

Michael Vickery, "What to do About *The Khmers*", review article on David P. Chandler and Ian Mabbett, *The Khmers*, in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, part 2 (September 1996), pp. 389-404.

Ian Mabbett and David Chandler. *The Khmers*. Oxford UK & Cambridge USA, Blackwell, 1995.

This book is a history of the Khmers, from prehistory to the UN-supervised election in 1993, but as the title "The Khmers" rather than "A History of the Khmers", or "A History of Cambodia", implies, it is intended, as one of a series on *The Peoples of South-East Asia and The Pacific*, to be more than just a chronological historical treatment, and includes thematic chapters on religion ("The Immortals"), "Daily Life", "Farmers", "Ruler and State", "Society and Economy", and "Artists and Craftsmen".<sup>1</sup> There are 47 interesting plates and eight maps, the first of which shows a serious error. The Dangrek mountain range, along the crest of which runs Cambodia's modern northern border, has been displaced about 50 km southward, leaving the border in a plain, while the mountains are shown occupying the flat land of the Wattana Gap, just north of the town of Aranyaprathet, on the northwest border with Thailand.<sup>2</sup>

The first 15 chapters taking the story of Cambodia through the Angkor period are attributed to Ian Mabbett and chapters 16-17 on post-Angkor Cambodia to the present are by David Chandler, but because the Preface says "all chapters were revised in the light of extensive discussions, and the authors share responsibility for the book as a whole", my remarks on all matters assume the entire book to be a joint work.

Mabbett and Chandler (M/C) are surprising as authors. It is now realized, as it may not have been in the days of George Coedès, whose Cambodia chapters in his classic work of historical synthesis contain only one reference to a Khmer inscription, all work then being based on the Sanskrit corpus, that the hard data about pre-Angkor and Angkorean Cambodia are in the Khmer inscriptions, and that where a Sanskrit text covers the same subject as one in Khmer the former is an abbreviated paraphrase.<sup>3</sup> In particular, information

---

1. General Editors of the series are Peter Bellwood and Ian Glover.

2. A good relief map, although without borders or lines of latitude and longitude, is at the end of J. Boisselier, *Le Cambodge*, Manuel d'Archéologie d'Extrême-Orient, Première Partie, Asie du Sud-Est, Tome I, Paris, Éditions A. et J. Picard et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1966.

3. The standard treatments by George Coedès are *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*, Paris, Éditions E. de Boccard, 1964; English translation, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, Edited by Walter F. Vella, translated by Susan Brown Cowing. Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, University of Malaya Press, 1968.

about "Daily Life", "Farmers", "Society and Economy", and even "Ruler and State" is found only, or mostly, in the Khmer texts. All administrative terms, such as the dozens of titles and categories of personnel, are only in Khmer.

Mabbett, however, is a Sanskritist and does not know Khmer, while Chandler, although fluent in modern Khmer, has not seriously studied old inscriptions. This would not necessarily impede work on a book such as this, for Coedès, although neglecting Khmer inscriptions in his work of historical synthesis, provided transcriptions and French translations of most of them. Moreover, in their bibliography M/C cite a 400-page unpublished typescript devoted entirely to the pre-Angkor Khmer inscriptions of the 7th-8th centuries, and in particular to the subjects of "Ruler and State, "Society and Economy", and "Farmers".<sup>4</sup> Mabbett and Chandler, however, have made little use of the Khmer record in any form, and where they have, they show either carelessness, or lack of understanding of their subject. They are clearly more comfortable following the scholars who relied on Sanskrit, the latest being Claude Jacques, an unpublished manuscript of whom is cited and used for modifications of details of Angkor history found in earlier work of Coedès.<sup>5</sup>

Their preference for the established and apparent fear of the new have led them into scholastic involution, forcing new interpretations into the frame of old ones instead of replacing them, maintaining, sometimes unwittingly, an old interpretation after the support for it has been removed, and incoherent syntheses from different sources. There is no way for readers, in particular students for whom this book may become an introduction to Cambodia, to understand how the syntheses of M/C differ from the older standard treatments by Coedès and Briggs, or how they have operated syntheses of them with new work by Jacques and Vickery, sometimes in contradiction with the intentions of the latter.<sup>6</sup>

The first five chapters, covering general description and prehistory are the best in terms of accuracy and incorporation of new research, perhaps because they do not depend on inscriptions, but on work by writers in modern languages. In particular, chapter 4, "Before History Began", summarizes much of the latest relevant archeological work, and is a real advance on comparable chapters in the older works.

---

4. Cited further as Michael Vickery, "Pre-Angkor", although page numbers will not be given since they are still unstable in the text which exists only in typescript versions.[\*This has now been published as Michael Vickery, *Society, Economics and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia: The 7th-8th Centuries*. Tokyo. The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for Unesco, The Toyo Bunko, 1998.\*]

5. Claude Jacques, "Histoire préangkorienne du pays khmer".

6. Lawrence Palmer Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1951.

The first example of neglect of attention to primary sources, or even to serious secondary sources, is in their description of the "pattern of Khmer settlement...when written records first provide evidence" (p. 35). That pattern, as evidenced in the earliest Khmer inscriptions in the seventh century was not mainly "along the course of the Mekong, as far north as...Bassac in Laos and probably along the Mun river...also extended downriver to...confluence near Phnom Penh". The most important area of Khmer settlement as evidenced by written records was central and southern Cambodia, the modern provinces of Takeo, Prei Veng, Kompong Speu, and Kampot, with an extension northward along the Mekong through Kompong Cham as far as Kratie. There is no khmer evidence in Bassac or the Mun valley, or in "a belt running east-west with its ends at Vat Ph'u and Phimai", until much later, although it would be a reasonable hypothesis to situate Khmers there from prehistoric times. In this context M/C have been victims of their passion to maintain old frameworks into which new evidence is to be forced. In this case the old framework was an interpretation of Chinese reports on Chenla.<sup>7</sup>

In their discussion of Fu-nan/Funan (69), M/C describe, no doubt correctly, the excavated site of Oc Eo as a port, not the capital, which may have been inland, and the location of which is still uncertain. They erroneously cite me as arguing for Banteay Prei Nokor far upriver in Kompong Cham, while Claude Jacques "situates it near Prei Veng". In the source cited, a too rare occurrence, I made no suggestion for the 'capital of Funan'. My argument was that Vyādhapura, which others since Coedès had called the capital of Funan, was near Banteay Prei Nokor, but was not the capital of Funan, and implicitly had not been very important in early pre-Angkor times, for inscription K.109 dated 655, near Banteay Prei Nokor, which I was discussing, was "the only pre-Angkor reference to that place [Vyādhapura], and also the only text naming it which has never been utilized in the discussion of its location".<sup>8</sup>

Jacques likewise, in his latest publication, *Angkor*, which M/C seem to have been using on this point, refused to speculate on the capital of Funan, and was only giving Vyādhapura importance, correctly, as the area from which Jayavarman II, late in the 8th century, started his movement of conquest northward. He did situate it near the town of Prei Veng, but the record for that is of 200 years later, not contemporary to the event as was K.109. Nevertheless,

---

7. See Michael Vickery, "Where and What was Chenla?", *Recherches nouvelles sur le Cambodge*, publiées sous la direction de F. Bizot, École française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris, 1994, p. 205, for arguments against the late descent of the Khmer from the north. Mabbett and Chandler have cited a pre-publication typescript of this article.

