ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF LIVING HERITAGE PLACES

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ABSTRACT

From 1992 to 1997, conservation was undertaken on a Buddhist shrine in the Luang Prabang Province of the Lao PDR. Tourism, natural decay and the collapse of brick platforms endangered the 4000 sculptures housed in the caves and detracted from the religious qualities of the shrine. Critical decisions about the nature of the reconstruction of a key architectural feature, the rehanging of the doors of the shrine, the reconstruction of walkways, the placement of signage and appropriate security measures were made during the course of the conservation process. These features of the conservation program warrant review and analysis in the light of national and international conservation charters and guidelines.

Conservation work requiring archaeological input was carried out at Tam Ting, a Buddhist shrine within two separate limestone caves, an upper and a lower, on the west bank of the Mekong River in the Luang Prabang Province of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Tourism, looting, natural decay and the collapse of brick platforms endangered the 4000 sculptures housed in the caves and detracted from the religious qualities of the place. A five-year conservation project was initiated in 1992 where archaeological excavation was inter-woven with conservation actions within a flexible planning process. Fieldwork was undertaken during the dry season for one month of each year.

Archaeological and conservation aspects of the program are reported in Egloff 1998. That article provides essential contextual information and background details, and should be read in conjunction with this discussion of the key issues that required a degree of resolution during the conservation process. Detailed accounts of the work are presented in the conservation plans which served as planning documents as well as annual reports (Egloff, Johnson and Officer 1994; Egloff and Johnson 1997; Johnson 1997).

This paper is concerned with critical decisions that were made during the course of the conservation process. The transformation of a significant part of a living Buddhist shrine warrants review, analysis and discussion in the light of the various national and international guidelines and charters that presumably enable conservation work to be undertaken within the parametres of best practice. Australia ICOMOS (1999) drafted and subsequently amended the Burra Charter as a national response to the International ICOMOS Venice Charter of 1966. Along with these two charters there is a corpus of international and national guidelines that can be called upon to guide conservation best practice.

The reconstruction of the central *stupa* in the upper cave at Tam Ting, the repositioning of the main doors in the upper cave, the installation of electric lights in the upper cave and the construction of bars and cages designed to secure the portable sculptures emerged as key issues during the course of the conservation work. The central *stupa* in the upper cave, a focus of religious worship, had collapsed within living memory. The following questions needed to be addressed. Just how much work was to be undertaken to restore the religious qualities of the place? What was the appropriate process? What was the form of the missing portion of the *stupa*? Who should give approval for the reconstruction?

One of the two ornate decorated doors of the upper cave had fallen and the other had its base cemented into the entry steps. Different opinions existed as to what should be done with the doors, full restoration or some other course of action. Providing electric lights in the upper cave was mooted as a means of enhancing visitor experience as well as providing sufficient light to facilitate object security. A survey by UNESCO Thailand (Krataithong 1997) suggests that security grilles should be placed over all of the religious

sculptures. Concern has been expressed that the installation of such a prominent security system may not be a reasonable way to treat sacred objects of worship within a religious shrine. National and international charters and guidelines seem to offer no explicit answers when considering these key issues. The responsibility for rebuilding the walkways between and leading to the caves emerged as another issue. Strictly speaking, this was not the role of overseas conservation expertise as it could be dealt with by local authorities using village tradespeople. Yet, pressure was placed upon the Lao-Australia conservation project to undertake these works.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PORT ARTHUR, TASMANIA

The urgency to record the decision making process of heritage managers was reinforced by a series of unfortunate and tragic events at the Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania, far distant from Lao. Immediately following what is now referred to as the "Tragedy", when on 28 April 1996, 32 people were murdered and 19 wounded at Australia's foremost heritage place, the Federal government released some 2.5 million dollars to construct a replacement for the café that was the focal point of the tragedy. This flow of funds was to trigger a series of ill-planned actions, including the construction of a car park and visitor centre within the core of the historic site and only tens of metres away from the site of the "Tragedy". Public and professional protests at these actions led the State government to commission an inquiry by a former Director of the Department of Lands. The report found that the Board of Management of the historic site had made a series of bad judgements which were to some extent forced upon it in order to maximise revenue raising activities (Doyle 1997). The report stated that it was not possible to reverse the construction of the car park, however, it did prove possible to scale down the size of the visitor centre. At the same time as these matters were under investigation, plans were being made to undertake a serial nomination to the World Heritage Council of the key convict sites in Australia; the Tasman Peninsula including Port Arthur, Norfolk Island, and the Fremantle Goal in Western Australia.

Newly initiated works at Port Arthur ran contrary to the pattern of conservation planning developed during a nine million dollar conservation and development project that was undertaken from 1979 to 1986. The project works were well documented in files, a management plan had been drafted and released (National Parks and Wildlife Service 1985), and an account of the project was published (Egloff 1986). But nowhere was the process upon which major decisions were made detailed in a step-by-step fashion. Hence, when funds became available for construction following the "Tragedy", ill-conceived plans were grasped upon and put into action without public or professional review. When the Federal government exempted the expenditure of the funds from review by the Australian Heritage Commission, what is known in political jargon as "fast tracking", it set in train a process which further traumatised people with a genuine interest in the well-being of the Port Arthur Historic Site.

CONSERVATION AND TAM TING

This paper is of necessity a hybrid comprising a discussion of the principles guiding the conservation process employed at Tam Ting, coupled with an enumeration of the practical concerns that directed the key decision-making steps. There are two caves at Tam Ting, both of which contain brick structures that provide platforms for arrays of sculptures of Lord Budda. The lower cave, which is shallow and open, lies immediately above the Mekong River and presents few structural conservation problems, but does suffer from the pilfering of sculptures and the always-present threat of the flood levels of the Mekong River rising above their previous high mark (Figures 1 and 2).

It was the upper cave, high above the river, that required immediate stabilisation of structural components, as the central *stupa* and brick retaining walls were partially ruined with further decay occurring on a daily basis (Figure 3). This ruinous state of the shrine seemed to encourage visitors to clamber about on the elevated stages, knocking over sculptures, treading on religious objects, pillaging sculptures and markedly accelerating the deterioration of the brick structures. The place was not being treated as a religious shrine, but as a quaint ruin to explore by dim candle or flashlight.

Transformation of archaeological ruins by best conservation process can result in subtle changes in keeping with the significance of the place, or produce a hideous mélange of new and old elements, visually intrusive signs, clumsy engineering supports, a plethora of viewing platforms and walkways; all with the potential to detract from the heritage significance of the place.

