

CAMBODIA IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY:

A QUEST FOR SURVIVAL, 1840-1863

by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE : SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND ...	5
CHAPTER TWO : PRELUDE TO NATIONALISM : THE YEARS OF VIETNAMESE DOMINATION, 1807-1839	24
CHAPTER THREE : REBELLION AND THE THAI-VIETNAMESE WAR IN CAMBODIA, 1840-1845	64
CHAPTER FOUR : A THAI-VIETNAMESE <u>MODUS VIVENDI</u> AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CAMBODIA, 1846-1853	104
CHAPTER FIVE : THE MONTIGNY'S MISSION AND THE LAST YEARS OF DUONG'S REIGN 1856-1860 ...	138
CHAPTER SIX : NORODOM BEFORE THE COMING OF THE FRENCH, 1860-1863	169
CONCLUSION	188
BIBLIOGRAPHY	192

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASEMI	<u>Asie du Sud-Est et Monde Insulindien</u>
Am Anth	<u>American Anthropologist</u>
BAVH	<u>Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hué</u>
BEI	<u>Bulletin Economique de l'Indochine</u>
BEFEO	<u>Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient</u>
BSEI	<u>Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises</u>
BSOAS	<u>Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies</u>
CSSH	<u>Comparative Study in Society and History</u>
EC	<u>Etudes Cambodgiennes</u>
E & R	Cochinchine Française. <u>Excursions et Reconnaissances</u>
FA	<u>France-Asie</u>
IIEH	<u>Institut Indochinois pour l'Etude de l'Homme</u>
JA	<u>Journal Asiatique</u>
JAS	<u>Journal of Asian Studies</u>
JMBRAS	<u>Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</u>
JRGS	<u>Journal of the Royal Geographical Society</u>
JSEAH	<u>Journal of Southeast Asian History</u>
JSEAS	<u>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies</u>
JSS	<u>Journal of the Siam Society</u>
RI	<u>Revue Indochinoise</u>
RSEA	<u>Revue du Sud Est Asiatique</u>
SEA	<u>Southeast Asia</u>

INTRODUCTION

This study covers a period of approximately a quarter of a century, from 1840 to 1863. Although the coverage of the 1840's overlaps with a study already done by Dr. Chandler,¹ these years are important for a comprehension of the attitude of the Cambodian people towards the Thai and the Vietnamese during the 1850's when King Duong tried to get rid of both these enemies and suzerains by attempting to obtain help from a far-distant third power, France, to safeguard his nation. It was also during those years that the Thai had regained their preponderance over the Cambodian court after three decades of Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia and their own two earlier unsuccessful attempts at military intervention.

1840 was a year of a historical importance for Cambodia in the first half of the nineteenth century, for it was the year of a national rebellion fomented by the Cambodian people and led by the ocnha in an attempt to dislodge the Vietnamese. This was the result of persistent Vietnamese abuse with the determined aim to colonise the kingdom and to eliminate all traces of what was Cambodian. This uprising and France's mounting military pressure on Hue had made the Thai intervention during the 1840's a success; without these two factors, another Thai defeat would have resulted in the inevitable absorption of Cambodia by Vietnam.

This humble study tries to provide information by dealing with a period of the history of nineteenth-century Cambodia not entirely

1 D.P. Chandler, Cambodia before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794-1848, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Michigan, 1973.

covered by Dr. Chandler and Dr. Osborne.² It may also provide some explanation about the feelings of the Cambodian people towards their enemies and neighbours, the Vietnamese and the Thai, who strove for centuries to subjugate Cambodia and to swallow up its territory whenever they had a good opportunity to do so. For the present-day Cambodia of the twentieth century, it may also constitute to some extent a projection of the future of the country whose situation now is in some ways strikingly similar to that of the 1830s and 1840s.

Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century was indeed free from a foreign military presence on its soil, thanks to the mounting pressure of French forces upon Vietnam on the one hand, and on the other to the competition between the countries of the West, namely Great Britain, the United States and France, to gain preponderance with the Thai court in the matter of commerce and navigation. Without this simultaneous western interest in the region, the Thai would have taken over Cambodia from the Vietnamese and replaced them as occupiers. It was probably with this in mind that King Duong, even although the country seemed to be enjoying relative peace and independence after the withdrawal of Vietnamese and Thai armies in 1847 and 1848 respectively, turned for help and protection towards France, whom he most likely viewed as less dangerous than the Vietnamese and the Thai.

In preparing this thesis, Cambodian, Thai and Vietnamese sources were consulted in addition to French and English

2 M.E. Osborne, The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and Response (1859-1905). Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969.

materials.³ For Cambodian sources, the chronicle histories called Preah Reach Pongsavadar or simply Pongsavadar were the most useful ones, although they provided far less detailed and less accurate information⁴ than did the Thai royal chronicle histories, Phraratchaphongsawadan, and other Thai documents⁵ and the Vietnamese sources, mainly the Dai-Nam Thuc-Luc Chinh-Bien⁶ and Nhu Vien.⁷

3 For detailed discussion of the sources for nineteenth-century Cambodia, see D.P. Chandler, Cambodia before the French, Chapter I, pp.1-28. See also M.T. Vickery, Cambodia after Angkor, the Chronicular Evidence for the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries. PhD. Thesis, 1977, Yale University.

4 See Khin, Sok, 'Les Chroniques Royales Khmères', in Mon-Khmer Studies, Ed. by Philip N. Jenner, Hawaii: The University Press of Hawaii, 1977, Vol.VI, pp.191-215. See also George Coedès, 'Essai de classification des documents historiques cambodgiens conservés à la Bibliothèque de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient', BEFEO, Vol.XVIII, 1918, pp.15-28.

5 See David K. Wyatt and Constance M. Wilson, 'Thai Historical Materials in Bangkok', JAS, Vol.25, 1965, pp.105-118.

6 Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien (Translated by D.P. Chandler in Cambodia Before the French, as Primary Compilation of the Veritable Records of Imperial Vietnam), Hanoi, 1963. See Danny J. Whitfield, Historical and Cultural Dictionary of Vietnam. Historical and Cultural Dictionaries of Asia No.7, Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, inc., 1976, pp.56-57, for details of the Dai Nam Thuc Luc series.

For discussions of the Vietnamese sources, see also:

- L. Cadière, and Paul Pelliot, 'Première étude sur les sources annamites de l'histoire d'Annam', BEFEO, Vol.IV, No.3, 1904, pp.617-671;

- R.B. Smith, 'Sino-Vietnamese Sources for the Nguyen Period: An Introduction', BSOAS, Vol.XXX, 1967, pp.600-621;

- Chen Ching Ho, 'The Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945)', JSEAH, Vol. III, No.2, 1962, pp.111-128;

- Sokichi Kimura, 'Southeast Asian Archives/Notes et documents de l'Asie du Sud-Est', SEA, Vol.1, Nos.1-2, 1971, pp.153-163.

7 Nhu Vien, (External Pacification), means to overcome the far-distant [people] by kindness. D.P. Chandler translates it as 'The Harmonious Management of Distant Peoples', in Kham-Dinh Dai-Nam Hoi-Dien Su-Le. Nhu Vien consists of five books

From 1848 onward, when Hue and Bangkok agreed to grant King Duong some independence to govern his own kingdom, references of Vietnamese and Thai relations with Cambodia were greatly reduced in their respective chronicles. At this time, Vietnam was worrying about the increasing presence and threat of the French forces while Thailand was trying to balance its relations with the Western powers whose interest in and competition over commerce and navigation in the region was growing.⁸ Nevertheless, Thai documents provided valuable information in addition to that obtained from the Cambodian chronicles and French sources regarding the abortive attempt by King Duong in the 1850's to get rid of the threat from Vietnam and Thailand by looking for help from France. Thailand was a particular danger, since the court of Bangkok became almost an unchallenged suzerain over Cambodia from 1848 after the coronation of King Duong.

7 (books 132 to 136) and is bound in 2 volumes with the Chinese contd script on one page and its Vietnamese translation and interpretation done by Ta Quang Phat on the other. Edited by Buu Cam, Saigon, 1965-1966.

8 See, for example, Thiphakarawong, Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin Ratchakan Thi IV, (hereinafter referred to as PRP IV), Vol.1, for the first ten years of Rama IV's reign, from 1851 to 1861, references to Cambodia were very few; however the chronicle was full of information concerning the relations of Bangkok with countries of the West like Great Britain, the United States, France, Denmark and Holland.

CHAPTER ONE

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The nineteenth century for Cambodia was a century of intense foreign encroachment into its affairs. Its two powerful neighbours, Vietnam and Thailand, had competed relentlessly for the control of Cambodia, a land caught in between them. From the seventeenth century onward, Cambodia saw its territory shrinking.¹

The Nguyen, the ruling family in the southern part of Vietnam where they had been established since the sixteenth century, had progressively extended their domination and absorbed the territory of the kingdom of Champa which completely disappeared as an independent nation at the end of the seventeenth century.² The southward movement of the Nguyen continued, to the detriment of Cambodia from which they took an important region in the south known as Cochinchina.³ After Nguyen Anh succeeded in gaining the whole of Vietnam by defeating the Tay-Son brothers in June 1802, as there was no more space to move further in the south, he re-embarked upon an expansionist policy toward Cambodia in the west. For four

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- 1 In 1620, a Khmer king, Chey Chetha II, married a Nguyen princess. Only three years later, the Nguyen obtained a formal concession from Chey Chetha II to set up a customs post in Prey-Kor (Saigon) to collect customs duty and other taxes, while at the same time, Vietnamese moved in to settle in various parts of the country now known as Cochinchina; see Thai Van Kiem, 'La Plaine aux Cerfs et la Princesse de Jade', BSEI, N.S. Vol.XXXIV, No.4, 1959, pp.379-393; and Adhémard Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge depuis le 1er siècle de notre ère, Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1914, p.339.
 - 2 See Lê Thành Khôi, Le Viet-Nam: Histoire et Civilisation, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1955, p.265.
 - 3 See Micheal G. Cotter, 'Towards a Social History of the Vietnamese Southward Movement', JSEAH, Vol.IX, No.1, 1968, pp.12-24.

decades in the nineteenth century, the Nguyen strove to absorb Cambodia and to assimilate its population.

While Nguyen Anh was struggling against the Tay-Son to regain the throne during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Bangkok under a new dynasty, the Chakry, had gained a favourable position at the Cambodian court. King Eng of Cambodia was crowned in Bangkok in 1794, after spending more than ten years in exile at the Thai court, and was sent back to Oudong to reign over Cambodia.⁴ Thailand took over the control of the Cambodian provinces bordering it in the northern and north-western part of the country.⁵ The Thai preponderance over the Cambodian court culminated at the coronation of Chan in 1806. However, from 1807 onward, Hue succeeded in sharing control of Cambodia with Bangkok, and after 1813 Thailand lost ground almost completely to the Vietnamese in influence over Cambodian affairs.

There is no detailed and accurate information available, either in Cambodian sources or others, about the geographical, economic or social situation of Cambodia in the nineteenth century before the establishment of the French there. The overall impression about the country is that it was materially destroyed, economically ruined, socially badly disturbed and depopulated.⁶

4 Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.400; Nupparot, Rachaphongsawadan Krung Kampucha, 1877 (text in Khmer script and title in Thai), pp.129-130.

5 Leclère, pp.401-402; See also Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, pp.98-99; Krung Kampuchea Thipadei, Preah Reach Pongsavadar Moha Khsat Khmer, 4 Khsae, (Four volume of Royal Chronicle of the Khmer Kings), Revised version of Veang Tioun, 1934, pp.750-753. D.G.E. Hall, A History of South-East Asia, Third edition, New York: St Martin's Press, 1970, p.465.

6 Leclère, pp.404.

Its territory had been reduced to a much smaller size even than that of Cambodia today. When King Duong succeeded in regaining control of his kingdom from the Vietnamese, with the help of the Thai, and was allowed to reign over it with the blessing of both courts, Hue and Bangkok, he undertook social, cultural and administrative reforms. Nevertheless, the political and even administrative structure of the kingdom remained basically unchanged.

Cambodia was an absolute monarchy as it had always been. The monarch, through his court officials, members of the royal family and governors of the provinces or chauvay srok, retained all power. His subjects were all living within the boundaries of his kingdom where he could exercise his control. The population of the kingdom was mainly ethnic Khmer. However, other ethnic minorities such as the Chinese, Cham and Malay, and Vietnamese, played important roles in Cambodia during the nineteenth century.

Among these ethnic minorities, the Chinese were the most important minority group.⁷ Their presence in the country went back many centuries. Tcheou Ta-kouan, a Chinese official who accompanied a Yuan ambassadorial delegation to Cambodia in 1296,⁸ mentioned in his Mémoires the presence of Chinese already in the country.⁹ According to a list of high-ranking officials or ocnha of the Cambodian court established after the arrival of the

7 Aymonier, Le Cambodge, Vol.1, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1902, pp.27-28; See also A. Bouinais and A. Paulus, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Paris, 1884, p.31.

8 Paul Pelliot, Mémoires sur les Coutumes du Cambodge, de Tcheou Ta-kouan, Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1951.

9 P. Pelliot, pp.30 and 53.

French,¹⁰ there were seventeen Chinese ocnha out of altogether 262 in the capital; whether or not these ocnha wielded any power or influence in the affairs of the kingdom is not clear. It is most likely that these ocnha were in charge of the Chinese community. Their titles were made up of words that had something to do with commerce or wealth.¹¹ This was a clear indication of the commercial role which the Chinese were playing in the country.

Less numerous than the Chinese were the Cham, the descendants and remnants of a people whose country, Champa, once a powerful kingdom in the region that now is central Vietnam, was subdued and gradually absorbed by Vietnam from the fifteenth century until its complete disappearance at the end of the seventeenth century, and the Malays. The Cham and the Malays were all Muslims and are usually classed together, and no distinction was made between a Cham and a Malay.¹² Like the Chinese, they had ocnha nominated by the court, in this case eight of them,¹³ and there was a Cambodian ocnha at the court probably to supervise them.¹⁴ These Muslim minorities played an important political role in the nineteenth century Cambodia. During the 1810s, an ocnha named Tuan Pha was one of the closest of King Chan's aides. He followed Chan in his flight to Vietnam in 1812 before the advance of the army of Chan's brother,

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- 10 Liste des Mandarins de tous Grades au Cambodge, in Manuscrits de E. Doudart de Lagrée. Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Indochinois, No.28, pp.131-142.
- 11 E. Doudart de Lagrée, p.135; see also Aymonier, p.28.
- 12 Aymonier, p.28; Bouinai and Paulus, p.32.
- 13 E. Doudart de Lagrée, 'Liste des Mandarins...', p.134.
- 14 ibid., p.132; The title of this ocnha was Ocnha Samdech Botés.

