PRE-ANGKOR CAMBODIA: EVIDENCE FROM THE INSCRIPTIONS IN KHMER CONCERNING THE COMMON PEOPLE AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

This paper is based on an examination of the texts of the pre-Angkor inscriptions in Khmer, of which virtually all legible material has been published by G. Coedès (1924, 1936, and 1937-66). The works of Aymonier (1900-3), Lunet de Lajonquière (1901), Parmentier (1927), Briggs (1951), Malleret (1959-63, and Groslier (1966) have been consulted too, in order to mark on the map (at end) the position of as many inscriptions as possible. It seemed that the geographical position of the inscriptions, seen in relation to the relief of the area, would be of interest and it was hoped that inscriptions of certain areas might show some features different from those of other areas. Inscriptions are referred to throughout by their inventory numbers, K.1, etc. In Appendix B the pre-Angkor inscriptions in Khmer are listed in numerical order with, for each inscription, a rough indication of the date and, where possible, a reference to a marked area on the map. The key indicating which dot on the map refers to which inscription(s) is also given in Appendix B.

The pre-Angkor inscriptions in Khmer were intended to record, for the benefit and instruction of the public, details of the religious foundations to which they were related. The maximum content of an inscription, in terms of items of information, is set out below in the order in which items usually appear:

(i) the date or name of the reigning king;
(ii) the title and names of donors;
(iii) the name of the god;
(iv) names of the people from whom the donor obtained land to offer to the foundation;
(v) details of the price paid to those who relinquished land for the foundation;
(vi) the extent, location and capacity of the donated ricefields;
(vii) 'the names of the donated slaves' with an indication of their duties;
(viii) details of the subsistence to be given to the religious personnel;
(ix) details of other land given to the foundation: orchards, market gardens, etc.;
(x) list of precious objects given to the foundation;
(xi) the statement that the revenues are to be combined with those of another foundation;
(xii) warning of punishment for anyone using or abusing the belongings of the foundation.

299
Few inscriptions have even half of these items. Many are broken or partly illegible so that the total original content is a matter of guesswork. Others, however, seem to be complete, with perhaps only a few illegible characters, and it is clear that the information was intended to be less. Such inscriptions usually mention the donor, the gift, and the god. They may lack the date simply because this was given in an accompanying Sanskrit inscription. One suspects that when they lack details of duties of slaves or of lands other than ricefields or lists of precious objects it is because the foundation was not so rich or flourishing as others. With regard to details concerning the capacity and location of the ricefields and prices paid, one may speculate as to the reason why some inscriptions have them and some do not. It was advantageous to the foundation to have a clear statement written up about land transactions and personnel belonging to the god but perhaps not every locality could provide the people capable of writing down and inscribing all the names and composing a passage about the organization?

In spite of the restricted subject-matter and the lacunae which place even more restrictions on them for us, the Khmer inscriptions offer a wealth of information if studied minutely. Certain aspects of life in ancient Cambodia, its religions (Bhattacarya 1961), its political organization (Sahai 1970), the legal position of its slaves (Bongert 1959), etc. have been studied using the inscriptions as a major source. The aim of this paper is to assemble the information given by the pre-Angkor Khmer inscriptions about the populace: the work they did, the land they inhabited, the products they knew, the objects they made, and the conditions in which they lived. The material is set out in three sections with some subsidiary paragraphs. Lists of relevant vocabulary are given in Appendix A.

1. The Non-élite Free People

The inscriptions chiefly present to us the dignitaries on the one hand and the slaves they donated on the other, while we are hardly permitted more than a glimpse of those who lived in freedom but insignificantly. They surely included humble peasants, craftsmen, and traders who had not the misfortune to be carried off as slaves or bonded for debt or crime. They certainly included the religious personnel, the pāhīnos, who are mentioned on the inscriptions, chiefly as receivers of provisions, and the families of officials, themselves owners of household slaves. There are two direct references to people who had humble titles but owned land. A certain Nāgavindu who sold a piece of land is referred to as Va, 'Mr.' (K.22, l. 26), while we know of the reservoir belonging to a Ku 'Miss/Mrs.' from K.561, l. 19. The secular public were the ge 'persons' at whom warnings of punishment were directed. K.90, piédroit nord, ll. 4-7, reads ge ta dap gui, ge ta sak gui, ge emer uñña, ge dânda 'Anyone who causes any hindrance here, anyone who steals from here, any transgressors of the edict will be punished.' From more detailed warnings of this kind, particularly in K.904, K.259, K.426, and K.451, it is clear that the public were known to take things, ask for things, use temple slaves as their own, seize slaves, cattle,
carts, and even build their homes on a grotto (K.724)! Much of the evidence which will be produced in connection with the slave population obviously applied also to the free: the features of their environment; the artefacts, precious and ordinary, with which they were familiar; the assessment of the values of slaves, objects, and land in terms of other goods.

