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## ‘INVISIBLE CAMBODIANS’

Knowledge Production in the History  
of Angkorian Archaeology*Heng Piphah, Seng Sonetra and Nhim Sotheavin*

More than a century after the ‘collapse’ of Angkor and the Khmer Empire, 16th-century King Ang Chan returned to Angkor Wat to restore it as a political and spiritual centre and rededicate other temples to Theravada Buddhism (Groslier 1985, 16–19; Thompson 2004a, 205; 2006, 143–48). Khmers continued to curate and invigorate their Angkorian heritage through ancestral worship and Theravada Buddhist practice through the mid-19th century; for example, King Ang Duong tried to revitalise Cambodia in the face of encroachments by Thailand and Vietnam by restoring (and building new) Buddhist pagodas in Oudong (Edwards 2007, 132). This cyclical Cambodian worldview, which reinvigorates the past to generate new futures, contrasts markedly with progressive, linear-based approaches to the past that characterise most Western scholarship on the Angkorian world (Thompson 2006, 151–52). Renovating and even transforming ‘living’ heritage sites continues to be a central concern for Buddhists in both Thailand and Cambodia (e.g., Keyes 1991; Byrne 1995).

Despite repeated calls for diverse perspectives on Cambodia’s premodern past and vitality in Khmer-driven scholarship, Cambodian voices remain under-represented in discussions of the Angkorian world. Contemporary heritage management in Cambodia involves multiple museums, World Heritage sites, and heritage units that hundreds of professionals with BAs in Archaeology from the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) manage. Despite this surge in local capacity since the mid-1990s, Cambodian scholarship—like Southeast Asia-based archaeological scholarship more generally (Shoocongdej 2011, 722)—remains nearly invisible in global scholarship. This chapter complements previous work (e.g., Carter et al. 2014; Heng and Phon 2017) and explores why Cambodian scholarship still plays a marginal role in shaping understandings of the Angkorian world by focusing on Cambodia’s educational infrastructure and knowledge production during its 20th-century ‘modernisation’ period.

We argue that four interrelated process explain Cambodians’ near-invisibility: (1) frictions caused by competing Western and Khmer perceptions of heritage; (2) intellectual hegemony by the *École française d’Extrême-Orient* (EFEO) and constructing narratives of Cambodia’s aesthetic legacy (Muan 2001) and its Angkorian past; (3) mid-20th-century desire to ‘modernise’ Cambodia through Khmer studies that emphasised Buddhism, Khmer language and literature, and folk life; and (4) a lack of colonial commitment to capacity-building in Cambodian heritage

scholarship. Colonial scholarship on Cambodia's premodern past was largely divorced from the consciousness of the Khmer public, who viewed their heritage as a living religious tradition blending Buddhism, chthonic evidence, and folklore. Examining institutional histories and disjuncture between Khmer and foreign approaches to the past highlights complex relationships between archaeology, heritage management and education, colonised knowledge production, and the nation-state.

### Heritage and Archaeology in the Context of Khmer Studies

Cambodia entered the 20th century with a cultural renaissance and modernisation that included an expansion of education beyond the traditional pagoda-based structure. New academic institutions that were founded (e.g., Royal Library, Buddhist Institute) became crucibles for the emergence of *Kambuja Suriya* journal, the first Khmer dictionary, the *Association of Khmer Writers*, and the first Khmer political journal (*Sruk Khmaer* and later *Nagaravatta*) (Clayton 1995; Edwards 2004; Harris 2005, 105–56). Intense cultural and political exchanges between Cambodia and the French Protectorate characterised this period, as the French and the Khmers positioned themselves as rescuers of the descendants of Angkor to protecting their autonomy from encroaching neighbours of Thailand and Vietnam.

Khmer local responses to geopolitics were more responsible for this renaissance than were western pressures to modernise (e.g., Edwards 2007; Hansen 2007). Khmers increasingly linked Khmer literary traditions, Buddhism, and their Angkorian past to an emerging Khmer national identity, and Angkor Wat became the symbol of the new Cambodia (Thompson 2004b, 2006, 2016). French colonial scholars pushed back against this local narrative, denigrating contemporary Khmer literature and highlighting the rupture between modern Cambodia and Angkor through contrasting the 'degenerate' post-Angkor period with its Theravada Buddhist literature with Angkor's period of regional dominance (e.g., Cœdès 1931). Some also charged that Khmers lacked self-expression altogether (Pou 1980, 142). These colonial critics misunderstood Khmer literature, which—like Khmer education and knowledge production more broadly—was deeply enmeshed with Buddhism, the monarchy, and a patron-client system (e.g., Ayres 2000; Clayton 1995, 2; Chigas 2000). They also underestimated the local respect for Khmer cultural heritage, which King Norodom explained in 1891 in opposition to a French request to remove statuary from Khmer temples:

Since antiquity, Cambodian laws and customs under all reigns to this day have never permitted the abduction of pieces of religious sculpture. The Cambodian people set great store by these laws and customs. To allow the removal of statues of monumental stone from the Cambodians would be tantamount to destroying the Khmer religion. . . . [It was impossible] to contravene the laws and customs [of Cambodia], or to attack the Cambodian religion.

(cited in Edwards 2007, 127)

Cultural heritage (and by extension archaeology), literature, social sciences, and religion were interlinked in the 20th-century Khmer worldview. Khmer-language publications produced from the Royal Library and the Buddhist Institute reflect this holistic view of Khmer studies. Contemporary French colonial scholarship through academic institutions like the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* viewed Khmer studies more narrowly: a point explored in the following section.

### Institutional Knowledge Production in Khmer Studies

Although Cambodia's educational system began expanding beyond the traditional pagoda primary school system in the late 19th century, it took the country's independence in 1953 to see genuine educational reform. Whether developing a Western educational system was a colonial priority has been debated (Chandler 2008, 190–96; Osborne 2016, 147; cf. Clayton 1995), but French administrators were consistently unsuccessful in implementing an alternative educational system to the traditional pagoda curriculum that most Cambodians preferred, perhaps because French pedagogical goals lay in training future colonial subjects (Népote 1979, 768–76; see Kelly 1977 for Vietnamese parallel). Nonetheless, two academic institutions emerged by the early to mid-20th century and dominated knowledge production in Cambodia: the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* and the Buddhist Institute with its associated branches, the Royal Library, and the Mores and Customs Commission (de Bernon 2010). Establishing these institutions both legitimised the French Indochinese colonial administration and its *mission civilisatrice* and it fostered a new generation of pro-French Khmer monks and middle-class students (e.g., Edwards 2007, 19–39; Cherry 2009, 88–90).

