

**“ARCHAEOLOGISING” HERITAGE?
LOCAL SOCIAL PRACTISE VS. GLOBAL VIRTUAL REALITY**

**International Workshop about Angkor/Cambodia
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**Organized by the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context“
in collaboration with the Institute for Scientific Computing**

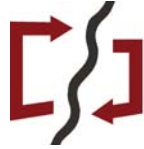
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The ideal reconstitution of the temple of Angkor Vat by Louis Delaporte in 1880 and Buddhist monks today in front of World Heritage Angkor Vat with digital cameras

General description

It is the aim of this international workshop to initiate an interdisciplinary discussion about the historical implications and contemporary challenges behind the concept of a so-called “archaeological heritage“. For this goal, methodological approaches ranging from architectural and intellectual history, historic preservation and scientific computing will be presented. Along with other case-studies, a focus of discussion is the UNESCO World Heritage site “Archaeological Park of Angkor“ in Cambodia.



Questions and approaches

From the perspective of intellectual and architectural history, the concept of so-called “archaeological heritage” sites in Asia can be traced back to the 19th century when European colonizing powers like Great Britain or France transferred and imposed their Western concepts of “dead archaeological ruins” on Asian sites in their protectorates or colonies. Very often, this approach ignored living local, social and ritual forms of usage that prevailed in colonised temple sites or similar structures, rooted as it was in a romanticized imagination of overgrown, deserted and forgotten sites as well as a colonial civilizing mission. The aim was a total reconstitution of these sites, ranging from early drawings or models to real physical reconstruction on site with western technology. From this critical point of view, the contemporary trend of an international (and again western-dominated?) scientific community for simulation techniques of existing and presumably reconstructed archaeological heritage sites in Asia could be interpreted as a version of postcolonial practice for a globalized forum.

Selected case-studies suggest that the (originally western) disciplines of archaeology, historic preservation and conservation were for long complicit with the present-day globalized perception of dead archaeological ruins – very often with disastrous effects for local (ritual and social) practice as well as touristic expectations of these sites. A pragmatic change in this attitude can be observed and is discussed by the global heritage preservation community under the slogan of a careful preservation and management of “living heritage sites”.

On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that the application of mathematical and computational modelling to simulate and optimize temporal and spatial processes has become a standard research tool in the natural sciences. With the availability of cheap and powerful desktop computers and the development of databases and digitized texts, scientific computing experts set sail to bring these methods to the humanities and social sciences as well. Archaeology constitutes a major new field where the application and the possibilities of computer modelling are being explored. Vast geometric models of temples and monuments, detailed scans of archaeological findings and simulations of time-line events establish a virtual representation of once-upon-a-time and might-have-been sites. But the techniques used are treacherous and the success of projects is often crucially linked not only to technically feasible actions but also to their prudent and selective use. Moreover, differences in the reception of technical methods between Asians and Europeans, especially when related to cultural heritage sites, critically influence what at first sight appears to be a straight forward approach. Selected case-studies ought to present us with a picture of a recent paradigmatic change in the computing discipline itself: from a mere simulation of supposedly dead archaeological building material to an increasing appreciation and scientific incorporation of the knowledge of local stakeholders with their ritual and social practice on living temple sites as well as of the social behaviour of an increasing globalized cultural tourism industry.

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