AN EXAMINATION OF KHMER PRAYER INSIDE THE TA PROHM COMPLEX
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ANGKOR MANAGEMENT POLICY

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS
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DECEMBER 2009
This thesis addresses the question of how the Cambodia Tourist Police prohibition of local custodians has impacted Khmer prayer rituals inside Ta Prohm Complex (Angkor Archaeological Park, Cambodia). For centuries, people of Khmer ethnicity have engaged in religious activities inside Ta Prohm. Local Khmers have functioned as custodians of spaces of religious activity there. Custodians decorate and clothe statues, and place incense, offering plates, and other religious paraphernalia in spaces of religious activity. Observations demonstrate that Khmer prayer rituals occur in spaces that contain religious paraphernalia. The prohibition reduced the number of spaces that contain religious paraphernalia in Ta Prohm. This thesis is the first research to closely examine contemporary religious activities at Angkor. The thesis discusses how the prohibition may impact future Khmer religious activities inside Ta Prohm, and presents a potential solution for the reduced functionality of Ta Prohm as a Khmer temple that resulted from the prohibition.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I greatly appreciate the family I stayed with in Cambodia for their hospitality and kindness. I thank my committee chair Dr. Don Merten for his wisdom, his patience with this project, and his uncanny ability to “think through” intellectual problems. I thank Gerald Waite for his confidence in me and his encouragement. I thank Ricardo Fernandez for his humor, his patience, and his enthusiasm for this project. I also thank him for encouraging me to present my findings at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting. I also thank Kat, Moe, Amy, Joe, Ben, Nevada, and Tierra for their constant encouragement and support throughout this project.
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Chapter One: Introduction

For centuries, religious activities have occurred inside the Angkor monuments in Cambodia. Many pilgrims of Buddhist and other religious traditions have visited the Angkor temples to perform religious rites. The diversity of religious practices that visitors engage in at the monuments, and the diversity of meanings that visitors ascribe to their own behaviors and to the monuments, impact monument preservation. This thesis originally intended to gain a better understanding of the preservational impact of religious activities (and the domains of meaning that motivate the activities) on the Ta Prohm temple complex at Angkor, but changes in Tourist Police practices at the Angkor temples prevented this research plan from being executed.

In April 2007, Tourist Police (operating within Cambodia’s Ministry of Interior) prohibited local people from operating as custodians of statues and other centers of religious activity in Ta Prohm and other Angkor monuments. These custodians typically decorated and clothed statues, and also placed incense, offering plates, and other religious paraphernalia in spaces of religious activity. For Khmers, the religious paraphernalia demarcates a space where they can perform prayer rituals.
Following the prohibition, local people could continue to operate as custodians if they paid enough money to the Tourist Police. By December of 2007 – one month prior to the beginning of the study – only individuals working for the Tourist Police or Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA) operated as custodians. This reduced the number of centers of Khmer religious activity within Ta Prohm, and it also eliminated a significant source of income for local Khmers who operated as custodians inside the temple complex.

This thesis is the first academic effort to closely examine religious activities at an Angkor monument. It will discuss the religious activities that were observed in Ta Prohm in January-February 2008. This thesis also discusses how the Tourist Police prohibition of local custodians has impacted Khmer religious activities inside Ta Prohm, and how this policy may impact future Khmer religious activities inside Ta Prohm. Finally, the thesis presents a potential solution to the reduced functionality of Ta Prohm as a Khmer temple that resulted from the prohibition.

Khmer religious activities and the domains of meaning surrounding these activities have relevance to Angkor’s history as well as its management and preservation in the present and future. Many monuments (such as Ta Prohm) were constructed as Khmer temples, and Khmers have used them as temples for centuries. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has identified Angkor as a World Heritage site, and Khmer religious activities and domains of meaning need to be considered to achieve a UNESCO goal for World Heritage sites: “to encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and world heritage” (2007a).
Chapter Two: A Background of Ta Prohm and Angkor

For hundreds of years, Khmers and peoples of other ethnicities have engaged in religious activities inside the Angkor monuments. Many works (Archaeological Survey of India 2006; Audric 1972; Dagens 1995; Di Giovine 2009; Freeman and Jacques 1999; French 1999; Japanese Government Team for Safeguarding Angkor 2003; Pou 1997; Thompson 1997; Thompson 2004) acknowledge the presence of religious activities and pilgrims at Angkor. However, none of the scholarship concerning history, archaeological preservation, or sustainable tourism at Angkor has closely examined or discussed the religious activities occurring inside the monuments.
Figure 1. Map of the Angkor region. (Map courtesy of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient – www.theangkorguide.com.)

From Ta Prohm’s beginning, the Khmer people have attributed religious significance to the monument. Khmer King Jayavarman VII ordered the construction of Ta Prohm, which was originally named Rajavihara. According to the temple stele, in C.E. 1186 Jayavarman VII dedicated Ta Prohm in his mother’s honor. It was probably also dedicated to Jayavarman’s guru (Jessup 1997:115). The stele presents a genealogy that links Jayavarman’s family to Mahayana Buddhist divinities (Cœdès 1906:71)
large image on a tower took the form of his mother, identified with Prajnaparamita (the personification of wisdom).

Figure 2. Ta Prohm Complex.

Builders primarily used laterite and sandstone to construct Ta Prohm. Laterite is a volcanic conglomerate enriched in iron and aluminum. It is found in tropical areas, and is widely available in Southeast Asia. Most of the laterite used for the construction of the Angkor monuments was probably excavated locally (Sanday 1997:86). The Angkor laterites can be classified as either pisolitic or porous (Uchida, Maeda, and Nakagawa 1999:163). Porous laterite was used to construct Ta Prohm. Laterite can be easily dressed into blocks, and solar exposure hardens it. However, its
surface often becomes pitted after it dries, making it less desirable as a visible surface stone (Freeman and Jacques 1999:28). The porosity assists in water drainage (Sanday 1997:86). All of these factors made laterite a useful material for the construction of Angkor monument foundations, including Ta Prohm’s. Generally, the Ta Prohm laterite has large pores in comparison to the laterites used to construct other Angkor monuments (Uchida et al. 1999:166). A wall made of laterite (1 kilometer long and 600 meters wide) surrounds the Ta Prohm complex.

Sandstone was quarried in the Kulen Mountains, about 50 kilometers north of Angkor. The stone dates from the mid-Jurassic to the mid-Cretaceous Period. The sandstone used for monument construction ranges in color and geologic properties. Unlike laterite, the sandstone permitted elaborate carvings. Studies of magnetic susceptibility have indicated that the sandstone used to construct the Angkor monuments was extracted from seven different quarries (Uchida, Cunin, Shimoda, Suda and Nakagawa 2002:223). Researchers identify three types of sandstone used to construct the Angkor monuments (Delvert 1963; Uchida et al. 2002). Uchida et al. classify the three types of sandstone as grey to yellowish-brown sandstone, red sandstone, and green sandstone (2002:222). Uchida et al. base this typology upon the color and constituent minerals of the sandstones. Grey to yellowish-brown sandstone was used to construct Ta Prohm and most of the other Angkor structures. Grey to yellowish-brown sandstone consists of quartz, plagioclase, alkali feldspar, biotite, muscovite, and rock fragments. There are no observed differences in constituent minerals or bulk chemical composition among the grey to yellowish-brown sandstones used at Angkor (Uchida et al. 2002:223).
Differences in magnetic susceptibility of sandstone blocks at Ta Prohm suggest that builders constructed Ta Prohm in four stages (Uchida et al. 2002:225), using sandstone from two different quarries (Uchida, Ogawa, and Nakagawa 1998:418). In the first stage the Central Tower, the Inner Gate Towers, and the Inner Gallery were built. In the second stage the Outer Gallery was built. In the third stage of construction, the Middle Gallery, the Hall of Dancers, and the Outer Gate Towers were built. The House of Fire was built in the fourth stage.

![Plan of Ta Prohm](www.theangkorguide.com)

**Figure 3. Plan of Ta Prohm. (Map courtesy of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient – www.theangkorguide.com)**

The stele at Ta Prohm, which dates to C.E. 1186, offers some detailed information about the use and significance of the temple area during Jayavarman VII’s reign. However, the accuracy of this information is debatable. Early Khmer inscriptions, including the Ta Prohm stele, are heavily concerned with glorifying kings and their families, and linking them to the supernatural. Even detailed historical information is
presented in a manner that glorifies individuals and their actions (Pou 1997:54).

According to the Ta Prohm stele, 18 high priests and 2740 officials supposedly lived and carried out their duties at Ta Prohm, along with 615 female dancers. The stele states that a total of 12,640 people had permission to live there. The stele lists 35 diamonds, 40,620 pearls, 512 silk beds, and 876 Chinese veils, and other valuables were kept at Ta Prohm.