8. Michael Vickery, "Some Remarks on Early State Formation in Cambodia", *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries*, ed. by David G. Marr and A.C. Milner, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1986, pp. 95-115, p. 100, and note 22.

the *viṣaya* ('province') Vyādhapura of the 10th century may have included both Banteay Prei Nokor and Prei Veng, which are only 70 km apart.<sup>9</sup>

When Jacques, in another study cited by M/C, though not in this connection, did pronounce on the location of Funan's capital, he preferred to locate it near Angkor Borei or Phnom Da west of the Mekong (Prei Veng is on the east), where the connections to Oc Eo were much better.<sup>10</sup> This could not have been Vyādhapura at any date, nor did Jacques propose a name. The problem of M/C here is that they have retained Coedès identification of Vyādhapura with the Prei Veng area and with the capital of Funan, contrary to the work of Jacques and myself which they cite.

Still in the Pre-Angkor Chenla period, M/C (84) have mangled the discussion of *poñ* as it appears in my own and Jacques' work. The first discussion of the importance of *poñ* was in my "Some Remarks, etc.", where I showed that *poñ* were an important ruling group, with some occupying positions just below kings. *Pace* M/C, it was not against me that Jacques "argued against the identification of *poñ* with minor local chiefs, noting that it was possible for a prince...to have the title of *poñ*", but rather against S. Sahai, whom M/C have preferred to cite for such details, in spite of warnings from myself and from Jacques. Moreover, Jacques objected when I first suggested that the prince in question, *poñ* Śivadatta, had such a high status, but he came around to my point of view when writing the article which M/C cite.<sup>11</sup> Another inaccuracy in the

---

9. Claude Jacques, *Angkor*, Paris, Bordas, 1990, p. 43. This is a large art book of excellent color photographs, maps, and diagrams illustrating the monuments of ancient Cambodia and their environment. Jacques has also used it to propagate some of his new historical constructions which have not been argued on their evidence in previous articles, nor exposed to scholarly peer review, and there is no warning to the reader about the novelty or hypothetical character of those conclusions. They include, p. 40, the statements that Bhavavarman I was passed over for succession to his father's throne and that he may have provoked his brother's death; p. 43, the marriage of Jayadevī and Nṛpāditya, and the occupation of the throne by the latter before it passed to Jayadevī at his death; pp. 47, 51, the conflict among brothers following the death of Indravarman and resulting in the enthronement of Yaśovarman, implicitly an usurper; p. 67, Koh Ker, "capital of a small kingdom" before the reign of Jayavarman IV; p. 71, Rājendravarman's supposed transformation of "all the Khmer kingdoms into *vishaya* [*viṣaya*] or 'provinces'" (see further below); and p. 20, the ability of supreme kings to "create" other kings, illustrated by Jacques with false examples (that is, by the 11th century the title '*varman*', which could apparently be granted, no longer by itself denoted a king).

10. The citation by M/C was moreover incorrect. It should have been, Claude Jacques, "Le pays khmer avant Angkor", *Journal des savants* [M/C cite *Dossiers histoire et archéologie* 25, 1988], janvier-septembre 1986, p. 62. For the Angkor Borei location see M/C map, p. 67.

11. S. Sahai, *Les institutions politiques et l'organisation administrative du Cambodge ancien*, Paris, École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1970; Vickery, "Some Remarks", note 6. Nor was it

same context concerns the title *mratāñ*, which gradually superseded *poñ*. It did not only appear "in the later seventh century in the north" (84), but is found in the earliest Khmer inscription, in the south, (K.600/AD 611), together with *poñ*.

Even for the reign periods of the pre-Angkor kings M/C have not assimilated the relevant data. The same inscription which finally convinced Jacques that *poñ* Śivadatta was son of King Īśānavarman also indicates that King Īśānavarman was not dead by 628 (82), but lived at least until 637, as I noted in "Where and What was Chenla?", and there is no question of a "Bhavavarman II...recognized in the eighth century" (83). The important new information about Bhavavarman II, long a mystery, from the same records which concern Śivadatta and Jyeṣṭhapura, is that he was son of King Īśānavarman and lived in the 630s-640s.<sup>12</sup> Mabbett and Chandler seem to have been confused by Claude Jacques' proposal for a Bhavavarman III in the eighth century.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps M/C prefer, as I do, to reject Jacques' 'Bhavavarman III', a strictly hypothetical incarnation to fill by analogy a blank space in an intriguing, but very damaged, inscription; but if the case for Bhavavarman III is unconvincing, there is no case at all for a Bhavavarman II in the eighth century.<sup>14</sup>

They cite me incorrectly again (85) with respect to the problem of centralization or political division in late Chenla. I did not write that there was "a clustering of lines of royal descent around the royal women of Śambhupura", but that the apparently rival genealogies studied by P. Dupont and which he believed proved eighth-century political fragmentation, "can be traced back either to the cohorts of Jayavarman II or to the Śambhupura royalty", and are evidence not "of multiple dynasties in the eighth century, but [of] royal cliques vying for influence and for the throne in the 9th-10th centuries".<sup>15</sup>

a question of "a prince, the son of the lord of Jeṣṭhapura" (M/C, p. 84), but rather a son of King Īśānavarman.

12. Two inscriptions are involved, K.506 and K.1150. See Vickery, "Where and What was Chenla?", p. 203, n. 12. The interpretation that Īśānavarman died by 628 is due to Claude Jacques. See his "Le pays khmer avant Angkor", p. 71; and *Angkor*, p. 40.

13. Jacques proposed 'Bhavavarman III' in his "Cours 1985-1986" (a typescript of his lectures at the École Pratique des Hautes Études), p. 4; and in "Le pays khmer avant Angkor", pp. 72-78, and table, p. 94.

14. In this connection M/C do not cite Jacques at all, a real lack of scholarship, for the new revelations about Bhavavarman II and the proposal for Bhavavarman III come entirely from Jacques' work.

15. Dupont, Pierre. "La dislocation de Tchen-la et la formation du Cambodge angkorien (vii<sup>e</sup>-ix<sup>e</sup> siècle", *BEFEO* XLIII (1943-1946), pp. 17-55. Vickery, "Where and What was Chenla?", pp. 207, 209.

