LIMINA
A JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Commodifying Culture: Ownership of Cambodia's Archaeological Heritage

William Anderson
University of Melbourne

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the FLUX Conference of the School of Art History, Cinema, Classics & Archaeology and The AHCCA Postgraduate Association of the University of Melbourne in November 2006.

Looting of historical sites to supply material for the antiquities market has caused the world's archaeological heritage to be steadily depleted, and knowledge about past people and societies to be lost. Private ownership of heritage entails certain rights pertaining to the treatment and accessibility of the material, and so greatly affects how the material is interpreted and displayed: commodification of heritage is a process involving not only physical, but also conceptual appropriation of material, into the sphere of private property. By being exchanged and circulated as cultural property, material remains are transformed into artworks, often ending up in exhibitions where little attention is given to their original context. This paper looks at the history of collecting and displaying Khmer antiquities, demonstrating how private ownership of Cambodia's archaeological heritage has influenced perceptions and understandings of the past.

The National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne houses an impressive collection of Asian antiquities, including four sculptures originating from Cambodia that were brought to Australia over the course of the twentieth century. On a recent visit there, I was asked by a guard to stop photographing these objects, as photography was prohibited in that part of the gallery. I was told at the information desk that special dispensation was required, and that I should contact the appropriate curator. This incident may simply show the rules enforced by a particular institution, but it also raises the issue of cultural property, and the kinds of rights enjoyed by owners of cultural items – whether they are private collectors, or state custodians.

Material remains of the past are often the subjects of dispute over who has the right to own, manage, and interpret them. The question of ownership is particularly controversial, as the owner can determine the treatment of, and access to, the material, and so influence how it is conceived, presented and understood. In this paper I will argue that the commodification and private ownership of Cambodia's archaeological heritage has greatly influenced how the material is presented and perceived. I will begin with a brief introduction to the issues of cultural property and heritage value, before looking at the history of collecting during and after the period of French colonialism, and exploring how this has affected current presentations and understandings of Khmer material culture.[1]

Ownership of cultural heritage is governed by a range of national patrimony laws and international codes, with material mostly designated as either privately or state-owned property.[2] The circulation of heritage as private property can be seen in the financial transactions that take place in auction houses and art dealerships worldwide, however, this free market in cultural goods is a relatively recent phenomenon. Collective ownership, whether through the state or other social grouping, has been, and to some extent still is, the norm for objects and sites of cultural significance.

The question of ownership is particularly relevant today, at a time when the world's archaeological heritage is being destroyed, as material is dug from the ground or detached from monuments, and sold on the international antiquities market.[3] The market in stolen antiquities is thought to be worth billions of dollars annually, and is one of the world's biggest illegal trades.[4] Although numerous international conventions, national laws and codes of practice have been introduced to stem the trade, they are enforced sporadically, and have had only limited success.[5]

Rather than looking at heritage ownership from a legal perspective, I want to consider commodification in its historical and social context. Commodification of heritage can be seen as a process whereby material is transformed from being a non-property resource into an exchangeable commodity with commercial value. The transformation is from the multiple values associated with publicly or commonly-owned material, to the exclusive rights of private property.

The link between value and ownership is reflected in definitions of the word heritage, which is generally used in two ways; firstly to describe material or objects fashioned by humans, and secondly 'as an expression of meanings, values and claims placed on that material, particularly as an inheritance'.[6] This second definition denotes entitlement, and therefore ownership – the rights of control and access.

The modern-day antiquities market operates on the basis that heritage material can be owned and circulated as cultural property, however financial value is just one of many values attributed to things from the past, which are also seen in terms of their historical or archaeological significance, and their spiritual or symbolic worth.[7] The market price of antiquities is not determined by the raw materials from which objects are made, nor especially by the labour expended on producing them, but rather by their symbolic value, conditioned by their circulation and provenance. The art auction has been described as a 'tournament of value', with its own peculiar patterns, distinct from the ethos of conventional economic exchange.[8] The antiquities trade is therefore a market in symbolic capital, where value is constructed through a process of social consecration.[9]

In the mid-nineteenth century, Karl Marx described the form of wealth produced under capitalism as an 'immense accumulation of commodities'.[10] Marx sought to de-mystify the commodity, which he defined as an object that has use value, and that accumulates exchange value. Commodities are now seen in broader terms as 'anything intended for exchange',[11] with a greater emphasis placed on the consumption, rather than production, of the commodity. In order to be a commodity, a thing simply has to be designated and accepted as such. It is this process of commodification – the marking of objects as commodities – that I wish to explore.