Khmers have also used religious paraphernalia at Ta Prohm since its consecration in C.E. 1186. According to the Ta Prohm stele, clothing for statues was kept in the temple (Cœdès 1906:75). Some 165,744 wax torches supplied the temple with lighting and were used for rituals (Cœdès 1906; Higham 2001:126-127). The stele notes that rice was stored at the temple for sacrifice to deities. The stele also identifies fruits and vegetables as well-known accessories of worship; currently, Cambodians frequently offer fruits as sacrifices to Buddha and various supernatural entities.

Following the death of King Jayavarman VII in C.E. 1218, Theravada Buddhism became prevalent in Khmer lands. Many scholars argue that Theravada Buddhism had a populistic orientation in comparison to the Brahmanism and Mahayana Buddhism of earlier times, and it de-emphasized or rejected the attribution of divinity to Buddha and others. Thus, Theravada Buddhism diminished the Khmer king’s ability to associate himself with supernatural power through monument building. Following Jayavarman’s death, the construction of large monuments nearly ceased, and over time vegetation grew over many monument structures (French 1999:174). The Angkor monuments lost political value, but maintained religious significance. Angkor continued to be a destination for religious pilgrimage even after Theravada Buddhism became prominent (Pou 1997:54; Groslier 2006:94).
Under King Jayavarman VIII, a Hindu king reigning from 1243-1295, many Buddha images in Angkor monuments were destroyed or defaced (Chandler 2000:69). This destruction also occurred at Ta Prohm. Jayavarman VIII also attempted to convert another Angkor monument, the Bayon, into a Hindu temple.

In 1296-1297 the Chinese envoy Zhou Daguan stayed at Angkor. Zhou’s account *The Customs of Cambodia* (2006) provides a description of late 13th century Cambodian culture. In a description of Cambodian religious practices, Zhou notes that Buddha statues were clothed, and food offerings were made to Buddha (2006:29). These practices occur in contemporary Cambodia. Zhou’s account does not discuss Ta Prohm.

Portuguese and Spanish sources dating to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are the earliest European accounts of Angkor. These sources are typically related to missionary activities in Cambodia. The Portuguese Franciscan friar Antonio da Magdalena visited Angkor around 1585 or 1586. Portuguese historian Diogo do Couto produced an unpublished description of Angkor based upon Magdalena’s descriptions. The description remarks at the sophistication and magnitude of the Angkorian constructions (Groslier 2006:52-55). Marcello de Ribadeneyra’s description, which was printed in 1601, also emphasizes the magnificence of the monuments. Ribadeneyra, however, attributes this magnificence to the work of ancient Romans or Alexander the Great, and states that “it is a surprising thing that none of the natives of this kingdom can live there” (Groslier 2006:57). In a similar fashion, Spanish friar Gabriel de San Antonio attributes the monument constructions to the work of Jewish immigrants (Groslier 2006:57).
The Portuguese and Spanish sources do not mention Ta Prohm, and they do not describe Khmer religious activities in much detail. However, Khmers continued to engage in religious activities in the temples (Groslier 2006:94) at this time. Numerous inscriptions on Angkor Wat’s walls recorded various Khmer pilgrimages, as well as pilgrimages from other Asian nations, that occurred in the 16th century and later (Thompson 1997:30). Inscriptions at Angkor Wat dating to the late 16th century mention an effort to restore Angkor Wat (Aymonier 1904:295-296). Pilgrimages to Angkor continued in the 17th century (Groslier 2006:98, 101-102). A Japanese pilgrim visited Angkor in the early 17th century and constructed a plan of Angkor Wat (Peri 1923:119-126).

The French missionary Charles-Emile Bouillevaux visited Angkor Wat in 1850. Bouillevaux observed individuals of Khmer ethnicity burning incense as they prayed inside the temple (1858:244), which occurs in contemporary Khmer temples and other Khmer religious places.

The French naturalist Henri Mouhot came upon Ta Prohm in 1860. Mouhot observed that the center of Ta Prohm seemed abandoned, but Khmer villagers living outside the complex’s outer enclosure would occasionally enter the complex (2000:253). Mouhot also noted that Ta Prohm had “suffered greatly at the hands of time” (2000:253).

Benedict Anderson observes various political regimes in Cambodia linking themselves to Angkor, beginning with the French (1991:183). The French, including Bouillevaux (1858:245) and Mouhot (2000:211-213), thought that the Angkor monuments proved that Cambodia was once a great civilization, and many thought that Cambodia could be great again. In 1863 Cambodia became a French protectorate.
Archaeological sites such as Angkor were studied and restored, and colonial investment into archaeological sites increased. This investment “allowed the state to appear as the guardian of a generalized, but also local, tradition” (Anderson 1991:181). The monuments provided the French colonial administration with “a useful justification for the westward expansion of their mission civilatrice” (French 1999:175).

Beginning in June 1866, the French naval officers Doudart de Lagrée, Louis Delaporte, and Francis Garnier led an effort to locate and describe many Angkor monuments. The leaders of this expedition stated that this visit to Angkor had a scientific intent, but in fact the visit produced little scientific inquiry and “had the air of a holiday” (Osborne 1975:41). The explorers posed for a portrait as they sat on Angkor ruins (Garnier 1873:27). The expedition produced a brief description of Ta Prohm’s architecture and features (Garnier 1873:73, 74; Garnier 1985:26). Thailand gained control of the province of Siem Reap and the Angkor monuments within the province as part of a treaty with France. Historical records do not reveal how the Thai occupation affected the monuments.

Delaporte undertook subsequent expeditions to Angkor, taking casts as well as original stonework from various monuments to museums in France, Phnom Penh, and Saigon for display (Chandler 2000:142). Delaporte described the architecture of many monuments, including Ta Prohm (Delaporte 1880). These descriptions were more detailed than those resulting from the original expedition. Efforts to map Ta Prohm were initiated in 1873 and continued until 1883 (Delaporte 1920:4).

In 1898, French administrators founded the École Française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO) in Hanoi, Vietnam. The EFEO was the scholarly and scientific institution of the
French colonial administration in Indochina. The EFEO gained control of the Angkor monuments after Thailand ceded Siem Reap back to Cambodia in 1907 (French 1999:176). For colonial administrators, the monuments held scientific significance. Expeditions to the Angkor monuments required scientific purpose (French 1999:176) and EFEO scholars began studying the monuments in an effort to describe Khmer cultural history. The EFEO advocated the study of sculptures and stonework in its archaeological context, utilizing a cultural historical archaeological approach that focused on describing the details of Khmer cultural history.

The EFEO would also work to restore most of the Angkor monuments to their original condition. However, the EFEO decided to leave the Ta Prohm temple complex in the general condition in which it was found. This was done to illustrate how the Angkor monuments looked when the French explorers first saw them (Delvert 1963:453, 459). This was not an official decision, but a general agreement reached among EFEO scholars.

I contend that this agreement is a result of colonial nostalgia, in which colonial administrators (and subsequently, the present administrators of the monuments) yearned for the very cultural entities which they transformed or destroyed (Rosaldo 1993:69-70). In other words, the colonial administration’s restoration and management of the Angkor monuments removed the monuments from their originally-discovered, “natural” state, and thus the agreement to keep Ta Prohm in the condition in which the French found it was a nostalgic reaction to the colonial transformation of the monuments. This agreement is recognized and honored to this day by the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA), the Cambodian
government agency that oversees the protection and maintenance of the monuments. Currently the roots of silk-cotton trees (*Tetrameles nudiflora*), strangler-fig trees (*Ficus gibbosa*), and other vegetation have penetrated the temple structure’s masonry, loosening temple blocks (Figure 4). Other ecological forces have also loosened and broken Ta Prohm’s stonework.

Figure 4. *Tetrameles nudiflora* atop Ta Prohm’s second enclosure wall.
In postcolonial Cambodia, much nationalistic energy and ideology has focused on Angkor (Anderson 1991). Ledgerwood has identified Angkor Wat as postcolonial Cambodia’s “ultimate symbol of Khmerness” (1997:95). According to French, the French-educated Cambodian elite “brought together an older, indigenous sense of the cultural significance of the temples with a more European sense of national identity and pride” (1999:179). Angkor Wat was the central symbol on the flag of Sihanouk’s, Lon Nol’s, and Pol Pot’s regimes, and it is the central symbol of the current Cambodian national flag. Angkor Wat “transposed the glories of past realms into new forms of modernity for the nation” (Weix 1997:28). The Cambodian association of monuments with nationalism is probably the strongest in the world today (Stark and Griffin 2004:117).

