PROPOSAL FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE HALL OF DANCERS AT PREAH KHAN

THE HISTORIC CITY OF ANGKOR, CAMBODIA

WORLD MONUMENTS FUND
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THE PREAH KHAN HALL OF DANCERS CONSERVATION PROJECT
ANGKOR, CAMBODIA

Background
The World Monuments Fund has been working at Angkor since 1989 when it was one of the first foreign missions to visit the country in order to assess the condition of the Historic City of Angkor after the 10 year hiatus caused by civil war. In 1991 the Cambodian government asked WMF to undertake the conservation of Preah Khan which is considered to be one of the five most important sites at Angkor. Built by Jayavarman VII, the 'builder king', and dedicated to his father in 1191 AD, Preah Khan served as a monastic complex, where according to inscriptions, some 515 divinities were worshipped.

From the beginning of WMF's involvement at Angkor five years ago, it was clear that a new generation of conservators and caretakers of the site must be re-established, and that utilization of the latest conservation methodologies and technologies will be required in the future task of conserving and presenting this unique and vast site. For the past three years, especially, WMF has served in a leadership role in a serious 'hands on' effort to conserve Angkor through its work at Preah Khan.

Project Scope and Purpose
At the time of WMF's first mission to Angkor in May 1989 the WMF field team noticed a particularly important structure within the monastic complex of Preah Khan which was referred to as the Hall of Dancers. Its name derives from the series of extremely fine and well preserved lintels over its four main entranceways which contain bas reliefs in stone of apsaras, or dancers and consorts to divinities, royal personages and those who died in valor for the kingdom.
This structure, cruciform in plan with remarkably wide vaulted spaces (now mostly collapsed) is located on the principal East-West axis of the temple complex and would have been the first monumental interior experienced on entering the complex. It remains a rare example of a specialty architectural form and aspects of it such as its spans, use theme, and certain architectural details, are thought to be unique to Khmer art. The inner volume of the Hall of Dancers is defined by colonnades of square columns which support a richly carved entablature which in turn supported corbelled vault spans of up to 3.5 meters. The interior colonnades were supported by outer walls and buttressing colonnades which formed small courtyards containing reflecting pools at each corner of the structure.

The importance of undertaking the conservation of the Hall of Dancers lies in its significance as rare and prominently located special building type to be seen at Angkor. When conserved and more effectively presented, it would serve as a major attraction at the Preah Khan and could also serve as a location for dance performances by the Royal Cambodia Dancers. (See illustrations Vol.V, Appendix S.) Perhaps most important is that the process of repairing, stabilizing and conserving the building will serve as a particularly good demonstration project for repair and conservation methodologies which will prove useful in the conservation of other sites at Angkor.

**Present Condition**

At present much of the external enclosure and the colonnade system of the Hall of Dancers is intact, though in several instances there is an urgent need for repairs. The high roof vault system is no longer present, though the remains of end gables indicate its original height and design. French archaeologists removed most fallen stone and debris from the site in the 1930's, at which time some emergency stone propping was carried out to enhance its structural stability.

During WMF Field Campaign II at Preah Khan the team archaeologist, architect and engineer made preliminary surveys of the structural condition of the Hall of Dancers and determined that a number of fairly simple structural consolidation and repair interventions elements could greatly extend the life of the structure and its imposing artwork. In March 1994 field tests were conducted to repair split stone columns using metal dowels and special glue. The proposed conservation approach calls for interventions which are visually discrete, if noticeable at all, so as not to compromise the special time worn appearance of this important building. (See Vol. V, page 67-68.)
Structural Repair Recommendations
Based on a structural condition analyses made in January and March 1994, the WMF field team proposed the following set of recommendations that, if executed, would render the structure fit for extended use as an accessible open ruin:

- Strengthen the central hall column and supporting wall structures by adding new structural ties.

- Re-establish the original profile of the central hall roof where possible. Realign displaced stones and re-erect selected fallen stones. Secure with steel dowels and plates.

- Repair miscellaneous stone fractures and reset fallen stones as required.

- Re-set misaligned stone paving blocks within the structure.

- Provide improved site drainage and landscaping in immediate area of the building.

- Provide complete documentation of the conservation project.
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The following is a budget cost estimate for structural stabilization, repair and conservation of the Hall of Dancers to a state which extends its life as an open air ruin and safe location for public dance performances.

Budget Cost Estimate

Supplementary survey material conservation analyses, field tests, and 'as found' conditions documentation $ 8,500
Scaffolding erection 7,800
Special equipment: lifting devices, jacks, drills and bits, epoxide adhesives, nonferrous dowels, etc. 5,500
Stabilization work at east and south walls 23,000
Alignment of the remains of roofing vaults 11,000
Reerection of East Fronton, stabilization of 3 others 9,500
Miscellaneous stone repairs, stabilization work, flooring repairs and waterproofing measures 14,500
Site drainage and landscaping 1,200
Fees for specialty consultants and services (engineer, materials conservator and laboratory tests) 11,200
Site interpretation plaque and donor acknowledgment panel. 800

TOTAL $93,000
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Hall of Dancers shown in yellow.
Cracks in Columns, Hall of Dancers

Column, Hall of Dancers