The EFEO was launched in 1901 to research, restore, and conserve Cambodian monuments and artefacts through the Angkor Conservation and the National Museum (previously Musée Albert Sarraut). Until WWII, this institution's aim was to study premodern or pre-Theravada Buddhist Cambodia to separate it from Thai influence (Hansen 2007, 109–47), an approach that is characterised as Orientalism (Clémentin-Ojha and Manguin 2007, 18–32). In so doing, the earlier EFEO scholars separated their work from contemporary ethnographers who were not affiliated with the EFEO like Adhémar Leclère and Étienne Aymonier (Peycam 2010, 165–66): although some ethnologists like Gabrielle Martel and Jean Boulbet worked through EFEO in the mid-20th century (Manguin 2010, 26, 28). EFEO and its scholars retained absolute, and later after 1950, preferential rights of archaeological research and publication in Cambodia through 1972.

The French colonial administration founded the Buddhist Institute with the Khmer monarchy in 1930 by re-organising the Royal Library. It remained under the direction of Suzanne Karpelès, an EFEO member, with support from Louis Finot and George Cœdès, through 1941 (Edwards 2004, 80; 2007, 186–90; Khing 2006, 55). Unlike EFEO, which was purely colonial in structure and personnel, Khmers viewed the Buddhist Institute as a Khmer institution and centre for Khmer studies: a point made explicitly after Cambodia's independence in 1953 (Buddhist Institute 1963, 69–72). The Buddhist Institute provided a venue for a new stratum of educated Khmer and modernist Buddhist monks and reformers, including the venerables Chuon Nath and Huot Tat, to publish their research and voice opinions that helped shape 20th-century Cambodia's nation, religion, language, and state (e.g., Edwards 2004; Hansen 2007).

Khmer-authored publications from this period drew largely from traditional Khmer genres formed the field of Khmer studies, which encompasses the study of culture and civilisation, literature, folklore, history, and the traditional '*cpāp*' (e.g., Jenner 1976; Pou 1979). Khmer authors published on a range of topics in Khmer studies that drew primarily from folklore and chronicles, such as the background of a place or pagoda (e.g., Pich 1957; Chap 1958a, 1958b; Chuon 1963; Huot 1964), astrology (Um 1934), rituals (e.g., Commission des mœurs et coutumes 1958), and Buddhism in Cambodia (Pang 1960, 1963). Both Cambodian state and French colonial administrators viewed this corpus as potentially subversive. Tight state control over publication attempted to keep rebellions in check and neutralise resistance from traditionalist scholars, who favoured traditional palm leaf manuscripts over the printing press and eschewed vernacular language in Buddhist teaching (Edwards 2004). Few of these publications met Western

academic standards but instead were designed as dedicatory pieces during major religious events like commemoration of a new vihara (e.g., Chuon 1963; Pang 1952, 1999; Huot 1993).

Khmer scholars published some literature on the Angkorian world, including guides to the Angkor monuments (Huot 1928; Pang 1941). They referenced Angkor in other genres, including the *nireas* (voyage) like 'Voyage to Angkor' (Suttantaprija Ind 1967) and short poems in *Kambuja Suriya* journal. One of the most popular novels, *Phka Srapon (Wilted Flower)* by Nou Hach (1989[1949]) depicts an event when the main female character, Vitheavy, visits Angkor on a remorque (bicycle trailer). They also translated some Angkorian scholarship by leading EFEO members (e.g., Cœdès, Finot, Goloubew, Marchal, Pelliot) into Khmer (e.g., Cœdès 1950, 1951; Marchal 1936; Gnok 1944). Khmer writers credited EFEO scholarship but also registered disagreement with French interpretations in a subtle manner. For instance, a translation of Cœdès' article on 'Littérature cambodgienne' (1931) omitted any negative connotations in relation to the Early Modern Period and Theravada Buddhism (Chigas 2000, 140–42).

Mass dissemination of this newly created Khmer scholarship was accomplished in print through the Buddhist Institute's bookstores, a province-focused book bus, and a radio program that Suzanne Karpelès (director, Buddhist Institute) developed (Edwards 2004, 75–78) solidified a Khmer national identity throughout Cambodia and the Khmer-majority region of Southern Vietnam. Through the post-colonial 1960s, Chuon Nath brought attention to his movement to modernise Buddhism and Khmer literature on a weekly national radio program established in 1959 (Kong 1970, 26; D. Ly and Muan 2001, 209; Keo 2011). This program was an extension of the Khmer dictionary project (also under Chuon Nath's leadership) and structured as a dialogue between listeners who mailed in their questions and/or complaints about the 'correct way' to spell and use Khmer terminology. A few of these dialogues were salvaged from the National Radio archives in the 1980s and are available online (e.g., <http://5000-years.org>, see 5000 Years 2012).

Khmer-created film and music also promoted Angkorian heritage to the descendants of Angkor in post-colonial Cambodia, including Norodom Sihanouk's film projects. *Chhaya Loe Angkor (Shadow Over Angkor)*, 1967) featured both ancient Angkor and modern Phnom Penh to showcase Sihanouk's Sangkum government, and *Prachea Kumar (Le petit prince)*, 1968) featured the current monarch, Norodom Sihamoni, inhabiting Angkor as his royal home. These widely shown films provided opportunities for rural Cambodians to see images of Angkor for the first time. At the same time, the *nireas* genre (see Edwards 2023, this volume) published through the Buddhist Institute also influenced the popular music of the 1960s and 1970s, for example, *Romduol Angkor (The Romduol Flower of Angkor)*, *Bopha Moha Angkor (Flower of Angkor)* by Sinn Sisamouth, and *Angkor Souvenir (Anussavriy Angkor)* by Duch Kimhak and Pen Ron. Iconic Angkor was also codified in Sangkum state construction projects in the 1960s, including the Vann Molyvann-designed Independence Monument and Olympic Stadium, both of which drew on the Angkor Period to promote national pride, identity, and continuity (D. Ly and Muan 2001, 1–62; Ross and Collins 2006; Ross 2015). The foregoing examples illustrate how Khmer-produced literature (including folktales and fantasies featuring Angkor), media, and monuments increasingly promoted Angkor as a living ritual space, a place of past greatness, and the source of national identity.

