillé's tomb was constructed with Angkorian style cement mouldings inside the Angkor Park, in the vicinity of the Bayon temple (fig. 2). Ironically it was he who was the first, as conservator of Angkor, to push the villages and monasteries outside the tourist zone claiming them to be harmful encroachments. Falser highlights these paradoxes really well throughout these two parts of the chapter. Step by step, these two chapters demonstrate how the French negotiated complete control over the Angkorian temples after they were returned by Siam in 1907 and made tourist ready for an international audience while completely ignoring the local pagoda and village culture.

Once Angkor was transformed, in Falser's view, into a touristic commodity or a museum without the walls, the task of bringing the Angkorian temples back to their former glory was vigorously taken up by the French conservators, archaeologists and architects. The author thus challenges the aesthetic recreation of the living Angkor site through the emerging disciplines of archaeology and conservation based on the French vision of Angkor Wat. In Part three the author goes on to question the restoration of Angkorian temples in a critical analysis of the application of the Dutch-pioneered 'reconstruction' technique, which has hitherto been vaunted as a key French-colonial achievement in Angkor as anastylosis.

During 1907-1916, the first phase of clearing the temples of vegetation, fallen building blocks and getting the park area under overall control was achieved by Commaillé. After him Henri Marchal took charge and blamed the dilapidated condition of the temples on the rudimentary construction techniques of the ancient Khmers. He first introduced stabilisation and strengthening measures by using patinated flat irons for the collapsing lintels of Angkor Wat, along with extensive use of reinforced concrete. His hasty efforts were the outcome of EFEO's urgent strategy to make all sites and temples accessible to the growing number of tourists. Some of Marchal's seniors were apprehensive about the severe use of concrete and the cutting of many trees to make the temples accessible. There is a thin line between the romantic approach to a ruin and the need to conserve or restore it. Even though a picturesque ruin arouses romantic feelings, it is still vulnerable to decay unless the process is halted or reversed. It is a skill to ensure the process of conservation and restoration that respects the structure, as Marchal wrote in his notes. The conflict between the scientific recovery and touristic exploitation of the Park grew intense at this time as some of the restoration/reconstruction measures had already damaged the original structure of few Khmer temples. In 1929, a somewhat restored Angkor Wat was introduced to the world by the EFEO.

French experts working in Cambodia were aware of the work of their Dutch counterparts in restoring sites in Java. In fact, they keenly followed the Dutch applied methods of conservation/restoration/reconstruction and publications, especially after the success of a large and earthquake-prone Prambanan temple project in Central Java. Falser highlights the exchange of cultural diplomacy and scientific knowledge between the Dutch East Indies' Archaeological Service at

Batavia and the French EFEO in Hanoi, along with the mutual visits by administrators, architects and archaeologists to important heritage sites.

The French restoration methods were criticised as ‘old fashioned’ by the director of the Dutch colonial service on his visit to Neak Pean temple in 1929. Immediately, Marchal took up an official study tour to inspect Javanese archaeological sites and implemented the technical/aesthetical ‘method of Java’ after his return to Angkor at Banteay Srei temple.⁵ The Dutch methods implemented partially disassembling, cleaning and then reassembling the stones of a building to return it to its original condition. They prepared detailed drawings, photographs and descriptions to show the original appearance of the building and the proposed restoration. Whenever there was any lack of information on some building parts, the Dutch left them incomplete to avoid importing wrong assumptions into a building. At the same time any necessary new stones were left uncarved and recognisable to the viewer (fig. 3).

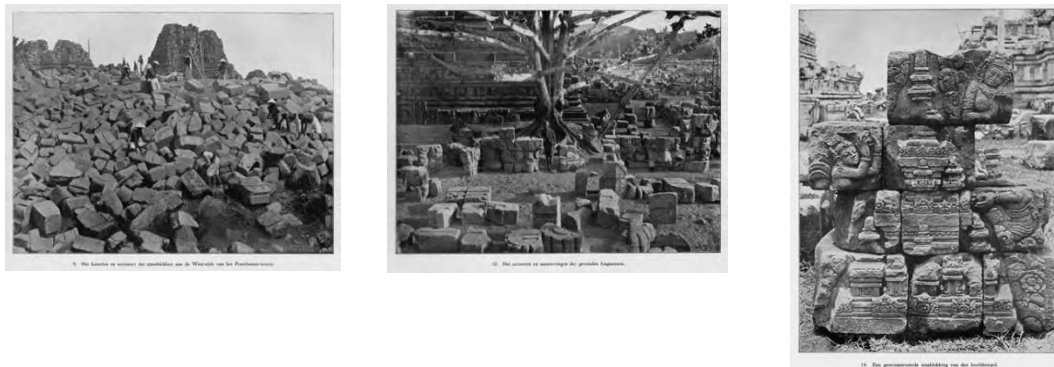


Figure 3: Depictions of the Prambanan temple reconstruction/restoration work as published in Bosch’s 1922 ‘Restoration’ in the Journal *Djawa*. Source: Bosch 1922: plates 14-16. (Falser, Vol. 2:70- fig. IX. 39 a, b.)

The great lesson to be learnt from the methods put into practice in Java is to use cement with greatest discretion. The technique of *anastylosis* was established in these practices but the Dutch called it ‘reconstruction’. The term *anastylosis* was first introduced in Greece after the Acropolis restoration in Athens. Falser questions, ‘how and when did the knowledge of the Athens contexts reach the French specialists in Angkor?’

