



# FINAL REPORT

## CollAsia Field Project 2021-2022

Making Buddhist Statuary in Cambodia:  
Battambang, Siem Reap, Phnom Penh



Department of Antiquities Ministry of Culture of Fine Arts, Cambodia

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## PROJECT SUMMARY

Making Buddhist Statuary in Cambodia's project selected just two provinces, Battambang and Siem Reap, and Phnom Penh city. Recently, through working experience in the Department of Antiquities, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, a great number of wooden Buddha statues are highly requested to export as a souvenir and for worshipping by the Buddhists.

It is noted that a lot of them are suspected antique just by naked eyes. It is important that the staffs of the department who are closely working in the field understand the technique of making the Buddha statue and be able to see the difference between the copy and the original Buddha statue through the explanation of the craftsmen about the process and the technique of making Buddha statues. It is not only beneficial for the staff of the department but the record would be valuable for the scholars and some other fields of arts to have as a reference.

Most importantly, it shows the remaining traces of the ancient, and new techniques for making Buddha statues. It provides a level of caution regarding the protection, preservation, and sustainability of the technique of making Buddha statues in Cambodia.

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The cooperation between the provincial department of Culture and Fine Arts is the most effective way to get information about the workshops that will be able to share information with us. Most of the workshops were appointed in advance and provided a clear explanation of the purpose of this research. The craftsmen were requested in the name of the Department of Antiquities, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts of Cambodia, and promised to use the information just for the purpose of study and documentation.

One week before the interview, the date and time were set between the team and the craftsmen. Furthermore, according to some restrictions on meeting due to Covid-19, there was no possible gathering event among the craftsmen in each region. There are many cases in which the research team set an interview online. However, the craftsmen could not operate the zoom meeting which is the one that could give us a good talk. Some workshops were closed. Therefore, only communication by phone was available. Unfortunately, it was not effective because the craftsmen felt uncomfortable that way. Another challenge was the craftsmen were busy with their work so working and answering at the same time.

## PROJECT OUTCOMES

Through the research and mainly the interview with the craftsmen, the making of Buddha statues for worshipping is still active. The craftsmen show have a good skill and fine work could stand against the effect of the down the economy and the pandemic of Covid-19. However, the majority of the wooden Buddha statues that were ever produced were small and made of some limitation of good wood. In contrast, the production of copied Buddha statues for a touristic purpose tends to raise much concern during the analysis before permitting export did not have many examples as workshops closed.

However, the information from interviews about the technique of making both types of Buddha statues seem very consistent with other craftsmen which could allow us to do a good conclusion about it. Even though there are many workshops and long distances, the technique seems to be shared and adopted very broadly.

The main information that we got was the making technique of Buddha statues in the present is the same as in the past. There are some new techniques applied to accelerate the work. However, the making technique was well informed, and what is called the ancient technique is still fully adopted.

## PARTNERSHIPS

During the timeframe of the research, there are three main parties that we were working with. Firstly, the Provincial Department of Culture and Fine Arts of Battambang, Siem Reap, and Phnom Penh. Secondly, the chief of the villages, some key persons in the district office, and the monks. Thirdly, the craftsmen.

Every research trip was officially informed to the director of each Provincial Department of Culture and Fine Arts. Then the staff were sent to assist and sometimes work with the team. The team had the chance to discuss with the chief of the village or some persons in charge. In some cases, we went beyond talking about the project but also discussed cultural awareness and the possible plan in the future for the sustainability of cultural heritage. Those discussions brought a very well understood the level of the local authority and could talk also about the people. Similarly, the monks were in important sources about the Buddha statues in the pagodas. More importantly, the team could make a good understanding with the craftsmen. There was some encouragement in recording and sharing the data with the Ministry. Also, there were some requests from craftsmen about the support of handicrafts.

# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

## I. CHALLENGES

The research faced a considerable number of challenges. The workshops in Phnom Penh city were closed. The craftsmen and the owners of the workshops were not allowing the team to meet and conduct the interview. It seems the people in the city were seriously concerned about the Covid-19 pandemic much more than the craftsmen in the provinces.

