

NOTES

NOTES ON ANGKOR WAT

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In March 1982 I went to Phnom Penh and proceeded to Angkor by car. I had been to Phnom Penh before in 1972, 1980 and 1981, but 1982 was the first time that I had ever visited Angkor. I may perhaps claim that I was the first Thai to visit Angkor properly since the break-down of the diplomatic relationship between Siam and Cambodia during Sihanouk's period in the 1950s. During Lon Nol's regime, although the Thai and the Khmer Governments had good diplomatic relations, neither could visit Angkor, which was under the control of the Khmer Rouge.

During Pol Pot's regime, there were a few flights from Bangkok directly to Siamriep for a brief visit of Angkor, but that was only for tourists, who only had a few hours to look at the ancient monuments.

For my part, I took a Thai cameraman with me. We travelled by car, from Phnom Penh, with a chauffeur as well as a Khmer interpreter. It took us over 11 hours to reach Battambang where we had to spend our first night before we proceeded to Siamriep the next day. At Siamriep we stayed at the Grand Hotel which was very much run down. Hardly was there any electricity and we had to bathe in the *klong* nearby. Yet the Khmer Government charged us as if we were in a first class hotel. We also had to pay for the car, interpreter, guide etc. It cost me and my cameraman a fortune, as we are not rich Americans or Japanese. However, we had the ancient monuments to ourselves. We spent three nights in Siamriep and two nights in Battambang, and we had a good look at many temples in Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom and the environs. Of course we needed at least a week more to do justice to the great monuments, yet, since I felt so privileged I asked my photographer to take time in photographing what I thought to be very important to us historically, especially the inscriptions at Angkor Wat on Suriyavoraman II's troops to fight the Cham, particularly :

- (๑) เนะ สยาม กุก (นี้ เสียมกุก)
- (๒) อุนกู ราชการุญย ภาค ปมมย เซง ฉาล ด นำ สยาม กุก (ข้าราชการฝ่ายทหารพราน
แห่งเมืองเซงฉาล ซึ่งนำชาวเสียมกุก)
- (๓) พระ กมร เตง อัญ ศรี ชยสังหารมณ กำลุง ไพร นำ พล โลว (พระกมรเตง อัญ
ศรี ชยสังหารมณ ในป่า นำพลละโว)

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Figure 1. The author at Angkor Wat, March 1982.



Figure 2. "Siamese leader" with his troops joining Suriyavaraman II's army against the Chams.



Figure 3. Detail of "Siamese troops"



Figure 4. Inscription next to the 'Siamese troops' นะ สยาม ฤๅ



Figure 5. Inscription อนุภา ราชการุญย ภาค ปมณ
เซง ฉาล ต นำ สุยา กุก

Figure 6. Inscription พระ กมรเตง อนุ สุรี ชยสิง
หรรมน กำล่ง ไพร นำ พล โลว





Figure 7. The author at Angkor in February 1983 pointing at the **พระเจ้าสุริยวงศา** inscription which had been destroyed in June 1982.

Figure 8. The author being interviewed by USSR television at Angkor Wat, February 1983, about destruction and conservation of the historic monuments.



On my return to Bangkok, I had the slides shown to accompany my lectures at the Siam Society in Thai once and in English once. I also had a Thai book published (อนฺสติจากนครวัด โดย ส. ศิวรักษ์ ศุภชัย ศิลปวิทยาติลล กถ่ายภาพ ศูนย์พัฒนาวัฒนธรรมแห่งประเทศไทย จัดพิมพ์ พ.ศ. ๒๕๒๕)

In February 1983, I was again invited to attend a Peace Conference in Phnom Penh. Without any expectation, we were all flown to Siamriep one day for a brief visit of Angkor Wat. I thought I would enjoy the magnificent monuments again. Unfortunately when I inspected the inscriptions on *นະ เสียมทุก*, it was badly damaged, apparently by wanton gunshots. This time there were three other Thai journalists present as well as others. So I made a great fuss and they took my photograph pointing at the damage. The Russian television man interviewed me on the spot so I complained bitterly that more care should be given by all concerned in preserving such important monuments.

On my way home via Hanoi, again I pleaded with the Deputy Vietnamese Foreign Minister as well as with the Vice Chairman of the National Committee of Social Sciences about better conservation of Angkor. Both agreed with me and said they would pass my concerns to the appropriate authorities in the area.

Unfortunately what has been lost can never again be replaced. Let us hope that other inscriptions will be well preserved for future generations of mankind.