Paris trained Greek engineer Nicolas Balanos began his work on the Parthenon in 1898. His work was officially praised by the experts during the Conference organized by the International Office of Museums in Athens in 1931, which resulted in the drawing-up of the first International Charter for the Conservation of Monuments. The Greek term ‘*anastelosis*’, employed by Balanos for his work, was adopted in the Charter of Athens as ‘*anastylosis*’.⁶ While sanctioning the judicious use of modern material, especially reinforced concrete, section VI of the Charter describes the method:

⁵ As mentioned by Marchal in *Journal des fouilles* on 28th November 1930. See Falser, vol. II: 74.

⁶ For the etymology of the term, see J. Dimacopoulos, ‘Anastylosis and Anasteloseis’, ICOMOS Information 1- 1985,16-25.

In the case of ruins, scrupulous conservation is necessary, and steps should be taken to reinstate any original fragments that may be recovered (*anastylosis*), whenever this is possible; the new material used for this purpose should in all cases be recognizable.

While Balanos based his work on using original elements, he was not concerned about their original position. He also introduced for the first time the insertion of metal reinforcements within the monument in the restoration process. Many defenders of modern heritage believe that Balanos is responsible for more harm to the Parthenon than repair.⁷ Balanos has published the concept of *anastylosis* in his Greek publications but the term was first introduced to the international audience in the French language as argued by Falser (Vol. II:86):

The scientific contact zone-where global knowledge about conservation activities from Angkor, Java, Athens (and Rome) among others was spread and exchanged between the different French actors from all international centres of advanced archaeology and heritage preservation – was diverse.

Based himself on what was published in the EFEO's journal, Falser demonstrates how the concept of *anastylosis* was circulated in French academia even before the Athens charter and a link between archaeological conservation activities in Athens and Angkor by the mid 1920s.

The restoration of Notre Dame as well as other prominent religious monuments in France became infamous for the over intrusive modification technique used by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc in the mid nineteenth century.⁸ It even tarnished the French reputation for archaeological restoration in far-away Cambodia. With this tarnished image, and the radically revised terms for 'restoration and reconstruction' in the Athens Charter the French hurriedly adopted the new term '*anastylosis*' but used Dutch 'reconstruction' methods. Even though Marchal assigned to *anastylosis* the successfully completed prestigious project of the beautiful Banteay Srei temple, remote from Angkor, in reality, the technique was first adopted at Preah Khan temple in Angkor. There is no example of pure *anastylosis* in Angkor as most of the archaeological conservation work was achieved through a combination of consolidation and restoration.⁹ By highlighting the abrupt change from 'reconstruction/restoration' to '*anastylose*' in the French official

⁷ Unlike leaded iron, used by the ancient Greeks, the metal clamps used by Balanos were exposed to the elements and eventually corroded. The expansion of rusty iron has caused irreparable damage to most of the cracked building materials. Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999:187-189.

⁸ John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, Vol. IV, London: George Allen, 1903: 82-83

⁹ The technique is used only in some parts of Banteay Srei, Banteay Samre, the central part of Neak Pean, tower of Bakong, the Baphuon and at Preah Khan, for example, the tower of the Southwest corner of the first gallery and the columns of the 'rice god house' were rebuilt with this technique whereas the rest of the monument was just stabilised by the Conservation d'Angkor.

documents from 1932, Falser defines complicated and multi-sited network of knowledge and technology exchange transfers between Europe and Asia rather between Paris-Athens and Batavia-Angkor and exposes what he calls the ‘myth-making process’ of French anastylosis technique and challenges the official historiography of Marchal as a ‘man of anastylosis.’

The outbreak of the Second World War affected the reconstruction work at the Park and when it resumed, the new phase of temple projects began with ad hoc reconstruction and French ‘anastylose’ by Marchal’s successors Maurice Glaize and B. P. Groslier. With tourism rapidly filling the Park, even the technological advances couldn’t stop the structural interventions and the temples of Angkor were once again seeing tons of cement and reinforced concrete used as in the case of the poorly-restored small brick temple of Prasat Kravan, or the cement plates on the Southern gallery ceiling of Angkor Wat in place of the original wooden rosette design (fig. 4).¹⁰



Figure 4: Left- Identification of the old wooden ceiling decoration at Angkor Wat galleries as discovered by Commaile and published in BEFEO 1913. Right- Replacement of the wooden ceiling of the Angkor Wat galleries with cement tiles photographed in August 1948. Source: BEFEO 1913, plate XIX; © EFEO Archive, Paris (Falser Vol. 2:110- fig. IX. 66 a and d)

Falser (Vol. II: 111) comments,

And Angkor temples, paved the way for the first full scale hypothetical reconstruction in a non-original material...[With more and more such blunders,] French protagonists at Angkor progressively recast themselves as the ‘constructors of Angkor’, as opposed to their previous role as conservateurs d’Angkor. The almost industrialised procedure of dismantling the existing temple, reinforcing its old structure by strengthening and replacing its interior and exterior elements with new material, and finally re-erecting the whole above a new substructure was increasingly similar to contemporary construction sites.

The chapter thoroughly investigates all the available evidences to define a series of restoration blunders. The author’s proficiency in French is essential since all the

¹⁰ In order to mask the ruin as explained by Jean Boisselier, ‘La vie et l’œuvre d’Henri Marchal (1876-1970)’, *BSEI*, XLVII:1, 1972: 25, see Falser Vol. II: 111

archaeological, architectural and conservation reports, institutional correspondence and related photographic material is mostly hand or type written in French.

