

Hostages, Heroines and Hostilities



After the somewhat vague sources of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, the nineteenth century is well documented, often furnishing three perspectives on the same event. The beginning of the century saw Thai and Vietnamese involvement in Cambodian political affairs lead to the almost total loss of Cambodian sovereignty (see Fig. 5.1) and the eradication of Cambodian social norms; by its close, the French were firmly in control. The years between the restoration of Cambodian ‘independence’ in 1848 and the establishment of the French Protectorate in 1863, when Ang Duong reigned, are perceived by many Cambodians as a ‘golden age’,¹ paralleled only by the classical ‘Angkorian’ period and the Cambodia of the 1950s and early 1960s. The nineteenth century poses a dichotomy from the perspective of women and power. On one hand, an unmarried queen ruled Cambodia for over a decade; on the other, the *Cbpab Srei*, ‘Code of conduct for women’, was composed and a tradition of misogynist literature begun.

Thai forces burnt Phnom Penh to the ground in 1772 and virtually wiped out the Cambodian royal family. The Thai king ‘captured and cleared out families in the territories of Barai and Phothisat [Pursat], and took captive Cambodian nobles ... for a combined total, including other families, of ten thousand persons, all sent back to Thonburi ... [and] ordered that the Cambodian

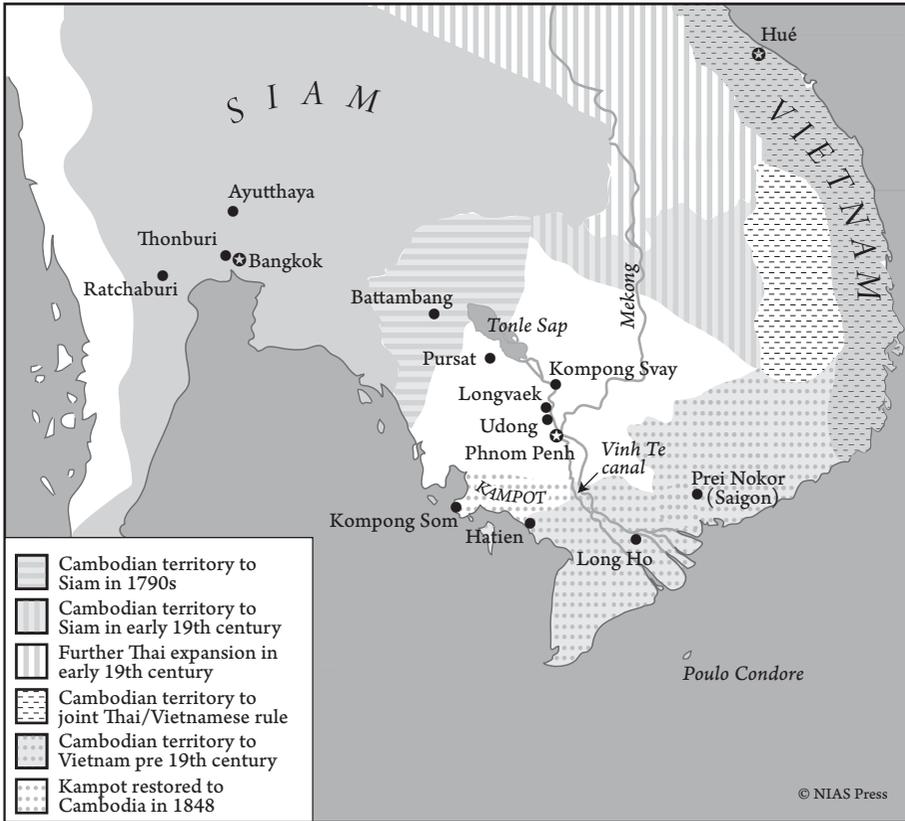


Fig. 5.1: Cambodia in the nineteenth century. Adapted from Jan M. Pluvier, *Historical Atlas of South-East Asia* and other written sources.

families taken captive be settled at Ratchaburi.² There are earlier examples of the Thai relocating Cambodians in this fashion, and Cambodian monarchs in their turn regularly moved thousands of people from Thai territory.³ After the razing of Phnom Penh, a Cambodian prince, Ang Eng (1772–1796 or 1797), was placed on the throne at Udong at the age of seven, under the patronage of the Thai king.⁴ The ensuing period was marked by internal dissensions between *oknha* who supported either a Vietnamese prince, Nguyen Anh (later to rule as Gia Long), or the Tayson rebels of Central Vietnam.⁵ Despite Ang Eng's precipitate death at age 24, he had nonetheless managed to sire six children: Ang Chan (1792–1834), Ang Phim (1793–1798), Ang Snguon (1794–1822), a princess, Meatuccha, whose dates of birth and death are unknown, Ang Im

The reign of Queen Ang Mei

King Ang Chan died in 1834, leaving four daughters; Baen, Mei, Peou, and Snguon (see Fig. 5.2).⁹ Although Ang Chan's surviving brothers, Ang Im and Ang Duong, immediately laid claim to the throne, the Vietnamese and possibly the Cambodian *oknha* wished to install one of Ang Chan's eldest daughters as sovereign. Three reasons are usually given as to why the eldest daughter, Baen, was passed over: she was sympathetic towards Thai interests; she refused to marry the son of the Vietnamese emperor; or the *oknha* would not allow her to enter into such an alliance.¹⁰ The records are similarly inconsistent towards the next princess in line for succession, Ang Mei. A Thai document relates that the Vietnamese forced the *oknha* to accept Mei as their queen, whereas the Vietnamese sources assert that the *oknha* proposed Mei as an alternative to Baen. Walter F. Vella cited a Thai manuscript that stated that the Vietnamese had tried to persuade Mei to marry the son of the Nguyen emperor in order to facilitate the incorporation of Cambodia into the Vietnamese state, but gave way 'in view of strong objections from Cambodian nobles.'¹¹ Khin Sok also alleges that an alliance between a Cambodian princess and a Vietnamese prince was the means by which the Vietnamese sought to gain control of Cambodia. In any event, Hué bestowed the title *quan chua*, 'princess', upon Mei in May 1835, and her three sisters were given the title *huyen quan*, 'chief of sub-prefecture.'¹² The Vietnamese kept a close guard on the Ang princesses. Mei had two companies of soldiers, 100 men in total, assigned to her for her protection. The other three Cambodian princesses were each assigned thirty soldiers. Ostensibly for their safety, the guards were, in reality, to ensure that they did not escape.

