Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 51(1-2), pp 132–153 June 2020.
 doi:10.1017/S0022463420000235

The epistemological shift from palace chronicles to scholarly Khmer historiography under French colonial rule

Theara Thun

Identifying the role of colonial-sponsored institutions and written texts produced by local scholars, this article argues that, although Cambodian scholars' intellectual orientation was not necessarily restricted to French scholarship, French colonial rule had played the key role in introducing modern historiography and creating the platforms for the epistemological transition in Cambodia which underwent different categories of knowledge adoption and various projects of translation of local individuals. Capturing the dynamic of the epistemological transition allows us to highlight a broader picture of the interplay between a long-existing body of knowledge and more contemporary scholarship under Western colonisation.

Similar to many other parts of Southeast Asia, 'history' in the present-day sense, as a field of analysis of past events related to human activities, was not practised in Theravada Buddhist societies like Cambodia prior to the arrival of Western colonial rule. Instead, a literary tradition known as the '*bańsāvtār*' or 'chronicle' writing (called *yazawin* in Burmese and *phoṅsāvdan* in Thai and in Lao) was the most popular body of knowledge widely circulated within educated and religious circles. In Cambodia, traditional scholarship which had existed at least since the second half of the eighteenth century was not simply replaced by French historiography following the establishment of the colonial regime during the 1860s.[1] For the entire colonial period

Theara Thun is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. Correspondence in connection with this article should be addressed to: thearathun2@gmail.com. The author would like to thank Bruce Lockhart for carefully commenting on the content and editing the language of the article since its early drafts until the published version. He is also grateful to Maurizio Peleggi, Maitrii Aung-Thwin, Anne Hansen, and Kathryn Sweet for helpful comments on its early drafts. His sincere gratitude also goes to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the National University Singapore, the Harvard-Yenching Institute, and the International Institute for Asian Studies for their generous fellowships. Special thanks goes to the anonymous reviewers and the editor of *JSEAS* for their valuable comments.

1 Important 19th century *bańsāvtār* include the palace text of 1869 (École Française d'Extrême-Orient [EFEO] cat. no. P.Camb. 88); the *Nupprat(ṇ)* of 1878 (EFEO cat. no. P.Camb. 48); and the *bańsāvtār* of 1883 (see Jean Moura, *Le royaume du Cambodge, II* [Kingdom of Cambodia vol. II] [Paris: Leroux, 1883], pp. 3–183). For earlier scholarship on Khmer *bańsāvtār*, see Michael Vickery, 'Cambodia after Angkor: The chronicular evidence for the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries' (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1977); translated and annotated chronicles can be found in Mak Phoeun, *Chroniques Royales du Cambodge (De 1594 A 1677)* [Royal chronicles of Cambodia, 1594–1677] (Paris: EFEO, 1981); Khin Sok, *Chroniques*

(1863–1953) and after, although it had undergone partial transformation in format and content, this literary tradition continued to exist and played a key role in representing Cambodia's collective past as well as in shaping its national identity and culture.[2]

The existence of the *bańsāvtār* under French rule coincided with the emergence of a new body of scholarship later known in Cambodian as '*pravattisātr*' writing (a neologism for history) borrowed from Thai by Cambodian scholars who were inspired by colonial-era historiography. While '*sātr*' means role, lesson, or knowledge, '*pravatti*' probably developed from '*pavatti*', which refers to a collection of past events of a person, a monastery, or a royal court. *Pavatti* or *pravatti* came into use in the Khmer magazine *Kampuchèa Sauriya* (to be discussed in detail later) in 1926, and it was used to refer to a collection of past events concerning an abbot in Siem Reap.[3] In the same magazine in 1927, a local figure named Krasem also used *pravatti* as the title of a Khmer text he translated from Thai.[4] That Thai text[5] was originally written in French by Georges Coedès (1886–1969) and published in Hanoi in 1925.[6] The publications of the Thai and Khmer texts displayed a three-way connection (Khmer-French-Siamese) which characterised the way some scholarship was produced and circulated during those years. More interestingly, while the Thai text uses '*tamnan*'[7] (the term for a particular kind of history text, usually relating to a religious object or a particular site) in its title, the Khmer version has *pravatti* which came into use more frequently among Khmer scholars during the second half of the 1920s.

Prior to the twentieth century, *bańsāvtār* scholarship was essentially produced to provide a genealogy of rulers and an account of their deeds. Its contents have come down to us in a storytelling format and generally does not make an epistemological distinction between factual and fictional events. Three major themes characterise the representation of the past in the nineteenth-century *bańsāvtār*. First, all kings in the *bańsāvtār* are portrayed as Buddhist rulers (even those Angkor rulers who were actually devotees of Siva or Vishnu) and, among them, the important ones are depicted as having the attributes of a '*anak mān puṇy*' or 'man of merit'.

royales du Cambodge: De Baña Yat à la prise de Langvaek, Longvek, 1417–1595 [Royal chronicles of Cambodia: From Baña Yat to the taking of Longvek, 1417–1595] (Paris: EFEO, 1988).

2 These 20th-century texts include the *bańsāvtār* of 1904 (EFEO cat. no. P.Camb. 63) and the *bańsāvtār* of 1928 and its edited version of 1934 (Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, cat. no. Reel 69). Most of the 1928 edition was published by Eng Sut in 1969: see Eng Sut, *Eksār mahāpuras Khmer* [Documentation of Khmer heroes] (Phnom Penh, 1969). See further Theara Thun, '*Bańsāvtār*: The evolution of historiographical genres in colonial Cambodia' (Ph.D. diss., National University of Singapore, 2017), pp. 67–83.

3 'Ther pavatti rapas' Braḥgrū Thamcariyāvoṅs Et, cau adhikār Wat Damnak [Biography of Breḥgrū Thamcariyāvoṅs Et, abbot of Wat Damnak]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 1, 1 (1926–27): 35–8.

4 Krasem, 'Pravatti braḥ buddhrūp bumb [History of Buddhist votive tablets]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 2, 10 (1927): 689–96; 11 (1927): 719–27; 12 (1927): 773–81.

5 This Thai edition of Coedès' text was prefaced by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1862–1943), and no translator's name was mentioned. See Georges Coedès, 'Tamnan phra phim' [Story of Buddhist votive tablets] (Bangkok: Sophon-pipatthanakorn, 1926). I thank Thanapas Dej for helping me search for the original Thai text.

6 Georges Coedès, 'Tablettes votives bouddhiques du Siam [Buddhist votive tablets from Siam]', *BEFEO* 20 (1925): 29–42.

7 For more discussion about the use of the term in Thai context, see Charnvit Kasetsiri, 'Thai historiography from ancient times to the modern period', in *Perceptions of the past in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid and David Marr (Singapore: Heinemann Educational, 1979), pp. 156–70.

Second, the chronicles frequently emphasise the agency of supernatural forces which are depicted as having a direct role in causing many major events to take place. Finally, while the neighbouring courts of Siam and Vietnam are portrayed as both rivals and allies, the nineteenth-century *baṅsāvtār* tend to favour the Siamese over the Vietnamese court. Considered as part of royal property,[8] these texts and their production were intended to strengthen and promote the 'Buddhist kingship' under the reigning king since they had a role to play as objects encompassing the spiritual and political powers of a ruler who considered the texts as a display of his peaceful and harmonious reign.

The strengthening of French rule over the kingdom from the 1900s onwards not only paved the way for the French for a more active engagement in exploring the kingdom's cultural heritage, but also allowed them to produce a great amount of scholarship dealing with Cambodia's collective past, which later played a hegemonic role in replacing the more traditional understanding. Unlike in the *baṅsāvtār* texts that focus on stories concerning the royal lineage and activities of specific rulers, French scholarship emphasises the development of the Khmer polity from the early centuries until the time of their writing. 'Great kings' and 'national territory' are the predominant themes in French colonial historiography. Highlighting the changes in the cultural and political landscapes of Cambodia drawn on various sources including epigraphy and other local written texts, architecture, archaeology, and Chinese and Western accounts, the colonial notion of the past brought about an understanding of great ancient rulers within a broader Indianised framework that included kings who were devoted to Siva and Vishnu, not just Buddha.[9] Through this approach, French colonial scholarship also used epigraphy to produce a completely new list of kings, many of whom were not mentioned in the local texts, which had lists of kings not found in any inscription. Great kings were depicted with outstanding abilities in defeating domestic and external enemies through military campaigns and constructing religious monuments. Issues concerning Cambodia's past also comprised an understanding of how large Cambodia's territorial extent was during different periods. In this case, while the *baṅsāvtār* does not pay attention to the size of Cambodia as a geographical unit, colonial historiography tends to focus more on the expansion and contraction of the polity over time.

