

## AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY INSCRIPTION FROM ANGKOR WAT

by

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Between 1541 and 1747 AD some thirty Khmer inscriptions, numbered collectively by Professor Coedès as K. 301<sup>1</sup>, were incised onto pillars in the galleries (Brāh Bān) connecting the second and third enclosures of Angkor Wat.<sup>2</sup> Generally, these inscriptions commemorate Buddhist ceremonies performed in the galleries at the behest of secular worthies, and contain valuable information about religious practices and monastic structure. Others also give dates when monarchs or high officials visited the temple. The 1747 inscription is interesting for these reasons and because some forty of its seventy-six lines are given over to the partial biography of an important Cambodian official.

The years covered by this part of the inscription (1737-1747) coincide roughly with those generally given for the third and last reign of the Cambodian monarch Thammrājā IV.<sup>3</sup> Little is known about his personality, beyond the fact that he spent the thirty years between his

- 1) George Coedès (ed.), *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. 8 (Paris, 1966), 129. The inscriptions in question are printed in *Silajarik Nokor Vatt* (Inscriptions of Angkor Wat, Phnom Penh, 1958); for the 1747 inscription, see 111-117. See also Etienne Aymonier, "Les inscriptions de Preah Pean (Angkor Wat)", *Journal Asiatique* (JA) 19 (1899), 493-529. Throughout this essay, except in the case of toponyms, I have generally followed the transcription system proposed in Saverio Lewitz, "Note sur la translittération du cambodgien", *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient* (BEFEO) 55 (1969), 163-170.
- 2) The popular name Brāh Bān ("sacred images") refers to the Buddha-images collected there. See Au Chhieng, "Bān et rnoc, deux thèmes de réflexion méthodologique pour l'étude de vieux khmer" in *Mélanges d'Indianisme à la mémoire de Louis Renou* (Publications de l'Institut de Civilisation Indienne, Vol. 28), 44-51. The name dates at least from the seventeenth century: see *Silajarik*, 32 (inscription of 1629 AD).
- 3) Western-language sources for this period of Cambodian history are Jean Moura, *Le royaume du Cambodge* (2 vols., Paris 1884); Etienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge* (3 vols., Paris, 1900-1904) and Ahémard Leclère, *Histoire du Cambodge* (Paris, 1914). In Khmer, the only detailed source is Eng Sut (ed.) *Akasār mahāboros khmaer* (Documents about Cambodian heroes, Phnom Penh, 1969) which draws heavily on manuscript sources. Two Thai translations of Cambodian chronicles

second and third reigns in semi-retirement in Siam. During this period, Cambodia was governed alternately by two kings, each of whom reigned twice. The first, Ang Im (reigned 1710-1722 and 1729-1730) was related to Thammrājā IV by marriage.<sup>4</sup> He abdicated twice to his son, Sāttā (reigned 1722-1729 and 1730-1737), but seems to have maintained considerable power, for a struggle to overthrow Sāttā ensued immediately after his father's death in 1736. The chronicles relate that Sāttā's wife, Sijhātā, and her relations plotted against Sāttā. After losing battles to them, the king fled into those parts of the Mekong delta which were under Vietnamese control.<sup>5</sup> At this point, the biographical portion of the 1747 inscription begins.

The inscription itself concerns three major characters: the narrator, an unnamed Cambodian official bearing three successive titles; his patron, Thammrājā IV, both before and after assuming power, and his wife, who accompanied the narrator to Angkor Wat. These persons appear in the inscription under the titles they bore at the moments of history being discussed—in other words, with several different names.

In December, 1747,<sup>6</sup> the inscription begins, a Cambodian official entitled *okñā voñsā aggrāj*, accompanied by his wife, convened monks at

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(not yet printed in Khmer) are also useful: *Ratchaphongsawadan krung kam-phucha* (Royal chronicle of the kingdom of Cambodia, Bangkok, 1917, reprinted 1970) and *Phongsawadan Khamen* (Khmer chronicle), which appears as part of the first volume of the series *Prachum phongsawadan* (Collected chronicles, Bangkok, National Library edition, 1963). A copy of the Cambodian manuscript which the *Ratchaphongsawadan* purports to translate, the so-called Nupparot chronicle of 1878, is in the National Library in Bangkok. Although the *Ratchaphongsawadan* often constitutes more of a treatment than a translation, the portions of the Nupparot chronicle covering the years 1737-1747 (pages 94-97) are accurately translated in the *Ratchaphongsawadan*. For a discussion of these sources, see George Coedès, "Essai de classification des documents historiques cambodgiens. . ." BEFEO 18. 9 (1918) 15-28.