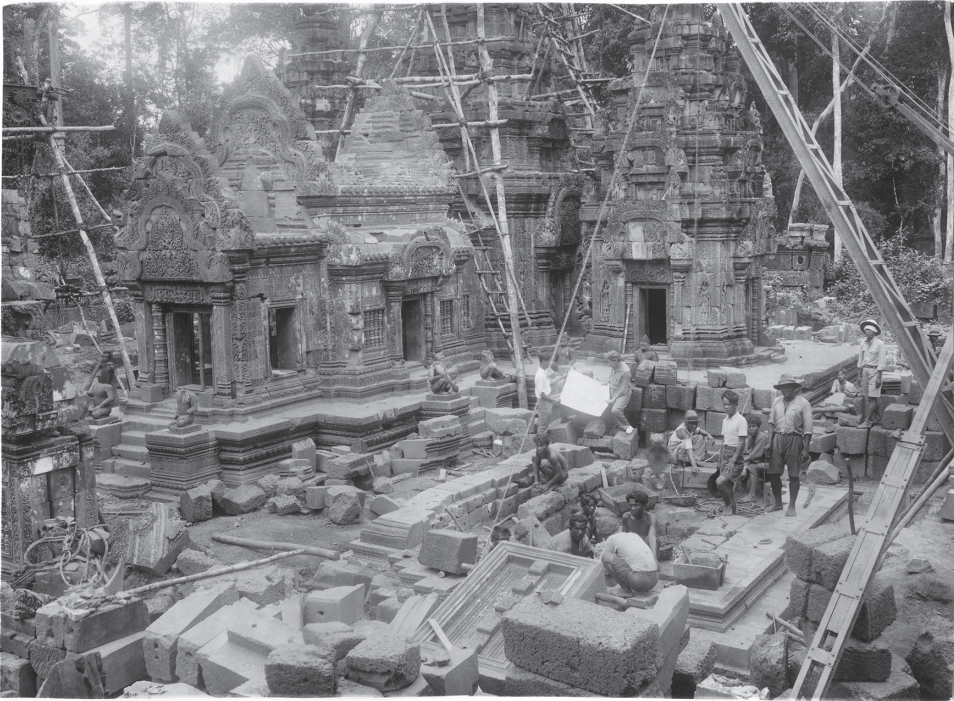
### **Archaeology as Esoteric Knowledge: EFEO Dominance and Orientalism in Khmer Studies**

Most EFEO scholarship on the Angkor period was imbued with some variant of Orientalism (following Clémentin-Ojha and Manguin 2007, 18–32; Peycam 2010, 158–59), which also guided conservation and park enhancement projects. Erasing Theravada Buddhism from

Angkor (which involved removing myriad statues and, in some cases, dismantling structures) created a break between the preceding Angkorian Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism, a cause for Angkor's collapse, and the inferior Thai-derived Theravada Buddhism of contemporary Cambodia (Cœdès 1931). EFEO conservators removed the seated Buddha of Phnom Bakheng and the earthen platform extension of Phimeanakas, for example, to show the 'original' Hindu structure (Marchal 1916; Boisselier and Griswold 1972; Chea 2018, 41). Even Henri Marchal strongly advocated this approach during his tenure as conservator of the Angkor monuments, in spite of his pioneering studies of Theravada Buddhism in Angkor (e.g., Marchal 1918, 1922, 1951) (Figure 3.1).

Such intrusive practices, copying contemporary conservation methods in Europe (Warrack 2011, 221–22), created mistrust between EFEO and the local Khmer public. So did the lack of public outreach. Writings by Okñā Suttanta Prījā Ind, who accompanied king Sisowath to Angkor in 1909 (1967, 87; see Edwards 2023, this volume), echoed the public perception that EFEO conservators disliked Buddhism and had looting, rather than preservation, as their ultimate goal. This suspicion was long lived and was occasionally reinforced by subsequent conservators such as Bernard-Philippe Groslier, who observed that the colossal sandstone Buddha of Preah Ngok, which the Khmer Rouge destroyed, was 'artistically not important' because of its Post-Angkorian date (White and Garrett 1982, 584). Ironically, this is among several works that Groslier (1985) dated to the 16th century but which are now associated with the 13th–15th centuries and the rise of Theravada Buddhism (Leroy et al. 2015; Polkinghorne et al. 2018; Tun 2015).

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*Figure 3.1* Henri Marchal, a pioneer of the anastylosis method in Angkor, with his Khmer assistant, Chan, and workmen at Banteay Srei temple restoration in 1934.

Source: (EFEO Photo Library MarH0174).

Whether EFEO explicitly sought to emphasise rupture between the Angkor and Modern Khmer Periods, French members focused on Angkor and Khmer scholars were relegated to research on Post-Angkorian and contemporary Cambodia, most of whom worked in the Buddhist Institute. Georges Cœdès assigned the Middle Khmer epigraphic scholarship to Khmer scholar Krassem. Working from the Buddhist Institute in 1935–1936 (Krassem 1984), his work laid the foundation for Pou Saveros' subsequent career of exemplary research (e.g., Lewitz 1972; Pou 1977). The Buddhist Institute also published most Khmer-language scholarship for decades. Its *Kambuja Suriya* journal included articles examining Buddhism, Khmer literature, and the construction of Khmer national identity (Pang 1960; Ly 1960, 1965; Leang 1967). Some Khmer scholars (e.g., Pang 1970; Ly 1973, 1; Tran 1973a, 1a–d) explicitly linked Khmer culture to India's high culture and Buddhist traditions in order to distinguish a pure Khmer race from Thai and Vietnamese neighbours. This overtly nationalist agenda was supported by the (1970–75) Khmer Republic government, particularly through the Khmer-Mon Institute (Peycam 2011, 22).

The Buddhist Institute was also a key player in national shifts toward 'Khmerization'—the use of Khmer, not French, as the medium of instruction (Khin 1999)—during the Sangkum era under Norodom Sihanouk (1953–70). This included mass publication and broad distribution of Khmer studies and language media and their incorporation into the national K–12 curriculum beginning in 1968. The Buddhist Institute's Phnom Penh-based Pali School and its associated Buddhist monk scholars were instrumental. Ly Theam Teng's (1960) volume on Khmer literature (published by Seng Nguon Huot Bookstore), his translation of Zhou Daguan from Chinese sources (Ly 1973), and Tran Ngea's (1973a, 1973b) two-volume Khmer history (published by Moahaleap Printing House) were read widely. Other Institute members, like Gnok Them, Leang Hap An, and Pang Khat, taught courses at the Royal University of Phnom Penh right up until 1975 (Khing 2010). Khmer performing artists also reached ever-expanding audiences through new media, from transistor radios and vinyl records to celluloid film (Fergusson and Masson 1997, 98–105; D. Ly and Muan 2001; Clayton 2005). King Sihanouk's efforts to bring education to the masses consumed up to 20% of the annual GDP and produced a new generation of literate Cambodians by the 1960s (Fergusson and Masson 1997, 99). His program also established the Royal University of Fine Arts in 1965 to provide educational opportunities in Khmer archaeology and art history through its Faculty of Archaeology, a topic to which the next section turns.