Modern-day ownership of Cambodia's archaeological heritage is contested between a number of interest groups with diverse concepts of heritage value, and with varying influence over how that heritage is managed. Although most interests are concerned with preservation, there is also a strong desire – from state departments and international agencies, private companies and investors, academic institutions and teams of archaeologists – to manage and control access to the material remains, with the result that others, including those with strong claims of entitlement, are often excluded from the heritage process.[12]

Competing interests frequently clash over decisions affecting the archaeological heritage; for instance, the interests of a hotel developer vie with those of the agencies responsible for preserving heritage sites. The interests of archaeologists and antiquities collectors are similarly at odds. Archaeologists rely on sites being undisturbed in order to obtain information from their physical context, but those involved in the theft, trafficking, sale and collecting of antiquities have no interest in the preservation of context as a source of historical information, and see heritage material as a commercially exploitable resource which can become private property simply by taking it and selling it.[13] These variant concepts of heritage value make ownership a hotly contested issue.

The following case study looks at portable antiquities from Cambodia, in particular carved stone sculptures which have been removed from their initial location, exported outside the region, circulated as artworks, and transplanted to collections and museums. I will demonstrate that the commercial value of Khmer antiquities is rooted in a series of ideological movements, whereby cultural proprietary developed in line with the political circumstances of the day. Despite involving

monetary transactions, the exchange of heritage material is more an economy of symbolic capital, a discrete sphere of exchange, where the currency is prestige and power. Sites and landscapes can themselves be appropriated as private property (and indeed, the site of Angkor is partly controlled by Sokimex, a company close to the ruling Cambodian People's Party),[14] but the process of commodification, and its subsequent effect on presentations of the past, is especially striking in the case of portable antiquities.

In her recent study of looting in Cambodia, Masha Lafont provides a detailed assessment of the trade in Khmer antiquities, considering the issues of supply and demand, and the trade's impact on Cambodian society.[15] Whereas Lafont addresses the contemporary situation, I will focus on collecting of antiquities in the French colonial period. Export of Khmer sculpture was then on a far smaller scale than it is today, but the political outlook of colonising nations in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century, and their actions at this time, greatly influenced later attitudes towards Cambodia's material heritage.

Discovering Angkor

Cambodia's numerous historical monuments date mostly from the ninth to fourteenth centuries CE, when the Khmer civilisation emerged around the delta region of the river Mekong. The rise of the Khmers is often traced to the year 802, when King Jayavarman II took control of the ancient kingdoms of Chenla, declared himself supreme sovereign, and established the capital of Angkor in northwest Cambodia.[16] For the following six hundred years, Angkor was the centre of an empire, which extended over a large area of southeast Asia. Around the imperial capital, extensive irrigation systems were constructed, and vast temples built from laterite and sandstone, adorned with carved relief sculptures depicting Hindu narratives and episodes from Khmer history. The monumental temples symbolised the mythical Mount Meru, the largest being Angkor Wat, built during the reign of Suryavarman II in the first half of the twelfth century.

The most detailed contemporary account of daily life in the imperial capital was written by Zhou Daguan, a Chinese diplomat who spent a year at Angkor in 1296.[17] At the time of his visit, Khmer supremacy was being challenged by the increasingly powerful Siamese kingdom. In 1431 the Thais sacked Angkor, and the royal court moved south of the Great Lake, Tonle Sap, to what is now Phnom Penh. A later Cambodian chronicle describes the Thais taking statues and precious objects to the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya. This may be seen as the first looting of Angkor, though as Bruno Dagens points out, it was not so much about enriching the Thais, as disempowering the Khmers.[18] While a comparison with modern-day looting may be far-fetched, this early example of cultural appropriation by a colonising power highlights the symbolic importance of controlling the material heritage of subordinate territories.

Awareness of the monuments around Angkor did not reach Europe until much later. Portuguese and Dutch traders and missionaries visited the temples in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but their accounts were not published or widely recognised.[19] It was only in the mid-nineteenth century, with growing European influence in Thailand, within whose borders Angkor was then located, that western explorers began travelling to the Cambodian interior.[20] One of the first was Henri Mouhot, a French naturalist who visited Angkor as part of an independent expedition around southeast Asia. His journal and drawings were published posthumously in the 1860s, and roused considerable interest in the region's archaeological heritage.[21]

At the time, France was looking to expand its trading interests in the region against its British rivals, and three years after Mouhot's visit, the French Vice-Admiral Bonard visited Angkor, reporting that Cambodia 'once nurtured and can still nurture a great nation, a nation both artistic and industrious'.[22] This was a call to install a permanent French presence in Cambodia, and an indication of how Angkor would be used as a symbol of colonial rule, restoring Cambodia's past glories. In 1864 the reigning king, Norodom I, was forced into making the country a French protectorate, and in 1887 Cambodia became incorporated into the *Union Indochinoise*. Appropriation of Khmer heritage therefore took place in tandem with France's imperial expansion.

