THE WORD ṅc IN KHMER: A SEMANTIC OVERVIEW

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1.1. Modern Khmer (mod.K.) ṅc /ñaːc/ is not what would normally be called a problem word. It is a verb pure and simple, and as such is likely to be modified by adverbs and, in particular, post-posed resultative verbs covering the ideas of 'to be possible' and 'to be not possible'. It belongs to the written language more because of its refined associations than because of any obsolescence.

1.2. Turning to our two Khmer dictionaries, we find ṅc defined as follows:

VK, 1719b: ṅc. a) to be brave, courageous, fearless; b) to be entitled to; to be possible, can.

DCF, 35b: ṅj. to dare; daring, bold.

Although there is no apparent semantic problem, in reality these glosses and their illustrations in the two dictionaries are far from adequate.

The best-known derivative of ṅc is ṃṅąc /ñaːnhaːc/, which is glossed as follows:

VK, 1848a: ṃṅąc. a) courage, boldness; b) capacity, title; c) strength, force, power.

DCF, 80b: ṃṅąc. a) power, authority; b) right, title, liberty, permission.

It is clear enough from the foregoing that ṃṅąc is a nominal derivative of ṅc, but once again the glosses provided by our two dictionaries are far from satisfactory and far from complete.

Another derivative, formed with prefix /bæːn-/ , is glossed as follows:

VK, 533b: amation. a) capacity, right; b) to encourage, make bold (causative derivative).
DCF, 915a: Pañ-āc. daring, fearless.

Here we note an obvious discrepancy between the two dictionaries; in my view, this points up the obsolescence of this derivative. The editors of the dictionaries have definitely failed to pinpoint the full sense of the item, and have therefore failed to assign it to the same wordclass.

1.3. Borrowed by Siamese, probably before the appearance of the earliest written document (end of thirteenth century), āc seems to have followed the same lines of development as in Khmer, as is suggested in TED, 989b: āc. daring; bold; fearless; valiant; undaunted...;
...capable; proficient; qualified; fitted.

Siamese also has the same two derivatives of āc as does Khmer, and I am inclined to believe they were borrowed at approximately the same period as the wordbase.

TED, 996b: Āmnāc. power; authority; right; jurisdiction; ability; capability; ...licence.

TED, 475a: Pāñ-āc. to be very bold, daring or fearless; to overstep the bounds of propriety.

The striking similarity between the Khmer and Siamese glosses is significant insofar as it shows that their editors' investigations were limited to the modern languages.

1.4. This much leads us into problems raised by the interpretation of āc as it occurs in older documents, namely of the Old Khmer and Middle Khmer periods. It must be mentioned here and now that these problems are not recognisable as such in translations of the Old Khmer inscriptions edited successively by Aymonier, Pinot and Cadès (cf. 2.2.).

For example, I myself was quite satisfied with the definitions of āc given in various dictionaries until I began, some five years ago, to analyse the Middle Khmer texts. It was only then that it occurred to me that the semantic range of āc was markedly broader and richer than I had suspected, and that it required further consideration and a reworking of its definition. The next step was intensive analysis of the Old Khmer inscriptions independently of their translations. Here again all occurrences of āc pointed to a breadth of meaning previously unknown to myself and previously unrecorded in the dictionaries. But the problem is even larger: Professor Alexander B. Griswold, the well-known student of the Old Siamese inscriptions, has recently called my attention to the fact that the various dictionaries cited (cf. 1.2., 1.3.) likewise do not cover all the senses that āc has in Siamese texts.
1.5. Sensing a need for external evidence, I next turned to Mon with a view to finding a cognate which would throw light on the problem. It was a disappointment at first to find that āc - ṛt in Old Mon and modern Mon alike is confined to the notions of 'to ask, to request', which seemed to rule out any possibility of comparison. However, it was not long before I was brought back to this question, for my most recent comparative studies seem to show the importance of the pre-inscriptional stage of Khmer and Mon, when these languages probably had more in common than is visible through written documents. This supposition led me to ask myself, "Could Khmer āc ever have meant 'to request', as in Mon?"

