CHAPTER FIVE: TRAVELERS’ VIEWS, PART ONE: THROUGH THE LENS

In the decades that followed the retrocession of Angkor to the Cambodian Protectorate the number of visitors from around the world who came to see the monuments rose precipitously, creating a need for the guidebooks that were discussed in the last chapter. These international visitors in turn produced new chapters in the Western product-narrative of Cambodia. In this chapter I will be investigating the first of two groups of objects that contributed to that narrative, and will continue with the second group in the following chapter. In this chapter I will be examining the production of a visual narrative that was widely disseminated through the reproduction of Angkor’s image in engravings, photographs, and postcards. I will focus on the image of Angkor, as well as a small group of specific objects, buildings, and people who were often visually connected to the monuments, and which all came to symbolize Cambodia for audiences in Europe and America. These images were produced for publication in travel journals, illustrated magazines, and newspapers, guidebooks, travelogues, advertisements, and in objects, such as postcards, which were produced specifically in support of the tourism industry.

The development of the tourism industry in Indochina during the colonial era and beyond, and its usage of a visual and verbal vocabulary for signifying Indochina in general, and Cambodia specifically, parallels the development of a similar vocabulary in other arenas, including fiction, newspaper and journal articles and the colonial displays for the international expositions.¹ These genre and media all influenced each other; however, the paraphernalia of tourism holds a unique place, as it is material that is specifically designed not only to utilize this

¹ The colonial expositions will be the subject of Chapter Seven.
vocabulary, but to promote it.

Some of these materials, such as advertisements for hotels, ferry companies, and tour operators were produced primarily for the purpose of commercial promotion. Other materials, such as the guide books that were produced by the successive *Conservateurs d’Angkor* and other *EFEO* members, were designed both as pedagogic aids, support materials for the tourism industry, and as promotional materials for the work of the *EFEO* at its largest site, Angkor.

![Excursion aux ruines d'Angkor](image)

**Figure 12 Colonial era tourism advertisement**

Finally, travel narratives and photographs, and specifically postcards, played, and play, a liminal role, staking territory in the interstices between the (commercial) promotion that played an important part in the creation and development of the tourism industry and the personal experiences of the tourists themselves. (Figure 12)^2

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Drawings, etchings, and photographs played an important role in creating the image of Southeast Asia in general, and Cambodia specifically, that developed in France and in other Western countries. These images gave form to the written descriptions and concretized the view—accurately or not—that was presented by the early travelers in their writing about Angkor. These images also solidified the idea of what subsequent travelers came to expect when they arrived at Angkor. Once Angkor had been transferred from Siamese to French hands images of Angkor, the royal dance troupe, the king, and the palace played an integral role in supporting the tourism industry, which in turn supported the work of the EFEO. Dozens of travel narratives—many illustrated—were produced and disseminated throughout the métrepole, particularly after 1907.

The travel narrative allowed the writer to make the transition from tourist to teacher and teller of tales. The writer became more than simply someone who had seen Angkor; through the travel narrative the author took the place of the tour guide, or even of the guidebook writer, for readers who would experience the monuments from home. Postcards were a form of advertisement; they allowed postcard writers to do as travel writers did without having to write a full length book or having to publish their words. Instead, the postcard sender was able to take the pedagogic role of authorized guide books, with the friends and relatives at home taking the senders’ former place as “students” of the temples; and they allowed a venue for the role-play involved in the senders’ authoring the cards they sent, inscribing their own story of exotic adventure, which may have been prompted by the novels or travel narratives they had read before leaving. All of these materials added to the aestheticization of the temples, and the process of de-historicizing and re-historicizing the monuments that was discussed in the previous chapter.
The aestheticization of Angkor is a process that begins most significantly with the visual encapsulation of Cambodia within the confines of the Angkor Historical Park. The temples of Angkor were not the only symbol that was used as shorthand for conveying the idea of Cambodia to audiences; in addition to the temples themselves, images that played a similar role in evoking the protectorate were portraits of Cambodian kings; images of sculpture found at the temples; portraits of shaven-headed and saffron-robed monks; and reproductions of members of the Royal Cambodian ballet in full regalia were all important. Each of these latter images came to prominence as symbols for the Cambodian protectorate in the years predating the retrocession of Angkor, however, the symbolic value of each was also carried on into the years that followed the return of the temples.