The Khmer Rouge aimed to remove Western cultural influences, and worked to eliminate individuals identified as non-proletarian elites; therefore, they aimed to execute the French-educated elite. Within these policies, university-led archaeological study of the Angkor monuments was discontinued. The Khmer Rouge’s national revolutionary project also worked to end religious activities and expression, vandalizing Buddhist temples. The Khmer Rouge damaged bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat with bullets, and also destroyed some of the Buddha statues that Theravada Buddhist pilgrims placed in Angkor Wat’s Hall of the Thousand Buddhas (Freeman and Jacques 1999:51).

However, the Khmer Rouge also idealized the Khmer Empire and the Angkor monuments as a symbol of the past greatness of the Khmer people. The regime directed large irrigation projects throughout Cambodia in an effort to replicate Angkor’s glory as the center of the Khmer Empire (Stark and Griffin 2004:121-122). Songs paralleled the
Khmer Rouge’s achievements with achievements of the Khmer Empire (Marston 1994:108). Generally, Angkor was abandoned until the end of the Khmer Rouge regime. No one continued the efforts that the EFEO initiated to protect the monuments from potentially destructive vegetation (Stark and Griffin 2004:121).

In the 1980s the economic hardships in Cambodia drove many poor Cambodians to engage in antiquities trafficking. Many Cambodians removed and sold monument materials. As economic hardships persist, substantial activity in removing and selling monument materials continues (Anderson 2007; French 1999:171). Monument materials have frequently crossed into Thailand and entered the global antiquities market (Anderson 2007; French 1999). Ta Prohm has an exceptional amount of loose stonework (Figures 2 and 4) in comparison to other Angkor monuments because of the EFEO’s decision to leave the complex as it was found. This increases the likelihood that individuals can remove pieces of stonework from the temple complex.

Beginning in the 1990s, Angkor gained an increasing international significance. It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1992 (UNESCO 2007b). After Angkor was named a World Heritage Site, the Cambodian national government needed to organize efforts to protect and manage the Angkor monuments. By royal decree, the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA) was created in 1995. APSARA was intended to provide more efficiency to the Cambodian government’s involvement in the management of Angkor (French 1999:183). Archaeological study of the monuments resumed in the 1990s, and scholars from Japan, Australia, the U.S., and other nations have studied the monuments. Portions
of the film *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001) were filmed in Ta Prohm and other Angkor monuments.

In this decade, tourist activity contributes substantially to Cambodia’s economy. In Cambodia, only the garment industry ranks higher than tourism in increasing national economic growth (Council for the Development of Cambodia 2007). Over 2 million foreign visitors entered Cambodia in 2007 (Cambodia Ministry of Tourism 2008), which is the number of visitors that Cambodia’s Ministry of Tourism had expected for that year (Council for the Development of Cambodia 2007). The Ministry of Tourism expects 3.2 million foreign visitors to enter Cambodia in 2010 (United Nations 2008). The Angkor monuments motivate much of this tourist activity. In recent years around 85 percent of all foreign visitors entering Cambodia visited Angkor (Winter 2003:60). Ta Prohm is one of the most frequently visited Angkor monuments by foreign visitors (Di Giovine 2009:339) as well as by Cambodians (Kapur and Sahai 2007:35).

Even with the EFEO’s decision to leave Ta Prohm as it was found, an effort to restore the temple complex is underway. In cooperation with APSARA, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is currently working to restore the Ta Prohm temple complex. The restoration involves studies of tree life and conservation. This includes the use of ground-penetrating radar to understand root movement below the monument structure. ASI has conducted hydrological studies as well as studies on the monument’s structural stability (APSARA 2007b). According to APSARA, the restoration “revolves around the basic concept of conserving both the natural and the built heritage” (2007b) of the monument. This clearly corresponds to the general appeal of the monument as being “untouched” and “natural.” ASI also led an effort to clear
away fungus and lichen from Angkor Wat in 1989 (UNESCO 1991), but the fungus and lichen returned shortly afterwards (Ciochon and James 1994:46).

Just as the activities of the ancient Khmer, French colonial scholars and administrators, the Khmer Rouge, antiquities traffickers, and tourists have transformed Angkor, the religious activities of Khmers transform the archaeological landscape at Angkor. Robert Ulin argues that any examination of local cultural phenomena “must be recast to account for the plurality of voices that are woven into the social fabric, sometimes at the center and sometimes at the periphery” (2001:223-224). Most Khmer Cambodians do not have the economic or organizational power of other cultural actors at Angkor, but their religious activities and the domains of meaning motivating them are significant to Angkor’s present and future.

The lack of scholarly examination or interest in contemporary religious practices at Angkor is startling when considering that many of the monuments were created with religious motivations. Only French acknowledges current religious activities as significant to Angkor in her identification of pilgrims as significant cultural agents at Angkor: “The range of interests that converge on the Angkor temples today, and the different ways these interest groups understand the temples’ value, is also remarkable. In addition to thieves, there are pilgrims, tourists, scholars, conservators, collectors, and developers of all kinds…” (French 1999:171-172). Scholarly investigation of religious activities, and the domains of meaning that motivate these activities, could be a useful step toward achieving UNESCO’s goal for encouraging the participation of local peoples in the preservation of World Heritage sites.
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework for Engaging the Problem

This thesis aims to ground actors in their cultural and physical environments. This grounding of individuals in their environments fits within the general anthropological theme of understanding humans’ relationships to their environments as a necessary and central aspect of human life. In the cultural context of the Ta Prohm complex, custodians, Khmer visitors, and the Cambodia Tourist Police patrolmen and administrators all must utilize symbols to engage their cultural and physical environments. Kockelman understands human agency as “a kind of mediating relationality” in which humans have “no choice about the field of options within which one may freely choose” (2007:376). He restates Marx’s observation that “men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered” (Marx 1991:15). Thus, the cultural and physical realities of environments present constraints within which humans must make decisions and engage symbolic processes.

The grounding of actors in their environments is particularly significant for understanding Khmer prayer. I have observed that Khmer individuals enact prayer rituals in environments where religious paraphernalia are visibly present and available for
use. Others discussions of Khmer prayer rituals (Hang 2004; Bizot 1994; Leclère 1975) do not make this observation, but they confirm the observation. These discussions do not focus on or analyze the significance of artifacts in prayer rituals. Many Khmer informants told me that they can pray anywhere, but I only observed them praying in places where incense, offering plates, or other religious paraphernalia were present. Thus, the presence or absence of certain items of material culture seems to environmentally constrain Khmer prayer rituals.

This thesis treats material culture as an indelible part of any cultural environment. Material culture is a necessary result of the human adaptive actions of modifying environments through cultural meanings, and material culture itself enables environmental modification. As Christopher Tilley wrote, “to be human is to speak, to be human is also to make and use things” (2002:24). Judy Attfield identifies artifacts as “vehicles of meaning through which people negotiate their relations with each other and the world at large” (2000:75). John Frow notes that things “never stand alone; they are bits of associative chains which form and re-form the hybrids of nature and culture of which our world is composed” (2004:357). Material culture is an essential element for communicating and interpreting many cultural meanings. Custodial activities in their provision and maintenance of religious paraphernalia are central to, and part of, Khmer religious meanings and activities.

In processes of human adaptation, material culture necessarily transmits and reflects cultural meanings, even if actors are not conscious of all of these processes or their meanings: Tim Dant states that “all artifacts are treated by human beings as having meaning; we recognize them, understand what their properties are, and treat them as
having particular social significance. In everyday life we take their meaning for granted when we know what the objects are” (1999:153). In a sense, Khmer individuals take for granted the significance of religious paraphernalia for prayer rituals when they state that they can pray anywhere, but, as far as I was able to observe, they only prayed in places where religious paraphernalia are present. Dant further states that “all objects are social agents in the limited sense that they extend human action and mediate meanings between humans” (Dant 1999:13). Material culture in the form of religious paraphernalia enables and extends Khmer prayer rituals.

I have observed thousands of Khmer prayer rituals in Angkor and elsewhere in Cambodia. Every prayer ritual I observed was enacted in the presence of religious paraphernalia. The candles, incense, statue clothing, and various offerings visually demarcate a space where Khmers can pray. Paraphernalia also provides a material, artifactual means by which individuals engage their prayer rituals. Prohibition of custodianship has decreased the number of spaces where there is religious paraphernalia inside Ta Prohm, which has thus limited the number of places where Khmers pray inside the temple complex. The reduction in the number of spaces where religious paraphernalia is visibly present increases the likelihood that Khmer visitors can walk through the temple without seeing religious paraphernalia, and thus not engage in ritual activity there.