CHARTERS AND GUIDELINES

Charters promoting the conservation of historic structures appeared following efforts towards internationalisation in the decades after the First World War. The Athens Charter, drafted in 1931, was the first of these efforts (Stovel 1990). With the intervention of the Second World War, advances on the Athens Charter were not made until the drafting of the Venice Charter and the resolution of UNESCO in 1964 to establish ICOMOS. An attempt was made in the 1970s to revise the Venice Charter. However, it was decided that the Charter should stand unaltered but that shortcomings and

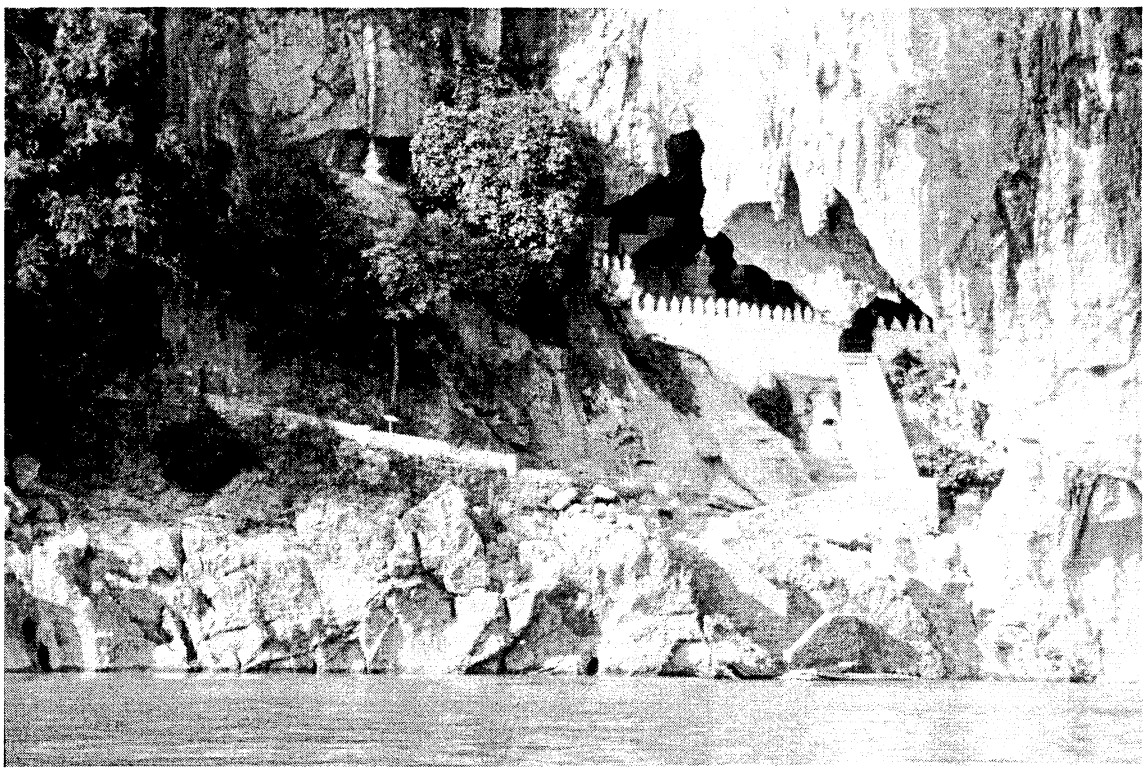

Figure 1: View of the entrance to the lower cave at Tam Ting with the Mekong River flowing from right to left in the foreground.

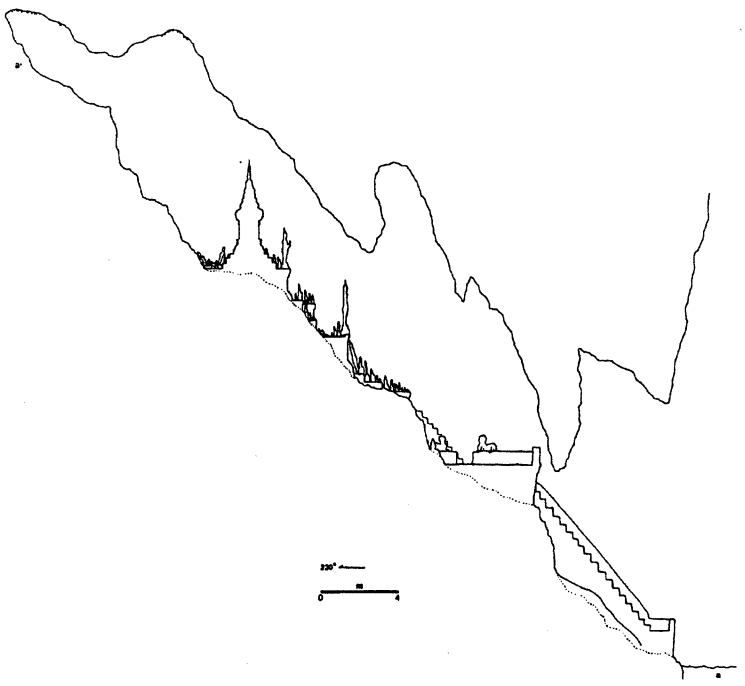

Figure 2: Cross-section of the lower cave illustrating the brick stupas *and platforms built directly on the limestone base of the cave system.*

gaps should be filled with guidelines focusing upon specific regional and thematic concerns. The following Articles of the Venice Charter are relevant to the conservation treatment of living heritage places:

Article 3. The intention in conserving and restoring monuments is to safeguard them no less as works of art than as historical evidence.

Article 4. It is essential to the conservation of monuments that they be maintained on a permanent basis.

Article 5. The conservation of monuments is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially accepted purpose.

Article 10. Where traditional techniques prove inadequate, the consolidation of a monument can be achieved by the use of any modern technique for conservation and construction, the efficacy of which has been shown by scientific data and proven experience.

Article 12. Replacement of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence.

