

## CHAPTER TWO: ANGKOR AND CAMBODIA IN HISTORY

The word “Angkor” refers to several different, but related, locations at once. Today Angkor most often refers to the collection of temples that is located in northwestern Cambodia, close to the provincial capital of Siem Reap. This designation closely coincides with the area the French designated as the Angkor Historical Park during Cambodia’s colonial period. The park still exists today in nearly the same form, although it is now administrated by the Cambodian government agency, APSARA Authority.<sup>1</sup> The word itself is thought to have its roots in the Sanskrit word *nagara*, meaning “city,” and is thus thought at one time to have referred to the city that surrounded the central temples.<sup>2</sup> Angkor is also used to refer to the largest temple in the area, Angkor Wat, built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by King Suryavarman II. Finally, Angkor is as often used to refer to a place in time as it is to refer to a location in space. When writers and researchers refer to occurrences, events, and practices which took place “at Angkor,” the reference not only applies to the place, but also denotes the period when the Khmer Empire was in its ascendancy, roughly from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Monuments are often imbued with great cultural importance. The meanings that are ascribed to structures, whether they were built by a society’s predecessors or by themselves in commemoration of an event, nearly always appear in the form of a narrative, as the story of the monument. Angkor, like most monuments, has a story. And, like most monuments, it has more than one story. In

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<sup>1</sup> APSARA, or the Authority for Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap, is a government agency “in charge of research, protection and conservation of cultural heritage, as well as urban and tourist development” in the area. Quoted from the APSARA web site, <http://www.autoriteapsara.org/en/apsara.html>, February 5, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> This city is discussed at length in the writings of Chou Da-Kuan, a member of the Chinese mission to Cambodia who visited the city in the 13th century. Chou Ta-Kuan, Trans. Paul Pelliot and J. Gilman d’Arcy Paul, *The Customs of Cambodia* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1992)

this dissertation I will be investigating one of these stories. It is not the first narrative of the monuments, although it was often claimed to have uncovered the “original” story of the temples and the civilization that built them. In subsequent decades it is the narrative that has exerted the heaviest influence on the world’s understanding and knowledge of the temples—particularly in the West. Many facets of that narrative continue to echo through descriptions of Angkor today, despite evidence that contradicts the validity of some of the details. In order to better understand the origins of these aspects of Angkor’s story, this dissertation will focus on the narrative of Angkor as it was told by the French during the colonial period in Cambodia, which lasted ninety years, from 1863 until 1953.

The area known as Angkor is located in what is today northwestern Cambodia. It is estimated that there may be as many as one thousand temples, *salas*,<sup>3</sup> and shrines that date from the Angkor period across present-day Cambodia, southern Laos, and northeastern Thailand. Less than one hundred have been cleared and stabilized, including temples such as Phimai in Thailand and Wat Phu in Laos. The highest concentration of temples from this period can be found in Cambodia’s Siem Reap province. In this dissertation I will be focusing on the most visited sites within the Angkor Historical Park: Angkor Wat, the Bayon, and Ta Prohm.

Angkor Wat is the largest structure amongst this cluster of temples and is located approximately six kilometers north of the provincial capital of Siem Reap. The structure was built in the twelfth century by King Suryavarman II and was originally dedicated to the Hindu god, Vishnu. The main temple has a rectangular floor plan topped with a succession of progressively elevated and receded levels, giving the structure a somewhat pyramidal outline. (Figure 1)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Meaning “hall,” this term covers structures meant to shelter pilgrims as well as halls where events took place.

<sup>4</sup> Photograph taken by the author.

The exterior walls of lowest level, which is raised more than a meter from the ground, are enclosed by a sheltered gallery whose inner walls are covered with bas-relief murals. These murals depict episodes from the great Indian epics (such as The Battle of the Kurukshetra Plain from the *Mahabharata* and the Battle of Lanka from the *Ramayana*), events found in religious texts (such as the Churning of the Milk Ocean from the *Vishnu Purana*), and historical events (including an Historical Procession in which Suryavarman II is thought to be depicted). Each corner of this gallery was once topped with a conical tower, however the towers



Figure 1 Angkor Wat

have toppled over time.

Behind the exterior wall lies an inner courtyard at the center of which rises the next level of the temple attainable by means of a steep staircase. This level has a square floor plan and is enclosed by another gallery whose walls are unadorned. Each of the four corners of this level is topped by a conical tower which overlooks a second interior courtyard. At the center of this level rises a staircase leading to the inner sanctuary. The sanctuary likely once held a statue of Vishnu, although today

is contains an image of the Buddha. It is topped by a fifth, centrally placed conical tower.