The first mass-produced images of Angkor to appear and be widely disseminated in Europe were engravings of the temples and their environs that were produced in the nineteenth century. Some of the most widely available engravings were those created by Louis Delaporte, the draftsman who traveled through Southeast Asia and China with the Mekong Exploration Commission. A number of Delaporte’s engravings accompanied the Commission report, and were each the result of transforming the drawings Delaporte had made while in Cambodia into a form that could be mass produced within the text. Delaporte returned to Angkor on a second commission a few years after the Mekong Exploration Commission had returned from China. As leader of his own mission in 1873 whose goal was to explore the Khmer monuments he would add a large number of new drawings and engravings to those he had created during the first voyage. Many of the images
from the second voyage were included in his book, published in 1880, entitled *Voyage au Cambodge L'architecture Khmer.*

Many of Delaporte’s drawings, particularly from the first mission, show the landscape, the people encountered by members of the mission, and daily life in the area. The scope of Delaporte’s illustrations from the first journey reflects the scope of the mission: to collect as much information about the area, the terrain, the people, and the river as possible. The drawings from the second mission focus more narrowly on Angkor, its architecture, and the sculpture that covers its walls. These illustrations appear throughout his book, and support a text which is focused more narrowly on Cambodia and the ruins at Angkor. Delaporte’s interest in Khmer architecture and sculpture was more than cursory, as is evidenced not only by his having led an exploration mission to Angkor to collect examples of Khmer sculpture, make drawings, and take photographs of the monuments and sculpture, but also his having been one of the organizers of the first Khmer museum in the 1870s.

Many of the illustrations found in *Voyage au Cambodge* are documentary, and take the place of photographs, which were, in the nineteenth century, still an expensive and cumbersome mode of capturing an image. While photography was used by the Delaporte mission, it was not relied upon as the only mode of visual documentation. Each chapter in Delaporte’s book is headed by an engraving of a lintel rendered in minute detail, and the pages are punctuated with drawings showing members of the royal ballet dressed in full regalia and drawings which reproduce scenes from the bas-relief sculptures that decorate Angkor Wat and the Bayon. In addition to these images, there are additional drawings interspersed within the text showing the various stages of the mission’s removal of a large

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number of sculptures which were taken to France to display in the new museums constructed to showcase the art of Cambodia and other French colonies.4

Many of the images which document the monuments as they were at the time of Delaporte’s second visit are engravings created from photographs taken at Angkor. Although Delaporte’s mission took numerous photographs of the temples, none of the original photographs appear in the publication. Instead, these photographs were rendered as engravings. While a number of the plates and illustrations in the book were originally photographs, it is not the case with every illustration. In between the engraved reproductions of the scenes of the Churning of the Milk Ocean and the Historical Procession from Angkor Wat’s bas-reliefs are numerous drawings which sprung almost entirely from Delaporte’s imagination.

Delaporte’s more fanciful images place aspects of the monuments in imagined settings or as the location of imagined scenarios. Many of these drawings depict what he imagines the architecture would look like were it “restored,” or illustrate scenes showing how he imagines they would have appeared originally, populated with kings and dancers.

4 Many of these pieces are still on display in the Musée Guimet in Paris. One of the most famous pieces removed during that mission, is the naga balustrade which currently sits in the Guimet entryway.
One such image, which appears as the frontispiece of the recent reprinting of Delaporte’s book,⁵ is meant to depict the Bayon, and is dominated by towers decorated with the well-known smiling faces of that temple. (Figure 13)⁶ In Delaporte’s engraving the towers appear as though they are growing from the floor if the jungle itself. The faces emerge from between the hanging vines, while the eyes of the tower placed in the left side of the foreground are lit in such a way that they appear to be glowing. The forest grows beneath, through, around, and above the towers, giving the structures the appearance of having been consumed by the

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⁵ Ibid, frontispiece.
⁶ Ibid.
vegetation eons earlier. While the paths that wend between the towers appear clear, the vegetation is so ubiquitous that the viewer is left with the impression that the civilization that created the monuments had long since abandoned them. Yet, the towers have not been completely foresaken: at the center of the composition stands a small, dark figure clothed in a short garment resembling a toga. His arms are upraised in awe, and he appears to be entreating the image above him—the only fully lit face amongst the repeated visages that appear throughout the illustration.