2. The answer to this question calls for re-examination of representative texts of all three periods. In presenting the results of my analysis I choose, for the sake of clarity and the reader's convenience, to work forward from the earliest texts rather than in the contrary direction. At the same time, data from modern Khmer are adduced whenever they seem to throw light on data from earlier periods.

2.1. āc is one of the most current lexical items in the Old Khmer inscriptions, being particularly common in the Angkorian inscriptions.

Analysis calls first of all for consideration of the kinds of speech involved. Briefly, occurrences of āc in a) "actual" speech (narrative, statement) must be distinguished from occurrences of āc in b) "virtual" speech (wish, injunction, potentiality). We turn first to consider virtual speech, the more complicated of the two types, since any light thrown on it will elucidate actual speech, whereas the contrary does not apply.

Occurrences of āc in virtual speech conform to the following pattern:

I. Actual speech  

A.  

āc ti  

II. Virtual speech  

vvaṁā c ti  

This means that āc introduces a clause in virtual speech (II) connected with a clause in actual speech (I) that precedes it. To pinpoint its sense and function it may be helpful to consider similar patterns of virtual speech in Old Khmer and modern Khmer:

I. Actual speech  

B. (OK)  

leň  

II. Virtual speech  

kampi leň  

C. (OK)  

jā  

vvaṁ jā
D. (mod.K.) suṃ suṃ kum

(OK vvām and kam and mod.K. kum are negative particles.)

Regarding A, B and C, our first readings of the texts do not make us aware of any difference between ṣac, leñ and jā. All three appear in similar constructions indicating that an actor, following the predication in I, next gives a kind of "warning" or "injunction", which may be expressed as follows:

I. II.
    , 'let (the object mentioned) '  
    , 'let (it) not '  

or:
    , 'let (the recipient) '  
    , 'let (him, her, them) not '  

2.2. Moreover, one is made even less aware of differences between ṣac, leñ and jā by French translations. As it happens, French has only one way of rendering all three, namely by the conjunctive particle que plus a verb in the subjunctive, the effect of which is to conceal all the nuances of the original. Be this as it may, analysis of the French subjunctive itself shows that it includes a range of aspects such as the optative, the potential, and an injunctive of various shades (which permits the subjunctive sometimes to overlap with the imperative), all of which offer clues to differentiating the senses intended in Khmer.

2.3. With reference to French translations, leñ (B) is shown by the texts to mark the optative. I shall not dwell on this case, as it has little bearing on the question at hand; however, I should at least note the fact that this use of leñ disappeared during the Middle Khmer period.

The case of jā (C) calls for a sharper focus. In Old Khmer as well as modern Khmer this lexical item means 'to be in such and such a condition; to be in good condition; to be good, proper; to be free (not a slave), of good breed; to be in good health'. Thus what the actor in I means to say in II is:

I. II.
    , 'it is good (it behooves) '  
    , 'it is not good (does not behave) '  


In other words, he expresses his way of thinking and/or his desire regarding the object of the preceding clause (I).

The case of ṛc (A) is a particular problem, since no known modern senses of it (cf. 1.2., 1.3.) fit the contexts; hence the need for comparative investigation.

2.4. In sorting out the data of virtual speech in modern Khmer, I chanced upon constructions with sūm (D), a marker of the optative but primarily a verb meaning 'to ask, request, ask for a favour, wish'. This brought me back to Mon ṛc – ṛt, of similar meaning, and led me to posit 'to ask, to request' for proto-Khmer/?asəc/ in order to account for the semantic and grammatical development of ṛc in historical times. Before entering into details on this point, it may be useful to sum up the foregoing comparative considerations:

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<tr>
<th>Pre-inscriptional Khmer</th>
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<tr>
<td>Optative</td>
<td>ṛc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desiderative</td>
<td>ḷ</td>
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<td>Injunctive</td>
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<tr>
<th>Inscriptional Khmer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optative</td>
<td>leŋ</td>
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<td>Desiderative</td>
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<td>Injunctive</td>
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<tr>
<th>Modern Khmer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optative</td>
<td>sūm</td>
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<td>Desiderative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Injunctive</td>
<td>trūv</td>
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3. While the above table helps elucidate the changes which took place in the system, they emphasise in particular the change which occurred with ṛc early in the history of Khmer, probably within or before pre-Angkorian times (sixth to eighth century A.D.). We turn now to consider how ṛc passed from virtual speech to actual speech.

