THE SOURCES OF KHMER /ʋə/  

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$1$ Of the thirty-four vowels of modern Khmer thirty-two can be traced back to Old Khmer while the remaining two, /ʋə/ and /əː/, cannot.¹ In the present paper I propose to suggest, if not demonstrate, that /ʋə/ was introduced into Khmer some time after the Old Khmer period through borrowing from neighboring languages, most notably Thai and Vietnamese.

To place what follows in perspective I first account for the modern reflexes of the Old Khmer vowels:²

\[
\begin{array}{llll}
/iː/ & < i, i̯, e, ya & /wː/ & < i, i̯ & /uː/ & < o, va \\
/i/ & < e & /w/ & < i, ya & /u/ & < u \\
/ɛː/ & < e & /əː/ & < e & /ɔː/ & < o \\
/ɛ/ & < e, u, a(i) & /ə/ & < u, a(u) & /ɔ/ & < a, u \\
/eː/ & < i, e, ya & /ɛː/ & < ? & /ɔː/ & < o, va \\
/e/ & < e, u & /ɛ/ & < i, e, ya & /ɔ/ & < u \\
/eː/ & < e & /aː/ & < a, ā & /ɔː/ & < a, o \\
/e/ & < e & /a/ & < a, ā & /ɔ/ & < a, o \\
/ɪə/ & < e, ya, yā & /ʊə/ & < o, va, vā \\
/ɛə/ & < a, ā \\
/ɛə/ & < a, ā, o & /ɔə/ & < a, ā \\
/æː/ & < e & /aə/ & < e & /ɔə/ & < o
\end{array}
\]


²Vowels marked off by slants are phonological; those given in italics are orthographic.
§2 In the dictionary of Jacob\(^3\) we find twenty-six forms containing /\ua/. Whatever the possible total number of such forms might be, we may reasonably assume that these twenty-six are of relatively common occurrence.

1. k\ua\ua v. go around.
2. k\uad\ua n. mortar with pestle.
3. k\ud\ua n. tile.
4. k\uh\uad n. raised edging around house...
5. kr\ug\ua n. equipment, set of utensils...
6. kr\uh\ua v. making steady progress...
7. \uh\uad v. perplexed.
8. \ua v. believe.
9. \ud\ua v. increase.
10. \uh\ug\ua n. belief.
11. \uh\uad\ua v. take a roll-call...
12. t\ue\ua n. dwarf.
13. t\uh\ua v. urge, exhort, prod, press for an answer.
14. t\uh\ua v. = t\uh\ua.
15. \ug\ua v. be tired physically or mentally...
16. pr\ug\ua v. fresh, light (of colour).
17. pr\ug\ua v. = pr\ug\ua.
18. ph\ue\ua n. friends, close associates.
19. \ug\ua n. story, matter, event, play.
20. \ug\ug\ue n. battle-field..., stage...
21. \ug\ug\ufe v. often, frequently.
22. \ue\ua v. yellow.
23. \ue\ue v. quick.
24. \ue\ud n. speed.
25. \ue\ue\ua v. limp...
26. \ue\ua v. bold.

§3 To the forms just listed fourteen others may be added:

27. (k\ue:) \ue n. hard-boarded bed.
28. \ue\ug v. ask for something importunately.
29. th\ue\ua n. ruler, measure; stick used as weapon.
30. b\uad\ue\ua v. make go aground.
31. b\ue\ua n. floating weeds in marsh...
32. ph\ue\ua n. albino.
33. \ue\ue\ue\ue n. plant name.
34. cau-k\ue\ua n. provincial governor (obsolete)
35. \ue\ue v. almost the same.
36. \ue\ue v. shrink (morally).


\(^4\)/\ua/ and /\ua/ are the same vowels, /\ua/ being used to distinguish contrasting orthographies.
37. លំដៅ-លុង  n. fame.
38. លុង v. skin very carefully.
39. ស្វាយ v. be depressed.
40. ស្វេ  v. half-drunk.

§4 To the best of my knowledge and belief these forty items comprise nearly all of the corpus on the basis of which any investigation of Khmer /mɛ/ must be made. I turn now to comment as briefly as possible on the sources of the above forms insofar as they are known.⁵

1. ក្រំ.  Source uncertain.

2. ក្រៃ.  Cf. Thai krâ?dâe 'a stamp mill'. Note that the Thai form has mai ek. Thai loans from Khmer usually have no tone marks. Khmer kdua may therefore have been borrowed from Thai krâ?dâe and reduced to its present form.

3. ក្លាត.  Cf. Thai krâ?bâe 'a tile used for roofs, floors or walls', with mai tho.

4. ក្លាត.  Cf. Thai khmôn 'dam, dyke, retaining wall, embankment', with mai ek.

5. ក្លាត.  Cf. Thai khmîn 'mechanism, machine, engine, appliance; an instrument; an agent; material, (food-) stuff, ingredients, food; utensils', with mai ek. The /k/ of Khmer krâe is from Old Khmer *g/, while the /kh/ of Thai krâe is from Old Thai *g/. The borrowing must consequently have taken place before the sound change *g/ > /kh/ occurred in Thai.