This engraving carries the title “Vue prise dans les ruines de Baion,” which leaves the audience with the impression that the image shows both the architecture as it appeared at the time that Delaporte was there, as well as a witnessed event. However, when the image is compared with the actual structure it becomes immediately apparent that the view depicted in this engraving could not have been taken from life, but was the result of Delaporte’s imagination. The point of view from which the image is drawn would have required Delaporte to have climbed up to the top of one of the additional towers. Although the image makes it appear as though the towers rise from the forest floor, it is clear from the floorplan of the Bayon that the only point from which the towers might be at seen at the angle depicted in comparison to the human figure would have been on the second level of the temple. The placement of the towers does not match the floor plan, and with the tower that looms large behind the figure and to the left the only possible candidate for the central tower, it quickly becomes apparent that the lit face to whom the figure dedicates its awe does not exist. A comparison of the floor plan and the drawing make it clear that this image was not simply a “view” of the temple that Delaporte had “taken” for the purpose of documenting the temples. As the engraving was not created with documentary intentions, then Delaporte’s compositional choices can be examined with an eye on their intent.
First and foremost, Delaporte has created a frame within the frame, focusing the audience’s attention on the central (and only) action: the interaction between the figure, which sits on the axis line of the engraving, and the god whose image he appears to be worshipping. Delaporte’s frame is filled with information for the viewer to take in; this frame is created by the interweaving of the overgrown forest vegetation and the looming faces of the temple. The intertwined root systems that take hold of the towers in the foreground surely conveyed to contemporary audiences the sense that the temples had been abandoned by their builders, and that they were lost in the depths of the forest. The arch at the top of the inner frame is mirrored by the opposing arch in the distance formed by the treetops. That the treetops reach so high would indicate to audiences that the period of abandonment was many years, or even many centuries.

The inner frame concentrates the viewer’s attention on the towers, forest, and most importantly, the figure contained within the boundary of that frame. Much of the contents of the frame echoes the frame itself—the faces of the towers and the vegetation, in particular. Delaporte’s placement of the figure at the central axis of the image as well as the darkness of the figure in comparison to the lighter columns behind him both work to draw one’s attention to his form. His upraised arms point the viewer’s attention upward where the lightness of the face embedded in the tower well above the figure hovers over the scene, as if surveying the land from his seat in heaven.

Thus, Delaporte has constructed a scene in which the most important component of the composition is the interaction between a human figure and the god that he is entreating. But the image is not the solemn prayers of the saints that may have been more familiar to the French audiences who would have viewed the image, and the hovering face is not the benevolent, white-haired figure that is often called upon to represent the God of Catholicism. Rather, it is one of many gods,
whose faces are repeated over and over again throughout the engraving. The face is not one of obvious benevolence; its brow is furrowed, its mouth is set in a neutral expression, and its eyes stare blankly. The deity’s face is repeated in the tower in the foreground, where it stares at the viewer with unnaturally bright eyes which appear to glow.

The combination of elements in this image must have left audiences with the impression that Angkor had been abandoned to the jungle centuries before. With the appearance in the image of multi-faced towers growing from the forest floor, viewers doubtless imagined that a walk through the Cambodian jungle would bring them face to face with the colossal visage of unknown gods. What impression might viewers have taken from this image of a man appearing to beg before the face of a forgotten, and perhaps angry, divinity?

Images such as Delaporte’s “Vue prise dans les ruines de Baion” left viewers with a particular impression of what the temples looked like at the time of Delaporte’s second visit—abandoned, jungle-covered, peopled only by the occasional frightened worshipper—that reflected the way in which Delaporte
himself perceived the monuments. Other engravings from his hand that are included in his book convey his ideas about what Angkor must have been like in its heyday. Included among the plates are several elevation drawings depicting the temples as they might look when “restored.” Some of these engravings, such as his engraving of the Phimeanakas, “élétion restituée,” are rendered as architectural elevation drawings. (Figure 14) However, some of the “restored” scenes not only depict the architectural restoration, but show the temples teeming with life.

Included in Delaporte’s book are several “vue restituée” engravings of Angkor Wat and several other well-known temples. These images display scenes heavily populated by dancers, warriors, royalty, monks, and elephants. The implication of the title “vue restituée” is that these scenes are meant to convey what the temple looked like during the heyday of the Khmer Empire, when Delaporte imagines it was the site of regular festivals and visits by the royal family. The details of the architecture are, in many cases, imagined. For example, the Garuda

7 Ibid, pp. 128-9.
sculptures lining the bridge that crosses the moat in the engraving entitled “entrée orientale de Pontéay Préa-Khan,” are imagined rather than recreated; they are as imagined as the images of the warriors and the royal elephant procession crossing the bridge. (Figure 15)  