Besides its extensive knowledge production, the colonial regime initiated the establishment of institutions such as the École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), the Bibliothèque Royale (Royal Library), and l'Institut Bouddhique (the Buddhist Institute). These academic institutions played key roles in providing platforms for the emergence of several Cambodian individuals who engaged in the reproduction of French historiography and circulated it among Khmer readers.[10] This group of

8 David Chandler, 'Going through the motions: Ritual aspects of the reign of King Ang Duang of Cambodia (1848–1860)', in *Facing the Cambodian past: Selected essays 1971–1994*, ed. David Chandler (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1996), pp. 100–118.

9 The most complete early syntheses of Cambodian history by French scholars are Étienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge: Tome I, II, III* [Cambodia: vols. I-II-III] (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1900–04) and Adhémar Leclére, *Histoire du Cambodge* [History of Cambodia] (Paris: Geuthner, 1914).

10 For studies of Khmer scholars performing this role with other types of knowledge, see Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The cultivation of a nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008) and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

local scholars were among those who, for the first time, had begun to step outside the conventional knowledge of the *baṅsāvtār* tradition in order to engage with more recent history scholarship.

Given the important role of these Cambodian intellectuals, the main purpose of this essay is to address the three categories of the epistemological transition in which the perceptions of the past initially shifted from those of the *baṅsāvtār* tradition to the newer history scholarship published and promoted by the colonial regime. These categories include an early form of local scholars' engagement with French colonial scholarship, translating colonial versions of Cambodian history into Khmer, and the formulation of a new *pravattisātr* scholarship for Cambodia's collective past.

My aim is to uncover the driving forces and forms of intellectuals' engagement that signified the emergence of *pravattisātr* writing at the expense of *baṅsāvtār* scholarship. Tracing the process of knowledge transition from a long existing literary tradition to a more recent historiography, the article argues that, although Cambodian scholars' intellectual orientation was not exclusively restricted to French scholarship, colonial scholars played the key role in introducing newer historiography and creating the platforms for the epistemological tradition in Cambodia which underwent different forms of knowledge adoption and various projects of translation by local individuals.

An early intersection with French colonial scholarship

A prominent figure named Thiounn (1864–1946) was perhaps the best example representing a type of scholar who lived through the moment when modern perceptions toward the past began taking shape in Cambodia. Son of a Sino-Khmer businessman, Thiounn became a Khmer–French interpreter in 1883.[11] Two years later, he went to France and studied at l'École Cambodgienne de Paris (the Cambodian School of Paris).[12] After returning to Cambodia, he continued serving as a language mediator between Khmer and French, which paved his way to become the Minister of Palace and Finance in 1902. From then onwards, Thiounn soon became one of the most influential figures in colonial Cambodia who, a few years later, obtained another key position as the Minister of Fine Arts.

Thiounn's fluency in French and his close association with scholars like Étienne Aymonier (1844–1929) and artist George Groslier (1887–1945) motivated the deepening of his scholarly interest in Khmer culture, religion, and history. In 1903, he completed a hand-written manuscript which tells the story of the *Rāmakerti*, the Cambodian version of the *Ramayana*. This manuscript incorporated the captions of the *Rāmakerti* murals on the wall of the Silver Pagoda (Vihār Braḥkaev Marakat)

Anne Hansen, *How to behave: Buddhism and modernity in colonial Cambodia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

11 Sasagawa Hideo, 'Post/colonial discourses on the Cambodian court dance', *Southeast Asian Studies* 42, 4 (2005): 430. For more about Thiounn, see http://aefek.free.fr/pageLibre00010ca2.html (last accessed 9 Sept. 2019).

12 Khing Hoc Dy, *L'enseignement primaire au Cambodge depuis le protectorat français jusqu'en 1975* [Primary education in Cambodia from the French protectorate until 1975] (Phnom Penh: Angkor, 2014), p. 96.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

inside the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh.[13] Thiounn mentioned that he had spent his own private time and effort in 1911 to translate this manuscript into French and turn it into two bilingual volumes that consisted of 192 coloured illustrations. Moreover, in 1915 he completed another illustrated volume in French consisting of 72 coloured illustrations, this time telling the story of the Enlightenment of the Buddha.[14] However, as Penny Edwards' book reveals, Thiounn never got any of these volumes published due to the lack of interest of French publishers, who believed that the volumes would only attract a local rather than French audience.[15] Failing to publish these works did not lessen his interest in and commitment to producing knowledge on Khmer culture and history. Finally, in 1930, he successfully published a book in French on Cambodian dance.[16] Published in Hanoi, 500 copies were offered for sale at the Colonial Exposition in Paris and another 500 were sold and distributed in French Indochina.[17]

The book's claim, as stated in the preface, was to give a complete and accurate account of Cambodian dance. In his discussion, Thiounn drew on many aspects of court dance, including its origins, gestures, masks, costumes, and jewellery. Due to the strong influence of Siamese culture, which was evident since King Ang Duong's reign (r. 1848–60), Cambodian dance contained elements similar to those in the Siamese court. As the Minister of Palace and Fine Arts, however, Thiounn felt the need to look at this sophisticated cultural form within a discourse that demonstrates its deep-rooted originality within Khmer culture. He engaged in a written work that gave him a platform to deny Siam's influence and, at the same time, to formulate his own narrative discourse containing elements from both the colonial history scholarship and the *baṅsāvtār* narratives. In this sense, in Thiounn's formulation of the background of Khmer court dance, we find a type of discussion that mixes the *baṅsāvtār* narrative convention with the colonial historical discourse. Ignoring Siamese influence on Khmer court dance during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, he portrayed the origins of Khmer court dance as being contemporaneous with the construction of the Angkor temples (built between the ninth and thirteenth centuries). He did so by linking the modern Khmer dances to those depicted in the bas-reliefs on the Bayon temple and sculptures of Angkor-group temples.[18] Such a linkage was disingenuous because it ignored the considerable Siamese influences found in Khmer court dance in the mid-nineteenth century.

Thiounn also established a historical discourse that associated court dance with the reign of King Jayavarman II (r. 802–835), identified by French scholars as the founder of the Angkor era. He acknowledged this ruler — identified from

13 Thiounn, 'Rīoeṅ gaṃnūr Rāmakerti knuṅthev Braḥ Uposath Ratanarām (Vatt Braḥ Kaev) [Murals of the *Rāmakerti* in the Silver Pagoda (Vatt Braḥ Kaev)]', 1903. The manuscript is preserved by EFEO in Paris under cat. no. P.Camb. 142.

14 Ukñā Varvīeṅjāy Thiounn, 'Seckṭī adhepāy aṃbī Jātaka niṅ paṭhaṃ saṃbhaudh [A description of the *Jātaka* and a book launch]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 1, 1 (1926): 69–70.

15 Edwards, *Cambodge*, pp. 89, 191–2.

16 Samṭec Cauhvā Thiounn, *Danses cambodgiennes* [Cambodian dance] (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1930). The Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh reprinted the book under the same title in 1956.