### Cambodian Archaeologies

Cambodian archaeology was an esoteric discipline closely associated with the EFEO from its founding in 1901 and focused on the ancient Angkor Period. With the Buddhist Institute's 1930 inauguration came an expansion in the range of topics associated with Khmer studies by Khmer scholars, but most French EFEO scholars continued their narrowly archaeological research on Angkor. Cambodian archaeology's origins and development are thus inextricably linked to EFEO's foundation and the EFEO-linked research and conservation institutions that emerged in its wake: Angkor Conservation (1907), the National Museum (previously the Musée Albert Sarraut, 1920), and the École des Beaux Arts (1917): the last two established by Georges Groslier. Motivated like his Orientalist peers to revive the 'classical' Angkorian art, his approach excluded Post-Angkorian and modern art from the school curriculum (Muan 2001). Cambodia's independence in 1953 did not shift responsibility for teaching and preserving cultural heritage from the EFEO to a Khmer institution. French EFEO members like Bernard-Philippe Groslier and Madeleine Giteau still oversaw operations, but now Cambodia—not France—paid most of the costs (Clémentin-Ojha and Manguin 2007, 88).

Archaeological instruction for Cambodians began during this post-colonial era of higher educational reform under then-prince/head of state Norodom Sihanouk, using the French system as its model (Fergusson and Masson 1997). In 1965, the prince tasked the creation of the Royal University of Fine Arts to architect Vann Molyvann, who became the first rector. Drawing inspiration from his alma mater, the prestigious *École nationale supérieure des beaux arts* in Paris, Vann Molyvann consolidated the *École des beaux arts* and the National Museum to form RUFA, with its Faculties of Archaeology, Architecture and Urbanism, Choreographic Arts, Music, and Plastic Arts (Ly and Muan 2001, 327–28; Reyum 2001; Vann 2001). Chea Tay Seng, the first Khmer art historian to graduate from the *École du Louvre* in Paris, was designated as the first dean of archaeology (Peycam 2011, 21–23). RUFA's mission was to train the next generation of Cambodian archaeologists and conservators to assume the roles and responsibilities that EFEO members had fulfilled for more than 50 years at Angkor and elsewhere across the country.

Nationwide educational reform at this time included Khmer as the medium of instruction, but RUFA courses were taught entirely in French by both French and some Khmer instructors, many of whom were conducting field research in Cambodia (e.g., Roland and Cécile Mourer, André Bateau, Jean Éllul, Albert Le Bonheur, Tep Im). Heritage professionals like Bernard-Philippe Groslier, Madeleine Giteau, and Claude Jacques provided occasional lectures and field trips for RUFA students. Like the early colonial insistence on French in the K–12 schools that produced widespread resistance to colonial schools (Clayton 1995), RUFA's requirement that Khmer students pass rigorous French-language examinations as part of their college training hindered success. This five-year program graduated only 25% of its annual cohort because so few students passed the examinations, producing only 50–70 archaeologists by 1975. Many RUFA dropouts joined the military on the cusp of the Third Indochina War (Fergusson and Masson 1997, 102, 107; Chuch 2014; Ang 2000, 1, 2021; Preap 2021, 35).

Yet RUFA's archaeology program produced significant success in its graduates. Graduate Pich Keo was recruited to work at the Angkor Conservation with Groslier and later became the first Khmer director of that institution after Groslier left Angkor in 1972. More than ten graduates from the Faculty of Archaeology at RUFA earned scholarships to study abroad, with some participating in UNESCO-funded training programs in Rome (including Chuch Phoen and Son Soubert). Other RUFA graduates pursued MAs and PhDs in archaeology, art history, and anthropology, including Kuoch Haksrea (1976), Ang Choulean (1986), Lan Sunnary, and Sunseng Sunkimmeng. Ponn Chhavann and four other archaeologists participated in an international training program provided by the University of Pennsylvania Museum/Thai Fine Arts Department Ban Chiang project in 1974–1975 (Gorman and Charoenwongsa 1976, 25).

Khmer-led Cambodian archaeology progressed slowly, and its Khmer-led scholarship struggled to make a scholarly impact. As Khmer-language scholarship on Khmer studies increased its readership from the late 1960s to 1975, work published in Khmer and French by RUFA's young archaeologists in the *Annales de l'université royale des beaux arts* and the *Bulletin des étudiants de la faculté d'archéologie* (Ang 2000, 2) never achieved the prestige or readership of work appearing in EFEO publications or the Buddhist Institute's *Kambuja Suriya* journal. The explicitly non-partisan and non-nationalist approach of RUFA scholarship, drawing from academic sources and intended for a specialist audience (Editorial Board 1973, 2; Ang 2021), contrasted sharply with the overtly political work of mainstream scholars at the Buddhist Institute and elsewhere. RUFA's archaeological influence was felt throughout the region. In the early 1970s, RUFA was to house the ASEAN Centre for Applied Research in Archaeology and Fine Arts (ARCAFA), which ultimately was established in Bangkok as the Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO SPAFA) (Pring 2001, 342).

Significant scholarship was produced during the Khmer Republic's 1970–75 period (see review in Peycam 2020, 39–43), but whether nationalist and scientific avenues of knowledge production could have converged in Khmer studies will never be known. Cambodia's Khmer Rouge era effectively put an end to both by 1975 and by 1979 had systematically eliminated all academic institutions and most of their scholars, including Huot Tat and Pang Khat (de Bernon 2010, 32). From 1975 to January 7, 1979, the Khmer Rouge destroyed or drove most of Cambodia's educated population out the country. An estimated 75–80% of higher education teachers and graduates, and 67% of primary and secondary students, vanished or emigrated abroad during the Khmer Rouge Period. By the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, only around 300 qualified professionals in any discipline remained in Cambodia (Duggan 1996, 365).