Material culture not only enables humans to transform environments, but also becomes elements of environments to which humans must adapt. The Tourist Police’s prohibition of custodianship and the subsequent provision of religious paraphernalia is a sort of adaptation to environmental conditions where religious paraphernalia was present.
All of the Tourist Police patrollers and APSARA employees I observed functioning as custodians were Khmer Cambodians, and their provision of religious paraphernalia enabled them to generate profits from money offerings; even if the number of spaces of religious activity (and therefore, potential money offering) had been reduced, the few Tourist Police or APSARA employees that functioned as custodians had greater control over the offering money, and could keep all the offering money left at places where they acted as custodians because they eliminated the locals’ custodianship. Material culture, as elements of cultural environments to which people must adapt, also serves as an index by which actors can perceive other actors’ agency, and can then act (Leach 2007:173).

This adaptive use of material culture as an index is illustrated in my own discovery as a researcher that Tourist Police patrollers and APSARA employees were profiting by providing religious paraphernalia after the prohibition of custodianship. I had already learned of the prohibition from a former custodian of Ta Prohm as well as the Tourist Police Angkor office, and I subsequently saw religious paraphernalia being provided in a few areas of the temple. I decided to investigate who left the religious paraphernalia, and discovered Tourist Police patrollers and APSARA employees functioning as custodians by providing religious paraphernalia. In this case, the religious paraphernalia became an index to understand the agency of the Tourist Police patrollers and APSARA employees.
Chapter Four: Methodology

As previously mentioned, I intended to study the effects of religious activities on preservation. The intended study would have involved the use of a scale map to record and describe various activities in centers of religious activity. Photographing of the sandstone surfaces in these centers was also planned. The intended study would have also included interviews of individuals that were participating in religious activities.

When I arrived at Ta Prohm in January 2008 and discovered that the Tourist Police no longer allowed custodians to operate in Angkor temples, there appeared to be a reduction in religious paraphernalia and frequency of religious activity in the temple in comparison to what I observed there in December 2006. Although I continued to attempt to gather data concerning preservation, I decided to gather information about the effects of the prohibition -- and the concomitant reduction in spaces with religious paraphernalia -- upon Khmer religious activities at the temple. Three statues inside the temple had religious paraphernalia (which was placed there by APSARA and Tourist Police personnel) present at some point during the course of my study. I observed behaviors occurring near these statues from locations where individuals would not know I was observing them. I would also make observations of Khmer behaviors at statues where
there was no religious paraphernalia nearby, except for used or discarded remains of paraphernalia (such as used incense sticks or candle wax). Observing behaviors in spaces where there was religious paraphernalia as well as spaces where there was no paraphernalia was done to gain a better understanding of how the reduction of spaces with religious paraphernalia in Ta Prohm impacted Khmer prayer rituals.

No individuals observed or interviewed for this research were named in any way or assigned aliases in the recording of data or in the writing of this thesis. Therefore, individuals’ responses to questions were not in any way linked to their name or identity. Individuals interviewed were informed of this procedure before interviews (see Informed Consent Form, Appendices I and II). This was done out of sensitivity toward Khmer individuals who may have previously endured negative experiences in which institutional powers (such as the Khmer Rouge) gathered information from these individuals or monitored them in some way. This research procedure is the reason why informants discussed in this thesis (including the key informant discussed below) are not given names.

An individual of Khmer ethnicity who has given many tours through Ta Prohm assisted me with observations, commenting on various observed behaviors and providing language translation when needed. His experience and knowledge of Ta Prohm and Khmer ritual activities provided substantial insight; he was a key informant in the course of the research. I would remain at one location for the entire day, and on some days the assistant would observe behaviors at a separate location in order to increase the observational capabilities of the study. A timer was used to record the duration of some activities. It is important to note that individuals who are not Khmer also perform prayer
rituals at Ta Prohm. Two hundred seventy-one individuals were observed enacting prayer rituals inside Ta Prohm in the course of the study, and 92 of them (roughly one-third) identified themselves as ethnically Khmer.

I interviewed individuals who were praying inside Ta Prohm, utilizing translations from the assistant mentioned above. I would wait until three to five seconds after the prayer ritual was completed to ask questions. This was done to avoid interrupting ritual activity and to avoid influencing the ritual by my questions or presence. Asking the questions shortly after the ritual would also help to ensure that the individual being interviewed would be able to recall the details of the ritual. To further aid in recollection of the ritual, interviews were conducted within a few feet of where the individual being interviewed completed the ritual so that the individual being interviewed would remain near the same visual context where they completed the rituals.

I asked various individuals enacting prayer rituals about their place of origin. If individuals responded that they were from Cambodia, I asked them if they were Khmer (which is the predominant ethnic group in Cambodia). I also asked what they were praying about or for – descriptive questions such as these allow informants to describe and explain their activities and perspectives (Spradley 1979:85-86). These questions were often followed with more questions, such as why individuals prayed at Ta Prohm.

I interviewed 22 Khmer individuals that enacted prayer rituals at Ta Prohm, but also interviewed individuals who were not of Khmer ethnicity that enacted prayer rituals at Ta Prohm. This interviewing of visitors who were not ethnically Khmer was done with the intention of understanding Khmer prayer rituals more fully by understanding how
they differ from the rituals performed by those of other ethnicities. No one under eighteen years of age was interviewed.

Interviews and observations of Khmers praying at other sacred sites were conducted to see if prayer rituals conducted at various locations differed from those occurring at Ta Prohm. Hundreds of Khmer prayer rituals were observed in various places in and around Siem Reap, Cambodia in January-February 2008. Informal interviews of custodians at various sacred sites around Siem Reap were also conducted. I interviewed custodians to better understand the role they played at Khmer sacred sites. I also wanted to obtain their perspective on prayer rituals occurring at the sites where they worked. Rapport with custodians (those operating outside of Angkor as well as the Tourist Police and APSARA personnel operating as custodians inside Ta Prohm) was initiated by engaging in ritual activities at the locations where they worked, and leaving offering money. Custodians encourage visitors to participate in rituals to increase the potential for money offerings. Participating in rituals also provides the researcher another visual and spatial perspective of prayer rituals.

On two occasions I informally interviewed a former custodian of a space inside Ta Prohm. I located this individual after speaking with a tour guide who worked at various Angkor monuments. Both of those interviews were recorded with a digital audio recording device. I also conducted informal interviews of APSARA personnel working at Ta Prohm, Tourist Police patrollers working at Ta Prohm and other Angkor monuments, and two officials working at the Tourist Police Angkor office. These interviews were conducted to gather information about the Tourist Police prohibition of local people operating as custodians at Angkor monuments.
Field notes were kept to record data from interviewing and observation. Two notebooks were utilized to record this data; two notebooks allowed the research assistant and myself to simultaneously record data at separate locations on some occasions. A journal was kept to initiate and develop insights made during the course of the study. The above-mentioned digital audio recording device was also used to record insights. Another notebook was used to map the location of some behaviors as well as material remains of recent religious activities inside Ta Prohm.

Photographs assisted in documenting the presence (and absence) of religious paraphernalia in various spaces in the temple. APSARA granted permission to publish photographs in this thesis (Appendix III). Taking photographs of spaces documented the placement and removal of religious paraphernalia by Tourist Police patrollers and APSARA personnel that occurred when these individuals began and ended their workdays. All paraphernalia was removed at the end of the day, except for clothing for statues and incense urns.

A concerted effort was made to not photograph individuals while they were enacting prayer rituals inside Ta Prohm. This helped to prevent the researcher from interrupting prayer rituals, and to prevent the researcher from violating individuals’ photographic and proxemic norms. It is particularly important to be mindful of behaviors that may violate individuals’ photographic and proxemic norms in locations like Ta Prohm where various nationalities (and thus, varying proxemic and photographic norms) are present (Schissler 2007).

I also photographically documented the material remains of religious behaviors that recently occurred, but no longer occur, in some areas of the temple. As stated
previously, the policy of not allowing caretakers to operate inside the temple had reduced the number of places inside where religious paraphernalia was present; material remains of recent religious behaviors provides evidence of this. I utilized archaeological photographing scales to illustrate the size and spatial relationship of various artifacts.