Prince Snguon, and the Thai troops.¹⁵ This Cham-Malay Tuan Pha was later promoted by King Chan to the rank of chauvea, or prime minister, and was executed by the Vietnamese in the aftermath of the 1820's rebellion on the charge of being involved in it.¹⁶ A Cham ocnha and his three brothers were also involved in the late 1850s in another rebellion on a limited scale which was put down by King Duong just before his death.¹⁷

Another important minority group was the Vietnamese. In the nineteenth century, they were as numerous as the Chinese. Their number had been increased greatly as they kept moving in gradually and imperceptibly to settle in the country from the seventeenth century onward.¹⁸ The Vietnamese and the Cham-Malays were fishermen, merchants and farmers. They settled by groups in the regions bordering lakes and rivers. Unlike the case of the Chinese and Cham-

15 Nupparot, p.153; Veang Tioun, p.784; Moura, p.103; see also Phongsawadan Khamen, in Prachum Phongsawadan, Chhabap Hosamut Haengchhat, Bangkok: Samnakphim Kaona, 1963, lem 1, pp.254. (Hereinafter, PP I.)

16 Nupparot, pp.171-172; see also Preah Reach Pongsavadar Nokor Khmer (Royal Chronicles of Cambodia), manuscript from Wat Kork Kak in four volumes, Vol.III, p.30. (Hereinafter, Wat Kork Kak.)

For details of the rebellion, see Robakhsat Srok Khmer (printed version); Phnom Penh: Raksmeay Kampuchea bookshop, Vol.I, pp.42-60 and Pongsavadar Prates Kampuchea, Manuscripts in verse from Wat Krouch (hereinafter Wat Krouch) in three volumes. In the introduction to the Wat Krouch poem, the author stated that in 1875 he copied the chronicle of Pich, from Baray in central Cambodia; see also Minh Menh Chinh Yeu, Saigon, 1971-1974, Vol.V, book XX and Vol. VI, book XXV. I am grateful to Mr. Mak Phoeun who has kindly lent me the copies of the Wat Kork Kak chronicle, Robakhsat Srok Khmer and Wat Krouch poem.

17 Nupparot, pp.233-234; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.17.

18 Aymonier, p.28; Bouinai and Paulus, p.31.

Malays, there were no Vietnamese ocnha, nor a Cambodian ocnha in charge of the Vietnamese, in the list of the ocnha referred to above.¹⁹ This was probably because the Vietnamese had already been the real masters of Cambodia for forty years or so before their complete withdrawal in 1847, and after that date most likely because of some psychological complex, if not only resentment and hatred, that the Cambodian harboured toward the Vietnamese.

In addition to these important minority groups, there were also Thai and Lao whose number was unknown. The origin of the Thai settlers in Cambodia was not clear. They were probably descendants and remnants of those who were sent in by the Thai court as personal guards or slaves for the Kings of Cambodia during the last few centuries. As far as the Lao were concerned, they were descendants of those exiles who took refuge along with their king and the Lao royal family in 1705 at the Cambodian court as the result of a rebellion in their country.²⁰ Unlike the Vietnamese, the number of the Thai minority did not increase and there is no mention in the sources that they had moved in to settle in Cambodia during the nineteenth century. On the contrary, their armies carried off Cambodian inhabitants of the regions through which they passed in their retreat from Cambodia, for example, in their expeditions in 1812-13 and 1833-34. The Thai and Lao readily assimilated with the local people because they were Buddhists like the Khmers.²¹

Besides these migrant groups, there were 'montagnards' or hill tribes whose number is not available but probably did not exceed ten

19 E. Doudart de Lagrée, *Liste des Mandarins...*, p.135.

20 Leclère, p.368; Moura, p.69; Nupparot, p.90.

21 Aymonier, P.28; Bouinai and Paulus, p.31.

thousands.²² Among these hill tribes, the most important ones were the Stieng and Phnong, two tribes who populated the eastern provinces, and the Kouy in the region of Kompong Svay. There were two other hill tribes, whose leaders were known as 'King of the Fire' and 'King of the Water', in the north-eastern region of the country.²³ An ocnha of the court was in charge of these montagnards.²⁴

The whole population of Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century was around one million. According to some documents written after the French had established themselves in the country, Cambodia had a population of between one and one-and-a-half million at the turn of the century.²⁵ Scattered unevenly throughout the kingdom, the most populated regions were around rivers and plains where fertile lands provided good crops and other commodities for a population of mainly farmers. However, the provinces bordering the Tonle Sap river and the Great Lake were depopulated. These regions had since the sixteenth century been on the usual route of frequent Thai invasions and retreats during each of which tens of thousands of inhabitants were carried off to Thailand as prisoners-of-war.²⁶ These regions are still comparatively underpopulated even in modern Cambodia.²⁷

22 Aymonier, p.28; Bouinai and Paulus, p.31.

23 Aymonier, pp.26-27; Bouinai and Paulus, p.31.

24 E. Doudart de Lagrée, *Liste des Mandarins...*, p.132. The title of this ocnha was 'Ocnha Noren Séna'.

25 Aymonier. p.24; Bouinai and Paulus, p.31; see also Jean Delvert, Le Paysan Cambodgien, Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1961, pp.426-427.

26 Bouinai and Paulus, p.32.

27 See Jean Delvert, pp.428-434.

The majority of the population, up to 80 per cent, were ethnic Khmer.²⁸ They practiced Buddhism as their religion, which is represented by monks who live separately from the common people in monasteries or wat. No exact figures are available for the size of the community of monks, or Preah Sangha, or for the number of the monasteries throughout the kingdom in the nineteenth century. French officials and authors put the number of the Sangha at between two and five thousands in the last quarter of the century.²⁹ The monks were not liable to taxes, corvee labour or military service.³⁰ By and large, male Cambodians, in their youth, spent at least a few months of their lives in monkhood, usually three months according to the custom during the Buddhist Lent from July to October. Generally, it was during that time that they learned to read and write.³¹ This educational function was one of the most important features of Buddhism in the history of Cambodia. Apart from this religious aspect and their role as educational institutions, the monasteries were also depositories of literary culture. It was in the wat that all religious books, literary works and chronicle histories were kept and recopied. This was the reason why some chronicle histories were called by the names of the monasteries where they were found.³²

28 Aymonier, p.24.

29 Bouinaiis and Paulus, p.31.

30 Aymonier, p.50.

31 Aymonier, pp.42 and 50; See for example Nupparot, p.134, Chan had spent three months in a monastery during the Buddhist Lent in 1802; and p.146, Chan and his brothers, Snguon and Duong became monks in 1810.

32 For example chronicles from Wat Kork Kak and Wat Krouch; see also Chandler, Cambodia before the French, i.e. chronicles from Wat Prek Kuy, Wat Sralauv, Wat Setbor.

The wat was the spiritual and cultural centre of the village. Houses in the village were scattered within a few miles radius around the wat. Religious ceremonies were celebrated in the wat throughout the year. The prosperity of a village could be judged by the prosperity of the wat.

Although the Preah Sangha and the wat played important roles in the daily life of the people, it is difficult to know how great was the influence of the Buddhist religion in the political affairs of the kingdom. Buddhist monks were not usually active in politics; however, anti-Vietnamese rebellion in 1820 was instigated and led by some of these monks, at least during its early stage.³³

Besides Buddhism, the Cambodian people believed in the existence of the Neak Ta or 'spirits' who could provide them with some help and relief in certain difficult situations, or cure disease of a certain nature.³⁴ They were excessively superstitious. Superstitious observances regulated almost all aspects of their life from birth to death.³⁵ The traditional rites in this respect were numerous; they were handed down from generation to generation. Cambodians believed in 'magical or supernatural powers'.³⁶ During the nineteenth century, there were at least two cases of rebellion led by neak sel or 'men possessing

33 See Chapter Two, p.42 ff.

34 André Souyris-Rolland, 'Contribution à l'Etude du Culte des Génies Tutélaires ou "Neak Ta" chez les Cambodgiens du Sud', BSEI, Vol.XXVI, no.2, 1951, p.161.

35 Aymonier, p.53. For details of magical means of immunisation, see André Souyris-Rolland, 'Les procédés magiques d'immunisation chez les Cambodgiens', BSEI, Vol.XXVI, no.2, 1951, pp.175-187.

36 Aymonier, p.53.

magical power' who succeeded in attracting thousands of followers and dangerously threatened the established authority. The anti-Vietnamese rebellion in 1820 instigated by sel Kè could only be put down by a combined army of Vietnamese, Cham-Malay and Chinese because no Cambodian army was willing to fight, for Cambodians believed that sel Kè was in possession of supernatural powers.³⁷ This was also the case with a rebellion in 1866 led by Pocambor.³⁸ These people who pretended to be in possession of supernatural powers were in general Buddhist monks or former ones. They supplied magical talismans or other magical devices to their followers to protect them against misfortune or bullets, or even to cure them of diseases. The superstitious belief in magic recurred recently in Cambodian history. When Prince Sihanouk was deposed in 1970 by Lon Nol and the war broke out soon afterwards, the latter resorted to proclaiming that this war against the Communists was a 'holy war'. Lon Nol was profoundly superstitious. He used to consult astrologues not only on matters concerning his private life but also on matters concerning the affairs of the State.³⁹ He urged his army officers and his soldiers as well to provide themselves with amulets and other magical devices during the whole period of war from 1970 to 1975.

Above the mass of people were the monarch, his family and the ocnha. The monarch or Preah Moha Khsat (or in the common language

37 See note 33 above.

38 Moura, pp.159-170.

39 Lon Nol, 'Message to Buddhist Believers', Cambodia: The Widening War in Indochina, Edited by Jonathan S. Grant, Laurence A.G. Moss and Jonathan Unger, New York, 1971, pp.109-112.

Sdach) had unlimited power. He was the absolute 'Master' of all living things, lands and waters within the boundaries of his territory. He had the power of life and death over his highest officials as well as over the lowliest subjects in his kingdom. He was the absolute chief of the armies and the head of all the political and administrative affairs of the country. He symbolised unity in the nation and continuity of the state. His person was inviolable and he was viewed by his subjects as a semi-divine being; even when a king lacked real power, as during the nineteenth century or during the French protectorate, he still remained a demi-god. As the medium between Heaven and his subjects, he symbolised the source of prosperity of the kingdom and the well-being of the people.⁴⁰ Therefore he could exercise great influence over any event in the kingdom.

The king exercised his power through members of his family, the court ocnha and through the governors of the provinces, or the chauvay srok. In Cambodia, there were usually two, and sometimes three, other royal figures who had territorial appanages like the king. The origin of the territorial division given in appanage to other close family members of the king went back to the Angkor period.⁴¹ The Upayuvareach post was usually held by a former king who had abdicated.⁴² When this post was occupied, the incumbent had precedence after the king. The next most important post was that of the Uparach. This post was normally held by the king's younger brother or one of his sons. Usually, the incumbent of this

40 Aymonier, pp.55-56.

41 Aymonier, p.61.

42 Ibid.

post was the heir-apparent to the throne.⁴³ In cases where both of these posts were occupied, as during King Chan's reign, the right of succession to the throne of the Upayuvareach prevailed over that of the Uparach.⁴⁴ Finally, the other member of the royal family who also was entitled to territorial appanage was the Queen-Mother, the Samdech Preah Teav or Samdech Preah Voreachini.⁴⁵

In nineteenth-century Cambodia there were fifty-six provinces,⁴⁶ although the territory of the kingdom was much smaller than its present size. Battambang and provinces in the north of the kingdom bordering Thailand, as well as Stung Treng province, were taken over by the Thai after the 1810s,⁴⁷ while on the south the Vietnamese moved in to settle in those provinces now in Cochinchina bordering the present territory of Cambodia. Of these fifty-six provinces the appanage of the king was forty-one provinces, and the Upayuvareach, the Uparach and the Queen-Mother had seven, five and three provinces respectively.⁴⁸

Besides the chauvay srok in the provinces which formed their respective appanages, the Upayuvareach, the Uparach and the Queen-Mother, like the King, had their own courts, although much smaller

43 Ibid.

44 See Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.21.

45 Aymonier, p.61.

46 E. Doudart de Lagrée, 'Liste des Mandarins...', pp.139-141 gave the names of the srok (provinces) as well as the titles of each Chauvay Srok; see also Bouinais and Paulus, pp.23-28 and Aymonier, p.61; both gave the number of the srok to 57.

47 See Leclère, p.412 and D.G.E. Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p.465.

48 E. Doudart de Lagrée, Liste des Mandarins..., pp.139-141. Aymonier, p.61.

in size and personnel than that of the King. The Upayuvareach had fifty-one ocnha under his direct responsibility, while the Uparach had forty and the Queen-Mother twenty-five.⁴⁹ The central administration under the command of the King was much more numerically staffed. According to the same source, 121 ocnha formed the core of the royal court and administration, excluding the seventeen Chinese ocnha and the eight Cham-Malay ocnha.⁵⁰ In these four court, the total number of the ocnha including the chauvay srok amounted to only 318 persons.

The ocnha who were the 'eyes, the ears and the hands of the King' transmitted his orders, watched to see that these orders were carried out properly, collected taxes, suppressed crime and disturbances etc...⁵¹ These 318 people performed their duties with the assistance of deputies and subordinates, relatives, friends and 'clients' who numbered about a thousand.⁵² There was no army but a purely civilian administration. The ocnha were at the top of the hierarchy. They were called the Namoeun nasen or Mandarins of Ten Thousand and a Hundred Thousands. This probably referred symbolically to the sak or sakdi (authority, honours and dignity). Scale for the sak of these ocnha varied from seven thousand honours to eight and nine thousand honours. The highest-ranking ocnha held a ten thousand honours position. The holders of these higher honours had the title of samdech, a word normally used to designate members of the royal family. It is derived from the word sdach or

49 E. Doudart de Lagrée, pp.135-138.

50 E. Doudart de Lagrée, pp.134-135.

51 Aymonier, p.65.

52 Ibid.

king. This title was bestowed by the king on the ocnha who were related to the royal family. The Samdech Preah Keo was the highest-ranking of the ocnha in the kingdom. This post was held by one of the king's relatives who did not wield much direct power in the political affairs of the kingdom but rather was the 'chief' of all other ocnha.⁵³

Under the ocnha and the chauway srok there were the chau ponhea whose sak were six, five and four thousand honours. At the bottom of the official hierarchy were the luang, khun, moen and neay.⁵⁴

At the royal court, besides Samdech Preah Keo or Samdech Preah Ang Keo, five ocnha held with the king the power in the central administration. They formed the cabinet consisting of the chauvea tolaha or chauvea or akkamohaséna, the prime minister; the younreach, Minister of Justice and Internal Security; the veang, Minister of the Palace and Finances; the kralahom, Minister of the Navy; and the chakrei or Minister of War.⁵⁵ In addition to the duties attached to their titles, these ministers had individual responsibilities over the forty-one provinces which formed the appanage of the king.⁵⁶ The Upayuvareach, the Uparach and the Samdech Preah Teay had their own courts which were an exact replica of the royal court.⁵⁷

53 Aymonier, p.66.

54 Aymonier, p.67.

55 Aymonier, pp.67-68.

56 Ibid.

57 Aymonier, pp.71-72; see also E. Doudart de Lagrée, 'Liste des Mandarins...', pp.135-138.

In the provinces, the chauvay srok were the real masters of the people living under their jurisdiction. They wielded considerable power. They were responsible for collecting taxes, providing manpower either for military purposes or for the corvee-labour which every able-bodied man owed the king for ninety days every year.⁵⁸ These chauvay srok seemed to enjoy more freedom of action than the officials at court. The farther away they were from the court, the less the central administration exercised control over them and the more leeway they seemed to have. This can be explained by the lack of means of transportation and communication throughout the kingdom. The fifty-six provinces were divided into six territorial divisions called dey or 'territories', according to their geographical situation. They were the territories of Thbaung Khmum, Baphnom, Kampong Svay, Pursat, Treang and Chado-Mukh.⁵⁹