At the time of French 'discovery' of Angkor,

Cambodians did not see Angkor as the heart of their nation. That was a notion later cultivated by the French. They made Angkor central to their narrative justifying colonial control — that Cambodia was a great kingdom fallen into 'decadence,' and that France was setting it straight, bringing it into the modern age, by creating such institutions as ports and post offices, and by conserving — for Cambodia and the world — the fabulous archaeological site of Angkor. Angkor became the national symbol, appearing on the colonial flag, on banknotes, and postage stamps.¹¹

Chapter X (153-204) discusses how Angkor Wat mutated into an icon of the appropriated cultural heritage of Cambodia's French-colonial prestige. The first two parts deal with the making of new princely leader Norodom Sihanouk as the twentieth century political reincarnation of the twelfth-thirteenth century Buddhist king Jayavarman VII. Sihanouk appropriated the golden age of Angkor into the official national narrative and saw in his own 'Buddhist socialism' the legacy of the great thirteenth century Buddhist king. Like the thirteenth century king who had portraits statues made of himself and his wives installed in his temples and who had his own image carved in reliefs showing his military expeditions and other exploits on the walls of the huge Bayon and Banteay Chhmar temples, Sihanouk cultivated his own visual record in film and photography to demonstrate his Buddhist piety and protect the nation-state. Sihanouk consciously recalled Jayavarman VII to create a direct lineage between two Buddhist monarchs.¹² In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Europeans opined that Cambodians were ignorant of their own past. Many of the named rulers, their reigning dates, and their deeds were resurrected by European archaeologists and epigraphers in this period. Possibly, Sihanouk and his entourage were keen to show their knowledge of the 'dates-and-names' history developed by the French as they began to draw implicit analogies between Sihanouk and his Angkorian predecessors, as much for the benefit of international audiences as for that of an internal Cambodian audience.¹³

In the third part, Falser discusses the making of Angkor as a 'hydraulic empire'. One of the features of Angkor commonly articulated by the French (first developed by Goloubew and then followed by B. P. Groslier) was how political

¹¹ John Burgess, 'Modern life of Angkor Wat', *The Diplomat*, 23rd February 2021.

<https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/john-burgess-on-the-modern-life-of-angkor-wat/>

¹² Milton Osborne, 'History and Kingship in Contemporary Cambodia,' in *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, no. 7 1966:1–14. For details of the references to Angkor made by Cambodian kings and politicians in the mid-twentieth century see Robert Garry, 'La Renaissance du Cambodge de Jayavarman VII, Roi d'Angkor à Norodom SihanoukVarman', Phnom Penh: Departement de l'information, 1964.

¹³ Joanna Wolfarth, 'Lineage and Legitimacy: Exploring Royal-Familial Visual Configurations in Cambodia', *Art and Vernacular Photographies in Asia*, vol. 8, issue 1, 2017:9 <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7977573.0008.104>

regimes shaped water management systems in ancient Cambodia and how these systems sustained their regimes. Groslier further (1952, 1956, 1960) developed the water management model of Angkor as a 'hydraulic city' which he saw as being managed by top-down state sponsored hydraulic infrastructure that was to ultimately decline due to gradual laterization.¹⁴ Groslier's 'myth of hydraulic city' as Falser calls it, has been criticised as colonial and orientalist, by Karl A. Wittfogel, a Marxist Sinologist, who identified it with the 'terror of hydraulic despotism' combined with large-scale irrigation systems and autocratic leadership.¹⁵ In his view, many societies, mainly in Asia, relied heavily on the building of large-scale irrigation works. To do so, the state had to organize forced labour from the population at large. As only a centralized administration could organize the building and maintenance of large-scale systems of irrigation.

While the description of 'Angkor as a hydraulic city' and its economic and social implications are still debated in academia, Falser seems to support Wittfogel's view and rejects — without much explanation — the 'hydraulic city' concept as a French colonial and neo-colonial creation myth.¹⁶ Our understanding on a triangular relationship between water, infrastructure and political rule has undergone radical changes since Wittfogel's time.¹⁷ The most significant shift is that infrastructures, today, are generally viewed as being socio-technical, rather than merely technical. Building on insights from science and technology studies, social scientists and historians are in wide agreement that an infrastructure system for, say, water irrigation or supply, cannot be reduced to its material/physical components alone. Instead, it needs to be seen as a combination of technical

¹⁴ B. P. Groslier, 'La cite hydraulique angkorienne: exploitation ou surexploitation du sol?', *BEFEO* 66, no. 1, 1979.

¹⁵ Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957:18, 137-151. His famous work involved the despotic hydraulic state, which he described as 'if irrigation farming depends on the effective handling of a major supply of water, the distinctive quality of water — its tendency to gather in bulk — becomes institutionally decisive. A large quantity of water can be channelled and kept within bounds only by the use of mass labour; and this mass labour must be coordinated, disciplined, and led.'

¹⁶ Wittfogel recognized that different hydraulic conditions allowed for the development of different types of irrigation systems: hydraulic societies have tended to develop in massive riverine environments, while hydro-agricultural societies have tended to develop along smaller water sources in regions where geographical features hydraulically compartmentalized the countryside. Even though the question of hydraulic city is disputed by Falser, he does not ponder hydro-agricultural as discussed by Wittfogel. Falser, Vol. 2: 441-2.