The combination of mapping, observing, interviewing, and photographing enables the study to capture the components of place, actors, and activities that Spradley identifies as primary in social situations (1980:39). Spradley also observes that “ethnographers make cultural inferences from three sources: (1) from what people say: (2) from the way people act; and (3) from the artifacts people use” (1979:8). This study draws from all three sources to gain a more thorough understanding of Khmer religious activities at Ta Prohm and how the Tourist Police prohibition of custodianship has affected the activities.
Chapter Five: Khmer Prayer inside the Ta Prohm Complex

Chapter Two presented a history of religious significance attributed to Ta Prohm. In contemporary times, many Khmer Cambodians continue to attribute a sense of religious significance to Ta Prohm that compels them to visit the temple complex and pray there. This sense of significance is found in Loung Ung’s autobiographical account, *First They Killed My Father*. Ung’s father identifies Ta Prohm as the place “where the gods live” (2006:68). Many Khmer informants told me that they and other Khmers pray at Ta Prohm because the temple is “powerful;” one informant noted that the temple’s state of ruin stirred up “a lot of emotion and attraction.” A number of spirits called pāramī are associated with Angkor (Bertrand 2001:35), and Ta Prohm is believed to be the place of origin for a particular pāramī named Preah Kum Long. Pilgrimages to Ta Prohm related to Preah Kum Long have been undertaken (Bertrand 2001:36). Khmers believe that spirits inhabit the statues and spaces where prayers occur (Bizot 1994), and that spirits protect the statues and give them supernatural power to answer prayers.

Broken baluster pieces are frequently found near statues inside Ta Prohm (Figures 5.1-5.3, 5.5, and 5.7). An Angkor tour guide, an archaeologist that regularly worked at Ta Prohm, and a former custodian that worked at Ta Prohm all told me that
custodians would invite spirits to enter the baluster pieces, which would give the statues and the spaces more power to answer prayers. The key informant discussed in the previous chapter told me that “it is good to pray in places where many people have prayed (before) because if many people have prayed there, that probably means that the space (and the statue and spirits in that space) must have power to answer prayers.” The broken baluster pieces (along with paraphernalia placed near statues) probably give Khmers the impression that many other visitors have prayed in that space; the location of broken baluster pieces near statues suggests that someone must have moved the baluster piece to that location and used it (in the same way that paraphernalia near statues suggests that people have engaged in ritual activity at that location).

Interestingly, all the statues inside Ta Prohm were clearly broken, which may have contributed to the notion that many prayer rituals had been previously enacted in the spaces. Visitors may infer that past ritual activities have broken the statues and worn down the statues’ surfaces.

As stated in the previous chapter, 271 individuals were observed enacting prayer rituals inside Ta Prohm in the course of the study, and 92 of these individuals were ethnically Khmer. Every Khmer prayer ritual (called nak boung soung in Khmer) I observed in Ta Prohm was enacted in front of Buddhist statues (or remains of statues) that were ornamented and surrounded with religious paraphernalia. Paraphernalia included clothing for statues, plates for money offerings, incense, and food offerings. I never observed any Khmers enact prayer rituals in front of Buddhist statues (or remains of statues) that were not ornamented and were not surrounded by any paraphernalia.
This is consistent with what I observed in sacred sites elsewhere in Cambodia—that Khmers enact prayer rituals in the presence of religious paraphernalia. This contrasted with the prayer rituals of individuals who were not Khmer; these rituals were enacted in locations where there was no religious paraphernalia as well as locations where there was religious paraphernalia.

A number of Khmer informants in Ta Prohm and elsewhere in Cambodia told me that incense, money offerings, statue clothing, and food offerings are all considered offerings to sustain and pay respect to Buddha or other supernatural entities. The key informant also told me this. He noted that such offerings “generate good karma,” which can increase the likelihood that the individual presenting the offerings will have his or her prayers answered.

As stated earlier, Khmers insist that they can pray anywhere even though I observed them praying only in the presence of religious paraphernalia. This emic-etic conflict made it difficult to directly discuss with them the necessity of religious paraphernalia for Khmer prayer rituals. The visible presence of various items of religious paraphernalia seems to indicate to Khmers that a statue at a location possesses power to answer prayers. It also provides Khmers an artifactual and sensual medium through which to engage their prayer rituals. Further research is needed to better understand the relationship of religious paraphernalia to prayer rituals.

The important point here is that (as will be discussed later in this chapter), as far as I was able to observe, religious paraphernalia is visibly present at all Khmer prayer rituals at Ta Prohm, and thus the prohibition of custodianship and the concomitant reduction in centers with paraphernalia have reduced the number of locations where
Khmers pray inside Ta Prohm. This reduction in centers with paraphernalia increases the likelihood that people can visit the monument without seeing paraphernalia. There are numerous points where visitors can enter and exit the temple complex, and various paths visitors can take as they walk through the temple complex, and therefore any reduction in centers with paraphernalia increases the likelihood that Khmer visitors will enter and exit the temple complex without seeing paraphernalia. As will be discussed later, the prohibition could eventually end Khmer prayer rituals and other religious activities at Ta Prohm.

The prayers of the individuals I interviewed contained common Khmer themes, and these individuals identified themselves as Khmer, which clarifies that the individuals I interviewed are ethnically Khmer. Fifteen of the 22 Khmer individuals praying at Ta Prohm that I interviewed prayed to Buddha for safety. Thirteen prayed for prosperity or something related to improved economic conditions. Eleven prayed for health or for something health-related. Six individuals prayed for good luck or something related to good fortunes. Six individuals prayed for happiness. Other researchers have also noted that Khmer prayers elsewhere focus on these themes (Hang 2004:113,116; Marston and Guthrie 2004:129). This is also consistent with Adhemard Leclère’s late 19th century observations that Khmers prayed to Buddha with the belief that he would intervene on behalf of them (1975:329). Alain Forest also observed this perception of Buddha as a protector and benefactor (1992:17).
Table 1. The prayers to Buddha of 22 Khmers inside Ta Prohm. These prayers can be categorized into prayers for safety (yellow), prosperity (green), health (lavender), good luck (blue), and happiness (orange).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>safety</th>
<th>Life</th>
<th>that family is safe</th>
<th>things go well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>good luck</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>business go well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>higher ranking</td>
<td>better salary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>to get a good job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td>parents' business do well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>prosperity</td>
<td>good luck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>prosperity</td>
<td>long life</td>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>good luck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>more rain for my rice crop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td>that a family member recover from a stomach illness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>health</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>happiness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>good luck</td>
<td>success leading to a better income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td>Prosperity</td>
<td>health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>supervisor would like my work so I can make more money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>good luck</td>
<td>business do well</td>
<td>my children be healthy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td>Prosperity</td>
<td>health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td>Prosperity</td>
<td>health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although common themes of Khmer prayers can be identified, Khmer prayer rituals were enacted with substantial behavioral variation. Individuals may bow multiple times, or not bow at all. Some individuals placed incense at the altar and then prayed, and some prayed before placing incense at the altar, and others prayed without incense. Prayer rituals occurred with or without the use of money or food offerings. Rituals could be performed with closed eyes or open eyes. Some bowed in front of statues on their knees, and some would lower their bodies and place their heads upon the ground, and some would not bow at all. Hands may (or may not) be clasped together, with either thrusting of the hands upward, or hands clasped together close to the mouth and held there for many seconds. Prayer rituals lasted as long as 15 minutes or as short as less than one second (in such cases, bows were quickly performed). When asking Khmer informants on numerous occasions why they prayed the way they did, they almost always responded, “this is how I was taught.”

I could not discern any clear gender-related patterns in Khmer prayer ritual behaviors or the frequency of ritual enactment. When I asked my key informant if women or men prayed more frequently, he replied that women prayed more frequently because “women feel weaker” and feel the need to ask Buddha or spirits for intervention in their lives, but men aimed to avoid experiencing the vulnerability of seeking such intervention. Fifty-two of the 92 Khmer individuals I observed praying in Ta Prohm were female. However, at other sacred sites I visited in Cambodia there seemed to be a relatively equal number of women and men enacting prayer rituals. When families visited sacred sites, all family members (except infants) enacted prayer rituals.
Khmer prayer ritual behaviors may be quite heterogeneous, but all the Khmer prayer rituals at Ta Prohm were enacted in the presence of religious paraphernalia; and Khmers attribute a sense of significance to Ta Prohm, often identifying the temple complex as “powerful.”