Mabbett's and Chandler's reluctance to drop traditional tales is seen in the page and a half devoted to an invasion of Cambodia by 'Java', the decapitation of the Cambodian king and, later, the return of a Cambodian prince, Jayavarman II, from Java. In one treatment Coedès labeled this fiction, and it has been rejected by Wolters, Jacques, and myself, and its proper place is in a small footnote. Although three inscriptions of over 200 years later mention Java in connection with Jayavarman II, modern historians are at a loss about the meaning, but at least do not believe that Jayavarman II ever set foot there. They [The inscriptions] may reflect Cambodian preoccupations with Java in the 11th century, rather than events of the eighth.<sup>16</sup>

Confusion continues in their treatment of Jayavarman II. They wish to make his reign both a continuity, "just a stage along the way", "continuous with earlier monarchies", and "a real discontinuity between the jostling principalities of 'Chen-la' [themselves only a hypothesis] and the empire that came into being" (88).

One of Jayavarman's innovations was the *devarāja* cult, "possible to regard...as an expression of a Khmer ideal of political unity" (88). This is possible in a now obsolete understanding of *devarāja* which considered that it represented some kind of fusion of the king and a god. But it is an example of scholastic involution when M/C also recognize that the cult "was important to a family of priests in the eleventh century...does not mean that it was important as a decisive statement of sovereign power at the time of...Jayavarman II...[and] was not unique after all" (89), and when they recognize the new interpretation of Claude Jacques that the term '*devarāja*' was merely a Sanskrit translation of a Khmer term (*kamrateñ jagat ta rāja/rājya*) for a type of local protective deity, "like the *neak ta*" (90).<sup>17</sup>

Their treatment of the reign of Rājendravarman (944-968) shows more evidence of mixing contradictory sources and interpretations. First is the question of "he also had links with the old 'Chen-la' royalty" (99), which they appear to have derived from P. Dupont, whose presentation they would have done well to read more closely, for his definition of 'Chenla' no longer appears solid (see below). Nowhere in the epigraphy of Rājendravarman does a name of

---

16. See Coedès, *Les états hindouisés*, pp. 175-7, 184; *The Indianized States*, pp. 92-93, 97; O.W. Wolters, "Jayavarman II's Military Power: The Territorial Foundation of the Angkor Empire", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1973), No. 1, p. 21, n. 7; O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982, p. 7 where he did not even mention this detail; Claude Jacques, *Études d'Épigraphie cambodgienne VIII*, "La carrière de Jayavarman II", *BEFEO* LIX (1972), p. 208; Jacques, *Angkor*, p. 43.

17. Claude Jacques, "The Kamrateñ Jagat in Ancient Cambodia", in *Indus Valley to Mekong Delta Explorations in Epigraphy*, edited by Noboru Karashima, New Era Publications, Madras, 1985, pp. 269- 286.

any 'Chenla', that is pre-Angkor, king known from the contemporary pre-Angkor records appear; and Rājendravarman's claim to descend from the *rishi* Kambu, whom M/C (8) recognize as legendary, and from the "first king of the Kambujas", is without historical value.<sup>18</sup>

Their 'also' in this context gives away the lack of source control, for it is preceded by "claimed descent from the rulers of Bhavapura", who indeed included some of the 6th-7th-century kings, and this is the only ground on which Rājendravarman might in theory be linked more closely than other Angkor kings to the rulers of 'Chenla', although his genealogies do not name any of the known Bhavapura kings either.

Together with this is the conception of Rājendravarman restoring the empire and centralizing the administration following nearly a half century of disintegration after the death of Yaśovarman (c. 890-c. 912), "suggested by the absence of inscriptions...attesting the dominion of successor rulers over the outer provinces"(99). Thus, "it has been argued that the kings who followed Yaśovarman failed to control a large area". Among the rulers between Yaśovarman and Rājendravarman was Jayavarman IV (928-941), whom historians used to call an usurper, mainly because he established his capital some 90 km to the northeast, and did not leave a genealogy clearly linking himself to his predecessors. Mabbett and Chandler do not mention him at all in this context, but jump straightaway from Yaśovarman to Rājendravarman. In their summary of reign periods (262), however, they write that Jayavarman IV "ruled over territories in Battambang, Siemreap, Kampong [sic!, Kompong] Thom, Kampong Cham and Ta Kev", that is over nearly all of Cambodia, and an area nearly as large as the territories imputed to either Yaśovarman or Rājendravarman.<sup>19</sup> On this point I would agree that they have read accurately what the epigraphic evidence says, but then the entire plot of Rājendravarman restoring unity following disintegration collapses.

In the sections treating these reigns Mabbett and Chandler should have warned their readers, at least if they intended their book as a guide for students, that the regnal dates they provide for Jayavarman II (770-834) and III (834-870), Yaśovarman and his sons Harṣavarman I and Īśānavarman II differ from

---

18. In *Angkor*, p. 71 Jacques wrote that Rājendravarman's genealogy in the Baksei Camkrong inscription, began with "completely legendary kings". If they faked gods, why not royal genealogies too, as in claiming descent from kings of Bhavapura.

19. The evidence is in the distribution of inscriptions of Jayavarman's reign, and in the lists of provinces and districts listed in the inscriptions in his capital. If 'Kampong' is not a typographical error, and in all other contexts of M/C it appears as 'kompong', they may have been trying to signal its alleged Malay origins (221). This interpretation may be outdated, for 'kompong' < ancient 'kamvañ', an apparently Khmer term found in inscriptions as early as the seventh century, much earlier than Malay influence has usually been attributed. Nor would *kamvañ* have been an ancient form of Malay *kampong*.

those found in Coedès' standard works, and apparently follow revisions by Claude Jacques. Jacques' revisions may be superior, but they have differed slightly from one study to the next, and in his latest work the reign of Jayavarman II begins twenty years later than the date in M/C while the end of Yaśovarman's reign is only implied, as though Jacques wished to avoid commitment.<sup>20</sup>

There is a minor linguistic blooper in their paragraph on the reign of Jayavarman IV, "his power base...at Koh Ker ([was] referred to in an inscription as *Chok Gargyar*, 'Island of Glory')" (262). The ancient name, *Chok Gargyar*, recorded in contemporary inscriptions, means 'thicket' (*chok*) of *koki* [trees], *koki* being the modern reflex of ancient *gargyar*. It is this term, *gargyar* > *koki*, which in popular etymology was transformed into the modern toponym *koh ker*, 'island of glory'. Or perhaps, if the oral tradition that the mapping of Cambodia was carried out by French surveyors with Vietnamese interpreters is accurate, the genuine local toponym may still have been *koki* which the surveyors turned into *koh ker*.