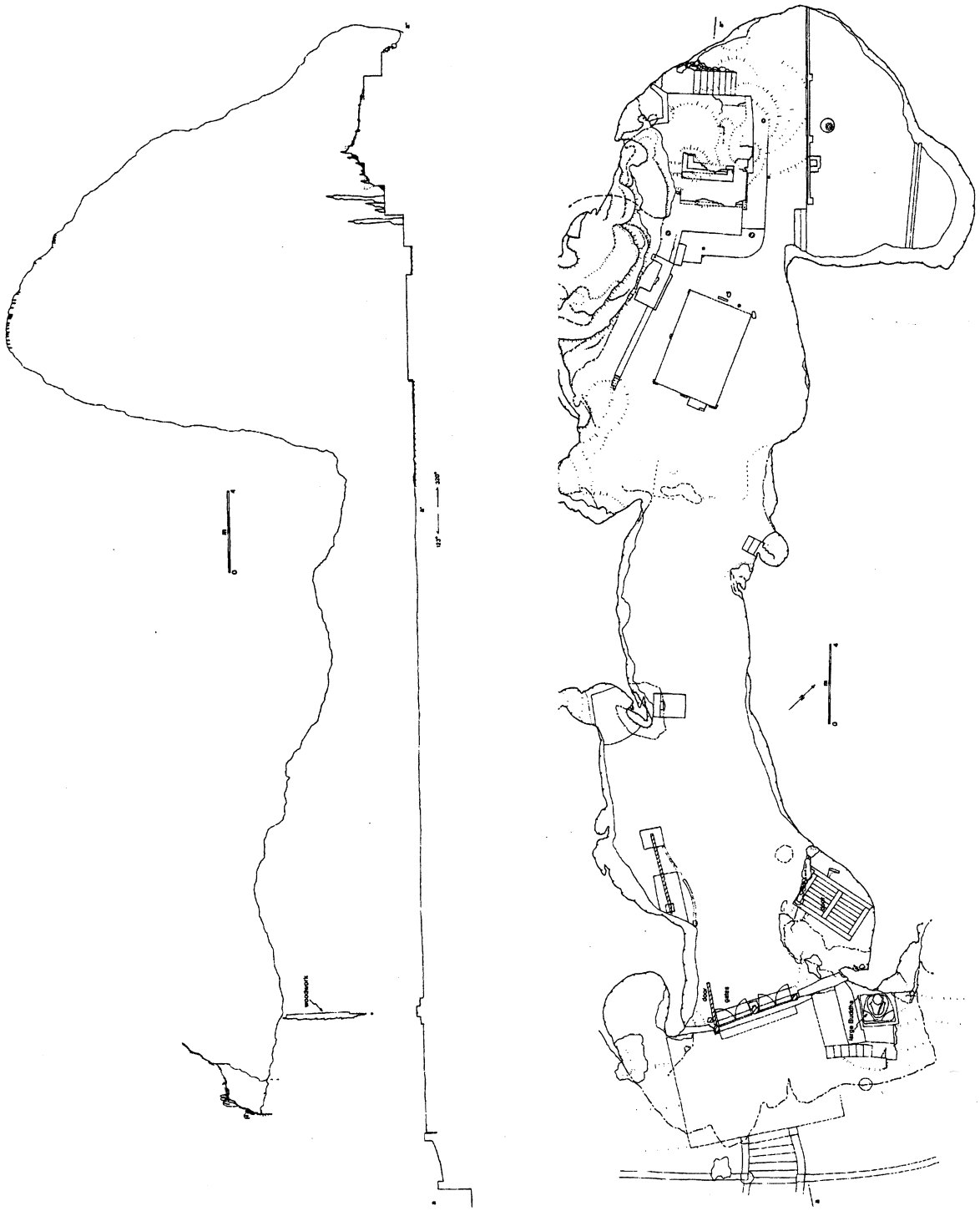

Figure 3: Cross-section and plan of the upper cave with the entry door to the left and the main stupa *and platform to the right. When compared with the lower cave, it is readily apparent that the floor has been levelled with fill brought into the upper cave.*

The Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 1999; Marquis-Kyle and Walker 1992; Pearson and Sullivan 1995:10) stresses a sequential, explicit and transparent process of heritage conservation planning as follows:

identification of heritage place, object or collection;

documentation of the history of the site – identifying and contacting key interest groups;

a significance assessment and a management assessment;

defining the Conservation or Management Policy;

choosing the Conservation or Management Strategies;

implementation, monitoring and reassessment.

The following articles of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter offer some direction when conserving places which embody strong spiritual values:

Article 2.4 Places of cultural significance should be safeguarded and not put at risk or left in a vulnerable state.

Article 3.1 Conservation is based on a respect for existing fabric, use, associations and meanings. It requires a cautious approach of changing as much as necessary but as little as possible,

Article 4.1 Conservation should make use of all the knowledge, skills and disciplines which can contribute to the study and care of the place.

Article 4.2 Traditional techniques and materials are preferred for the conservation of significant fabric. In some circumstances modern techniques and materials which offer substantial conservation benefits may be appropriate.

Article 12 Conservation, interpretation and management of a place should provide for the participation of people for whom the place has special associations and meanings, or who have social, spiritual or other cultural responsibilities for the place.

Articles dealing with reconstruction are as follows:

Article 20.1 Reconstruction is appropriate only where a *place* is incomplete through damage or alteration and only where there is sufficient evidence to reproduce an earlier state of the fabric. In rare cases, reconstruction may also be appropriate as part of a use or practice that retains the cultural significance of the place.

The International Venice Charter, and its offspring the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, emphasise the use of traditional techniques, except where these techniques fail and then modern methods may be used where they have a proven track record. The differentiation between modern and traditional is not readily apparent, particularly in the light of the ICOMOS Conference on Authenticity held in Nara, Japan in 1994. Papers presented at that conference consider tradition, continuity and change as elements of authenticity. As such, the differentiation between "modern" and "traditional" is not at all straightforward nor is it apparent how a technique achieves the status of "proven and reliable" if it cannot be employed unless it is already "proven".

The ICOMOS "test of authenticity" was in the past applied to design, material, workmanship and setting with the dimensions of surface, architectural form and function being added by Tschudi-Madsen (Stovel 1995: xxxiii). In the last 30 years the concept of heritage has broadened in one sense, while on the other hand regional interpretations of the Venice Charter have been encouraged. Following the Nara Conference, there was an appreciation of "appropriate" treatment in relation to significance in differing cultural and heritage settings (Stovel 1995). Henry Cleere (1995:63) provides examples of the use of modern or non-traditional materials in the interests of long term conservation. At the same conference, David Lowenthal (1995:132) states that "Living continuity in today's heritage conscious world challenges earlier preserved-in-amber ideals." He considers that "authenticity inheres in process of change, mutabilities of time and history, continuities enlivened by alteration as much as by constancy."

