



# A report on the 2011–2012 excavation of Lovea: An Iron Age, moated settlement in Cambodia



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## ABSTRACT

Archaeological mounds surrounded by moats and embankments are common in the Mun River valley of the Khorat Plateau in Northeast Thailand. Sites with a similar morphology have been identified in neighbouring Cambodia but they are far less common. While several of the Thai sites have been subject to investigation only one moated site, to date, has been excavated in Cambodia. This paper presents the findings of the recent excavations at Phum Lovea.

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## 1. Introduction

Archaeological mounds surrounded by moats and embankments have been long been noted in the Mun River Valley of Northeast Thailand (Boyd et al., 1999; Boyd and Habberfield-Short, 2007; Boyd and McGrath, 2001; Damrong and Prince, 1995; Higham, 1977; Higham and Kijngam, 2010; Moore, 1985, 1986, 1988; O'Reilly, 2014). Excavations at selected sites indicate that the moats and embankments date from the mid- to late Iron Age, c. AD 1–600 (Boyd et al., 1999; Boyd and Habberfield-Short, 2007; Boyd and McGrath, 2001). Some sites seem also to have arisen during the Iron Age yet others demonstrate occupation during the Iron Age and in one case, at Ban Non Wat, to the Neolithic (Higham and Kijngam, 2010). Moore (1989) noted the presence in Cambodia of moated sites comparable to those found in Northeast Thailand and pondered the relationship in these morphologically similar sites.<sup>1</sup> One of the sites Moore references is Lovea (Fig. 1) located in Puok District, Siem Reap Province, first investigated by Mallert (1959). Mallert was informed by locals that human remains and bronze had been uncovered at the site c. 1889 but his own investigations were fruitless (Mallert, 1959).

Lovea was selected for excavation for a joint Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA), Australian Research Council (ARC) project aimed at examining the emergence of complex societies in Southeast Asia prior to the rise of the Angkorian state. Our understanding of this crucial period in prehistory has been enhanced by an increasing number of archaeological excavations conducted at Cambodian Iron Age sites in recent years. Research completed attests to a transformative period characterized by increasing socio-political complexity, intensified trade and exchange, differential access to resources, technological transfer and developments in site morphology. The presence of extramural architecture at Lovea, in the form of moats that surround the site is seen as a possible indicator of socio-political change in the region during the Iron Age. Herein we will present the site of Lovea and describe the excavations that were undertaken at the site in 2011/2012.

### 1.1. Lovea and environs

Currently at Lovea there is a modern village situated atop a low mound that measures 210 m from north to south and 312 m from east to west. Surrounding the mound are two, fragmented, encircling embankments separated by moats. The outer embankment averages about 20 m in width and the moat is between 70 and 50 m wide (the width varies). The inner moat varies in width between 50 and 40 m terminating at the edge of the habitation mound.

The outer embankment of Lovea abuts what is likely a later, Angkorian-era hydrological construction. A rectangular feature 2354 m on the east-

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<sup>1</sup> Circular sites, surrounded by a ditch are known from southeast Cambodia and south-west Vietnam, known as Memotian or Banteay Kou sites. These are morphologically distinct from the sites of northeast Thailand and the few sites found in the Angkor region.

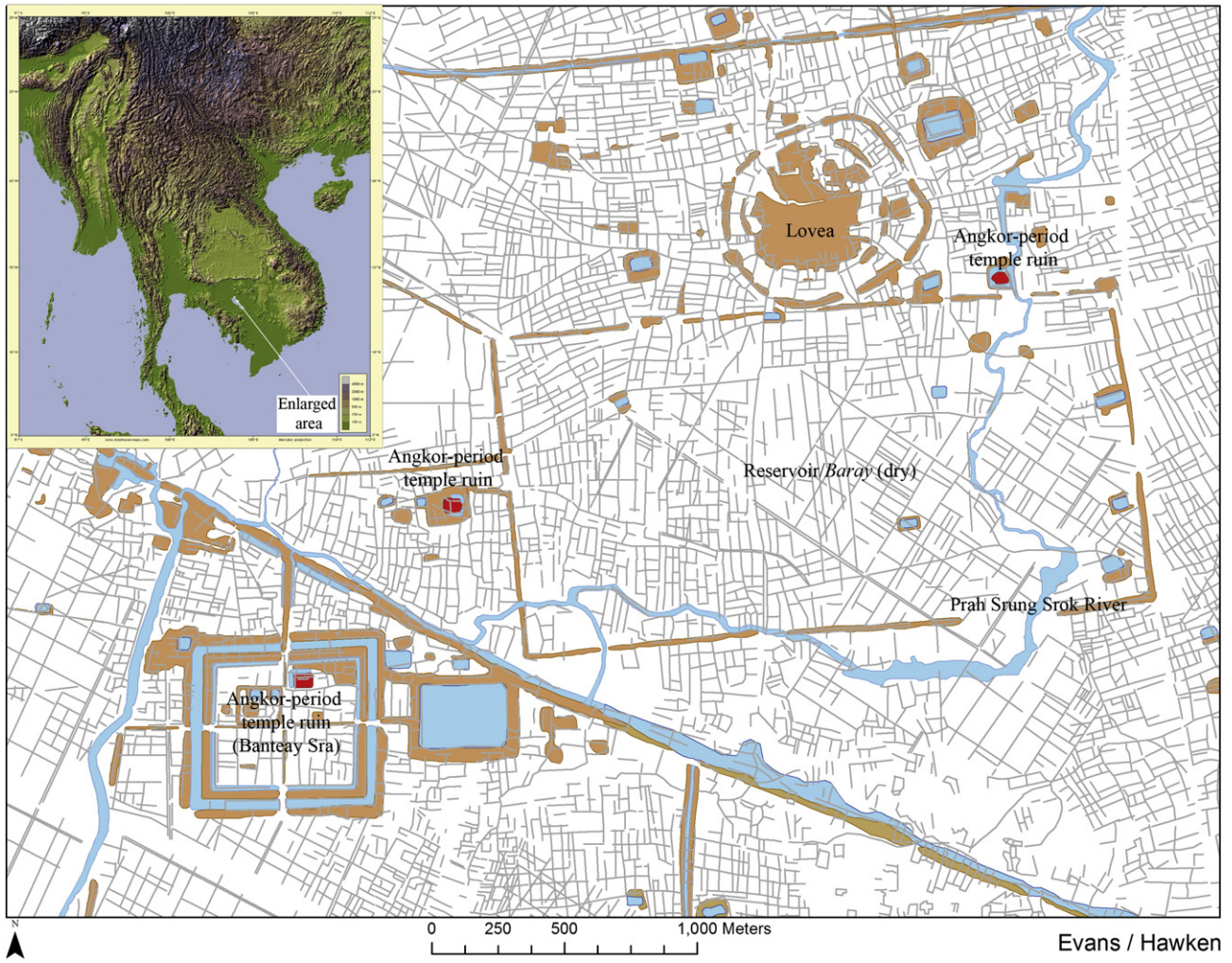


Fig. 1. Map showing site location in Southeast Asia and of the area surrounding Phum Lovea.



Fig. 2. Aerial view of Lovea from Google Earth (Map data Google, CNES/Atrium 2014).

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