The scholarly tradition that Rājendravarman restored the empire rests on the 'usurpation' of Jayavarman IV and Rājendravarman's claim in his official genealogies to have been heir to the kingdom of Bhavapura. In an article which M/C cite, I showed that not only was Jayavarman IV a solid member of the main line of Angkor royalty, but he was also served in a high-ranking capacity by the future Rājendravarman who was his brother or half-brother.<sup>21</sup> As for The scholarly tradition about Rājendravarman and Bhavapura, its alleged independence until the reign of Rājendravarman seemed important when earlier scholars, such as P. Dupont, thought Bhavapura was Chenla and was far from the center of Angkorean Cambodia, somewhere in southern Laos, whereas it is now accepted that Bhavapura was in central Cambodia, not far from the town of Kompong Thom.<sup>22</sup> Claude Jacques, who influenced M/C, has still given it far too much weight, arguing that Bhavapura maintained independence under its

---

20. See Jacques, "La carrière de Jayavarman II", pp. 205-220 for Jayavarman II and III, and *Études d'Épigraphie cambodgienne* VI, "Sur les données chronologiques de la stèle de Tuol Ta Pec (K.834)", *BEFEO* LVIII (1971), 163-176, for Harṣavarman I to Harṣavarman II. I do not know where Jacques has argued his case for the new dates of Yaśovarman, whose date of death is implied in *Angkor*, pp. 63, 186. The date of 790 for the consecration as king of Jayavarman II, as king of Indrapura (my emphasis--MV), is another unexplained novelty in *Angkor*, pp. 43, 186, and in this case evidence has been abused, for the inscription in question, K.583, merely says Jayavarman was ruling at that date, and there is no connection with Indrapura.

21. Michael Vickery, "Some Remarks on Early State Formation in Cambodia", pp. 106-107, and inscription K.957.

22. Dupont, "La dislocation de Tchen-la et la formation du Cambodge angkorien", p. 45: Claude Jacques, "Le pays Khmer avant Angkor", p. 79.



own kings up to the time of Rājendravarman.<sup>23</sup> Not only is this implausible if Bhavapura is situated in central Cambodia, but Jacques has now pushed aside the epigraphic evidence that Bhavapura had already come under the control of Jayavarman II, and that Rājendravarman had been a loyal subordinate to Jayavarman IV.<sup>24</sup>

Mabbett and Chandler seem unsure of themselves in writing of Rājendravarman's administrative reforms, as well they might be, for the idea is taken from Claude Jacques who has asserted it in four contexts without ever providing a thorough argument. This is that under Rājendravarman "ancient principalities, with the scions of their lineages still eager for autonomy, began to be absorbed within the apparatus of a national monarchy...administrative division[s] were standardized" (99 [100]), or with less certainty, "the empire was divided into areas and districts, but the terms used in the inscriptions are inconsistent, and there is doubt about their precise meaning...ancient principalities, with the scions of their royal lineages still eager for autonomy, began to be absorbed within the apparatus of a national monarchy...at any rate, administrative divisions were standardized"(167).<sup>25</sup>

What is at issue here is "one widely shared interpretation [that] the designation of many territories as *viṣaya* ["primarily a geographical term"] where previously there had been *pramāṇ* ["a specific administrative division"] indicated that formerly autonomous princely fiefs were integrated as provinces" (167). I am unable to say how widely this interpretation is shared. It has been promoted by Claude Jacques, without, however, arguing the evidence, or even listing the *viṣaya* and *pramāṇ* to see how well they fitted into the theory. Of 25

---

<sup>23</sup>. Claude Jacques, *Angkor*, p. 70. Another of the unsupported reconstructions of history in *Angkor*, is Jacques' assertion, pp. 20, 186-7, of the existence of an institution of "roi des rois" ('king of kings', Sanskrit *rājādhirāja*) among other contemporary Cambodian kings. This was first outlined very summarily in his *Études d'Épigraphie cambodgienne* VI, p. 173, without, however, attempting to show whether this was used regularly by most kings and in situations where other lesser kings might credibly be hypothesized. He contented himself with "the king of Angkor is often called *rājādhirāja* in the inscriptions, or an equivalent title (my emphasis--MV)". In Sanskrit inscriptions kings are called by many different titles, usually for metrical reasons, and a convincing argument must examine all occurrences of '*rājādhirāja*'.

<sup>24</sup>. In his "La carrière de Jayavarman II", pp. 218, 220, Jacques noted some of the evidence that Jayavarman II might have ruled over Bhavapura. Coedès also read the evidence as meaning that Jayavarman II "began by establishing himself in...Indrapura....[t]hen he moved "to a region north of the Tonle Sap...the fief of Bhavapura" (G. Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, pp. 98-99).

<sup>25</sup>. Mabbett and Chandler (262) offer still a third interpretation, Rājendravarman "brought together under his rule a number of territories not previously assimilated", which, except for the possible case of Bhavapura, itself extremely dubious, is unsupported by any evidence, nor has it been claimed by scholars of Angkor history.

*viṣaya* named in the inscriptions, only four may be considered to have once been ancient kingdoms, but there is strong evidence that they lost that status long before the reign of Rājendravarman. The terms *viṣaya* and *pramān* are not related as stated by M/C, either in the raw records or in the interpretation of Jacques, abstracting from the accuracy of the latter. First, they are used concurrently, and Jacques did not conclude that *viṣaya*, for him the “specific administrative division” (emphasis added--MV) developed from *pramān*, but rather from ancient kingdoms, by which he seems generally to have meant names ending in *-pura*. *Pramān*, for Jacques, was a term designating a vague geographical area, and in some inscriptions it is still applied to territories earlier recorded as *viṣaya*.<sup>26</sup> The whole subject is still in great confusion, and moreover, contrary to what Jacques believed, the existence of *viṣaya* is recorded in at least three inscriptions before the reign of Rājendravarman, and one of those *viṣaya*, Dharmapura, appears in a pre-Angkor inscription as a kingdom.<sup>27</sup>

As another illustration of the methods of M/C let us take the case of Sūryavarman I (1002-1050), my study of whom is acknowledged by M/C and cited for several details, including one *-devarāja-* (90) which is not entirely accurate. I did not “den[y] that the evidence allows us to recognize its [*devarāja* cult] operation before the tenth century”. On the contrary I accepted the possible antiquity of the cult which was later named in Sanskrit ‘*devarāja*’, but doubted that the Khmer title *kamraten jagat* had been used before the tenth century.<sup>28</sup>

In two contexts M/C summarize Sūryavarman's campaign to conquer Angkor (100, 263). Sūryavarman's "territorial base was in the east, on the Mekong", he first "moved northward up the Mekong from a power base at Sambor", then "west across the Dangreks and finally south to Angkor".