Regarding the chauvay srok of these provinces, they were classified into three categories according to their rank. The first category was called the Sdach Tranh or 'super-governors'. The dey Chado-Mukh, which included Oudong and Phnom Penh and other provinces in the region surrounding these two cities, did not have a 'super-governor' as did the other five dey of the kingdom. These five super-governors, according to their order of precedence were the Decho, governor of the dey Kampong Svay; the Pisnulok, governor of dey Treang; the Archun, governor of dey Thbaung Khmum; the Thommea Decho, governor of dey Baphnom; and the Surkealok, governor of dey Pursat.⁶⁰ These ocnha wielded considerable power and played an

58 Aymonier, p.73.

59 Bouinai and Paulus, pp.25-28, have given the composition of each territory of dey; see also Aymonier, p.71.

60 Aymonier, p.71.

important role in all the affairs of the kingdom in the nineteenth century. The other chauway srok were under the direct control of these sdach Tranh and were ocnha of eight thousand honours and seven thousand honours according to the importance and the size of their provinces. Each of them held a specific title which was attached to the province irrespective of the sakdi of the incumbent. It was, therefore, common usage in the nineteenth century for the ocnha to be called by the title attached to their ranks or their positions, i.e. the Chakrei, the archun etc ... rather by their personal names. The chauway srok were appointed by the king. They received their official seals and letters of commission from the king during an official investiture ceremony at the capital. They had to come to the court twice every year to swear allegiance to the king. While they were in the capital, they also paid tribute and homage to the ocnha of the court on whom they were dependent.⁶¹

The Court ocnha and the chauway srok formed the governing elite of the kingdom. Like in the central administration at the court, the chauway srok were assisted in their duties by balats or deputies and by a crowd of officials, the snang, the mésrok and the méphum.⁶²

Below these chauway srok ocnha and numerous other officials, there were the people or prachea reastr. Most of the population were peasants and were liable for corvee and military service, in addition to their taxation. Although they enjoyed freedom of movement throughout the kingdom and in their activities in eking out their living, these 'free people', in contrast to the slaves, had to

61 Aymonier, P.71; Bouinai and Paulus, p.34.

62 Aymonier, P.72; Bouinai and Paulus, p.24.

enlist themselves with one of the ocnha or princes or princesses in the capital called their 'Patron' as his or her 'client' or member of his or her kamlang, 'strength'. Their loyalty was to their king whom they viewed as a semi-divine being, but they also owed respect, obedience, services and gifts to the 'patron'.⁶³ This chain of loyalty was well illustrated by the rebellion of 1840 against the Vietnamese presence in the country. When Queen Mei of Cambodia was taken away to Vietnam along with her sisters and court officials, this set in motion the chain of loyalty of the ocnha and the Cambodian people towards their Queen and their 'patrons', and led to the uprising. Indeed abuses and attempts by the Vietnamese to assimilate Cambodian society into a Vietnamese one had contributed to the rebellion. The relationship between 'patron' and 'client' was a two-way obligation. The 'patron' had in his turn to provide assistance, protection and accommodation while his 'clients' were staying in the capital. He also provided assistance to his clients in lawsuits, and none of his 'clients' could be sued without his knowledge.⁶⁴ During the census, all male population had to enrol with an ocnha in the capital. This kind of inter-relation had, at least in principle, restrained some rapacious chauvay srok from abusing credulous and defenceless peasants under their jurisdiction. It also reduced the uncontrollable power of the chauvay srok. The system was based upon the personality and prestige of the 'patron' rather than on the territorial responsibility of the ocnha. The 'patrons' transmitted orders from the king to their 'clients', for example on matters of raising troops in

63 Aymonier, p.74; Bouinai and Paulus, p.35.

64 Aymonier, p.74.

case of wartime, or corvée-labour for public works. The 'client' could shift from one 'patron' to another whenever he wanted to or in the case of a 'patron' in disgrace, as this 'patron-client' system was based upon the degree of importance of the 'patron' alone. The prestige, as well as the power of an ocnha at the court, could be measured by the size of his entourage or the number of his 'clients'. Moreover, the 'patron' was entitled to deduct a quarter from the 'capitation' or from the corvée payment of his clients.⁶⁵

In nineteenth-century Cambodia, all able-bodied men, aged between 21 and 50 years, owed the king up to ninety days of service and corvée every year.⁶⁶ The king had no professional or regular army. In time of civil unrest or war, all men whose name were registered during the triennial census by an ad hoc commission composed of a representative of the throne, a representative of the ocnha Veang or Minister of the Palace and a representative of the chauvay srok, were enlisted in the king's army for an indefinite period. The 'patron' assembled his 'clients' and either he himself led them into battle or he handed them over to the commanding ocnha appointed by the king for the job. In wartime, the Cambodian army was divided into five corps: the advanced guard, the rearguard, the left-wing army, the right-wing army and the central corps accompanying the king.⁶⁷

At the bottom of society were the slaves. The origin of slavery went back many centuries. Tcheou Ta-kouan had mentioned in

65 Bouinai and Paulus, p.35.

66 Aymonier, p.73.

67 Aymonier, pp.74-75.

his Mémoires the existence of slavery during the Angkor period, though he had noticed only slavery of the less civilized tribal groups.⁶⁸ These slaves could be sold like goods. The hill tribes and uncivilised groups living in the remoter regions constituted the sources of this first group of slaves.

The second category consisted of the slaves of the state. They were prisoners-of-war, criminals, captured rebels and members of their family. The third and most important group of slaves were those enslaved for debts. They were temporarily deprived of their freedom and worked for the creditor to pay off their debts. In theory, their condition was subject to change once the debt had been met and the debtor sometimes engaged the whole family to work as slaves for the creditor in order to shorten the duration of his slavery. In some cases, these persons became integral part of the creditor family to which they were attached. Their treatment was much better than that of the first two categories of slaves.⁶⁹

This was the main features of the social, administrative and political structures of Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century.

68 Paul Pelliot, Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge, pp.33-34.

69 Bouinai and Paulus, pp.35-38; see also Aymonier, pp.98-102.

CHAPTER TWO

PRELUDE TO NATIONALISM:

THE YEARS OF VIETNAMESE DOMINATION,

1807-1839

In 1807, Gia Long despatched an embassy to perform an investiture ceremony for Chan in Oudong as his first gesture as suzerain of Cambodia. Chan was crowned the previous year in Bangkok soon after the sudden death of the regent Pok in the Thai capital when both Chan and Pok were there paying homage to Rama I.¹ Cambodian sources mention only that during that year the 'Heavenly Monarch' in Hue sent envoys to Oudong with a quadrangular golden seal weighing seven nen.² The Vietnamese source Nhu Vien, however, provides a detailed account of the event:

Gia Long year 6th (1807). The Chief of State of Cao-man [Cambodia] Nac-Ong-Chan reaffirmed his allegiance [to the imperial court of Vietnam]. By imperial appointment, [Nac-Ong-Chan] was made king of Cao-man and [Ming Mang] conferred upon him a gilded silver seal, a red lacquered box with a carved lion image handle, a diploma inscribed on bronze sheets, sheets of imperial writing paper. [The emperor] then designated envoys to take these items to Cambodia.

The Imperial Council also approved that Gia-dinh Thanh [Saigon] first informed Cambodia about the date of departure of the imperial envoys, in order that [the Cambodians] prepare

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- 1 Nupparot, Royal Chronicle of Cambodia, (title in Thai, manuscript in Khmer), p.137; Veang Tioun, Preah Reach Pongsavadar Moha Khsat Khmer, p.769; Phongsawadan Khamen in Prachum Phongsawadan, Ed. National Library, Vol.I, 1963, p.243. This is a Thai translation of a Cambodian chronicle, presented to the Thai court in 1855, which was printed for the first time in 1869.
 - 2 Nupparot, p.139; PP Vol. I, p.244; Veang Tioun, p.772; Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.407; see also Aubaret, Gia Dinh Thung Chi. (Histoire et Description de la Basse Cochinchine), Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1863, p.121 and Maybon, Histoire Moderne du Pays d'Annam (1592-1820), Paris: Librairie Plon, 1920, p.381.

beforehand two rest-houses, one in Labich port [Kampong Luong?] and the other one outside the Cuu Ban-thanh [royal palace in Oudong?]. When the imperial envoys reached Gia-dinh, officials [of Gia-dinh] prepared the Long-dinh [literally, 'the imperial court', here it probably means all the symbols representing the imperial court], parasols, flags, banners and boats and appointed members of the embassy as well as a military escort. The convoy consisted of one Long-dinh, four imperial parasols, eight boats, an imperial silk flag with a four-word inscription Kham Menh Tich phong [to bestow honours by imperial command] flying above the Long dinh boat, two red silk flags, one with the inscription 'the Imperial Chief Envoy', the other with the inscription 'the Imperial Deputy Envoy' flying on the respective boats [of these officials] and 165 soldiers, including two interpreters.³

When the convoy reached the Cambodian borders, a Cambodian welcoming party escorted the embassy and sailed with it through Phnom Penh where a delegation of 'ocnha' greeted it and joined the convoy to Kampong Luong, where the embassy stayed in the rest-house built for the purpose. The following days were devoted to preparation for the ceremony. On the day before the ceremonies, the Imperial Envoy sent an 'Official attached to the Travelling Envoy', probably a protocol officer, wearing colourful ceremonial dress, to the Cambodian court to check that everything was in order.⁴

On the day of the ceremonies, early in the morning, the imperial envoys, the officer attached to the travelling imperial envoys and the rest put on very neatly and tidily their court dress and ceremonial paraphernalia. The Cambodian Chief of State, followed by his officials, went to the rest-house and first knelt down in front of the Long-dinh and bowed down his head; after, he greeted the imperial envoys.

The imperial envoy took the Long-dinh respectfully with both hands and walked through the main gate into the palace, the other imperial envoy on his left side, the Cambodian Chief of State on his right side, and his retinue following behind the Long-dinh. When the Long-dinh arrived in the hall of the palace, it was respectfully and very carefully passed over to be put on the incense table set on a mat and facing south.

3 Nhu Vien (in Kham Dinh Dai Nam Hoi Dien Su Le) Vol.II, book 134, pp.8-11. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations in this work are my own translations.

4 Ibid

The officer attached to the travelling imperial envoy introduced the Cambodian Chief of State to the salutation ceremony in a kneeling position. The Chief Envoy respectfully carried the imperial orders in both hands and handed them over to the officer attached to the travelling imperial envoy who, after reading loudly in a standing position, respectfully with both hands placed it on the incense table. The imperial Chief Envoy picked up the imperial orders respectfully with both hands, stood up and handed them over to the Chief of State of Cambodia who received them respectfully with both hands, raised them up to his forehead and then passed them over to his officials who continued with the performance of the rites and prayed for prosperity. The Cambodian Chief of State knelt down, the imperial Deputy Envoy respectfully with both hands handed over the seal to the officer attached to the travelling imperial envoy who, after making a proclamation in a standing position, respectfully with both hands put it on the incense table. The imperial Deputy Envoy respectfully with both hands took the seal and handed over to the Cambodian Chief of State who respectfully with both hands received it and raised it to his forehead and passed it over to his officials to continue the performance of the rites by bowing down five times.

When the ceremony was over, everyone went out. The Cambodian King received the imperial envoys in the hall of the palace where they paid homage to him before they retired to the rest-house.⁵

This ceremony of investiture of Chan by Hué was mainly a response by Gia Long to the act of Rama I in crowning the Cambodian King the previous year. It was also the culmination of the Hue policy to bring Cambodia back under its allegiance, and to open the way towards direct intervention in Cambodian affairs in the future.

Earlier, in late 1802, Gia Long had sent an embassy to Oudong to return to the Cambodians a pair of carved cannons (which had been taken to Vietnam a few decades earlier by a Vietnamese army which intervened in Cambodia during a civil war) and to thank the Cambodians for helping him defeat the Thai Son during those years.

5 Ibid. pp.12-15; Maybon, p.381. (See also Maybon for detailed ritual during the investiture of Gia Long by Chinese imperial envoys. The rituals were amazingly identical in almost every detail; pp.377-378).

Although the source did not mention it, the other aim of this embassy was to inform the Cambodian court that Gia Long had now established himself as the sole ruler of Vietnam and that as such he expected Oudong to act appropriately, that to say, to send missions and tribute as formerly. The Regent Pok did not wait long to respond to this Vietnamese approach. In the following year he sent off an embassy to Gia Dinh with tribute consisting of eleven pairs of elephant tusks, six rhinoceros horns, four male elephants, and other products such as white calico, yellow wax, black lacquer and purple dye.⁶ The Cambodian embassy went to Hanoi, then Bac Thanh or 'The North City', where it was rewarded with gifts from the Vietnamese ruler. These gifts mainly consisted of fabrics, silver and money. For example, as presents for Prince Chan, Gia Long sent with the embassy thin coloured brocades, red silk crepe and feather satin; to the chief envoys and their deputies he gave ten ounces of silver and some red silk crepe.⁷ The Cambodian embassy was of an important size. It consisted of two chief envoys, seconded by two deputies, and escorted by a few dozen men.⁸ The embassy was well received and entertained by the Vietnamese.⁹ Cambodian sources do not, however, mention any embassy sent to Hanoi during that year, 1803. But they recorded the visit of an impressive embassy from Vietnam in 1805 composed of a little less than a hundred men. This

6 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, pp.86-87.

7 Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 133, pp.132-135.

8 Ibid.

9 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 135, pp.138-139 and 191-192; see also Maybon, pp.380-81.

embassy brought with it gifts of fabrics for Prince Chan and a letter for the Regent Pok, the content of which was not disclosed in the sources. Pok received the embassy with pomp, and had fifteen rest-houses built for their stay, five in Phnom Penh, five in Kampong Luong and five near the royal palace in Oudong.¹⁰

Although there was no mention in the sources of the aims of the embassy, it is obvious that its mission was one of great importance, judging by its size and composition - two imperial envoys and seventeen mandarins.¹¹ Probably the embassy came to offer Pok and Prince Chan protection from Hué, if not to impose it, as Gia Long felt strong enough and was able to do so with all legitimacy since he had already received official investiture as the legitimate ruler of Vietnam from the Emperor of China a year earlier.¹² The seriousness of the mission can also be judged by two other facts. The first was that, according to Cambodian sources, soon after the Vietnamese embassy left, the Regent Pok and Prince Chan hurried off to Bangkok to pay homage to Rama I.¹³ The second one was the construction of the rest-houses in Phnom Penh. Indeed the sources do not provide any reason for this, and there would be no plausible reason for Pok to have built these rest-houses in Phnom Penh unless

10 Nupparot, p.136; PP.Vol.I, p.242; see also Martine Piat, Chroniques Royales Khmères, BSEI, ns, Vol.XLIX, No.1, 1974, p.135.