These “restored” or “returned” images—drawings which “return” the temples to their “original” state, including the population that would have used the structures—are, like the photographs of Ta Prohm in the guidebooks discussed in the previous chapter, meant to be seen by viewers as part of a comparison. It is the comparison that laid the foundation for the French argument in favor of intervention in Cambodia, and is the precursor to (and the mirror image of) the guidebooks’ comparison. Rather than arguing for the “success” of the EFEO and the mission civilisatrice as the guidebooks later do, Delaporte’s drawings are an argument in support of France’s expansion of the frontier to include Angkor. Both arguments are similarly structured as “before” and “after” discussions, however, the implied argument of Delaporte’s drawings is that in the past the temples were lively, the center of activity. His drawings of processions and performers entering in the shadow of Angkor are meant to be contrasted with the drawings of crumbling structures all but abandoned to the forest, such as the image that is the frontispiece of the book. The comparison of Angkor at that time of its construction and at the time of Delaporte’s second visit as pictured in his engravings emphasizes the qualities which will continue to appear in images and in print throughout the colonial era: abandonment, emptiness, ruin, and wilderness.

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8 Ibid, pp. 20-1.
The themes present in Delaporte’s illustrations of Angkor resonated with earlier modes of travel illustration. Similar themes run through paintings of Rome and Pompeii created by artists of earlier generations who composed scenes of ruins overgrown with weeds, playing host to no one but the occasional traveler seeking solitude. Many of Delaporte’s scenes of Angkor cobble together different parts of one monument, or details from several monuments, to create an idealized “ruin,” rather than an attempt at creating a “true” view of the temples. The practice of cobbling together of one idealized ruin from pieces of several others was a practice utilized by a number of well-known ruin painters of the eighteenth century, particularly the French painter of ruins, Hubert Robert. The influence of painters
such as Robert is particularly notable in drawings such as “Vue prise dans les ruines de Préa-Khan,” which bears a strong resemblance to a number of drawings by the sixteenth-century Italian artist, Giovanni Batista Piranesi. (Figures 16 and 17)\(^9\)

![Figure 17 Piranesi engraving of Italian ruin](image)

Delaporte’s engravings, particularly those from his first expedition, comprise some of the earliest views of Angkor that European audiences saw. His book was followed by subsequent editions on Angkor written and illustrated by other authors, artists, and photographers, each conveying themes in their work similar to that of Delaporte. The influence of Delaporte’s work was particularly strong in the first years that followed the publication of his book, but the impact of his drawings in setting in place the frame through which Angkor would subsequently be viewed by Westerners would resonate for many decades beyond the printing of *Voyage au Cambodge*.

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While there were additional artists who captured the temples in the form of drawings and engravings, such as Lucien Fournereau’s 1890 volume of illustrations of the monuments,\textsuperscript{10} photography increasingly became the preferred mode of visual reproduction at Angkor. One example of the ascendance of photography at Angkor can be found in the 1909 collection of photographs taken at Angkor by a Hanoi-based photographer named P. Dieulfils.\textsuperscript{11} The book’s preface was written by Étienne Aymonier, whose own book cataloguing Khmer vestiges in Siamese territory was considered the authoritative source until the publication of Lunet de Lajonquière’s catalogue in the early nineteenth century. The book’s text was written by Louis Finot, then director of the EFEO. Aymonier praises the collection of photographs as a “superb repertoire” of images covering “geographical, ethnographical, and picturesque” subjects “of ancient and modern Cambodia.”\textsuperscript{12}

While there are several pictures of “modern Cambodia,” including nearly a dozen photographs of the French-built palace and “naga bridge” in Phnom Penh, the vast majority of the images are dedicated to what Finot calls the “enigma” of the “history of Cambodian art.”\textsuperscript{13} The black and white photographs include long shots and details of the monuments. Human figures are rarely a part of the scene. When human figures appear they are often faceless, appearing out of focus, or with their back to the camera. At other moments they are set in groups who stare into the camera lens, and who seem to have been placed there by the photographer in order to indicate scale. These figures rarely give the impression of being captured in the midst of their daily routine (the exception can be found in the images of people in the small, thatched huts along one side of the temple); rather, they appear posed, as

\textsuperscript{12} Dieulfils, 2001, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, p. 8.
though they had been placed within the scene by the photographer. Because of the 
posed quality of the images in which human figures appear these photographs do 
little to counterbalance the impression of desertion that the pictures, in large 
measure, convey.

