

FOLK MEMORIES OF THE DECLINE OF ANGKOR IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY CAMBODIA: THE LEGEND OF THE LEPER KING

by

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One of the intriguing features of the European 'discoveries' of Angkor in the mid-nineteenth century A.D. was that the supposedly forgotten ruins, and much of the statuary, came equipped with Cambodian names. Recent research has shown that in some cases these names were historically accurate while others, in somewhat garbled form, are folk memories of the kings and divinities associated with a particular site¹.

This paper argues that the association of a statue and three toponyms with the phrase *sdach komlong* ("leper king") in nineteenth-century Cambodia constitutes a folk memory of this kind, quite possibly of an otherwise all but forgotten king, Indravarman II (reigned c. 1220-1243?) who left no inscriptions of his own.

Evidence to support this argument comes from an examination of the statue and the toponyms, from a study of myths about a leper king from Cambodia and Thailand, from the research of the late Victor Goloubew (who came to the conclusion that Indravarman II's predecessor, Jayavarman VII, was a leper), from the only inscription that mentions Indravarman, and from the testimony of Chou Ta-Kuan, the Chinese envoy who visited Angkor in A.D. 1296.

Chou, in discussing illness at Angkor, mentions that lepers could be seen "from time to time" ("*de distance à distance*") along the roads nearby, and adds:

there was a sovereign who contracted this disease, for this reason, people do not speak of it contemptuously (*avec mépris*)².

The story of a leper king at Angkor, then, dates from at least the thirteenth century A.D., and no earlier references are known. By the mid-nineteenth century the story had become embedded in Thai and Cambodian chronicles as well as in popular

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1. See Saveros Lewitz, "La toponymie khmère", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient (BEFEO)*, LIII (1966-1967), 375-451, for a detailed discussion of toponyms. For the persistence of some Angkorian ones, see David P. Chandler, "Maps for the ancestors", *JSS*, 64/2 (July 1976), 170-187.

2. Paul Pelliot, *Oeuvres posthumes*, vol. III, *Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge de Tchou Ta Kouan* (Paris, 1952), 23-24.

folklore¹. Some people even believed that a leper king had built Angkor⁴. In the Cambodian chronicle (which, incidentally, makes no mention of the heyday of Angkor), the leper king is placed in the tenth century A.D. The passage that refers to his contracting leprosy reads as follows.

One day the king summoned all of his ministers to a meeting. When he had done so, he noticed that one of the ministers, named Neak (i.e. "naga", or dragon), refused to prostrate himself. Filled with anger, the king took his sacred sword and smote the minister. When he did so, venomous spittle fell on him, and he became a leper. People called him the leper king [*sdach komlong*] and he was no longer recognizable as a king. He died at the age of sixty-nine, having reigned for fifty-nine years⁵.

Other versions of the myth say that the king contracted leprosy by cheating a Hindu magician, or by being kissed by a leprous woman⁶. Mme. Porée-Maspero has shown that the myth penetrated deeply into Cambodian folk-lore; Stieng and Cham versions, moreover, have been reported⁷.

3. Versions of the myth can be found in Dr. Angier, "Le lèpre au Cambodge", *Annales de l'hygiène et médecine coloniale* 6 (1903), 176-180; Etienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, vol. III (Paris, 1904), 488; A. Benazet, "De quelques pratiques de la médecine chez les cambodgiens", *L'Ethnographie*, 1932, 29-44; James Campbell, "Notes on the antiquities . . . of Cambodia", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 1860, 182-199; Adhemard Leclère, *Cambodge: contes et légendes* (Paris, 1899), 112-113; Claude Notton, *Légende d'Angkor et chronique du Bouddha de cristal* (Limoges, 1960), 22-25; C. Notton, *Légendes sur le Siam et le Cambodge* (Bangkok, 1939), 48-52 and 97-104; Eveline Parée-Maspero, *Etudes sur les rites agraires des Cambodgiens*, 3 vols. (Paris and The Hague, 1962-1969), 258, 669, 678, 704, 745 and 847.

4. See Campbell, *op. cit.*, 194, where Rama IV reports the rumor, and C. Naudin, "Recueil des documents pour servir à l'histoire des temples du groupe d'Angkor", *Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises (BSEI)*, III-IV (1928), 5-134 at 32.