¹⁷ Criticism levelled at Wittfogel is that his work is conceptually too rooted in technological determinism, empirically too selective in its attention to certain states, and ideologically too motivated by anti-communism. see E. R. Leach, 'Hydraulic Society in Ceylon', *Past and Present*, vo.15, no.1, 1959:2-26; F. W. Mote, 'The Growth of Chinese Despotism: A critique of Wittfogel's theory of Oriental Despotism as applied to China', *Oriens Extremus*, vo. 8, no.1, 1961:1-41; J. A. Offner, 'On the inapplicability of 'Oriental despotism' and the 'Asiatic mode of production' to the Aztecs of Texcoco'. *American Antiquity*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1981: 43-61; D. Worster, *Rivers of empire: water, aridity, and the growth of the American West*, New York: Pantheon 1985. None of these publications feature in the bibliography.

artefacts, regulatory frameworks, cultural norms, role in ritual, environmental flows, funding mechanisms, governance forms, etc. that get configured in distinct ways in particular places at particular times.

There is no doubt that the Angkorian infrastructure rerouted river systems and substantially transformed the natural hydrology of the region. The scale of the hydraulic system is perhaps unparalleled in the pre-industrial world, and includes channels 20 km in length and 40–60 m wide, reservoirs with surface areas of up to 16.8 km², and a vast network of walled fields used for flooded rice agriculture.¹⁸ Most prior accounts of agriculture at Angkor have focused on major infrastructure associated with top-down management because of theoretical preconceptions, scholarly preoccupation with Angkorian elites, and the prominence of the huge reservoirs and channels. However, in addition to the state-sponsored infrastructure, temple communities with residential hamlets and a primary temple with associated reservoirs also regulated water management and rice production at a local level.¹⁹

The old debates about water management should now be replaced by a more productive discussion about the role of the network, how it was developed, the way it was managed, the degree to which the state managed and its day-to-day functions, and the relationship between the operation of the network and the demise of Angkor.²⁰

Falser goes on to argue for the continued evocation of the achievements of ancient Angkor in agriculture, water management and infrastructure in the brilliant architect Vann Molyvann's vast modern building program for the new capital of Phnom Penh in the fourth part of the chapter. Vann Molyvann, the pioneer of the 'New Khmer Architecture' graduated from Paris and had studied with the famed French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier. In the newly independent Cambodia, when the country was eager to release itself from its colonial identity, Vann created some of the finest buildings, in nearly 100 projects, for the newly independent nation. Reflecting on the regional past and incorporating modernism, he helped forge a new Khmer urban identity. Water was a recurring design element in his works as seen in the National Sports Complex, where he directed rainwater into a basin beneath the indoor stadium to produce a cooling effect through evaporation and convection (fig. 5).

¹⁸ R. Acker, 'New geographical tests of the hydraulic thesis at Angkor', *South East Asia Research*, 6, 1998: 5-47; Damian Evans, 'Putting Angkor on the map: a new survey of a Khmer 'hydraulic city' in historical and theoretical context, PhD. diss. University of Sydney, 2007; Roland Fletcher and Damian Evans, 'The dynamics of Angkor and its landscape', Haendel A. (ed.), *Old Myths and New Approaches: Interpreting Ancient Religious Sites in Southeast Asia*, Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2012a: 42-62; S. Hawken, *Metropolis of Ricefields: A Topographic Classification of a Dispersed urban Complex*, PhD. diss. University of Sydney, 2012.

¹⁹ Sarah Klassen and Damian Evans, 'Top-down and bottom-up water management: A diachronic model of changing water management strategies at Angkor, Cambodia', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 2020: 2

²⁰ Roland Fletcher et al., 'The Water Management Network of Angkor, Cambodia', *Antiquity* 82, 2008:669



Figure 5: Rainwater basin under the stadium to produce cooling effect in the National Sports complex designed by Vann Molvann. Source- Journal Nokor Khmer, 1969, 40-41. (Falser Vol. 2:199- fig. X. 34)

It was the independent state's single largest public construction project and truly 'Khmer', built entirely without any international financial support.²¹ Vann asserted after completion of the stadium that 'modernity should not be inspired superficially by Western ideas that destroy all traces of the past. New building should bring tradition and heritage back to life.'²² While acknowledging Vann's inspiration from the Angkorian monumental legacy and traditional Khmer architecture, Falser brings out the entanglement of the local and the colonial in Vann's Independence Memorial, built before the National stadium. The monument combines the pre-Angkorian temple forms and decoration styles with the symbolic content of the Parisian Arc de Triomphe.²³

The final part of the Falser opus discusses the staging of various cultural performances and re-enactments in Angkorian style within Sihanouk's strategies of cultural diplomacy, both in Cambodia inside the Angkor Archaeological Park, and around the world through the king's private Royal Khmer Ballet. Even though, the ancient roots of Khmer dance are well attested in epigraphy there is no surviving sculpture, image or text on ancient Khmer dance choreography as argued by Falser.

²¹ It is a surprisingly little-known fact that Phnom Penh's National Stadium was built with funds raised by a special national tax imposed on ice, alcohol, and ice cream: items regularly consumed by many Cambodians of all classes and backgrounds. See Roger Nelson, 'Locating the Domestic in Vann Molyvann's National Sports Complex', *Abe Journal: Architecture Beyond Europe*, Paradoxical Southeast Asia, 2017-
<https://journals.openedition.org/abe/3615>

²² Helen Grant Ross and Darryl Leon Collins, *Building Cambodia: New Khmer Architecture 1953-1970*, Bangkok: Key Publishers, 2006:205.

²³ Falser, Vol. 2: 394.

There is no way of knowing exactly how sacred or courtly dance was performed in ancient Angkor, even though celestial dancers and musicians appear in abundance on the temple reliefs in Angkor. The Khmer royal dance survived in the Siamese court in Bangkok after the Thai capture of Angkor in the fifteenth century. The Thais captured thousands of artists, musicians and installed in the Thai capital of Ayutthaya, where the traditions of Khmer royal dance were preserved.

