

# Human Sciences Encounters in Phnom-Penh: Past Presentations: The translation of Angkor Vat for the Universal and Colonial Exhibitions in France

## WHOSE HERITAGE?

### The translation of Angkor Vat for the Universal and Colonial Exhibitions in France

(1889 - 1937)

Angkor Vat temple from the 12th c. in Cambodia is the largest religious stone monument in the world. Despite its massive architectural structure in situ, Angkor Vat is one of the most “travelled” objects in Southeast Asia through its reproduction in models and moulds. This phenomenon is tightly linked with the modern notion of nation building, the invention of the concept of cultural heritage and the increasingly commercialised cultures of display. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Angkor Vat became the most important monument and archaeological fetish in the French mission civilisatrice of the Indo-Chinese Protectorate: its surface was copied through the technique of moulding and transferred for scientific study and display to the new-found Parisian Musée Indochinois and after being partially reconstructed for earlier World Exhibitions, it reached its most spectacular transcultural translation in the 1:1-scale model for the state-propagandistic Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931.

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