### **Post-Khmer Rouge Reincarnation of Khmer Studies**

France sheltered the only multidisciplinary Khmer studies program that operated during the 1975–79 period. Centre of Documentation, Research on Khmer Civilization (CEDORECK) was established in 1977 and functioned until 1991 (Peycam 2011, 23–28; 2020, 50–56). Back in their home country, the Pol Pot-era civil war ushered in a protracted hiatus in Khmer studies until Cambodians began to rebuild their country in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Cambodia's post-1979 higher education depended on external funding from Vietnam, the USSR, and other socialist blocs and non-aligned movement countries (Peycam 2020, 66–68). Meeting crucial human resource needs required Cambodia to reopen a series of higher educational institutions in 1979, including the Faculty of Medicine, School of Agronomy, Institute of Technology, and Tuk Thla Vocational School (Kiernan 1982, 180). The Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) opened a few years later and concentrated on teacher training to staff public schools across the country (Duggan 1997, 8). The first Vietnamese teachers recruited to teach at RUPP used French, but the language of instruction shifted to Vietnamese within a few years, and Russian teachers and engineers taught at the Institute of Technology in Russian (Tomasi 2000, 159). Efforts to use Khmer language and textbooks (i.e., Khmerisation) in education finally accelerated in the 1980s (Kiernan 1982, 180), since so few Khmers could use any foreign language, let alone Vietnamese or Russian.

Even as the country's educational infrastructure returned to life, Cambodia's fragmented higher education created a gulf between RUPP and RUFA. RUPP is housed in the Ministry of Education, while RUFA falls within the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MoCFA). Other problems include the lack of coordination between international aid organisations (Duggan 1997) and a tiny national budget for higher education that barely rises above 10% of the total annual government expenditures (<http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/kh>). In today's market, this current budget is only 50% of the level of funding that the 1953–1970 Sangkum government allocated to education. It is within this national context that the post-Khmer Rouge RUFA, discussed in the next section, evolved from its reopening in 1989.

### **Archaeological Training: RUFA and Partner Institutions**

Only three RUFA archaeology alumni from the 1970s survived the Khmer Rouge Period to participate in post-conflict rebuilding in 1979, when archaeological heritage training began to take various forms (see review in Stark and Heng 2017). Ouk Chea directed the National Museum after its 1979 re-opening, Chuch Phoeurn directed the new Palace Museum, and Pich Keo briefly returned to head Angkor Conservation (where he had worked before 1975) before being transferred to head the National Museum. Both India and the USSR provided short



training courses in archaeology and conservation to a few Cambodians (Kiernan 1982, 180; White and Garrett 1982, 585). Ang Choulean returned to Cambodia from France and helped revive the Faculty of Archaeology in 1989 (Ang 2019; Chuch 2021). Whereas the mission of RUFA pre-1975 was explicitly to train the next generation of heritage managers, post-1979 RUFA faculty faced new challenges, including neglected archaeological sites being consumed by vegetation and rampant looting. Compared to the late 19th–early 20th centuries, the situation of heritage in post-conflict Cambodia was dire (see a description of Angkor in 1981 by White and Garrett 1982; compared to early descriptions by Delaporte 1880; Drège Bernon and Josso 2003, 15–16).

RUFA suffered chronic staff and resource shortages (textbooks, laboratories, and field equipment), and most Khmer professors resorted to teaching what they had memorised as students. Similar to the pre-conflict RUFA, the curriculum consisted of a five-year fine arts program focused on Khmer art history which concentrated on the studies of ancient temples, stylistic evolution, Indian and Southeast Asian art history, the history of Cambodia, ethnology, linguistics, and epigraphy. Students were required to complete a thesis based on research (*mémoire*) to graduate with a degree in archaeology. The faculty was in dire need of international assistance to provide capacity-building for its new students, and this issue was raised at international conferences on Angkor organised by UNESCO in Bangkok in 1990 and in Paris in 1991 (Ishizawa 1992).

International assistance began to arrive in 1990, including a team of French specialists from the Musée Guimet led by Albert Le Bonheur, a Japanese team from the Sophia University Mission led by Yoshiaki Ishizawa, and post-doctoral fellow Judy Ledgerwood (1992, USA). From 1992–2000, UNESCO/TOYOTA launched its training program at RUFA and sought to replicate the pre-Khmer Rouge archaeology curriculum. UNESCO-funded international experts taught courses at RUFA in English, French, or Japanese, with local Khmer teaching assistants serving largely as translators. The Australian Centre for Education and APSO (Ireland) provided English language training, and the Centre Culturel Français provided French language training. The University of Tübingen ran a multi-year training program at RUFA, led by Gerd Albrecht (Chuch 2021).

Field-based archaeological training and short-term training abroad for RUFA students and graduates were supported by multiple institutions, including the EFEO, Sophia University, Japanese Government Team for Safeguarding Angkor, Waseda University, the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, and the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (e.g., Endo 1992, 126; JSA 1994, 252–75; Ishizawa 1996, 213–15; Griffin Ledgerwood and Chuch 1999; Ang 2000, 2–3; Stark and Griffin 2004; Nara 2012, 12; Preap 2021). The Center for Khmer Studies (CKS), a non-profit organisation founded in 1999, also provided support for Cambodian participation in foreign archaeological projects and cultural heritage management training at RUFA (Peycam 2020, 91–119).

By the mid-2000s, Cambodia’s trained heritage professionals also began training Khmer students in archaeology and field techniques. Cambodian governmental organisations like APSARA and the Royal Academy of Cambodia (and also the non-governmental Heritage Watch) have provided short-term field training programs at their respective research localities. Since 2012, RUFA has cooperated with Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) to create the Francophone *Manusastra* Project, which provides training in archaeology at the MA and PhD level at RUFA and/or in France (Preap 2021, 37).

From 1989 to 2020, more than 700 students graduated from the Royal University of Fine Arts’ Faculty of Archaeology, and many have pursued postgraduate training abroad. These include seven MAs and seven PhDs from France (INALCO, Université de Toulouse Jean

Jaurès–Toulouse 2, Université Paris 3–Sorbonne Nouvelle, Université Nanterre), six PhDs and four MAs from Japan (Sophia University, Osaka Ohtani University, Tokyo Fine Arts University, Waseda University), and two PhDs from the United States (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa). Nearly 30 more Khmers have obtained terminal MA degrees in archaeology, art history, or anthropology: two from the United States (Northern Illinois University), two from Germany (University of Tübingen), one from the United Kingdom (University of Surrey; but see subsequently), and one from Canada (University of Western Ontario). Approximately 15 RUFA staff and students received their MAs or PhDs under the 2002 UNESCO institutional capacity–building project in a joint program between RUFA and the Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC).