The interviews through telephone were many times not allowed due to business as claimed. Some craftsmen informed of shutting down the workshops and pack to transfer. The skilled persons who were teaching art carvings were many times postponing the appointment and finally end up with no meeting.

Furthermore, the running workshops were postponed producing the Buddha statue so there were not many Buddha statues available to see and observe. The remaining Buddha statues at the workshops were not precious. Additionally, some workshops that promised to inform us about their starting of carving the Buddha forgot us. Sometimes, they transferred the finished Buddha statue before our arrival. Importantly, it was very difficult to find the available place and to match the schedule between the two parties. Security was sometimes a big issue when we go to the village.

## II. LESSONS LEARNED

Social issue such as the Covid-19 pandemic plays such an important role. It prevents a lot of access and limitation of the achievement and the result in large. The collaboration and the trust in the relationship between the teamwork and the key persons of the project must be at a high level. People should feel much more comfortable before going into business. Otherwise, the rule will never break apart and needed information will be limited.

Planning in advance is vital. However, flexibility should be seriously adopted. This type of project should be paid more time to the community of the craftsmen. It is an ethnology subject that the researcher should spend more time directly observing the work of the craftsmen than asking the question.

Significantly, the situation does not always give convenience to the research. However, adaptation and the compromising result are what project proposals must be alerted to. It will be not a good way to wait until one difficult situation changed because another good situation will change too. It is strongly believed that the result would be valuable for the educational purpose of the scholars. Importantly, informing much further about the challenges of making Buddha statues in Cambodia.

## QUOTES ON THE PROJECT

There are many supporting statements from the officials who are beneficial to the research. Many departments in the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts strongly support the research and documentation. They were asking for a copy of the research paper even before the project has begun. The minister of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts encouraged us to collect more information and try to make good relations with the locals, especially the craftsmen.

Besides, the team really appreciate the colouration of all craftsmen that happily shared with us every information that they know without a single doubt. Most of them even stated that whatever they can do to build data of the making Buddha statue in Cambodia, they would happily do it.

They expressed to share what they know but were respectfully humble about the hard and fine work of the ancestors. Most of them said:

**"We cannot do or compete with the work of our ancestors"**

**"We don't know how our ancestors did it"**

When the team went to the villages and asked for the workshops, the locals even brought us to the workshops and said:

**"Recalling the lost techniques of our ancestors is a good and noble work"**



## FUTURE PLANS

The same topic will be considered to do in a different province because we would expect to see and meet the local craftsmen who are of old age and might know more of different about the making of Buddha statues. The culture tends to fade away in the city.

Therefore, it is beneficial to have craftsmen who are living away from the light. More importantly, we would like to find the craftsmen who still use natural products such as lacquer and gold leaf to coat the Buddha statue. However, in order to do this, we need to make more stakeholders and collaboration with many people in the field in advance.

Additionally, we will spend more time in the community to do observations. If there is no more pandemic or any issue, we would have courses or meeting sessions between the craftsmen in the selected location. We expect this plan is the most effective method to know about the making of the Buddha statue in Cambodia