Pisit Charoenwongsa (1995:289) states that conservation expertise has to come to terms with the needs of the "general public". In Thailand, seat of much important Southeast Asian history, the majority of the archaeological sites and objects are religious in nature, purposely created for the worship of Lord Budda. With Buddhism the primary religion of the country, the local Thai consider it appropriate to have a complete icon of Budda, be it a painting or statue. Charoenwongsa quotes letters from the Royal Thai family expressing concern with the "over conservation of archaeological ruins". They pleaded that there was a need "to harmonise the old and new together" and to "mend it well".

ICAHM, the international scientific committee of ICOMOS which deals with archaeological heritage management, has a charter which was adopted in 1990. The International Charter for Archaeological Heritage Management addresses professional responsibilities while providing tangential references to the need for participation by the "general public", being particularly essential "where the heritage of indigenous peoples is involved". The Charter emphasises that the "participation must be based upon access to the knowledge necessary for decision-making."

Within the ICAHM Charter reference is made to the 1956 UNESCO Recommendations on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavations. These recommendations are concerned primarily with the centralisation and institutionalisation of national archaeological systems and the activities of foreign archaeologists within host countries. The UNESCO Recommendations do not mention special needs of indigenous peoples, the requirement for

decisions impacting upon heritage to be made at the local level or the obligations of archaeologists to living traditions.

The 1994 ICAHM Montreal conference addressed "archaeological remains in situ preservation" (Mousseau 1996). Only a few of the papers presented at that colloquium were concerned with sites that had a continuing traditional religious significance for the local populations. Marilyn Truscott, from her Australian perspective, stressed that it is rare for archaeologists to deal with sites of "defunct" peoples and that archaeologists do not have the past to themselves because living cultures often have a strong relationship with heritage places (Truscott 1996, see also Horsfall 1996).

CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF TAM TING

Generally speaking, Western heritage managers seek to define tradition as something which has its primary manifestation in the past and is brought forward into the present in an altered and muted form. That is the historical perspective, whereas a social scientist views tradition primarily as something that is happening today which has roots in the past but overwhelmingly is defined by contemporary users. Social scientists on the whole are more interested in what is happening today than what happened in the past (Knowles 1997). One of the major challenges for heritage managers is to come to terms with traditional contemporary community uses, that which is happening today.

A statement of significance for Tam Ting was drafted following the preliminary archaeological survey of the caves and the inventory of the groups of sculptures. During the process of survey and inventory, the significance of the place was discussed with Lao colleagues (Johnson and Officer 1992). These discussions were followed in the subsequent field season with in-depth interviews with key Lao officials prior to intervention with the fabric of the place (Egloff, Johnson and Officer 1994). The statement of significance for the Tam Ting caves is as follows (Egloff and Johnson 1997):

The cultural significance of Tam Ting lies in its association with past and present religious beliefs, in particular the blending of Phii with Buddhism which is manifested in a natural cave system that has been extensively modified in order to create a religious shrine.

The placement of thousands of sculptures upon brick structures and in natural grottos is the only display of its kind in the caves of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and as such it attracts both religious worshippers and tourists.

The carved wooden sculptures offer the opportunity to study a corpus of historically related religious objects.

Aesthetically, the powerful natural setting in a cliff on the banks of the Nam Kong (Mekong) adds considerably to the drama of the place.

The religious shrine is linked to the World Heritage listed centre of Luang Prabang, in particular the former Royal Palace and Wat Phusi.

Wat Ban Pak Ou, in the village directly opposite Tam Ting, is linked through history, proximity, and social and religious values with the caves.

Tam Ting is an integral feature of regional tourism and has local, regional and national importance to the economy.

The conservation/management policy for Tam Ting is one which maintains the cultural significance of the shrine while channelling the increasing numbers of tourists into a positive revenue raising mode of visitation. Initial conservation work focused on recording and excavation where necessary for stabilisation (not for academic research), followed by reconstruction where the significance of the place could be enhanced. The archaeological procedures manual prepared by the Port Arthur Conservation and Development Project (Davies and Buckley 1987) lists seven stages of archaeological involvement in a conservation program, the first of which consists of recording, excavating and providing design input during the stabilisation process. This stage frequently occurs out of sequence prior to any conservation or management planning activity taking place.

At Tam Ting, the 16th century construction techniques utilised bricks measuring approximately 265 x 135 x 60 mm while the modern hand-made village brick measures 200 x 95 x 40 mm. The large ancient bricks were poorly fired and easily fractured or crumbled. The media employed to bond the bricks was not a simple mortar. Composition of the substance is known from historical sources but has not been used within living memory and is considered by Lao colleagues as all but impossible to replicate (pers. comm. Bounheng Bouasisengphraseuth, Ministry of Information and Culture, Lao PDR). The bonding material is said to have been made of a combination of banana, tree sap, buffalo hide and a white mineral substance gathered by monks in far distant places.

A key decision was whether or not to attempt a recreation of the ancient techniques or to use methods of reconstruction employed in local village construction works, as well as at the SIDA (Swedish International Development Authority) restoration of the Royal Palace in Luang Prabang, a key place in the World Heritage listing but one whose construction dated to 1904 - 1909, more than three centuries later than that of the *stupa* in the upper cave at Tam Ting (Lindt and Hagmüller 1991). The following factors led to the decision to use contemporary techniques rather than to attempt to reconstruct the ancient methods:

The structure had failed due to problems inherent in the unstable nature of the upper cave fill which is a loose large rock rubble fill covered by a thin layer of river silt/ sand.

Traditional rebuilding techniques required the removal of all suspect material, often leading to the demolition of historically significant fabric.

Sixteenth century building methods have not been used within living memory. Resurrection and demonstration of reliability would require considerable time, experimentation, and could inflate the project costs beyond the level of available funding.

By employing contemporary building techniques, local tradespeople would be able to undertake continuous maintenance without having to rely upon esoteric expatriate conservation expertise.

Southeast Asia regional guidelines for cultural resource management are under preparation by SPAFA (Comer 1994). The guidelines stress that the various academic disciplines which are involved in cultural heritage management should undertake conservation in a planned manner which advances the needs of cultural heritage management. Problems identified in the report include the absence of regulations regarding community consultation; the coordination of the conservation of properties belonging to religious orders; and, unsatisfactory approaches to dealing with traditional practices at heritage sites (Comer 1994:6). The need to cater for the use of places by traditional practitioners leads to practices that might not be condoned at places which no longer have an ongoing local social significance.