King Ang Duong returned from Thailand to be crowned as the king at Oudong in 1847 and he brought dancers with him from Bangkok. He founded a school at the royal palace and began minutely reconstructing the choreography, music, costumes and the décor of the 'original' Khmer ritual ballet, emphasizing its antiquity and claiming its origins in the Angkorian period. But much of it was based on the twelfth century apsara relief carvings at Angkor Wat (fig. 6):

There is no evidence that the apsaras performed dance dramas based on the epic Ramayana [as *robam kbach boran* does today]. As far as we know, extended dance-drama did not develop at all in the court at Angkor. ... It is popular to claim that the dance style of Angkor's apsaras of the twelfth century is perfectly preserved in the Royal Cambodia Ballet dance style. Unfortunately, this is romantic nonsense. A world of difference separates the elaborately costumed, chaste, and refined Cambodian dancers of today from the bare-breasted, hip-swinging beauties of Angkor.²⁴



Figure 6: Bopha Devi photographed in front of the Apsara reliefs of Angkor Wat as published in *Cambodge d'aujourd'hui* in 1962. Source- *Cambodge d'aujourd'hui*, 46-47, July-August 1962, 22. (Falser, Vol. 2: 209-fig. X. 44)

²⁴ James Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1967:59.

In early twentieth century, King Sisowath brought to France a troupe of dancers to lend authenticity to the spectacular replica of the royal palace at the colonial exhibition in Marseille. Reproductions of Angkor temples manned with king and dancers encapsulated the reign on French soil as 'original Khmer' of 'great purity'.²⁵ In reality, it was random collage of some traditional Khmer dance elements for the Occidental gaze.²⁶ But the success of these performances made the 'back translation' easy on the real site in Cambodia, where these dances were performed in front of the temple.

After Cambodia's independence in 1953, a major configuration of the Khmer dance was initiated by Sihanouk's mother, Queen-consort Sisowath Kossamak, for anti-colonial cultural nationalism but ironically it was based on the French ideas developed by George Groslier and Sappho Marchal.²⁷ She introduced group precision dance, entertaining effects, and shortened the day long royal dance ritual into a compact two-hour show along with the 'Apsara dance', which served the new Khmer nationalism. All, important diplomatic visits were combined with dance performances at the actual temple sites with fireworks and illuminations inspired by the Parisian celebrations.

Under the Khmer Republic that followed the overthrow of Sihanouk, dance was still linked to the national agenda and the royal ballet practiced each morning in their riverside pavilion in the royal palace. But when the Republic fell in 1974, the Khmers Rouges, banned the courtly dances and killed the dancers and teachers. In early 1979, when the Vietnamese army drove out the Pol Pot regime, among the first impulses of the common people and the new Khmer national authorities was the reconstruction of classical dance. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and many communist regimes crumbled, the Cambodian scene changed.

What had been de-contextualised, fragmented, reassembled and altogether re-invented during French colonial times, and then essentialised during cultural nationalism and diplomacy in Cambodia's Sihanouk-led era of independence, was now, with a total of twenty years without any creative development, incorporated into the new identity construction of the reborn

²⁵ John Tully, *Cambodia Under the Tricolour: King Sisowath and 'Mission Civilatrice' 1904-1927*, Clayton, Victoria: Monash University, 1996:22-23.

²⁶ Catherine Diamond, 'Emptying the sea by the Bucketful. A Difficult Phase in Cambodian Theatre or the Creation of a Culture of Independence', Ravi Chaturvedi, Brian Singleton (eds.) *Ethnicity and identity> Global Performance*, New Delhi, 2005: 147-178. Falser Vol. 2:211

²⁷ George Groslier's study on royal court dancers was the first modern in-depth study. Once again, based on the celestial dancing reliefs of Angkor Wat, he conceived the earthly dancers. George Groslier, *Danseuses cambodgiennes anciennes et modernes*. Paris 1913. [Trans.: *Cambodian dancers - ancient and modern*, ed. By Kent Davis, Holmes Beach 2010] Sappho Marchal, daughter of Henri Marchal, published a detailed study on the costumes and hairstyles of the female figures popularly known as devatas of the Angkor Wat. Sappho Marchal, *Costumes et parures khmères d'après les Devatâ d' Angkor-Vat*, Paris: G. van Oest, 1927. These studies served as perfect catalogue and pattern book for the Royal Ballet.

Cambodian nation state: the representational modes of the Angkorian temple site and the Apsara Dance were back on the spot.²⁸

Few years later, from a desire to rescue something 'authentic' out of danger due to power changes in Cambodia, Queen Kossamak's invention of Apsara dance was judged by UNESCO to be rooted in antiquity.²⁹ In 2008, the Royal Ballet of Cambodia was inscribed as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO. The combination of fake apsaras re-enacting 'ancient dances' in front of Angkor Wat has become a stereotype of ancient Khmer culture. Unfortunately, there is no original for this patchwork that sells as an identical copy.

These disparate hybrids that are being created produce an uneasy web of historical markers to our built past and our urban future. Even though Falser confesses that performance study is not his field, this final section of the chapter forms the climax, questioning various aspects of the ancient dance, its re-invention and re-activation, our understanding of it, and UNESCO's role in safeguarding and promoting it as 'intangible heritage'.