11 Nupparot, p.136.

12 Lê Thành Khôi, Le Viet-Nam, Histoire et Civilisation, pp.323-24. Gia Long, after receiving official investiture from the Emperor of China in 1804, fixed his capital in Hué, then Phu Xuan, and proclaimed himself Emperor only two years later in 1806; see also Maybon, p.349.

13 Nupparot, p.137; Veang Tioun, p.768; Leclère, p.406.

on the demand of the Vietnamese.¹⁴ Was it a preliminary mission of inspection of the country for military purposes, as the Vietnamese were preparing to bring Cambodia back under their suzerainty while Rama I was occupied with the Burmese?

Soon after the investiture ceremonies, in the same year (1807), Chan sent an embassy to Hue allegedly to thank Gia Long for having made him King of Cambodia.¹⁵ The embassy took with it two pairs of rhinoceros horns and three pairs of elephant tusks along with forest products.¹⁶ It was recorded that only one pair of rhinoceros horns and one pair of elephant tusks were accepted, as well as some forest products, while the rest was bestowed back on Chan.¹⁷ While the embassy was in the capital, the Vietnamese determined the list of products, and their quantity, to be paid as tribute, as well as the size of the embassy bringing it and the timetable for its arrival. It was fixed that Cambodia must provide fifty can or kilograms each of nutmeg, of yellow wax, purple dye, cardamom, twenty jars of black lacquer, three rhinoceros horns, a pair of elephant tusks and two male elephants, at least five cubits tall.¹⁸

The Imperial Council stipulated that the tribute must be brought every three years, taking this year dinh-mao (1807) as the first year. However, the next time would be in the year ky-ty (1809), and only after that once every three years, which would be in the years ty [1812], than [1815] and hoi

14 Nupparot, p.136.

15 Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 132, pp.20-21.

16 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, pp.86-89.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., see also Maybon, p.381; Aubaret, pp.121-22.

[1818] as the limit. In the appointed year, the tribute must reach Gia-dinh in the fourth month of the year.¹⁹

The size of the embassy was also fixed at only ten persons, consisting of a chief envoy, his deputy, two interpreters and six guards, if it travelled from Gia-dinh to Hué by land; and to twenty, with the increase of ten more guards if it travelled by sea.²⁰ However the size of the embassy was not limited for the journey from Oudong to Gia-dinh.

The limitation of the size of the delegation to Hué was probably dictated by reasons of convenience and protocol, or even simply by a desire to have anything regulated just to show that the Vietnamese were more 'civilised' and 'well organised' than their tributary states. Nevertheless, Hué did not require the presence of Chan in person at the Vietnamese court. Apart from the imperial titles, honours, gifts and money they received from the Vietnamese court, the members of the embassy were also entertained with feasts during their trip.²¹

When the 1807 embassy returned to Oudong, Gia Long gave it a letter for Chan in which he reminded him to be 'loyal and obedient' to the Vietnamese court, since Cambodia was originally a servant and child of the imperial court [of Vietnam], owing submissiveness and loyalty...²²

19 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, p.58; Aubaret, p.122; see also Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien (DNTL II), Vol.III, p.347.

20 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 135, pp.213-15.

21 Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 132, pp.46-49, and Vol.II, book 135, pp.140-143 & 190-193.

22 Ibid, p.84.

As a vassal king, Chan was allowed to have two companies of Vietnamese troops of fifty men each at his disposal. One was called Cuong Bo and the other An Bo.²³ Chan sent another embassy to Hué in the following year to 'thank' Gia Long again for his grace in sending envoys to Oudong to perform the investiture ceremonies and also for limiting the number of male elephants in the tribute to two. This embassy also took tribute for the following year. As usual its members were well received and entertained by the Vietnamese.²⁴

There is no evidence in the sources to show the reaction of Bangkok to the rapprochement between Chan and Hué. In fact, this did not at all please Rama I, who was, however, at this stage more worried about the Burmese and because of this as well as of his advanced age, does not seem to have taken any action against Chan. Hué had always maintained good relations with Bangkok by sending and receiving regular embassies with presents to and from Bangkok even since Gia Long had established himself as the ruler of Vietnam.²⁵

23 Ibid; see also DNTL II, Vol.III, p.347.

24 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, pp.88-89; see Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 135, pp.214-215 about the composition of the embassy; and book 135, pp.192-93, as well as Vol.I, book 133, pp.136-37, for rewards and feast given by the Vietnamese to the embassy.

25 In 1803, Gia Long sent an embassy to thank Rama I for his help during Gia Long's struggle against the Tay Son; see Phraratchhaphongsawadan chabap Phraratchahatthalekha, Vol.II, p.596; see also Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 136, pp.226-27. In the same year, Rama I sent an embassy to Hué in return; Phraratchhaphongsawadan chabap Phraratchahatthalekha, Vol.II, p.598.

In 1804, another Vietnamese embassy was sent to Bangkok to attend the funeral of the Thai second king; Ibid, pp.607-08 and Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 136, pp.228-29.

In 1805, another embassy was led by the governor of Banteai Meas; see Phraratchhaphongsawadan chabap Phraratchahatthalekha, Vol.II, pp.614-16.

In 1807, another Vietnamese embassy went to Bangkok; Ibid, pp.623-24; and a Thai embassy to Hué, see Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 136, pp.230-31.

The Vietnamese attitude towards the Thai had obviously two aims: first, to express gratitude and friendship to the Thai king, from whom Gia Long himself had received asylum and assistance during his hard time in the 1790s, and second, to soothe, if not to neutralise, Rama I in face of the Vietnamese diplomatic offensive in Cambodia.

When Rama I died in 1809,²⁶ Chan did not go in person to attend the funeral and to pledge allegiance to the new Thai king, Rama II, as a vassel king was supposed to do. He sent instead a delegation to Bangkok a few months later. The delegation included his full brother, Snguon, his half brother, Im, Samdech Preah Ang Keo, Kralahom Moeung, Chakrei Pen and many other officials.²⁷ A Thai source asserted that Chan did not go in person to Bangkok at this time because he had hard feelings towards Rama I for three reasons: first, the refusal of Rama I to allow Chan's aunt, neak ang Y, to return to Cambodia; second, the refusal of the Thai king to hand back the rebel ocnha Meng, governor of Kampong Svay, who had refused to swear allegiance to Chan and fled to Bangkok a year earlier when Chan sent troops to arrest him; and third, an incident during Chan's last farewell audience with the Thai king.²⁸ In

26 Phraratchhaphongsawadan chabap Phraratchahatthalekha, Vol.II, p.633; Nupparot, p.142.

27 Nupparot, p.142; PP, Vol.I, p.246; Leclere, p.407.

28 Thiphakarawong, Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin Ratchakan thi 2, pp.16-17 (hereinafter PRP II). The incident occurred in late 1808 when Chan went into Rama I's palace very early one morning without the Thai King's permission just before his return to Cambodia; see Phraratchhaphongsawadan Chhabap Phraratchhahatthalekha (Royal Chronicle, Royal Writings volume) Vol.II, Bangkok, 1973, p.631.

fact, Chan had been to Bangkok the previous year and just returned home shortly before Rama I's death.²⁹

The governor of Battambang also died shortly after Rama I. The new Thai king's reaction was to nominate a new governor to Battambang, without however informing Chan, in order to reassert Thai control over that part of Cambodia.³⁰ This had increased Chan's resentment and distrust of the Chakry. Then, when the Cambodian delegation was about to return home, Rama II bestowed titles and ranks upon the two princes, also without consulting or informing King Chan beforehand,³¹ thus formalising their status within Chan's court and administration and also, in the words of a Thai chronicle, 'enabling them to continue the dynasty'.³² By doing this, Rama II brought both princes into his sphere of allegiance and set up legal pretenders to the throne of Cambodia. The delegation was also entrusted with a letter from Rama II to King Chan, requesting the latter to raise troops and send them to Bangkok to help the Thai fighting the Burmese in Phuket.³³ Chan's response to the Thai king was an angry one and he refused to levy troops for Rama II,³⁴ whereupon the two ocnha, Kralahom Moeung and

29 Nupparot, p.141; PP, Vol.I, p.246; Veang Tioun, pp.774-75; (Martine) Piat, p.137.

30 Phongsawadan Muang Phratabang in Phrachum Phongsawadan, lem 12, phak thi 16, p.140; see also PP, Vol.I, p.246; Nupparot, p.142.

31 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, pp.20-21; Nupparot, p.143; Leclère, p.407.

32 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, pp.20-21.

33 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, pp.20-21; see also D.G.E. Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p.466.

34 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.22.

Chakrei Pen started to raise troops for Rama II on their own authority. Chan had them both executed.³⁵ Fearing reprisals from Rama II, Chan sent a delegation of two high-ranking ocnha to Hué to inform the Vietnamese what had happened and to request protection should any Thai retaliation occur.³⁶ The Chakry's policy towards Chan had pushed the latter willy-nilly into the hands of the Vietnamese and, politically, Rama II now lost ground in Cambodia as Chan now leaned more and more on Hué for support in facing up to Thai threats. The equilibrium of influence over Chan between Hué and Bangkok started to break from this time onwards.

Gia Long sent in an army³⁷ while Chan despatched his troops to strategic points in the kingdom in preparation for an eventual attack by the Thai.³⁸ Rama II also sent troops to reinforce the Thai position in Battambang.³⁹ However, the worst did not happen. Both sides waited for the other to make the first move. Neither the Vietnamese nor the Thai wanted to engage in a direct military confrontation. The Vietnamese would not venture to attack Thai positions in Battambang for tactical and logistic reasons, while the Thai were more worried about the conflict with their northern neighbours, the Burmese, although there was as yet no major

35 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.35; Nupparot, p.143, and PP, Vol.I, p.247, refer to the execution of both ocnha on the count of the crime of treason.

36 Nupparot, p.144; see also DNTL II, Vol.IV, pp.90-91.

37 Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 132, pp.72-73. Gia Long appointed Nguyen Van Nhan as Viceroy to Cambodia and sent him to Phnom Penh to protect the kingdom on Chan's request; see also DNTL II, Vol.IV, p.94; Aubaret, p.124; Nupparot, p.144 and Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.24.

38 Nupparot, p.145; PP, Vol.I, p.248.

39 Nupparot, p.145.

engagement between the two countries. But raids and counter-raids were still going on,⁴⁰ and any direct military adventure against Vietnam might encourage a full-scale attack by the Burmese.

In early 1812, Snguon fled from Oudong and took refuge in Pursat; the reasons for his flight are unclear.⁴¹ Be that as it may, according to Cambodian sources, Snguon now became a rebel prince who kept as hostages a delegation of four ocnha sent to Pursat by Chan to negotiate his return, and he demanded that King Chan grant him some provinces as his personal appanage.⁴² Therefore, the main cause of Snguon's flight was probably that Chan denied Snguon the rights made upayuvareach by Rama II in Bangkok without Chan's knowledge. Fearing an invasion led by Snguon from Pursat, Chan requested help from Hué, upon which the governor of Gia-dinh sent a naval force to Oudong.⁴³ Snguon, for his part, received military assistance from Rama II who despatched a chau phraya with an army from Battambang to march to Oudong with Snguon and his followers, allegedly, in the words of a Thai chronicle, to reconcile the two brothers.⁴⁴ The Thai - Snguon army, totalling about five thousand men, proceeded to Oudong from two directions: one by land from Battambang-Pursat, the other by water from Stung

40 D.G.E. Hall, p.466

41 Nupparot, p.148; Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.31; see also Aubaret, p.124.

42 Nupparot, p.150; Veang Tioun, p.780.

43 Nupparot, p.150; Aubaret, p.125; PP, Vol.I, p.251.

44 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.32.

Treng.⁴⁵ When King Chan learned that his troops were no match for the enemy force, he and his family and some ocnha of his entourage fled down the Mekong with the Vietnamese army en route to Cochinchina. His two other brothers, Ang Im and Ang Duong, deserted him half-way, while the party stayed overnight, and joined Sngun and the Thai army by now entering Oudong.⁴⁶ Chan and his party were escorted to Saigon where they were provided with accommodation, food, money and clothing.⁴⁷

Sngun and the Thai army occupied Oudong and Phnom Penh until the dry season in 1813. Fearing that the Vietnamese would soon attack to reinstate Chan and also motivated by shortage of supplies and the weariness of the troops, the Thai general and Prince Sngun agreed between themselves to withdraw their main army to Battambang, leaving behind a Thai phraya with some troops to administer the country with a mixed body of Thai and Cambodian officials.⁴⁸ Before leaving, the Thai army burnt down the citadels of Phnom Penh, Kampong Luong and Oudong and carried off inhabitants all along its return route to Battambang and Thailand.⁴⁹ At the same time, Rama II sent an embassy to Hué with a letter for Gia Long in which he

45 Veang Tioun, p.781; Nupparot, pp.150-152.

46 Veang Tioun, pp.782-83; Leclère, p.410; Moura, p.102; Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.34; see also DNTL II, Vol.IV, pp.146-47.

47 Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 132, pp.74-77, provides detailed account of sum of money, food, clothing etc... that Gia Long gave Chan and his party, as well as the composition and number of Chan's party.

48 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.37; Veang Tioun, p.784; Nupparot, p.154; Francis Garnier, Chronique Royale du Cambodge, JA, Oct-Dec 1871, pp.336-385 and Aug-Sept. 1872, pp.112-144.

49 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.37.

said that the chau phraya Yumarat was sent [to Oudong] in order to settle peacefully the dispute between brothers [Chan and Snguon].⁵⁰ In his letter he also referred to the ungratefulness of Chan whom the Chakry had been fostering since childhood and who did not take the trouble to pay his last respects at the funeral of Rama I or pledge allegiance to the new king at the time of his coronation. Rama II proposed a friendly settlement⁵¹ of this affair to the Vietnamese Emperor. Gia Long agreed to the proposal of Rama II and in his letter of reply, he wrote that 'to be kind to the weak is an act of righteousness',⁵² and referred to Snguon as a 'traitor to his king, an ungrateful child, a greedy brother...'⁵³

As the result of the political arrangement between the Thai and the Vietnamese, towards the end of the dry season in 1813, King Chan and his entourage were escorted back from Saigon to Cambodia by Le Van Duyet, the governor of Gia-dinh, by a Thai delegation headed by Chau Phraya Maha Ammat and by a Vietnamese naval force more than thirteen thousand strong.⁵⁴ Chan was then reinstated jointly by Hué and Bangkok as king of Cambodia. After a decade or so of political as well as military manoeuvring, Vietnam and Thailand now finally formally consented to share the suzerainty rights over Cambodia. The Thai delegation withdrew to Bangkok soon afterwards,

50 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.37.

51 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, pp.37-38.

52 Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 132, pp.76-77; also Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.38.

53 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, pp.38-39.

54 Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 132, pp.76-77; see also DNTL II, Vol.IV, p.187; Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.41 and Nupparot, p.155.

together with the remaining Thai army which had occupied Oudong during the retreat of Snguon earlier in the same year.