2. The Slaves

In the briefest inscriptions, no more is said about the slaves than that a gift of kñuñh was made to the god. More informative inscriptions give lists of names, men first, women and children second, each adult entry being preceded usually by a title (or kinship term serving as a title). Unusually, on K.137, the women are given titles and then men are not! After each name there is usually a stroke or, more rarely, a circle. This mark of each of the slaves or potential slaves (i.e. the young children) would make it easier to count the totals. The most detailed inscriptions indicate the duties of the slaves. The information about slaves will be presented in five paragraphs.

2.1. Categories of slaves

Sometimes the lists of slaves were preceded by the terms kñuñh ta si or ghoda ‘menfolk’ and kñuñh or just kantai ‘womenfolk’. Further classification is found in connection with the status of the children, involving the following four categories:

- der Possibly to be connected with Mod. Khmer sto:(r) ‘on the point of’ and interpreted, like Mod. Mon homoe (leaj) as ‘on the verge of (puberty)’. This interpretation arose from discussion of this and the next word with Professor Shorto.


- rat ‘running, toddler’.

- pau ‘unweaned’.

The word si ‘male’ or tai ‘female’ follows this classification, e.g. K.149, l. 11, Ku Cãnhvây I kon Ku der si I pau si I ‘Ku Skein 1, ku’s child, male of der age 1, unweaned male 1.’

Two more words describing categories of slaves, occurring once each, are Skt. kārmmāntika ‘workers’ (K.41, l.4) and kłamuñ ‘maidens’ (K.24, B, l. 12). List 1 in Appendix A includes all the pre-Angkor words denoting categories of slaves: such words are not followed by a personal name.

2.2. Slave duties

On the inscriptions which give information about individual duties, the lists of slaves are divided first into groups according to the duty carried out and secondly, within each such group, into the categories of age and sex etc., described in the last paragraph. Where information about duties is not given we may imagine that all personnel were commandeered to work in the ricefields, orchards, plantations, or market gardens in accordance
with the local requirements and that special tasks such as cooking, weaving, dancing were performed by the more talented and fortunate. Such people would probably help with the farming at harvest-time. However that may be, our evidence is that a great variety of duties is recorded. Some of the vocabulary is not yet understood but, since the context makes it clear that a duty is being mentioned, all such vocabulary is entered in the list. Many of the activities may easily be imagined by those familiar with South East Asia and will have been observed in Cambodia in the twentieth century. They include grinding, spinning, grooming the king’s elephant, moulding statues, singing, and playing musical instruments. Even mūr slik ‘ones who sew leaves’ recognizable through the modern makers of woven plates and other utensils for many occasions. Some roles are not so clear-cut. The positions held by the kñum vraḥ ‘slave of the god’ was probably privileged; usually only one or two slaves have the duty. Among the vocabulary is less clear come ‘heaters of water for ceremonial ablutions’ (Coedès’ interpretation of “muh as ‘heater’); ‘trappers’ (camdak, cf. Mod. K. teak “trap”); slaves working inside either pīle ‘for above’ (i.e. on the floor, not under the building), or kamlūn vraḥ ‘in the interior of the temple’. Slave duties are listed in Appendix A.2.

2.3. Slave titles

The words given in list 3, Appendix A are classed as titles on the criterion that they are followed immediately either by a personal name or, as in a minority of cases, by a word such as the title of a master or a description of a duty, which served equally well as an identification of the slave. Va and Ku occur the most frequently. The translations ‘male adult’, ‘female adult’ given in the list sound extremely impersonal, even inhuman, but it seems to the writer that the titles were not lacking in dignity. If the masters had been contemptuous in their attitude to the slaves they could have had them entered, as in fact they are on a few inscriptions, by name only, following the category indication ‘menfolk’, ‘womenfolk’. In the translations of citations Va and Ku have been left because, although ‘Mr.’ is satisfactory as a translation of Va, neither ‘Mrs.’ nor ‘Miss’ is suitable for Ku; only the cumbersome ‘Miss/Mrs.’ would be adequate.

Mān and Oñ, which occur on K.46 and K.76 are not known through Mod. Khmer and must be compared respectively with Old Mon māḥ ‘(young) man’ and possibly uin, in, onomastic prefix (Shorto 1971: 18 and 25). K.76, l. 2 makes it clear that in that inscription the male slaves with this title were Mons: kñum ramañ ta si, Mān . . . ‘Mon slaves, males, Mān . . .’

2.4 Kinship

All the kingship terms which occur in pre-Angkor inscriptions, whether or not they occur in connection with slaves, are given for the sake of completeness in list 4, Appendix A. The kinship terms occur in several kinds of context in the slave lists, chiefly, however, in the lists of women