

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Country (and State Party if Different): **Kingdom of Cambodia**

State, Province or Region: **Preah Vihear Province**

Name of Property: **Koh Ker: Archaeological Site of Ancient Lingapura or Chok Gargyar**

The geographical coordinates of the property's central point to the nearest second: **13° 46' 59" North and 104° 32' 14" East**. Located at Prasat Prang of the Prasat Thom complex, a central feature in the much larger site of Koh Ker: Archaeological Site of Ancient Lingapura or Chok Gargyar.

Textual Description of the boundaries of the nominated property:

The urban ensemble of Koh Ker, historically known as Lingapura or Chok Gargyar, was established by Jayavarman IV in 921 C.E., when he shifted his capital here from Angkor, about 80 km to the south-west. The archaeological site of Koh Ker comprises various temples centred around a rectangular artificial water reservoir or large pond, called Rahal which stretches along the north-south direction, as well as the central temple complex of Prasat Thom, featuring a seven-tiered stepped-pyramid temple, called Prang (High Tower). Due to the angular rotation of its main temple and the Rahal, the site has a dynamism which would appear to be symbolically oriented towards other historic cities beyond its physical boundary. The spatial organization of the site may appear sporadic at first, but is well-planned with a defined geometry composed of several alignment systems centred around the central and ceremonial Prasat Thom complex.

Other than the architectural and aesthetic value of the site with magnificently built elements, the hydraulic system of the site centred on the Rahal (reservoir) is also particularly sophisticated. Its exquisite engineering demonstrates an impressive modification of the natural environment to modulate the hydrology of the place for utilitarian and ritualistic as well as protective purposes. Koh Ker's water management system is hybrid in nature, amalgamating elements of both highland and lowland reservoirs, channels and bunded fields -- the first of its kind in the Khmer civilization. The natural terrain of the site facilitates the use of water for its religious symbolism, as well. The ancient site is conceptualized on Mount Meru, the centre of the universe. The pyramidal structure of the Prasat Thom (Great Temple) resembles the holy mountain, and the moat around the site the Sea of Milk.

The boundaries of the Nominated Property encompass the original sacred centre created by Jayavarman IV together with its associated important components and elements of the site, its sacred geometry with the main temples and their axial alignments. The characteristics of the site are represented in various manifestations: its striking geographical and natural forest setting; its 127 architectural and archaeological components, including 76 temples; the Rahal and its associated water management features; a network of embankments, roads and the structure of an ancient city; extensive and largely intact archaeological deposits, a moat and other material arts like sculptural remains, carvings, and existing temple wall paintings. All the components and elements that contribute to the potential OUV of the site are well within the Nominated Property.

The buffer zone of the Nominated Property conforms with the surrounding landmarks, the natural terrain and associated civic infrastructure, including the dyke, the Angkor Royal Road, the Rahal etc. that were used as reference points for establishing the support infrastructure for the new capital city in the 10th century C.E.

Beyond the buffer zone is also established another zone, called the satellite zone, which covers a further 4,078.05 hectares in conformity to the wider protected zone of Koh Ker under national law.

The Nominated Property of the site has a perimeter of 16,326 m and covers a total area of 1,187.61 ha. The north-south extent of the site is 4.9 km, with a width of 3.5 km. The area of the Rahal is 570,000 m², and is located at a distance of about 230 m from Prasat Thom. The total length of Prasat Thom complex is 1.17 km.



Figure 2: General view of Prasat Thom with Prasat Prang at its rear (Source: NAPV 2020)