- 4) Ang Im's wife was the daughter of Thammrājā IV's father, King Jai Jesthā, who reigned four times in Cambodia and died there in 1729. Ang Im's wife's half-sister, Sijhātā, married Ang Im's son, Sāttā.
- 5) Eng Sut, 861-862, says that Sāttā personally sought help from the Vietnamese monarch, who refused it.
- 6) The date appears in the inscription as Thursday, thirteenth waxing day of the month *magsir*, 1669 *sakā*, year of the hare. Most of the other dates in the inscription are in the form of animal years.

Brāh Bān to recite prayers associated with memorial services for the dead.<sup>7</sup> The inscription then doubles back to trace part of the narrator's career, beginning at an unspecified date (earlier than January, 1738) when he was in Siam with Thamrājā IV and bore a title which translates roughly as minister of war.<sup>8</sup> The "ruling monarch" of Cambodia, the inscription tells us, had recently left Ayudhya and had reached the district of Chantabori on the coast.<sup>9</sup> Here he ordered the narrator to go to Lovek to meet "the lesser prince, entitled *brāh kaev fā*". We know from the chronicles that Thamrājā IV travelled from Ayudhya to Chantabori in 1737, and it seems likely that the "lesser prince" was his nephew Cān, a cousin of Sāttā's rebellious wife.<sup>10</sup> The chronicles place Cān at about this time in Lovek, north of the traditional Cambodian capital at Udong, gathering troops to overthrow King Sāttā.<sup>11</sup>

We do not know if the narrator's mission was a success, but the inscription says that by January, 1738, he was already "sad, poor, without riches or possessions". At this point an aunt visited him in Lovek,

- 7) This prayer is given in the inscription as *bānsukul amnicā*. I am grateful to mahā Prahsan Bunprahkong of the Department of Fine Arts for identifying it. See also Evéline Porée-Maspéro, *Cérémonies Privées des Cambodgiens* (Phnom Penh, 1958), 76.
- 8) This title, *copuñā montri sanggrām*, still existed in the 1790s, but apparently went out of use at some point in the nineteenth century. See Prince Damrong Ratchanuphap (ed.) *Tamra tamniap bandasak krung kamphucha* (Guide to the rankings of the royal household of Cambodia, Bangkok, 1922), 5, and *Phongsawadan khamen*, 237. This officer was responsible for the flintlock weapons of the *upayorāj*, the prince who has abdicated. It was probably given the narrator by Thamrājā IV when he abdicated leadership of the Cambodian court at Ayudhya to his son, an event which Leclère (377) places in 1732, and Eng Sut (857-858) five years later.
- 9) Before leaving Ayudhya, Thamrājā IV probably obtained permission to do so from the Siamese king, Baromokot, who also provided him with troops. See Eng Sut, 864, and *Phongsawadan khamen*, 198.
- 10) *Ratchaphongsawadan*, 114, and Eng Sut, 861. Although Ang Im had been known by this title (bestowed on him in 1699 by his father-in-law, King Jai Jesthā) for most of his life, he had assumed the title of *upayorāj* when he abdicated for the last time in 1730.
- 11) Lovek, the capital of Cambodia throughout most of the sixteenth century, had been reoccupied in 1732, and made the capital again, by King Sāttā. Sāttā abandoned Lovek following his father's death in 1736. See *Ratchaphongsawadan*, 115; *Phongsawadan khamen*, 195, and Eng Sut, 855.