None of this is sourced, and the reader might imagine that it has been the standard view, except for, p. 263, "it used to be thought...that he came from the west", after which the reader might consider that the new interpretation was ground-breaking research by M/C. In fact, standard doctrine, since Coedès'

---

26. Jacques' statements about this problem are in, Claude Jacques, “Sur les données chronologiques de la stèle de Tuol Ta Pec (K.834)”; Claude Jacques, “Sur l'emplacement du royaume d'Aninditapura”, *Études d'épigraphie cambodgienne* VII, *BEFEO* LIX (1972), pp. 193-205; Claude Jacques, “Nouvelles orientations pour l'étude de l'histoire du pays khmer”, *ASEMI*, XIII (1-4), 1982 *Cambodge* I, pp. 39-58; *Angkor*, p. 71.

27. Inscription K.697 from Ubon in northeastern Thailand, from the time of Yaśovarman's son Īśānavarman II (923-928), records activities of a certain *loñ Myaṅ* in the *viṣaya* of Dharmapura. *Viṣaya*, although unnamed, are also implied in other pre-Rājendravarman inscriptions, K.52/918 from Prey Veng, K.99/922 from Kompong Cham, and K.957/941, from Prachinburi, recording the presence of *khloñ viṣaya*, ‘chiefs’ of *viṣaya*.

28. This was in Michael Vickery, "The Reign of Sūryavarman I and Royal Factionalism at Angkor", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, XVI/2 (September 1985), pp. 226-44, see p. 235, n. 37.

study of 1923 had been that Sūryavarman was of Malay peninsular origin, and a foreign conqueror who reached Angkor via central Thailand. His eastern origins and the lack of foundation for a connection with the Malay peninsula or central Thailand were only established by my studies of 1980 (an unpublished conference paper) and 1985, cited by M/C.<sup>29</sup>

Although the formulation of M/C cited above is in broad agreement with my conclusions, they have chosen to cite Jacques, though not mentioning him either, in particular the detail about Sūryavarman's "power base at Sambor", which was never part of my treatment, although I agree that it is plausible.<sup>30</sup>

This is amusing because Jacques, both in personal correspondence and in his own study of Sūryavarman between my conference paper and the final publication, reacted very negatively to my proposal that Sūryavarman came from eastern Cambodia, and in particular he tried to use inscriptions K.125 from Sambor (Jacques' Çambhupura) and K.720 from Wat Phu which in fact name no king, as evidence that Sūryavarman had not initially held power there.<sup>31</sup> Then, following publication of my final paper, with analysis of K.125 and K.720 and Jacques' treatment of them, Jacques in his *Angkor* has come around to the conclusion that Sūryavarman had "probably not at first been master of more than the ancient kingdom of Çambhupura", in the East, from where he began a march northward to Wat Phu and then proceeded westward towards Angkor.

Showing the same intellectual tight-fistedness as M/C, Jacques acknowledged no collegial contribution to this interpretation, and my study of Sūryavarman is absent from his bibliography. At least, the flight of fancy about Sūryavarman ruling the Kingdom of Çambhupura/Sambor where "he must have received his consecration" is strictly Jacques' own, for there is nothing in K.125, nor in any other inscription to support that interpretation. My own conclusion was that Sūryavarman came from a family of high-ranking officials, not that he had been a ruling prince before conquering Angkor.

Another borrowed detail unacknowledged by M/C is "the considerable increase in the number of inscriptions" in the time of Sūryavarman, "and they refer to numerous cases of contested land-ownership, where rival families

---

<sup>29</sup>. George Coedès, "Documents sur l'histoire politique et religieuse du Laos occidental", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, XXV (1925), pp. 24-26; Vickery, "The Reign of Sūryavarman I and Royal Factionalism at Angkor".

<sup>30</sup>. Jacques, *Angkor*, p. 94.

<sup>31</sup>. Claude Jacques, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Cours 1982-93, "Épigraphie de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud-Est I. Épigraphie khmère: la prise du pouvoir par le roi Sūryavarman Ier", Paris, typescript 1982-1983.

claimed rights over land" (M/C, p. 102), which for me was the dynamic of the first half of the eleventh century.<sup>32</sup>

More inconsistent use of sources for Sūryavarman's reign characterizes the discussion of trade during 972-1071 (180), a period in which the epigraphy "shows a much greater concentration of references to merchants...and many of them fall within the reign of Sūryavarman I". This is referred to Kenneth Hall's proposal "that in the eleventh century the Khmers were active in the trade of the Malayan Peninsula", a supposition based on the now rejected notion that the origins of Sūryavarman were there, and that therefore Angkor maintained control over the area.<sup>33</sup> Not only was Hall mistaken about Angkor-peninsular connections, but he was also wrong in his identification of merchants in the epigraphic references to a "[vāp] Cham, to a Vietnamese and to a Vāp China", as cited by M/C (178). There is no vāp China in the records cited by Hall, nor anywhere else, as M/C could easily have determined, nor can the Cham and Vietnamese in question be linked with trading.<sup>34</sup> The title vāp, perhaps in origin a kinship term, 'father', has nothing to do with trade or merchants. Its distribution in the epigraphy suggests that it came with the cohorts of Jayavarman II who accompanied him from the southeast, and during the 10th-12th centuries vāp were prominent as apparently second-level officials, although in some cases close relatives of royalty.<sup>35</sup>

Mabbett and Chandler are again confused in their discussion of slavery (173). It is only in Khmer that "records of endowments commonly include lists of the names of people", and different categories of labor. It is not true that "they are simply called men and women". In all but a few inscriptions they have classificatory designations, which changed over time (*va/ku*, *si/tai*). Such lists are not found in Sanskrit inscriptions, although there are references to people "called *dāsas*, 'slaves'", but this is not why "it has been normal among scholars to identify such people as temple slaves". The reason was that, again, in the

---

32. Vickery, "The Reign of Sūryavarman I and Royal Factionalism at Angkor", especially pp. 232-36.

33. They cite Hall, "Khmer commercial development and foreign contacts under Sūryavarman", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 18/3 (1975), pp. 318-36, which was largely reproduced in chapter seven of Hall's *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia*, which I reviewed in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 1987, pp. 211-213.

34. The inscriptions in question are K.105, with mention of a vāp Cham and a yvan, perhaps a Vietnamese, although both 'cham', and 'yvan' are also simply personal names in modern Khmer, and may have been in Angkor times, and K.164, in which there is a vāp Ci, which Hall fantasized into 'China'.

35. I have discussed this in a still unpublished paper entitled "Style, Names, and Titles as Elements in Studying Khmer Inscriptions", presented at the Symposium, Les Sources de l'Histoire du Pays Khmer, Paris, 28 June-4 July, 1993.