Chapter XI (235-322) highlights the history of twenty years (1970-1990) when Angkor was made into a global icon and the heritage of humanity. Falser argues that in spite of numerous publications on the transcultural heritage of Angkor Wat, very little is known about the role played by the temple through the twenty years of a politically traumatic period. It saw the years of the US-backed Khmer Republic (1970-1975), the China aided Democratic Kampuchea (DK) or Khmers Rouges (1975-1979), the Russian role in Vietnamese temporary occupation of Cambodia or People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK, 1979-1989), the United Nations acknowledged Khmers Rouges government in exile, several Asian interests and claims over Angkor including from the camps of Khmer refugees from the Khmers Rouges.

In spite of the civil war, genocide-related tragedy, devastation of cultural and political landscape, Falser observes the built fabric of Angkor Wat remained almost untouched by the wars even though neglect, vandalism and illicit traffic had some impact.³⁰ The temple remained important to all these political regimes as attested in its incorporation in all the respective regime flags. The Khmers Rouges appropriation of Maoist ideology in its terror regime at first controlled the country through the faceless *angkar* ('organisation').³¹ The ancient glory of the icon was transformed into a Khmer power of collective labour force under the leadership of Pol Pot, the eventually identified Khmer Rouge leader, who proclaimed in an oft repeated speech:

²⁸ Michael Falser, 'From colonial reinvention to postcolonial heritage and a global commodity: performing and re-enacting Angkor Wat and the Royal Khmer Ballet', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2013:14.

²⁹ UNESCO's Rehabilitation of Cambodian performing arts, 2002:2-3.

³⁰ A lot of damaged was done to the monument. 'Khmer Rouge demolished a great number of statues, mined the Gopura II South of Angkor Wat. [...] They have destroyed the archives, the plans of the monuments as other necessary items of the Conservation. [...] They destroyed our cultural heritage.' Falser Vol. 2:277

³¹ David Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past*, Bangkok, 1996: 260.

In the past, we were known for our Angkor Wat temple, which was built in the era of slavery. Slaves built Angkor Wat under the oppression and coercion of the exploiting classes of that time in order to make the kings happy. If our people could build Angkor Wat, they can do anything.³²

For him Angkor Wat symbolized the precolonial Khmer culture that he wanted to return to by emptying Khmer cities, including hospitals, abolishing money and killing anyone who understood a word of French. DK perpetrated genocide and torture and turned infrastructure to wasteland, focusing on military defence with little articulated state credo. Things changed suddenly during these unstable years of destruction that ended markets, education, Buddhism, books, art, private property and freedom of movement. Falser sees that the Khmer Rouge relationship with Angkor Wat as haphazardly borrowed from the colonial French and mixed with some Marxist buzzwords. In a vain attempt to imitate the ancient irrigation systems, vast new canals that would never contain water began to be dug by hand, by forced labour, in the name of the 'collective possession of soil by territorial communes'. The effort to convert Cambodia into a vast irrigated land produced nothing but the death of labourers.³³



Fig. 7: Refugees at Angkor Wat. Source- Prodromidès 1997, n.p. (Falser, Vol. 2: 241-fig. XI b)

After DK's neglect, PRK made a start at cultural heritage preservation but most books, drawings and archival material was lost during the Khmer Rouge regime. When conservation work started again in 1979, India was awarded the restoration work at Angkor Wat as a reward for its early diplomatic recognition of the PRK, and out of the age-old narrative of India's ancient cultural ties with Cambodia. Japan's presence in the Angkor Park was welcomed as an emerging

³² *Speech by Pol Pot, Summary of World Broadcast FE/5632/C/11, 5 October 1977.*

³³ Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979*, New Heaven, 1996 [reprint 2002]: 189-190.

economic influence in Southeast Asia and it also shared Buddhist traditions. Hungary and Poland lent archaeological and restoration skills to heritage protection schemes within the rhetoric of the socialist-internationalist brotherhood. Along with playing an important role for several countries Angkor Wat also played a specific role of cultural reference point for all the refugee communities that had fled the country during the politically turbulent years as the galleries of the temple had provided safe and secure place for them under the Khmer Republic (fig. 7). France returned to complete the '*anastylose*' of the great Śaiva Baphuon pyramid temple and to read and translate newly-found inscriptions. Even before the impact of UNESCO, Angkor was transformed into truly global, multi-sited and multi-centred heritage restoration project that made it easier for UNESCO to bring in the concept of 'world heritage' of humanity in 1990.

While exploring Norodom Sihanouk's private press cuttings collection and conservator B. P. Groslier's internal reports and personal diaries, Falser brings back a period that is something of a historical void in academia. The chapter brings out in detail the role of the temple in onsite battles among different political parties, international newspaper coverage. For Falser, these twenty years primarily paved the way for temple site nominations to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1992. Some researchers have called UNESCO's role global branding in a politicized selection process rather than global conservation.³⁴ Following a similar route, Falser has combed through all the reference material to establish the chronological history of these politically unstable twenty years to challenge the official narrative of emergency salvaging of Angkor by UNESCO. But as David Chandler comments:

It is uncertain whether historians of Cambodia a hundred years from now will devote as much space to the country's brief revolutionary period [between 1970-1990] as to the much longer, more complex, and more mysterious Angkorian era.³⁵

There is no denying the painstaking research Falser has put into this period, but it does seem to be shrinking into a minor late colonial period of history.

The last chapter XII (323-370) focuses on the years 1987-1993, when the decision was taken to include Angkor Wat as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There is much less on the entangled first period of French colonial life at the Angkor Park between 1900-1970 and the recovery after 1990, when political, cultural and institutional processes aligned to completely transform Angkor on a world stage.