## APPENDICES



**Fig 1.** Statues that remain in the workshops



**Fig 2.** Carving an APSARA



**Fig 3.** Colouring the statue



**Fig 4.** Activity in an authentic Khmer sculpture workshop



**Fig 5.** Skilful senior and junior craftswomen in the authentic Khmer sculpture workshop



**Fig 6.** Senior and Junior craftsmen working and sharing with one another in Angkor Chum 99 workshop



**Fig 7.** Hung and amazing art works remain in Angkor Chum 99 workshop



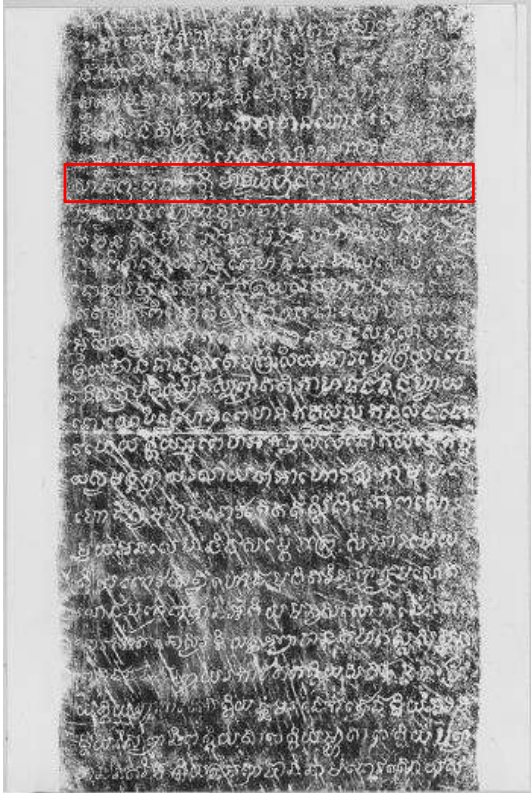
**Fig 8.** Senior and Junior craftsmen discussing each other in a workshop near Vat Athvea temple



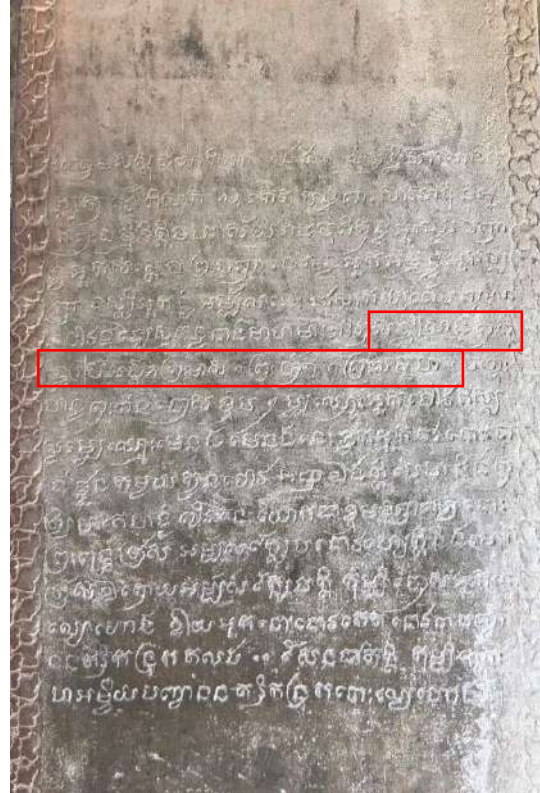
**Fig 9.** Small Buddha statues remaining in the workshop near Vat Athvea temple



**Fig 10.** The books that craftsmen use as reference in their workshop



**Fig 11.** Inscription Vat Athvea temple, K.  
792 mentions making a Buddha statue



**Fig 12.** IMA 11 mentions of making  
Buddha statues, Angkor Wat



**Fig 13.** IMA 12 mentions of making  
Buddha statues, Angkor Wat



**Fig 14.** Big Buddha statues require the presence of *Vishwakarma* through a ritual and worshipping



**Fig 15.** A wooden panel that cannot be stepped or sat on



Fig 16. Worshipping the Buddha statue together with other Hindu statues



Fig 17. The 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century wooden Buddha statues in which forearms, top knot, and part of the robe is joined



**Fig 18.** Ancient Buddha statues in the depot of Angkor Conservation and the Thousand Buddha gallery of Angkor Wat temple



**Fig 19.** Joints on the arm (a) due to insufficient wood and projecting part on the head (b) left to be worked on at a later time