Rama IV's fascination with Cambodian history, and with Angkor in particular, would reward detailed research. A good place to start would be the royally sponsored attempt, in 1859-1860, to dismantle two small towers of the twelfth-century temple of Ta Prohm and transport them to Bangkok. The temple was in Thai territory at the time, but the attempt failed when Thai foremen were murdered by local people. See Christopher Pym (ed.), *Henri Mouhot's Diary* (Kuala Lumpur, 1966), 109 and Aymonier, *op. cit.* III, 32-33, as well as C. Flood (trans.), *The Dynastic Chronicles; Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign* (Tokyo, 1967), I, 222-223 and 226-227 and *chotmal het ratchakan thit 4* ("Collected Documents from the Fourth Reign"), *es* 1221/70 and *es* 1222/80, in the National Library in Bangkok—a reference supplied by Chalong Soontravanich.

5. *Brah raja bangsavatar mahaksat khmaer* ("The Royal Chronicle of Cambodia"), manuscript from the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh, photographed by the Institute of Far Eastern Studies in Tokyo (available on microfilm), p. 43. See also Jean Moura, *Le royaume du Cambodge* (Paris, 1883), II, 15, which paraphrases an earlier recension of the chronicle.

6. Cf. John Audric, *Angkor and the Khmer Empire* (London, 1972), 151-152 and Charles Danguy, *De la ville des hommes à la cité des dieux* (Paris-Saigon, 1940), 221-224.

7. Porée-Maspero, *op. cit.*, 514 and Paul Mus, "Deux légendes chamos", *BEFEO*, XXXI (1931), 97.

Against this impressive body of myth is Chou's matter-of-fact statement which suggests that his interlocutors were referring to an historical personage, perhaps within the living memory of some. It is not impossible, of course, for a myth to have its basis in fact; many twentieth-century Cambodian myths can be traced to real events⁸. However, if the story of a leper king at Angkor had no basis in 1296, what follows is pure speculation.

Because of its unusual appearance, the statue known as the *sdach komlong*, located in the *tilean sdach komlong* ("terrace of the leper king"), is difficult to date⁹. Most experts, however, date it, cautiously, to a period slightly later than the statuary of the nearby Royal Terrace—i.e. to the early years of the thirteenth century A.D.¹⁰ A short inscription on the base of the statue, dated by Coedès on linguistic grounds to the fourteenth or fifteenth century, identifies the statue not as a king but as Dharmajara, or Yama, the divine assessor of virtues and defects¹¹. Its placement in what is believed to have been the royal cremation ground suggests that it occupies its original position¹².

By the mid-nineteenth century the statue was revered as a representation of the leper king, and was associated by some with Yasovarman I, the founder of the city of Angkor¹³. Visitors to Angkor throughout the nineteenth century saw the statue sheltered in a small hut, in the manner of a Cambodian ancestor spirit, or *neak ta*¹⁴. Perhaps its 'leprosy' was connected with lichenous growths that flourished on it. On the other hand, it is possible that the phrase *tilean sdach komlong* means "the terrace of the king who was a leper" rather than "the terrace where a statue, now

8. See, for example, Buddhist Institute (comp.), *Brajum rioeng preng* ("Collected Folk Stories"), VIII (Phnom Penh, 1972), 125-129 and 185-190, where cults involving ancestor spirits (*neak ta*) are traced to twentieth-century events.

9. See, for example, N. Filoz, *Cambodge et le Siam* (Paris, 1889), 75 and 81; Henri Mouhot, *Voyage dans les royaumes de Siam . . .* (Paris, 1863), 201-202 and Pierre Benoit, *Le roi lepreux* (Paris, 1927), 117-118 (a fictional account). For a description of the statue (a seated, nude, male figure without sexual organs and with disorderly hair, fangs, and rudimentary modelling of the torso), see Jean Boisselier, *La statuaire khmère et son évolution* (Paris, 1955), I, 191.

10. On dating, see Boisselier, *loc. cit.* (by inference); M.C. Subhadradis Diskul (personal communication). H.W. Woodward, however, perceives no fool-proof date (personal communication).

11. G. Coedès, "Le date du Bayon", *BEFEO*, XXVIII (1928), 81-112 at 84. This dating has been confirmed by Ms. Saveros Pou (personal communication). In 1940, Coedès apparently leaned toward the fifteenth century: Coedès, "La destination funéraire des grands monuments cambodgiens", *BEFEO*, XL (1940), 315-343 at 338.