The environment in which tangible material culture must survive, however, is a social and political one as well as physical. Thus, more radical treatments are justifiable if they offer the societal or economic support required for the maintenance of a resource. With such radical treatments, it is even more important to operate from a firm basis provided by research and documentation (Comer 1994:11).

SPAFA guidelines emphasise that the reconstruction of structures, generally speaking, is not endorsed. In limited circumstances where it might be considered that a set of standards apply, all feasible alternatives must be considered, no intact fabric or undisturbed remains should be destroyed, sufficient information must be available to guide the reconstruction, and when new materials are used they shall duplicate the composition, design, colour, texture and other visual qualities of the missing parts (Comer 1994:75). There was no doubt that the reconstruction of the *stupa* in the upper cave would radically alter visitor experience, from that of exploring a darkened ruin to one of maintaining a respectful distance from a "complete" religious shrine.

TOURISM AND SIGNIFICANT PLACES

The 1976 ICOMOS Charter of Cultural Tourism is a brief document that focuses upon education and training, and both the positive and negative effects that tourism can have on heritage places. The International Cultural Tourism Charter: managing tourism at places of heritage significance was adopted by ICOMOS in 1999. The Charter reflects current thought in its definition of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage encompasses artefact collections, cultural landscapes, heritage places and built environments, as well as past and continuing traditions and activities. It records and expresses long processes of cultural change, forming the essence of diverse national and regional identities and as an integral part of modern life.

The six principles of the Charter deal with tourism as a vehicle of cultural exchange, the need for both cultural heritage and tourism to be sustainably managed, planning for worthwhile visitor experiences, the need to involve host communities and indigenous people, obligation to generate educational and employment opportunities, and the need to promote realistic heritage expectations. Principle 2 states that "The relationship between Heritage Places and Tourism is dynamic and may involve conflicting values. It should be managed in a sustainable way for present and future generations." Throughout the draft Charter, mention is made to meeting the needs of local communities as well as the requirement that " the sanctity of spiritual places, practices and traditions" be respected. The draft states that precedence should be given by site managers "to using local materials", while taking into account "local architectural or vernacular styles". The Report on Heritage and Tourism, ICCROM (1993) lists factors which are relevant to the conservation of Tam Ting:

Make the best possible use of the site so as to maintain significance

improve visitor understanding of the place and enhance their visit and worship

generate revenue to sustain care-taking and conservation

stimulate national and local pride in cultural heritage.

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE *STUPA*

The reconstruction of the upper portion of the *stupa* (Figures 4 and 5) raised not only technical problems but complex social and procedural issues requiring considerable planning and consultation. Archaeology provided evidence of the structures conformity only to the levels below the "dome" of the *stupa*. A portion of the *stupa* dome was recovered in the debris, but there was not enough evidence to proceed with the certainty required under the provisions of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter.

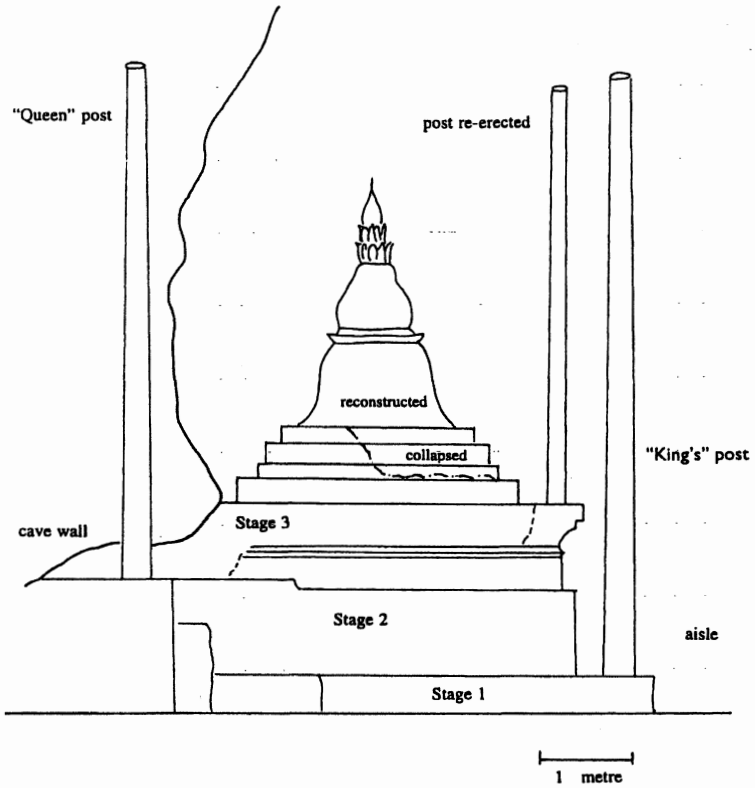

Figure 4: Drawing of the stupa *of the upper cave indicating the area above stage 3 which had collapsed and was rebuilt using the advice of Tit Nya Silipone.*

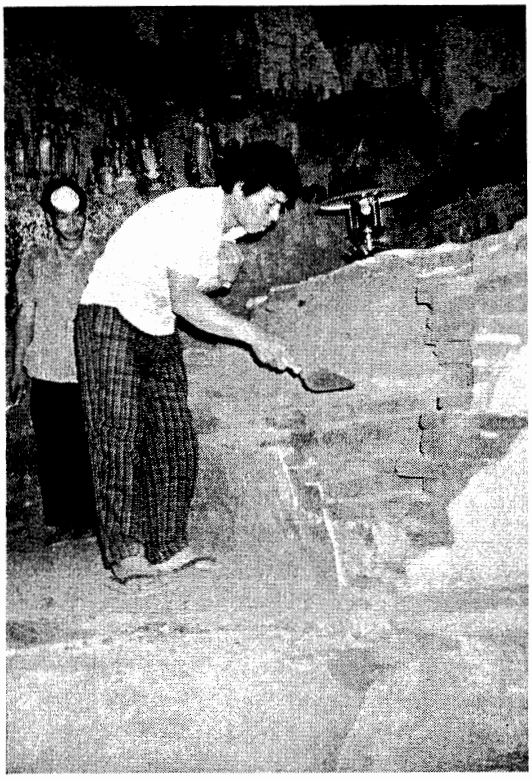

Figure 5: The intact brickwork of the upper cave stupa *being "excavated" prior to reconstruction.*

The only known documentation of the *stupa* is a drawing made during the French exploration of the Mekong River (Garnier 1866-8). However, the shape of the *stupa* base depicted in the published drawing did not match the archaeologically defined structural remains (Egloff 1998:172). As such, the drawing could not be confidently used as an aid in the reconstruction. It was not until the 1996 field season of the conservation project, following intense discussions with an elder from Luang Prabang who had visited the caves as a young monk and clearly recalled the shape of the *stupa*, that reconstruction could proceed. Being a former Royal artist, Tit Nya Silipone had a developed sense of image reproduction and was able to draft a plan of the *stupa* that matched the archaeological remains as well as meeting the standards required by the Ministry of Information and Culture (Figure 6).