The frames taken up by the architectural form and the vegetation that grows 
from between the cracks of the walls show a temple that appears—and is meant to 
appear—as though it weren’t built to human scale. Despite the appearance in many 
of Dieulefils’s photographs of abandonment, the touch of recent human intervention 
is everywhere apparent in the images, particularly at Angkor Wat. The empty 
hallways appear clean, free from vegetation, and recently swept. The stairways have 
small clusters of grass growing between some of the stones, but the majority of the 
larger vegetation has been kept at bay. The flagstone inner courtyards are largely 
cleared of brush and some of the stones appear to be laid out nearly in rows. In his 
introduction Finot explains that this is the result of the efforts exerted by the 
EFEO.\textsuperscript{14} The desire to capture in photographs images of the temples “before” large 
scale clearing and reconstruction was apparent even at this early stage: “This work 
comes exactly at the right moment to confirm the state of the ruins at the moment 
when the Archaeological Service of the École Française D’Extème-Orient is 
making such zealous and deserving efforts to save them from destruction and bring 
to light from amid the refuse some of those fine aspects with which they delighted 
the eyes of the men of former days.”\textsuperscript{15}

For the \textit{EFEO}, not only was photography a means by which Angkor could 
be introduced to the metropolitan public, but was also, even at the opening of the 
period of French control over the area, a means of conveying to Western audiences 
the results of their work in Cambodia. With this mind it is not surprising to find that

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p. 9.
the emphasis in many of these photographs is on ruin and on conveying the perception of abandonment. However, it is notable that the images are nearly free from scenes that might convey how the temples were used by Cambodians, or what the interaction between the monks and farmers who lived in the temple precincts and the *wat* might have been. Although the introduction states that the photographs contain ethnographic information, this information is restricted primarily to the images showing Cambodian houses. The emphasis of the photographs is firmly trained on the monuments and their state of ruin; it is a visual focus that continues with subsequent photographers, books, and postcards throughout the colonial period, and played a major role in the creation of Angkor as the representative image for the country. (Figure 18)\(^{16}\)

\(^{16}\) Ibid, p. 79.
One of the most important media for disseminating these images of Cambodia came in the form of inexpensive, mass produced postcards. While the number of people who actually traveled to Cambodia during the colonial period was limited, postcards made it possible for travelers to share their experiences, as well as images of what they had seen, with a large number of friends and relatives in the métropole. Postcard images included photographs of classical dancers, the palace, King Sisowath’s coronation portraits, the palace, and, of course, images of Angkor. The emphasis in the images used for postcards was trained on the same themes as the illustrations that appeared in books; in fact, some of the illustrations from books—such as Dieulefils photographs—were made directly into postcards. Furthermore, unlike books of photographs, whose expense created a limited audience, the low cost of postcards made it possible for visitors to share these images of Cambodia with a larger audience, many of whom might not have sought out images of the colonies on their own.

Images such as Dieulefils’s 1909 photographs and Delaporte’s engravings contributed to the aestheticization of Angkor by distinguishing the monuments that quickly became shorthand for Cambodia from the daily life and daily activities of the country and its people. The monuments were regularly depicted as empty; when human figures were included in photographs they are rarely shown utilizing the temple, such as placing offerings before one of the images of the Buddha. Without being given the context for the temples within Cambodia, Western audiences are invited to view the monuments simply on the merits of their beauty. Furthermore, in the repeated photographs showing Angkor as a ruin, in which the bas-reliefs and architectural details are obscured by the vines and brush, the most important details of the image become not the monument, but the overgrown vegetation. In the majority of Dieulefils’s photographs—as well as those created by many of the
photographers who followed him—it is specifically the ruin, rather than the temple, that is the object of aestheticization.

While Angkor was by far the most common image used to portray Cambodia, there were a limited number of additional symbols that came to prevalence, particularly once photography became more common. Among the most widely-used symbols representing Cambodia outside of Angkor were images of the king, the royal family, classical dancers (often in full regalia), and the pin peat orchestra that accompanied the dancers. Photographers did occasionally include images of farmers or, more rarely, city-dwelling Cambodians among the collections in books or in postcards, however, these scenes are far less common than those of dancers dressed as kinnari or those of the so-called “royal harem.” The royal or classical dancer’s place as a widely recognized symbol for Cambodia was solidified, particularly in France, by the extremely popular performances given by the royal dance troupe at each of the Colonial Expositions held in France in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The impact of the Colonial Expositions will be the focus of a later chapter.