³⁴ See Lynn Meskell, 'States of conservation. Protection, Politics, and Pacing within UNESCO's World Heritage Committee', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 87, 1, 2014: 217-43, Lynn Meskell et. al., 'Multilateralism and UNESCO World Heritage. Decision making, states parties and political process', *IJHS*, 21, 3, 2015: 423-440; Enrico Bertacchini et. al., 'The politicization of UNESCO World Heritage decision making', <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11127-016-0332-9>; S. M. Titchen, 'on the construction of Outstanding Universal Value. Some comments on the implementation of the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention', *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 1, 1996: 235-242; S. Wright, 'The Politicization of 'Culture'', *Anthropology Today*, 14 (1), 1998: 7-15.

³⁵ David Chandler, *A history of Cambodia*, Colorado: Boulder, 1983: 255.

Falser's tireless researching of the UNESCO archives in Paris, leads him to counter the 'success story' of UNESCO as it is written in official historiographies. He concludes that the 'site's instant nomination to the World Heritage List may count as the first complete misuse of UNESCO's influences to bolster its own cultural-political prestige and leadership claim at the ideological threshold at the end of the Cold War'. UNESCO director Federico Mayor and Azedine Beschaouch, the then acting president of the World Heritage Committee, exerted their power for the rushed nomination against the UNESCO's own procedure of neutral evaluation. Angkor Wat was swiftly moved from the 'Heritage in Danger' to the 'world Heritage' list at a meeting held in Santa Fe in United States in 1992. Just before the Santa Fe meeting, Cambodia's Khmer Rouge-led UNESCO delegation was initiating internationalist 'heritage of mankind' slogans with help from Sihanouk to facilitate Mayor's Angkor heritage mission. An international push to 'Save Angkor' gathered considerable momentum in 1990. The first Round Table of Experts on the preservation of Angkorian monuments saw the participation of ten countries and twenty-eight experts. In 1991, UNESCO led an international help structure for local action that was taken up by the former Paris-trained, state architect Vann Molyvann. Falser describes him as a perfect 'trans-cultural broker', who planned the Park's future based on the Javanese heritage site of Borobudur. He drafted heritage management schemes with modern restoration strategies, zoning laws, infrastructural improvements for global tourism, landscaping and the production of picturesque vistas. In doing so, he also breached the boundaries between the old-fashioned concept of 'original' archaeological reserves and the emerging theme park industry. The year the Second International Round Table of Experts met in Paris, Mayor made an official tour to Cambodia. On this trip, he made an 'internal' agreement with Sihanouk for the nomination of Angkor to the World Heritage List. In 1993, the Angkor Archaeological Park was globalized as international agencies took charge and Vann's vision of combining international scientific research, architectural preservation, sustainable tourism and socio-cultural development at the regional level fell tragically by the wayside.

Falser unravels the behind-the-scenes process between 1987 and 1993 when UNESCO in neo-colonial style, denoted the 'universal value' to Angkor Wat and brushed aside 'local' Khmer claims to manage the Angkor Park independently. Critical commentators have concluded that 'the ideal of collective responsibility, once so central to the ideals of the Convention, is losing ground' and the UNESCO 'World heritage Committee's disregard for the Advisory Bodies' recommendations has continued unabated'.³⁶

³⁶ Meskell, *States of Conservation*, 221, 226; David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Richard Allen, 'Heritage and Nationalism', , Rodney Harrison (ed.) *Understanding the Politics of Heritage*, Manchester: Manchester University press, 2010: 197-233; Ian Donnachie 'World Heritage', Rodney Harrison (ed.) *Understanding the Politics of Heritage*, Manchester: Manchester University press, 2010: 115-153; Tim Winter, *Post-conflict heritage postcolonial tourism: Culture, politics and development at Angkor*, New York: Routledge, 2007, 'Beyond Eurocentrism? Heritage Conservation and the Politics of Difference, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 20 (2), 2014.

Today, the Angkor Park represents world's largest configuration of cultural heritage with twenty countries implementing sixty odd projects over a time span of thirty years. The Epilogue of the book (405-452) surveys this by connecting the park's history over the last 150 years under European projects (volume I) and Asian identities and post-colonial archaeologies (volume II). The Park continues to develop into an archaeological theme/amusement park involving several international players. Falser cites Philippe Peycam's seminal article 'ICC- Angkor: A World Heritage site as an arena of competition, connivance and state (s) legitimation',³⁷ the role of UNESCO and the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) from 1993 in mediating between international and national state interests in the conservation and development of the site as well as supporting the local population. In 1995, ICC set up a domestic partner to manage all aspects of World Heritage Sites in Angkor called the 'Autorité pour la Protection du Site et l'Aménagement de la Région d'Angkor' (Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap or APSARA). The designated site covers approximately 400km², including many monuments, forests, eighty villages with over a million residents.

Rapid urbanization and intense tourism slowly began to exact wear and tear on the painstakingly restored temples. Internal politics and antagonism developed with other local sectors of the national authorities, and inadequate financial and human resources impacted the efficacy of the Khmer Angkor authority APSARA. A Heritage Police force trained by the French was established in 1997 to work in collaboration with APSARA, but in reality, it sometimes collaborated with villagers in illegal loggings.³⁸ After declaring Angkor a 'Living heritage' in 2013, the focus has moved to sustainable development and management of people living in Angkor but the only official employment available for the locals is physical labour on conservation/restoration projects or as temple guards.