17 Sasagawa, 'Post/colonial discourses on the Cambodian court dance', p. 430.

18 Thiounn, *Danses cambodgiennes*, p. 30.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

inscriptions, but not mentioned in traditional Cambodian texts — as a historical figure and the founder of the Angkor dynasty, but did not find the other information surrounding this king uncovered by the French worth mentioning. Instead, he associated Jayavarman II with King Ketumālā, legendary king recorded in the chronicle texts, claiming that the two figures were the same person.[19] Following this argument, he detailed the story of this legendary king, who had been depicted by the palace chronicles as one of the most significant Cambodian rulers prior to the fifteenth century, but who was absent from the colonial scholars' narrative as his name did not appear in any foreign accounts or inscriptions. The narrative about this king occupied the bulk of the section describing Ketumālā as a son of Indrā (Lord of Heaven), who was portrayed as having built the Angkor civilisation as well as constructed the Angkor temples.[20] In this regard, as Hideo Sasagawa has correctly observed in his examination of colonial and post-colonial Cambodian court dance, Thiounn established his ability to orchestrate the colonial narrative with the existing narratives, and construct a new discursive formation.[21]

Thiounn was able to accomplish this because he had lived through the moment when the perceptions about the past held in French history scholarship had begun to interface with those put forward in the *baṅsāvtār* writing. Having lived in and worked for the palace under Kings Norodom (r. 1860–1904), Sisowath (r. 1904–27), and Monivong (r. 1927–41), he shared a well-established traditional understanding of the country's past with others in the local elite, and in fact, was himself in charge of composing the *baṅsāvtār* manuscripts for the royal court from the early 1900s until the 1930s.[22] At the same time, he was strongly influenced by French colonial discourses on Angkor.

However, when Thiounn made the effort to formulate his own narrative on the origins and other elements of Cambodian dance, he selectively ignored the details of what French scholarship had established about the rulers of Angkor. Instead, he adapted the *baṅsāvtār* narrative — specifically the story of Ketumālā — and turned it into evidence to support his claim about the origins of court dance. In this case, his move demonstrated both his acceptance of and resistance to different elements of French colonial scholarship. (Although he did not explicitly challenge the latter, his linking of a historically attested ruler to a mythical figure would not have been endorsed by French scholars.) His scholarship embodies a particular body of narrative that was formulated and based on his personal understanding of knowledge available during his time. Thiounn's coexisting historical narrative disclosed an epistemological transition between the *baṅsāvtār* and the colonial historiographical ways of viewing Cambodia's past.

The pattern of Thiounn's narrative resembles that of a prominent Buddhist-educated scholar, Ind (1859–1925), who was well grounded in Buddhism and the Siamese language. Having received a Buddhist education from a very

19 Ibid., p. 27.
20 Ibid., pp. 27–9.
21 Sasagawa, 'Post/colonial discourses on the Cambodian court dance', p. 432. My own study of Thiounn's book leads me to agree with Sasagawa's conclusion.
22 For more discussion on Thiounn's involvement in producing these texts, see Thun, '*Baṅsāvtār*', pp. 69–75.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

young age, Ind spent seven years in the 1880s as a monk studying in Bangkok.[23] In his poem published posthumously in 1934, *Nirās Nagarvatt* (Travel to Angkor Wat), written to commemorate King Sisowath's visit to Angkor in 1909, Ind conveyed an understanding which closely resembled Thiounn's, regarding the portrayal of the founding of the Angkor dynasty and its glories by legendary King Ketumālā. He even believed that this fictitious ruler had his portrait carved on the bas-reliefs of the southern gallery of Angkor Wat.[24] Ind's assertion was contradicted by French scholar Aymonier, who in his 1904 study had identified the portrait as that of King Suryavarman II (r. 1113–45), now identified by some scholars as the builder of Angkor Wat.[25] In the same poem, however, Ind rejected the long-held view accounted in the *baṅsāvtār* that claimed Indrā had constructed the Angkor temples. Instead, he argued that the temples were built by meritorious ancient Khmer kings and that the sandstone used in the construction was taken from the nearby mountains.[26] In this respect, while to some extent holding on to what had been traditionally assumed about the ancient temples, Ind's poem at the same time conveys ideas that partially denied this long-existing understanding. His poem reveals a mixture of perceptions combining elements of both the *baṅsāvtār* and the more recent understandings in the interpretation of the history of Angkor as it moves towards a more rationalist and less supernatural view of the temple's construction.

This comparison shows that both Thiounn, who had received a French-style education, and Ind, who had been educated in a traditional Buddhist monastery, put forward similar interpretations of Cambodia's past. This is largely due to the fact that they both were equipped with similar conventional knowledge though, later on, similarly exposed to more recent notions, they incorporated these notions differently. Ind became a religious modernist who worked to promote a more rational Buddhist philosophy during the 1910s and the early 1920s,[27] whereas Thiounn, the epitome of the colonial official, translated the colonial knowledge associating Cambodia's past based on specific social, cultural, and political motivations. Nevertheless, the writings of both scholars are instances of an early form of the epistemological transition in the interpretation of the kingdom's past, a form which involved adaptations, resistance, conflicts, and coexistence of understandings.

Translating colonial versions of Cambodian history

When it comes to issues concerning translation of colonial history scholarship on Cambodia, Thiounn's case is once again worth examining more closely. From the time he began holding important positions as Palace and Finance Minister in 1902, most of his writings appeared in French. Even though some texts were originally written in Khmer, he managed to get them published in French translation. This was

23 Khing Hoc Dy, *Suttantprījā Ind niṅ snāṭai* [Suttantprījā Ind and works] (Phnom Penh: Angkor, 2012), p. 15.
24 Suttantprījā Ind, 'Nirās Nagarvatt', *Kampuchèa Sauriya*, 6, 7-8-9 (1934): 1–81.
25 Aymonier, *Le Cambodge: Tome III*, p. 230.
26 Ind, 'Nirās Nagarvatt', pp. 50–51.
27 During the 1920s, Ind established himself as the most prominent Cambodian Buddhist scholar who translated and produced a number of Khmer texts dealing with Buddhist philosophy. See Hansen, *How to behave*, p. 1.

partly because most of Thiounn's works were intended to provide communication between the royal palace and French colonial authorities. In the case of his illustrated manuscripts on the *Ramakerti* and the story of the Enlightenment of the Buddha, he intended to briefly explain the murals to French guests or tourists in order to help them understand the life-story of the Buddha, to whom all Cambodians were firmly devoted.[28] In this context, Thiounn acted as a cultural mediator who had an intention to transmit knowledge about Cambodian culture and religion to a French audience.

Interestingly, in contrast to Thiounn, another type of Cambodian intellectual viewed the task of knowledge transmission very differently. For them, it was the conversion of French scholarship into the Khmer vernacular that was most important as it allowed the circulation of French historical knowledge among a local audience. This marked another category of local scholars' response to the emergence of French colonial scholarship, following the development of intellectuals like Thiounn and Ind. Although most of the French texts selected for publication adopted perspectives that were in conflict with local traditional understandings, these intellectuals appeared to have a preference for colonial scholarship, as they believed it provided a more accurate sense and representation of the national past.

The main channels for transmitting such knowledge were colonial institutions like the Royal Library, founded in 1925 from the conversion of the *Khemara: Paṇṇālăy* (Khmer Library), and the Buddhist Institute, founded in 1930. When these scholarly institutions were established, they were under the leadership of French scholar Suzanne Karpelès (1890–1968), who prior to her arrival in Cambodia had spent a few years in Siam studying Siamese Buddhist texts. During her time working in Cambodia (1925–41), Karpelès played a predominant role in preserving and promoting Cambodian Buddhism and culture.[29] In 1926, she helped to establish the magazine *Kampuchèa Sauriya*, one of the earliest Khmer-language publications, which operated under the Royal Library until 1943, when the latter was merged with the Buddhist Institute.[30] In 1930, she also helped to found the Buddhist Institute, which aimed to produce scholarship in Khmer on Buddhism. Along with new books published by the Institute and the Library, *Kampuchèa Sauriya*, which continued to exist until 1974, again from 1994 to 2006, and then again from 2014 to the present, broadly covered topics including religion, literature, philosophy, arts, folklore, ceremonies, archaeology, politics, and history. Its audience was mainly educated urban readers and monks in Phnom Penh and other major towns in the country. This magazine opened up a platform for local intellectuals, especially those working in the Royal Library, to serve as mediators in transmitting and circulating more recent scholarship among Khmer readers.

From the start of *Kampuchèa Sauriya* until the mid-1930s, the major texts in Khmer dealing with Cambodian history which appeared in the magazine were the translation efforts of Choum Mau (1900–1944). Given his well-grounded experience

28 Thiounn, 'Seckṭī adhepāy aṃbī Dasjātaka niṅ paṭhaṃ saṃbhodh [A description of the ten teachings in the *Tripitaka* and a book launch]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 1, 1 (1926–27): 69–91.