The 'Vietnamisation' of Cambodian society, already underway during the reign of Ang Chan, continued during the reign of Ang Mei. All women were ordered to grow their hair long in the Vietnamese style and to wear trousers instead of skirts.¹³ Cambodian dance assimilated elements of Vietnamese and Chinese traditions. The markets sold only Vietnamese food. Cambodian officials had to don Vietnamese ceremonial dress when summoned to Vietnamese officials. A form of Vietnamese had to be spoken to Vietnamese officials. Cambodian administrative and military officials were replaced by Vietnamese ones. At least 5,000 Vietnamese relocated into Cambodia each year. Places received new Vietnamese names. Vietnamese notions of Confucian piety were applied to Cambodian society; an edict from the

Vietnamese emperor Ming Mang exhorted Mei and her sisters to be loyal to their father's memory, a Confucian virtue. Princess Baen's mother, Queen Tep, was deemed 'disreputable' and 'immoral' by the Vietnamese as she was living in Battambang with a Thai official, having deserted her husband's family – contravening another standard of Confucian piety. Masses of Cambodians were forced into *corvée* labour for Vietnamese construction projects. There was some resistance to the changes wrought by the Vietnamese during this period, however. Kompong Svay revolted in 1836, led by the *oknha* Nong. The following year two brothers in Kompong Som followed suit, eventually seeking refuge in the Thai court. A Cambodian local official in an ethnically Khmer district of southern Vietnam who refused to implement regulations enforcing Vietnamisation policies was executed.¹⁴

Princess Baen met a similar fate for her resistance to the Vietnamese. In 1840, the Vietnamese discovered that the princess had been in contact with her mother, Tep, and uncle, Ang Im, who were living in Battambang province, and was planning to escape to them. Charged with collaborating with the enemy, Baen was imprisoned in Vietnamese military barracks in Phnom Penh pending her trial. The Vietnamese emperor, Minh Mang, demoted the other Ang princesses to low-ranking titles in the civil service. In August or September 1840, Mei, Peou and Snguon, and other members of the court, including two of Ang Chan's queens, were enticed onto a barge, their retainers plied with alcohol and rendered incapacitated, and taken off to Vietnam. Around the same time, princess Mom, daughter of Ang Duong (r. 1848–1860), another half-brother of Chan, and his principal wife Ong, were captured by the Vietnamese and imprisoned on the island of Poulo Condore. Thai and Cambodian sources state that the Vietnamese drowned Baen in the Mekong river after her sisters had been taken to Saigon, although Khin Sok, citing the Veang Thiounn version of the chronicles, states that Baen was taken to Long Ho and tortured to death by the Vietnamese general, after which her body was placed in a sack and thrown in the river.¹⁵

Many Cambodian *oknha* and their followers had already revolted against Vietnamese policies; the unrest worsened with the arrest of Baen and the prolonged absence of Mei. Vietnamese officials in Phnom Penh called for Mei to be returned to Cambodia as queen in order to quiet the rebellion, but the Vietnamese emperor refused. The Vietnamese official in charge of Cambodia, Truong Ming Giang, reiterated this request in March 1841. Minh Mang, alarmed

and bemused at the continued civil unrest, allowed Mei, Peou, Snguon, and queen Ros, one of Ang Eng's wives and the mother of Ang Duong, to return at the end of April 1841. Upon her return to Phnom Penh, Mei issued directives embossed with the official royal seal of Cambodia, appointed new officials and issued letters to provincial officials and leaders asking for their support of her reign. At the same time, Duong was issuing similar calls for support from Udong. Mei was reinstated as queen and her sister Peou appointed the heir apparent in 1844. Towards the end of that year, the Vietnamese distributed letters stating that Mei and her sisters were the sovereigns of Cambodia and that any dissenters would be executed. Most of the Cambodian court remained under Vietnamese control until October 1846, when the Vietnamese released Ros, a daughter of Ang Duong, and 34 other members of the Cambodian court and allowed them to join Ang Duong in Udong. Discussions were underway between the Thai and Vietnamese for the resolution of the Cambodian problem, resulting in a compromise whereby both Ang Duong and Ang Mei would rule as co-sovereigns. Simultaneous coronations were held in Bangkok and Phnom Penh in 1848, although Cambodian sources record only Duong's accession. The chronicles do not mention Mei after 1848, although she was still living in Udong in the 1870s.¹⁶

Mei's story is told dispassionately in the Cambodian chronicles, where she is portrayed as a puppet of Vietnamese emperors and officials; some later writers do not even mention her at all, glossing over the period of her rule as one in which Emperor Gia Long made Cambodia into a colony. This is because her reign has been perceived as synonymous with the Vietnamese 'occupation' of Cambodia, a period that left deep scars upon the Cambodian psyche. Khin Sok calls the period encompassed by her reign 'la période calamiteuse'.¹⁷ The first half of the nineteenth century remains a deeply reviled period in the collective Cambodian consciousness to this day; it is hardly surprising that the sovereign during that time, seen as collaborating with the enemy, would be perceived in a negative context by later generations. A typical example of the association between Mei and Vietnamese dominance can be seen on an Internet forum for Cambodians in diaspora in a blog dated 22 August 2002. A photograph of Prince Norodom Sihanouk being embraced by Vo Nguyen Giap at Hanoi Airport in 1969 had superimposed upon it the following dialogue:

Sihanouk: Guess who will succeed me in 2003?
Giap: Your cousin, descendant of Ang Mei!¹⁸