accompanied by an unmarried female cousin named Sor.<sup>12</sup> These women gave him clothes and he "hurried after" them to Samrong Sen, a swampy region north of Lovek, near the mouth of the Tonle Sap.<sup>13</sup> Here he encountered a "young queen, princes, princesses, royal nephews and royal nieces; he also saw his own aunt, and his relations to seven degrees of kinship".<sup>14</sup> The "young queen" was probably Sāttā's rebellious wife, Sijhātā, who was in Samrong Sen at about this time.<sup>15</sup> During the narrator's stay there (and perhaps this is why he had gone) he courted and married a young woman, Pau, who had "large quantities of goods and slaves". When the couple returned to the "fortified city" (presumably Lovek)<sup>16</sup> they received titles from the "great prince", Thamrājā IV's eldest son. This prince, who bore his father's name and was to succeed him to the throne in 1748, had preceded his father into Cambodia, travelling via Angkor Wat.<sup>17</sup> The narrator's new title, *okñā surinthrāthibbāti*, carried with it, in the nineteenth century at least, revenues from the district of Roleia Pear, south of the Tonle Sap.<sup>18</sup> More interestingly, his wife's new title, *comtav sri ratna kesrā*, combined those of his aunt (*ratna kaññā*) and his deceased mother (*kañña kesrā*). This fact reveals the narrator's deep sense of obligation to these two women and suggests that his wife may even have been his aunt's daughter, if not the girl Sor mentioned earlier in the inscription.<sup>19</sup> No date is given for these events, which probably occurred in 1739 or 1740.

12) Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, Vol. 3, 311, suggests that the narrator was in prison, but the form his rescue took makes this unlikely.

13) The region has been famous since the 1870s for the neolithic artifacts discovered there. For its strategic importance, see Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, Vol. 1, 354.

14) For the concept of seven degrees, see Solange Thierry, "Contribution à une étude de la société cambodgienne", *L'Ethnographie* 58-9 (1964-1965) 63-70.

15) *Ratchaphongsawadan*, 115; *Phongsawadan khamen*, 198; Eng Sut, 866.

16) See Saveros Lewitz, "Quelques cas complexes de dérivation en cambodgien", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1969, Part 1, 43.

17) This prince expected to be crowned himself, according to Leclère (377).

18) A. Fourès, "Royaume du Cambodge. Organisation politique", *Excursions & Reconnaissances* 13 (1882), 169-211. In the 1790s, the title was associated with the ministry of justice: see Prince Damrong, 11.

19) For the mother's title, see *Silajavik*, 117. The Khmer word *pau*, although frequent as a proper name, also means merely "younger".

In 1741-1742, the inscription goes on, a royal personage referred to as the "revered father"—probably Thammrājā IV—gave the narrator the title he still bore in 1747—*okñā voñsā aggrāj*. In the eighteenth century, this official shared responsibilities with the minister of justice (the *yommrāj*) for the suppression of disorders.<sup>20</sup> In the nineteenth century, with similar duties, the office was part of the parallel administrative structure allotted to the second princely house, that of the *obbayorāj*, or prince who has abdicated.<sup>21</sup> This connection, and the absence of the phrase "ruling monarch" from the titles attached to the "revered father", suggests that in 1741-1742 Thammrājā IV was not fully in control of the kingdom. By 1744-1745, however, this situation appears to have changed, for the inscription tells us that a ruling monarch with some of the same titles as the "revered father" ordered the narrator to subdue bandits operating in five districts along the southern shore of the Tonle Sap. The narrator may still have had duties connected with one of these districts, Roleia Pear, and his expedition was apparently a success.<sup>22</sup>

In the summer of 1747, the narrator was ordered to raise troops to fight a "princess who was the daughter of the prince *brāh kaev fā*". No other source mentions her, or this rebellion. However, we know from the chronicles that the *brāh kaev fā* originally named by Thammrājā IV, prince Cān, had died in 1743. His widow, whom he had married when Thammrājā IV assumed the throne, soon married one of the king's own sons. Another son was then appointed *brāh kaev fā*.<sup>23</sup> This sequence of events may have insulted Cān's relations, who had been helpful in returning Thammrājā IV to power. A daughter from Cān's earlier marriage, owing nothing to the monarch, might thus have been able to rally troops whose loyalty was primarily to Cān. In any case, the rebellion apparently failed. For his generalship the narrator was offered the position of *okñā tejō*, with which to "consume"—or administer—the

20) Ahémond Leclère, *Les codes Cambodgiens* (2 vols., Paris, 1898), Vol. 2, 32, mentions this officer in connection with a law promulgated by King Sättā in 1723. See also Leclère, *Histoire*, 408, and Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*. Vol. 1, 236.