The first official mission to Angkor took place in 1866 as part of a naval expedition. The Mekong Exploration Commission, headed by France's representative in Cambodia, Ernest Doudart de Langrée, visited several of the monuments at Angkor. In his account of the mission, Louis de Carné wrote of his amazement at the scale and intricacy of the temples, but of his ambivalence towards the Khmer achievement: 'In the presence of these grand wrecks of the past, one is struck with admiration; but there is little emotion, and one is far from complete. … Here, in this spot of the extreme East, all is dead.'[23] From an early stage, the romantic appeal of Angkor as a lost city discovered by European explorers was being fostered, but only insofar as the monuments were a relic of an extinct civilization which never progressed to maturity as occurred in the industrialised West.

Another member of the Mekong Commission was Admiral Louis Delaporte, who is widely credited with introducing and promoting Khmer heritage to the French public. In 1873 Delaporte led an archaeological mission to Angkor, with the specific intention of obtaining antiquities for export to France.[24] The mission – which consisted of three engineers, a diplomat and a museum curator – visited the temples of Bayon and Preah Khan, detaching and removing statues and lintels, and making plaster casts of relief panels. Delaporte's sumptuously illustrated book, *Voyage au Cambodge*, features four full-page engravings of statues being dismantled, loaded on to rafts, and transported by groups of natives.[25] Delaporte returned to France with around 70 original sculptures, some of which were shown in the 1878 *Exposition Universelle*, where a French audience had its first glimpse of Khmer antiquities.

In 1882, Delaporte returned to Angkor with the first Aymonier mission, which collected almost one hundred original statues and twelve inscribed stelae.[26] About 300 pieces of Khmer statuary were reportedly in France by the end of the nineteenth century, although the total number must have been far greater, with many undocumented in private collections. Dupont's 1934 catalogue of the *Musée Guimet* – the major state repository for Khmer art – identifies 173 sculptures, most of which had *provenance inconnue*, unknown provenance.[27] In addition, dozens of sculptures, architectural friezes and stelae were transferred to the *Musée Albert Sarraut*, which opened in Phnom Penh in 1920, and the *Musée Louis Finot* in Hanoi, which opened in 1930.[28] The amassing of antiquities in state-run museums in Europe and overseas colonies, encouraged the emergence of attitudes regarding both the material's ownership and interpretation. As cultural property, antiquities could be exchanged and circulated as any other commodity was, and as artworks, the objects could be evaluated aesthetically, in isolation from their architectural and historical context.

Collecting and Exhibiting Khmer Sculpture

The relationship between physical and conceptual ownership of antiquities can be seen in the attitudes of collectors towards material in their possession. In Europe, appreciation of Khmer art grew towards the end of the nineteenth century, and collecting Angkorian sculpture became popular. Its aesthetic appeal was highlighted from an early stage, often with reference to its 'classical beauty', as collectors purchased heads and torsos reminiscent of Greek and Roman statuary.[29] Despite the documentation, epigraphy, and archaeological work carried out by the *École Française d'Extrême Orient* (EFEO) from its foundation in 1899, the physical context of the material was rarely given priority when sculptures were exhibited, and connoisseurship was the dominant approach.[30] Between 1923 and 1944, the EFEO conducted a number of antiquities sales at the Grand Hôtel d'Angkor in Siem Reap, providing quality sculpture to collectors, purportedly to try and prevent looting from the monuments.

As well as the sale of Khmer antiquities on the art market, and their incorporation into a Western art historical canon, their display needs also to be viewed in the context of French colonialism. Political use of Khmer heritage is clearly evident in the international exhibitions that were held in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, where Angkorian sculptures and 'Khmericana' were displayed as a celebration and justification of French rule in Indochina.[31] Khmer antiquities were exhibited in 1878, and again in 1889 at the *Exposition Universelle*. For the 1900 exhibition, a pseudo-Angkorian appendage was built on the *tour du monde* in the centre of Paris, and an original face tower was brought from Angkor and reconstructed in the gardens of the *Exposition de l'Indochine*.[32]

The 1922 *Exposition Coloniale* in Marseille featured an enormous reconstruction of Angkor Wat, and at the colonial exhibition of 1931, another massive model of the temple – supposedly two-thirds the size of the real thing – was built at the exhibition park in southwest Paris.[33] Inside the folly were staged demonstrations of rice planting and other traditional activities from the southeast Asian colonies, and displays showing French economic and educational initiatives in the region, while lavish military parades were held outside.[34] Dozens of books were released in the run-up to the 1931 exhibition, in a series titled *Indochine Français*, which covered wide-ranging aspects of the colonies including archaeology. The series can be viewed as an earnest justification of French policy in the region, and indeed this can be said of the exhibition itself, which may be seen as a celebration of *la plus grande France* to benefit French commercial interests and shore up public support for the colonial project.