The temple is reached by crossing a long causeway edged with balustrades in the shape of giant *nagas*, or mystical water serpents. The causeway crosses a large moat leading to an exterior wall which encircles the island at the center of the moat. At the point where the causeway meets the exterior wall one crosses



Figure 2 Colonial era photograph of Angkor Wat

through an enclosed gallery whose walls are decorated with bas-relief patterns resembling floral patterned brocade and the likenesses of numerous *devata* and *apsaras*—the demi-goddesses and semi-divine dancers of the court. In the main gallery located at the crossing of the gallery and the causeway there is a large statue that was originally an image of Vishnu. Pilgrims now leave offerings at the base of the statue and dress it in saffron cloth as an image of the Buddha.

The causeway continues beyond the gallery across the expanse of a large grassy field. In colonial era photographs this field often appears filled with creeper

vines, palm, and coconut trees. (Figure 2)<sup>5</sup> Today it is often used as a picnic area, especially for visiting domestic tourists, and as a football pitch for local children. Walking along the causeway one passes a pair of small buildings with architectural design that mirrors each other, which were dubbed “libraries” by French scholars, but whose purpose has not been entirely illuminated. Beyond the libraries is a pair of small, rectangular pools which reflect the façade of the temple during the wet season when the water level is high. Just beyond the northern pool rises the roof of the Buddhist monastery which houses several dozen monks. The building is of relatively recent construction, however, a monastery has existed in that spot for at least one hundred and fifty years, and most likely has a history that goes back much further.

The layout of the temple and its grounds is thought to have been designed to resemble the cosmological map of Mt. Meru, the sacred mountain of Hindu cosmology. It is believed that the successive bodies of water (moat, reflecting pools) and rings of walls and covered galleries surrounding courtyards were meant to mimic the rings of successive mountain ranges and seas which encompass the five peaks of Meru. The five towers topping the square galleries at the center of the structure were meant to represent the peaks of the holy mountain. The centrality of Mt. Meru is echoed in the bas-relief found on the southeastern wall depicting the Churning of the Milk Ocean. In this scene from the Vishnu Purana the *devas* (gods) and the *raksas* (demons) are using the king of the nagas as a rope to churn the milk ocean in order to release *amrita*, the elixir of life. Mt. Meru is the pivot of the churn, and is thus the pivot upon which the universe turns.

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Hürlimann, *Photographic Impressions: Burma, Siam, Cambodia, Yunna, Champa, and Vietnam* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001) p. 199.

Angkor Wat is considered the masterpiece of ancient Khmer art and architecture. It is the largest structure from the Angkorian period and contains more than a kilometer of exquisitely carved bas-relief murals. While significant clearing and reconstruction efforts have been implemented at Angkor Wat since



Figure 3 The Bayon

1907 when they came into French colonial possession, of the numerous temples in the area Angkor Wat was the best preserved at the time of the arrival of Europeans in the area. Initially, much of the French focus on the temples was trained on Angkor Wat, and it has continued to be the most well known and often-visited structure at Angkor. Angkor Wat also has the distinction of being an important pilgrimage place for Buddhists in Cambodia, which has a population that is more than ninety percent Buddhist.

In addition to the silhouette of Angkor Wat, the enormous faces carved into the towers of the Bayon are amongst the best known images of the temples at Angkor, and were, and often continue to be, emblematic of the temples at Angkor.

(Figure 3)<sup>6</sup> The temple has a distinctive layout which is not duplicated elsewhere amongst the Angkorian period temples, while at the same time echoing some of the more integral components of the floor plans of other temples which predate it, such as Angkor Wat. This notably includes the successive elevated and receding levels.

The lowest level of the structure is laid out in the shape of a square, and like Angkor Wat, this entry level is ringed with galleries. These galleries were once covered by a corbelled, stone roof, and the walls are covered with bas-reliefs. The second level stands elevated and recedes in size from the first. The second level also presents a series of covered galleries decorated with bas-reliefs.

From the second level one ascends to a square, stone courtyard. Each of the corners of the crenalated courtyard is topped by a conical tower which bears a smiling, male face pointed in each of the cardinal directions. At the center of this courtyard stands a circular tower that is surmounted by conical towers which again bear the smiling, male faces looking out at the four directions. This circular tower has a small staircase that leads to an interior chamber, and the chamber is topped by another conical, four-faced tower.

The smiling faces are thought to be that of Lokeshvara, the Mahayana Buddhist bodhisattva of mercy, to whom the temple is dedicated. Built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the last great king of Angkor, King Jayavarman VII, the Bayon is the centerpiece of the building frenzy that characterized his reign. While previous kings often built one major temple, and others were only able to carry out renovations of structures built by others, Jayavarman VII appears, according to inscriptions, to have been responsible for the construction of numerous major stone temples, as well as smaller stone structures, wooden *salas* and hospitals, and schools. In addition to the Bayon, major temples such as Banteay K'dei, Beng Mealea, Preah

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<sup>6</sup> Photograph by author.

