

## CHAOTIC BOUNDARIES IN KHMER HERITAGE

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### Abstract

Khmer sites often incorporate natural features into their design. In some cases these natural features were probably more important elements of the sacred landscape than the temples themselves. A good example of this is the monument at Wat Phou in Laos, where the sacred linga mountain and accompanying representation of the yoni (the Mekong river) have been recognised as an integral part of that area's heritage.

Moreover, water features are a ubiquitous element of the cultural heritage of Khmer sites, not only for their utilitarian value but for their cosmological symbolism and the control on resources they afforded rulers. However, waterways are typically not provided the same heritage value as above-ground features.

Similarly, the vista afforded by many Khmer sites is of immense significance, for example the temple of Phnom Rung in Thailand, where sunlight is only admitted into the inner sanctum at the time of the equinox. Yet lines of sight and shading by trees are not yet part of the typical heritage management plan for temples, and are sometimes in competition with preservation of natural heritage.

A specific model is proposed that seeks to incorporate notions of sacred landscape into heritage management plans for mainland Southeast Asia, examining relationships between temples, natural features and the boundaries between them.