The conceptual appropriation of Khmer heritage, and its physical transfer to museums in the West, can therefore be seen as being intimately bound with nationalist and colonialist, as well as capitalist ideology, where the riches of the colonies were imported to benefit the domestic population, and colonisers were portrayed as contributing to the cultural fabric of colonised territories. The documentation and maintenance of the site of Angkor, and the establishment of cultural institutions in Cambodia, no doubt enriched understanding of the Khmer past, but whether such initiatives benefited the Cambodian people is debatable.

Increasingly, it was private individuals rather than government-sanctioned archaeological missions that removed material from Angkor. The EFEO became custodians of the site from the early-twentieth century, and the first curator at Angkor, Jean Commaille, was appointed in 1908. As tourist numbers grew, curators found themselves having to prevent visitors looting from the monuments. A notorious incident occurred in 1923, when the young French writer André Malraux was arrested in Phnom Penh after being caught with material taken from the temple of Bantay Srei, which lies some 25 kilometres from the centre of Angkor.[35] His renegade mission removed six cornerstones of the south tower, along with several relief panels. At his trial, Malraux's lawyer asserted that since the recently discovered temple had not been officially listed as a protected monument, it was to be regarded as *res derelictae*, an ownerless object. His three-year sentence repealed, Malraux went on to become Minister of Cultural Affairs under Charles de Gaulle.

The Malraux incident can be seen as the point where appropriation of heritage was refined through an intellectual framework that advocated the benefits of 'world heritage' and the dissemination of cultural items outside of their geographical milieu. This position was advanced by Malraux in his concept of the 'museum without walls', where objects could be re-appraised as artworks when separated from their initial setting.[36] The removal of material from Angkor, and its transfer into museums, greatly influenced how Khmer heritage was perceived and interpreted. This appreciation for art-out-of-context continues to this day.

From the 1920s, Angkorian sculpture became more common in museums and collections worldwide, but it was private collectors rather than state authorities who were increasingly responsible for obtaining the material. Wealthy art magnates bought Asian antiquities for their collections, often using mediators who procured and exported objects from the Far East. Angkor was becoming a popular tourist destination, especially for colonials living in Saigon or Bangkok, who would travel there in convoys, stay at the temples for a day or two, and return with pieces of sculpture, which were almost invariably sold or bequeathed to museums in their home states.[37]

Even as Cambodia was experiencing upheaval and war in the second half of the twentieth century, the ethics of collecting Khmer antiquities were rarely questioned. An exhibition held in the United States in 1969 called *Ancient Cambodian Sculpture*, included items taken from Angkor both before and after the French colonial period (which ended in 1953). The catalogue's preface gives some idea of the carefree attitude to acquiring Angkorian art. After the Second World War, it says,

> the noticeably improved guest facilities at Angkor are material evidence of the growing influx of visitors from all affluent areas of the world. With increasing familiarity came galloping "collectivitis", and hence the possibility of an exhibition of Cambodian sculpture drawn almost wholly from American collections.[38]

Indeed, it would have been difficult to have displayed objects lent from Cambodia, as the country was by then being heavily bombed by the United States Air Force, and rapidly heading towards calamity. Under the Khmer Rouge, the Communist party which ruled from April 1975 to January 1979, around a third of the population died, and many thousands were executed as enemies of the state. After the Khmer Rouge were toppled by the Vietnamese army, there followed over a decade of fighting. It was during this period of civil strife, under an authoritarian regime that abolished private property, that the temples of Angkor suffered relatively moderate damage. In contrast to events in China, where iconoclasm was rife during the Cultural Revolution, the Khmer Rouge does not appear to have been hostile to things from the past. The towers of Angkor Wat continued to feature on the flag of Democratic Kampuchea, and Pol Pot even alluded to the temples in ideological terms.[39]

Since the return of relative political stability with United Nations-administered elections, and the opening of Cambodia's borders in the early 1990s, the temples around Angkor have again become accessible to tourists, and the site is now a major international tourist site, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.[40] These developments have brought with them a massive increase in looting, coordinated by corrupt officials and military personnel. Meanwhile, local Cambodians are often excluded from the benefits of heritage tourism, as international corporations and government officials cash in. Despite laws prohibiting the theft and export of antiquities, and measures to police the monuments, very little can be done to monitor remote, widely dispersed sites.[41]

Loot and Legitimacy

The monuments of Angkor have become increasingly important for Cambodians over the last decade, not only as a major economic resource, but also as a symbol of national and cultural identity. Angkor has been used as a focus for reconciliation and national pride, and growing numbers of Cambodians are visiting the site; others are moving to Siem Reap, attracted by the emerging tourist economy.[42] But despite significant investment in Angkor, both political and economic, many Cambodians are frozen out of the benefits of tourism because of corruption and tight government control over planning and development decisions. Corruption is also a major factor in the current looting crisis, which is rapidly destroying Cambodia's historical and archaeological sites.