**Fig 20.** *Tomleak Reang* (forming the shape)



**Fig 21.** Sketching the details



**Fig 22.** Forming the shape and working on the details



**Fig 23.** Shaping the body



**Fig 24.** Detail of the body



**Fig 25.** Adding the designs and motifs



**Fig 26.** Finish look of a Buddha statue





**Fig 27.** Buddha statues without coating



**Fig 28.** Buddha statues painted in gold



**Fig 29.** Buddha statue coated with varnish (BL + Gasoline)



**Fig 30.** The scale of standing Buddha



**Fig 31.** The scale of seated Buddha



**Fig 32a.** Seated Buddha with diamond pedestal and a design of a piece of cloth in the front of Buddha



**Fig 32b.** Buddha with Abhaya mudrā



**Fig 32c.** Meditation Buddha on lotus flower



**Fig 32d.** Bhumisparsa mudrā Buddha with Dharani goddess

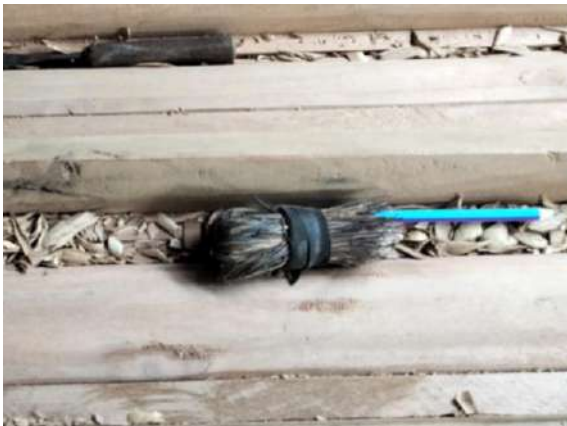
**Fig 32.** Types of Buddha statues in sitting position



**Fig 33a.** Ponleak Krachak and Dek Svan  
(Chisel of nail shape and drilling tool)



**Fig 33b.** Leas Chok, Leas Krachak, Leas Trang  
(Chisels of shell shape: scoop, nail, and straight)



**Fig 33c.** Brush made of palm tree



**Fig 33d.** Abrasive materials and motors



**Fig 33e.** Dek Reir (V shape)



**Fig 33f.** Anloun (wooden hammer)

**Fig 33.** Types of tools used in the making of the wooden Buddha statues



**Fig 34a.** Woods placed outdoor



**Fig 35b.** Natural aging the Buddha statue



**Fig 35c.** Natural aging the Buddha statue



**Fig 35d.** Natural aging the Buddha statue

**Fig 34.** The natural aging process of the wooden Buddha statues



**Fig 35a.** Applying black paint



**Fig 35b.** Application of red paint drying



**Fig 35c.** Cleaning and rubbing chemical mix



**Fig 35d.** Use of gas flame to dry the statue



**Fig 35e.** Multiple application of chemical solution and cleaning



**Fig 35f.** Cleaning and rubbing off the red layer



**Fig 35g.** Polishing with yellow and dry banana leaf



**Fig 35h.** Comparison between red layer and final look after cleaning



**Fig 35i.** Example of final artificial aging

**Fig 35.** Application of paint and chemical layers on the wooden Buddha statues for artificial aging

## LIST OF WOOD CARVING WORKSHOPS AND ITS' CURRENT STATUS

### PHNOM PENH CITY

N	Name	Type	Village	Commune	District/City	Permission	Remark
1	Chan Pheap	Wood carving	Srah Chak	Don Penh	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
2	Eoung Leang Houn	Wood carving	Tek Laoc 3	Toul Kok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
3	Pha Syna	Wood carving	Tek Laoc 3	Toul Kok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
4	Mam Ladet	Wood carving	Veal Vong	7 Makara	Phnom Penh	Not Permitted	Not producing
5	Sim Lai	Wood carving	Beong Salang	Russei Keo	Phnom Peng	Permitted	Not producing
6	Hing Kimlang	Wood carving	Beong Salang	Russei Keo	Phnom Peng	Permitted	Not producing
7	Chhum Mom	Wood carving	Terk Tla	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
8	Nov Sokhom	Wood carving	Km6	Russei Keo	Phnom Peng	Permitted	Not producing
9	Kong Naran	Wood carving	Km6	Russei Keo	Phnom Peng	Permitted	Not producing
10	Sok Thea	Wood carving	Phnom Penh Thmei	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
11	Seang Sokkeang	Wood carving	Phnom Penh Thmei	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
12	Khut Sophanith	Wood carving	Kok Khlang	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
13	Meong Sreinith	Wood carving	Kok Khlang	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
14	Sa Kannitha	Wood carving	Kok Khlang	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
15	Chiv Seng	Wood carving	Terk Tla	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
16	Chan Kunthea	Wood carving	O Bekaom	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
17	Tat Socheat	Wood carving	Phnom Penh Thmei	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
18	Tang Lihea	Wood carving	Phnom Penh Thmei	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing
19	Sou Sakina	Wood carving	Km6	Russei Keo	Phnom Peng	Permitted	Not producing
20	Keo Phalla	Wood carving	Toul Sanker 1	Russei Keo	Phnom Peng	Permitted	Not producing