**Custodians of sacred sites**

In my visits to Cambodia I have observed that it is a Khmer cultural norm that custodians work to maintain places of religious activity. In the late 19th century the French explorer and scholar Étienne Aymonier observed that custodians maintained spaces of religious activity inside Khmer temples (1904:571). Hang Chan Sophea (2004) also observes that there are caretakers of statues in Cambodia, and Ashley Thompson (2004) mentions that they are present at Angkor Wat. Custodians typically decorate and clothe statues, and also place incense, offering plates, and other religious paraphernalia in spaces of religious activity. Custodians also discard old food offerings and used incense. As stated earlier, visitors will often leave money offerings at sacred sites, and Khmers apparently believe that such offerings generate good karma that may improve their chances of having prayers answered. Custodians use some of the money offerings to help support themselves economically. Custodians also use the money to replenish paraphernalia for ritual use. They donate some of the money to local monasteries, and they also give money to police patrolling nearby to maintain good relations with the police. I observed police collecting money from custodians at two sacred sites in Siem Reap, and four custodians told me in interviews that it is a norm for police to collect money from custodians at Cambodian sacred places.
Prohibition and its effects on Khmer prayer

In April 2007, Tourist Police (operating within Cambodia’s Ministry of Interior) prohibited local people from operating as custodians, or caretakers, of statues and other centers of religious activity in Ta Prohm and other Angkor monuments. Four Tourist Police patrollers working in Angkor, two officials working at the Tourist Police Angkor office, a former custodian who operated inside Ta Prohm, and an Angkor tour guide all told me that the stated reason for the prohibition was to prevent local people from collecting money from Angkor visitors. According to an Angkor tour guide and several former custodians who operated inside Ta Prohm, locals could continue to function as custodians if they regularly paid money to the Tourist Police patrol officers working in Ta Prohm. This was a continuation of the previous arrangement between custodians and police, except that it was occurring while custodianship was prohibited.

According to a former custodian that worked inside Ta Prohm, a tour guide regularly giving tours at Ta Prohm, and two employees working in Ta Prohm for APSARA, by December of 2007 only individuals working for the Tourist Police or APSARA functioned as custodians. All of these individuals were ethnically Khmer. All Tourist Police patrollers and APSARA employees I observed functioning as custodians inside Ta Prohm told me that they functioned as custodians to “make money.”

I observed three APSARA employees functioning as custodians on various occasions. These individuals either worked together as custodians or they worked as custodians by themselves at times when the other employees were not working at Ta Prohm. I observed them at various times paying money to Tourist Police patrollers; all
of the APSARA employees functioning as custodians told me that they paid money to the Tourist Police patrollers to maintain good relations with the patrollers.

On various occasions the APSARA employees placed paraphernalia in three locations (see map, Figure 5, locations 1, 2, and 3) that were in the general vicinity of where they were assigned to work for that particular day. However, as APSARA employees, these individuals had a variety of responsibilities (including picking up trash and monitoring visitors’ behaviors) that required them to go to other locations within the temple for brief periods of time and then return to the area which they were assigned to work. Therefore, they could not always keep watch over their offering plates to ensure that money did not get stolen. One APSARA employee told me he was concerned that Tourist Police patrollers would take money from an offering plate he placed near a statue. On two occasions I observed Tourist Police patrollers taking money from offering plates belonging to APSARA employees.

If the APSARA employees functioning as custodians were required to move to another location in the temple for an extensive period of time, they would move paraphernalia, except for the statue clothing (there was clothing at two locations [see map Figure 5, locations 1 and 2], which was never moved during my observations) to spaces adjacent to statues near the location of their new assignment, or they would not lay out any paraphernalia if a Tourist Police patroller was already functioning as a custodian at that location. It was not clear if any individual maintained or took responsibility for statue clothing.

Unlike the APSARA employees, the Tourist Police patrollers who functioned as custodians could stay nearby the offering plates they placed near statues, which prevented
theft from the offering plates. During my observations, various patrollers worked in Ta Prohm and they would often speak to one another in front of spaces with religious paraphernalia. This made it difficult to determine how many patrollers were engaging in custodial activities in Ta Prohm. The Tourist Police patrollers placed religious paraphernalia at the same three locations that APSARA employees placed paraphernalia (but never at the same time as APSARA employees). The placement of religious paraphernalia at the same statues as the APSARA employees leads me to suspect that individuals placed paraphernalia at these statues because a) they were nearby where these individuals worked and b) because many visitors walk by those statues, increasing the likelihood that they will leave money there (however, it must be emphasized that the reduction in locations with religious paraphernalia increases the likelihood that visitors will walk through the temple complex without seeing religious paraphernalia). Tourist Police patrollers may also prefer to function as custodians at those locations to ensure that APSARA employees, who are assigned to work in adjacent areas, cannot function as custodians there. Patrollers, by placing paraphernalia near statues before APSARA employees get a chance to place their paraphernalia near those statues, has the effect of “squeezing out” the APSARA employees’ custodianship of those spaces, thereby giving patrollers a greater share of the total money offerings in the temple.

The Tourist Police patrollers may be motivated to function as custodians because they can keep all of the money offerings at a space, rather than getting only some of the money offerings from local Khmers that functioned as custodians in the temple. In a given day, the average value of total money offerings at Ta Prohm may be less than it would have been if locals functioned as custodians because there are fewer spaces in the
temple with religious paraphernalia. If the total value of money offerings at Ta Prohm has decreased since Tourist Police patrollers began functioning as custodians, Tourist Police patrollers may be collecting less money as custodians than they did when they collected money from locals who functioned as custodians. However, the value collected per patroller may be higher now that fewer individuals are placing paraphernalia near statues, and the few who place paraphernalia in temple spaces can keep all of the money offerings left at those spaces.

Etically, a Tourist Police patroller may or may not be collecting more money as a custodian than he collected from locals operating as custodians inside Ta Prohm. However, emically a patroller may think that he is (or could eventually be) collecting more money because he gets to keep all the money offerings as a custodian of a space.

I never observed any of the Tourist Police patrollers or APSARA employees inviting spirits into broken baluster pieces as the previous custodians inside Ta Prohm once did. This, and the stated intent to “make money” suggests that the Tourist Police patrollers’ and APSARA employees’ custodianship was profit-focused. It is also important to note that APSARA employees and Tourist Police patrollers did not engage in custodial activities every day. On four days (out of 21 total days of observation at Ta Prohm) I did not see any custodial activities inside Ta Prohm, and I did not see any offering plates available to collect money offerings or any incense available for burning at Ta Prohm. On these days, the only items of paraphernalia inside the temple were the statue clothing and the urns that collected used incense. The lack of custodial activity on these days may be related to work assignments and schedules. On days of no custodial
activity, individuals who functioned as custodians were not scheduled to work, or may have been scheduled to work at a location other than Ta Prohm.

When I arrived at Ta Prohm in January 2008, there appeared to be a reduction in religious paraphernalia and frequency of religious activity in the temple in comparison to what I observed there in December 2006. In January-February 2008 I observed only three centers of Khmer religious activity (Figure 5). I found the remains of recent religious activity – including candle wax and used incense – at four centers that were no longer active (Figure 5.5a). A former custodian that operated inside Ta Prohm and tour guides confirmed that religious activities had regularly occurred at these abandoned centers in the recent past, when custodians were present to maintain the centers on a nearly daily basis.
Figure 5. Centers of Khmer religious activity in Ta Prohm. Red dots indicate locations where Khmer religious activity was observed in January-February 2008. The blue dots indicate locations where Khmer religious activity recently occurred, but where no religious activity occurred in January-February 2008. Map location numbers correspond with centers of religious activity depicted in the subfigures below (e.g., Figure 5-1 is a photograph of location 1). (Original Map courtesy of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient – www.theangkorguide.com.)

This reduction in centers of religious activity occurred because there are fewer potential custodians that can provide religious paraphernalia. Prior to the prohibition of custodianship, a number of local Khmers had the opportunity to function as custodians. By January 2008 only a few Tourist Police patrollers or APSARA employees had the capability of functioning as custodians. Thus, the number of potential custodians was greatly reduced. Custodianship requires enough attention to a location to ensure that used paraphernalia (such as incense) is replaced, that money does not get stolen from offering plates, and that spaces are kept clean. Custodians of sacred spaces typically remain at these spaces while they are maintaining them. Acting as a custodian of
multiple spaces — especially in a large, frequently visited location such as Ta Prohm — becomes difficult or impossible.

Figure 5.1. Center of Khmer religious activity (see location 1 on map, Figure 5). Buddhist statue with baluster pieces (in boxed region) placed next to it. A pile of baluster pieces was found in the space between the statue platform and the wall immediately to the east of the platform.

Prohibition of custodianship has decreased the number of spaces where there is religious paraphernalia inside Ta Prohm, which has thus limited the number of places where Khmers pray inside the temple complex. Even if religious paraphernalia is left in locations where many visitors walk by, the reduction in the number of locations with paraphernalia increases the likelihood that visitors can walk through the temple complex without seeing paraphernalia.
Besides its effects on prayer rituals, the prohibition has had economic consequences for custodians that operated in Ta Prohm. As stated earlier, custodians use part of the offering money collected to support themselves economically. The prohibition eliminated a significant source of income for local Khmers who functioned as custodians inside Ta Prohm and other Angkor monuments.