3.1. We first posit for virtual speech ṛc 'to wish':

(Optative) ṛc ti ________ 'wishes that...'


This optative notion, taking on force, blends into an injunctive or jussive encompassing "orders" of various nuances. Thus:
(Injunctive) \( \text{āc ti} \) \( \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \) 'orders that...'  
\( \text{vvaṃ āc ti} \) \( \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \) 'does not order that...

Inasmuch as the Khmer verb has no formal distinctions of voice, the above glosses could also be 'it is [not] desired that...' and 'it is [not] ordered that...'. In the two negative constructions, moreover, \( \text{vvaṃ} \) may negate the dependent verb: 'wishes that...not...' and 'order that...not...'.

Illustrating this injunctive function are numerous instances to be culled from the Angkorian inscriptions, the majority of which are concerned by their nature with the "orders" of sovereigns or high-ranking officers. I confine myself to a few of these dating mostly from the tenth and eleventh centuries.

a. K.444, IC II, p.64, A (19-21):

\[
\text{nā paṃnvās gus gi nā thve vraḥ rājakāryya vvaṃ āc ti}
\]
as for religious only who do Royal Corvée not ordered

\[
oy vrīhi paryyaṇ viśaya caṇcūli phoṅ
\]
(passive marker give rice oil district ricinus plural

'Only the religious serving in the Royal Corvée are ordered not to provide rice, local oil, and ricinus [oil].')


\[
\text{ri anak ta vvaṃ thve raṅka caṃnām saṅkalpa}
\]
as for person linker not do rice ritual supply ritual supply

\[
vvaṃ āc ti nau ta bhumyāśrama noḥ.
\]
(not (are) ordered stay linker land hermitage that

'Those who do not provide ritual rice are ordered not to remain in the hermitage of this land.'

3.2. Here we come to a kind of turning-point where, in the mind of Khmer speakers, an actual transformation takes place. It is but a short step from 'I am desired or ordered to...' to 'I am obligated or entitled to...'. Conversely, 'I am not ordered to...' easily passes into 'I am not required or allowed to...'. This first step in the shift clearly runs parallel to the initial semantic enlargement. Thus, to use our previous examples:

a. It is ordered to

\[
(VP_1) \quad \text{only the religious serving in the Royal Corvée (recipient)}
\]
not to provide rice, etc.

\[
(VP_2)
\]
Only the religious, etc.
(recipient)

may not
are allowed not [to] provide rice, etc.
(VP₁) (VP₂)

b. It is ordered to
persons not providing ritual rice
(recipient)
not to stay in the hermitage of this land
(VP₂)

Those who do not provide ritual rice
(recipient)
may not
are not allowed [to] remain in the hermitage, etc.
(VP₁) (VP₂)

The first semantic shift may hence be summarised as follows: 'it is requested of X to do' > 'it is ordered of X to do' > 'X must, is allowed (entitled), has the right, to do', or the corresponding negative.