The connection between Mei and Vietnamese annexation of Cambodia partly facilitated the identification of female political power with national humiliation. As Chandler has shown in his analysis of a chronicle composed in 1856, Cambodians seem to have regarded the time prior to the coronation of Ang Duong in 1848 as one of ‘homelessness, barbarism, and the loss of status’, a great contrast to the subsequent period, one of ‘harmony, propriety and elegance’. Ang Duong himself took care to emphasise the association between Mei and the Vietnamese, blaming ‘Samdech Pheakanyea [Ang Mei] who ruled during the Annamite period’ for the loss of indentured slaves, who, he implied, having behaved themselves during the reigns of Ang Eng and Ang Chan, took the opportunity of lax (female) rule to escape to the forest. Most histories of the period imply that the *oknha* and Cambodians in general acquiesced to Mei as their sovereign reluctantly, holding out – ‘forlornly’ – for Duong or for both Im and Duong to return as sovereigns. Walter F. Vella implies that the Vietnamese used a pre-existing negative association between women and political power in order to weaken Cambodian internal politics. There was even a rumour that she was engaged in an affair with Truong Ming Giang, the Vietnamese governor in Phnom Penh. Jean Moura consulted *oknha* and women of the palace who had had positions at the court during the reign of Ang Mei and independent observers who told him that the rumour was not true.¹⁹ Yet historians continue to construct Mei as a passive victim, hardly legitimate in the eyes of her own people.²⁰

Bun Sun Theam represents Mei as failing to garner popular support in Cambodia because the general population preferred Duong, as he was male. This is also the line pursued by Nguyen-o Thu-uong. Khin Sok alleges that the Cambodian populace ‘turned naturally towards Ang Duong’ in order to lead the uprising that would resuscitate the fortunes of the kingdom, which were ‘practically in the abyss’ during the Mei incumbency.²¹ Her reign is seen as completely negative, during which Cambodian territory, culture, and independence were almost lost. A 52-year-old *chao adthika* in Kampot province described her as

greedy for power. She let the *yuon* eat Cambodia, and for what? So she could be a *neak thom* and live a comfortable life. She didn’t care about the people, what they suffered. We had to speak their language and eat their food and they destroyed our wats because they want our culture to die.²²

Whilst it cannot be denied that the Vietnamese were in control of Cambodia during Mei's reign, she inherited a country that had already been mortgaged to Hué by her father, King Ang Chan. Almost immediately after his coronation, Chan sent word to Gia Long of his coronation and received in return a letter that gave him 'permission' to rule. He was also advised to follow 'civilized models of government', meaning those of the Vietnamese. A period of dual fealty, paying tribute to both Vietnam and the Thai, ensued until 1830, but Chan grew increasingly anti-Thai, refusing to travel to Bangkok to attend the funeral of Rama I. He also refused Thai demands for troops to assist in the campaign against Burma. Fearful of reprisal, he asked the Vietnamese for assistance and in answer they sent a small naval force to Udong in 1810, where it remained until 1812.

The reign of Ang Chan, not Ang Mei, was the beginning of Vietnamese interference in the social, political and economic life of Cambodians; they had already been in control of the Cambodian territory around Prei Nokor for over fifty years. Unlike the Thai, who were content to allow Cambodia to retain its traditions (which in any case differed only slightly from their own), the Vietnamese sought to impose their own customs. Ang Chan was ordered by the Vietnamese to relocate his capital from Udong to Phnom Penh, where Vietnamese storehouses and barracks were constructed. By 1816, Gia Dich Thong Chi, a Vietnamese advisor in Cambodia, reported that Cambodia had adopted Vietnamese clothing styles, which aggravated the *oknha*. Thai records relate that the Vietnamese forced Cambodians to dismantle their Theravada Buddhist *wats* and *viharas*.²³ In 1816, Ang Chan was ordered to recruit 5,000 workers to excavate a canal linking Chaudoc and Hatien, some seventy kilometres apart. The 500 supervisors were solely Vietnamese, who beat some of the workers to death for infractions. One Cambodian man was decapitated and his head placed on a stake in order to intimidate other Cambodian workers. Conditions such as these only exacerbated the resentment that many Cambodians felt towards the Vietnamese for usurping Cambodian territory, and may have contributed to the rebellion against them, led by a monk, Kai, in 1820.²⁴

Mei was crowned sovereign of a kingdom in which the Vietnamese were already in charge. It is difficult to ascertain what course of action other than acquiescence was available to her. Mei seems to have sought a peaceful solution to the factionalism in her country, telling envoys sent by Duong that

she wished for a return to peace and amicability, and hoping that ‘we would be able to live together with our uncle.’ This may, of course, have been a diplomatic response; the Vietnamese annals described her as ‘an intelligent young lady’ at the time of her accession. Nothing – sudden flights to Vietnam, the murder of her elder sister, and continual changes in her status – seems to have induced hysterical or untoward behaviour. Perhaps Mei would have fared better in Cambodian collective memory if, like her sister Baen, she had actively resisted the Vietnamese. She does not seem to have been despised by the *oknha* in Cambodia; during her exile in Udong Jean Moura spoke with women who had been members of Mei’s court during her reign and who remained devoted to her.²⁵ Furthermore, as we have seen above, in 1844 it was Mei, rather than Ang Duong, who was crowned sovereign of Cambodia, after a campaign in which both attempted to garner support from the Cambodian *oknha*. If Mei had been genuinely unpopular due to her gender, the *oknha* would not have countenanced her accession.

The misogyny of Ang Duong

It is highly likely that Ang Duong harboured some personal resentment towards Ang Mei for not stepping aside as Cambodia’s sovereign so that he could ascend the throne. He never attempted to liberate his nieces; in fact, he had to be prompted by the Vietnamese to send a contingent to escort them and the other members of the court to Udong. Once there, Ang Mei was probably ostracised, and possibly imprisoned or tortured. In 1874 she was found by Jean Moura, ‘old ... and mad ... long since removed from power and the world’, living ‘almost alone in the furthest corner of the old capital’. She died soon after his visit.²⁶ Yet an underlying thread of misogyny is discernible throughout the life and works of Ang Duong, before and after his accession.