Khan, and Banteay Samre are thought to have been constructed during his reign, although each of these additional temples was constructed on a single level, or with only a partial second level, rather than as a “temple mountain,” as structures like Angkor Wat, the Bayon, and earlier temples such as Ta Keo, have been called.

In addition to these single level structures the temple of Ta Prohm was also constructed during the reign of Jayavarman VII. Ta Prohm has several towers



Figure 4 Ta Prohm

which top some of the structures located in the inner courtyard, however, it is predominantly set on a single level; a raised platform approximately one meter from the ground comprises the foundation for the structure. It has a cruciform floor plan which includes a decorated gateway and a structure named by French scholars as the “hall of dancers,” which bears a resemblance to a similarly named structure at Preah Khan. This hall is flanked by twin reflecting pools set before the entryway constructed into the surrounding gallery which was once covered by corbelled stone roofs carved to resemble clay tiles. Inside the gallery lies the first courtyard, which contains buildings that have been labeled “cloisters” to the East, North, and South. In the center lies a second, covered gallery, which surrounds another courtyard. At

the center of the second courtyard stands yet another square gallery surrounding a courtyard. At the center of the courtyard is a small stone enclosure where a statue of the Buddha likely once stood. Fragments of Buddhist statues, mostly of the Buddha beneath the hood of a seven-headed *naga*, are today piled inside this structure with incense and other offerings set before them.

Ta Prohm's floor plan bears a strong resemblance to that of Banteay K'dei, which is located less than two kilometers away. In fact, a visit to Banteay K'dei or to Preah Khan, which has a similar floor plan as well as some unique features, might give the visitor a clearer conception of how the temples were constructed and decorated, and how they might have originally been presented. While this may be the case, Preah Khan is less often visited, and Banteay K'dei lesser still.

This is due mainly to the decision by the French colonial *Conservation d'Angkor* to not clear the site of Ta Prohm completely, but rather to leave it in its "natural state."<sup>7</sup> Instead of visiting Angkor for its statuary or its architecture most visitors come to view the banyan trees which have taken root in between the stones of the temple, and which sprout from its roof and walls. (Figure 4)<sup>8</sup>

While there are tens of temples in the vicinity of Angkor Wat, it is these three temples—Angkor Wat, the Bayon, and Ta Prohm—which have consistently been the focus of the most public discussions about Angkor, particularly in print. Scholars debated the meaning of the inscriptions that were found in the area and attempted to piece together a chronology of the temples through in-depth studies of the style of bas-reliefs and statuary, however, only a small portion of this discussion made its way into more widely read descriptions of Angkor. The learned discussions of Angkor continue amongst scholars who still debate Angkor's

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<sup>7</sup> Maurice Glaize, *Les Monuments Du Groupe D'angkor*, 2nd ed. (Saigon: Portail, 1948), p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> Hürlimann, 2001, p. 173.

history,<sup>9</sup> however, it was and continues to be the more popular impressions of the temples which has made the greatest impact on the broad understanding in the West of Cambodia and of the monuments.

### ***Historical Background***

The Khmer Empire, whose capital was based at Angkor, was at its height between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The history of the area prior to the Angkorian period is somewhat unclear, as what is known has come about through piecing together mostly Chinese and Arabic sources and matching them with the archaeological evidence that has been excavated. There have been a number of pre-Angkorian stone statues that have been found which exhibit a style that differs distinctly from the style of later stonework.

From the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Khmer Empire grew and expanded, despite various power struggles within the ruling class of the kingdom. The reach of the kingdom at its height was certainly felt in what is today northeastern Thailand, southern Laos, and southern Vietnam, in addition to what is today Cambodia, as physical remains of the Khmer Empire have been found in each of these places.<sup>10</sup> The Khmer conducted a number of wars with neighboring kingdoms, particularly with the Cham in present-day central Vietnam during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Until the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Khmer had the upper hand over the Cham, but

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<sup>9</sup> For example, two such debates which have captured the attention of scholars are the purpose and uses for the canals which consumed so much of ancient Angkor's resources, and the devaraja cult. French scholars such as Bernard-Philippe Groslier wrote in the 1960s that the canals were the key to Angkor's success as a capital and as an empire, theorizing that the canals were for irrigation. He proposed that as irrigation canals they would have doubled the rice growing capacity of the empire, making it possible to invade neighboring kingdoms. In recent years hydrologists have shown that this was a improbable scenario. See Bernard-Philippe Groslier, *The Art of Indochina* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1962) p. 70. The devaraja cult has also proved to be a point of debate. The term appears in numerous inscriptions, and was surmised by French scholars to be indicative of a practice of belief in which the king and one of the Hindu gods- usually Siva- were seen as conflated. How far this can be taken as a belief system has recently come under question.