So ended an era; the era of Thai preponderance was now replaced by a Vietnamese era. In the words of a Thai chronicle '... from that time, King Chan and all thirty-four provinces of Cambodia became dependent on Vietnam 'alone'.⁵⁵ Le Van Duyet also withdrew his army to Saigon, but left behind one of his lieutenants, Nguyen Van Thuy, with 1500 men in Cambodia as an army of 'protection'.⁵⁶ Chan was asked by Le Van Duyet to move his capital soon afterwards to Phnom Penh. A Vietnamese barracks and rice-storehouses were built at Lovea-Em as well as a temple in Chruoy Changvar, on the right bank of the Mekong river, opposite the Royal Palace, where twice a month King Chan and his court officials, dressed in Vietnamese official court costume, had to bow down to a tablet representing the 'imperial mandate' of Hué, acknowledging their vassal status in respect of the Vietnamese emperor.⁵⁷

In 1815, as soon as the Vietnamese had established themselves militarily in Cambodia, Nguyen Van Thuy persuaded Chan to send a military expedition to recover Battambang from the Thai.⁵⁸ The Vietnamese saw a potential threat from Battambang which they considered of logistic and strategic importance. However, they urged Chan to act on his own without any military support from

55 Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.43.

56 Nhu Vien, Vol.1, book 132, pp.78-79; Nupparot, p.157.

57 Nupparot, p.157; Aubaret, pp.128-129; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.42.

58 Damrong Ratchanuphap, Praratchaphongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin Ratchakan thi 2, 2 vols, Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1962, Vol.I, p.218; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.68.

them. By so doing they, at least Nguyen Van Thuy and his men, would not be the ones to be blamed in case of failure of the expedition, and especially in case of any representations from the Thai, with whom Hué had agreed together in 1813, to be to Cambodia, as a chronicle put it '...the king of Thailand as the father and the emperor of Vietnam as the mother of the king of Cambodia...'⁵⁹

The expedition was in fact a complete failure.⁶⁰ In a letter to Gia Long soon afterwards, Rama II accused the Vietnamese officials at the Cambodian court of inciting Chan to undertake the campaign.⁶¹ Gia Long despatched a representative to Phnom Penh to investigate the affair. Probably to please the Thai king and most likely to cover up the truth of the matter, Gia Long ordered Chan to arrest Samdech Chau Ponhea Tei, who had been appointed commanding general of the expedition by Chan himself and send him to Hué to be reprimanded and fined. On his way to Hué under escort, Tei escaped but was recaptured soon afterwards and sent off to Vietnam.⁶² He was later involved in the anti-Vietnamese rebellion of 1820.

The campaign of 1815 threw light on the Vietnamese policy in Cambodia. No matter from where the directives originated, Hué, Saigon or the Vietnamese officials in Phnom Penh, the main concern of the Vietnamese was to avoid a direct military confrontation of any kind whatsoever with the Thai. A direct confrontation would be costly and might endanger their position in Cambodia, which they had

59 'Ruang Hetkan Muang Khamen Ton set Songkram Thai kap Yuan', in PP, phak thi 56, p.163.

60 Damrong Rachanuphap, PRP II, Vol.I, p.220.

61 Ibid. p.220; Thiphakarawong, PRP II, p.70.

62 Nupparot, pp.162-63; PP. Vol.I, p.261; see also DNTL II, Vol.IV, p.269.

been consolidating progressively since 1813. As a consequence of this policy, King Chan was now virtually a prisoner of the Vietnamese in his own kingdom. He was completely dependent on them for his safety. Chan's inability to protect or punish any of his ocnha whom he had appointed to carry out a mission, was a good example of the relationship between Chan and the Vietnamese.

In 1816, the Gia Dinh Thong Chi asserted that '...the mandarins and the people of Cambodia have adopted the Vietnamese costumes...'.⁶³ Gia Long sent to Phnom Penh during that year an imperial envoy with Vietnamese court dress for Chan as well as for the ocnha of his court. The ceremony of presenting the costumes to Chan and his officials was similar to the investiture ceremony of Chan in 1807:

When the Imperial Envoy arrived, the King of Cambodia, followed by his officials, greeted him in kneeling position. The Imperial Envoy respectfully with both hands placed the imperial letter and the mandarin dresses on the tables ...

After the Master of Ceremonies finished reading the imperial letter, the King of Cambodia, followed by his officials, saluted five times and received respectfully with both hands the cap and dresses....⁶⁴

For the ocnha twenty-seven sets of dresses with caps were sent to Phnom Penh, but the Vietnamese mentioned specifically that none be given to "Tham Dich Chau Bon Nha".⁶⁵ [That is Samdech Chau Ponhea Tei.]

In 1819, according to Vietnamese and Thai sources,⁶⁶ Chan received orders from Le Van Duyet in Saigon to recruit workers to

63 Aubaret, p.129.

64 Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 132, pp.24-25.

65 Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 133, pp.144-47; see also Nupparot, P.165; Aubaret, p.129, F. Garnier, p.134.

66 DNTL, Vol.IV, pp.389-90; Thiphakarawong, PRP II, pp.152-53.

dig a canal linking Chaudoc to Hatien, a distance of some seventy kilometers. The Cambodian chronicles are brief about this event, and place it in late 1815 and early 1816.⁶⁷ The work was the responsibility of Nguyen Van Thuy and Phan Van Tuyen, and was under the supervision of 500 Vietnamese, acting as foremen and guards. The workers were Cambodian and Vietnamese.⁶⁸ A Cambodian source the Robakhsat from Baray province, provides a detailed and moving account of the conditions of the Cambodian workers on the project. Workers were treated like slaves. In some cases, they were beaten to death by the Vietnamese foremen, especially towards the final stage of the project when the workers were almost totally exhausted.⁶⁹ Harsh working conditions, malnutrition, mistreatment by the Vietnamese, disease, all these had contributed to create discontent and resentment towards the Vietnamese. In one case, Cambodian workers deserted the site; the Vietnamese had a Cambodian official named Kè from Baray province executed and 'his head exposed on a stick to intimidate other Cambodian workers so they would not follow Kè's example'.⁷⁰ Kè was Snang in the local administration of srok Baray. He was in charge of supervising Cambodian labourers from his srok working on the canal.

67 Nupparot, pp.163-64; Veang Tioun, p.786; Leclère, p.412.

68 DNTL, Vol.IV, pp.389-90. Five thousand Vietnamese and 5,000 Cambodians worked on the project which started at the end of 1819. The Vietnamese foremen and workers were paid with a monthly salary of 6 quan (Vietnamese coins used in that period) and one phuong (a measure for grains) of rice each, while the Cambodian workers were paid with a salary of 4 quan and 5 tien (decimal unit of the quan) and one phuong of rice.

69 Robakhsat Srok Khmer, p.38.

70 Ibid. p.40.

King Chan knew him well and expressed his deep sorrow when he learnt about Kè's death.

The memory of this event survived in the feelings of the Cambodian people for generations to come. Leclère, in his book published nearly a century later, wrote:

When the French authority recruited workers to build roads, ... it was not rare to hear these people recalling the sad time when [Cambodians] had to work on the canal of the Yuon.⁷¹

Gia Long died in early 1820 and his son, Prince Dam, whom he had made heir-apparent in 1816, ascended the throne under the reign name of Ming Mang. Chan sent a delegation with presents to pay homage to the new emperor and to attend his coronation ceremony.⁷²

As far as the relations between Hué and Phnom Penh were concerned, outwardly it seemed that they were as smooth as they had been during Gia Long's reign. Chan had acted according to his status as king of a vassal state. However, the resentment harboured by the Cambodian people towards the Vietnamese was rising with the tightening of Vietnamese control over the kingdom.

Cambodian and Vietnamese sources record that in the first year of Ming Mang's reign, an anti-Vietnamese rebellion broke out in the region bordering Cochinchina, led by a monk, also named Kè.⁷³ The latter was originally from wat Sambor in Phnom Penh. With his magical skills, he was viewed by the inhabitants of the region as a

71 Leclère, p.413.

72 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, pp.96-97; see also Truong Vinh Ky, Cours d'Histoire Annamite à l'Usage des Ecoles de la Basse Cochinchine, 2 vols., Saigon: Imprimerie du gouvernement, 1875-1877, Vol.II, p.255.

73 See D.P. Chandler, 'The Anti-Vietnamese Rebellion in Early Nineteenth Century Cambodia: Pre-colonial Imperialism and a Pre-Nationalist Response', in JSEAS, Vol.VI, no.1, 1975, pp.16-24.

'holy man' or neak sel and succeeded in gathering around him many followers. Sel Kè and his army murdered the ocnha Thomma Decho, governor of Baphnom province, after which:

... monk Kè joined Samdech Chau Ponhea Tei, ocnha Noren Kol and Kè Preal in slaughtering Vietnamese troops. Ong Ta Kun [Le Van Duyet] despatched Ong Chanh Dao with a Vietnamese army of three thousand men to Koh Sotin. King Chan ordered Chauvea Tuon Pha to lead troops to help Ong Chanh Dao fighting the rebels. Monk Kè was killed; Samdech Chau Ponhea Tei, ocnha Noren Kol and Kè Preal were arrested and sent to Ong Ta Kun in Saigon.⁷⁴

The most detailed account of the rebellion was in the Rabakhsat Srok Khmer.⁷⁵ It was written in the form of a poem and began with the introduction of two characters: monk Kè and novice Kuy. Both men were portrayed as able to cure diseases by reciting incantational formulae and, wherever they went, they attracted so many followers that the local Chauvay Srok or governor was unable to raise enough men for the corvée.⁷⁶ The news reached the capital, creating worries among the Vietnamese 'protectors' as to the consequences, which might have endangered the Vietnamese position in the kingdom. The Vietnamese ordered Chan to organise a military expedition to arrest Kè and his followers. Chan appointed Samdech Chau Ponhea Tei, once again, and Chauvea Tuon Pha, along with two other officials, Narin Kol and Kè Preal, to lead the expedition composed of Cambodian and Vietnamese troops, the latter probably stationed in Phnom Penh. It was a disaster, as the Vietnamese troops were massacred by Narin Kol, Kè Preal and the Cambodian troops even before they had reached the rebels. After they had killed the Vietnamese, Narin Kol and Kè Preal, along with the

74 Nupparot, pp.171-72.

75 Robakhsat Srok Khmer, Vol.I, pp.42-60.

76 Ibid. p.44.

Cambodian troops, went over to the cause of the rebels. Samdech Chau Ponhea Tei and Chauvea Tuon Pha retreated and reported the débâcle to Chan and the Vietnamese in Phnom Penh. The latter ordered Chan to write to Ming Mang requesting assistance. A Vietnamese army was sent by Le Van Duyet but again was defeated by the rebels. A combined army made up of Chinese, Cham-Malays and Khmers joined the Vietnamese forces in a second campaign which succeeded in killing the sel Kè in Koh Sautin, but his disciples Kuy, Narin Kol and Kè Preal, escaped the massacre and went into hiding. The last two were later captured by King Chan's men on orders from the Vietnamese. After interrogation, the two men declared that they had defected to sel Kè on the recommendation of Samdech Chau Ponhea Tei and Chauvea Tuon Pha.⁷⁷ The four were then sent to Saigon to be tried. The Minh Menh Chinh Yeu relates that:

After Tham Dich Tay and associates were brought under control, Chan-lap was entirely pacified. The emperor ordered that troops be retained in order to protect this country [Cambodia] and sent back Tham Dich Tay and associates in chains to Chan to be punished for their crime.⁷⁸

Ming Mang also wrote a letter to Chan concerning the punishment of the four incriminated, in which he said:

The law of this empire is a public one. The law must eradicate this revolt to make your generation, as vassals and servants, remember this perverse strength that you have encountered and that you are unable to overcome. Now the criminals are caught and sent to you to be punished; you must resolutely undertake a severe and public punishment; this is not to be forgiven.⁷⁹

77 Ibid. p.58.

78 Minh Menh Chinh Yeu, Vol.VI, book 25, pp.3b or 211.

79 Ibid. pp.3b-4a or 211-212.

The four men were executed publicly by the Vietnamese as soon as they reached Phnom Penh.

Two questions deserve to be asked in connection with this event. The first is whether Chan tacitly supported Kè in his drive against the Vietnamese or not. According to the account given in the Rabakhsat Srok Khmer, at the end of the strophe concerning the rebellion, the author wrote that Chan tried in vain to save the life of the four men in exchange for goods and that he wept when he learnt about their execution.⁸⁰ On the other hand, there is no other indication either in this source, apart from this mention of Chan's sympathy for the four men, which suggests that Chan had implicitly given his support to the rebels in their drive against the Vietnamese. Nevertheless, the fact that Chan had appointed Samdech Tei and Chauvea Tuon Pha to lead the expedition to quell the rebellion is intriguing. Chan already knew the feelings of the two men towards the Vietnamese. Tei had been reprimanded and demoted by the Vietnamese after the failure of the 1815 expedition.⁸¹ Tuon Pha was treated with distrust by the Vietnamese when he was sent by Chan from Saigon to Hué to request help from Gia Long in 1812.⁸² The Vietnamese themselves did not object when Chan appointed the two ocnha to lead the campaign, however.

The second question is whether sel Kè had any dynastic pretensions or not. Cambodian sources do not refer to any dynastic ambition on the part of monk Kè in his anti-Vietnamese drive.

80 Robakhsat, Vol.I, p.60.

81 See page 39 above.

82 Moura, p.103; see also Nupparot, p.153.

However the Vietnamese chronicle Minh Menh Chinh Yeu is unequivocal about this.

Nguyen Van Tri and Nguyen Van Thuy attacked a Buddhist monk named Ke in Nam-Vang [Phnom Penh] and killed him. Ke was a Chan-lap [Cambodian] man who used charms and spells to mislead the people. The number of his followers increased every day and then he gathered them together to plot a rebellion and proclaim himself Chieu Vuong [king]. Ke led a naval force of more than thirty boats and advanced closer to Nam-Vang. The king of the country [Cambodia] wanted to abandon the city. At that time, Nguyen Van Tri and his men reached Chaudoc; he promptly sent light boats first, and Nguyen Van Thuy followed afterwards with his reinforcement troops and killed many rebels... Afterwards Nguyen Van Tri mercilessly attacked Ke again at Ba-tam-lai and beheaded him.⁸³

One thing that is sure is that the Vietnamese succeeded in getting rid of anti-Vietnamese elements from Chan's entourage.

According to the Mihn Menh Chinh Yeu, Chan sent a letter to Ming Mang in the following year admitting his guilt in having listened to bad advice which had resulted in the removal of Nguyen Van Thuy and the subsequent rebellion.