Khmer inscriptions the most frequent general term for all such people is *kñum/khñum*, which in modern Khmer is 'slave', though not necessarily in Old Khmer, because the cognates in other Mon-Khmer languages mean 'youth'. They [Mabbett and Chandler] then refer inaccurately to Jacques with the explanation that "some...have argued that ['slave'] is the wrong word to describe their status, since being a temple 'slave' could be an honour...[and] there were others whose functions were ritually important". This treatment derives from Vickery, not Jacques, whose argument was that the people listed could not have been slaves because in India (sic!) slaves could not enter temples nor be named in temple inscriptions.<sup>36</sup>

"The Immortals" is a terrible jumble of unrelated comments, jumping from an analogy with Vietnamese folk religion, through a peculiar assertion that Khmers fear the forest (108), and a discussion of modern Cambodian folk cults (*neak ta*) projected back to the distant past. The last is not unreasonable and is in line with current research, but it is a new interpretation, and not research by M/C, and it needs citation. This would have been the place to cite Claude Jacques on the *kamraten jagat - devarāja* (see above). When M/C do cite studies of old Khmer cults in this chapter, they are not the ones concerned with what M/C emphasize in their description, indeed they negate it. Mabbett and Chandler thus repeat the errors of a writer who himself was out of place among Khmer sources. O.W. Wolters (123) was wrong in stressing Pāsupatas, who are mentioned not in "some" inscriptions, but only two, and thus obviously not very important; kings were only rarely "portrayed...as ascetics", and there is no way to conclude that "gifts offered by such rulers...were...transmission of supernatural power".<sup>37</sup> Although some, though not most, "shrines of spirit cults have been erected in high places" (110), the example selected, "Vat Baset in the north west" was not among them. That Baset is on flat land. Wolters carelessly confused it with another Baset on a hill near Phnom Penh where there was also

---

<sup>36</sup> Vickery, "Pre-Angkor"; C. Jacques, "A propos de l'esclavage dans l'ancien Cambodge", XXXIX Congrès International des Orientalistes, Paris 1973, *Proceedings*, pp. 71-76. In his *Angkor*, p. 17, Jacques did not even allude to India as the evidence for this alleged prohibition, but wrote that the people listed as workers in the temples or attached fields could not have been slaves because, "it was formally forbidden for the latter [slaves] to enter temples, which they would have desecrated; it is thus hardly imaginable that care would have been taken to engrave their [slaves'] names under the very eyes of the gods" [translated from the French]. There is nothing in the Khmer record about what was forbidden or permitted to slaves.

<sup>37</sup> O.W. Wolters, "Khmer 'Hinduism' in the Seventh Century", in R.B. Smith and W. Watson, *Early South East Asia: Essays in Archaeology, History and Historical Geography*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 427-442.

a seventh-century lintel. L.P. Briggs already got that right over forty years ago.<sup>38</sup>

Rather than exaggerating continuity in Khmer religion from ancient to modern times, M/C, had they paid attention to the work they cite in their bibliography, would have told their readers that from pre-Angkor (7th-8th centuries) to Angkor (9th-14th centuries) times there was a nearly complete change in the names and titles of 'immortals', and that an important class of non-Indic Khmer goddesses, the *kpoñ*, together with the community leaders called *poñ*, completely disappeared in the eighth century. Also important is the identity of divine and kingly titles (not to be confused with the *devarāja*) in the seventh century, and the continued close relationship between the secular and divine hierarchies throughout Angkor.<sup>39</sup> These details undoubtedly reflect great changes in society, as do the shifts to Mahāyāna Buddhism of Jayavarman VII and to Theravada a few centuries later.

The same defects appear in chapters 10-13, where there is total detachment from the relevant Cambodian sources for questions of daily life, cults, land, farmers, structure of society.

They mix up Ma Tuan-lin's late 14th-century compilation of reports from different times and places, Chou Ta-kuan's description of Angkor in 1296, and vague references to 20th-century life, as though these aspects of Cambodia were virtually unchanged for 1500 years, and present them according to the format of an earlier generation of European scholars whose preconceptions about Cambodia are no longer in accordance with the evidence.

Where the students for whom this book was presumably intended should have been warned about obsolete 'discourses', they naively adopt such details from old Chinese reports as, "there is some evidence that in very early times, the Khmers were accustomed to go naked", oblivious to current awareness that 'nakedness' is also a cultural construction, as proven by the book of a 17th-century Iranian envoy to Ayutthaya who said the "Siamese do not wear any clothes".<sup>40</sup>

---

38. Wolters, O.W.. "North-Western Cambodia in the Seventh Century", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 37, 2 (1974), pp. 355-384, see p. 368. Lawrence Palmer Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, Philadelphia, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1951, p. 72.

39. Details in Vickery, "Pre-Angkor"; and on *poñ* in Vickery, "Some Remarks on Early State Formation in Cambodia". For example, in the seventh century the title *vrah kamratān añ* designated both gods and kings without distinction.

40. Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaiman*, translated by John O'Kane, Persian Heritage Series No. 11, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, p.56. It describes a voyage to Ayutthaya between 1685 and 1688.

From available inscriptions there is sufficient evidence to relegate to a critical, explanatory footnote the passage from Ma Tuan-lin citing the Sui history passage for the reign of Īśānavarman (7th century), with its remark (128) that "[t]heir food includes a lot of butter, milk-curd...rice and also millet, from which they make a sort of cake which is soaked in meat juice and eaten...".<sup>41</sup> To the contrary, the seventh-century inscriptions suggest that no other agricultural crop than rice was of great significance in the diet. Butter, in the form of ghee, is mentioned in only six Khmer-language inscriptions of the entire pre-Angkor plus Angkor corpus, milk in only three or four, and millet and wheat in only one each (K.124 and K.421), all as portions of offerings rather than as products for large-scale consumption; and the very Indian diet reported by the Chinese, would be completely foreign to modern Khmer, who are within the east Asian sphere of milk-avoiders, as M/C remarked in another context (65).<sup>42</sup>

Although noting this with some astonishment, M/C have unthinkingly followed Coedès, who explicitly assumed Cambodia to have been a branch of Indian culture, and was not surprised by the anomaly in the Sui History passage, which must result from the well-known practice of the Chinese chroniclers of mixing sources when describing exotic areas, as M/C noted in emphasizing the contradictions in another set of Chinese sources (69-70).<sup>43</sup>

There is a problem with the evidence about the conditions of rice agriculture in Angkor--was it large-scale irrigation or not (150-53), and M/C cannot be blamed for leaving it moot. Their own contributions, however, are unhelpful and naive. Apparently drawing on Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) to explain Angkor, they write, "involvement of the farming population in a centrally managed scheme to grow multiple crops in the dry season did not contribute to efficient agriculture" (153), forgetting that in past and present

---

<sup>41</sup> See Pelliot, "Le Fou-nan", p. 254, cited in Coedès, *États*, p. 85; *States*, p. 42; and Coedès, *États*, p. 143; *States*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>42</sup> This does not prove that the same was true in the 7th century, but the total content of the inscriptions implies it was true then also. The totals are from published inscriptions. Saveros Pou, *Dictionnaire Vieux Khmer-Français-Anglais An Old Khmer-French-English Dictionary*, Paris, Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Civilisation Khmère (Cedoreck), 1992, p.235, lists millet (*tvau*) in the unpublished K.329/9th c.; and also lists a personal name *va tvau*, which may not be taken as evidence for millet.