A series of new laws were promulgated when Ang Duong came to power, as, according to the king, ‘the ancient laws, for a long time, have not been revised, neither by kings, nor officials, nor the wise’ and had not kept pace with regional developments like ‘those from Siam, Laos, China, Annam, Europe and Malaya’. In this he was following the normal course of action for kings upon their accession and reassuring his people that the disorder of previous decades was past. One of the first new laws altered the way in which Cambodian princesses could marry, which probably reflected a fear that an *oknha* would marry Mei or one of her surviving sisters and attempt to claim

the throne. Another decree was issued in 1857 regulating the succession of princes and princesses in relation to their mothers. These changes ensured that titles could be issued and revoked by the king alone; they were no longer inherited according to the status of the queen or princess. Again, it is likely that Ang Duong feared a challenge to his position, from a child of one of his nieces or brothers' children. Royal women were effectively removed from their previous positions of significance in relation to sovereignty. The only woman to continue to hold any permanent authority, at least until the colonial period, was the queen mother.²⁷

Outside the palace, some laws of Ang Duong privileged male interests. Sons born to slave women but fathered by free men inherited their father's status. Divorce was made more difficult for women to initiate. All that men were required to do was present their wives with a document bearing their mark. Women were required to keep this document so that they could prove their status if they wished to remarry. Much more forbearance was necessary for unhappy wives. Even complaining about their husbands was frowned upon; a woman who 'speaks against, injures, or denounces her husband to the law' was an offence in law.²⁸ Only after repeated attempts to dissuade her spouse from his evil ways was a woman permitted to seek recourse from the courts:

When, amongst the ordinary people, a married man is a thief, a smoker of opium, a habitual gambler, if his wife, numerous times, reproaches him, tries to correct his behaviour, and he does not heed her, but continues to gamble and smoke, and if his wife is afraid that his debts will fall upon her, the judges must receive her request for divorce and consider that the husband is a bad and obstinate subject.²⁹

A woman who took matters into her own hands and dared to beat or otherwise wound her husband was 'fined and put in chains and shackles, then condemned to strangulation and the confiscation of all her goods, which will be divided between the husband of said woman and the royal treasury'. Punishments were generally very harsh during the reign of Ang Duong; although Jai Jettha II had revised *Kram Jao* in 1621 because he considered some of the punishments therein too barbaric, Ang Duong reversed some of these amendments. The punishments for women in the revised *Cbpab tous bhariya* were similarly ruthless, including the use of shackles and impalement.³⁰

Ang Duong did not confine his views on female behaviour to legal texts. He was also an author of didactic literature. One of his earliest of works is

Neang Kaki, written in 1813, derived from two *jataka* stories, *Kakati Jataka* and *Sussondi Jataka*, both of which deal with the theme of a king experiencing difficulty in controlling his wife. Women, in these stories, are described as inherently promiscuous, and their energies must be channelled into pious activities lest their sexuality rage out of control, bringing dishonour to the king, and therefore the kingdom. In Ang Duong's *Neang Kaki*, a *raks* ('demon') with whom the king plays chess is consumed with lust for Queen Kaki and devises a scheme by which he may possess her. The *raks* assumes the form of the king and summons Kaki to his bedchamber (or, in some versions, visits her in her own), where she is obligated to fulfil the desires of her 'husband'. When the real king discovers what has occurred, Kaki is thrown out of the court in disgrace for her infidelity. The moral of the story is that women are to blame for their transgressions, even when they have been deceived into committing them. This theme is also discerned in Ang Duong's laws; *Kram bier*, 'Treatise on gaming', held that women who frequented public houses could not be dishonoured in word or deed as they were *srei neak leng* ('women who gamble') and thus were not respectable.³¹

The Cbpab Srei

Correct behaviour for women is set out in the *Cbpab Srei*, 'Code of Conduct for Women', the best-known of the *cbpab thmei*. Authorship of the *Cbpab Srei* is somewhat contested. Khing Hoc Dy states that the *Cbpab Srei* was composed by Ang Duong in 1837. Judy Ledgerwood describes a 'more recent version' of the *Cbpab Srei* as having been authored by a Minh Mai, and another version altogether as the work of the poet Ind in the late 1800s. Judith Jacob, renowned scholar of Cambodian literature, does not include Ind as having written a *Cbpab Srei*, but lists three extant manuscripts of the *Cbpab Srei*, one of which is attributed to a pandit named Mai, a poet of the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, and another to Ang Duong. Léang-Hap An attributed a *Cbpab Srei* to the court poet Nong, but the manuscript itself is not well described. Nong was a court poet during the reigns of kings Ang Eng and Ang Chan and tutor to all of Ang Eng's surviving sons after their father's death. He also accompanied Ang Duong and Ang Im to Bangkok for their education. Ang Duong made Nong his personal advisor and secretary, employed him as tutor to his own children, and gave him land. It is perhaps inevitable that Ang Duong's literary style would imitate his tutor, and this may have contributed to a confusion of their work.³²

The *Cbpab Srei*, like all *cbpab*, provided guidelines for acceptable behaviour. In the 'Minh Mai' text (the best known of the *Cbpab Srei* manuscripts) the narrative takes the form of Queen Vimala instructing her daughter Indrandati in necessary information that will be of use throughout her life before she leaves her parents' kingdom. The key thrust of the text is that it is the responsibility of wives to ensure the good reputation of the family by maintaining a harmonious image of the home, regardless of what occurred behind closed doors. This was best achieved, according to the *Cbpab Srei*, by total obedience to one's husband:

If you do not believe your husband or ignore him, conflict will arise;
Happiness will be destroyed, your reputation will suffer, discord will continue
without ceasing.
This means you are not ladylike, but a low person, with the heart of a 'golden
flower' [immoral woman or prostitute].³³

Women are also advised in the text not to tell their mothers if their husbands mistreat them, nor to gossip in general. More prosaic are warnings not to touch one's husband's head in order to look for lice without 'respectfully bowing and informing him', not turning one's back on one's husband in bed or misfortune will befall the household, and to busy oneself with useful activities beneficial to the household, such as weaving. Wives should speak with a gentle voice and walk softly so as not to draw attention to themselves. If a husband becomes angry, regardless of whose fault it is (the *Cbpab Srei* even makes allowances for drunkards who spend all of the family money on gambling), she should 'retire for the night and think about the situation, then speak softly to him and forgive him'. If a man takes a mistress, a wife should not be upset or angry, as 'if she allows him to wander where he wants, he will return to her'. Harsh words, that might affront the dignity of a man, are never to be used, or it will appear that the wife is more potent or powerful. A woman must never think herself as superior to her husband in any respect, but consider him, 'the lord of the chamber, as your leader; never forget it'.³⁴