<sup>10</sup> It has been speculated that the influence may have extended beyond the reach of the physical remains, but it is hard to assess where the boundaries of this influence might have been.

in 1177 the Cham mounted a successful attack on Angkor, leading the charge up the Mekong and Tonle Sap rivers, and eventually ransacking the Khmer capital. Jayavarman VII would exact revenge a number of years later as the Cham kingdom was losing its centuries-long resistance to the push south from the Vietnamese.

By the 13<sup>th</sup> century the influence of the Khmer Empire was also waning. Angkor would be attacked several times over the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the neighboring Siamese, who appear to have occupied the capital for a number of years in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. It may have been an attack by the Siamese in the 14<sup>th</sup> century which caused the Khmer kings to finally move their capital south to Oudong. While the Khmer Empire was no longer in its ascendancy during the year the Chinese official Zhou Da Guan spent in the Cambodian capital, he still depicted a powerful and wealthy city. Zhou visited Angkor in the last years of the 13<sup>th</sup> century as part of the mission from the Mongol court, and his notes on his time at Angkor include descriptions of the city as one whose towers were topped with gold and whose walls were constructed of stones set so perfectly that they have “no crevices for weeds to grow in.”<sup>11</sup>

Half a century after Zhou’s departure from Angkor the Khmer kings would move south. They would return to the city briefly in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but would leave soon afterwards, moving their capital between the hills of Oudong and the site where the present capital, Phnom Penh, sits at the meeting of the Tonle Sap and Mekong Rivers. Beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Cambodia would gradually lose more and more of its territory, one piece at a time, as its two neighbors—Siam to the west and Vietnam to the east—fought wars with each other and took advantage of Cambodia’s relative weakness.

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<sup>11</sup> Chou, 1996, p. 2

At the opening of the 1800s, Cambodia was a “protégé” of the Siamese court, and the period, from its start to establishment of the French protectorate in 1863, begins and ends with a Siamese sponsored Cambodian coronation.<sup>12</sup> The establishment of the Nguyễn dynasty in Việtnám brought a level of stability to the country after many years of internal fighting, making it possible for the Vietnamese kingdom to begin looking beyond its borders toward territorial expansion. The lower Mekong Delta—the area that has been called Kampuchea Krom (Lower Cambodia)—was being settled and colonized by the Vietnamese, a process that began with the marriage of a Cambodian king to a Vietnamese princess in the seventeenth century. Although the Cambodian kingdom had been under the sway of the Siamese court, by 1811 the balance of power was shifting eastward to Việtnám.<sup>13</sup> The seeds of discontent in Thai-Cambodian relations were sown in a land exchange that placed the then seven year old King Eng on the Cambodian throne under Siamese tutelage and regent at the loss of the provinces of Battambang and Angkor. However, influence shifted when a Siamese-backed attempted coup against Eng’s son, King Chan, led by Chan’s brother. Clashes between Siamese and Vietnamese forces followed, both inside Cambodia, and ultimately the Cambodian king escaped to Sài Gòn. When King Chan (r. 1797-1835) was re-installed on the throne by the Vietnamese in 1813, he was much indebted to, and heavily influenced by, the Vietnamese court. The Cambodian court, in an attempt to hedge its bets, continued to send tributes to the Siamese as well as the Vietnamese. The situation was described succinctly by the Vietnamese emperor, who called Cambodia “an independent country that is the slave of two.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> David Chandler, “An Anti-Vietnamese Rebellion in Early Nineteenth Century Cambodia”, in *Facing the Cambodian Past*, 1996b, p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> Chandler, 1996a, p. 63. Chandler further notes that after 1810 “King Chan and his advisers were swept up into a game of power politics that they had little chance to change and no opportunity to win. They had no choice.” Chandler, 1996a, p. 115.

<sup>14</sup> From Chotmai Het (Thai archival documents) 2/1173/19ko, quoted in Chandler, 1998, p. 119.

The Vietnamese and the Siamese saw themselves in a parental role with Cambodia positioned as their “child,” if not by birth, than by adoption. According to David Chandler, Siam saw itself as the “father,” while Vietnam saw itself as the “mother” to the Cambodian king’s “unruly child.”<sup>15</sup> King Chan, for his part as the rebellious offspring, played a dangerous game of pitting his symbolic parents against each other—a game that often ended with one or the other sending an expeditionary force. These forces, and their movement back and forth across the Cambodian countryside over half a decade created an atmosphere of terror, instability, and persistent danger, and its imprint is marked in historical sources of this period.<sup>16</sup>

The Vietnamese continued to hold sway over Cambodia until the 1840’s, despite Siamese invasions in 1833 and 1841. During the second of these invasions in 1841 Cambodia revolted against its Vietnamese “mother,” but the rebellion soon lost steam, as well as supplies, and petered out in a matter of months. In the midst of this rebellion, however, the Vietnamese emperor, Minh Mạng died, and his son, Thiêu Tri, took the throne. Unlike his father, he didn’t have a clear plan, or desire, to prolong the efforts being exerted to hold on to the Cambodian buffer state that kept the Siamese at bay.