12. Coedès, "La destination . . .", 338-339.

13. Aymonier, *op. cit.*, III, 487. Notton's identification of the statue and the real leper king with Indravarman III (r. 1296-1308) is supported by his contention that representations of this king are "well known" at Angkor. Notton, *Légendes de Siam . . .*, 50, n.

14. E. Lunet de Lajonquière, *Inventaire descriptif des monuments du Cambodge*, III (Paris, 1911), 56-57.

called the leper king, has been found". The suggestion that the place has named the statue, rather than the reverse, is strengthened somewhat by the existence of a near-replica of the statue, found at Wat Khnat, which was not reportedly known as a *sdach komlong*¹⁵.

In addition to the terrace, only two toponyms in nineteenth-century Cambodia contained the phrase. Both are in the Angkor region. One is on Phnom Kulen—a small brick building, five metres by ten, opening to the east, roofless, known as the *prasat dot sdach komlong* or "temple of the leper king's cremation"¹⁶. In the 1870s it sheltered a stone lingam. According to Aymonier, local traditions held that the leper king had been cremated on the roof of the building; according to Moura (who did not visit the site) a statue similar to the leper king mentioned above was found nearby¹⁷.

Near the site of the temple, a large slab of sandstone in a streambed has been carved with innumerable small lingams. Local people told Aymonier that the leper king had bathed in this portion of the river, a belief shared by their counterparts almost a century later. Inscriptions found at the site in the 1960s, however, date these carvings to the ninth and tenth centuries A.D.¹⁸

Aymonier, incidentally, who is cautious when confronted by many Cambodian historical myths, believed that the leper king was an historical person¹⁹.

The second toponym is in Chikreng Province, to the east of Angkor, and refers to a temple visited by Aymonier known as the *kampheng sdach komlong*, or "leper king's fortress"; the name dropped out of use toward the end of the nineteenth century²⁰.

Aymonier found two inscriptions at the site, on stones reused in the construction of the temple²¹. A third inscription, published by Coedès in 1953, is

15. Lunet de Lajonquière, *op. cit.*, III, 281-282. Coedès, "La destination . . .", 339n, remarks that the Wat Khnat statue lacks the fangs (*crocs*) of the one found at Angkor Thom. The Wat Khnat statue, incidentally, turned up between the visits of Aymonier, who fails to mention it, and Lunet de Lajonquière.

16. Aymonier, *op. cit.*, III, 416, and Lunet de Lajonquière, *op. cit.* III, 236-237.

17. Moura, *op. cit.*

18. Jean Boulbet, "Kbal Spean: The stream of a thousand lingas", *Nokor Khmer*, No. 2 (January-March 1970), 2-17. The mountain is dotted with monuments and statuary from all periods of Angkorian history. See Philippe Stern, "Travaux exécutés à Phnom Kulen", *BEFEO*, XXXVIII (1938), 152-175. Danguy, *loc. cit.*, and Notton, *Légendes d'Angkor*, 25, connect the leper king with this site. Notton's text (dating in its Thai version from 1932) reads: "[the king] being leprous, did not recover. He went with his cortège of concubines to cure himself on the eight-peaked mountain of Koulen. Getting no better, he died of old age. His body and those of his concubines turned into stones, which can be seen today."

19. Aymonier, *op. cit.*, II, 417. Contrast this with his criticism of the mythologizing impulse in nineteenth-century Cambodia at III, 326.

20. Aymonier, *op. cit.*, II, 448-450; Lunet de Lajonquière, *op. cit.*, I, 373.

21. These are catalogued by Coedès as K.170 and K.171.

dated on calligraphic grounds to the thirteenth century, and, although fragmentary, is of markedly Sivaite character²². In 1940 Coedès had suggested that the temple had been built during the reign of Jayavarman VII, attached to one of the hospitals constructed by that monarch throughout the kingdom²³.

Both sites, then, are of markedly Sivaite character, while the terrace of the leper king is not. The Chikreng temple, like the terrace, probably dates from the end of the twelfth or early thirteenth century, while the Phnom Kulen site, impossible to date, is associated by local people with a leper king whom Aymonier believed to have been a real man.

The myth of the leper king fascinated Victor Goloubew of the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient (1876-1945). In a series of informal studies begun in 1922 and extending into the 1930s, Goloubew became convinced that the leper king was a real person, and came to associate him with Jayavarman VII²⁴. This association is attractive for several reasons, and fits some of the evidence nicely. In the late 1930s it was accepted, tentatively, by Coedès²⁵; more recently, and with less caution, it has been advanced by B.P. Groslier²⁶.