3.3. From the idea of 'to be entitled' the semantic development proceeds one step further:

c. K.33, IC III, p.150 (30-32):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ti} & \; \text{aṁ svāṁ} & \text{leḥ} & \text{āc ti} & \text{aṁ ta} \\
\text{passive marker} & \text{I ask} & \text{optative marker} & \text{be entitled} & \text{I linker} \\
\text{pāṃvās} & \text{pvās} & \text{paripāla} & \text{vvaṁ} & \text{āc ti} \\
\text{religious} & \text{enter} & \text{clergy} & \text{take care} & \text{not be allowed} \\
\text{Āyatva} & \text{ta} & \text{kāmloṁ} & \text{phoṁ} \\
\text{depend on} & \text{linker} & \text{dignitaries collective particle} \\
\end{align*}
\]

'It is my request, I who am a religious in the clergy, to be entitled to take care of [this foundation], not to have [it] depend on the mandarins.'

d. K.933, IV, p.48, B (15-16):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nau} & \text{ anak pvās} & \text{ta} & \text{mān dharma} & \text{pi} \\
\text{as for religious linker have virtue marker of coming action} \\
\end{align*}
\]
āc paripālana pi vvam pidā noḥ
be up to take care marker of coming action not oppress that

gi ta āc stap vartamāna caṃnyar dau
linker be entitled listen to news future translative marker

'Religious endowed with virtue who would be up to taking care of [the aśrama] and would not do harm to it would be entitled to receive official information from now on.'

e. K.693, IC V, p.205, B (27-28):

vraḥ sabhā tantyaḥ daha āc vyavahāra nu vāp
Royal Court inquire whether be up to sue then male title

vraḍhmaputra kathā man vvam āc
personal name declare particle not be up to

'The Court asked vāp Vraḍhmaputra if he meant [or was up] to bringing suit; he then declared that he did [or was] not.'

The following is a typical verbal phrase found in descriptions of land or ricefields:

f. K.817, IC V, p.201 (12-13):

bhūmi noḥ ti duñ ta anak ta roḥḥ noḥ
land that passive marker buy linker person linker like that

phoḥ āc ti vroḥ bhay mvay tap
plural marker capable linker sow twenty one ten

'The land bought from those people has a capacity of thirty sowings of grain.'

g. K.258, IC IV, p.179, A (11-12):

bhūmi noḥ nu vrai vnur mvat āc ta vroḥ
land that and forest hill put together capable linker sow
štata 1
hundred one

'The land together with the forests and hills has a capacity of a hundred sowings of grain.'

3.4. Another aspect of the semantic development of āc involves the moral connotation growing out of the idea of capability, which is to be borne in mind if we are to account for āc in Middle Khmer texts.
h. K.227, BEFEQ XXIX, p.309 (22):

cāma p sarō sántac āyat anāk mvay ta āc
Cham surround [His] Majesty without person one linker capable
chpañ ley
fight ever

'The Cham surrounded His Majesty [Yasovarman] without any of his men
being capable [or having the courage] to fight back.'

i. K.659, IC V, p.146 (28-29):

nau sādhu ta āc varddheya neḥ
as for good linker have courage make prosperous this
pūnya neḥ ge mān svargga
good deed this they have heaven

'Good people who have the courage [or are determined] to take good
care of this deed [the cult of a Śivalīṅga] will obtain the
heavenly reward.'

j. K.705, IC V, p.199 (10-11):

ri ta āc paripālana ge svey divyaloka
as for linker have courage take care they enjoy celestial world
aṃval nu gaña phoṅ
together with group plural marker

'Those who have the courage [or have the merit] to take care of
[the cult] will enjoy [the bliss] of the celestial world together
with their folk.'

Before moving on to the Middle Khmer texts, it seems worthwhile to
consider a few of the more involved instances of āc illustrating its
semantic effect.

k. K.292, IC III, p.208 (lines unnumbered). This is the famous oath of
allegiance of royal officers to Sūryavarman I.

daḥa āyuḥ yeṅ āc dan ta vraḥ rājakāryyavelā lvoṅ ta
if life we can reach linker time of Royal Corvée arrive linker
kāla nau prakāra leha yeṅ slāp hetu bhakti
death as for kind whatever we die cause devotion
gi pi yeṅ thve
future marker we do

'In the event that our lives can [fortunately] last as long as the
time of the Royal Corvée, whatever manner of death befall us, we shall accept it out of devotion [to His Majesty].'