<sup>43</sup> Note also the remark of John Whitmore, "'Elephants Can Actually Swim': Contemporary Chinese Views of Late Ly Dai Viet", *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries*, edited by David G. Marr and A.C. Milner, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore and Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, pp. 117-38., p. 134, note 8 (with citation from Pelliot, "Le Fou-nan", p. 138), concerning d'Hervey de Saint-Denys' (Ma Tuan-lin's translator) "habitual negligence" and tendency "to gloss over some points rather than directly translate them", noted by sinologists.

Southeast Asia there have been examples of widespread successful irrigation schemes--Kyaukse, Bali, Java, Vietnam.

Such *ad hoc* speculation is unnecessary if the Khmer inscriptions are consulted. Their evidence indeed is that irrigation was not an element in centralization or control by higher authorities, that no large-scale irrigation at all was undertaken in the seventh-eighth centuries, and that what may have represented small-scale irrigation was carried out at the level of the local communities, under the leadership of local *poñ* and other chiefs. No term denoting 'dig' occurs in the pre-Angkor corpus, and no remains of large hydraulic works have been discovered for the period between Funan and Angkor. Evidence that some organized digging occurred for water management or fish capture is in the numerous references to *travāṇ*, artificial ponds. In the pre-Angkor corpus *travāṇ* are mentioned 66 times, 40 of them are named for members of the elite, including 21 *poñ*, several more whose names indicate they may have been *poñ*, three *mratāñ*, and one each of *kurāk* and *kloñ*, two more titles denoting respectively regional chiefs and group leaders. It is safe to conclude that hydraulic work was local, led by chiefs of small communities.

This could have evolved to great centrally-controlled hydraulic projects for agriculture as the state expanded in the Angkor period, but there is no coherent evidence for it. Modern scholars who oppose that interpretation argue that the large hydraulic works whose remains are evident were for urban embellishment, not agriculture.<sup>44</sup> There are, however, eight Angkor inscriptions which record organized digging (*jyak*) of water sources (*danle*, *sthalā*, *travāṇ*), of which the last are named 174 times.

A possibly related point which in any case is worth following up for itself is (176, n. 11) "[f]ield areas were measured in *sare* or *samre* [sic!, correct *sanre*]", terms of apparently identical meaning derived from *sre* 'rice field'. Comparison of the contexts of these terms suggests they meant a basic area of land which could be worked by one man with a pair of draft animals.<sup>45</sup> Equally significant is that they are pre-Angkor terms which do not reappear after the eighth century. This suggests a total change in systems of land occupation, use, and measurement. Angkorean records contain the base term *sre* 'rice land', often in contexts which indicate that the area in question was very large, but not its derivatives denoting units of land.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup>. See W. van Liere, "Traditional water management in the lower Mekong Basin", *World Archaeology*, 11, no. 3 (1980), pp. 265-80. New work by scholars involved in Roland Fletcher's Greater Angkor Project, University of Sydney, seems to show that some of the large Angkor hydraulic works really did contribute to agricultural irrigation.

<sup>45</sup>. The details are in Vickery, "Pre-Angkor".

<sup>46</sup> Examples, out of many, are K.735/AD 1012 and K.252/1020 in which there is no indication of size; K.190/Yaśovarman, a description of *sre* outlined by geographical features



The refusal of M/C to face the facts, or at least the implications of the Old Khmer record, appears in "farmers seeking to grow more would move out and clear more fields" (153), "farming communities could often move away and open up new land if they were disgruntled" (170), "there was a population of free farmers" (173). This imposes a structure of society and labor organization quite contrary to the evidence of the Old Khmer inscriptions. In pre-modern Southeast Asia, no more than in most of feudal Europe, could the individual agricultural laborer just 'move out' and claim land for himself. In their efforts to knock down the straw man of 'Oriental Despotism' (154, 164-5), which no one has ever theorized for Cambodia, they try to make Angkorean Cambodia a country of free farmers, quite contrary to the evidence which can be derived from the inscriptions, and also contrary to M/C themselves in their discussion of the military, "armies...were raised *ad hoc* for particular campaigns by the great men in the provinces" (158), impossible if the countryside was populated by free farmers, and in fact unknown, though a reasonable hypothesis.

It is not at all true that "a large proportion of all the inscriptions...have to do with the disposition of privately owned land". In most of the inscriptions which have been abusively interpreted as records of private land transactions, appeal was made for royal intervention, suggesting, not 'private' ownership, but service-related conditional occupation, a type of tenure prevalent in Cambodia and Thailand until European land laws were adopted in the 19th-20th centuries.<sup>47</sup>

An extreme example of incompatible synthesizing appears in their treatment of the end of Angkor, "in 1369 the capital of Angkor was temporarily abandoned", and "in the fifteenth century, the decisive move was made by the court to the south", "conventionally it is considered to have taken place in 1430-1" (212-14).

Now the date '1369' derives exclusively from O.W. Wolters "The Khmer King at Basan", not cited, which I proved conclusively in two publications, both cited approvingly by M/C, to be a misunderstanding based on ignorance of primary sources.<sup>48</sup> In Wolters, moreover, the final abandonment of Angkor was in 1389-90, and Wolters was arguing against the conventional date of '1430-1'.

---

and apparently huge; K.873/999, *sre* together with "lands with their revenues" (*bhūmyākara*), a list of *sruk* and *camnat*; and K.205-207/1114, 1120, *sre* measured in units of unknown length, but apparently very large.

<sup>47</sup>. The exaggerated view of private land in Angkor is in Merle Ricklefs, "Land and Law in the Epigraphy of Tenth-Century Cambodia", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 26/3 (1967), pp. 411-420.

<sup>48</sup>. Wolters' article appeared in *Asia Major*, XII, 1 (1966), pp. 44-89. See Vickery, "Cambodia After Angkor: The Chronicular Evidence for the Fourteenth to sixteenth Centuries", Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1977, and Vickery, "The 2/k.125 Fragment, a Lost Chronicle of Ayutthaya", *Journal of The Siam Society* (JSS) LXV, 1 (January 1977), 1-80.

My answer is that nothing of importance happened in Cambodia in 1369 or in 1389, at least so far as extant sources inform us, and that the conventional date is only partly right. The “2/k 125 fragment” of an Ayutthayan chronicle informs us that Ayutthayan, not necessarily Thai, forces occupied Angkor *circa* 1431-1445, after which there was no further attempt to maintain a capital there.