The practice of setting accessory, or secondary, images representing Cambodia (the king, the royal ballet, etc.) within the confines of the primary symbol—the temples at Angkor—began before the provinces of Battambang, Sisophon, and Angkor had been returned to Cambodia. However, it was an image that became more common after retrocession. The coupling of these secondary symbols within the temples themselves only served to confirm the primacy of the monuments. Images such as the photograph of dancers at Angkor Wat shown here, which was originally published in a travelogue in the 1930s, are examples of this visual doubling. (Figure 19)\(^{17}\) By setting the secondary symbol of Cambodia (the

\(^{17}\) Deane H. Dickason, *Wondrous Angkor* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh Limited, 1937) p. 48
dancers) within the confines of the primary symbol (Angkor) it served to convey the idea to audience that the temples were the locus of all that was believed to be essentially Cambodian.

An excellent example of the collecting together of Cambodia’s “essential” symbols can be found in the frontispiece of Dieulefils’s 1909 book of photographs. The image—a black and white reproduction of a watercolor by V. Lorant Heilbronn—is entitled “Fêtes données a Angkor-Vat par sa majesté Sisowath, Roi du Cambodge,” and appears to have been created in order to commemorate King Sisowath’s visit to Angkor in 1911. (Figure 20) The painting is a visual catalogue of symbols regularly used to represent Cambodia to French audiences. In the foreground sits a musician from the pin peat orchestra, while to the right a number of dancers in full regalia (including one woman in the costume of the kinnari) dance on a large carpet. Behind the musician stands a woman holding the hand of a small

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18 Dieulphils, 2001, frontispiece.
child, who the audience, if they have seen other images of Cambodia, would most likely have identified as a royal consort with one of the princes. Behind the royal consorts are three monks with their heads shaved and wearing the robes of the sangha. To the right of the monks sits the king in a jacket and waistcoat beneath the umbrella that denotes his rank. Standing at the corner of the carpet are two colons, dressed in the white, tropical weight suits that were virtually a uniform in French Indochina, each with his white casque, or pith helmet. Behind the dancers stands a small sanctuary that resembles the form of the “libraries” of Angkor Wat, while behind the monks to the left a large tree grows from the top of another structure, the roots intertwining with the building’s stones, covering part of the bas-relief images of devatas, or semi-divine beings. Behind the king one can see the foot of a set of stairs that lead to Angkor Wat, whose façade looms above the scene, hazy in the distance. Even the painted frame that Heilbronn created for the image echoes the themes of Cambodian symbolism: the “frame” is made up of a series of architectural decorations, including dancers, nagas, and lions.
While the image appears to have been created in honor of an event that actually took place, the painting is a painted collage rather than a captured or posed scene. The three main architectural elements—Angkor Wat in the background, the porch or library that is situated behind the dancers, and the wall covered with vegetation behind the monks—are views cobbled together, linked by imagined details. The view of Angkor Wat in the background resembles a photograph of the
temple that appears on later pages within the same book. The stairway that leads up to the distant temple is not a feature of that monument, but does bear a resemblance to an engraving by Delaporte of the stairway leading up the nearby hill to the Bakheng. (Figure 21) King Sisowath appears not only to be posed in a way strikingly similar to a famous photographic portrait taken of him on the occasion of his coronation, but he appears to be wearing the same formal clothing. The tree that looms over the scene and the tower from which it is sprouting look distinctly like Neak Pean before a lightening strike killed the tree that once grew from atop the tower.

Figure 21 Delaporte engraving of Bakheng stairway

Rather than attempting to capture the event as it appeared, Heilbronn has instead created a pastiche of the symbols of Cambodia that would have been the most recognizable to the book’s audience, which included not only French readers, but also Anglophone and German readers. This list of recognizable icons of

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20 The text which accompanies the photographs is given first in French, and is followed by English, German, and even handwritten Khmer. Considering the expense of such a book it is unclear who might have been the target audience for the Khmer script, however, while the use of photographs by the EFEO to exhibit their achievements in Cambodia was in service of an argument predominantly directed towards a metropolitan audience, the inclusion of Khmer script in this instance may be an
Cambodia includes the king, the royal dancers, the pin peat orchestra, members of the sangha, the “royal harem,” the lions and nagas that decorate the frame, and Angkor Wat, looming in the background, while in the foreground the tree-topped towered stands as a reminder of the state of ruin.