Like the sentiments encapsulated in the Brahmanical inscriptions of the preclassical and classical periods in Cambodia, all versions of the *Cbpab Srei* embody the *ideal* society as perceived by a particular author. As we have seen, controlling and disempowering women seems to have been a popular theme for Ang Duong in his literary efforts and in his administrative reforms. It may not have been coincidental that *Cbpab Srei* was written almost immediately

after Ang Mei was crowned by the Vietnamese; one can almost see a frustrated and angry Ang Duong sitting down to furiously write a treatise on the correct behaviour for women in the face of his own niece's perceived obstinacy. Yet there was another source of inspiration for Ang Duong and other members of the Cambodian elite at the Thai court during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the more conservative strain of Buddhism that became known as the Dhammayut sect. In 1788, Rama I (r. 1782–1809), believing that Buddhism had been corrupted by the involvement of the sangha in political machinations in the middle of the eighteenth century in Siam, sponsored the ninth Buddhist council. The subsequent 'purifying' of Buddhist texts could not have failed to influence the young Cambodian princes, Ang Im and Ang Duong, sequestered at the Cambodian court during this time, especially as Cambodian monks were amongst those involved in the work. Rama I also issued seven decrees aimed at raising the level of morality in the sangha in order to 'restore its prestige and authority'. Three more decrees were issued in 1779, 1794, and 1801. The last expelled 128 monks for 'ignoble behaviour', one characteristic of which was associating with women.

This more austere Buddhism was transmitted to Cambodia, at first slowly, as members of the Cambodian community returned to Udong and Ang Duong pursued his agenda of *wat* restoration and other pursuits aimed at increasing his stores of merit. In 1854, his reign established, Ang Duong asked the Thai court to send him a complete version of the new, 'pure' *Tipitaka* and a number of monks who were well versed in the new form of Buddhism. Ang Duong was sufficiently devoted to this more conservative sect that he imported it to Cambodia, and it was he (not Norodom) who established it, contrary to Adhémard Leclère's account. It is not surprising, therefore, that Ang Duong inculcated elite Cambodian society with models of correct behaviour that reflected the conservatism of the Thai court in which he had grown up, and to which he owed his position as king of Cambodia. There is little doubt that Ang Duong drew inspiration from Thai texts; *Neang Kaki* was modelled on the work of a Thai court poet.³⁵

The inspiration of Minh Mai is less readily explained due to the lack of information on his life, but if he was indeed a court poet of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries he would have been subject to the same conservative influences as Ang Duong. Most elite men would have spent some years as monks. The author of the third and most recent *Cbpab Srei*, Ind, was or-

ained at the age of twenty, having studied as a novice under *Preah kru achar Sok* at Wat Kaev in Battambang. He then went to Bangkok, returning seven years later and taking up a position in Wat Kandal, where he remained for a decade. In 1896 Ind voluntarily defrocked and married. According to Tauch Chhong,

the people of Battambang knew him well. He was called Achar In [*sic*]. Everyone in Battambang praised his works and speeches. While Cambodia had no printed books, the people of Battambang borrowed his work from one another, copying them out by hand to keep and distributing them one to the other for reading. Some people memorized many pages of his poems.³⁶

When Battambang was returned to Cambodian control in 1907, Ind was invited to remain under the new administration, with the title *oknha sutanta prachea*, 'lord poet of the land', which he held until his death in 1924. Amongst his many works were *Gatilok ru cbpab tumnam khluon* [Guidelines for one's behaviour], *Supasit cbpab srei* [Maxims of the *Cbpap Srei*], and *Neang Chhantea*, a translation of a Thai manuscript in which a wicked woman attempts to deceive her *bodhisattva* husband. Ind's *Cbpab Srei* is thematically similar to the other two versions. The challenge of adhering to the code was admitted but readers entreated to apply themselves with diligence and persevere. Women were enjoined to 'sit modestly, when speaking do not shake with laughter; a woman who is timid has high prestige. Please pay attention to the circumstances appropriate to one's rank'.³⁷

The extent to which these texts, and others like them, permeated Cambodian society is debatable. Probably, few people could read and write at the non-elite level; even provincial *oknha* may have been illiterate, maintaining a few educated staff for administrative purposes within their own retinues. It is highly likely that the literature written by Ang Duong and Minh Mai circulated within the court alone. No doubt Ang Duong's work was received favourably as it was written not only by the king, but a king who had saved Cambodia from absorption into Siam and the cultural hegemony of the Vietnamese. Those who had not supported Duong in his bid for the throne would have taken care not to displease him once he came to power through overt criticism of either his religion or his literary pursuits. Similarly, Ind was lauded for being not only a gifted writer, but a *Cambodian* writer who 'demonstrated that while Thailand could interfere with the domain of administration, it could not interfere with the Khmer mind in Battambang'.³⁸ Reading

the work of these authors was far more than mere literary appreciation for the Cambodian elite; it signified political allegiance and collective identity.

Revisionist (female) histories

The negative perspective toward women and power in the didactic literature of the nineteenth century is echoed in contemporary court chronicles' explanations for earlier events. Kings, it seems, were not responsible for any of their actions. Instead, women were implicated as causal agents for events that led to upheaval and disharmony in the kingdom, including civil war, Vietnamese territorial encroachment, and the renunciation of Buddhism.

In 1627 Paramaraja Udayi married his niece Mae Yuor Vatti, although she had been promised to her half-brother Dhammaraja. The siblings, meeting by accident, fell in love. Mae Yuor Vatti deceived her husband and fled to her lover. A war ensued and Mae Yuor Vatti was captured by Paramaraja Udayi's Portuguese mercenaries, returned to her husband's court, and sentenced to death by his *okhna*. Even though the authors imply that Paramaraja Udayi acted incorrectly in marrying Mae Yuor Vatti because she was betrothed to Dhammaraja, and although the half-siblings are depicted as being genuinely (and appropriately) in love, Dhammaraja is represented as being led astray by his passion whereas Mae Yuor Vatti is calculating and deliberate. She asked her husband if she could take a pleasure trip to the lakes and stay there for one or two nights. Having received permission, she went at once to her half-brother's palace at Udong. Her eventual death is portrayed as a fitting punishment for transgressing her duty to her husband and causing the war that resulted in Dhammaraja's death. Before dying, Dhammaraja realised the error of his ways. He is recorded as saying to the Portuguese mercenaries: 'Because of a woman, I am in a detestable state Because of passion, I am now facing death. Better to go to my death, in order to once more know *dharma*!'³⁹