Looting has become a major problem in recent times. It is estimated that in the last twenty-five years, more than ten times as many statues have been taken from Cambodia than in the previous twelve centuries, and that since 1986, more than half the country's heritage has been stolen.[43] Industrial scale looting has been carried out by sections of the military, who remove and export material on behalf of middlemen and art dealers. For the larger operations it appears that material is stolen to order, with dealers specifying which sites to plunder. Cambodian villagers, who dig up sites looking for small finds, which are sold to supplement their meagre incomes, also carry out some looting.[44]

Since being inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1992, the principal monuments around Angkor are better protected, with a force of guards employed by the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA), the Cambodian heritage agency, which along with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and international teams of archaeologists, manage the so-called Angkor Archaeological Park.[45] Looting is now more prevalent at outlying sites, especially those along the border of Thailand, from where objects are exported and sold at dealerships in Bangkok. These are often remote places that lie deep in the jungle, and are almost impossible to effectively monitor.

Well-organised and violent operations to obtain antiquities indicate the demand to own Khmer heritage, and the material's considerable financial worth. In 1999, two trucks were stopped on the Thai border carrying 113 pieces of sculpture and architecture, including a twenty-metre section of wall, which had been removed from the temple of Bantay Chmar by a unit of the Cambodian army.[46] This was just part of the total amount removed from the temple, which is thought to have weighed several tons altogether. Another instance of organised looting occurred in the early 1990s, when a storage depot in Siem Reap was attacked twice by men armed with guns and rockets. Dozens

of antiquities were stolen, including some later bought by museums in the United States.[47] These cases illustrate the complicity of collectors in the looting process, and show how, when it comes to antiquities collecting, it can be hard to discern between individual and institutional culpability.

Michael Freeman's recent book on Cambodia illustrates the looting crisis with a photograph of three men in a police station, crouched in front of sculptures taken from a causeway at Angkor Thom.[48] The men were said to have gained around ten US dollars for their work. Although Cambodian villagers are sometimes responsible for carrying out the looting, this image focuses on the supply side of the market, and detracts from the demand side; the profligate dealers and collectors who fuel the trade. Maybe the plunder of Cambodia's heritage would be better illustrated with an image of a head on a plinth being sold at auction, or a fragment of architectural sculpture displayed in a museum! The chain of transactions that link the looter, dealer and collector, are well explained by Lafont, who shows how as the material is exported to Thailand or Singapore, its value increases, and as it is taken outside the region, to Europe or the United States, the price rises again.[49]

In November 2003, several Khmer sculptures were auctioned at Christie's Paris, as part of the 'vintage' collection of Georges Halphen.[50] The auction netted 3.3 million euros, with some pieces fetching hundreds of thousands of euros.[51] To art collectors these sculptures clearly have great value – as beautiful objects, as financial investments, or as possessions which bring prestige – but to archaeologists concerned with obtaining information through study of context, their value is limited. The comments provided by the auction house, describing the sculpture's appearance, or to which school it might be attributed, are part of a narrative suited to the art world and created entirely by the material's clandestine removal from its original location.

Whereas some of the pieces sold at the Christie's auction reached hundreds of thousands of euros, Khmer sculpture can be bought far more cheaply, from shops in Bangkok or Singapore, or through online antiquities dealers. An internet search for Khmer sculpture brings up dozens of vendors selling material for a fairly low price – around 3000 to 5000 US dollars for a sculpted torso, or a piece of relief carving.[52] It might be argued that the price reflects the object's authenticity or artistic quality (and much Khmer material is indeed faked), but it has more to do with the fact that objects sold through an established auction house are seen to have acquired legitimacy on the art market.

Legitimacy, obtained through exchange and display, greatly influences an object's value. The process of legitimising looted antiquities is an important step in their commodification and re-individualisation, where material is transformed from stolen goods into exchangeable artworks. This can be done through exhibition in art galleries, and/or publication in an academic context; what Colin Renfrew has called 'provenance through publication', a sort of 'academic laundering'.[53] Production of glossy catalogues with supporting comments from experts, or display in supposedly reputable institutions, lend legitimacy and conjure up a provenance, which is all-important for generating value – both monetary and symbolic. Being included in a sales catalogue and sold in the ritualistic environment of an auction house would seem enough to make a stolen object legitimate, *ex silentio*, in the absence of further information.