Heilbronn has packed so many icons into his composition that the painting feels cramped and busy: it is as if he has attempted to fit the entire country within the confines of this watercolor. Yet, there are key components of the country that are absent from Heilbronn’s painting. From looking at this image one gets the impression that Cambodia was completely covered with jungle: the tree hovers above the scene, leaving the figures in shadow; it appears as though there is no escaping the cover of the forest. Yet, much of the country was, at the time this watercolor was created, and through to today, grazing and farm land. Also absent from Heilbronn’s tableau are most of Cambodia’s citizens, particularly the farmers who made up the majority of Cambodia’s population.

Heilbronn’s painting, with its compendium quality, represents a number of components of the product-narrative about Cambodia that was being created throughout the colonial period. Many of the visual elements that collectively came to be the Cambodia of the French imagination neatly dovetailed into each other. For example, some of the best known sculptural images from the temples at Angkor were images of apsaras, or celestial dancers. The images of living dancers performing in the shadow of the temples evoked the sculptural renderings of past performers, consciously drawing upon the sculptures. Photographers often

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example of attempts that were made to establish the same argument with a—presumably elite—Khmer audience as well.

21 The trope of the apsara as shorthand for both the temples and for the country is not restricted to photography, although the visual representations were not only among the most important conveyances of this vocabulary, but also some of the most arresting examples. However, this trope does appear in numerous addition mediums, including literature and journalism. For example, the trope is utilized by Pierre Benoit in his novel set at in Siem Reap and at Angkor, *Le roi lépreux*, which includes a female character who introduces herself to the main character with the request:
positioned the dancers as if they were themselves sculptures come to life. (Figure 22)\textsuperscript{22}

In addition, by situating the live performers within the space of temples that were often described or depicted as abandoned, these images evoked not only the sculptural remains of the “lost” civilization of writers like Pierre Loti, but the belief in the \textit{EFEO}’s successful cultural revitalization and the restoration of historical memory that is described in the guidebooks discussed in the previous chapter. The importance of these programs to “revitalize” Cambodian culture and history to the perceived success of the \textit{mission civilisatrice} in Cambodia is apparent not only within the pages of those guidebooks, but in government sponsored programs such as the School of Cambodian Arts.\textsuperscript{23}

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\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{apsaras.png}
\caption{“Apsaras” at Angkor Wat}
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\textsuperscript{22} Claudius Madrolle, \textit{To Angkor} (Paris: Société d’Éditions Géographiques, Maritimes et Coloniales, 1939) p. 20.
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\textsuperscript{23} For further information about the programs of cultural salvation and revitalization, particularly through the institution of the School of Cambodian Arts in Phnom Penh, see Ingrid Muan, "Citing
\end{flushleft}
Images of dancers publicized on postcards or in advertisements that were not set within the temples themselves are often placed within a neutral or unspecified space that either does not provide a potent alternative to Angkor, or else echoes the temples. One series of photographs taken of the royal dance troupe offers a collection of images of dancers posing in various positions along the elevated, exterior walkway of the Musée Albert Sarraut. (Figure 23) Because the building, which was designed by George Groslier, was conceived of as a “traditional” Cambodian structure, it is difficult to place the edifice without the inclusion in the images of the full façade. Furthermore, without being aware of what the building was, or who had designed it, the enormous carved wooden doors and the Angkorian sculpture that litters the walkway behind the dancers in

Figure 23 Dancer in the doorway of the museum

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many photographs would simply be read by most metropolitan viewers as the traditional façade Groslier intended it to be. However, although the backdrop for these photographs would likely have been read as traditional, it would not have been read as monumental. In these photographs of dancers taken at the museum, the atmosphere is intimate, and implies the closeness of the inner court, and by extension the cloistered inner rooms of a harem. The intimate atmosphere of these images would have reminded contemporary viewers of the widely held assumption in the métropole that the women of the royal dance troupe were all the king’s consorts. By contrast, images of dancers at Angkor often show the temples in the distance, or looming large over the dancers, if not the countryside. Even the images showing dancers interacting with the ruins on a more intimate scale are clearly images of a monumental structure. (Figure 24)\textsuperscript{25}