Ang Chuv, the Nguyen princess who married King Jai Jettha II around 1620, is held responsible for the loss of Prei Nokor (Saigon) and its surrounds and the subsequent permeation of Vietnamese influence in the Cambodian court. In 1623, the Nguyen emperor at Hué asked that the lands of Prei Nokor and Kompong Krabei be handed over to Vietnamese authority. Jai Jettha II consulted with his *oknha* and members of the royal family. They determined that 'if we do not accept ... amicability will cease and the royal lady the queen will be annoyed. In this matter, it is proper to give them what they ask'. The

Cambodians were described as reluctant to refuse for fear of upsetting Ang Chuv, who had ‘extraordinary powers, on the one hand a result of being the royal Vietnamese princess and on the other being the royal queen’. The implication was that Ang Chuv, not the king and his advisors, was responsible for the Vietnamese presence. Even though Ang Chuv was instrumental in overthrowing a deeply unpopular king, Ramadhipati I (see below) in 1659, by summoning Vietnamese troops to aid her stepsons, her part in this was written dismissively. Far from being portrayed as a heroine, some chronicles describe her as base in nature, consumed by an insatiable sexual appetite. This story alleges that Ang Chuv discovered an aphrodisiac commissioned by her husband the king when she was clearing out his rooms after his death. Unsure what it was for, she tested the potion, which caused her to have ‘men to come one by one, continuously. But if a page did not please her, she would drive him away or have him killed to prevent him from talking’. She eventually took a permanent lover, Dham.⁴⁰ Thus the memory of Ang Chuv preserved in the Cambodian court histories is of an immoral woman who delivered her adopted country into the hands of the Vietnamese.

Perhaps the most significant event in which a woman is described as having led a Cambodian king astray is the conversion of Ramadhipati I (r. 1642–1659) to Islam. The chronicles relate that while taking a pleasure-trip along the river in the 1640s, the king saw a young Cham girl going down to the river and fell in love with her. He called the people of the village, who were Cham and Malay, to ask them who she was. Her name was Neang Hvah. The king summoned the girl’s mother and asked if Neang Hvah could stay on his launch and serve him. The king ‘was very pleased’ with her and asked her mother if he could take her to the palace. Agreeing, the mother called together the people of the village. The elders of the village performed a series of enchantments that would make the king progressively more in love with Hvah. The king made her his ‘queen of the left’ and appointed Cham and Malay officials to govern all Cham and Malay peoples in the kingdom. A Malay religious official, ‘using magical formulae’, convinced the king to convert to Islam. He ordered the court, including the royal family, to do likewise. Carool Kersten suggests that Ramadhipati’s conversion to Islam was actually a political strategy in order to form an alliance with the Cham and Malay peoples in the country. This was because he was in a somewhat precarious position with the Cambodian *oknha*, having murdered members of his own

family to lay claim to the throne, and as a form of spiritual bulwarking, as he had been led to believe that Islam would expiate these sins whereas Buddhism and Catholicism would not. Nevertheless, the court chronicles specifically detail that it was, firstly, the beauty of Neang Hvas, then her complicity in applying the magic potions, that caused Ramadhipati to take this drastic, most un-Cambodian step.⁴¹



The Cambodian chronicles written after Ang Duong came to the throne depict Ang Mei as a lesson, bitterly learned, in the consequences of women exercising direct power in the political arena. By contrast, the reign of Ang Duong (1848–1859) is a ‘golden age’ in Cambodian history. This is especially true of Cambodian dance and literary styles, which he is seen as restoring to their pre-‘Vietnamisation’ glory. He is credited with the ‘liberation’ of Cambodia from Thai and Vietnamese encroachment and the restoration of Cambodian culture for a brief period of independence before foreigners once again subjugated Cambodia.⁴² Historians ascertain their information from written records; the problem, however, is that the Cambodian sources for this period were written in the courts of Ang Duong and his descendants, in whose interests it was to represent Ang Mei as an ineffectual ruler. This was easy to do by playing upon the hatred Cambodians felt (and still feel) for the Vietnamese, dating back to their annexation of Prei Nokor in the early seventeenth century – for which another woman, Ang Chuv, was blamed. The precedents for women and political power, within living memory, led to increasing Vietnamese dominance; the influence of others led Cambodian kings to turn against each other and the holy path of Buddhism. The association between women being in charge and Cambodian subjugation was virtually assured through the ‘scapegoating’ of women in the chronicles. This was buttressed by the literature written by the conservative elite in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the legal reforms of Ang Duong which placed women in a position of inferiority in relation to men. As was the case with correct models for behaviour set out in earlier periods, the didactic literature of the nineteenth century did not make much of an impact upon ordinary Cambodians; indeed, if we are to accept late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as indicative of ‘traditional’ Cambodia, it was customary for women to have significance and agency.