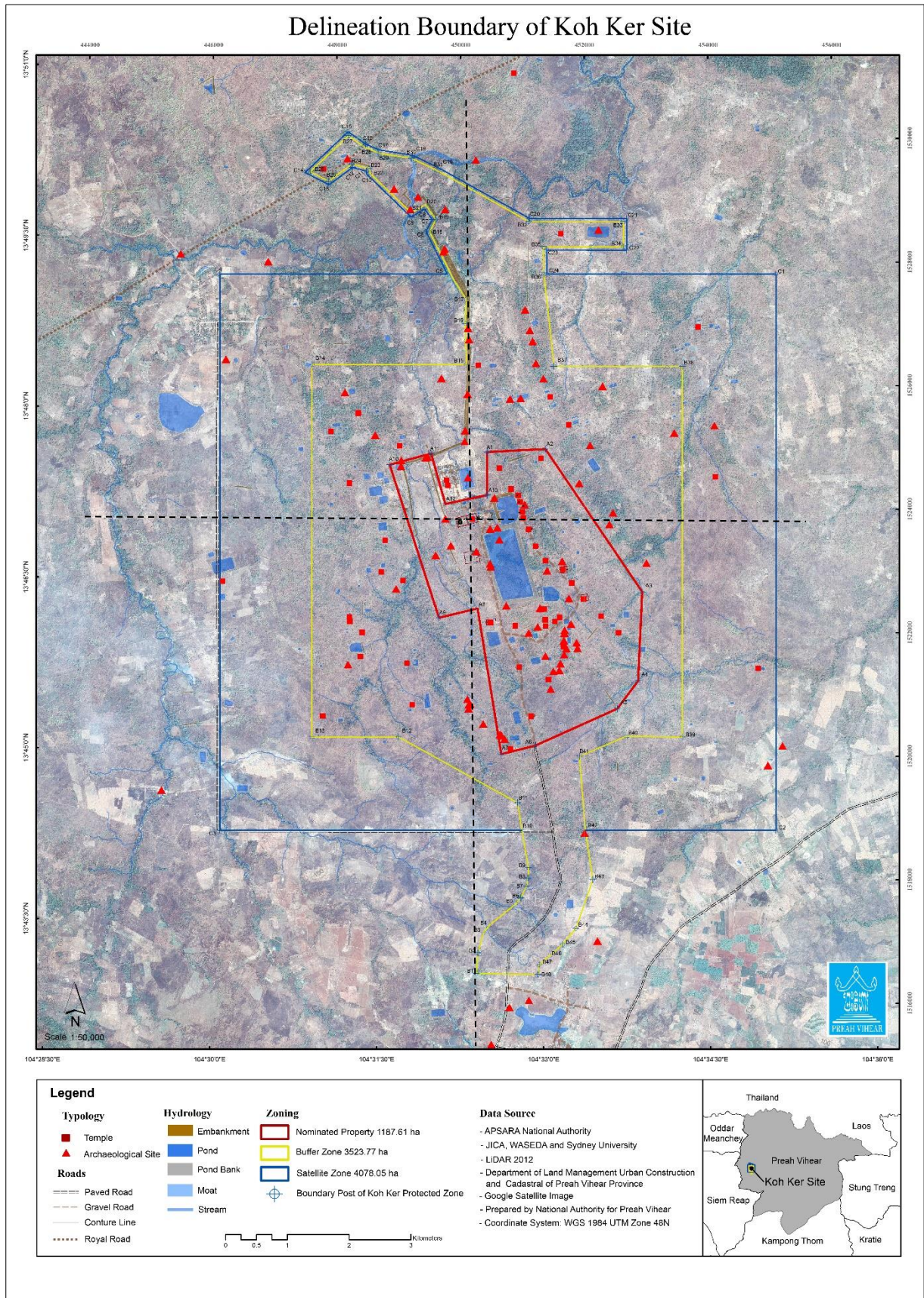


Figure 3: Map showing attributes of significance and delineated boundaries of Nominated Property, buffer and satellite zones in the site of Koh Ker. (Source: NAPV 2020) Detailed Map in Appendices

Criteria under which Inscription is proposed:

Koh Ker: Archaeological Site of Ancient Lingapura or Chok Gargyar is nominated for the World Heritage List under **criteria (ii) and (iv)**