In the same year, the Siamese, led by Chaophraya Bodin attacked and overcame the Vietnamese at Pursat. Bodin wrote to Bangkok that Prince Duang, one of Chan’s surviving brothers, should be released from Siamese custody in preparation to take the Cambodian throne.<sup>17</sup> The Vietnamese attempted to put Chan’s other surviving brother, Prince Im, who had by this time defected to the

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<sup>15</sup> Chandler, 1996a, pp. 114-5.

<sup>16</sup> “It would be difficult to overstress the atmosphere of threat, physical danger, and random violence that pervades primary sources... and perhaps much of everyday life in nineteenth-century Cambodia. The sources are filled with references to torture, executions, ambushes, massacres, village burnings, and the forced movement of populations.” Chandler, 1996a, pp. 121-2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Vietnamese side, on the throne. This move had virtually no support, so instead Vietnamese forces took the Prince, other royal family members, and much of the capital's population as they withdrew to Việtnám. Cambodia's fortunes shifted once again between the Vietnamese and Siamese: the Vietnamese re-installed Queen Mei in Phnom Penh in 1844, but were unable to move the Siamese from Oudong in 1845. Eventually, the stalemate was ended with a Vietnamese demand for a tribute to the court at Huế, and when the embassy returned to Phnom Penh in 1847, the Vietnamese returned a number of royal family members, as well as the regalia that would serve to legitimate Duang as sovereign of Cambodia. He was crowned by the Siamese at Oudong in April of 1848.

The rule of King Duang is often seen as a time of calm and stability, particularly in comparison with the nearly continuous war that characterized the period immediately preceding it. Duang continued to be caught between the influence of Việtnám and Siam, although this tension less often resulted in armed conflict during his reign. The relative peace did not prevent Duang from seeking remedies that would release Cambodia from the pressures placed upon the country by its two neighbors. In the early 1850s King Duang appears to have made overtures toward France. In assessing the situation, Duang is reported as having asked a French missionary, "What would you have me do? I have two masters who always have an eye fixed on me. They are my neighbors, and France is far away."<sup>18</sup> This appears to also have informed the thinking of Duang's successor in his own dealings with the Siamese, Vietnamese, and French. Eventually the court discovered that even though France was far, it did not preclude their installing the French administrative and military structure in the territory once the door had been opened.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, quoting Charles Meyniard, *Le second empire en Indochine* (Paris: Société d'éditions scientifique, 1891) p. 461.

In 1860 King Ang Duang died, and Norodom, his designated successor, appears to have had little support.<sup>19</sup> He was only able to take control of the kingdom with the assistance of the Siamese, who retained the royal regalia in Bangkok. Unable to truly take the helm of Cambodia without the regalia, and angered by the interference of the Siamese, Norodom began to once again court the French, who had recently installed themselves downriver in Cochinchina. Norodom signed treaties with the French in 1863, while continuing to proclaim fidelity to the Siamese court. Norodom's multiple allegiances would be the cause of confusion and tension at his coronation in 1864. The event was officiated jointly by the French and Siamese, and included a storm of procedural bickering. In the end, the king's titles were chosen and bestowed by the Siamese, while it was the French who placed the crown on his head. In 1867, the French and the Siamese signed a treaty that settled the matter, with the coronation marking the close of real Siamese influence over the Khmer court, and the commencement of the French colonial period.

The French military officers, troops, and administrators who arrived in Phnom Penh, where the country's seat had been moved from Oudong once again in 1866, were not the first Europeans to have a presence in Cambodia. Written descriptions of Cambodia by Europeans go as far back as Tome Pieres in the early sixteenth century. Portuguese missionaries made numerous concerted efforts in the sixteenth century to find converts among the Khmer, and were joined in this endeavor by Spanish missionaries. Despite imperialist designs by the Spanish,<sup>20</sup> the

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<sup>19</sup> Meyer says of this period that both Norodom and his half-brother Siwotha were in Bangkok, awaiting the Siamese decision regarding which of the princes would be placed on the throne. ["Pendant huit mois, Norodom et Siwotha attendirent au Siam qu'à Bangkok on daignât se prononcer en faveur de l'un ou de l'autre. Finalement, le premier fut choisi et put regagner sa capitale en mars 1862..."] Charles Meyer, *La Vie Quotidienne Des Français En Indochine, 1860-1910* (Paris: Hachette, 1985). p.107.