Since the inception of its Alphawood funding scheme in 2014, the United Kingdom's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Southeast Asian Art and Archaeology Program has dominated post-graduate training in Cambodian art and archaeology. By the time of this volume's publication, the SOAS Southeast Asian Art and Archaeology program had graduated 11 Khmers with post-graduate diplomas and 22 Khmers with MAs, and two Khmers are PhD candidates. Six Cambodian students are currently enrolled in SOAS postgraduate programs. These programs have produced talented professionals, but lack of adequate funding has constrained RUFA's efforts at sustainable local capacity–building. Until and unless Cambodia invests more resources in supporting its archaeology faculty and heritage managers, talented RUFA archaeology graduates will continue to leave the field—and sometimes the country—to pursue other, more lucrative professions. This 'archaeology brain drain' has affected the nature of contemporary knowledge production and diminished the role of Cambodian scholarship on the Angkorian world.

### **Post–Khmer Rouge Knowledge Production: Research and Publication**

Khmers have long valued and written about their heritage, including the Angkorian world despite structural challenges, the colonial burden, and a more recent history of geopolitical conflict. Most RUFA archaeology graduates who remain in the field, like their peers elsewhere globally, work in heritage management, not academia, and find few opportunities to publish. Archaeology students from RUFA, with support from the non–profit (and now–defunct) Reyum organisation, briefly revived the Archaeology Students' Bulletin in the 2000s. The new non–profit Yosothor for Khmer Culture and its cultural information network, KhmeRenaissance ([www.yosothor.org](http://www.yosothor.org)), provide the best outlets for Khmer–language publication online and in print for archaeological research and outreach.

Despite intellectual bridging by Khmer scholars like Pou Saveros and Long Seam (whose students taught epigraphy at both RUFA and RUPP), a deep divide remains between the two universities. RUPP scholars, like their predecessors, publish their work in their internal bulletin, through personally and privately funded print runs, and in *Kambuja Suriya* (e.g., Vong 2010, 2011). The latter was revived in 1994 (Chhon 1994) and, spearheaded by Long Seam, continues its publication in traditional Khmer studies, for example, Buddhism, folklore, culture, translation of old French articles, and epigraphy (e.g., Long Seam 1997; and recently, Chhom 2019; Hun 2019; Vong 2019). Khmer–language publications on archaeology are extremely rare, particularly primary sources like site reports and regional archaeological syntheses (see, for example, Thuy 2020).

Scholarly production of publications on Khmer archaeology remains small relative to the growing number of trained Khmer archaeologists. Nonetheless, the recent advent of online

platforms like Wordpress, Facebook, and Khmer newspapers has provided alternative venues for writers from RUFA and RUPP to engage with a public readership. It is fair to say that, despite the continuing low literacy rates and the limited training and resources available for those seeking to publish (Jarvis 2006), online media accommodates a mass public outreach on Khmer studies comparable to that facilitated by radio and movies in the pre-Khmer Rouge Period (Heng et al. 2020).

We would argue, therefore, that despite facing a series of political upheavals and tragedies, Cambodians are actively curating their heritage and contributing to knowledge production in the domain of Khmer studies. Yet their work is rarely known or recognised in international scholarship in Cambodia—and thus we turn our attention to the problem of ‘invisible Cambodians’. Institutional weakness in Cambodian higher education is clearly one factor. But given Cambodia’s long and intimate relationship with French colonial interventions in Angkor heritage, we must in turn recognise a longstanding lack of commitment, since the beginning of the Colonial Period in the 19th century, to systematically training Cambodian people in the study of their past. We also acknowledge several key French scholars who were exceptions to this pattern and were instrumental in capacity-building and knowledge production.

Khmer assistants travelled with the renowned colonial scholar Étienne Aymonier across Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand in the 1880s, collecting ethnographic and archaeological data and producing inscription rubbings. Aymonier heartily praised their work and competence in his publications (e.g., Aymonier 1895, 1901); some even recorded their journeys in their own inscriptions in Angkor (Antelme 2014; Guérin and Chhom 2014; Weber 2014). One of the assistants was a prominent figure who held important government offices, owing largely to his noble family and French intervention (Guérin 2017), but little is known about their archaeological work. Many publications by Adhémar Leclère during the late 1800s/early 1900s were also based on contemporary Khmer writers whose works are preserved at the Musée des Beaux-Arts et de la Dentelle in Leclère’s hometown of Alançon (France). All these Khmer researchers of the 19th century are largely invisible within the historical record.

The establishment of EFEO in 1901 employed many Khmers in archaeological and conservation work but could have produced more opportunities for meaningful Khmer involvement like Khmer-authored publications. To be clear, the EFEO was a heritage organisation with conservation as its goal, not educating local and descendant communities. EFEO helped resuscitate Cambodia’s remarkable heritage for more than a century and remains important. Yet the EFEO, despite its ‘École’ designation, was never a school for Khmer archaeologists and conservators. Before 1975, the EFEO primarily trained Khmers through Angkor Conservation as technical assistants for restoration and excavation/clearance activities. Some of these individuals were exceptionally talented and held the status of ‘caporal’ (foreman/site manager): They managed field logistics, survey, and mapping and directed excavations (Figure 3.2). For instance, the Caporal Suon oversaw the excavation of Angkor Wat’s central tower in 1934–35 under the supervision of Henri Marchal and Georges Trouvé (Conservation d’Angkor and EFEO 1908, 1a, 139–46). Hired from the surrounding communities in Angkor, these invisible workmen provided the foundation for the success of EFEO scholars in research and conservation. Trained Khmers produced sketches and plans of temples and of the broader temple complex to assist with conservation and restoration; one of them, Mar Bo, who worked with Bernard-Philippe Groslier (1985, 24), published a tourist guide for Angkor (Mar 1969).

The Royal Library/Buddhist Institute under its first director, Suzanne Karpelès, was a rare venue in which Cambodian scholars were visible since its creation in 1925. The library’s mission was to support publication by its Cambodian staff and students of the Pali School (Hansen 2007, 144). André Bareau, a renowned Buddhistologist, briefly taught at RUFA in the late 1960s



Figure 3.2 Henri Marchal and an unnamed Khmer assistant at the restoration of Banteay Srei (Damdek) in 1952.

Source: (EFEO Photo Library: CAM01679)

and encouraged archaeology students to publish their first articles in the *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* (BEFEO) (Faculté Royale d'Archéologie de Phnom Penh and Bureau 1969). Two of these students, Lan Sunnary and Sunseng Sunkimeng, continued to publish their research in other journals (e.g., Lan 1972, 2008; Fabricius and Lan 2003; Sunseng 1977). It was not until the 1970s that extensive publication activity by a maverick Khmer female researcher, Pou Saveros, appeared in BEFEO with support from her mentor, Jean Filliozat, who was also the EFEO's director at that time (Pou 1984, 5).