The evidence for Goloubew's claim included a lintel to a hospital temple, depicting Lokesvara and a leper; bas-reliefs from the inner courtyard of the Bayon, showing a man being treated for the disease; and tantalizing evidence from southern India and Ceylon which indicated that at an unspecified date a Cambodian king, afflicted with leprosy, had visited both places and been miraculously cured. Another piece of evidence, which Goloubew did not use, is the association between a *sdach komlong* and a hospital-temple of Jayavarman VII, discussed above. A smaller bit, drawn from Chou Ta Kuan's account, is the phrase translated by Pelliot as "*de distance à distance*". While the phrase can as easily mean "from time to time" it is

22. K.764. See G. Coedès, *Les inscriptions du Cambodge, IV* (Paris, 1953), 318.

23. G. Coedès, "Les hôpitaux de Jayavarman VII", *BEFEO*, XL (1940), 344-347 at 346.

24. See Louis Malleret, "La vingtième anniversaire de la mort de Victor Goloubew", *BEFEO*, LIII (1966-1967), 331-373, especially 345, 352-353. Goloubew never published all the results of his research; nor did his fellow-Indianist, Silvain Levi, who shared his fascination with the leper king: see V. Goloubew, "Silvain Levi et Indochine", *BEFEO*, XXXV (1935), 351-367. Portions of it, however, appeared in V. Goloubew, "Un idole khmer de Lokesvara au Musée de Colombo", *BEFEO*, XXIV (1924), 510-512 and V. Goloubew (with Louis Finot), "Rapport sur un mission archéologique à Ceylan", *BEFEO*, XXX (1930), 627-643. See also V. Goloubew, "Sur quelques images khmères de Vajradhara", *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, June-December 1937, 97-104. G. Coedès, "Le mystère du Bayon", *Cahiers de l'EFEO*, X (1937), 25-30 summarizes Goloubew's research and tentatively accepts his conclusions. See also G. Muraz, "Les scènes médicales et domestiques dans les bas-reliefs des temples d'Angkor", *La Géographie*, LXIV (1935), 103-120, especially fig. 14.

25. G. Coedès, *Angkor* (Hong Kong, 1963), 93-94.

26. B.P. Groslier, "Les inscriptions du Bayon", in J. Dumarçay and B.P. Groslier, *Le Bayon* (Paris, 1973), 255.

just possible that it is a veiled reference to Jayavarman's hospitals, still being used as leprosaria nearly one century after his death²⁷.

Goloubew's hypothesis is useful in explaining some of the idiosyncratic features of Jayavarman VII's reign, such as the hospital-building program and what looks like an effort to finish his building program before what may have been a predictable death from the disease²⁸. Perhaps, as Coedès suggests, the king sought to obtain merit in this way, or better, to counter the demerit implied by his affliction²⁹.

Goloubew seems on less firm ground, however, when he suggests that the Bayon bas-reliefs represent Jayavarman VII. Several authorities date these bas-reliefs well after Jayavarman's death, and perhaps to the period of Hindu-inspired iconoclasm at Angkor³⁰. Goloubew's evidence from Ceylon and southern India is likewise hard to use, although it strengthens his contention (and mine) that the leper king was a real person. The Khmer statuette of Lokeśvara found in Ceylon is difficult to date, although it may be from the Bayon period; we do know that one of Jayavarman VII's sons went to Ceylon to study Buddhism³¹. However, if the royal visitor was Jayavarman VII, and especially if he was, as myths suggest, miraculously cured, it seems unlikely that no inscriptions in Cambodia have records of this event. A visit by a less pretentious monarch seems more likely; and if this monarch is to fall in the memory-span of people alive in A.D. 1296, it would have to be Indravarman II.

The last 15 years or so of Jayavarman VII's reign, of course, are shrouded in mystery, and so is the reign of Indravarman II³². This 40-year period, moreover, is

27. I am grateful to Professor O.W. Wolters, who checked the original Chinese, for reducing my enthusiasm for this interpretation (personal communication).

28. In the last years of his reign, Jayavarman VII sponsored no inscriptions, nor do other inscriptions mention his activities. This suggests retirement, consonant with leprosy, perhaps, but just as easily with Jayavarman's advanced age.