The king of Chan-lap, Nac Ong Chan presented memorial [to the emperor] saying that his country is small and feeble. Formerly it received favour from Duc The To Cao Hoang De [emperor Gia Long] who sent imperial officials to protect the country, so it could rely upon them in order to have peace. But, I, Chan, still young, immature, having no wisdom, was inclined to believe in slander which brought about the recall to Gia-dinh of the officials in charge of the protection and of the government troops. Subsequently, the country was faced with the rebellion led by the rebels Ke and Tay... So, I beg that the protection be re-established as of old.⁸⁴

The same source also reported that in 1824 Chan offered three prefectures (phu) to Nguyen Van Thuy as a personal gift to show gratitude for Thuy's services in Cambodia. It was alleged that Thuy

83 Minh Menh Chinh Yeu, Vol.V, book XX, p.1b or pp.109-110.

84 Ibid, Vol.VI, book 25, pp.5a or 214.

brought up Chan's proposals for discussion with Le Van Duyet as to whether to accept the three districts offered or only two of them which were in the region of Chaudoc and Giang Thanh. In a memorial to Ming Mang, Le Van Duyet wrote:

The people of Chanlap want to offer Thuy [the three prefectures]. [They] do so not from the bottom of their hearts; it is only because the Thai are protecting and nourishing the brothers [of King Chan] and they want to get support and assistance from us, that is all.

If we accept the offer, perhaps we risk having a bad reputation as being greedy; yet if we decline it all, we fear that we will have acted contrary to the original intentions of Duc The To Cao Hoang De [Emperor Gia Long] in his strategy concerning the protection of the borders. Moreover, since the district of Ky-bat is in a slightly distant region, we should decline it, while the two other districts, Chan-sam and Mat-luat are in our regions of Chaudoc and Giang Thanh which lie inside the heart of our country.

Your humble servant begs the emperor to accept these [last two] lands, to collect taxes in these regions. This is a very advantageous project for the defence of the frontiers.⁸⁵

Ming Mang agreed to Duyet's proposals and ordered Thuy to accept only the two phu of Chan-sam and Mat-luat. Vietnamese cadres were then sent in 'to train the people about new and traditional techniques of combat to enable them to guard the frontiers'.⁸⁶

The Dai Nam Thuc Luc reported that Chan still offered the third phu to Thuy. When Thuy died in 1829, the source asserts, Chan requested that the three phu be incorporated for ever into Chaudoc.⁸⁷ There is no mention at all in Cambodian sources about this offer to Thuy.

85 Ibid., pp.10b-11a or 223; see also DNTL Vol.IX, p.328, which refers to the three districts as Chan nom, Mat Luat and Loi-y-bat; D.P. Chandler, 'An Anti-Vietnamese Rebellion in Early Nineteenth Century Cambodia: Pre-Colonial Imperialism and a Pre-Nationalist Response' JSEAS, Vol.2, no.1, 3, 1975, p.20.

86 Mihn Menh Chinh Yeu, Vol.VI, book 25, pp.10b-11a or 223.

87 DNTL, Vol.IX, p.328.

Although Chan was now completely dependent upon the Vietnamese, contacts between Phnom Penh and Bangkok, where his two younger brothers were confined to live in exile for nearly two decades, were still possible. A Thai chronicle of the third reign records that in 1829 Chan sent a delegation, led by Samdech Preah Ang Keo Ma with tribute, to Bangkok.⁸⁸ Ma was a son of the late governor of Battambang, the first Apheiphubes Ben and an elder brother of King Chan's wife, neang Tep. His pro-Thai feelings were unquestionable, like those of most members of his family.⁸⁹ Ma's embassy had a more important mission than a usual tributary one. The source relates that Chan's wife, neang Tep, had also entrusted Ma with clandestine letters for Chan's brothers, Princes Im and Duong, and for Thai court officials, ostensibly to petition Rama III for help in ridding Cambodia of the Vietnamese and to getting Chan to revert to his allegiance.⁹⁰ Rama III saw the opportunity not favourable as yet to intervene in Cambodia; however, in order not to discourage such feelings towards Bangkok, Rama III got Im, Duong and his officials to write to Chan's wife, telling her that he would welcome Chan back as of old.⁹¹ It was not clear if Chan was aware of the plan or not. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese in Phnom Penh were most likely aware of the conspiracy being hatched against them. As soon as Ma returned from Bangkok, they planned to arrest him and send him to Vietnam, but Ma, knowing the danger threatening his

88 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.99.

89 See 'Phongsawadan Muang Pratabang', pp.141-42.

90 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.99.

91 Ibid.

life, escaped with his family to Thailand.⁹² With Ma's escape, Chan's court was now almost completely purged of prominent pro-Thai figures. The last pro-Thai ocnha to leave Cambodia was the governor of Pursat ocnha Kas. In 1832 Kas carried off two-thirds of the population of Pursat along with his family to settle in the Thai zone.⁹³

In 1832, Le Van Duyet, the governor of Gia-dinh, died. Ming Mang took advantage of Le Van Duyet's death to reorganise the administrative structure of Gia-dinh and to bring it back under the direct control of Huế. Gia-dinh had enjoyed a certain autonomy under Le Van Duyet since the early days of Gia Long's reign. Duyet was a close friend and a loyal servant of the former Emperor. He had helped him defeat the Tay Son and had earned the reputation of being a good friend of the Christian missionaries. Earlier, in 1816, Duyet had strongly expressed his opposition to the nomination of Ming Mang, the then prince Dom, as heir-apparent to the throne, arguing that the throne must go to the son of Prince Canh, an elder son of Gia Long and a legitimate queen.⁹⁴ Ming Mang's first action to take revenge on Duyet was to desecrate Duyet's tomb.⁹⁵

92 'Phongsawadan Muang Pratabang', pp.142-43, relates that Ma was then nominated by Rama III as Governor of Svay Chek, a town in Battambang Province. See also Robakhsat Srok Khmer for details of the tricks used by the Vietnamese to capture Ma, pp.63-70.

93 Nupparot, pp.174-75; see also Robakhsat, pp.70-73 and Minh Menh Chinh Yeu, Vol.VI, book 24, pp.22b or 144.

94 Truong Vinh Ky, Cours d'Histoire annamite, Saigon: Imprimerie du gouvernement, 2 volumes, 1875-1877, Vol.II, p.255.

95 Ibid. p.263. Thieu Tri, son and successor of Ming Mang, later restored Duyet's tomb during his reign.

Duyet's entourage was demoted and replaced by officials appointed by Ming Mang himself. Prominent among those victimized was Duyet's adopted son, named Le Van Khoi. Khoi was dismissed allegedly for being involved in an illegal timber trade with Duyet. He refused to appear when he was summoned to Hué for an explanation.⁹⁶ Khoi simply openly rebelled against Ming Mang in 1833. Civil war flared up and, with support of the population, Khoi and his men succeeded in a relatively short period in gaining control of Cochinchina. He was killed a year later but the trouble went on until 1835.

It was during the first days of the civil war that many Chinese residents of Saigon and Long Ho fled the misery and danger of the fighting and taken refuge in Thailand, bringing word that Cochinchina was being torn apart by civil war.⁹⁷ When Rama III learnt about this, he decided that the time was right to send an army over land to take over Cambodia, and then proceed further to Saigon with reinforcement by a naval force. He was reported as saying that:

The Vietnamese are arrogant. This is the time that we must attack them to show them our capability, so that they will not look down upon the Thai power any longer...⁹⁸

Rama III was running out of patience with the Vietnamese over what the Thai called 'Vietnamese insolence and contempt of the Thai'.

96 Ibid. p.264. It was most likely connected with the exploitation of forest products. The Vietnamese in Cambodia used the Cambodians to cut down trees and haul them to Cochinchina in the 1820s when 'ocnha yumareach Ros', once responsible of the supervision of the Cambodian workers on the Vinh Te canal, was again appointed by the Vietnamese to supervise the work, see Robakhsat, pp.61-62; and Chandler, Cambodia before the French, p.103

97 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, pp.131-32; see also Kulap, Anam-Syam Yudh, 2 vols., Bangkok: Phrae Phithaya, 1971, Vol.II, pp.471-72.

98 Kulap, pp.482-83.

Ming Mang at least twice had sent envoys to Bangkok to instruct the Thai to address him properly as 'the Emperor of Vietnam Duc Hoang De' in their diplomatic correspondence with Hué, and also to stamp with the official royal seal the duplicate correspondence written in Chinese, before it was sent to Hué.⁹⁹ Another reason for the Thai king to intervene was that Ming Mang was deeply involved with the rebellion of Chau Anu of Vientiane against the Thai.¹⁰⁰ The third reason was that the link between Phnom Penh and Bangkok had been virtually cut since Samdech Preah Ang Keo Ma, brother of Chan's wife, and ocnha Kas, governor of Pursat, had fled to Thailand in 1830 and 1832 respectively. Since then, there had been no prominent pro-Thai ocnha at Chan's court, and Rama III probably feared that if this state of affairs continued, he would lose Cambodia to the Vietnamese.

The strategy of the Thai expedition, which involved tens of thousands of troops, consisted in a main force of about fifty thousand strong operating by land through Cambodia towards Phnom Penh, and two other columns of more than ten thousand men, one of which was a naval force, attacking the Vietnamese in their own strongholds thus preventing them from sending reinforcement to stop the advance of the main army in Cambodia. The main target of the expedition was to take Cambodia back and replace Chan by his two brothers Im and Duong. The main force was under the command of a high-ranking Thai civilian official named Chao Phraya Bodin Decha Singh. His task was to subdue Cambodia and then to proceed on to

99 Kulap, p.483; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.135.

100 Kulap, p.483; see also Rama III, Prachum Phraratchaniphon Phrabat Somdet Phra Nang Klao Chao Yuhua, Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1968, p.142.

Saigon to help Le Van Khoi. The naval fleet was to attack Banteai Meas in the south by entering through the Vinh Te canal and was due to meet Bodin Decha Singh's army in Saigon, while the other land column was to attack Nge An in Central Vietnam with reinforcement troops raised in various vassal Lao states in the northern regions. This army was apparently a diversion force to dilute Ming Mang's strength in the south.¹⁰¹

The expedition began in November 1833. Rama III sent Princes Im and Duong to accompany Bodin Decha Singh's army in the drive towards Phnom Penh with instructions that 'if Chan was captured, Im and Duong would be installed as kings of Cambodia'.¹⁰² Samdech Ma and ocnha Kas were also with Bodin Decha. Learning about the expedition when it reached Battambang, Chan tried to raise an army to oppose the advance of the enemy. Only a handful of troops raised hastily by chakrei Long, mostly among his relatives and entourage, was sent to meet Bodin Decha's army by now in Kampong Chhnang province. Long's force disintegrated in the first contact with the enemy. He escaped into hiding in Baphnom, while some of his men returned to Phnom Penh to report to Chan about the disaster.¹⁰³ Chan realised that he had no choice but to flee again to Vietnam before such an enormous Thai army moving towards Phnom Penh without any obstacle in its way. He gathered together his family and some of his entourage and sailed with the Vietnamese troops stationed in

101 Kulap, p.485-87; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, pp.135-36.

102 Kulap, p.485.

103 Nupparot, p.176; Veang Tioun, p.790; Moura, p.108; Leclère, pp.416-17.

the capital to Long Ho in Vinh Long in December 1833. Here he was provided with a cash allowance, food and quarters to live.¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile, in Vietnam the rebels encountered fierce opposition from the Imperial army and confined to entrenching themselves in the citadel of Saigon. Ming Mang was however worried about Khoi's rebellion, and had had to concentrate all his efforts to quell it, consequently leaving Cambodia vulnerable to any attack from outside.

Bodin Decha's army moved through Cambodia in two columns. The main column under his command took the Pursat-Phnom Penh route on the right bank of the Tonlé Sap. The other column marched on the other side of the Tonlé Sap. Looting and exaction were the main feature of the invading armies. Bodin Decha's expedition in Cambodia would have been almost a complete success if King Chan had been captured. Bodin Decha left Im and Duong behind in Phnom Penh to 'persuade Cambodian ocnha there to join their cause' and led his army towards Chaudoc to meet the Thai naval forces there before moving together with them to Saigon to help the rebels in their battle against the imperial forces.¹⁰⁵ Since the rebels were now besieged in the citadel of Saigon, Ming Mang despatched an important army under the command of Truong Ming Giang and Nguyen Xuan to stop the advance of the Thai by then in Chaudoc.¹⁰⁶ Truong Ming Giang was to be a key figure in Cambodia's history for the rest of the 1830's. He was one of a few scholars from the south who had graduated in a regional examination held in 1819. He was also a

104 Nupparot, p.177, Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.137; see also Nbu Vien, Vol.II, book 132, pp.80-81.

105 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.137.

106 Minh Menh Chinh Yeu, Vol.V, book 20, pp.37a or 151-52.

prominent figure in Cochinchina during the same period. As R.B. Smith put it: 'even more significantly, in the south the leading position came to be occupied by Truong Ming Giang...'¹⁰⁷

Truong Ming Giang and Nguyen Xuan attacked Thai positions in Ang Giang and Chaudoc but the battles were not decisive during the first encounters. Nevertheless the Thai armies seemed no longer able to defeat the Vietnamese or even to sustain their attacks.¹⁰⁸ With reinforcement troops from King Chan of more than a hundred battle-junks, and from Saigon, Truong Ming Giang and Nguyen Xuan routed the Thai armies in February 1834.¹⁰⁹

The Thai not only retreated in disarray from Cochinchina but also withdrew from Cambodia. The Thai naval forces retreated through the Vinh Te canal to Hatien and carried off the local population of Banteai Meas, Kampot and Kampong Som to be resettled in Chanbury.¹¹⁰ Bodin Decha Singh's army retreated by land through Cambodia and took along as much of the local population as it could find on the way back to Pursat and Battambang.¹¹¹

107 R.B. Smith, 'Politics and Society in Vietnam during the Early Nguyen Period: 1802-1862', Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1974, p.156.

See also, Danny J. Whitfield, Historical and Cultural Dictionary of Vietnam, Historical and Cultural Dictionaries of Asia No.7, Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, inc., 1976.

108 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, pp.144-45.

109 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.144; Marcel Gauthier, Ming Mang, Paris: Larose, 1935, pp.143-44; see also, DNTL, Vol.XIV, p.14; Minh Menh Chinh Yeu, Vol.V, book 21, pp.2a or 158.

110 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.144.

111 Ibid. p.145; Moura, p.109; Leclère, pp.417-18.

Princes Im and Duong were also taken back to Battambang. Before leaving, the Thai demolished the citadels and burnt down Phnom Penh.¹¹²

Various factors contributed to the failure of the Thai expedition of 1833-34. The timing of the expedition was wrong, as Ming Mang's forces had already gained the upper hand over the rebels in Saigon where the latter were besieged; therefore Ming Mang could afford to put up an important army to counter-attack the invading Thai army in Chaudoc and Ang Giang. The Thai naval forces encountered difficulties with their war junks sailing through the canal deep inside the country as the level of the water had started to fall by this time of the year. One Thai chronicle of the third reign mentions that the Thai commanding general of the naval forces had to use war elephants to tow boats stuck in the mud until they reached the deep water.¹¹³ This had disastrous effects on the Thai armies' capability, as the mobility of the troops was greatly reduced.

The inability of the Thai to intervene earlier can probably be explained by the difficulties in communication, and also by the fact that the Thai had just a few years earlier put down a rebellion in Vientiane. Raising an army of tens of thousand men like this one certainly took a great deal of time as 'mobilisation in Siam was a rickety institution'.¹¹⁴ Tactical and logistic problems were the

112 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.1, p.145.

113 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.1, p.144.