29 For a detailed discussion about Karpelès, see Edwards, *Cambodge*, pp. 186–97; Khing Hoc Dy, 'Suzanne Karpelès and the Buddhist Institute', *Journal of Siksācakr* 8–9 (2006–07): 55–9.

30 Sasagawa, 'Post/colonial discourses on the Cambodian court dance', p. 432.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in Khmer linguistics[31] and his deep knowledge of French, he was entrusted by Karpelès to take charge of publishing *Kampuchèa Sauriya* between 1926 and 1935. Besides overseeing and ensuring the regular publication of the magazine, Choum Mau actively participated in translating major texts from French into Khmer, especially those related to the Angkor temples. Most of the translated texts which appeared in the magazine were written by French scholars affiliated with the EFEO, including Louis Finot (1864–1935), Victor Goloubew (1878–1945), Coedès, and Henri Marchal (1876–1970). Choum Mau simply translated these texts without providing any commentary, and it appears quite clear that he was supporting the (revisionist) French views of Cambodian history.

Among the most important pieces Choum Mau translated was Finot's writing on the origins of the Angkor temples.[32] The Khmer version was divided into three parts that appeared in three separate issues of the magazine in 1927.[33] In his text, Finot sought an answer for the mysteries surrounding the construction of the Angkor Thom capital complex and the Bayon temple.[34] He rejected the claim made by other French scholars that King Yasovarman (r. 889–910) was behind the construction of the capital as well as the Bayon, arguing that this king had not been a Buddhist and that his temples, like the Bakheng, differed vastly in style from the Bayon. Drawing from inscriptions, art, and architecture, Finot discussed the origins of the Bayon, which was originally dedicated to Mahayana Buddhism, concluding that both the capital and the temple were built during the reign of Jayavarman II. Finot's argument would prove to be historically inaccurate, however, as the Bayon was shown to have been constructed under King Jayavarman VII (r. 1181–1220?).

In the same year, Choum Mau translated another article on Angkor which had been published five years earlier by Goloubew.[35] He divided Goloubew's piece into two parts and published them in the *Kampuchèa Sauriya* of 1927.[36] In the article, Goloubew gave an extensive account related to the discoveries of the Angkor temples. He recalled the times Angkor was surrounded by forest and the moment when this ruined city was recorded in several Western travellers' accounts from the seventeenth century onwards. Goloubew highlighted the work of Henri Mouhot (1826–61),[37] who

31 Besides actively participating in numerous translations of French texts into Khmer, Choum Mau was a key member of a commission created to work on the establishment of the first-ever Cambodian dictionary. The first volume was published in 1938 and volume 2 in 1943. See Khing, 'Suzanne Karpelès and the Buddhist Institute', p. 56.

32 Louis Finot, *L'origine d'Angkor* [The origin of Angkor] (Phnom Penh: Imprimerie Nouvelle Albert Portail, 1927).

33 'Ṭoem kaṃnoet prāsād Angkor [The origin of Angkor]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 2, 3 (1927): 253–60; 4 (1927): 395–402; 6 (1927): 482–500.

34 A good overview of new perspectives on the Bayon is found in Joyce Clark, ed., *Bayon: New perspectives* (Bangkok: River Books, 2007).

35 Victor Goloubew, 'Introduction à la connaissance d'Angkor [Introduction to knowledge about Angkor]', *Bulletin de l'Association française des Amis de l'Orient 4* (Paris: Musée Guimet, 1922), pp. 33–69.

36 'Aṃbī ṭoemhetu naikār ṭael bānsgāl prāsād Angkor [Introduction to knowledge about Angkor]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 2, 11 (1927): 728–49; 12 (1927): 782–99.

37 Henri Mouhot was a French naturalist and explorer who visited the Angkor area in January 1860. His travelogue alerted the West to the ruins of Angkor. See Henri Mouhot, *Voyage dans les royaumes de Siam, de Cambodge, de Laos et autres parties centrales de l'Indo-chine* [Travel to the kingdoms of Siam, Cambodia, Laos and other central parts of Indochina] (Paris: Hachette, 1868).

had claimed that the locals supposedly lacked any clear sense of who had built these temples and how they had been built. Later on, besides giving an account of the early French explorations of the area, Goloubew claimed that Angkor was absent from contemporary Khmer chronicle texts, an incorrect statement as the chronicle texts do mention Angkor by describing it in more general and mythical terms. Drawing on major French scholarship on Angkor during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Choum Mau valued this new knowledge, which revealed that the Khmer kingdom had been powerful and much bigger between the ninth and thirteenth centuries than it was, in the 1920s. Obviously, Goloubew's article highlights not only the accomplishments of colonial rule in returning Angkor to Cambodia,[38] but also sheds light on French contributions to the production of knowledge and the protection of the temples from destruction by the tropical weather and the jungle.

The two translated texts, both of which present information on the origins of Angkor, represent different aspects of the larger French narrative. Finot's piece draws on a historical discourse specifically related to the Angkor Thom capital and the Bayon, while Goloubew's narrative emphasises the discovery and protection of the Angkor temples by the French colonial government during the 1920s. While the two articles both address knowledge about Angkor, the translator's intention in publishing them in the magazine at this point in time remains doubtful. Did Choum Mau select them because of his personal interest in these new interpretations of Cambodia's past? Or did his French masters like Karpelès assign him to translate and circulate the French texts among the Khmer audience? To address these questions, it is necessary to look at some of the other translations he produced.

In the *Kampuchèa Sauriya* of 1934, Choum Mau published a translation of then EFEO director Cœdès' public lecture, delivered at the Louis Finot Museum in Hanoi on 6 March 1933.[39] Appearing as the first text in the issue, the Khmer version of Cœdès' talk focused on Khmer monuments in relation to history, kings, and religions. He began by laying out what he called the 'Khmer-temple-map', which covered the area from the Gulf of Siam to Vientiane and from Brai Nagar (Saigon) to the Chao Phraya valley. The territory within this area included the current Cambodia, the greater part of Cochinchina, the southern and central parts of Laos, and the entire eastern part of Siam — roughly the extent of the Angkor empire at its peak. Cœdès noted that there were Khmers in the mountainous northern part of the Ṭaṅrek as well as in the southern valleys of this mountain range. He then went on to raise the following questions: Which group of Khmers actually built all these monuments? Were those ancient Khmers actually the same as the current ones who regarded these enormous temples as the works of Indrā? For Cœdès, the answers to these questions were obvious. Since the oldest temple in the region contained inscriptions composed in part in Sanskrit and in part in Khmer in a local script little

38 The whole territory around Angkor had fallen under Siam's control by the end of the eighteenth century. In the early 1900s Bangkok returned the territory to Cambodia — more precisely to French Indochina — in exchange for the return of Siamese territory still occupied by France following the 1893 Paknam Incident and the abolition of extraterritoriality for French Asian subjects in the country.
39 'Aṃbī prāsād purāṇ nūv sruk Khmer [Ancient temples in Cambodia]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 6, 4-5-6 (1934): 5–45.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

different from contemporary Khmer, he argued it could be assumed that the builders of these temples were the ancestors of the current Khmer people.[40]

In subsequent parts of his lecture, the EFEO director projected onto early twentieth-century Cambodia a long linear past, beginning in the early centuries of the Christian era with the Funan civilisation. While chronologically drawing on a long historical development based on the names of major monarchs and their capitals and temples, he identified the Angkor Wat builder, whom local scholar Ind earlier had believed to be Ketumālā, as Suryavarman II.[41] Additionally, when coming to the story about the Bayon, Cœdès reviewed French scholarship produced prior to 1929 and rejected all previous ideas and explanations about the temple. He asserted that it was Jayavarman VII, who had actually built the Angkor Thom capital and the Bayon.[42] On this aspect, Cœdès went into much detail to support this new interpretation drawing on temple architecture, inscriptions, and new archaeological findings. In the last part of the lecture, he focused on the influences of the major Indian religions, Hinduism, and Buddhism, on the social and political structures of ancient Cambodian society.