29. Coedès, *Angkor, loc. cit.* Angier, *op. cit.*, mentions that Cambodians in the early twentieth century thought that leprosy was hereditary.

30. These bas-reliefs have been dated well after Jayavarman VII. See Philippe Stern, *Les monuments khmers du style du Bayon et Jayavarman VII* (Paris, 1965), 164 and G. de Coral Remusat, *L'art khmer: les grandes étapes de son évolution* (Paris, 1951), 85-86. B. Dagens, "Etude sur l'iconographie du Bayon", *Arts Asiatiques*, XVI (1969), 123-167, argues that the death of Indravarman II, perhaps in A.D. 1243 (see below) ushered in a new style at the Bayon; however, too little is known about the tastes and policies of this monarch to be sure. If the bas-reliefs represent Jayarvaman (merely) as a leper, one must assume a deeper change in attitudes toward kingship than Chou Ta-kuan's account implies. If, however, the reliefs were carved after the death by leprosy of a more insignificant (or unmeritorious) king, perhaps the aura of *lèse majesté* would be less.

31. G. Coedès, *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* (Paris, 1964), 323.

32. See G. Coedès, "Inscriptions de Prasat Chrung", *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, IV (Paris, 1953), 230 ff. In his discussion of these inscriptions, found at the four corners of Jayavarman's capital city, Coedès points out the decline in the skill of the versification from the beginning of the reign to the end, and adds that, perhaps at Jayavarman's death, the inscriptions on certain steles were left unfinished. See also G. Coedès, 'L'année du lièvre AD 1219', in *India Antiqua (Mélanges Vogel)*, (Leiden, 1947), 83-88.

crucial to understanding the shifts and changes that added up to the decline of Angkor as a major power. The period was marked by declining Cambodian influence abroad³³, by Hindu iconoclasm at Angkor (hitherto unknown)³⁴, by the rise of Theravada Buddhism at the expense of Jayavarman's Mahayana beliefs, and by a steep decline, quantitatively and qualitatively, in temple construction, stone-carving, and inscriptions³⁵.

The argument that Jayavarman's successor was a leper is a tentative one. All we know about this shadowy king is that he was dead in A.D. 1243³⁶. He may have been Jayavarman's son, but this is by no means certain³⁷. He is mentioned in only one inscription, K.488, composed at the end of the thirteenth century, which describes the life of a Brahmin, Çri Jaya Mahapranjana, who may have been born in Burma, and who served Jayavarman VII as well as Indravarman's two successors³⁸. The stanza which mentions Indravarman is the thirteenth, and it reads as follows.

In the year 1165 (*saka*; AD 1243) [he went] to offer homage to Śiva in Bhimapura (P'imai) for the peace of Indravarman, who was gone.³⁹

Several things about the stanza are enigmatic. One is that Indravarman's posthumous name—if he had one—is not mentioned, although this is not crucial, since the posthumous names of other dead kings mentioned in the inscription are not included either. Another point is that the Brahmin seems to be careful to demonstrate his awareness of the continuity of Cambodian kingship from Jayavarman VII to Indravarman III (r. 1295-1308) in whose reign the inscription was presumably incised. But he is just as careful, it seems, not to praise Indravarman, or to mention his services to him. The voyage to P'imai, moreover, may not have been merely to pray for Indravarman (an odd reason for such a long trip, in any case); the inscription mentions that the Brahmin met and married a young woman there who later gave birth to his six children. That the Brahmin prayed to Siva may indicate that Indravarman II was a Sivaite but not necessarily, for the Brahmin had served Jayavarman VII, a Buddhist, while still a Hindu himself. The brevity of the mention, finally, suggests that in some unspecified way Indravarman II failed to live up to the kings who came before and after him. Would this merely indicate pique on the

33. This decline is summarized in Coedès, *Les états*, 328-330. See also L.P. Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire* (Philadelphia, 1951), 238-239.

34. Coedès, "Le mystère du Bayon", 30 and Coedès, "Le date du Bayon", 97.

35. Coedès, "Inscriptions de Prasat Chrung", *passim*. See also Briggs, *op. cit.*, 243-244.

36. See below, notes 38 and 39. Scholars have been perhaps hasty in accepting this year as the one in which Indravarman II actually died.

37. For a discussion of four of Jayavarman VII's sons, see Coedès, *Les états . . .*, 328. They would seem to have been born too early to have reigned in 1243.