The best of these instances are provided by a text engraved at different places (K.444, IC II, pp.63-5; K.868, IC VI, pp.170-2; K.175, IC VI, pp.175-8) reporting the creation of two varṇa or 'corporations of Royal Officers' by Jayavarman V and consequently containing a number of regulations expressed by means of āc or vvaṃ āc. I choose only one case:

1. K.444, IC II, B (9-13):

naṃ rū kule ta anak si man ka āc ti
as for relative linker person male linker capable

paryyann hoṅ nāṃ mok oy ācāryya... pre paryyann
teach indeed bring to teacher order teach

siksā āy nagara pi pre nā vraṭh
learn at city marker of coming action order at Royal

rājakāryya nā pamvās vvaṃ āc ti bhāgavata
Royal Corvée at religious not be entitled Bhāgavata

'Male members of the family capable of receiving education [will be] brought to the ācārya. These are instructed to teach and train the former in the City and to employ them as religious in the Royal Corvée [but] not as Bhāgavata.'

3.5. The results of the foregoing analysis (c to 1) may be summarised as follows:

āc has the following nuances:
'to have the ability, capability, competence, to; to be up to';
'to have the power, right, title, mandate, to';
'to have the intention of, mean to';
'to have the courage to';
'to have the merit, good fortune, to';
'to have the (supernatural) power to'.

4. Bearing the last value in mind, we may now move on to the Middle Khmer texts.

m. IMA 31 (between 1684 and 1687 A.D.), lines 11-13:

braṭh aŋg jā buṃṅnāk trey trān rohān sambau
sacred being body be refuge shore shelter like junk

ratn ruṅ ṽuṭun samār ḍā nū āc nām satv
gem wide noble capable that is capable lead creature
phoñ chloñ leñ vattasañsār
plural marker cross leave cycle of transmigration

'The Lord [Buddha] was the refuge, the sheltering shore like unto a precious, broad, and majestic sea-going junk capable of transporting all creatures across and beyond the [Ocean] of transmigrations...'

This passage illustrates the type of equational expression that arises in a community of people employing two languages, a learned and a popular idiom - in the case of Cambodia, Sanskrit and Khmer. The group samār āc is tantamount to saying or writing samār = āc or, better yet, samār (= āc). In other words, samār (< Skt. samartha 'capable') is synonymous with our āc.

Here are instances from the cpāp', ethical and didactic texts in verse composed by religious teachers for their disciples:

n. C.Ka., stanza 4:

mtāy ūbuk sot pā
mother father moreover

āc mak pampuos
have courage some cause to enter clergy
hetu cañ sambhār
because want accumulation

'Your parents, moreover, ...had the courage [or the virtue or merit] to bring you here and make you a religious because they wanted to accumulate [merits for themselves and for you].'

o. C.Ka., stanza 33:

rī grū pādhyāy
as for guru preceptor
praṭūc nūv mtāy
compare with mother
ūbuk eṅ hoṅ
father indeed
āc  oy  kti  cpā'p
have capacity  give  principles
praṭau  dharm  phoḥ
instruct  Dharma  collective marker

'As for your preceptors, they are comparable to your parents, [since]
they are qualified [or have the merit or virtue] to teach you all
the principles and the Dharma...'

Slightly different are the two following cases:

p. C.K.C., stanza 67:

kra  bāky  biroḥ
rare  word  harmonious
kra  citt  āc  smoḥ
rare  heart  capable  devoted

'Rare are sweet [agreeable] words, rare is the heart brave [bold]
enough to be devoted [to others in distress]...'

q. C.K.C., stanza 68:

kra  man  bāky  saty
rare  be  word  true
kra  citt  āc  kāt'
rare  heart  capable  cut off
srālaḥ  bī  sneh
free  from  love

'It is hard to find true words and a heart bold enough to get free
from attachment...'

4.1. I have so far concerned myself with the wordbase rather than any
derivatives of āc, on the grounds that the occurrences of the former
greatly outnumber occurrences of the latter. Moreover, I have assumed
that the semantic expansion of āc over the centuries has to some extent
had a bearing on the development of the derivatives. Here I shall
confine myself to the most common of these, ampāc (cf. 1.2.) and mention
one aspect of its development.