Perusal of this additional translation of a key work by Cœdès shows that Choum Mau's roles as a French–Khmer translator and magazine editor-in-chief was more complex than was evident from his translations of the two earlier French texts. Through this text, he acted as a mediator transmitting scholarly works on Cambodia's national past by a prominent colonial scholar to a Khmer audience. Noticeably, this text represented the first appearance in Khmer of what can be called the complete French-created 'master narrative' of Cambodian history, based on the Funan-Chenlā-Angkor sequence of polities. This new knowledge was chiefly the result of French scholars' rejections of all information given by existing local sources about the period prior to the thirteenth century and their prioritisation of information from Chinese texts. Since the late nineteenth century, when examining understandings related to Angkor, colonial scholars tended to refer to the existing local knowledge about the temples, including that found in *baṅsāvtār*, only to reject it because of what they considered to be its questionable evidence and its heavily fictionalised content.

However, at the same time it must be noted that the three texts Choum Mau dealt with alluded to conflicts among French scholars in their interpretations of particular issues. Goloubew, who wrote about Angkor in 1922, placed high value on what the French had accomplished, while he paid little attention to the local accounts which showed that Angkor had never disappeared from local knowledge. With regard to Finot's piece, even though his paper was rather specific, his interpretations emerged from his rejections of both the local accounts and what earlier French scholars had written about the Bayon.[43] This pattern becomes even more obvious when reading the transcript of Cœdès' lecture in 1933, which refuted explanations of many aspects

40 Ibid., pp. 7–8. Although Cœdès did not elaborate this point, he was probably responding to claims by other French scholars that those temples could not have been built by the Khmers.
41 Ibid., pp. 7–15.
42 Ibid., p. 33.
43 Those earlier French scholars include Aymonier, whose book published in the early 1920s mistakenly depicts the royal city of Angkor Thom being built during Yasovarman's reign between the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Cambodia's past given previously by his French colleagues and, at the same time, tried to offer new theories to his audience.

To return to Choum Mau's case, along with transmitting what the French had written about Angkor, his translations and publications also conveyed the ideas that display the contestations and debates among French scholars. Although he never specifically pointed out these conflicts, they arose in the context in which colonial intellectual hegemony was continually being extended, in part through its cultural, historical, and archaeological projects in the kingdom. In addition, the French texts that Choum Mau translated, particularly Cœdès' lecture, contained ideas and information that gave an impression of the vastness of the ancient national territory as well as the glorious civilisation of Angkor, points which had never been explicitly mentioned by the *baṅsāvtār*.

In addition to the three articles mentioned earlier, he translated several other texts related to Angkor before he left the magazine in 1934 to take up several other administrative positions outside Phnom Penh.[44] One of them appeared as a book authored by Cœdès on Jayavarman VII, published by the Royal Library in 1935.[45] Another one was Marchal's piece on the architecture of Angkor Wat, published in an issue of the *Kampuchèa Sauriya* in 1936.[46] In order to get some access to Choum Mau's own ideas on Cambodian history, it is worth looking more closely at the contents of these two texts.

Both Cœdès and Marchal elaborated their research findings with the intention of conveying new understandings about Cambodia's past, particularly about its ancient monarchs and temples. Cœdès' extensive historical and archaeological research on Angkor allowed him to draw a more detailed picture of an ancient monarch, who, as reflected in the title of his book, he regarded as the most celebrated king in Cambodian history. Besides depicting Jayavarman VII's family background, the author provided an account of the great successes the king had achieved in stabilising his kingdom from wars, enlarging its size, establishing a strong administrative structure, and building religious and public infrastructure. Aside from highlighting these celebrated achievements, however, Cœdès voiced a strong critique by blaming Jayavarman VII for leaving a destructive legacy after his reign because of his excessive programme of building.[47]

Marchal, an architect who had managed the Angkor Conservation project in the name of the EFEO since 1916, focused specifically on the structural organisation of Angkor Wat. He regarded this temple as one of the greatest buildings not only in Cambodia but in the whole world.[48] Comparing it to several other temples, the author studied its geographical location, size, design, and the functions of different locations

980s and the 910s. See Étienne Aymonier, *Histoire de l'Ancien Cambodge* [History of ancient Cambodia] (Strasbourg: Nouveau Journal de Strasbourg, 1920), pp. 83–106.

44 In 1944, the Royal Library announced the passing of Choum Mau, at the age of 44. See 'Bidhī pūjāsab Ukña Choum Mau [Funeral of Ukña Choum Mau]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 16, 9 (1944): 459–63.

45 Georges Coedès, *Kaṃbūl stec kruṅ Kampuchea: Jayavarman VII* [A great king of Cambodia: Jayavarman VII], trans. Choum-Mau (Phnom Penh: Bibliothéque Royale, 1935).

46 'Aṃbī vidhī kăsāṅ prāsād Angkor Wat [The building of the Angkor Wat]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 8, 5 (1936): 75–98.

47 Coedès, *Kaṃbūl stec kruṅ Kampuchea*, pp. 50–56.

48 'Aṃbī vidhī kăsāṅ prāsād Angkor Wat', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 8, 5 (1936): 77.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

within the vicinity of the temple. Furthermore, Marchal criticised the construction style of the Bayon, the most important temple of Jayavarman VII. He claimed that this temple was built out of the 'drunken imagination' of this king, and thus signified the gradual downfall of Khmer-temple constructing skills.[49]

These two texts, compared to the previous three, conveyed a mixture of knowledge of Cambodia's past. While depicting the greatness of the ancient monarchs and temples, they also contained information reflecting another side of Cambodia's past, namely its allegedly megalomaniac monarchs (notably Jayavarman VII, who was 'discovered' by French scholars in Angkorean epigraphy), destructive wars, and defeats. In this respect, Choum Mau, as the translator, transmitted critical and negative evaluations found in the works of colonial scholars like Cœdès and Marchal to his Khmer readers. However, these messages make it difficult to give a satisfactory answer to the question about whether his translations and publication of these texts were prompted by his own choice. The answer might possibly be related to Choum Mau's scholarly interest as well as his intention to give Khmer readers broader exposure to the different French views so that they could see how the colonial narrative of Cambodia's past was evolving.

Choum Mau's translations which appeared in the *Kampuchèa Sauriya* and elsewhere were not limited to the five texts presented above. Throughout his time working for the magazine, he had done extensive work in translating French documents into Khmer, including those related to Khmer and general Buddhism, artistic objects, rituals and ceremonies, literature, philosophy, speeches of colonial officers, and reports of the activities of the Royal Library. In these texts he occasionally mentioned in a preface that library head Karpelès had given him instructions to translate and publish them.[50] However, this does not imply that, as editor-in-chief, Choum Mau himself did not have any influence over such decisions. As we can see in later issues of the *Kampuchèa Sauriya*, the contents of the magazine would noticeably change when new editors took charge. Therefore, it is safe to say that Choum Mau's translating and publishing decisions, though not completely independent, were at least autonomous to a certain degree.

When examining Choum Mau's translations in a broader context, it appears that his case shared some similarities with Thiounn's works. It is worthy of notice that Thiounn's book on Cambodian dance came out in 1930, the same time Choum Mau was working for the library. Though Thiounn occupied a much higher and more influential position than Choum Mau, they both worked as mediators who attempted to bridge gaps in knowledge between the French colonisers and the Cambodian public. Both of them dealt with flows of knowledge between French and Khmer and were inspired by the French language and culture. However, they were working in opposite directions. While Thiounn saw his mission as translating Khmer texts into French, Choum Mau did the opposite by converting the colonial history scholarship, which was initially based on the translation of Khmer inscriptions and *baṅsāvtār* texts into French, into Khmer.

49 Ibid., pp. 75–6.

50 'Dharmdesnā rapas' lok Kuṃmaṅdaṅ Robert aṃbī Buddhsāsnā nau srok Dīpe [Lecture of Commander Robert on Tibetan Buddhism]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 1, 1 (1926–27): 63.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Seen from a colonial perspective, Choum Mau helped to accelerate the flow of the colonial production of knowledge to the Cambodian audience. While most French scholars' writings were written in French and published either in Hanoi or in the metropole (where information produced by the Cambodian EFEO branch was disseminated), Choum Mau's translation works essentially give evidence of how this scholarship had taken roots inside the country. In other words, the emergence of individuals like him significantly helped to explain the process whereby colonial scholarship was brought into conflict at the local level with long-held knowledge and, later on, assumed the dominant role. Looked at from a local perspective, Choum Mau's story reveals that translation and publication were a kind of engagement with colonial knowledge that could be carried out among local scholars. Although they themselves were not the original authors of those texts, having their names and official titles as *anak prae saṃruol* (translators) displayed on the opening page of the texts, together with their own version of written Khmer, indicated their crucial and critical engagement with the scholarship produced by French scholars. It was those colonial scholars who helped to make Khmer epigraphy a regular tool of these and later Cambodian historians where it had not been previously used.