38. Louis Finot, "Le temple de Mangalārtha à Angkor Thom", *BEFEO*, XXV (1925), 393-406.

39. *Ibid.*, 398 (Sanskrit text). I.W. Mabbett has translated this for me, pointing out that the phrase translated as "is gone" is a reconstruction by Finot; the initial character (*ga* of *gatasyn*) is effaced.

Brahmin's part? Perhaps, but if so we might expect at least one other mention of the king in the corpus of Cambodian inscriptions.

None of these remarks, of course, proves that Indravarman was a leper, and it would certainly be anomolous, to say the least, if a leprous prince were allowed or encouraged to accede to power. It is fair to assume that if Indravarman was a leper, he contracted the disease as a reigning monarch—a suggestion echoed by the myths.

Aside from this inscription, what can we infer about his reign? For one thing, Jayavarman's successor must have been responsible for carrying on his building program, especially at the Bayon and the royal terraces. Perhaps work on the hospitals continued in Indravarman's reign as well, for only 32 temples that can be linked to Jayavarman's hospitals, out of the originally planned 102, have come to light⁴⁰. Without venturing into psychohistory—a tempting thing to do with a person who may have been Jayavarman's son—we can see, by the absence of inscriptions, that if Indravarman was a Buddhist, his religion was less public and far less verbalized than Jayavarman's had been. It is possible that he was Hindu, or that he changed religions at some point in his life, as Jayavarman had done.

Perhaps he did so when he contracted leprosy. In this regard, Chou Ta Kuan's statement that the king's disease had been greeted with magnanimity among the people does not, I think, ring true. It is more likely that the knowledge that a reigning king was afflicted with this disease (and thus, in the words of the chronicle, "unrecognizable as king") would have called into question the legitimacy of Cambodian kingship, especially of the grandiose, individualistic variety celebrated by Jayavarman VII. Of course, this crisis of confidence would perhaps have been even greater had Jayavarman himself been a leper; but again had this been common knowledge, it seems unlikely that the inscription which barely mentions Indravarman would have been so fulsome about Jayavarman VII. Instead, I suspect that a king's leprosy would be interpreted, throughout the society, as a judgment and a curse. In 1860, judging his own reign to have been unmeritorious, the Cambodian king, Duang, stipulated that his body be exposed for birds of prey⁴¹. Perhaps Indravarman, afflicted with leprosy, made a similar assessment of his reign, and retired with his retinue to Phnom Kulen.

But all this is speculation. What we know for certain is that Cambodians from the thirteenth century onward believed that Angkor had been ruled, once, by a leper king. A likely time for such a king to reign is at some point between A.D. 1200 and A.D. 1243.

40. Coedès, "Les hôpitaux", *passim*.

41. Eng Soth, *Akkasar mahaboros khmaer* ("Documents about Cambodian Heroes"), (Phnom Penh, 1969), 1096-1097. See also Manuscript P-31 (fonds EFEO, Phnom Penh) in the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, Paris.

Like the toponyms associated with Yasovarman I, discussed in an earlier paper⁴², the myth of the leper king suggests that folk memories of Angkor were more persistent and more accurate than many *savants*, especially in the nineteenth century, were willing to grant. The uses to which Angkor was put by Cambodians, right up to its 'discovery' by the French, would also repay detailed study. Why was Angkor Wat, rather than the Bayon, a Buddhist pilgrimage site? Might the abandonment of the Bayon, and the rest of Jayavarman's city, reflect an assessment of the obscure period in Cambodian history associated in the popular mind with the catastrophe of a leper king? Until a better explanation comes to light for the rapid decline, after about A.D. 1200, in construction at Angkor, and for the silence that surrounds early thirteenth-century kingship there, it is worth suggesting that the story of a leper king, so often denigrated as myth, not only held its own in popular thinking, but represented the memory of an historical fact.

42. Chandler, "Maps for the ancestors", *passim*. Another folk memory of Angkor, perhaps specifically of Jayavarman VII, is reported by Albrecht, "Reconnaissance de l'anciennes chaussées . . .", *BSEI*, 1904, 1-17 at 7: "in former times, the old people say, on the great road which leads to Angkor, each stage of the journey was marked by a monument". See G. Coedès, "Les gîtes d'étape à la fin du XII siècle", *BEFEO*, XL (1940), 347-349.