6. ក្លាត.  Source uncertain.

7. េខ.  Cf. Thai េខ (nòi) 'slow, tardy, sluggish', which has mai ek.

8. ចំុ.  Cf. Thai ชนะ 'to believe', with mai ek. The /c/ of ចំុ is from Old Khmer */ʧ/ while the /ch/ of ចុ is from Old Thai */ʧ/.

9. ១១.  Source uncertain.

10. កណ្ត. Derivative of ចុ by infixation of */-១២-/. Derivatives of loanwords are not rare in Khmer.

11. កិរ្ន. Source uncertain. This form is used as a noun corresponding to ចុ; e.g., វួកេខ្យាណឱល ផ្លូយ គុន កិរ្ន សំ  'he studies hard but makes no progress'. It may be a derivative of ចុ, though the infixation of */-១២-/ is not found elsewhere.

12. ២១.  Source uncertain.

13. ២២. Cf. Thai วน 'to warn, caution; to remind'. Despite the fact that Thai วน has the mid-level tone, it is almost certain that Khmer borrowed it from Thai rather than the other way around; for in almost all cases Old Khmer */t/ before a vowel becomes modern Khmer /d/, a circumstance suggesting that modern /t/ in this environment are loans.


15. ឈាន. Cf. Thai ១២ 'to be tired, exhausted', with mai ek and initial orthographic ឈ. There is no discernible reason that Thai would borrow Khmer ឈាន and then represent it with the "aspirated" n.

16, 17. ម្រឺ, ម្រឺ.  Source uncertain.

18. ម្រឺ. Cf. Thai ងារ 'friend', with mai ek. The /ph/ of ម្រឺ is from Old Thai */b/, whereas Old Khmer */b/ yields modern Khmer /p/ rather than /ph/. Hence Khmer borrowed ម្រឺ from Thai after the */b/ > /ph/ change occurred in the latter.


20. រឹះ-រឹះ(k). Cf. Sanskrit raṇaraṅga 'battlefield'. We
have no other examples of the change Sanskrit /a/ > modern Khmer */ə/, however.


22. ḿën. Cf. Thai Ṽën 'yellow', with initial Ṽl (see item 15).

23. Ḽën. Source uncertain, but cf. Vietnamese ṿơn 'to fly like an arrow'.

24. Ṽwën. Derivative of Ḽën by infixation of /-b-/ (see item 10).

25. Ṽṁoṛy. Source uncertain.


27. Ṽë. Cf. Vietnamese ngő a gő 'hard-boarded bed', with tone /./.

28. Ṽëk. Source uncertain.

29. thṣëk. Cf. Vietnamese thuóc 'ruler, measure', with tone /'/.

30. bōṅkṣëŋ. Derivative of kṣëŋ (item 1) by prefixation of /bōṅ-/

31. Ṽwën. Source uncertain.

32. phṣëk. Source uncertain, but cf. Thai phṣëk 'albino'. In this case the direction of borrowing cannot be determined inasmuch as the /ph/ of Khmer phṣëk reflects Old Khmer */ph/ while the /ph/ of Thai phṣëk reflects Old Thai */ph/; and no changes have intervened to provide a clue.

33. māṅkḷwē (orthography: māṅkḷwē). Cf. Thai māṅkḷwē 'name of same plant as in Khmer'. The divergence of the orthography from the pronunciation of the Khmer form can be accounted for only by assuming that it is still written as it was once in Thai and that it was formerly pronounced as in Thai as well. Following voiced initials, Old Khmer */a/ before /ʔ, k, Ṽ/ is
reflected by /ɨə/. 6

34. cau-məŋ. Cf. Thai cau-məŋ 'governor of a məŋ', < cau 'lord, prince', with mai ek, + məŋ 'land, domain, country; territorial division, city-state'.

35. rələ. Source uncertain.

36. rə. Thai rə 'of customs) to fall into disuse; (of one's knowledge) to become rusty', with mai tho.


38. ləŋy. Cf. Thai ləŋy 'to saw, saw off', with mai ek.

39. səək. Source uncertain.

40. səəŋ. Source uncertain, but possibly a derivative of item 26.

§5 As has been said, the foregoing forty items represent the great majority of Khmer forms containing /əə/. Two of these, items 14 and 17, are mere orthographic doublets of other forms in the list; three, items 10, 24 and 30 (and possibly items 11 and 40), are derivatives of other forms in the list. These reduce to thirty-five the effective total of the forms to be considered. Fourteen of these have been found to be of uncertain source. The remaining twenty-one, however, show an unmistakable relationship to comparable forms in Thai, Vietnamese and, in a single case, Sanskrit. This proportion (60%), taken in conjunction with (a) the low frequency of forms with /əə/ and (b) the circumstance that /əə/ cannot be reconstructed for Old Khmer, is ample enough to demonstrate with fair probability that /əə/ came into Khmer after the Old Khmer period and by way of loans from Thai and Vietnamese for the most part.

6In very general terms, loans from Thai into Khmer appear to be modeled not on orthographic forms but on spoken forms.