<sup>20</sup> Gabriel Quiroga de San Antonio, a Dominican friar wrote in his 1604 publication *Breve y verdadera relacion de los successis del Reyno de Camboxa* about two failed attempts by the Spanish at taking the kingdom, the first of which ended in the murder of the Cambodian king, as well as

kingdom did not fall into European hands at that time, nor did the missionaries encounter much success in their pursuit of converts. And at the end of the century, Lovek fell to the Siamese. By the time this happened, however, both Lovek and Phnom Penh were brimming with foreign traders: Not just Spanish and Portuguese, but also Chinese, Arab, Japanese, English, and Dutch. The cities had designated and segregated areas for various foreign nationals.

The colonial presence of the French in Cambodia during the nineteenth century was not felt deeply outside of the capital. Provincial capitals eventually received French *Résidents* and other *fonctionnaires*, who, in the lower ranking positions and in later years, were often Vietnamese rather than French nationals. However, these administrative placements often weren't a reality until after 1884. The Cambodian administration, the *okya*,<sup>21</sup> would have felt their presence first, as the French administrators put it upon them to implement new administrative procedures.<sup>22</sup> In the capital city, and for the king, the French presence infiltrated many aspects of life, particularly in the administration. But even in Phnom Penh, which had the highest concentration of French in the country, the interactions that occurred between Europeans and the “*indigènes*” they ruled were limited.

This was, in part, because during the period from 1863 until 1884, the French role in Cambodia, as defined in the 1863 treaty, was rather vague. It more or

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attempts at gaining political and financial backing for a third try. None of these attempts resulted in the Spanish actually taking the territory, though as an interesting pre-cursor to the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it seems that when the Cambodian court felt it was being crushed under the weight of Siamese control, or when the internal squabbles among royal family members became too destabilizing, the Spanish were courted to intervene. Much like the French two and a half centuries later, the Spanish seem to have ignored these pleas at the time when they were given, and to have acted on them only much later, when it was often no longer desired. Gabriel Quiroga de San Antonio and Antoine Cabaton, *A Brief and Truthful Relation of Events in the Kingdom of Cambodia* (Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> The *okya* were high ranking officials, and the system carried numerous titles and distinctions of rank. Some of the *okya* were attached to the palace, while others were stationed at locations in the province where they administered the territory, including such duties as tax collection. Chandler, 1996a, p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> In these early stages these directives might have been given to the *okya* by the king rather than directly from the French.

less inserted the French into a system that already existed, with the *okya* acting as agents of the king, governing their territories, collecting taxes, and dispensing justice. This system was left largely in place. Furthermore, in the early decades of the protectorate, there simply weren't that many French citizens residing in Cambodia in an official capacity. Estimates for the first two decades of French rule put the total number of military officers, soldiers and functionaries at between one hundred and one hundred and fifty.<sup>23</sup>

The Convention of June 17, 1884 would change this situation significantly. With the signing of this treaty, France now had power over important branches of the government that it had not previously had. Among the areas that were placed in the hands of the French were the protectorate's economy, financial affairs, police, and judicial affairs.<sup>24</sup> As a result, Cambodia was soon host to an exploding population of new functionaries, military officers, and soldiers who would fill new positions created by the new responsibilities of the government. It is from this point that the French truly began to have an impact on the country, and its inhabitants as the French population began to grow.<sup>25</sup> Compared with the European population of one hundred to one hundred and fifty residents in the years between 1863 and 1884, the European population of Cambodia in 1904 was 825, eighty percent of whom were either in the military or part of the colonial government.<sup>26</sup>

Although the presence of the French was during this period being increasingly felt in Cambodia, 825 Europeans residing throughout the country is not many, particularly when one keeps in mind that the estimation of the general

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<sup>23</sup> Meyer, 1985, p. 115.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 116

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. The breakdown of numbers was 530 Europeans in Phnom Penh, 295 in the provinces. Of this population 101 were part of the tax bureau, 76 were administrators and civil servants, 88 were public works technicians, 25 were agents of the P.T.T. (post and telegraph), 12 teachers, 12 police officers, 7 magistrates, the remainder fall into a smattering of other categories. There were also Europeans at this time working in commercial areas not connected to the government, and by 1904 it was becoming more common for *colons* to bring their spouse with them from Europe.

population in 1904 was 1,250,000. The number of Europeans in the protectorate would never reach the numbers that it did in Tonkin, Annam, or Cochinchina, the three separately administered sections of Vietnam.<sup>27</sup> While there had been early supporters of the idea of taking control of Cambodia and its perceived or hinted-at riches,<sup>28</sup> Cambodia fell under French protection as much because of the court's desire to extricate itself from Siamese control, perhaps by King Norodom's misreading of French power, as from France's desire for colonial expansion. The taking of Cambodia had been completed without bloodshed or struggle. However, few of the projected resources manifested, and Cambodia's role in the French colonial empire was considered less than crucial, particularly in comparison to Vietnam's economic strength.