Draft Statement of OUV:

a. Brief Synthesis

Koh Ker is an exceptional example of a sacred urban ensemble, which was established in 921 C.E. by Jayavarman IV. He used an emboldened and innovative architectural style to express his devotion to Shiva and the supremacy of his ambition to claim the throne of an emergent empire. The site shows how influences from Indian religion, town planning, architecture and artworks were adapted, assimilated and refined into a distinctive local style, later known as Koh Ker Style. Koh Ker was envisaged and planned in a single phase, in a remarkably different approach from previous town planning practices, as evident from the changes in existing norms of alignments, scale and aesthetics of the time. The uniqueness of its town planning and infrastructure is credited to Jayavarman IV's grand urban vision, which responded to local topographical settings, creating an iconic and symbolic city infused with geometric order and religious symbolism in harmony with nature. This sacred and ceremonial centre was also integrated into a large infrastructure for protection, connectivity and water management to make Koh Ker an economically throbbing capital. This sophisticated symbolism had a lasting impact on the art, architecture and town planning of the region. The divinisation of the king as a political idea through the Devaraja cult, manifested in architecture and art at Koh Ker for the first time, became the source of inspiration for the great monuments of Angkor and in wider Southeast Asia in later centuries.

b. Criteria for Inscription:

Criterion (ii):

The Archaeological Site of Koh Ker is an outstanding example of how, enabled by cultural exchanges with Indian religious symbolism, indigenous cultural values and traditions were able to influence urban design, architecture, and arts of the early 10th century. Khmer empire. As manifested through the attributes of the site, material culture marked an important artistic revolution that, though lasted but for a short period, had an enduring impact in the Khmer Empire and on a wide part of South-East Asia. Jayavarman IV interpreted, adapted, assimilated, and refined ancient Indian religious concepts, iconography, and accompanying architectural and artistic expression and created a new innovative style called the Koh Ker Style. In his attempt to symbolise royal power through his capital city, Jayavarman IV also used complex symbolic imagery, adapting and localising inspirations from Indian religious philosophies. The capital of Koh Ker, when established, was unparalleled in the entire Southeast Asia, as also its pyramidal temple, as a regional centre of Shiva Worship. This interlude left its mark on the urban design, spatial planning, architecture, and art of the region and served as an illustration for the revival of this style later by his successors.

Criterion (iv):

Koh Ker established by Jayavarman IV in 921 C.E. represents an outstanding example of a sacred urban ensemble. His bid to establish Koh Ker as the centre of Shiva devotion and the Hindu cosmos is manifested in the distinct sacred urban design, monumental structures and infrastructure, such as the tiered pyramid of Prasat Thom complex, the Rahal, other temples and water structures, representing a significant stage in human history. The urban ensemble and its components are characterised by their scale and their innovative integration into natural topography using a sacred symbolic mandala plan. This constituted a significant and distinct expression of early Khmer urban planning and architecture which showed a marked advance over similar attempts in the region including the Indian subcontinent. The use of colossal monolithic stone blocks in construction and sculptures inaugurated a centuries-long phase of stone temple construction across the Khmer Empire

c. Statement of Integrity:

The nominated area of the Koh Ker Archaeological site has a high level of integrity. Its boundary encompasses the original sacred urban centre together with the associated symbolic inter-relationships among the various elements of the site. A remarkable feature is the absence of later modification or reuse during the subsequent more than 1,000 years after its abandonment as the royal capital in 944. Further, the nominated area retains the same size and almost the same virgin condition as in the time of its documentation in the late 19th century and its subsequent and re-veneration.

All the components that contribute to the potential OUV of the property are well within the site, and remain intact in most respects. The integration of the natural geographic setting with artificial features in the design and functional layout of the entire capital can still be discerned and the form of the original city plan with suburban pattern is evident. The main features of the hydraulic system are partially intact, with many still functioning to fulfil the need of local communities. The looting that did take place during Cambodia's civil war period (from the late 1960s to the late 1990s) has been brought to an end and significant masterpieces have been repatriated. An important array of statues, sculptures, inscriptions and traces of valuable paintings are still integral to the abiding value of Koh Ker. Most remains are still in-situ and in their original state. Sculptures restored in 1954 have been conserved and are to be housed in the proposed information centre at the site, which remains entire with minimal overlays from subsequent eras.

d. Statement of Authenticity:

The characteristics demonstrating the potential OUV of Koh Ker's Nominated Property are represented by the archaeological remains of the ancient capital city, with its components, including temples, ruins of royal palace, hydraulic system, sculptures, inscriptions and wall paintings. Koh Ker is a rare site where significant events relating to its history are mostly dated on the basis of the 73 in-situ inscriptions, which also shed light on the social, economic, cultural and religious conditions of ancient Cambodia. Documentation from the 19th and 20th centuries is being updated through modern archaeological and scientific studies. The authenticity of the site has been maintained in terms of its location and setting, with its natural topography and the original extent fully retained. Particular attention has been taken to maintain and improve the present state of conservation of all its important OUV attributes. Due to its nature as a largely unexcavated archaeological site, interventions have mainly focused on addressing the effects of natural factors and undertaking emergency stabilisation as well as safeguarding the site from looting. Large scale restoration projects have been avoided so that impact on the authenticity is minimal. The largely untouched archaeological elements provide ample evidences of authentic materials and construction, and the limited interventions that have been made have maintained these qualities. Today, Koh Ker still constitutes a living site in the buffer zone, where local communities have continued their daily life, keeping the area from turning into an abandoned or deserted site, enhancing the appeal of Koh Ker.

e. Protection and Management Requirements:

Koh Ker is strictly protected by Cambodia through the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage dated 25 January 1996. The site was demarcated and placed under special protection by Royal Decree dated 2004, as amended in 2020 to assure effective conservation and protection of its archaeological remains, cultural landscape and natural ecosystem. The Law defined the Nominated Property, buffer zone and satellite zone. To address the challenges of safeguarding its precious but fragile attributes, the Angkor Charter adopted by the International Coordinating Committee for Angkor (ICC-Angkor) will be the guiding document for Koh Ker. The National Authority for Preah Vihear (NAPV) is the dedicated authority that oversees policy formulation and implementation for protection, preservation and combating against illegal destruction, alteration, excavation, alienation or exportation of cultural objects at Preah Vihear and Koh Ker. Building upon their prior successful experience of management of the Preah Vihear WH site, NAPV technical teams dedicated to Koh Ker together with the active participation of the community, undertake activities for the preservation, promotion and conservation of the site in accordance with the accepted Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan of the site. The International Coordinating Committee for Preah Vihear, (ICC-PV) comprising several national/international experts, has monitored all activities of NAPV, including those at Koh Ker, since 2015.

Name and Contact of Official Local Institution / Agency:

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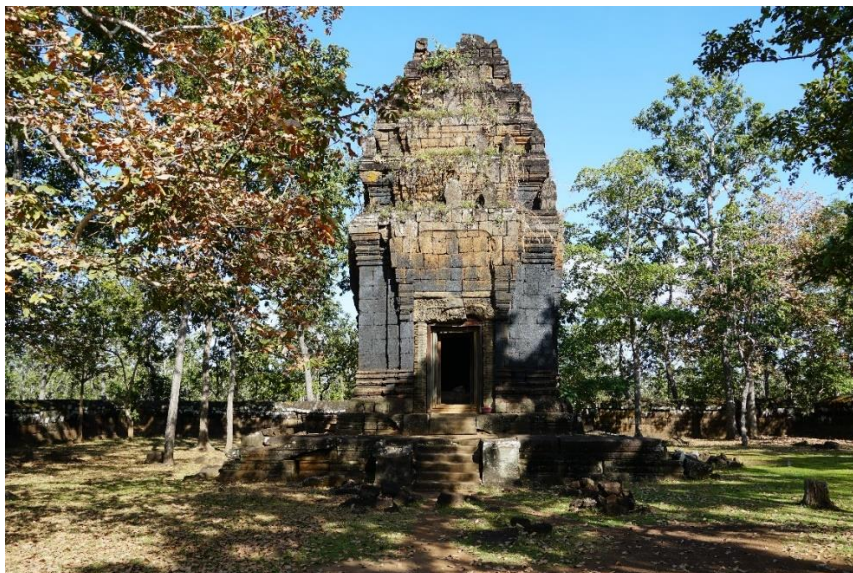


Figure 4: Prasat Neang Khmau (PKK3) (Source: NAPV 2020)



Figure 5: The Rahal (PKK84) viewed from northeast. (Source: NAPV 2020)