Language challenges continue to affect the visibility of Khmer scholars today. Publishing through EFEO requires technical competence in French, and publishing for a more global audience requires linguistic competence in English. Khmer-language publications remain largely restricted to the Buddhist Institute and Cambodia's higher educational institutions. Most Khmer scholars do not publish in Western languages, and most Western scholars do not read and speak

Khmer. Limited moral and structural support from both within and outside Cambodia, the fragmented and poorly funded higher education system in-country, and disparate international collaborations often segregated by nationality and institution have all thus contributed to the problem of ‘invisible Cambodians’.

The tide has begun to turn in the last two decades as increased numbers of Cambodian scholars have published in international venues on prehistory (e.g., Ly 2001, 2002; Heng 2008; Song 2010; Voeun 2013; Heng et al. 2016), historical archaeology (e.g., Chhan 2000; Ea 2005, 2013; Ea et al. 2008; Heng 2012, 2016; Chhay et al. 2013; Nhim 2019a; Chhay et al. 2020), history (Nhim 2009, 2014), cultural anthropology (e.g., Ang 1986, 1997, 2020; Hang 2004; Phlong 2004; Kim 2011), religion (e.g., Ang 1998, 2007; Siyonn 2005, 2006), or heritage and conservation (e.g., Im 2019; Chan 2011; Chhay 2011; Phon 2011; Song 2011; Seng 2012; Heng and Phon 2017; Nhim 2019b; Heng et al. 2020). These publications are the results of both individual and international collaborative projects that help promote heritage management and integrate Cambodia’s research into the regional and global contexts. For example, Voeun Vuthy’s work on fish and animal bones from both modern and archaeological contexts remains the standard for zooarchaeology in Cambodia and Southeast Asia (e.g., Voeun and Driesch 2006). Phon Kaseka’s long-term research at archaeological sites around Phnom Penh, including Cheung Ek and Sre Ampil, contributes to the documentation of ceramics kilns outside Angkor and Pre-Angkorian and Angkorian archaeological sites located within reach of the rapid urban development that saw many archaeological sites vanished without proper documentation. Heng Sophady’s collaborative research with the University of Tübingen in eastern Cambodia and with the French Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle at Laang Spean has continued to shed light on Cambodia’s deep history from the Paleolithic to Neolithic Periods. Most of these publications are made possible with assistance from international colleagues and mentors. Nonetheless, there is still a bifurcation with Khmer-language publications that does not materialise in western languages and vice versa because of some structural challenges discussed in the following.

### **Structural Challenges to Making Khmers Visible in Angkorian Archaeology**

Multiple structural challenges facing Cambodian researchers have contributed to the lack of meaningful collaboration in most research on the Angkorian world. The fact that academic and research institutions in Cambodia are government institutions places additional pressure on their employees, who are both teachers or researchers and administrators. Central among these governmental institutions are the APSARA National Authority and MoCFA, which are in dire need of well-trained personnel, both from RUFA and abroad, to rehabilitate their human resources decimated by the Khmer Rouge. To satisfy the state bureaucratic nature, productivity is measured by the time spent doing manual labour like teaching, working in the field, or administrative duties (e.g., meeting, paperwork, etc.). Staff are often assigned to various internal or collaborating research projects. The collective nature of a bureaucratic office, unlike the well-sourced academic institutions abroad that encourage individual publication, produces reports or publications that can be described as ‘white papers’ or policy documents. This practice pressures writer(s) to label the office as the author, implying that the work belongs to everyone in the office, particularly the high-ranking officers in charge. Individual publication is sometimes discouraged, as writing time for such publication is considered a personal matter. Local researchers often rely on public interviews (newspaper, radio, or TV) to publicise their work rather than publishing in a peer-reviewed academic journal that requires both language proficiency and time commitment.

Differing research agendas between Cambodian and international researchers pose another structural challenge. Unlike the generalising and social science-driven paradigms that shape many Western archaeological research programs, archaeologists in Southeast Asia's post-colonial countries often prioritise nation-building over academic concerns (Trigger and Glover 1981; Shoocondej 2007). In Cambodia, a nationalist agenda of history and culture championed by the Buddhist Institute has penetrated the public education system since the 1960s. Archaeological research in Cambodia, despite being immersed in a comparative and generalising curriculum, still pursues the same agenda to communicate with the general public and to stay relevant. The different agendas between local and international researchers compounded by the language barriers discourage any meaningful collaborative engagement (Glover 2004, 68). Furthermore, underfunded public institutions that lack infrastructural support, like laboratory and equipment for data processing and analysis, as well as the limited language proficiency for local researchers to acquire international grants, also hinder meaningful Khmer-led research projects. The lower wage (c. USD \$293–325 per month [Tith 2022]) is barely enough to afford communal meals at home, not to mention paying for food and supplies during fieldwork. Local researchers have relied on collaborative international projects for access to funding, an up-to-date research paradigm, methodology, equipment, and other benefits.

It is ethical that international collaborators be aware of these structural problems facing their Cambodian counterparts and contribute to building equal opportunity for their local collaborators and the communities they work with. While these issues are Cambodia's problems, international collaborations under these circumstances exacerbate the inequality between rich and poor countries that privilege international collaborators. There is no ready systematic solution to these issues that at the same time avoids repeating the scope of *mission civilisatrice* implemented in the 20th century (Heng et al. 2020). Capacity building for the local collaborators, students, and community members is a remedy to some of these structural issues and should be a required component of international research in Cambodia (Stark and Heng 2017). Another resolution should begin with the involvement of the Cambodian collaborators with the *chaîne opératoire* of a research project from conceptualising to securing funding and to fieldwork, data analysis, and publication of the results. Such project would incorporate the local collaborator's or project co-director's research questions into the project agendas and include analysis and writing time built in to the research designs that allow the Cambodian contributor to take leave, work on data analysis, and co-author publications.

Increasing numbers of international collaborative projects including, but not limited to, the Lower Mekong Archaeological Project (LOMAP), Greater Angkor Project (GAP), and Dharma project (EFEO), have begun to implement many of these solutions. Such deep involvement takes a long-term commitment, yet it provides a hands-on learning experience for Cambodian researchers hoping to garner international funding and collaboration for their projects. Furthermore, the public engagement aspect of such research through capacity building will build a long-lasting relationship and forge shared research interest with the local communities.

