

Koh Ta Meas Ceramics Conservation 2006- 2008

General History

In 2004 and 2005, an EFEO and APSARA Authority team excavated the Koh Ta Meas site at the Western Baray. Koh Ta Meas proved to be a burial site with several graves containing a great number of artifacts dated to early 1000 B.C. The ceramics found at this site are therefore the oldest ceramics unearthed so far in the Angkor area, and they include many type of pots, such as basins, pedestal bowls, water jars, huge water jars, cooking pots, and storage jars.

From 2005 to 2008, the Ceramics Conservation Lab (CCL) cooperated with Christophe Pottier, Director of EFEO Institute, in a long-term project to conserve Koh Ta Meas ceramics.

Ceramics Conservation

Ceramics from the excavated site arrive at the Ceramics Conservation Lab as bags of sherds, which go through the following process of conservation: 1- cleaning , 2- matching, 3- assembly, 4- gap-filling, and 5- inpainting. Before these processes can start, the sherds must be examined to determine if they were low or high fired and if their decoration dissolves in water, for the cleaning process differs with different ceramic materials. Pots must never be over-cleaned, removing important signs of use like fire soot or destroying decoration or clay surfaces in order to take away more dirt, because the materials removed can't be put back again. Hence cleaning is a very important technique and requires skill and care.

Now that the ceramics from the Koh Ta Meas site have been conserved, it is possible to appreciate the skill of the potters by looking at the shapes they formed, the fine thinness of the pots, their decoration, and their large size. These pots are an important part of the Khmer cultural heritage in the Angkor area, and I am so exciting to have had the chance to conserve them. They will soon be on exhibit at the National Museum, and I hope all these ceramics will be very interesting to the general public, as well as to Cambodian and foreign researchers.