21) Etienne Aymonier, *Le géographie du Cambodge* (Paris, 1876), 42.

22) The inscription says that after the bandits were suppressed "commerce flourished, and goods went in and out", suggesting that the bandits had disrupted internal commerce at a time when Cambodia's access to the sea was blocked by the presence of a group of Sino-Vietnamese who administered the ports on the gulf. See Emile Gasparadonne, "Un chinois des mers du sud", *JA* 240 (1952), 363-386.

23) Eng Sut, 872; *Phongsawadan khamen*, 201.

important territorial division of Kompong Svay, north of the Tonle Sap.<sup>24</sup> This part of the inscription is obscure, but the narrator apparently refused the promotion, perhaps temporarily, choosing instead to travel to Angkor Wat.<sup>25</sup> His wife, his aunt, and several female relations went with him.

Here the biography stops, and the last lines of the inscription describe ceremonies at Brāh Bān in which the family took part. A curious feature of these ceremonies was the temporary entrance into religious life of several women, including the narrator's wife and aunt, but not the narrator himself. For their services in reciting prayers and the great Jataka, monks at the temple were offered silver, cloth and other objects. The inscription closes by recalling the narrator's mother and father, in whose honor an inscription had been incised onto a neighboring pillar in 1703.<sup>26</sup>

The 1747 inscription is the last extensive one at Angkor Wat and reveals the importance of the temple in Cambodian religious life barely a century before it was "discovered" by the French. The inscription itself is helpful for the political and social information it conveys. For example, the importance of women in the narrator's career, in the religious ceremonies at Brāh Bān, and in the two dynastic revolts mentioned in the inscription throws an interesting side-light onto the question of the dynamics of power at this time. The inscription also reveals a continuity of patronage and functions within a single bureaucratic career. Finally, the inscription provides valuable support for the chronicles and offers some clarifications in matters of dating. The length of time between Sāttā's departure and Thammrājā IV's assumption of power, the inscription suggests, lasted at least from 1737 to 1741-1742, and perhaps longer. The chronicles obliquely confirm this delay, without stressing dates, by spelling out the extensive set of patronage and marriage arrangements which Thammrājā IV made among his potential supporters before resuming the throne.<sup>27</sup> These arrangements seem to have disintegrated when Thammrājā IV died, in 1747-1748, and the dynastic turmoil which followed lasted for over thirty years.

24) For a discussion of this post, see Jean Imbert, *Histoire des institutions khmères* (Phnom Penh, 1961), 67.

25) Despite his refusal, the monarch appears to have given him the regalia of office.

26) This earlier inscription dates from Thammraja IV's first reign.

27) Eng Sut, 873-877.

### Translation

[To those who read what follows] greetings, good health, prosperity, victory.

In the year 1669 *saka*, year of the hare, month *magsir*, thirteenth waxing day, a Thursday, at an auspicious moment all the ranking members of the sacred order assembled, the lords of the ever prosperous community—superiors, teachers, elders and novices in the right proportions, as requested by *okñā voñsā aggrāj* and the lady *sri ratna kesrā* who had gone up [the steps] to [perform a ceremony with which to] earn merit, and had invited the monks to recite *bañsukula aunicā* at Brāh Bān.

When *okñā voñsā\** *aggrāj* was still [entitled] *copoña montri sanggrām*, the ruling monarch [of Cambodia] bid farewell and left Krung Thep, the great city (Ayudhya) and came to the region of Chantabori, where he ordered *copoñā montri sanggrām* to come first to the fortified city of Lovek and meet the lesser prince, whose title was *brāh kaev fū*.

In the year of the dragon, month *magh* [the narrator] was in difficulty, sad, poor, without riches or possessions. Then the lady *ratna kañna*, the younger sister of one of his parents, and an unmarried girl named Sor, a cousin, sent a silk skirt and a jacket to *copoña* in Lovek. He hurried after his relations to the region of Samrong Sen, where he met a young queen, princes, princesses, royal nephews and royal nieces; he also saw his own aunt, and his relations to seven degrees of kinship. He courted and took in marriage a young woman Pau, who had large quantities of goods and slaves.