## Conclusion

The Colonial Period separation of ancient and modern Khmer studies that gave rise to the Royal Library/Buddhist Institute and EFEO laid an enduring foundation for a divide between Khmer-based research traditions on the one hand and archaeology/antiquity-focused research dominated by non-Cambodians on the other hand. The systematic production of knowledge in the domain of Khmer studies by the Royal Library/Buddhist Institute helped to produce and institutionalise the gap between the Modern and Angkor Periods and—intentionally or

unintentionally—reinforced the notion of Khmer identity that underpins nationalism in this domain of research today. The EFEO and its scholars, by contrast, largely monopolised research on Cambodian heritage and archaeology, and few Khmers received comprehensive academic training in these fields even after the Colonial Period ended in 1953.

Despite these obstacles, Cambodians have actively researched and promoted their heritage through a variety of institutions and media. RUFA's development as a modern academic institution was halted by the Third Indochina War and subsequent Khmer Rouge Period, in which most of RUFA's human resources were exterminated. The university's revival after 1989 was hampered by a host of challenges, from neglected temples to rampant vandalism. These challenges, as well as underfunding, prevented RUFA from impacting mainstream education and scholarship until rather recently. Now, however, initiatives such as Yosothor and mass media platforms like Facebook and Wordpress bring locally produced knowledge about Cambodian archaeology and heritage to a much broader audience.

'Invisible Cambodians' in Cambodia's archaeological and heritage management worlds are a lasting and problematic legacy of French colonial rule. Yet Khmers have actively contributed to heritage management and knowledge production through their service at the Angkor Conservation and their publications in other venues. Today, limited internal and external structural and moral support, lack of training, narrow opportunities to work in the heritage sector, and underdeveloped language skills (on the part of both Cambodian and international scholars) all contribute to the problem of 'invisible Cambodians.' More meaningful, genuine, and cohesive collaborations between international teams and Cambodian counterparts are required to overcome this problem and to narrow the divide between Cambodian and international scholars. Things have begun to turn in the right direction, albeit slowly, over the past decade as an increasing number of Cambodian scholars have published their work in various international venues in English or French. Increasing international collaboration has also involved more Cambodian counterparts in research designs.

In the year 802 CE, the official start date of Angkor, the Khmer king Jayavarman II performed the magic ritual of *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja/ devarāja* to prevent Cambodia from living under the yoke of 'Java', a foreign entity, and protect its spiritual power. One might argue that the 16th–19th century Khmer-led restorations of Angkor and the recent post-conflict rebuilding efforts extend and reflect this magic spell. The thin silver lining of foreign-dominated Angkorian studies and conservation is the clear historical value of this work, which contributes to our understanding of the Khmer past. Yet many more Khmers must become visible in this domain, through training and mentorship, to create a future in which Cambodians control their own heritage.

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# THE ANGKORIAN WORLD

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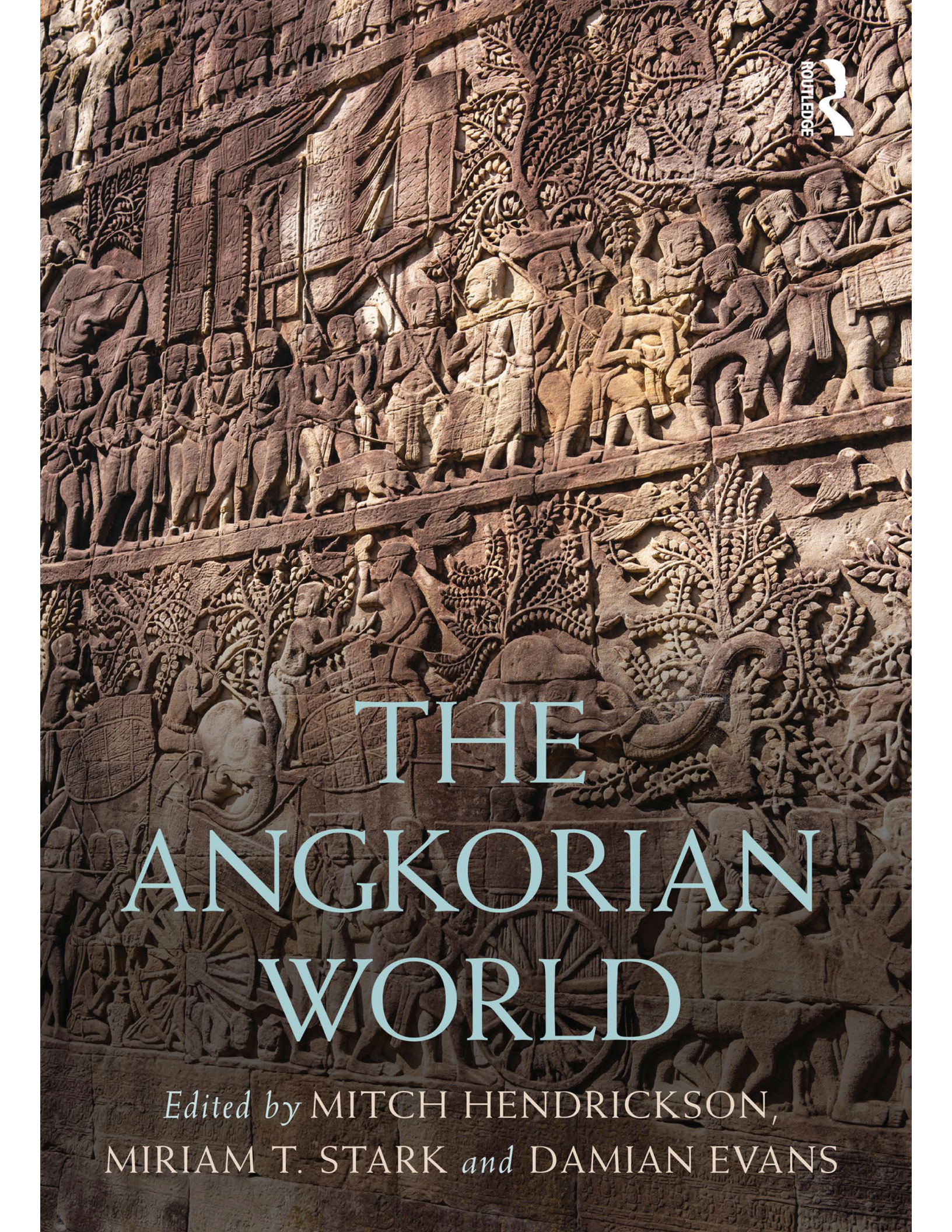
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