21	Tith Sophearin	Wood carving	Toul Sanker 2	Russei Keo	Phnom Peng	Permitted	Not producing
22	Kak Borin	Wood carving	Chrang Chamreh 1	Russei Keo	Phnom Peng	Permitted	Not producing
23	Sou Marima	Wood carving	Phnom Penh Thmei	Sen Sok	Phnom Penh	Permitted	Not producing

### SIEM REAP PROVINCE

1	Sok Sery	Wood carving	Ta hok	Trei Nhor	Pouk	Permitted	Rarely Producing
2	Heak Jesh	Wood carving	Chong Kao Sou	Sla Kram	Siem Reap	Permitted	Active
3	Khem Sophal	Wood carving	Chong Kao Sou	Sla Kram	Siem Reap	Permitted	Active
4	Mey Phally	Wood carving	Trapang Seh	Kok Chak	Siem Reap	Permitted	Less active
5	Leng Pohy	Wood carving	Trapang Seh	Kok Chak	Siem Reap	Permitted	Active
6	Mao Mov	Wood carving	Trapang Seh	Kok Chak	Siem Reap	Permitted	All most of the craftsmen resigned the job and finding other jobs.
7	Sun Noern	Wood carving	Briy	Kna Sanday	Banteay Srei	Permitted	Less active
8	Chhay Phat	Wood carving	Kakoh Chachrum	Kna Sanday	Banteay Srei	Permitted	All the craftsmen resigned their job and he as the owner become a farmer.
9	Chab Sinath	Wood carving	Trapang Seh	Kok Chak	Siem Reap	Permitted	Stop producing
10	Ho Hanh	Wood carving	Veal	Kok Chak	Siem Reap	Permitted	Active
11	Chem Vuth	Wood carving	Rohal	Nokor Thom	Siem Reap	Permitted	Rarely producing
12	Reorn Savon	Wood carving	Kakoh Chachrum	Kna Sanday	Banteay Srei	Permitted	Rarely producing
13	Sun Samnang	Wood carving	Briy	Kna Sanday	Banteay Srei	Permitted	Less active



14	Phoung Phallit	Wood carving	Svay Chrum	Ta Som	Angkor Chum	Permitted	Less active
15	Chea Thai	Wood carving	Svay Chrum	Ta Som	Angkor Chum	Permitted	Less active
16	Sut Saman	Wood carving	Chong Sou	Kao Sla Kram	Siem Reap	Permitted	Rarely producing
17	Preong Kong	Wood carving	Rohal	Nokor Thom	Siem Reap	Permitted	Rarely producing
18	Sam Chhunh	Wood carving	Rohal	Nokor Thom	Siem Reap	Permitted	Rarely producing
19	Pech Plong	Wood carving	Rohal	Nokor Thom	Siem Reap	Permitted	Rarely producing
20	Chan Lida	Wood carving	Rohal	Nokor Thom	Siem Reap	Permitted	Rarely producing
21	Nok Ea	Wood carving	Rohal	Ampil	Siem Reap	Permitted	Rarely producing
22	Preong So	Wood carving	Rohal	Ampil	Siem Reap	Permitted	Rarely producing
23	Vat Atvea	Wood carving	Kakranh	Siem Reap	Siem Reap	Permitted	Active