114 D.P. Chandler, Cambodia before the French, p.108. For details of mobilisation of troops in Thailand, see 'Tamnan Kan Ken Thahan' in Prachum Phongsawadan, phak 23, pp.42-67.

main cause of the debacle.¹¹⁵ The Thai armies were operating far from their food supply bases and their exactions from, and mistreatments of, the Cambodian people ruled out all chance of cooperation and help from the latter. A Cambodian regional source, the Wat Krouch Chronicle, relates that after the Vietnamese had suffered defeat in the first Thai offensives, they brought pressure to bear upon King Chan, who was in their care, to launch an appeal to the Cambodian people to rise up against the Thai throughout the country.

When the people heard the King [Chan] call upon them to revolt against the Thai troops, everyone was happy and rose up everywhere without exception; from Baphnom, Prey Veng to Romeas Hek where Thai troops were stationed, the Cambodians chased and killed them as the latter were caught by surprise.¹¹⁶

This popular uprising had detrimental effects upon the morale of the Thai army. Thai chronicles termed it the 'treachery of the Cambodians'.¹¹⁷ The Vietnamese army under the command of Tran Van Nang and Truong Ming Giang, followed the Thai army to Phnom Penh where Tran Van Nang fell very ill. He returned to Saigon and died soon after. Truong Ming Giang took over the command of the Vietnamese army in mopping-up operations in Cambodia.¹¹⁸

King Chan returned to Phnom Penh in April 1834 under Vietnamese escort. The Wat Krouch chronicle related that

115 See Prachum Phraratchaniphon Phrabat Somdet Phra Nang Klao Chao Yuhua, p.142; Kulap, pp.549-50.

116 Wat Krouch, Vol.II, p.19.

117 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.145.

118 DNTL, Vol.XIV, p.61.

Upon his arrival in the capital, he [Chan] saw the place deserted, he wept deeply in sorrow. The palace was completely destroyed, trees in the compound were chopped down, houses in the market-place and along the streets were all burnt down.¹¹⁹

As soon as the kingdom was 'pacified', Ming Mang sent special envoys to Phnom Penh to examine thoroughly every aspect of affairs that needed to be dealt with virtuously in the future. In a memorial to the Emperor, these envoys listed, among other things, six items as being of first priority. These included construction of military camps with walls and moats, the separation of civilian matters from the military affairs of the garrison, storage of food supplies in all military camps, reward and punishment of the Cambodian ocnha according to their merits and crimes, interdiction of the sending of representatives of the Cambodian court to Bangkok, and the re-organisation of the Cambodian army and its equipment.¹²⁰ Indeed the most urgent task of the Vietnamese was to strengthen their military presence and consolidate their control in order to face the eventuality of another Thai attack. During this same year, the Governor of Battambang died. Rama III appointed Prince Im to the position, and Prince Duong to be head of the district of Mongkolborei. This had confirmed Vietnamese suspicions and fear of Thai intentions in Cambodia. By appointing the Princes to Battambang and Mongkolborei, Rama III expected that Im and Duong could gather followers and support from the Cambodian people which

119 Wat Krouch, Vol.III, p.5

120 DNTL, Vol.XIV, pp.55-60.

would be crucial for the Thai army in case of another war against the Vietnamese in the future.¹²¹

From his return to Phnom Penh after the Thai *débâcle* until his death in early January 1835, King Chan seemed to almost lose his grasp over the affairs of the kingdom to Truong Ming Giang and his associates. This was understandable since Chan owed his throne for the second time to the Vietnamese and moreover this time he was re-instated by force of arms. The previous arrangement between Gia Long and Rama I in the aftermath of the 1812-13 to 'mother' and 'father' of Cambodia became ipso facto obsolete and inoperative.

Truong Ming Giang tried to normalize relations with the Thai as soon as he took over the control of Cambodia. In 1834, he sent a delegation of sorts, with a letter for Bodin Decha Singh in Battambang, ostensibly proposing the restoration of friendship as of old. This unofficial exchange of letters did not produce any better relation between the two main contenders.¹²²

Chan was survived by four daughters, but no son.¹²³ Ming Mang originally thought of making Princess Ben, the eldest daughter of King Chan by neang Tep (whose connection with Bangkok was well known) Queen of Cambodia on condition that she would marry one of his sons. The ocnha objected to the proposal and the project was called off.¹²⁴ The choice fell upon Princess Mei, second-eldest

121 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.154; Kulap, p.774; 'Phongsawadan Muang Pratabang', p.143; see also, Chotmai het Kiev Kap Khamen lek Yuan nai Ratchakan thi 3, in Prachum Phongsawadan, phak thi 67, pp.11-12.

122 DNTL, Vol.XIV, p.287.

123 Nupparot, p.181; Moura, p.111.

124 Kulap, Vol.II, pp.785-86; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.159.

daughter of Chan, who was made Queen four months later by the Vietnamese. In the meantime, Truong Ming Giang was commissioned by Ming Mang to run all affairs in Cambodia.¹²⁵ At least five thousand Vietnamese troops were stationed in Phnom Penh and intensive military training was seen going on in various military camps in the city during the early months of 1834, according to the account of an eyewitness.¹²⁶ Truong Ming Giang requisitioned elephants and horses throughout the kingdom and it was reported that at least sixty to seventy elephants were in the Vietnamese military camps in Phnom Penh.¹²⁷ In the market-places, the merchants were most Vietnamese who had been brought in since Chan's death. Chauvea Long and his colleagues, all dressed in Vietnamese mandarin costumes, were ordered by the Vietnamese to see them every morning either to report to them about the daily business of the administration or to receive orders from them, allegedly coming from Hué.¹²⁸ The Cambodian people would probably have preferred to have Im or Duong back as kings, instead of Mei who was officially to the Vietnamese only princesses. An edict of Ming Mang bestowed upon Mei the title of Quan Chua or princess, and upon her three other sisters the title of Huyen Quan or Chief of Sub-prefecture. Ming Mang also wrote to Truong Ming Giang saying:

... you should be tolerant, generous and gentle, but firm in your task of improving their customs and manners, of pacifying

125 Minh Menh Chinh Yeu, Vol.VI, book 25, pp.33b-34a or 261-62; see also, Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, pp.70-71.

126 'Chotmai het Kiev Kap Khamen lek Yuan', nai Ratchakan thi 3, in Prachum Phongsawadan, phak 67 & 68, Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1969, pp.71-90, the testimony of Neak Suan.

127 Ibid, p.81.

128 Ibid, p.82. Long was promoted to the rank of Talaha or chauvea by Chan since Chan's return in 1834.

and unifying the people; let them respect in awe and cherish the virtue of the Imperial Court again.¹²⁹

The Governor of An-giang Province, Truong Phuc Cuong, was commissioned as the Imperial representative to perform the ceremony of investiture of Mei and her sisters. The ceremony was similar to the one performed twenty-eight years before in Oudong for their father, King Chan. Princess Mei, her sisters and officials of the Cambodian court had to kneel down on the floor in front of a ceremonial table on which the imperial edict was placed and to perform the five obeisances (ngu bai) by bowing the head up and down to the floor.¹³⁰

When Rama III learnt about Chan's death, he wrote to Bodin Decha Singh in Pursat where the latter was building up fortifications that

Cambodia, this time, is disappearing because Chan, still young, who has died during a wartime like this, has caused grave concern to us. We should think about bringing Cambodia back under our control again... If [you are] unable to bring it back under control, [you] must destroy Cambodia and turn it into a jungle...¹³¹

From the Vietnamese viewpoint, Cambodia was their conquered territory, since they had defeated the Thai by force of arms. This view was reinforced after the death of Chan. They started the re-organisation of the military and administrative structures of the kingdom. They divided the country into 32 phu or prefectures and two (special?) huyen or sub-prefectures, to all of which they gave

129 Minh Menh Chinh Yeu, Vol.VI, book 25, p.34a or 262; see also, Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.171 and Kulap, p.807.

130 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, pp.18-25; see also Nupparot, p.182.

131 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, p.160; Kulap, p.788.

Vietnamese names.¹³² Cambodia became Tran Tay Thanh or 'the Western Citadel'. The Vietnamese governing body in Cambodia was composed of eight high-ranking officials: one Tuong Quan or General-in-Chief (who was Truong Ming Giang himself), one Tham Tan Dai Than or High-ranking Counsellor (Le Dai Cuong), one Thu De Doc or General Responsible for Administrative Affairs, (Bui Cong Huyen), one Hiep Tan or Colonel, and four Chanh Lanh Binh and Pho Lanh Binh or Chiefs and Deputy Military Commanders.¹³³ Numerous military and civilian cadres, and teachers as well, were sent to Cambodia. Throughout the kingdom, the proportion in the troops was one Vietnamese to four enlisted Cambodians.¹³⁴ The districts were administered by Vietnamese governors for military affairs and seconded by a Cambodian ocnha.

As the Vietnamese were building up their military strength in Cambodia, in 1836, Rama III ordered Bodin Decha Singh to start mobilising troops in eastern Cambodia and southern Laos, which were under Thai control, by first up-dating local census figures of all able-bodied men in the region.¹³⁵ Nevertheless the Thai did not intervene militarily until 1841.

Although Cambodia seemed to be a heavy burden on the resources of Hué at least during this time, as a Vietnamese source has revealed that Truong Ming Giang in a memorial to Ming Mang requested

132 See Le Huong, Su Cao Mien, footnotes p.188; Leclère, p.422; Phung Van Dan, 'La formation du territoire du Viet Nam', RSEA, 1963, pp.243-294 and 1964, pp.127-177.

133 Leclère, p.422-23; see also DNTL, Vol.XVIII, p.220.

134 Wat Krouch, Vol.III, pp.5-6; Kulap, pp.807-808.

135 Kulap, p.814; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.I, pp.177-78.

yearly supplies of rice and money to sustain his troops in Cambodia,¹³⁶ the long-term economic and territorial advantages of the Vietnamese adventure in Cambodia were obvious. The Vietnamese programme in Cambodia was comprehensive. Besides military activity and administrative reforms, it contained a mission civilisatrice ranging from the attempt to change Cambodian clothing and the Cambodian way of thinking, through educational reform to destroying Cambodian beliefs and the political structure of the kingdom.¹³⁷ Truong Ming Giang forcibly carried out this policy throughout the country for the rest of the 1830's. To reward their accomplishments in Cambodia, Ming Mang promoted Truong Ming Giang and his colleagues based in Cambodia to a higher grade. He said: 'the border of 'Tran Tay Thanh' is an important area. Recently, Truong Ming Giang has obeyed the imperial orders and carried out his duty perfectly...'.¹³⁸ Giang was promoted to Dai Hoc Si, Lord Chancellor of the Empire, and concurrently Tuong Quan, Supreme Chief in Cambodia, as well as Lanh Tong Doc, Governor of the Provinces of An Giang and Hatien.¹³⁹

Truong Ming Giang proceeded to replace Cambodian officials and military units by Vietnamese throughout the kingdom. Five to six thousand Vietnamese civilians moved into Cambodia to settle every

136 DNTL, Vol.XVIII, p.83; see also Woodside, Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A comparative study of Nguyen and Ch'ing civil government in the first half of the nineteenth century, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971, p.253.

137 Woodside, p.254; see also Nupparot, p.182; DNTL, Vol.XVIII, pp.65 & 341.

138 DNTL, Vol.XVIII, p.220.

139 Ibid, p.231.

year.¹⁴⁰ In early 1839, Ming Mang sent in 4,000 more naval and infantry officers and enlisted men to take over the administration of the provinces, as well as their defence. Truong Ming Giang started to replace the district chiefs of the thirteen provinces surrounding Phnom Penh first,¹⁴¹ for they did not rely on Cambodian troops to defend their positions. They used the Cambodians to grow rice and to do other corvée-labour like cutting trees in the jungles instead.¹⁴² Towards the end of 1839, Im, who had been for some time disappointed with the Thai for he expected the Thai King to make him King of Cambodia, took advantage of Bodin Decha Singh's absence from Battambang and defected to the Vietnamese. He burnt down the barracks and carried off several thousand inhabitants with him on his way to the vietnamese garrison in Pursat. 'Im is a traitor', Ming Mang wrote to Truong Ming Giang when he learnt about Im's defection, 'his crime must not be forgiven, his capital punishment must not be regretted'.¹⁴³ When Im reached Phnom Penh, he was escorted immediately to Vinh Long where he was imprisoned on Ming Mang's orders.

140 DNTL, Vol.XXI, p.11.

141 Ibid, p.19.

142 Ibid, p.39.

143 Ibid, p.269.

CHAPTER THREE
REBELLION AND THE THAI-VIETNAMESE WAR
IN CAMBODIA, 1840-1845

After sending Im off to Vinh Long, Truong Ming Giang thought of making a surprise attack on the Thai garrison at Battambang. The reason was that Im's defection which had almost emptied the population of the whole province without the Thai having noticed, constituted a good example of the enemy's 'negligence'.¹ He encouraged Talaha Long, the Kralahom and the Yumareach to lead a military expedition of several thousand men, made up of Cambodian troops with food provisions for ten days, to Battambang. In order to boost the morale of the Cambodian army, he issued orders that rewards in cash would be given to anyone who captured or killed the enemy.² Truong Ming Giang planned to send an army made up of Vietnamese troops, about five hundred strong, to follow the Talaha's as a relief army.³ The Vietnamese were eager to attack the Thai positions in Battambang because they believed that it was 'an opportunity not to be missed'.⁴ They wanted to take advantage of what was in their view the state of unpreparedness of the enemy, and also to test the capability and the reliability of the Cambodian army. However, they did not want themselves to engage into a direct confrontation with the Thai.

1 DNTL, Vol.XXI, p.271 and Vol.XXII, pp.15, 38, 56.

2 Ibid.

3 DNTL, Vol.XXI, p.272.

4 Ibid.

However, Long and his colleagues refused to lead the expedition on the pretext that 'Cambodian soldiers were cowards and the Thai were already on the alert; therefore the operation would not be successful'.⁵ Long was probably right about the vigilance of the Thai following Im's defection. Rama III, when he learnt about Im's flight, hastily despatched Bodin Decha Singh with an army of about five thousand men to Battambang to investigate the incident, as well as to defend the city against a possible attack by the Vietnamese.⁶

The refusal of the Talaha, kralahom and yumareach to obey Truong Ming Giang's orders resulted in their arrest by the latter and sending off to Vietnam to be imprisoned. They were sent separately a few months later, in the second half of 1840 to Hanoi, Bach Ninh and Hung Yen in the northern part of Vietnam, respectively.⁷ Before they were sent to North Vietnam, the three accused were demoted by Giang to mere non-commissioned officers of the Vietnamese army, as cai doi, chanh doi truong and doi truong respectively.⁸ Their crimes were non co-operation, ungratefulness to the Imperial Court and concealment of the real number of able-bodied men by under-estimating the total by as many as 15000 men or more.⁹

5 Ibid.

6 Kulap, Anam-Syam Yudh, pp.837-38; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.13.

7 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.157; see also, Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.16.

8 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.157.

9 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.157.