Nevertheless, the French administrators who established themselves in Cambodia in the 1860s did begin work on building a capital city. While Phnom Penh would never be declared the "Paris of the East," as its downriver neighbor Sài Gòn, was, it would come to be known as a pleasant, if somewhat isolated, town. Wide boulevards lined with trees were built, and like many French colonial cities, Phnom Penh was divided into segregated *quartiers*: an European quarter, a Chinese quarter, a Vietnamese quarter, a "native" quarter. Despite these efforts, by 1891 Phnom Penh was not considered a choice assignment for colonial officials, as evidenced in one official's description of the capital as "a miserable conglomeration

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<sup>27</sup> Of the three, only Cochinchina was technically administered as a colony. The other two, Tonkin and Annam, like Cambodia, were protectorates. Laos would later be added, also as a protectorate, with the five administrations together being labeled Indochine, or the *Federation Indochinoise*.

<sup>28</sup> For example, the naturalist Henri Mouhot seems to have believed that Cambodia held untapped resources that should be exploited by a colonial power. His beliefs were repeated loudly by other French explorers in the area, including Francis Garnier, Louis de Carné and Auguste Pavie, though all of these men came to Cambodia - with the exception of Garnier, who arrived before, and stayed on- after it had effectively become part of Greater France. Even so, all of them echoed the perceived and imagined riches that Gabriel Quiroga de San Antonio described in his early seventeenth century publication. The assumption that the unknown jungles of Cambodia were hiding nearly limitless untapped resources, and that the Mekong river was a "river road" that would lead into the much sought-after interior of China, are a common theme running from the earliest European accounts into the twentieth century.

of straw huts or brick hovels planted around infected swamps whose emanations in the dry season decimate the population.”<sup>29</sup> This began to change in 1889 when the king traded his property rights on much of the land that became Phnom Penh in exchange for an influx of *piastres* by the French administration.<sup>30</sup>

King Norodom, crowned by the French, remained on the throne until his death in 1904. He appears not to have been pleased with the situation he found himself in vis-à-vis his European masters, and to have made his displeasure known. For their part, the French often seemed to have an equal distaste for King Norodom, and the possibility of replacing him with his Francophile half-brother, Prince Sisowath, was always kept as a possibility.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, the French realized that deposing the king in favor of his half-brother, while it might make particularly French interests more easily attainable, might also carry the possibility of instigating a revolt among the population at large.

Sisowath became king in 1904 after the death of Norodom. He would rule throughout much of the remainder of the colonial period until his own death in 1927, when he was succeeded by his son, Monivong. King Monivong was believed to have been a life-long Francophile until the beginning of World War II when the French lost Siem Reap and Battambang provinces to Thailand after a disastrous defeat. He reportedly refused from that moment to meet with French officials or to speak French until his death in 1941.<sup>32</sup> He was succeeded by Prince Sihanouk, who

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<sup>29</sup> J. Agostini, “Pnom Penh (Voyage au Cambodge en 1893-1894)”, *Le Tour du Monde*, 1898, as quoted in Meyer, 1985, p. 136.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 117. “Norodom est et demeure un monarque oriental, despotique, irascible, maître absolu de la vie de ses sujets, ne tolerant aucun manquement à la tradition qui fait de lui une personne “sacrée et inviolable”.” Whether or not this observation of the king is an exaggeration, it does give an idea of the way in which he was perceived by the French, and are sentiments that are echoed by contemporary observers, such as Louis de Carné who, when discussing Norodom’s opinion of the king of Bassac as a “man of the woods”, declares that the Cambodian king had come to this opinion “with his accustomed stupidity.” Louis De Carné, *Travels on the Mekong : Cambodia, Laos and Yunnan, the Political and Trade Report of the Mekong Exploration Commission (June 1866-June 1868)* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2000) p. 66.

<sup>32</sup> Chandler, 1996a, p. 166.

was barely eighteen years old at the time of his ascendance to the throne. Sihanouk was perceived by the French to be young and easy to manipulate, an impression that would prove to be inaccurate. Sihanouk would ultimately leave the throne to enter politics after Cambodia won its independence in 1953, and would become the country's first prime minister in 1955. He played an active role in politics until his overthrow by General Lon Nol in 1970, and returned to the forefront of Cambodian politics as the public face of the Khmer Rouge for the early years of the Democratic Kampuchea regime. He would re-ascend the throne as Cambodia's king in 1993, reigning until his abdication in late 2004 due to health concerns.

