



**AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY
PHNOM PENH**

MEDIA RELEASE

**EXHIBITION LAUNCHED FEATURING WORK OF
JOINT AUSTRALIAN AND CAMBODIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEAM**

In an example of the expanding people to people links between Cambodia and Australia, on Tuesday 9 July 2013 an exhibition featuring archaeological treasures uncovered during excavations conducted at Phum Sophy, Banteay Meanchey Province in 2009 and 2010 by a joint Cambodian and Australian archaeological team opened at the National Museum of Cambodia,.

The exhibition, which is entitled “Origins of Empire. Cambodia’s Prehistoric Past: Archaeological Remains from Phum Sophy”, was opened by the Minister for Fine Arts and Culture, HE Him Chhem. The exhibition is supported by ANZ Royal and the Australian Government’s Australian Research Council and closes in late September 2013.

Speaking at the opening, Australia’s Ambassador to Cambodia, Ms Alison Burrows, said “Phum Sophy provides us with a tantalising glimpse of life and death in Iron Age Cambodia – the foundations that built Angkor and represent a proud and fascinating past of this great country.”

The excavations were led by Dr Dougald O’Reilly of the Australian National University, Dr Louise Shewan of Monash University Australia and Mr Vouern Vuthy of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, Cambodia. The exhibition highlights the mortuary tradition and material culture of the Iron Age site of Phum Sophy (c. AD 300), providing a unique glimpse into life before the rise of the Angkorian Empire.

“Little is known of Cambodia before Angkor and research of this kind is important” said O’Reilly, also the founder of the NGO, Heritage Watch. “Unfortunately much of the site of Phum Sophy was looted in 2003 and we have worked closely with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts to promote the preservation of this important heritage.”

The exhibition details the research conducted to date including skeletal examination and chemical analysis of human teeth and showcases the beautiful burial offerings including exotic glass and stone beads, ceramics, metal artefacts and jewellery. Dr Shewan, the project’s chemical analysis expert, said “the data collected from the skeletal remains would allow the team to understand movement of prehistoric people, as teeth formed in childhood preserve a chemical signature that provides information about an individual’s living environment during their early life”.

The National Museum’s metal conservation laboratory, headed by Mr Huot Samnang, has meticulously restored daggers, spears, ornamental rings and bangles and pottery from the site has been conserved and reconstructed by members of the Ceramic Conservation Lab at the Royal University of Fine Art, Cambodia, headed by Mr Tep Sokha.

The team is not only interested in the past inhabitants of Phum Sophy, but has also launched a project called '500 Hearts' which screens young children in the area for heart disease at no cost. Five hundred children at Phum Sophy were screened by Australian and Cambodian doctors and students.

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