The Tourist Police prohibition of custodianship was enforced very unevenly at Angkor monuments. I observed locals (who were not Tourist Police or APSARA employees) operating as custodians at the Preah Khan, Ta Keo, and Angkor Wat complexes. Just as was the case at Ta Prohm, Tourist Police and APSARA employees functioned as custodians at the Bayon temple. At the Bayon temple I observed an APSARA employee and a Tourist Police patroller sitting together about five meters away from a statue surrounded by religious paraphernalia. They were sitting in a location where visitors praying at or viewing the statue could not see them, perhaps to conceal their presence while they monitored visitors’ use of paraphernalia and money offerings.
Figure 5.2. Center of Khmer religious activity (see location 2 on map, Figure 5). This is the remains of a Buddha statue (feet below the saffron cloth) along with other broken stonework, including broken baluster pieces (in center of photograph, behind the lamp). A money offering plate and incense sticks are in the foreground.
Figure 5.3. Center of Khmer religious activity (see location 3 on map, Figure 5). This is a Buddhist statue with paper replica pay si (banana leaf) offerings and an incense urn in front of it. A broken baluster piece is in the left foreground.
Figure 5.4. An abandoned center of Khmer religious activity (see location 4 on map, Figure 5). A broken statue of Buddha, surrounded by ashes and candle wax.
Figure 5.5. An abandoned center of Khmer religious activity (see location 5 on map, Figure 5). A broken Buddha statue, broken baluster pieces, and other broken stonework rest atop a platform. The remains of recent Khmer religious activity found here include candle wax and used incense sticks.
Figure 5.5a. Candle wax remains from previous religious activity found at location 5 on map, Figure 5.
Figure 5.6. An abandoned center of Khmer religious activity (see location 6 on map, Figure 5), including a broken Buddha statue and other broken stonework with used incense sticks and ashes found nearby.
Figure 5.7. An abandoned center of Khmer religious activity (See location 7 on map, Figure 5). A broken Buddha statue is on the platform, with baluster pieces and other broken stonework in the foreground. On the platform, ashes remaining from prior activities surround the statue.
Chapter Six: Implications for Policy

UNESCO

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) formulated the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972. Cambodia ratified the convention in 1991, and UNESCO named Angkor a World Heritage site in 1992. Article 5 of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage states that “….each State Party to this Convention shall endeavor, in so far as possible, and as appropriate for each country to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community” (UNESCO 1972). Ta Prohm and other Angkor monuments currently function in the local community as revenue-generating sites where tourists spend money while visiting the monument. However, Khmer religious activities and the domains of cultural meaning motivating these activities over the centuries have created the basis for Ta Prohm and Angkor as cultural heritage, and therefore significant to its functionality as a sacred site in the community. The policy of prohibiting custodianship would end the religious function of Ta Prohm as an active Khmer temple, which seems inconsistent with Article 5 of the Convention. Cessation of custodianship also ends the
function of Ta Prohm as a place where locals can earn money to economically support themselves by operating as custodians.

It may well be that the prohibition and its stated intent – to prevent locals from taking money from visitors – is indeed an effort to improve visitors’ experiences. However, as discussed later in this chapter, prohibition may not improve visitors’ experiences.

Prohibition of custodianship also seems inconsistent with one of the UNESCO goals for World Heritage sites, which is “to encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and world heritage” (2007a). Many Angkor monuments such as Ta Prohm were constructed as temples. As part of the Khmer cultural heritage, Khmers have used them as religious sites for centuries with locals operating as custodians of ritual spaces. Custodianship of religious spaces enables local Khmers to preserve their cultural heritage because custodianship enables Khmer prayer rituals and other religious activity to occur inside Ta Prohm; custodians also keep temple spaces clean and oversee activities. Also, many custodians in Cambodia are women, and custodianship enables Khmer women to have a significant religious role that they cannot have in Cambodian Buddhist clergy. To attain the UNESCO goal, Khmers’ religious utilization of Angkor monuments, and their opinions of how it should be used, warrants consideration.

It is inconsistent with UNESCO’s World Heritage convention to decrease Khmer religious expression inside Ta Prohm. A decrease in the number of spaces maintained by custodians increases the possibility that Khmer visitors can walk through the temple without seeing any spaces with religious paraphernalia and therefore not enact prayer
rituals inside Ta Prohm. A decreased number of spaces maintained by custodians is itself a decrease in Khmer religious expression because the act of custodianship contains religious elements, such as inviting of spirits to enter objects. Furthermore, as argued in Chapter Three, paraphernalia plays a central role in the facilitation and communication of Khmer religious meanings; therefore, the reduction in the number of locations where religious paraphernalia is present signifies a reduction in Khmer religious expression.

The convention states that “deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world.” (UNESCO 1972). The convention identifies “works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view” (UNESCO 1972:2) as cultural heritage. The prohibition has led to the disappearance of material culture (religious paraphernalia) of Khmer religion, and has thus deteriorated Ta Prohm’s cultural heritage as a sacred site. Prohibiting local Khmers from being custodians has limited the number of locations where religion is visibly manifested inside Ta Prohm. Khmer religious activity is a part of the cultural heritage, as it has occurred for centuries.

**APSARA and the ASI restoration effort**

As mentioned earlier, APSARA is the Cambodian government agency that oversees the protection and maintenance of the Angkor monuments. The agency is managed by Khmer Cambodians, and nearly all APSARA employees are Khmer Cambodians. On the APSARA website there is a statement from Norodom Sihanouk:
APSARA, if it is strong-willed and single-minded, will put the management, the promotion and the exploration of the Khmer heritage into Khmer hands, even while it is a world heritage, into the same hands that sculpted it, that caressed it and protected it for so many centuries. And it will do this in the only way possible: by helping to form a new generation of well-qualified, caring Khmer specialist - technicians – intellectuals -- thinkers and doers, who will be capable, on this international stage, of standing in the present with an arm around the past and eyes on the future. [APSARA 2007a]

Sihanouk expresses a desire to reconnect Khmer heritage with the Khmer people.

It seems that APSARA’s mission of managing that heritage should include an understanding and consideration of Khmer religious activities that actively shaped that heritage, including Khmer custodians’ activities; Khmer custodians and pilgrims have certainly “caressed it....for so many centuries.” Prohibition of custodianship, and its impact on Khmer prayer, seems inconsistent with Sihanouk’s statement. A consideration of Khmer religious activities in the development of management policies and practices would also be consistent with UNESCO’s World Heritage mission: “to encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and world heritage” (2007a).

Sihanouk’s statement correctly acknowledges human agency as integral to the construction, utilization, and preservation of Angkor. Humans constructed Ta Prohm, and humans later made the decision to allow vegetation to grow over the monument. APSARA’s consideration of human agency also must consider Khmer individuals’ religious activities. Khmer actors actively create and reformulate meanings regarding their religious activities, which direct the nature of activities that are significant to Ta Prohm’s heritage as a temple in the present and future.
Archaeological Survey of India is currently working in cooperation with APSARA to restore the Ta Prohm complex. The ASI restoration involves studies of hydrology and tree life and conservation, but it does not involve any close study of human activity or acknowledge religious activities as important to the temple and the temple restoration.

ASI should be concerned about trees and hydrology, but it should also be concerned about Khmer religious activities at Ta Prohm. Humans, like trees and water, are a constant presence at Ta Prohm (Chihara 1996:260). ASI acknowledges that local Khmers continue to engage in religious activities at Ta Prohm (Archaeological Survey of India 2006:19). However, ASI neglects to consider religious activities a significant factor to consider in restoring the temple (which was originally intended for religious activities), as does EFEO’s previous studies concerning Angkor monument preservation (Fusey 1991; Delvert 1963).

Consideration for Khmer religious activities seems logical if the intent of the restoration is to revolve around the “built heritage” of the temple (as mentioned in Chapter Two). Khmers built Ta Prohm, and use of the temple for religious activities helps to maintain Ta Prohm’s heritage as a temple. This is consistent with the EFEO’s decision to leave Ta Prohm in the condition in which it was found. Certainly, current activities may be quite different from earlier activities at the temple, and current activities may enact meanings that differ from meanings that directed early activities at the temple. Nevertheless, the presence of religious activity reminds visitors of Ta Prohm’s heritage as a temple. I have overheard many visitors remarking how the religious activities within
the temple magnified the “natural” and “authentic” appearance of the structure that the EFEO intended.

Considering the stated goals of both APSARA and ASI, both have sufficient reason to consider the significance of Khmer religious activities at Ta Prohm. However, neither APSARA nor ASI has closely examined (or attributed any significance to) Khmer religious activities as they relate to monument management or restoration.