The temples at Angkor and wars that ravaged Cambodia in the 1960s and 1970s are perhaps the two things for which the country is best known outside of Southeast Asia. The war that raged in Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s bled over the border into Cambodia, and the American military began bombing the Cambodian countryside in an attempt to cut off the supply line that ran along trails from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. The Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian Communists, began waging their own war against the U.S.-backed Lon Nol government in Phnom Penh with growing success throughout the early 1970s. Eventually the city of Phnom Penh, overflowing with refugees trying to escape the American bombings and Khmer Rouge fighting in the countryside, were cut off. The airlifts supplying the city could not hold back the invasion, and on April 17, 1975 Khmer Rouge troops entered the capital. Phnom Penh was evacuated within days. The genocidal Democratic Kampuchea regime held power in Cambodia for nearly four years, during which time an estimated 1.7 million people died from starvation, overwork, exhaustion, and execution. The Khmer Rouge only fled the capital after Vietnamese forces invaded in early 1980. The Vietnamese stayed until 1989; the civil war spearheaded by remnants of the Khmer Rouge continued throughout much of the 1990s, ending only as the century came to a close.

With the fighting finally over, Cambodia is turning to rebuilding and to development. Phnom Penh is once again bustling with traffic, trade, and tourists. The textile industry comprises a major component of the country's nascent industry and entrance into the global economy.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the garment industry the Cambodian government is setting its sights on capturing an important slice of the global tourism industry, particularly in the growing market for tourists visiting Southeast Asia. The success of the Thai tourist industry has spurred other countries on the Southeast Asian mainland to turn their sights towards capturing a portion of the market, or at least linking industries such as Cambodia's to their neighbor's success.

The legacy of Cambodia's late twentieth century wars provides an important element of the country's 21<sup>st</sup> century tourist industry. Visitors to the country can tour Tuol Sleng, the high school that was turned into a prison and torture and interrogation center by the Khmer Rouge, as well as the "Killing Fields," a mass grave containing the skeletal remains of hundreds of the regime's victims.<sup>34</sup> Despite the availability of genocide tours, the majority of tourists do not visit Cambodia in order to see Tuol Sleng, and many of the more than 330,000 travelers who were issued tourist visas in 2000 never even made it to Phnom Penh.<sup>35</sup> The focus of the Cambodian tourism industry has been trained predominantly on the temples at Angkor.

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<sup>33</sup> Major companies which have some of their lines produced in Cambodia include The Gap, Columbia, and Old Navy. It is unclear at this point how the change in quota regulations in the textile trade- many of which ended at the start of 2005- will change the industry in Cambodia and other developing countries.

<sup>34</sup> The Cambodian government has also completed some preliminary work towards making the small village of Anlong Veng along the Thai border into a major destination for genocide tours. The village was the last holdout of the Khmer Rouge, and houses once belonging to much of the most senior Khmer Rouge leadership can be found within its boundaries. It is also the place where Pol Pot finally died. Personal communication with Timothy Dylan Wood, June 2002.

<sup>35</sup> "Open Skies Bring Flocks of Tourists to Cambodia," *The Nation*, Bangkok, Thailand, December 13, 2000.

The Cambodian government sees “a protected and prospering cultural heritage” as one that “will make an essential contribution to permanent economic stabilization” in the country.<sup>36</sup> With so much of Cambodia’s economic future being laid upon the tourism prospects the presentation and publicity of the country’s principal site is of great importance. Yet, even as King Sihanouk urges the placing of “the management, the promotion and the exploration of the Khmer cultural heritage into Khmer hands...into the same hands that sculpted it, that caressed it and protected it for so many centuries,”<sup>37</sup> much of the information most accessible to the international tourists that are being courted is not written by Cambodian hands. Furthermore, much of this material, from guidebooks to coffee table photography books, relies on the narrative of Angkor written, embellished, and cultivated during the colonial period. In the following chapters I will be investigating that narrative, and following its continued prevalence in the discussions of Angkor published for general audiences through to today.

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<sup>36</sup> From the website of the APSARA Authority, <http://www.autoriteapsara.org/en/apsara.html>, viewed February 7, 2005. In addition, the website states:

“In Angkor - a geographical region, an archaeological site and a cultural concept - lies much of Cambodia's future. The Angkorian heritage offers incomparable potential for economic prosperity, which can in turn provide a favorable climate and the means necessary for true protection of the Khmer heritage for the generations to come.”

<sup>37</sup> King Sihanouk quoted on the website of the APSARA Authority, <http://www.autoriteapsara.org/en/apsara.html>, viewed February 7, 2005.