Formulating a new pravattisātr narrative with a nationalistic view

Apart from Choum Mau, there were a few other local scholars affiliated with the Royal Library who also produced Khmer articles for the *Kampuchèa Sauriya*. Among them, a particular individual named Krasem played an active role. This figure, whose background is virtually unknown, worked for the magazine from 1927 until the last years of the colonial regime. Due to his long-lasting involvement, Krasem's role in the magazine as well as in the larger Cambodian intellectual circle was influential. As in the case of Choum Mau, at the early stage of his contributions most of Krasem's works were translations of foreign-language texts. Later on, he began to produce his own writings, which touched upon a range of topics, foremost history. Through the pages of the magazine, Krasem established himself as yet another intellectual who had an interest in traditional culture and Buddhism and, at the same time, showed a strong motivation in formulating Cambodia's national historical narrative.

Perhaps one of the major differences between the works of Choum Mau and Krasem concerns the languages in which they had competence. Krasem's translations into Khmer were from Siamese sources (he appears to have been the first secular-educated Cambodian scholar to utilise these), and included the *Mahabharata* epic, a transcript of Prince Damrong's lecture on the history of Siamese Buddhism, Cœdès' article on the history of votive tablets, and several other texts extracted from books in Thai. Some of these works were most likely selected because of the scholarly interest of Karpelès, who had studied Siamese Buddhist tradition and language. For example, in his preface to the Khmer version of the *Mahabharata*, Krasem mentioned Karpelès' request to make this epic available in Khmer after he had taken her to see the bas-reliefs depicting the tale on the wall of Angkor Wat.[51]

51 'Rīoeṅ Mahābhārata: [Story of the *Mahabharata*]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 2, 3 (1927): 285–6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Krasem's affinity with Siamese scholarship revealed another influence on Khmer scholars' cultural and intellectual orientation, which was not restricted to French scholarship. Just like Ind, who had studied in Siam during the 1880s and was well grounded in Siamese culture and language, Krasem and many other Khmer intellectuals and members of the *sangha* (monkhood) during the 1930s and 1940s had undergone a thorough Siamese-grounded education. The emergence of these scholars, in fact, put them in opposition to other local scholars like Thiounn, who had tended to downplay Siamese influence on Khmer culture.

From his Khmer texts published in the *Kampuchèa Sauriya*, it is evident that Krasem's early interests lay primarily in the history of religion. Besides the *Mahabharata*, his major contributions to the magazine are his translations of the scholarly works of Cœdès and Damrong.[52] While the former tracks the historical roots of Buddhism through votive tablets in the region, Damrong's lecture examines the historical background of how Buddhism became established in Siam. Later on, Krasem became interested in producing his own writings on the history of Cambodia's religions and its ancient rulers. Entitled '*Sāsnā pavatti*', which means history of religions, he finished the text in 1932, and it was published in the magazine between 1933 and 1936. He indicated that he undertook this work because when he was a tour guide in the Angkor area between 1926 and 1927, the Protectorate administration had asked him to write an explanation of the different religions associated with the ancient temples.[53] Therefore, besides incorporating a detailed narrative on Buddhism and Hinduism, Krasem embedded in his text a lengthy account of the history of ancient Khmer kings, together with their temples, which recognised the coexistence of the two religious systems in Cambodian history.

In his writing, Krasem showed a stronger appreciation of French colonial scholarship and greater skill at adopting more recent historical frameworks than Thiounn. While arranging his narrative chronologically, based on the various reigns of the ancient monarchs, he regularly drew on information derived from the *baṅsāvtār* texts to elaborate on or make comparisons with French scholarship. Interestingly, Krasem's case revealed another form of coexistence between *baṅsāvtār* and colonial historiographical notions of the collective past at that particular point in time. To see what form this coexistence took, it is worth examining his writing in detail.

Krasem's formulation of religions unfolded all the way from information related to Buddhism to the narratives entirely associated with Cambodian dynastic history. The author began with his argument about the origins of the Khmer people, claiming that they were not originally from the land of Suvaṇṇabhūmi but were, as evident from the earliest inscriptions and sculptures in Cambodia, emigrants from South India.[54] He referred to prominent scholars on ancient history like Damrong and

52 'Paṭhkathā braḥ Damrong Rajanubhab [Lecture of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 3, 4 (1930): 95–101; 5 (1930): 125–36); 6 (1930): 155–63.

53 Krasem, 'Sāsnā pavatti [History of religions]', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 6, 1-2-3-4-5-6 (1933): 161.

54 'Suvaṇṇbhūmi' or 'Suvarnbhumi', which literally means golden land, is a famous term with Saṅskrit and Pāli origins and usually referred to the territory located either in Southeast Asia or in Southern India. The term has been the subject of debate among scholars and nationalist figures who attempt to claim their own country as the real 'Suvarnabhumi'. Krasem claimed that 'Suvaṇṇbhūmi' referred to the entire Southeast Asian mainland, including Burma, Mon, Lan Na, Laos, Siam, Cambodia, and Vietnam. See Krasem, 'Sāsnā pavatti', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 6, 7 (1934): 114.

Cœdès to support this argument.[55] Without mentioning the people who inhabited Cambodia prior to this supposed arrival of the Khmers, Krasem then asserted that the Khmers migrated to the country due to commercial considerations and war, and that these migrants were the *Khmer Ṭoem* (original Khmers).[56] According to him, after a while these people assumed dominance over the locals due to the advanced knowledge, traditions, and civilisation of their ethnic group compared to the other ethnicities in the region.[57]

The author's claim about the origins of the Khmers in this respect represented a completely different view from what the *baṅsāvtār* had said about this particular issue. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century *baṅsāvtār* texts neither emphasise the geographical origin of the Khmers nor recount any information relating to interactions between locals and migrants from South India. The main version of the story found in the *baṅsāvtār* focused on the legendary King Braḥ Thoṅ, who was described as being in conflict with his father and then fleeing to an island where a Cham king was ruling. Later Braḥ Thoṅ forced the Cham king to leave the island and took it over. Soon after, Braḥ Thoṅ married a lady named Somādevī, whose father was a nāg-king (King of the water).[58] In this sense, while the *baṅsāvtār* texts make hardly any claim about the origins of the Khmer, Krasem's assertion introduced a different view towards the early part of Cambodia's past. He eventually created a new nationalistic discourse drawing on the significance of searching for the origins of the Khmer through building the connection with other well-known ethnic groups such as those in India. This view might have been motivated by Krasem's readings of the works of Damrong and Cœdès and his intention to extend the Cambodian past back in time as far as possible to assert the seniority of Cambodia over neighbouring kingdoms like Siam, which did not come into existence until after the migration of Tai-speaking peoples into the region. This motivation was parallel to what Luang Wichitwathakan (1898–1962) did in his writings in the late 1920s and early 1930s by glorifying the Thai race at the expense of others, including the Cambodians and people of the islands in the Pacific Ocean who were considered uncivilised.[59]

When discussing Cambodia's dynastic history, Krasem tried to find a correspondence between the myth found in Chinese sources for the origins of the pre-Angkorean polity known to them as Funan and propagated by French scholars about a Brahmin named Hunṭīen (usually rendered as the Indian name Koṭiṇyā) and a local queen named Līvyī, and a corresponding Cambodian tale recounted in the *baṅsāvtār* texts. According to Krasem, the queen in the Funan myth was equivalent to Nāṅnāg or Nāg-lady, who according to traditional texts had ruled over a country which was then Cambodia with a capital named Vedyādhapura: or Nagar Purī. In those early years, he wrote, there were Khmer ethnic groups who had originally come from India by ship led by a captain known in Chinese as Hunṭīen, whom the royal *baṅsāvtār* had possibly referred to as Braḥ Thoṅ. He had come to inhabit Līvyī's

55 Krasem, 'Sāsnā pavatti', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 7, 1-2-3a (1935): 11.
56 Ibid., p. 13. It is possible that he meant to clearly distinguish between the native Khmer and the more recent Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, although he does not make this explicit.
57 Ibid.
58 See *Nupprat(ṇ)*, p. 6.
59 Charnvit, 'Thai historiography from ancient times to the modern period', p. 167.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

capital. Later, Hunṭien went to war with Līvyī, defeated her and took her as his wife. According to Krasem, because of her beauty, which was as appealing as the full moon, King Hunṭien gave her a new royal title, Somādevī. At the same time, the author raised the possibility that Somādevī might be the queen known in the *baṅsāvtār* as Dāvatī. Fusing the Funan myth found in the Chinese sources (including the names of the protagonists) with indigenous Khmer beliefs, he went on to comment on the marriage between Hunṭien and Līvyī which, he believed, had encouraged more and more Khmers to come to Cambodia and had led to the beginning of the Khmer dynasty.[60] Thus a Chinese version of Cambodian history 'discovered' and disseminated by French scholars was now being 'localised' and grafted onto an indigenous version.