Tourist Police

Cambodia’s Tourist Police maintains a website (Cambodia Ministry of Interior 2004). On the website, “The Main Principle [sic] of Tourist Police” are listed as:

1-Lifting up the planning goal to lead command the Tourist Police to perform the security protection, safety obligation and providing the information tourist guide for the national and international tourism according the law decision.

2-Completing the skill measure follow the conduct leading principle of the Commissioner General of National Police and Ministry of Interior.

3-Measuring [sic] the other necessary measures preventing and vanquishing on time all the other activities caused to abuse to the body, life, health, and honor of the tourism with respect by the basic of [sic] the human rights.

4-Providing the truly and clearly [sic] information for the tourism.

5-Post Stationing defending and patrolling around the gathering places of the tourism easy in providing-receiving the information and inventing on time in the purpose to secure the safe [sic] of the tourism.

6-Facilitating the travel of the tourism on the administrative procedure making easily, safety [sic] and confidence of the tourism in the period staying in Cambodia avoid the difference cooperation and discriminating the race. [Cambodia Ministry of Interior 2004]
In the first section of this statement the Tourist Police acknowledges that it serves national and international tourists. Thus, it should serve Khmer pilgrims visiting Angkor monuments such as Ta Prohm, who are national tourists. The third section of the statement – prevention of activities that can harm the honor of tourists – appears inconsistent with the Tourist Police prohibition of custodianship, with its substantial reduction in places where Khmer visitors can pray inside Ta Prohm. Khmer visitors attribute religious significance and power to Ta Prohm, and prohibition has dishonored Khmer tourists’ ability to engage the temple as a religious space.

Section 6 of the Tourist Police statement expresses an intent to avoid racial discrimination. The prohibition may be (or, at least, intend to be) an effort to improve visitor experiences in preventing locals from collecting money from visitors because it could prevent situations where visitors might feel uncomfortable about individuals collecting money inside the monuments. However, any feelings of discomfort are dependent on a visitor’s particular cultural norms, and are highly variable. It is also important to stress that, according to my observations, visitors at Angkor were in no way required to participate in ritual activity or to leave money in offering plates in spaces where custodians were present. Moreover, according to my observations, individuals (Khmer or non-Khmer) visiting sacred sites in Cambodia are not required to participate in ritual activity or leave money at the sites.

The Tourist Police prohibition of custodianship may actually be discriminatory against Khmers and their religious practices when considering that the Tourist Police’s stated reason for the prohibition was that they did not want local people to be “taking money from visitors.” The stated reason for the prohibition relates to visitors (which are
of varying ethnicities), but the prohibition has eliminated what is a cultural norm for visitors of Khmer ethnicity (custodial activities).

The above statement may suggest that international tourists (who are typically wealthier than Khmer Cambodians) are preferred over Khmer Cambodians as visitors at Angkor if some of these visitors were bothered by custodial activities, or expressed concern that custodians were “taking money” from them. Khmers are very unlikely to complain about, or be bothered by, custodial activities because they expect them to occur at sites of religious significance.

International tourism is highly important to Cambodia’s economy, and the stated reason for the prohibition may be related to the intention of not wanting international visitors to feel uncomfortable about custodial activities. However, I have noticed that many international visitors are very interested in custodial activities and the artifacts related to them. They frequently clustered around custodians in the Angkor monuments to observe individuals as they pray, burn incense, and engage in other ritual activities. Di Giovine has also observed visitors’ interest in these activities (2009:311). Many international visitors also burn incense, pray, and leave money in offering plates.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion and a Potential Solution

It is possible there will be an even greater decrease in Khmer religious activities in Ta Prohm in the future. If, for whatever reason (e.g., changes in assignments or scheduling of work shifts) Tourist Police patrollers and APSARA employees can no longer place paraphernalia in Ta Prohm, no one else may leave religious paraphernalia inside the temple, and Khmer visitors would not pray or engage in other religious activities inside the temple. As stated in Chapter Five, on four days (out of 21 total days of observation at Ta Prohm) I did not see any custodial activities inside Ta Prohm, and I did not observe any Khmer religious activity in Ta Prohm on those days.

Khmers rarely bring religious paraphernalia to places of religious practice; because custodianship of these places is a cultural norm, they assume that paraphernalia will already be at the place of activity. It is possible that Khmer visitors will decide to bring paraphernalia into the temple for religious activities, but it cannot be assumed that this will occur in the future.

A possible solution to the problem would be communication to Tourist Police personnel that local custodians will generate more revenue for the Tourist Police (if all patrollers get the opportunity to collect money) inside the temple because more spaces in
the temple will have religious paraphernalia. As stated earlier, it is a norm for custodians to give money to police patrolling nearby to maintain good relations with the police. If more spaces in the temple have religious paraphernalia, money offerings related to ritual activities will increase. Allowance of custodians also means that the Tourist Police can collect revenue without the need to maintain areas or provide incense in the temple.

In this scenario, APSARA employees may not collect money because they do not seem (at least, according to my observations and interviews) to have the power to collect money from custodians (it is important to note that, according to my interviews and observations, APSARA employees did not collect money from custodians prior to the prohibition, so this solution would be a return to such conditions). My observations that APSARA employees engaging in custodial activities paid Tourist Police patrollers suggests that the Tourist Police had the power to collect money from APSARA employees, but these employees did not have the power to collect money from patrollers.

Because Tourist Police patrollers expressed an intent to engage in custodial activities to “make money,” and they do not invite spirits into broken baluster pieces, their custodial activities seem to be more motivated by collecting money than any other particular motivation. This potential solution incorporates and utilizes such a motivation.

The advantage of such a solution is that it functions within the cultural logic of Khmer prayer and Tourist Police money-collecting activities. Other applied anthropologists have implemented successful solutions using the same strategy of working within the existing cultural logic and not attempting to transform that logic (Trotter 1987; Murray 1987). This solution also enables local Khmers to resume
generating income as custodians. My proposed solution is beneficial to custodians, Tourist Police patrollers, and Khmer and international pilgrims and tourists.

To locate and analyze points where management policies impact local people such as the one discussed here, anthropologists must formulate and practice research that lies between the traditional anthropological subfields and the questions these subfields have traditionally attempted to address. It is there that the interesting questions and the innovative methods needed to answer them lie (Schissler 2008). My research is the first academic effort to closely study contemporary Khmer religious activities at an Angkor monument. This seems very strange to me, given that most of the monuments were originally constructed to accommodate Khmer religious activities. My research fills in a significant knowledge gap simply because it examines contemporary phenomena at a location that is typically studied by archaeologists.

The prohibition of custodians for the purpose of preventing local people from collecting money from Angkor visitors seems flawed when considering that, outside of Ta Prohm and many other Angkor monuments, local vendors frenetically attempt to sell various items to monument visitors. These vendors’ endless pestering of visitors to purchase their items seems like much more of a disruption to visitors than custodians’ activities.
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Appendix I: Informed Consent Form

Visitors and Preservation at Angkor: A Consideration of Ta Prohm

The purpose of this study is to examine visitors’ activities at Ta Prohm and how visitors’ activities affect Ta Prohm’s stone blocks and surfaces. For this study, you will be asked several questions about what kinds of things you do at Ta Prohm, and why you came to Ta Prohm. It will take you approximately 15 minutes to answer the questions. To maintain accuracy, with your permission your answers to questions may be recorded. Your answers will not in any way be linked to your name or identity. A number will be assigned to your answers, and no one besides the investigator and his advisor will have access to the recording.

One benefit you may gain from this study is that it can help Ta Prohm to last longer so that visitors can come to Ta Prohm in the future. There are no perceived risks from participating in the study.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason, without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask the investigator any questions before signing the Informed Consent form and before beginning the study, and at any time during the study.

For one’s rights as a research subject, the following person may be contacted: Coordinator of Research Compliance, Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306 USA (765) 285-5070.

I, ______________________, certify I am 18 years of age or older, and I agree to participate in this research project, entitled “Visitors and Preservation at Angkor: A Consideration of Ta Prohm.” I have had the study explained to me and the investigator has answered my questions to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.
Participant’s signature

Date

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Appendix II: Khmer Version of Informed Consent Form
Phnom Penh

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Appendix III: Permission from APSARA to Publish Photographs in this Thesis

Siem Reap, 09 October 2009

Mr. Eric Schissler
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Ref: Memorandum of Agreement between APSARA National Authority and Mr. Eric Schissler dated 24 January 2008.

Dear Mr. Eric Schissler,

Referring to your letter dated 22 August 2009, seeking permission to publish photographs, we would like to inform you that the APSARA Authority does not have any objection for the publication of your photographs shot during your research. Nevertheless, according to the article 5 of the Memorandum of Agreement we would appreciate to receive a copy of your thesis.

Yours sincerely,

BUN Narith
Director General,
APSARA National Authority