The Epilogue addresses the question 'whose Angkor?' it is. Colonial involvement of the last 150 years, the Asian identity politics and post-colonial archaeologies practiced on the site, and inner Asian or trans-regional replicas of Angkor Wat – as seen in Bangkok or India – has made the site 'transcultural'. For Falser, today, the Angkor Park continues to develop as a 'global heritage conglomerate' with increasing features of an amusement park. He focuses on some of the ongoing archaeological projects in the Park, such as the EFEO's Baphuon 'anastylose' and the restoration of Ta Prohm temple by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). He finds that the work still follows the 'national pavilions' logic of the colonial exhibitions of the past. In the case of Angkor Wat, he talks about the restoration of the 're-restored'. The heavy tourist traffic, the pre-Covid-19

³⁷ Peycam asks: 'But can a proper mechanism of cooperation for the safeguarding of a major heritage site be realized, or sustained, without the effective participation of the communities living in and around these sites?' *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* Vol. 31, No. 3 (November 2016), pp. ISEAS: 743-85.

³⁸ Keiko Muira, 'The Need for Anthropological Approaches to Conservation and Management of Living heritage Sites: A Case Study of Angkor, Cambodia' in Elisabeth A. Bacus, Ian C. Glover & Peter D. Sharrock (eds.) *Interpreting Southeast Asia's Past: Monument, Image and Text*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2008: 385.

proliferating use of the site for spectacles, and the ongoing natural corrosion cause constant damage to the built structure. After the initial French restoration of the temple, subsequent Italian, American, German and Indian teams have applied their own methods. The highly commercial tourist district of Siem Reap, now packed with hotels, is changing rapidly outside the park boundaries. New additions, such as the Canada-New Zealand-Singapore funded project called Run Ta-Ek: Eco village for sustainable development; Angkor hotel zone; privately owned Cambodian Cultural Village comprising 210,000 m² along the national highway as a theme park, and North Korea's Angkor (Wat) Panorama Museum are seemingly superseded by a 'development' phase rather than the initial international salvage campaign (1993-2003).

Physical heritage sites are always considered to be more important than intangible heritage. After the listing of Angkor as Living Heritage, the debates about the site's religious nature and tourist commodification and the rights over its management have become intense amongst residents, Buddhist monks and Cambodian authorities. Scholars like Roland Fletcher (2007), Gamini Wijesuriya (2008, 2017), Britt Baillie (2007), Keiko Muira (2018), Akiko Tashiro (2001), Fabienne Luco (2006), Tim Winter (2007), Mackay and Palmer (2005) have studied these issues. Some of these voices would have enlivened Falser's epilogue with their different interpretations of heritage and the contestation over its meaning, as well as the serious issues posed for the villagers still living in large numbers within the site. Falser notes one instance of outstanding local involvement on site was Simon Warrack's 2001-3 repair of Angkor Wat's most venerated Viṣṇu statue known as the Angkor site deity— *Ta Reach*. Consulting religious leaders and involving local communities helped the heritage authorities to find the best solution to restoring the original stone head and adding three missing arms. The restoration that local elders authorised was eventually celebrated with a religious ceremony with 200 participants and the 3.4m statue has remained in constant veneration.

Angkor Wat today has a mixed religious character from its long history. Originally dedicated to Viṣṇu, it was transformed into a Buddhist temple in the sixteenth century. Falser aptly labels it 'transcultural'. Angkor Wat that was once a place of high dynastic ritual and ceremony is presented to us today as a vast and static monument entangled between old and new, traditional and modern. A comedy of notice boards, ticket counters, navigation charts, balloon rides, souvenirs, palm readers, and staged monks surround it. Today when visitors take their cameras at 4am and 4pm to await the sun's contribution to one of the modern world's best studios for monumental photo opportunities, one admits that the current heterotopia of Angkor Wat fits what Foucault imagined. Falser brings us to face such thoughts.

Some of the questions that come to mind after reading the book are: how can we safeguard this 'transcultural', hybrid heritage from going empty of meaning? French notions of 'heritage' changed during the span of 150 years of its association with Angkor. What authority defines it today? Can the economic benefits of global tourism be somehow turned to more sensitive and deeper heritage conservation? What new Khmer point of view is emerging to replace the Sihanouk narrative? There is no general agreement on the definition of heritage neither is it a unified

category of places, objects or people.³⁹ Falser (Vol. 1: 6) defines the concept of heritage 'as a starting point, relates to material structures, institutional complexes and practices and at the same time carries a powerful emotional charge emanating from idea of belonging and shared cultural meaning, especially in the context of young nation.' Tracing the origins of the concept to eighteenth-century Europe, he claims the concept travelled to the non-European world as a colonial modernity designed to 'create new identities for alien cultural objects and situate them in a distinct discursive frame that was equally constitutive of the modern disciplines of architectural history and conservation'. Even though Falser makes it very clear at the beginning that it deals with the modern process of cultural appropriation that marked the transcultural relationships centred on Angkor Wat, it would have been useful to have some clear thoughts on Khmer notions of 'heritage', especially when the *volume II* is focused on Cambodia, where the resident population has long been the primary protector and user of the site.

Falser brings a spotlight on the fascinating yet underexplored world of transcultural studies through his thorough scholarship of Angkor Wat's modern history. The book adds considerably to our understanding of the temple and the Angkor Archaeological Park. It is an excellent in-depth research, commendable for bringing together a wide range of disciplines in the complex nexus of transcultural studies. His long unwieldy sentences, extensive quotes and exhaustive footnotes do not make for an easy reading, but the book is very important reference work for students and scholars across the disciplines of Khmer history, art, architecture, archaeology, religion, Southeast Asian studies, conservation practices, colonialism, museology, tourism and heritage studies. For a novice, there is a beautiful photo essay that runs parallel to the text as an anthology.

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³⁹ Kevin Meethan, *Tourism in Global Society: Place, culture, consumption*. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001:106