Taking it as understood that ampāc has progressed from the sense of
*'request' to that of 'title, right; ability, capacity; strength, energy,
(personal, political, administrative) power' and on to 'virtue, merit; courage, boldness', I find still another connotation which goes beyond the moral and religious implications of the term. In its sense of 'power', amṇāc also includes the domain of the supernatural and conveys the idea of force emanating either from the divine world above us or from magic. One can possess amṇāc 'potential force' because (a) he has accumulated merit in the past, even in previous existences, or because (b) he has acquired magical knowledge. This personal amṇāc enables him, consciously or otherwise, to perform quasi-miracles, and in this sense the word is equated with Skt. tejas 'hot and piercing power'. This point is illustrated by the following passages:

r. IMA 39 (1747 A.D.), p.113 (29-31):

noḥ vā cor kāṃṇāc pāk papp khlapp khlāc toy nū braḥ then bandits evil routed submit thanks to sacred

amṇāc braḥ pāḍa anak jā amcass noḥ pān power His Majesty person be lord then obtain

parapūr sruk kḥsem khsān sāpāy dūlāy abundance country pacified comfortable well off

'These evil bandits were then routed and submitted, thanks to the supernatural power of His Majesty our Lord, and the country resumed abundance, peace, comfort, and prosperity...'

s. IMA 39, p.114 (40):

[The General came out victorious and dispersed the enemy]

toy nū tejaḥ amṇāc braḥ pād anak jā amcass...
thanks to power power His Majesty person be Lord

'...thanks to the supernatural power of His Majesty our Lord...'

Both of these texts refer to victories won by the same outstanding general. Both, moreover, reflect the collective mind of the times which interpreted all happenings as manifesting an immanent supernatural power.

4.2. To bring our inquiry to a close, I propose the following statement of the semantic range of āc and its derivative:

āc to ask, request, require; (impersonal) to be desired, ordered to do;
to be required, obliged, expected (supposed) to do; to be allowed (entitled), have the right, to do; to be able
(capable), competent, qualified to do; to mean (intend), be determined to do; to have the courage, have the merit (virtue) or good fortune to do; to have the power (authority) or supernatural power to do.

ἀρχή request, wish;
liberty, permission, right, title, capacity;
force, (personal, political, administrative, judicial, supernatural) power, (personal, local, national) authority.
NOTES

1. All extracts from texts are given in transliteration, indicated by bold ("Courier") type, thus: ṃc ti; vvaṃ Ǝc ti, etc.

2. Obsolete spelling.


5. It is not my intention to blame the translators of the Old Khmer inscriptions, most of whom were eminent scholars, for having rendered ṃc so vaguely. Their chief aim, after all, was to make these texts available for historical use. For this we must be thankful. My point here is that we must seek to improve upon their translations by applying the techniques of linguistic analysis.

6. It is sometimes forgotten that the so-called particles of Khmer are originally lexical items with full meaning and that they tend to carry part of their original meaning even when grammaticalised. Exceptions to this general rule are a very few particles such as nu - nau 'and', dañ - doñ - dãmã 'and, together with', and pi - pI 'marker of coming action'.

7. In the glosses I use the English passive to show the rôle of ti as a passive marker.

8. My translation, which differs from that of Cœdes (1942), is intended to achieve greater accuracy by reflecting the structure of this passage.
Cœdès's comment (1942:67, note 5) on bhāgavata is worth reproducing: "The Bhāgavata represented, together with the Pāñcaratra and Sāttvata, one of the Viṣṇuite sects of Cambodia (cf. BEFE0, XXXII, p.106). According to this last text, they were not considered regular religious (pāṇḍvās), probably because monkhood was the privilege of the Śaivite sects."
ABBREVIATIONS

BEFE0  Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient.


C.Kr.  Cpāp' kram, included in Cpāp' phseñ-phseñ (as above).


K.  Inventory number of Old Khmer inscriptions in IC.

Skt.  Sanskrit.