An exhibition held in Germany in 1988 called *Thai and Cambodian Sculpture from the Sixth to the Fourteenth Century*, included dozens of Khmer antiquities, almost none of which was accompanied by any information about their origins, or who was lending them.[54] The exhibition was supported by Sotheby's auction house, and is an example of how display and publication is used to generate legitimacy and financial value for unprovenanced antiquities. The foreword to the catalogue reflects the priority given to aesthetics over context:

> Previously unpublished, these works of art should help to broaden our knowledge of the history of art in Southeast Asia. They have been selected not in terms of criteria which, unfortunately, are all too often seen as the ones crucial for the significance of ancient works – age, size, special iconographic features or condition – but rather for their artistic excellence and singularity. As a result they escape the confinement of conventional methods of categorization without losing their cultural significance.[55]

What do the supporting comments say? What little discussion there is of the objects' origins is conjectural. If the vandalised context were known, then its existence would surely be played down. So there is a focus on the material's appearance, its style, subject matter, antiquity, and beauty. As such the object is consecrated by being placed in an art-historical framework, allowing it to obtain respectability, legitimacy and collectability. This treatment of antiquities as artworks divorced from their original setting can be seen in exhibition catalogues and museum labels worldwide, and has become a standard interpretational approach.

Thus, through display and publication, the process of commodification is complete: the object has been removed from its setting, exchanged as a commodity, re-evaluated as private property and legitimised through stylistic evaluation. The object is then able to be re-individualised, and to acquire symbolic value within its new sphere; to bring prestige to its owner, and to advance ideological or pedagogical standpoints.

In considering the 'social life of things', Arjun Appadurai described how 'things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with'.[56] He emphasised that it is transactions, 'things in motion', that should be examined in order to understand meaning and value. An analogy for the commodification of culture is the process of enslavement described by Igor Kopytoff, where individualised persons become commodified things.[57] This happens through a 'process of social transformation that involves a succession of phases and changes in status,' beginning with an initial withdrawal from a given original social setting, and commodification, followed by increasing singularisation (that is, de-commodification) in the new setting, with the possibility of later re-commodification.

The same may be said of heritage, where material is privatised into an exchangeable commodity, which through being circulated as property, is then re-individualised and sacralised within its new cultural sphere, often a museum or art gallery.

It can clearly be seen that private ownership of cultural heritage brings with it various rights relating to control, access and interpretation. Even in the supposedly public arena of a national art gallery, rules are enforced to remind us that we are looking at private possessions. The rights of private ownership allow the owner to not only determine the treatment of, and access to, the material, but also to influence how that material is perceived and understood. For this privilege, institutional and individual collectors, whether nation states displaying the cultural treasures of colonised territories, or private collectors accumulating prestige by acquiring antiquities, have gone to great lengths not only to secure physically, but also to appropriate conceptually, material remains of the past.

Notes

[1]The term 'Khmer' is here used in a historical sense, to describe the ancient Khmer civilization, spanning approximately the ninth to fourteenth centuries. The term 'Angkorian' is used to describe material from Angkor, the capital of the ancient Khmer empire.

[2]J. Carman, *Against Cultural Property: Archaeology, Heritage and Ownership*, Duckworth, London, 2005. Carman discusses the various 'property regimes' applied to archaeological heritage, identifying the four main types as private property, state property, common property and open access. Also, see J.O. Young, 'Cultures and the Ownership of Archaeological Finds', in C. Scarre and G. Scarre (eds), *The Ethics of Archaeology. Philosophical Perspectives on Archaeological Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp.15-31.

[3]Looting and the antiquities market are addressed in a number of recent publications such as N. Brodie and K. Walker Tubb (eds), *Illicit Antiquities: The Theft of Culture and the Extinction of Archaeology*, Routledge, London, 2002; C. Renfrew, *Loot, Legitimacy and Ownership*, Duckworth, London, 2000; N. Brodie, J. Doole and P. Watson, *Stealing History: The Illicit Trade in Cultural Material*, The McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge, 2000.

[4]Brodie et al, Stealing History, pp.23-25.