From this point onwards, the Khmer dynastic historical narrative of Krasem turned into a summary of French historical writings. Without any reference to the palace *baṅsāvtār*, he adopted from colonial scholars the complete historical framework and information about the titles of the kings, the years of their reigns, religions, and temples. He accepted the term 'Chenlā' for the last pre-Angkorean polity, a name — like Funan — derived from Chinese sources by French scholars, and agreed with the idea (derived from local epigraphy) that King Jayavarman II had been successful in liberating Cambodia from foreign invasions in the early 800s. He also accepted the interpretation of French scholars made during the late 1910s and greater part of the 1920s — though later rejected — that this same king was the builder of the Angkor Thom capital and the Bayon.[61] Moving to the reign of Suryavarman II, Krasem depicted him as a warrior who had defeated both internal and external enemies and was successful in placing the Cham kingdom under the Angkor Empire. Additionally, he asserted that it was this king who had built the temple of Angkor Wat and ordered the carvings of his battles against the Cham King and his own portrait on the bas-reliefs of the temple.[62] The author ended his narrative on Angkor with the reign of King Jayavarman VII.

Furthermore, Krasem's identification of the king portrayed on the temple bas-reliefs as Suryavarman II differed from that of earlier local scholars like Ind. As pointed out earlier, according to local oral and written traditions, it was Ketumālā who had been depicted as the builder of the Angkor Wat. Similarly, Thiounn, in his *Cambodian dance*, found a need to present the story of this legendary king in order to construct his discourse on the origins of Cambodian dance. However, when later scholars like Krasem, who was also well grounded in traditional culture, abandoned this long-existing understanding in favour of the new knowledge of the French, it showed the strong influence of colonial scholarship on *baṅsāvtār* scholarship, which it called into question.

Most likely, this influence had to do with Krasem's earlier experience as a tour guide in the Angkor area and as a scholar at the Royal Library. While his year of experience (1926–27) working around the ancient temples allowed him to familiarise himself with the artistic and architectural styles of those religious monuments, his affiliation with the library put him in touch with local texts like the *baṅsāvtār*

60 Krasem, 'Sāsnā pavatti', *Kampuchèa Sauriya*, 7, 1-2-3a (1935): 14–16.
61 Ibid.: 9–22. Aymonier also shared this view. See Étienne Aymonier, *Un aperçu de l'histoire du Cambodge* [An overview of the history of Cambodia] (Paris: A. Challamel, 1918), pp. 19–20.
62 Krasem, 'Sāsnā pavatti', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 7, 1-2-3 (1935): 94–5.

which were collected and kept there. His employment in the library also gave him exposure to what French scholars had written and said about the temples. A major reason for his preference for French scholarship was most likely due to the mythical nature of the *bańsāvtār* texts and their lack of clear information about Angkor and the Khmer religions. As a tour guide, he needed accurate detailed information about those temples, including their builders, bas-reliefs, architecture, functions, artistic and religious meanings, and a chronology to draw on in order to consistently elaborate on the ancient city of Angkor. In these respects, French scholarship obviously fulfilled his needs since many of the visitors he guided around Angkor were foreigners with whom he interacted in French and who expected him to provide them with 'factual' information about its history. This is probably a key factor which played a major role in changing his whole view on Cambodia's past.

Moreover, when Krasem became involved in producing Khmer texts for *Kampuchèa Sauriya*, his inspiration by more recent scholarship became predominant in his narrative style and content. His adaptation of French historical discourses was not only an act of reproducing and circulating colonial scholarship at the local level. As we have seen, the ideas Krasem adopted from French scholarship, regarding the claim that Jayavarman II was the builder of the Angkor Thom capital as well as the Bayon, were later rejected by Cœdès and subsequently by other historians. In this sense, Krasem's writings presented another form of the epistemological transition among local intellectuals in moving towards more recent scholarship when viewing their country's past. Even more significantly, the case also reveals that the changes in Cambodian historical discourse were shaped by, and kept up with, those taking place within French scholarship.

Nevertheless, in Krasem's religious history text, particularly in the early section, he frequently provided references to what the palace chronicles had mentioned about early Cambodian rulers like Braḥ Thoṅ and Ketumālā, despite his heavy reliance on French discourse on the origins of the Khmers and the circumstances surrounding the founding of the first Khmer dynasty. On top of that, the ways he formulated his narrative showed a style at least partially influenced by the *bańsāvtār* writing. His story about the local queen, the arrival of Hunṭīen in the kingdom, and their interracial marriage was also based on a popular story in the pre-twentieth century *bańsāvtār* about the first King Braḥ Thauṅ and his wife Queen Dāvatī. At this point, although the author appeared to favour colonial-era history scholarship, his historical writings were formulated to fit with — and draw on — the conventions of the *bańsāvtār* narratives. Likewise, Krasem's sub-title in the text, *Braḥ Rājbańsāvtār Kampuchea* (Royal chronicle of Cambodia),[63] indicated that he did not view his narratives, which had been largely his adaptations of Siamese and French historical discourses, as different from those of the *bańsāvtār* texts, which also focused on the descriptions of Cambodia's royal lineage of rulers.

Krasem's lengthy '*Sāsnā pavatti*' did not end with Angkor's King Jayavarman VII. He added an extensive discussion of Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism. In these sections, the author repeated his earlier claim about the Khmers having originated from India and, he believed, throughout history both kings and ordinary people

63 Krasem, 'Sāsnā pavatti', *Kampuchèa Sauriya*, 7, 1-2-3 (1935): 10.

interchangeably practised the two religions. That was the reason, he argued that there were many ancient Khmer temples, together with Khmer inscriptions, dedicated to the religions throughout both sides of the Chaophraya river (it is likely that his use of the Chaophraya as a reference point reflects the influence of Damrong, since this would not be a usual Cambodian perspective).[64] In the section on Hinayana Buddhism from India, he asserted that it came to Cambodia through the Mons and became established before the Mahayana sect. To further support this claim, Krasem extensively elaborated his discussion by quoting directly from Damrong's book describing the geographical extension of the ancient Khmer kingdom over the Chaophraya river until the border with the Mons. At the end of the quote, he mentioned in a 'footnote' that there were no Siamese living in this area at those times.[65] On the following pages, he kept referring to Siamese sources, including those of King Mongkut (r.1851–68) and, at the same time, pointed to the existence of ancient Khmer temples in what was now Siam and the firm establishment of the Theravada sect in Cambodia between the third century BCE and the first century CE.[66]

Krasem claimed that Sinhalese Buddhism had entered Cambodia through Pagan (Burma) around the thirteenth century, providing an account which is almost identical to that found in nineteenth century palace *baṅsāvtār* texts. He narrated a story about a Burmese king, who had ordered monks to copy the *Tripitaka* scriptures in Sri Lanka. According to the palace *baṅsāvtār*, he wrote, after successfully copying the *Tripitaka*, on their way back to Burma, the monks' ship which also contained the Emerald Buddha statue was hit by a storm and driven off-course to a Cambodian province.[67] The governor of the province brought the books and the Emerald Buddha to a Khmer king, whom Krasem identified as Angkor Wat builder Suryavarman II. The king ordered the translation of the *Tripitaka* from Pāli into Khmer and then brought them, together with the Emerald Buddha, to be kept inside the Angkor Wat. In Krasem's view, this is the reason Angkor Wat was converted from a Hindu temple into a Buddhist one.[68] To support this claim further, the author cited the *baṅsāvtār* describing the arrival of Sri Lankan monks in Cambodia by invitation of a Khmer king. He stated that the chronicle texts had erroneously recorded this king as Ketumālā (the same legendary king as in Thiounn's book). At the same time, however, though the author did not elaborate further on Ketumālā, he did believe that this king had been one of Cambodia's past rulers.