One of the problems which faced the conservation work was the position of Buddhism with respect to the government. The government has assumed responsibility for the shrine, firstly the Department of Tourism and then the Department of Information and Culture. In this respect it was a secular place. But as the government loosened its

Figure 6: Stupa *in the upper cave following reconstruction.*

suppression of Buddhism, the heritage place was increasingly patronised by abbots, monks, novices and pilgrims who obviously believed that the place was a religious shrine. The uneven fit between religion and the State, which has existed in Lao since the declaration of independence in 1975, made it difficult to formerly incorporate religious leaders into the consultation process and management structure. Yet, the nature of Lao culture means that many men have been monks for a short time, in some cases for a considerable time, and as former monks they are aware of Buddhist religious practices. Another factor in this complex equation is the genesis of the *stupa*. It is said to have been constructed from 1559 to 1560 by King Sai Setthathirat as a resting place for the relics of his father, a secular leader, not the relics of a deity.[1] Should the stupa have contained relics of Lord Budda or a revered religious figure, before conservation could be undertaken a detail protocol would have to be established with the communities religious leaders.

In May of 2002, David Wixted, of Heritage Alliance, reviewed the conservation of the *stupa*. His findings were: "We did look closely at the cement in the torchlight and it is cracking. I presume that the background brick base is cracking/moving and this is the cause. The cracks are slightly bigger than fine/hairline so they are not drying out cracks, more like movement/expansion cracks. There was no efflorescence on the cement and the red colouring looked very effective." The report indicates that the materials used were appropriate. The minor cracking of the recent reconstruction is to be expected given that it was built upon the remains of the earlier stupa.

UPPER CAVE ENTRY DOORS

The upper cave main entry doors and surrounds were failing, with one leaf of the door being cast aside and lying in a nearby niche of the cave. The doors were massive and heavy while the ornate surround was in a fragile state (Figure 7). For security purposes it would have been desirable to be able to close the entry securely, and using the original doors would add to the authenticity of the place. But the objects conservator and Director of the conservation project, Benita Johnson, was firmly opposed to closing the main entry stressing that this would severely restrict air circulation, leading to a change in the environment of the cave and no doubt accelerating decay of the wooden sculptures. Other factors which needed to be taken into consideration were that not only was the wooden surround in fragile condition, but the brick-work that fitted between the cave wall and the wooden surround had obviously failed in the past and had been crudely repaired. Also, the door surround had obviously failed and had been crudely repaired and was out of plumb. Any attempt to make the door swing from it would have required nearly complete demolition and reconstruction.

Figure 7: Entry to the upper cave, viewed from the interior, prior to being restored. The door to the left is laying to the side and the door to the right is cemented into the door step.

Following a detailed examination and recording, the solution designed by Chris Jacka, a senior architectural student at the University of Canberra, was to fix the massive entry doors upright and at right angles to the surround. Thus the doors would be in an authentic position but one which serves to support the fragile surrounds. The doors now support the surround rather than the surround supporting the doors (Figure 8).

WALK-WAYS AND SIGNS

Responsibility for visitor safety, control and site interpretation raised salient questions concerning the placement of signs in or near the shrine. Many historically significant sites are cluttered with signs, security devices and walkways. How then should a religious shrine be treated? Firstly, it was decided to replace some of the small "do not touch" and "do not enter" signs which had been made during the early phases of the conservation project with more

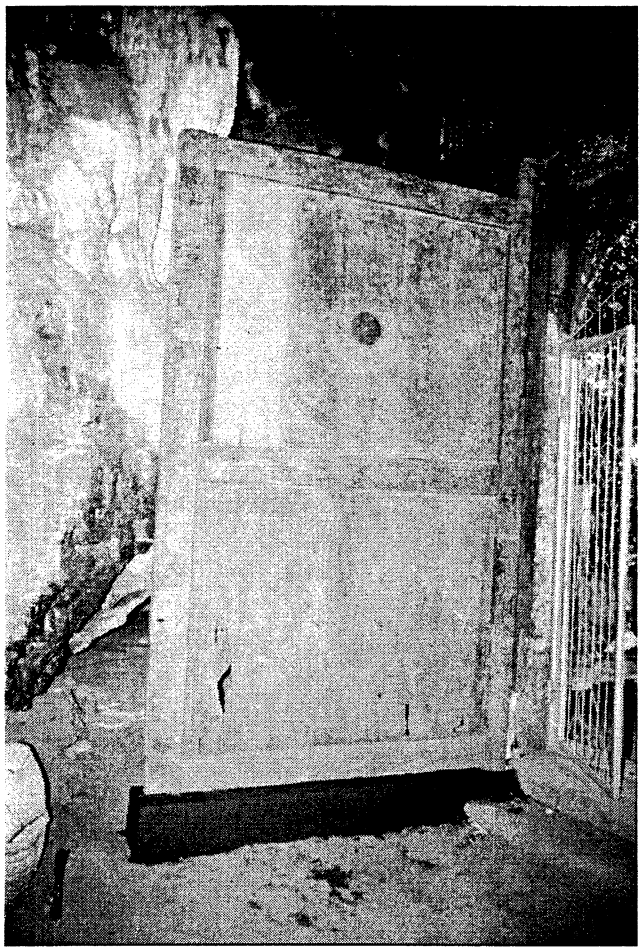

Figure 8: Upper cave entry door following erection and fixing in place with metal stirrups in an open position.