The intimacy evoked in the photographs of dancers at the museum is similar to the intimacy conjured by an earlier series of photographs of dancers assembled and posed in the palace courtyard. Taken close to the turn of the twentieth century, these photographs are perhaps the closest that any depiction of the royal ballet dancers came to a portrait of the imagined sequestered inner court: an earlier representations of the royal ballet troupe show a line of young women and girls in a straight line, with the star dancer positioned atop a Cambodian style platform bed. (Figure 25)26 This photograph is taken outside in the open air, and, as with the later photographs of the dancers at the museum, the size and importance of the building pictured behind the women is unclear. While the image title proclaims the setting as the palace, the backdrop contains no elaborate structures. Like the Musée Albert Sarraut, the palace where these images were taken was another construction of French design and production, again in “traditional” Khmer style. Thus, in these images, the intimacy of the court is meant to be quintessentially Khmer, while being a location constructed and circumscribed by France. These photographs offer no truly monumental alternative, neither palace nor pagoda, to the backdrop offered by Angkor Wat. Interestingly, the photographs taken of the dancers inside the precincts of the palace bear a striking resemblance to the dancers depicted in Hielbronn’s watercolor.

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The royal dance troupe is not the only Cambodian symbol portrayed inside the palace precincts. Portraits of the king often show the ruler set within a vague, or even a staged, setting. The relationship between the rulers and the French administration can, at times, be discerned in the structure of the royal photographs: King Norodom, who did not get along well with his French “protectors” is pictured as an old man, short, skinny, and stooped. (Figure 26)²⁷ To his left stands his 33rd son who, although not yet a teenager, is already up to his father’s shoulder in height. The photograph is shot at a slightly raised angle, which amplifies the impression of the king’s diminutive stature. By contrast, King Sisowath, Norodom’s Francophile half-brother, presents a vastly different appearance in his portraits. This difference begins with his physical presence: Sisowath was portly where Norodom appeared frail and thin. However, his

coronation portraits, which show him alternatively in semi-Western and official coronation costume, show a man in command. He is seated at a chair, his arm leaning lightly on the table as he stares into the camera. (Figure 27)\textsuperscript{28} His posture is reminiscent of traditional portraits of rulers and statesmen in France, with the camera’s eye locked on its subject from a slightly sunken angle.

The location of the portrait of Norodom and his son is unclear. A servant kneels on the ground beneath and behind the king as he holds an umbrella above Norodom’s head. It is an intimate portrait, one in which the photographer is situated within the king’s space. The angle of the photograph is slightly raised, compounding the impression of his frailty, even weakness. The portrait of King Sisowath is also an intimate portrait, however, it is afforded the official intimacy of the photographer’s studio. Rather than a real location, Sisowath is instead pictured in a space that is at once unclear and unreal, a place imagined, owned, and controlled by the person taking the picture.

\textsuperscript{28} Postcard from the colonial period.
These portraits of the sovereigns, as well as the images of dancers in non-specific spaces, or within the confines of the palace, all have in common the subtle, but overarching, presence of the French state contained within them. This presence is most obvious in the studio photographs, where the intercession of the French gaze through the photographic eye is made manifest in the artificial construction of the portrait studio. This intervention is, however, no less present in the photographs situated within the palace, or in the later photographs situated in the Musée Albert Sarraut. Both the museum and the palace are French constructs, from French designs, which evolved from a French interpretation of local architectural style. The secondary symbols of Cambodia, embodied within portraits of kings, concubines, dancers, and musicians, whether taken in the controlled studio environment, or within the unspecified confines of the palace and museum, are most often portraits of space circumscribed and controlled by the colonial state. By containing both Cambodia’s living symbol and connection to past glory (the king) and the living symbol of his power (in the form of the Royal Ballet) within French controlled
space, both symbols are stripped of their historical dominion and authority. By removing the king from a space that is his own, and replacing him visually within French owned and controlled space, the sovereign loses his sovereignty: he becomes a king without a kingdom. This loss is emphasized and reiterated in the portraits of the dancers who are a traditional symbol of that sovereign power: As with his territory, he no longer has control over the dancers. In detaching the master from dominion, circumscribing both within a French sphere, both the king and the dancers are visually divorced from their historical power. By breaking the historical connection to command and power, these portraits interact with their subjects as aesthetic objects.

Yet, it is the temples that remain the most often-used image of Cambodia, from postcards to advertisements, with a gaze that falls most often, but not exclusively, on Angkor Wat. The silhouette of the temple in photographs and drawings, paintings, and etchings, appears in advertisements for hotels and shipping companies throughout the colonial era. The repeated use of the image of Angkor, most often cleansed of the presence of human life, in advertisements, books, postcards, and travel journals all contributed to the ascendency of Angkor as the ultimate symbol of Cambodia, as well as to its aestheticization for Western audiences.