In the last part of his writing, Krasem revisited his assertion on the extent of the Khmer kingdom prior to the thirteenth century over the territory which later became Siamese. While admitting that many aspects of Siamese culture and religions had been influenced by the Khmers, he pointed out Siam's repeated attacks and seizures of valuable elements from Cambodia including the *Tripitaka*, regalia, weapons, and population. He also mentioned that the Siamese had conquered and annexed more than half of Cambodian territory during the centuries after the foundation of

64 Krasem, 'Sāsnā pavatti', *Kampuchèa Sauriya*, 7, 4-5-6 (1935): 25–6.
65 Krasem, 'Sāsnā pavatti', *Kampuchèa Sauriya*, 7, 7-8-9 (1935): 121.
66 Ibid., pp. 121–7.
67 Krasem, 'Sāsnā pavatti', *Kampuchèa Sauriya* 7, 4-5-6 (1935): 121–6.
68 Ibid., pp. 185–7.

Ayutthaya in the mid-fourteenth century, and when the Cambodian capital had retreated to Longvek, the Siamese continued their attacks on Cambodia, which underwent a long decline from the sixteenth century onwards.[69]

In these sections of Krasem's history of Cambodian religions, his discourse contains information and ideas derived from various sources. While his notion of mapping out the Cambodian territory based on existence of the ancient Khmer temples was initially proposed by the French, the contents of his narrative and analysis were the outcome of his personal interpretations from Khmer palace *baṅsāvtār* and Siamese historical and cultural discourses. With regard to the chronicles, Krasem's position was ambivalent. He kept going back to the local sources, even though at some points he questioned the accuracy of the information they provided. In the case of Ketumālā, his rejection was prompted by his belief in the mistake of the chronicles in having attributed the wrong religion to this king, rather than a complete denial of the latter's existence in Cambodia's history. In this respect, Krasem's attachment to the conventional knowledge of the *baṅsāvtār* remained significant to some degree. The way in which Krasem was influenced by the *baṅsāvtār* tradition in his writing was largely similar to Damrong's writings on Thai history during the 1920s and the early 1930s which display much of the legacy of the *phoṅsāvdan* tradition even though he showed great skill in using multiple sources and consistent approaches in his scholarship.[70]

In the early 1930s, while French colonial rule was established firmly over Cambodia, discourses on national culture, religion, and history also began to take root among local intellectuals.[71] Alongside his colleague Choum Mau, whose main responsibility was to translate French texts into Khmer and to circulate them among local readers, Krasem took a more critical role by producing his own writings and addressing them to the same audience. His well-grounded knowledge of Khmer traditional culture, his scholarly interest in Siamese scholarship, and his affiliation with the Royal Library where he worked under the supervision of French masters, made him a different type of scholar than his colleague Choum Mau. The type of local scholar he represented resembled Thiounn, who had lived in a similar historical context and taken part in redefining Cambodian national culture by formulating a historical discourse that was marked by the coexistence of traditional and modern perceptions. Krasem presented yet another level of that coexistence. From the aspects I have drawn from his writings at this particular epistemological category of the 1930s, it appears that though Krasem showed a certain level of attachment to local knowledge, just like Thiounn, his historiographical practice and scholarly judgement clearly displayed a critical and major step moving away from the conventional knowledge of the *baṅsāvtār* scholarship.

Essentially, what Krasem did at this particular point in time suggests not only a new way of thinking about religion but also a new epistemological view of Cambodia's past. His Khmer texts which circulated in the *Kampuchèa Sauriya* during the early 1930s appear to be some of the earliest texts to make a distinction between different

69 Ibid., pp. 192–4.

70 Charnvit, 'Thai historiography from ancient times to the modern period', p. 165.

71 For a detailed discussion on the establishment of 'national culture' and 'national religion' during this period, see Edwards, *Cambodge*, pp. 166–209.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

religions and to treat 'religion' as a separate subject of study. Pre-twentieth-century writers, although obviously aware of the distinctions between Buddhism and Hinduism, would not have done a systematic comparison of this sort. What Krasem did in this regard implies the emergence of new approaches of viewing traditional cultures in a more specific sense. As a secular scholar, the categorisation he made between the two religions was helpful not merely in clarifying the religious ideology of Buddhism, the dominant religion of modern Cambodia, but also helped to give meanings to the existing stone temples like Angkor Wat, which was initially built in dedication to Hindu gods. Moreover, Krasem's work, which was formulated through his adaptation of the scholarship of historians like Damrong and Cœdès and his scholarly attachment to the conventional knowledge of the *bańsāvtār*, had consequently produced a new epistemological category in and of itself. This category, besides drawing on many new meanings from different aspects of the collective past, conveys its narrative through a coexistence of knowledge between the *bańsāvtār* and more recent Siamese and French historiography.

Conclusion

Throughout the article, my discussion has been based primarily on three local figures. I began with Thiounn, commenting on his personality and his works roughly from the late nineteenth century until the publication of his book on Cambodian dance in 1930. Thiounn was one of the earliest intellectuals who straddled the divide between the *bańsāvtār* and colonial historiography. His writing combined both the attachment to long-held understandings and newer French colonial scholarship. The contents of his book revealed an early form of the changes in perception that were significantly influenced by French colonisation. My focus then moved from Thiounn's case to Choum Mau and the issues he faced when translating French texts into Khmer and publishing them in the *Kampuchèa Sauriya* magazine. Choum Mau's story suggests that translation was another way of engaging and adapting French colonial historiography. Through translation, French colonial scholarship was transmitted to the local audience while the translator himself played a critical role in circulating and formulating the meanings and contents of those French texts in the local language. The third case I discussed was that of Krasem, whose works appear to be among the earliest original historical writings in Khmer produced by a local intellectual during the colonial years. In his lengthy texts, Krasem integrated his skills and ideas into his writing which demonstrated another level of coexistence between *bańsāvtār* and more recent historiography of Cambodia. His historical writing also showed a strong sense of nationalism in its depiction of Cambodia's relationship with Siam which, he pointed out, had repeatedly attacked and exploited Cambodia in the past.

These three scholars emerged at the moment when French power in Cambodia had reached its peak and its colonial projects had increasingly impacted local populations. All three scholars came to office due to colonial conditions and initiations. While Thiounn earned his three ministerial posts mainly via his competence in French and through collaboration, Choum Mau and Krasem obtained their positions in the Royal Library largely because of the directorship of colonial scholars like Karpelès. Besides French colonial scholarship, which played the dominant function

in producing new scholarship on Cambodia, colonial projects provided local scholars with platforms for not only reproducing and circulating more recent scholarship to the Khmer audience, but also for showcasing their own skills and ideas.

Most importantly, these epistemological transitional years demonstrated a process of how local individuals perceived more recent notions about Cambodia's past vis-à-vis those of the chronicles. These notions were not restricted to Western technology such as the printing machine, the cartographic map, or weaponry. They also originated in the techniques and skills of formulating historical narratives derived from French and Siamese scholarship.

These three cases demonstrate how newer historiographical knowledge concerning the collective past took place within different categories and evolved with different types of engagements and formats. The long process of transition was facilitated by colonial-sponsored institutions that paved the way for these individuals to translate scholarship from foreign languages into the local vernacular and circulate it among local readers. These institutions also provided the platforms for a new form of scholarship in local vernacular to emerge, which employed a different epistemological category of thinking about different religions and a new way of looking at the national past. This new form of scholarship was to play a key role in shaping the Cambodian national imagination and the construction of a collective identity and culture for the remaining years of the colonial period and after.