[5]N. Brodie and C. Renfrew, 'Looting and the World's Archaeological Heritage: The Inadequate Response', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 34, 2005, pp.343-361. The introduction and enactment of legislation regarding the illicit antiquities trade is discussed in Renfrew, *Loot, Legitimacy and Ownership*, pp.65-80, and the various conventions and codes of practice are published in appendices on pp.93-150. Also, see E. Clément, 'The UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (Paris 1970)', in H. Leyton (ed.),

Illicit Traffic in Cultural Property: Museums against Pillage, Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, 1993, pp.45-52.
[6]R. Skeates, *Debating the Archaeological Heritage*, Duckworth, London, 2000, p.9.
[7]T. Darvill, 'Value Systems in Archaeology', in M.A. Cooper, A. Firth, J. Carman and D. Wheatley (eds), *Managing Archaeology*, Routledge, London, 1995, pp.40-50.
[8]A. Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', in A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p.21.
[9]P. Bourdieu, 'The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods', in P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, Columbia University Press, London, 1993, pp.74-111.
[10]K. Marx, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I.,* trans. B. Fowkes, Penguin, London, 1990, p.125. Marx describes the 'fetishism of commodities' on pp.163-177. The development of ideas about the value of commodities is summarised in Carman, *Against Cultural Property*, p.21.
[11]Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', p.9.
[12]Skeates, *Debating the Archaeological Heritage,* pp.57-87. P.J. Ucko, 'Foreword', in P. Gathercole and D. Lowenthal (eds), *The Politics of the Past*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1990, pp.ix-xxi.
[13]It should be noted that archaeological excavation is an inherently destructive process, through which archaeologists themselves benefit. However, the recording and documentation involved means that, in my opinion, it is qualitatively different from digs solely intended to procure objects for their financial worth.
[14]The Sokha Hotel Company, a division of Sokimex, holds the concession to sell tickets to the site of Angkor. 'Interview with Ang Choulean, Director of the Department of Culture and Monuments of the Apsara Authority', Tales of Asia, 2000, viewed 20 October 2006, <http://www.talesofasia.com/cambodia-interviews-AC.htm>.
[15]M. Lafont, *Pillaging Cambodia: The Illicit Traffic in Khmer Art*, McFarland, Jefferson, North Carolina, 2004.
[16]For an introduction to Angkorian and pre-Angkorian history, see C. Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2001.
[17]Excerpts from Zhou Daguan's account are published in Bruno Dagens' book on the recent history of Angkor: B. Dagens, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1995, pp.130-133. Higham 2001, pp.134-138.
[18]Dagens, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire,* pp.20-21.
[19]Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor*, pp.1-3.
[20]Northwest Cambodia – the *sruk* of Battambang and Mahanokor – became part of Thailand in 1794. Throughout the nineteenth century, Cambodia was repeatedly invaded, occupied and ruled by Thai and Vietnamese forces, until the French began colonizing in the 1860s, see D. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, Third Edition, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 2000, pp.117-136.
[21]C. Pym (ed.), *Henri Mouhot's Diary: Travels in the Central Parts of Siam, Cambodia and Laos During the Years 1858-1861*, Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints, Kuala Lumpur, 1966.
[22]Dagens, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire,* p.47.
[23]L. de Carné, *Travels on the Mekong: Cambodia, Laos and Yunnan: The Political and Trade Report of the Mekong Exploration Commission (June 1866 – June 1868)*, White Lotus Press, Bangkok, 2000, p.44.
[24]Dagens, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire,* p.68. 'He [Delaporte] made a point of offering … goods to King Norodom, explaining with great diplomacy that "our government requested his permission to remove from his States certain artistic treasures to which we attach value and sent him in exchange a number of objects of artistic value from France".'
[25]L. Delaporte, *Voyage au Cambodge*, Delagrave, Paris, 1880, pp.13, 87, 239 & 259.
[26]P. Dupont, *Musée Guimet, catalogue des collections Indochinoises*, P. Leroux, Paris, 1934, pp.15-22.
[27]ibid. Khmer antiquities in France were initially divided between the *Musée Guimet* and the *Musée Indochinois du Trocadéro.* In 1910, George Coedès catalogued 119 pieces in these two collections, see G. Coedès, 'Catalogue des pieces originales de sculpture Khmère conserves au Musée Indochinois du Trocadéro et au Musée Guimet', *Bulletin de la Commission Archéologique de l'Indochine* 12, 1910, pp.19-62.
[28]G. Groslier, *Les collections Khmères du Musée Albert Sarraut à Phnom-Penh*, G. van Oest, Paris, 1931. This catalogue illustrates 82 statues and architectural features and various ceramics and 'objets divers'.
[29]Comparisons between the Khmer and Greco-Roman civilisations were made from an early stage, and persisted long into the twentieth century, e.g. H.G.Q. Wales, *Angkor and Rome: A Historical Comparison*, London, 1965. For a discussion of this issue, see J. Myrdal and G. Kessle, *Angkor: An Essay on Art and Imperialism*, Pantheon Books, London, 1970.
[30]However, George Groslier, curator at Angkor and founder of the *Musée Albert Sarraut*, although interested in aesthetic aspects, was also concerned with presenting Khmer sculpture in its architectural context: G. Groslier, *La Sculpture Khmère Ancienne*, Collection Française des Arts Orientaux, Paris, 1925.
[31]S. Leprun, *Le théatre des colonies: Scénographie, acteurs et discours de l'imaginaire dans les expositions 1855-1937*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1986.
[32]La Société des Études Coloniales et Maritimes, *Colonies Françaises et Pays de Protectorat a l'Exposition Universelle de 1899*, Léopold Cerf, Paris, 1899, pp.38-40. A. Quantin, *L'Exposition du Siècle*, Le Monde Moderne, Paris, 1900, pp.178-187.
[33]G. Goor, *Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris en 1931*, Paris, 1931, pp.20-21.
[34]R. Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion*, Macmillan Press, London, 1996, pp.260-265. Leprun 1986.
[35]W.G. Langlois, *André Malraux: The Indochina Adventure*, Pall Mall Press, London, 1966, pp.3-51.
[36]A. Malraux, 'Museum Without Walls', in A. Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. S. Gilbert, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1978, pp.13-130.
[37]Dagens, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire,* pp.83-104.

