In 1933, the fragments of a monumental statue of the Buddha sitting on Nāga were unearthed within the central sanctuary of the Bayon. Since then, this image has been celebrated as the central deity of Angkor Thom, the capital of the Khmer kingdom, and would have disappeared during an iconoclastic reaction shortly after the reign of the great King Jayavarman VII. Eighty years later, we conducted a reappraisal of that spectacular discovery, focusing especially on the head of a smaller Buddha statue that was found with the Great Buddha of the Bayon but went unnoticed. Yet this small image reveals much about the history of Angkor between the 13th and 16th centuries, particularly on the poorly known period of the abandonment of Angkor. This small Buddha head belongs to the typical style of the early Ayutthaya period, and the identification of more than forty other similar images in Angkor are the first physical evidence of the occupation of Angkor by the king of Ayutthaya in the 15th century. This little head demonstrates the maintenance of the Buddhist worship at the Bayon and calls into question the interpretation of the iconoclasm of the 13th century and of the nature and duration of the Ayutthaya presence in Angkor in the 15th century.

Dr. Christophe Pottier is Lecturer at the Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO) and head of the EFEO research centre in Bangkok at the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre. He gained his architect’s degree in 1990. After his first experiences in India and in Thailand, at the Prasat Phanom Wan under the supervision of Prof. Pierre Pichard in collaboration with the Fine Arts Department, he directed the EFEO center in Siem Reap – Angkor (Cambodia) from its reopening in 1992 until 2009. He directed restoration and conservation works at Angkor, in particular at the Royal Terraces in the centre of Angkor Thom. His 1999 PhD thesis in history and archaeology (Sorbonne University, Paris III), An Archaeological Map of the Angkor region, fundamentally transformed the understanding of the residential and social organisation of Angkor by mapping fields and house mounds and redefined the debate about urban studies and water management. Since 2000, he is director of Cambodian-French Archaeological Mission on the Angkor Region (Mafkata), and a co-director of the Greater Angkor Project at the University of Sydney.

The lecture will be held at the Siam Society’s Auditorium and will start with a small reception at 6.30 pm. The lecture will start at 7:00 p.m. Free of charge.