Notes to Chapter 5

- 1 David Chandler, 'Going through the motions: Ritual aspects of the reign of King Duang of Cambodia (1848–1860)' [1979], in *Facing the Cambodian past: Selected essays 1971–1994*, St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1996, p. 115.
- 2 *The dynastic chronicles of the Bangkok era – the first reign*, trans. and ed. Thadeus and Chadin Flood, vol. 1: *Text*, Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1978, pp. 21–22.
- 3 *Chroniques royales du Cambodge*, vol. 2: *De Bona Yat à la prise de Lanvaek (1417–1595)*, trans. and ed. Khin Sok, Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988 [hereafter *Chroniques 2*], pp. 213, 216; Bun Srun Theam, 'Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century: A quest for survival, 1840–1863', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1981, p. 77; *Dynastic chronicles of the Bangkok era*, vol. 1, p. 21.
- 4 Justin J. Corfield, *The royal family of Cambodia*, Melbourne: The Khmer Language & Culture Centre, 1993, p.15. Corfield says that Ang Eng was the 'sole surviving member' of the Cambodian family but in fact three of his sisters survived and accompanied him to the Thai court.
- 5 *Dynastic chronicles of the Bangkok era*, vol. 1, pp. 25–26, 35.
- 6 Corfield, *Royal family of Cambodia*, pp. 16–22. The Thai chronicle gives slightly different dates for the births of these children and does not record princess Meautuccha at all (*Dynastic chronicles of the Bangkok era*, vol. 1, p. 219).
- 7 David Chandler intimates that Ang Chan, aged five, was sanctioned as the next ruler of Cambodia, and *talaha* Pok appointed to act as his regent until the prince reached his majority, but the Thai chronicle states that Pok was in fact instructed to act as regent for all five princes, as 'the king intended to select the most intelligent and suitable one among them to reign in Cambodia.' The Vietnamese, however, seem to have seen Ang Chan as the next king of Cambodia, as their mission of 1805 was directed at him and his advisors. See David P. Chandler, 'Cambodia before the French: Politics in a tributary kingdom, 1774–1848', PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 81; *Dynastic chronicles of the Bangkok era*, p. 220.
- 8 *Dynastic chronicles of the Bangkok era*, p. 287. This disgruntlement is not evident in the Thai chronicle, but the fact that Ang Chan demanded that his paternal aunts, Y and Phao, who had accompanied Ang Eng to the Thai court in 1782 and who had subsequently married the heir to the Thai throne before his death, be returned to Cambodia, can be interpreted as an act of defiance, and his anger at the refusal of this request may be why Chan did not go in person to Bangkok when Rama I died in 1809 (Bun Srun Theam, 'Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century', p. 32).
- 9 Peou is usually a name given to the youngest child in Cambodian families, but all of the references to the princesses place Snguon last, implying that she was the youngest.
- 10 Bun Srun Theam, 'Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century', pp. 58–59; Michael Vickery, 'Cambodia after Angkor: The chronicular evidence for the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries', PhD thesis, Yale University, 1977, p.126. Khin Sok says that Baen 'judged the sug-

- gestion insupportable'. See Khin Sok, *Le Cambodge entre le Siam et le Vietnam (de 1775 à 1860)*, Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1991, p. 87).
- 11 Chandler, 'Cambodia before the French', p. 127; Walter F. Vella, *Siam under Rama III, 1824–1851*, Locust Valley, New York: J.J. Augustin, 1957, p. 100, fn 17.
 - 12 Khin Sok, *Le Cambodge entre le Siam et le Vietnam*, p. 88; Bun Srun Theam, 'Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century', p. 59. It will not escape the notice of astute readers that this title is very similar to *hyang*, 'princess', a title of the preclassical and classical periods in Cambodia.
 - 13 Vickery, 'Cambodia after Angkor', pp. 137–138. In the late 1840s, envoys of Ang Doung encountered a group of Cambodian courtiers living in exile in Vietnam. The men of the party were dressed and had their hair styled in the Vietnamese fashion, but the women of the party had retained Cambodian traditional dress and hairstyles (Bun Srun Theam, 'Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century', p. 114).
 - 14 Tep was the daughter of *oknha* Baen, who had been given the governorship of Battambang province by the Thai. Bun Srun Theam, 'Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century', pp. 58–59, 62, 67; Khin Sok, *Cambodge entre le Siam et le Vietnam*, pp. 89–91; Vickery, 'Cambodia after Angkor', pp. 128–129, 133, 137–138.
 - 15 Bun Srun Theam, 'Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century', pp. 71–72; Chandler, 'Cambodia before the French', p. 151; Corfield, *Royal family of Cambodia*, p. 23; Khin Sok, *Cambodge entre le Siam et le Vietnam*, p. 94. The latter makes the point that drowning was a form of capital punishment reserved for members of the Cambodian royal family (f.n. 288).
 - 16 David Chandler, 'Songs at the edge of the forest: Perceptions of order in three Cambodian texts', in *Facing the Cambodian past*, p. 92; Khin Sok, *Cambodge entre le Siam et le Vietnam*, p. 95.
 - 17 *Mémoire du Cambodge sur ses terres au Sau-Vietnam (Cochinchine)*, Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Palais Royale, [1954], p. 2; Julio Jeldres, *The royal house of Cambodia*, Phnom Penh: Monument Books, 2003, p. 10; Khin Sok, *Le Cambodge entre le Siam et le Vietnam*, p. 87.
 - 18 www.3.sympatico.ca/nearori/potins9.html.
 - 19 Chandler, 'Songs at the edge of the forest', pp. 93–94; *Kram Preas Reachea Khant*, in Adhémar Leclère, *Codes cambodgiens*, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1898, t. 2, p. 613; Chandler, 'Cambodia before the French', p. 126; Vella, *Siam under Rama III*, pp. 99–100; Jean Moura, *Le royaume de Cambodge*, 2 vols, Paris: Leroux, 1883, vol. 1, pp. 233–234.
 - 20 See for example John Tully, *France on the Mekong: A history of the Protectorate in Cambodia, 1863–1953*, Lanham, Maryland; New York; Oxford: 2002, p. 13.
 - 21 Bun Srun Theam, 'Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century', p. 188; Nguyen-vo Thu-huong, *Khmer-Viet relations and the third Indochina conflict*, Jefferson, North Carolina; London: McFarland & Company, 1992, p. 9; Khin Sok, *Cambodge entre le Siam et le Vietnam*, p. 95.