[38]S.E. Lee, *Ancient Cambodian Sculpture*, exhibition catalogue. Asia House Gallery, New York, 1969.
[39]D. Chandler, 'Seeing Red: Perceptions of Cambodian History in Democratic Kampuchea', in D. Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996, pp.233-254. Pol Pot referred to the temples at Angkor in a speech given in September 1977: 'Long ago, there was Angkor. Angkor was built in the era of slavery. Slaves like us built Angkor under the exploitation of the exploiting classes, so that these royal people could be happy. If our people can make Angkor, they can make anything.' Chandler, 'Seeing Red', pp.245-246.
[40]Interview with Ang Choulean, 2000. T. Winter, 'When Ancient Glory Meets Modern Tragedy. Angkor and the Khmer Rouge in Contemporary Tourism', in L. Chau-Pech Ollier and T. Winter (eds), *Expressions of Cambodia: The Politics of Tradition, Identity and Change*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2006, pp.37-53.
[41]R. Thosarat, 'Report from Southeast Asia', *Culture Without Context* 8, The McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge, 2001, viewed 20 October 2006, <http://www.mcdonald.cam.ac.uk/iarc/culturewithoutcontext/issue8/thosarat.htm>.
[42]'Heritage: Angkor's role in the search for a lost unity', UNESCO, 2002, viewed 20 October 2006, <http://portal.unesco.org/es/ev.php-URL_ID=2059&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html>.
[43]Lafont, *Pillaging Cambodia*, p.67.
[44]Thosarat, 'Report from Southeast Asia'.
[45]The inscription of Angkor on the World Heritage List is documented in the 'Report of the 16th Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Santa Fe, United States of America, 7-14 December 1992', viewed 20 October 2006, <http://www.unesco.org/africa/portal/patrimoine/sites/repcom92.htm>.
[46]Lafont, *Pillaging Cambodia,* pp.52-56.
[47]International Council of Museums, *Cent Objets Disparus – Pillage à Angkor / One Hundred Missing Objects – Looting in Angkor*, ICOM, Paris, 1997. Two Angkorian sculptures bought by the Academy of Fine Arts in Honolulu were eventually returned to Cambodia in 2002, see World Heritage Committee Decision 26COM 21A.10, viewed 20 October 2006, <http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id_site=668>.
[48]M. Freeman, *Cambodia*, Reaktion Books, London, 2004, pp.122-123.
[49]Lafont, *Pillaging Cambodia,* p.70.
[50]Christie's Paris, *Collection de Monsieur Georges Halphen, 20 Novembre 2003*, Paris, 2003.
[51]One sculpture, 'a rare torso of a female goddess, Khmer, Koh Ker style, second quarter of the tenth century' (lot 414), sold for 140 250 Euros. 'Christie's Press Releases, Collection de Monsieur Georges Halphen,' Christie's Paris, viewed 20 October 2006, <http://www.christies.com/presscenter/pdf/11242003/tt_5080halphen.pdf>
[52]'Kaizen Antiques Gallery 2006', Ebay, viewed 20 October 2006, <http://stores.ebay.com/KaiZen-Antiques-Gallery>.
[53]Renfrew, *Loot, Legitimacy and Ownership*, p.10.
[54]W. Felton and M. Lerner, *Thai and Cambodian Sculpture from the 6th to the 14th century*, exhibition catalogue Philip Wilson Publishers, London, 1988.
[55]ibid. p.7.
[56]Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', p.5.
[57]I. Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, pp.64-91.