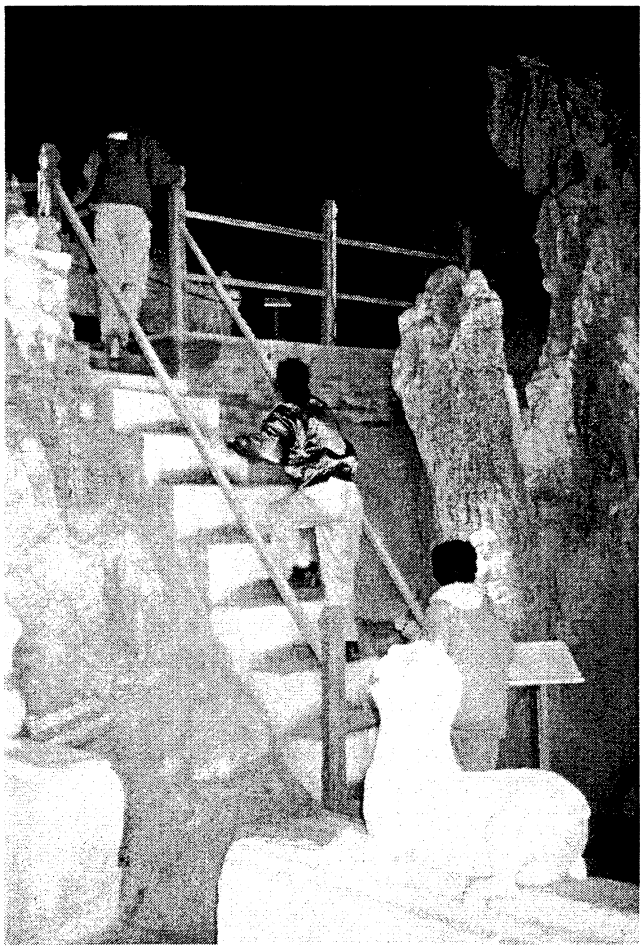

Figure 9: Sign stating that taking Lord Budda statues is illegal. The platform and the handrail have been rebuilt.

Some walkways within the caves were removed for safety purposes, and those which remained were made safe with traditional local materials and methods. This closed off some areas which had previously been accessible to the public. The exterior access walkways required rebuilding. Stairs and paths had been built of bricks and mortar commencing in the 1950s. One portion of the walkway traversed the steep side of the cliff and had been washed away by rainwater. It was questionable if this construction work should be undertaken by the Luang Prabang Provincial government or by the conservation project. It was apparent that the Provincial Departments of Tourism, and Information and Culture, gave a high priority to the appearance of the entry to the caves and wanted the access to be of the highest possible standard. Although all conservation work at Tam Ting was difficult, some projects required large amounts of materials. All of the bricks, lime, sand, water, scaffolding materials and cement had to be brought by river boat to the caves and then laboriously hauled up the stairs to a height equivalent to a ten story building. However, as the works program developed, the Ministry of Information and Culture required that a specialised crew be brought in to rebuild the *stupa*, and this freed up the labour and tradespeople needed to work on the walkways and rebuilding the steps leading between the lower and upper cave. During the final season in 1997 the walkways were rebuilt without any disruption to the overall conservation program (Figures 10 and 11).

LIGHTING

Currently, the caves are lit by candles, pressure gas lanterns or the flashlights of guides, pilgrims and tourists (Figure 12). This low-key lighting adds to the ambience of the place, but particularly in the upper cave it makes it difficult to ensure that visitors do not fall and hurt themselves or surreptitiously pilfer sculptures. Development interests in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Lao Department of Tourism consider the installation of an electric generator and lighting as an advantage. The

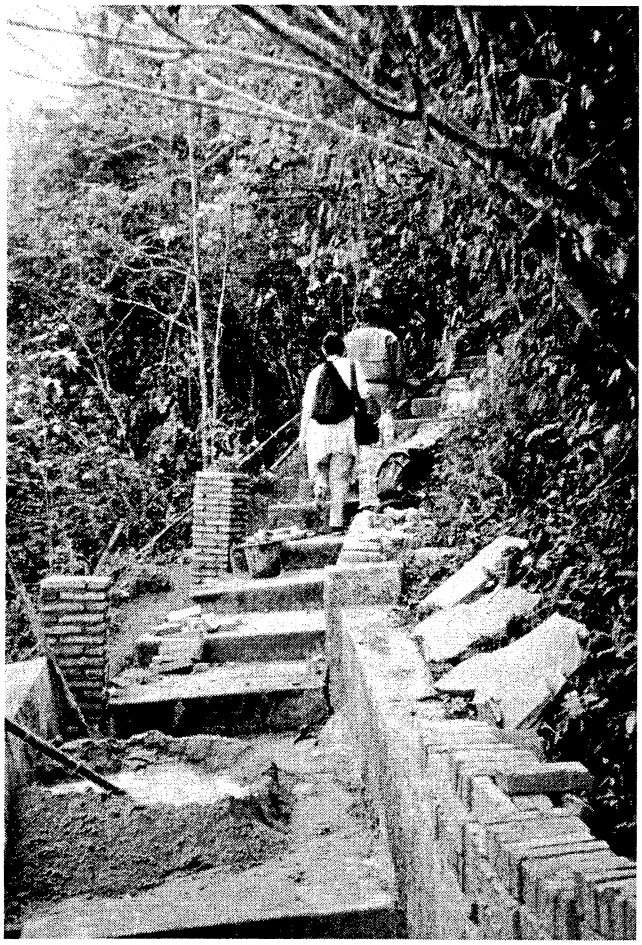

Figure 10: Walkway between the lower cave and the upper cave being reconstructed.

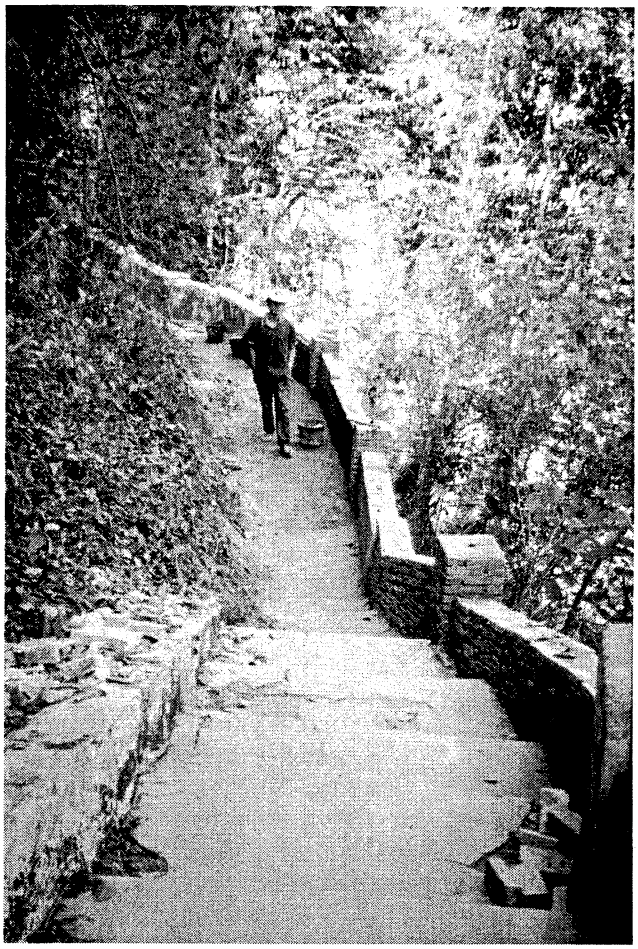

Figure 11: Completion of the walkway construction work.