- 22 Fieldnotes, 2005.
- 23 Bun Srun Theam, 'Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century', p. 40; Chandler, 'Politics in a tributary kingdom', p. 93.
- 24 As discussed in the preceding chapter, in 1623 the Vietnamese had asked formal permission from Jai Jettha II to set up a customs post in Prei Nokor (Saigon) in order to collect customs duty and other taxes. They were sure of his acquiescence, as a Vietnamese princess, Ang Chuv, had been married to the king three years earlier. The Vietnamese then began sending settlers into the area later known as Cochinchina. See David Chandler, 'An anti-Vietnamese rebellion in early nineteenth century Cambodia' [1975], in *Facing the Cambodian past*, p. 64.
- 25 Bun Srun Theam, 'Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century', p. 112; Vickery, 'Cambodia after Angkor', p. 127; Moura, *Le royaume du Cambodge*, p. 232.
- 26 Moura, *Le royaume du Cambodge*, pp. 233–234.
- 27 *Kram bamnol* [1853], in *Codes cambodgiens*, t. 1, pp. 458–459; David Chandler, 'Going through the motions: Ritual aspects of the reign of King Duang of Cambodia (1848–1860)', in *Facing the Cambodian past: Selected essays 1971–1994*, St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1996, pp. 100–118; Jeldres, *Royal house of Cambodia*, p. 15.
- 28 *Kram dasa kamokar* [1853], in *Codes cambodgiens*, t. 1, p. 386; *Kram Sanghkrey* [1853], in *Codes cambodgiens*, t. 1, p. 309.
- 29 *Kram Preas Reachea Khant* [1850], in *Codes cambodgiens*, t. 2, p. 616.
- 30 *Kram Sanghkrey* [1853], in *Codes cambodgiens*, t. 1, p. 309; *Kram Chor* [Jao] [1860], in *Codes cambodgiens*, t. 2, p. 296; *Kram tous piriyea* [1853], in *Codes cambodgiens*, t. 1, p. 235.
- 31 Ang Duong, *Rieong Kaki* [1813], Phnom Penh: Buddhist Institute, 1997; *Kram Bier* [1853], in *Codes cambodgiens*, t. 2, p. 476.
- 32 A *Cbpab Srei* ostensibly authored by Ang Duong was published by the Buddhist Institute in 1962. It lists the types of wives and their characteristics in a similar fashion to the Minh Mai text and to *Kram tous bhariya*. Khing Hoc Dy, *Contribution à l'histoire de la littérature khmère*, Paris: l'Harmattan, 1990, p. 90; Judy L. Ledgerwood, *Changing Khmer conceptions of gender: Women, stories, and the social order*, PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1990, pp. 82, 86; Judith M. Jacob, *The traditional literature of Cambodia: A preliminary guide*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 70.
- 33 *Cbpab Srei*, verses 83–85. This and all subsequent quotations are from *Cbpab srei- broh*, Phnom Penh: Phsep pseay juon koan khmei, 2001. A transliterated version with French translation can be found in Saveros Pou (comp. and ed.), *Guirlande de cpâp*, Paris: Cedorek, 1988.
- 34 *Cbpab Srei*, verses 7, 24, 53–54, 65–80, 100, 107, 108, 115.
- 35 Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, state, and society: Thai Buddhism and history*, trans. Peter Hawkes, Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 1986, p. 64; Somboon Suksamran, *Political*

- Buddhism in Southeast Asia: The role of the sangha in the modernization of Thailand*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1976, p. 26; J. Kathirithamby-Wells, 'The age of transition: The mid-eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries', in Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Southeast Asia*, vol. 2: *From c. 1500 to c. 1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 248; Meas Yang, *Le Bouddhisme au Cambodge*, Brussels: Thanh Long, 1978, p. 38; Klaus Wenk, *The restoration of Thailand under Rama I, 1782–1809*, trans. Greeley Stahl, Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1968, pp. 39–41; Chandler, 'Going through the motions', pp. 104–105; Adhémard Leclère, *Le bouddhisme au Cambodge*, Paris: Leroux, 1903, p. 403; Klaus Wenk, *Thai literature: An introduction*, trans. Erich W. Reinhold, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995, p. 30; Judith Jacob, 'Some observations on Khmer verbal usages', in David A. Smyth (ed.), *Cambodian linguistics, literature and history: Collected articles*, London: School of Oriental and African Languages, University of London, 1993, p. 154.
- 36 Tauch Chhong, *Battambang during the time of the lord governor*, 2nd ed., trans. Hin Sithan, Carol Mortland and Judy Ledgerwood, Phnom Penh: Cedorek, 1994, p. 99.
- 37 Tauch Chhong, *Battambang during the time of the lord governor*, pp. 98–100; 'Supasit cb-pab sreï', *Kambujasuriya* 6, 4–6, pp. 46–80, p. 48; *Gatilok ke oknha Suttanta Prachea Ind*, in *Kambujasuriya* 7 (1927), pp. 75–93; *Gatilok ru chbpab tunmean khluon*, in *Kambujasuriya* 9 (1928), pp. 25–41 and 10 (1928), pp. 21–58. A neighbour of Ind named Chheum, a fortune-teller by profession, claimed to have written *Neang Chhantea*, but Ind's son said that his father had written it.
- 38 Tauch Chhong, *Battambang during the time of the lord governor*, p. 99.
- 39 *Chroniques* 2, pp. 99, 104, 111, 158, 186, 214–215; *Chroniques royales du Cambodge*, Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988, vol. 3: *De 1594 à 1677*, trans. and ed. Mak Phoeun [hereafter *Chroniques* 3], pp. 79, 122, 127, 168, 171, 175–177, 423–424; Khing Hoc Dy, *Contribution*, p. 68.
- 40 *Chroniques* 3, pp. 79, 122, 127, 168, 171, 176–177, 423–424.
- 41 Perhaps this is understandable, as the king is said to have ordered all male members of the court to undergo circumcision. See Trudy Jacobsen, 'The temple of the thousand fore-skins', *Phnom Penh Post*, 16–29 December 2005, p. 7. *Cbpab tumnam pi boran* [Customs of the past], composed at the end of the seventeenth century from the memoirs of Princess Ang Li, does not mention any marriage between Ramadhipati and a Cham or Malay girl. It does, however, relate that 'the Muslim king' accused his principal wife, Ang Srey, of infidelity when she offered fruits to the *oknha chakvey*, demanding 'How can I practice the Malay religion when you are off speaking with other men?' and then challenging the *oknha* to a duel with swords 'according to Malay custom'. Ang Srey became enraged and demanded whether all the ministers thought she had been unfaithful as they were taking the king's side in the matter (*Cbpab tumnam pi boran* [Customs of the past] [1693], in *Codes cambodgiens*, t. 1, p. 127). Dutch merchants' records may shed more light on this incident, stating that in April 1642 King Ramadhipati I accused his queen of adultery with his own elder brother. The prince's house was set on fire and he was executed; the queen was stripped of her rank, possessions, and servants, tortured or mutilated, and

either was executed or committed suicide by taking poison some weeks later. See Carool Kersten, 'Cambodia's Muslim king: Khmer and Dutch sources on the conversion of Reameathipadei I, 1642–1658', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37, 1 (February 2006), pp. 16–17. *Kambujasuriya* published a version of this tale in 1933 in which the king was referred to as 'Mao'. See *Kambujasuriya* 6, 7–9 (1933), pp. 155–163.

- 42 'Coffee-table' books and travel guides are particularly prone to this perspective. See for example Jeldres, *Royal house of Cambodia*, p. 20.