[Having returned to] the fortified city, the great prince, whose title was *sri thammrājā*, bestowed the title of *okñā surinthrathibbāti*, and on the woman Pau that of *sri ratna kesrā*. Later the revered father, *baromnit brāh bāt barombupit*, bestowed the title of *okñā voñsā aggrāj*, in the year of the cock. In the year of the rat, the ruling monarch, *brāh bāt baromnit brāh bāt barombupit* ordered *okñā voñsā aggrāj* to assemble soldiers, slaves, dependants and relations to go out and subdue bandits in the districts of Roleia Pear, Borbaur, Klong, and Krakor. [The narrator] defeated the bandits, and made them resume their fealty to the ruling monarch. Then there was plenitude and abundance in the country; and the people were happy and at ease. Commerce. . . flourished\* and goods went in and out,

On Friday, the 3rd waning day, month *asadh*, year of the hare, *jai jeshthā thirāj rama thibbāthi baromanadh brāh bāt barombupit*, the ruling monarch, commissioned *okñā voñsā agg. . . \** to be a general. He accepted the royal command. . . \*, bowed, bid farewell, and went out to gather soldiers, conscripts, dependants and relations to confront and wage war against a princess who was the daughter of the *brāh kaev fā*. He fought the princess and defeated her, driving out, dispersing, seeking out and disintegrating [the enemy forces] so that they became aware of the ruling monarch's power. [Indeed, the victory was due to] the strategy, intelligence and tactics of *okñā voñsā aggrāj*, who planned and carried out attacks throughout the countryside, cutting across every road and path, until the forces, slaves and goods of the princess were led in [to the capital] and offered up [to the king].

Then *brāh bāt baromnit brāh bāt barombupit*, the ruling monarch, prepared an edict, benevolently bestowing upon *okñā voñsā aggrāj* the title of *okñā tejō*, to consume (administer) the province of Kompong Svay. [The narrator] implored the king, and did not accept the reward; (but ?) the king honored him with a gold plate and a four-tiered umbrella. [The narrator] bowed low and bid farewell to *brāh bāt baromnit brāh bāt barombupit*. He went away and came to earn merit at Brāh Bān.

[There he] entered into religious life the lady *ratna kannā*, his aunt; his wife, the lady *sri ratna kesrā*; a young woman Kim, who was a relative by marriage; and two nieces. These entered as nuns, to earn merit on a single day. For his aunt, the following monks were invited to recite *bānsukul annicā*: two superiors, five abbots, and eleven teaching monks. To recite on behalf of *okñā voñsā aggrāj* were one superior, one abbot, and two teaching monks. For the lady *ratna kesrā* there were one superior, two abbots, and six teaching monks. The following contributions were made: for each superior, an ounce of silver; for teaching monks, eight strings of coins per monk.

[When the monks had] finished reciting, the two superiors and the three abbots were each offered an ounce of silver, and teaching monks

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\* Lacuna in original,



were offered two *baht*. The two novices who had recited prayers were offered one *baht*, and the seventy novices who had [joined in chanting] *baṅsukul annicā* each received a string of coins.

Then the congregation was asked to recite the great Jataka, once, and Kuñ, an eight-year-old boy, was offered to the Law, along with three *baht*, and was repurchased for seven ounces of silver. The congregation was asked to record these actions, and to record the honor [which fell to those who] entered religious life. Other offerings [to the monks] included a carved box, a shoulder-bag, a length of white cloth, and a silk scarf for betel. The cost of musicians was seven *baht*. All the offerings totalled three *jing* of silver.

Those who made the offerings were *okñā voṅsā aggrāj*, the son of *okñā krālāhom senabortes* and of lady *kañna kesra*: the lady *ratnā kesrā*; and Hiiñ, Prom, and Kuñ. All of these people were eager to gain merit, and made these offerings to their parents and ancestors, to seven degrees of kinship.

They ask further to be granted great age, reaching five thousand rainy seasons, as well as wisdom and riches resembling those of (a mythical merchant named) Jotikasetti. Finally, they beg to be granted health and happiness until the time that they enter Nirvana.