Chapters 16 and 17 on the post-Angkor and modern periods are relatively free of bloopers, at least given the limits of space and the ensuing impossibility for long scholarly explanations. I would object to the notion that the Cambodian court fell under Thai domination at the end of the 16th century, at least not “a period of Thai suzerainty...that lasted...until the arrival of the French” (218, 223). There was a quick recovery from the brief Thai conquest at the end of the 16th century, followed by genuine independence until the eighteenth century, including Cambodian invasions of Ayutthaya, and repulsion of a major Thai attack in 1622, reported by Europeans on the scene, but expunged from official Thai history and from its foreign imitators.<sup>49</sup>

I find mystifying, following an accurate enough comment on the near identity of Ayutthayan and Cambodian high culture, the added comment (224) that “Cambodian social structure...seems to have been more rigid than its counterpart in Siam”, based on a 16th-century European description of class differences between nobles and commoners in Cambodia. Nothing written about Ayutthaya in any language or by persons from whatever cultural background gives grounds for postulating anything but wide and rigid class divisions in the societies of what is now Thailand. Otherwise the description of Khmer society (224-5) is unobjectionable.

An unfortunate projection of modern chauvinism back into the early nineteenth century is in the attribution of “the monarchy’s loss of credit” to “the unfortunate choice made by...King Chan (r.1806-34) to resist Siam by seeking countervailing patronage of Vietnam” (229). It is bad history to treat Chan and the Cambodian aristocrats who preferred to seek patronage from Vietnam rather than from Thailand as less patriotic or less competent. Rather, the historian should insist on the circumstance that their side lost and disappeared, while Cambodia has since then been dominated, and its history written, by the descendants of the pro-Thai faction of the time. If the prestige of the monarchy has declined, they, that is in direct filiation Ang Duang, Norodom...Sihanouk, bear at least as much responsibility.<sup>50</sup> Ang Duang (r. 1848-60), however, Chan’s pro-Thai brother, is in most treatments considered as enhancing the

---

<sup>49</sup>. Examples are David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984; and David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, second edition, Boulder, Westview Press, 1992.

<sup>50</sup>. There were two generations and two kings, not identical, between Norodom (1834-1904) and Sihanouk (b. 1922).

prestige of the monarchy, “a talented and popular ruler who presided over Cambodia’s coming back to life” (231).

A similar slip into partisanship appears in the treatment of the beginnings of the war and revolution of the 1970s. Mabbett and Chandler write (243), “In early 1968 the Cambodian communists opened up armed struggle against his [Sihanouk] regime--a move that probably had Vietnamese approval”. This is contrary to all treatments with which I am familiar, and the standard view has been that the Vietnamese did not approve of revolution in Cambodia until it was made unavoidable by Lon Nol’s coup against Sihanouk in 1970. If M/C have new evidence on this it should be spelled out, at least in summary. More likely they are following Chandler’s recent trend to blame all the faults of Cambodian communism on Vietnam.<sup>51</sup> The same tendentiousness continues in the treatment of the overthrow of Democratic Kampuchea and the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1979--it “became clear to many that Vietnam’s occupation of the country fitted into a long-term strategic plan to join the components of Indo-China into a Vietnam-dominated federation”(254). That Cambodian chauvinist fear and US regime propaganda line was year by year belied by Vietnamese actions from 1981 to 1989.

In a book that reached the latest contemporary period, it was impossible not to say something about the devastation of the Democratic Kampuchea revolution of 1975-1979, and the resultant population loss. Peculiarly, this is placed in chapter three, "The Land", not in the chapter on recent years; and the formulation of M/C is peculiarly vague in the extreme, and worth quoting in full as a gem of obfuscation. "There are only approximate estimates of the population before and after the savage depredations of the 1970s", true in an absolute sense, but one very respectable demographic study placed the population in 1970, when the war began, at 7.3 million.<sup>52</sup> The next sentence of M/C is "probably there were over six million Cambodians at the beginning of the decade", which verges on the intellectually dishonest if the 1970s decade, as the grammar suggests, is meant. No reworking of Migozzi's figures can bring the estimate for 1970 below 7 million. Mabbett and Chandler continue, "and about four million by the end of the Pol Pot regime...[and] by the early 1990s, the estimated population...was thought to have climbed beyond six million". This is surprising in that Chandler in earlier work has recommended my

---

<sup>51</sup>. See Chandler’s *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1992; and “Epitaph for the Khmer Rouge?”, *New Left Review*, 205, May-June 1994, pp. 87-99.

<sup>52</sup>. Mabbett and Chandler, p. 24; Jacques Migozzi, *Cambodge faits et problèmes de population*, Paris, CNRS, 1973.

treatments of Cambodian population figures, with estimates of 6-6.5 million in 1980, to his readers.<sup>53</sup>

Their four million estimate for 1979 goes back to the long discredited *CIA-Readers' Digest* propaganda, and the best international estimates for post-DK Cambodia were 6 to 6.5 million already in 1980-81, and nearly 9 million by the early 1990s. In 1992 the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) count of eligible voters estimated a total population of 8.8 million in those provinces of Cambodia to which UNTAC had access, not counting the population under the control of the Democratic Kampuchea group, or the estimated 300,000 surviving refugees in Thailand. The latest serious estimate for 1995 is over 10 million.<sup>54</sup>

Contemporary writing on Cambodian history of all periods is still troubled by much incoherence and confusion. For the eight centuries (c. 600-1400 AD) between Funan and the end of Angkor, this has been due in part to reasonable differences of interpretation of intractable sources, but also to neglect of the most important sources, the Khmer inscriptions. For the history of the past 50 years ideology also obtrudes. Cambodian history is not ready for a one-volume synthesis, although a better one could have been produced. In their intention to "be both scholarly and accessible" (frontispiece) the authors have overemphasized the latter, and have produced a volume for the coffee table, not for the scholar's, or even serious student's, bookshelf.

[\*A Response to Michael Vickery's Review of 'The Khmers: Journal article by I.W. Mabbett, D.P. Chandler; in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 28, 1997\*]

Michael Vickery, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia, 15 November 1995.

---

<sup>53</sup>. David Chandler, "Epitaph for the Khmer Rouge?", note 1.

<sup>54</sup>. Michael Vickery, "Democratic Kampuchea--CIA to the Rescue", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 14, 4 (1982), pp. 45-54; Michael Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, Boston, South End Press, 1984, pp. 184-87. The UNTAC figure of 8.8 million is in a computer program of statistics distributed by the UNTAC electoral component in 1993, and the Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report, "Indochina: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia", 3rd quarter 1993, p. 9, offered a 1992 population figure of 9.7 million based on UNTAC data. The latest estimates are in *Phnom Penh Post* (American-published English-language newspaper, Phnom Penh) 4/15, 28 July-10 August 1995, p. 8; "Govt approves study of ethnic minorities", showing table of population by province from "National Institute of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning (1994)", with total of 9,752,466; *Phnom Penh Post* 4/14, 14-27 July 1995, p. 17, Mark Dodd, "Population tops ten million", says "Cambodia's population has reached 10.4 million", citing a "statement from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities" released to mark World Population Day on July 11.