### **BATTAMBANG PROVINCE**

1	Norng Bin	Wood carving	Ktol Donteav	Ktol Donteav	Battambang	Permitted	Stop producing
2	Sous Makara	Wood carving	Ktol Donteav	Ktol Donteav	Battambang	Permitted	Stop producing
3	Sun Sambath	Wood carving	Vat Kor	Ktol Donteav	Battambang	Permitted	Stop producing
4	Soun Narath	Wood carving	Ta Prouch	Ktol Donteav	Battambang	Permitted	Rarely producing
5	Ly Heang	Wood carving	Kamakar	Svay Po	Battambang	Permitted	Stop producing
6	Ek Camreoun	Wood carving	Kamakar	Svay Po	Battambang	Permitted	Rarely producing
7	Hor Khouch	Wood carving	Chrab Krasang	Vat Kor	Battambang	Permitted	Rarely producing
8	Sun Sambath	Wood carving	Kampog Sima	Vat Kor	Battambang	Permitted	Rarely producing
9	Moung Ritha	Wood carving	Jrei Korng	Sla Kert	Battambang	Permitted	Stop producing

10	Sous Phearum	Wood carving	Ktol Donteav	Ktol Donteav	Battambang	Permitted	Rarely producing
11	Tat Kosal	Wood carving	Dam Spei	Sla Kert	Battambang	Permitted	Stop producing
12	Run Kimsung	Wood carving	Dam Spei	Sla Kert	Battambang	Permitted	Stop producing
13	Triv Peok	Wood carving	Jrei Korng	Sla Kert	Battambang	Permitted	Rarely producing
14	So Sila	Wood carving	Jrei Korng	Sla Kert	Battambang	Permitted	Less active
15	Sun Ponlok	Wood carving	Jrei Korng	Sla Kert	Battambang	Permitted	Rarely producing
16	Siv Bunhuy	Wood carving	13 Makara	Prek Preah Sdach	Battambang	Permitted	Rarely producing
17	Mean Veasna	Wood carving	Anlong Vil	Anlong Vil	Sanker	Permitted	Rarely producing
18	Rot Vireak	Wood carving	Anlok Korng	Chhoer Teal	Banan	Permitted	Rarely producing
19	Yin Ry	Wood carving	Anlok Korng	Chhoer Teal	Banan	Permitted	Stop producing
20	Youm Sokheng	Wood carving	Anlok Korng	Chhoer Teal	Banan	Permitted	Stop producing
21	Sang Sokchea	Wood carving	Vat Kanti	Kanti 1	Banan	Permitted	Stop producing
22	Phali Phalla	Wood carving	Vat Kanti	Kanti 1	Banan	Permitted	Rarely producing
23	Youm Sreiya	Wood carving	Vat Kanti	Kanti 1	Banan	Permitted	Rarely producing
24	Sang Soknith	Wood carving	Vat Kanti	Kanti 1	Banan	Permitted	Rarely producing
25	Khim Pisey	Wood carving	Ta Mem	O Dambang1	Sanker	Permitted	Less active
26	Serm Seong	Wood carving	Sdok Praverk	Sdok Praverk	Rukhkiri	Permitted	Rarely producing
27	Yov Phea	Wood carving	Sdok Praverk	Sdok Praverk	Rukhkiri	Permitted	Stop producing
28	Kim Lay	Wood carving	Sdok Praverk	Sdok Praverk	Rukhkiri	Permitted	Stop producing

29	Phan Chani	Wood carving	Crang Khpous	Basak	Rukhkiri	Permitted	Less active
30	Neak Yory	Wood carving	Crang Khpous	Basak	Rukhkiri	Permitted	Rarely producing
31	Toey Toeng	Wood carving	Chker Kham Presh	Prek Chik	Rukhkiri	Permitted	Rarely producing
32	Serm Sarin	Wood carving	Mukh Rea	Mukh Rea	Rukhkiri	Permitted	Less active
33	Ni Chiva	Wood carving	Mukh Rea	Mukh Rea	Rukhkiri	Permitted	Stop producing
34	Sam Chok	Wood carving	Roung 1	Prei Tralach	Rukhkiri	Permitted	Stop producing
35	Sa Soern	Wood carving	Roung 1	Prei Tralach	Rukhkiri	Permitted	Rarely producing