objects conservator and representatives of the Lao Ministry of Information and Culture believe that the installation of electricity could alter the environment of the cave and promote the growth of mould as well as change the subdued spiritual qualities of the place. There is the practical problem that a generator is a highly sought-after piece of equipment and it would have to be removed to the safekeeping of Ban Pak Ou every evening. Pak Ou, which lies on the opposite bank of the river from the caves, is the home village for the caretakers of Tam Ting. The removal and reinstallation of the generator each day would be a considerable burden given the need to carry the generator up some 240 steps and down again each day. It is conceivable that the caretakers could be spending much of their time looking after the operation of the generator when visitors are present, thus diminishing their monitoring of visitor activities in the caves. The generator has not been installed but it is possible that such a plan could be activated in the future.

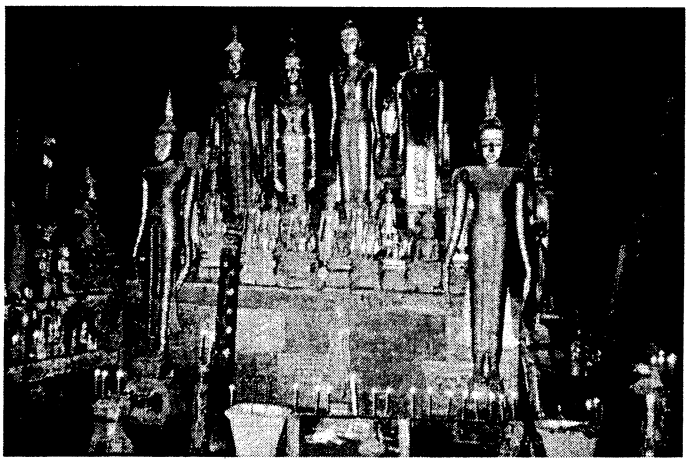

Figure 12: Candles lighting the semi-darkness of the upper cave stupa.

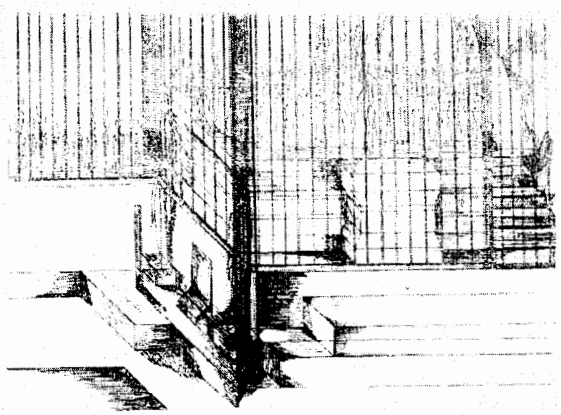

Figure 13: Illustration of the recommended object security system employing grilles and bars to enclose the sculptures; from Report on Museum Security and Selected Sites in Lao People's Democratic Republic by Kamthornthep Krataithong.

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OBJECT SECURITY

A study of museum security was undertaken at selected Lao sites by ICOMOS Thailand. The report by Krataithong (1997) recommends that all sculptures be placed behind bars or grille works (Figures 13 and 14). This recommendation has received a mixed reception. While placing grilles over the sculptures would make it difficult for visitors to casually pilfer objects, it would detract considerably from the visual, aesthetic and spiritual qualities of the place. One of the problems the site mangers face is that the large numbers of sculptures make it difficult to determine if any are missing or to quantify the cumulative rate of theft. Security grills have not been installed but given that it is difficult to determine if any sculptures are missing it may well be considered as a reasonable security measure at some time in the future.

CONCLUSION

Cultural heritage management is not about resolving once and for all the many issues that confront heritage specialists at places of exceptional heritage significance that have to meet the dual needs of tourism and local religious practices. If a place is highly significant it will by its very nature present values which conflict and change through time. How can heritage managers resolve the problems or issues inherent in transforming archaeological ruins within living religious shrines at a distance from urban or provincial centres which lie within a vernacular setting? How does the heritage planner provide for the needs of the local community, tourists and religious pilgrims? And, how does one insure that the corpus of highly significant religious objects housed within the shrine remain in safe keeping for future generations?

Tam Ting is both a contemporary and an ancient shrine in a naturally dramatic setting which reputedly attracts some 80% of the tourists to the region. Maintenance was interrupted for three decades by a new nationalism which suppressed the centuries old traditional Buddhist practices that called for a continual care-taking and an annual cleaning of the shrine under the patronage of the Royal Family. As such, Tam Ting was moving from being a religious place to an archaeological resource. Today the local community and national Lao government are embracing an emerging cultural identity which couples traditional Buddhism and animism with secular revolutionary ideals. Problems inherent in the ancient construction techniques and materials in the upper cave caused failure in the foundation brick course-work that brought about collapse of structures. Transformation of the in-part archaeological ruins into an intact functioning shrine employed contemporary reconstruction methods which, although different from the ancient and long defunct techniques, do permit continual sustainable maintenance by tradespeople in the local community under the supervision of trained personal from the Ministry of Information and Culture in Luang Prabang.

The evolution of international charters and guidelines indicates that there is a shift in the meaning of authenticity, away from winding back the clock to recreate ancient techniques to processes that recognise change in traditions and contemporary social values which empower local communities to employ and value their indigenous "traditional" skills. The dual aims of stabilisation and resource protection at times can only be met by restoring the place to its original function as a complete entity.

NOTE

1. Discussions regarding the finishing of the *stupa* and the planting of two commemorative *bodhi* trees were undertaken with the aid of Thong Phoumirath, an Australian Lao student of Asian Studies undertaking thesis research on the meaning of the religious temple to expatriate Lao, Thong was a member of the conservation team during the 1997 field season.

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illustrations which were published in the journal *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*. UNESCO (Thailand) has given permission to reproduce illustrations from the *Report on Museum Security and Selected Sites in Lao People's Democratic Republic, National Museum Bangkok* by K. Krataithong.

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