The Vietnamese seemed to have firm control of the country at the end of the 1830s. A complete population census of each province had been compiled for taxation purposes as well as for military ones, even including the latest arrivals who were brought in by Im in late 1839 from the Battambang region, and all land had been registered by the ocnha in fact, but under Vietnamese control and orders.¹⁰ Nevertheless, at one stage Ming Mang was still impatient with the slowness of the 'Vietnamisation of Cambodia'.¹¹ By early 1840, he sent more Vietnamese cadres to Cambodia to carry out this policy of complete assimilation of Cambodia to Vietnam. Further military and administrative re-organisation was undertaken, and all Cambodian names of places were replaced by Vietnamese ones. Even the Cambodian people were given a new name by the Vietnamese. They were called Tan dan which literally meant 'new people'.¹²

Ming Mang ordered that Cambodia be transformed into a tinh or province of Vietnam with a tong-doc or governor-general, tuan-phu or ordinary provincial governors, bo-chinh or provincial treasurers and an-sat or provincial judges to take over the responsibility for its administration, as in other Vietnamese provinces. He also

10 DNTL, Vol.XXII, pp.9-10.

11 DNTL, Vol.XXI, p.274. Ming Mang said: 'The entire territory of Cambodia has already been incorporated into the map of our country; it has been transformed into our phu and huyen; we have appointed officials and bestowed upon them honours and titles. If the [Cambodian] cities are [still left] separately [as such] and the [Cambodian] lands are [still left] separately [as such], how can the change in the [Cambodian] customs and manners occur [in order to be] really assimilated [with ours]?'

12 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.9.

instructed that the ocnha be trained and imbued with 'civilised manners of the city people' (a reference to the 'uncivilised habits of the Cambodians').¹³

In Truong Ming Giang's memorial to Hué presenting the administrative reorganisation of Cambodia in response to Ming Mang's instructions, the tinh of Tran Tay Thanh or Cambodia was divided into ten phu or prefectures, with twenty-three huyen or sub-prefectures, all of them receiving new Vietnamese names. The memorial gave also the exact number of male adults of each phu.

These new phu and huyen were:

1. Phu of Tran Tay, with two huyen, Thai-an and Lu-an, with 6769 male adults registered; the huyen of Thai-an was the main town of the phu;
2. Phu of Nghi-hoa with the huyen of Thuong-phong and the huyen of Phong-nhuong, with 6570 male adults registered. The capital town of the phu was Thuong-phong;
3. Phu of Nam-ninh, with three huyen, Nam-thinh, Phu-nam and Nam-thai. The phu had 4326 male adults registered and its main town was Nam-thinh.
4. Phu of Vu-cong with three huyen, the huyen of Binh-tiem, Ky-to and Trung-thuy. This phu had 6329 male adults registered and its main town was Binh-tiem;

These four phu were the direct responsibility of the tuong-guan and tham-tan of the Tran-tay thanh, which itself was under the control of Truong Ming Giang and his deputy.

13 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.130. For details of administrative and territorial organisation of cochinchina, see Aubaret, Gia-ding-thung-chi, Histoire et Description de la Basse Cochinchine, Note II, pp.345-347.

5. Phu of Hai-tay (literally the phu of the Western-Sea which probably designated the regions on the western banks of the lakes, that is, the region of Pursat) with two huyen, Hai-binh and Thau-trung, with 2501 male adults registered; its capital town was Hai-binh;

6. Phu of Ninh-thai with three huyen, Ngoc-bi, Giang-huu and Thai-thinh, it had 5257 male adults registered; its main town was Ngoc-bi;

These two phu were under the jurisdiction of the Tuyen phu su of the phu of Hai-tay;

7. The phu of Hai-dong (literally the phu of the Eastern-Sea, which probably designated the regions on the eastern banks of the lakes, that is, the region of Chikreng-Kampong Thom) had also two huyen, Hai-ninh and Tap-ninh, with 1804 male adults registered; its capital town was Hai-ninh;

8. The phu of Ha-binh had two huyen, Trung-ha and Phuc-lai, with 2808 male adults registered; its main town was Trung-ha;

These two phu were under the jurisdiction of the Tuyen phu su of Hai-dong;

9. The phu of Son-tinh, with two huyen, Que-lam and Son-dong, had a total number registered adults of 475; its main town was Que-lam;

10. The phu of My-lam with also two huyen, My-tai and Hoa-lam, had a total 3226 male adults registered.

These two last phu were under the jurisdiction of the Tuyen phu su of Son-tinh.

For the whole territory of the kingdom now under Vietnamese control, the number of male adults registered with the Vietnamese authority was slightly over 40,000.¹⁴

As for the army, Giang divided the Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, excluding the local Cambodian troops, into twenty-six co or regiments which were grouped in five doanh, military camps or regions, of five co each. The twenty-sixth co was a special regiment in charge of the training of war-elephants.

The five doanh were: the Trung doanh or Military Camp of the Centre, with 49 doi or companies totalling 2,695 men; the Tien doanh or Military Camp of the Front with 45 doi totalling 2,116 men; the Ta doanh or Military Camp of the Left with 46 doi totalling 2,530 men; the Huu doanh or Military Camp of the Right, with 40 doi totalling 2,200 men; and the Hau doanh or Military Camp of the Rear with 41 doi totalling 2,555 men.¹⁵

The last step in the 'Vietnamisation policy' in Cambodia was to destroy the symbol of its unity. Ming Mang ordered that Queen Mei and her sisters be demoted from their status as dependent monarch and that high-ranking officials of the Cambodian Court be demoted to mere salaried officials of the Vietnamese court. Ming Mang had changed and bestowed upon the Quan-chua [princess] of Chan-lap [Cambodia] Ngoc Van [Ang Mei] the title of My-lam quan

14 DNTL, Vol.XXII, pp.130-132; see also, Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.423. Leclère wrote that 'Cambodia was divided into eight phu or provinces, comprising eighteen huyen or arrondissements'. He missed out two phu, the phu of Ninh-thai and the phu of Hai-dong which had respectively three and two huyen each.

15 DNTL, Vol.XXII, pp.134-135. The total number of the Vietnamese army in Cambodia in early 1840 was 11,795 men; see also Leclere, p.423.

chua [Princess of the phu of My-lam]; huyen quan Ngoc Bien [Ang Ben] the title of Lu-an huyen quan [Princess of the huyen of lu-an]; Ngoc Thu [Ang Peou] the title of Thau-trung huyen quan [Princess of the huyen of Thau-trung]; Ngoc Nguyen [Ang Snguon] the title of Tap-ninh huyen quan [Princess of the huyen of Tap-ninh].¹⁶

As such, he provided for them yearly allowances as follows: 500 quan and 100 phuong of rice for Mei; 300 quan and 80 phuong of rice for Ben; and 200 quan and 60 phuong of rice to each of Mei's two other sisters, Peou and Snguon. Two companies of soldiers totalling 100 men were assigned ostensibly to protect Mei, in reality to keep close watch on her. Mei's three sisters had also a company of thirty guards for each of them¹⁷

The demotion of Mei and her sisters was followed a month later by the demotion of the Talaha Long and his two other colleagues, the Kralahom and the Yumareach.¹⁸

So far, the Vietnamese policy in Cambodia seemed to work perfectly well. Ming Mang, apparently satisfied with what had been accomplished in Cambodia, justified the take-over of the kingdom in these words:

Chan-lap has been a servant of this dynasty for more than a hundred years and has paid tribute appropriately. The Imperial Court gives it the status of a vassal country... But the former King Chan was a coward and unable to improve his strength through his own efforts. During Gia-long's reign, the Thai invaded and ransacked the country once; King Chan was forced to abandon the country and fled to stay in the old

16 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.137; see also, Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, pp.22 to 25 and Leclere, p.424.

17 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.137; quan is a coin used in Vietnam at that time; phuong is a measure for grain.

18 See page 65 of this chapter.

citadel of Gia-dinh; therefore the country did not belong to him any longer. The late Emperor The To Cao hoang de [Gia-long], because of his fondness of him [Chan] for his sincerity and the submissiveness [that Chan has] expressed on many occasions, sent a general and an army to rout the Thai, retook the country and made him [Chan] king again to protect the borders of the kingdom. He [Gia-long] had no intention of taking this country and making it our district. But since then, simply because they [the Cambodians] were lazy and leading a dissolute life, they did not know how to reorganise the administration of their country. During the 14th year of Ming Mang's reign, the Thai secretly carried out a surprise attack again [the 1833-34 expedition] and, he [Chan] again ran away to Vinh-long, so the land and the people of Chan-lap again did not belong to him any longer. We [Ming Mang] sent a big army to rout the Thai; we drove them away and recovered the citadels and assembled the people. This time, we took over the country and made it our district, because this time we had seized the territory of the Thai and not taken the territory of Cambodia.¹⁹

Truong Ming Giang and his colleagues allegedly discovered later that at least Princess Ben had maintained secret communication with the enemy. She was accused of preparing to escape from Phnom Penh to join her mother, Neang Tep, who was living with the Thai, with the help of one of her uncles, an official at the Thai court who had successfully slipped into the capital to meet her. Giang found that it was more prudent to send Mei, her two other sisters, Im's mother and other members of the royal family to Saigon while Ben, who had been arrested, was housed in the Vietnamese military barracks in Phnom Penh pending her trial on the crime of collaborating with the enemy.²⁰ According to Thai and Cambodian sources, Ben was later drowned by the Vietnamese in the Mekong River in Long Ho where she was sent in the month following her

19 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.144.

20 Op. cit., pp.177-180; see also Kulap, pp.839-840 and Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, pp.15-16.

arrest.²¹ Both sources also suggest that the Vietnamese tried to send as many ocnha as they could to Vietnam in order to deprive Cambodia of its leaders and cadres so that they could place the kingdom under their control indefinitely without fear of any uprising by the Cambodian people.²²

However, these last Vietnamese moves sparked off the rebellion, in August 1840, of the Cambodian people against the Vietnamese presence in the kingdom.²³ Disturbances in Cambodia had been noticed earlier, ever since the return of prince Im. An ocnha in Phnom Penh was beheaded by the Vietnamese for gathering followers, as was another ocnha in Kampong Chhnang province.²⁴ Ming Mang had been aware since early 1840 that the Cambodians were rioting against the Vietnamese.²⁵ Security in the kingdom had been deteriorating, especially since the defection of Im. On the Thai side, Bodin Decha Singh had reinforced Thai positions in Battambang to face the threat of an attack by the Vietnamese. Skirmishes along the borders were reported and rumours of an attack by the Thai army were spread all over the country.²⁶

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- 21 Kulap, p.840; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.16; Nupparot, p.186; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.III, p.39; see also, Leclère, p.427-428; Moura, p.113.
- 22 Kulap, p.841; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.16; Nupparot, p.187.
- 23 Kulap, p.842; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.16; see also Nupparot, p.187.
- 24 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.16; see also Minh Menh Chinh Yeu, Vol.V, p.41b, 206.
- 25 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.119.
- 26 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.126.

Many factors contributed to the rebellion of 1840. There was deep resentment on the part of the Cambodian people in general towards the Vietnamese, resulting from oppression and mistreatment ever since the latter brought King Chan back in the aftermath of the 1813 expedition, corvée-labour, harsh repression of the population allegedly involved in the rebellion in 1820 and 1837 in Kampong Som and Kampong Svay.²⁷ This was increased by suppression of the customs and traditions which symbolised the homogeneity and distinctiveness of Cambodian society, and finally by last attempt of the Vietnamese to deprive Cambodia of her leaders by sending off to Vietnam her queen and other members of the Cambodian royal family as well as the ocnha.

A Thai document described the outburst of the revolt in these lines:

...on the third day of the waning moon of the 9th month [being a Sunday, the 16th of August 1840, according to Thiphakarawong's version of the Thai chronicles of the third reign], all ocnha agreed to plot against the Vietnamese in every town and city. The Cambodians arrested the Vietnamese soldiers on duty protecting the country and killed some of them; they arrested the Vietnamese merchants and killed some of them; they arrested the Vietnamese guards in charge of the prisons and sent some of them to Chao Phraya Bodin Decha in Battambang, and some others to Phraya Ratchanikon at the town of Russei.

In the revolt many Vietnamese throughout the country were killed. Vietnamese military chiefs were unable to quell the rebellion because they were caught by surprise.²⁸

In a memorial to Ming Mang requesting reinforcement troops to cope with the situation in Cambodia, Truong Ming Giang acknowledged his negligence which led to the rebellion.

27 See chapter II, p.42 ff

28 Kulap, pp.842-843; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.16, Nupparot, p.187; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.III, p.41.

The Cambodian officials and people, secretly in concert with one another, betrayed us only because they saw that our army was small; therefore, every day they increased and spread more troubles. Not to mention the Thai who were coveting from outside or because of negligence [which had caused] much trouble to be worried about, troops stationed in neighbouring provinces were needed...²⁹

Ming Mang agreed to Giang's request and ordered Saigon to send an army of ten thousand men to assist Giang to put down the rebellion. In order to stimulate the morale of the army, he also issued an edict stipulating cash rewards for those who had killed the enemy.³⁰ In spite of major reinforcements from Cochinchina, the Vietnamese were however still unable to suppress the revolt. Truong Ming Giang put the blame on Talaha Long and his two other colleagues now in prison in Vietnam. He said that those who were leading the rebellion were of these three ocnhas' group. He demanded that the three ocnha be severely punished for the troubles in Cambodia.³¹ Summoned from Hanoi to be interrogated in Hué, Talaha Long denied Giang's charges. However, probably under the Vietnamese threat, Long wrote to his relatives and followers in Cambodia asking them to lay down arms and to call off the revolt, so that his 'punishment would be alleviated'.³²

The Vietnamese in Phnom Penh realised by this time that to regain control of Cambodia by using only force was a very difficult, if not impossible, task. They wrote to Hué saying that

29 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.229.

30 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.230.

31 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.232.

32 Ibid.

The Cambodian troops and people of Tran-tay followed one another to revolt. We have sent an army to suppress them many times and still the country has not been completely pacified because of their [the Cambodians] long-standing savage habits, either they obeyed and followed [orders] or betrayed friends and acted contrarily to orders. They listened to and followed their military chiefs [the ocnha]. Now to strike and vanquish them by force is not hard, but to pacify and comfort them again is difficult, because Tran-tay is also adjoining to Thailand...³³

Therefore they requested that Queen Mei be sent back to Cambodia in order to soothe the Cambodian people and that Prince Im, who had been imprisoned for a long term, be released temporarily.³⁴ Ming Mang did not agree to this view and turned down the request. He blamed Truong Ming Giang and his team-mates for the failure to prevent the rebellion from happening.

These Cambodians rose up and made trouble because mainly Tuong-quan [that was Truong Ming Giang] and Tham-tan [his deputy] did not know how to investigate things every day and to prevent them from happening...³⁵

Ming Mang saw no advantage in softening his stand towards the rebels and ordered that their suppression must be hard. As for the release of Im and the return of Mei and her sisters, the Vietnamese Emperor said that the latter must be punished because they were of Im's group and that, as for Im, his crime must not be forgiven.³⁶

The Vietnamese were indeed in a difficult situation, for they were operating in a hostile land and surrounded by enemies everywhere. Hué sent more armaments and ammunition to Cambodia with additional military cadres. Truong Ming Giang's general staff was

33 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.252.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.253.

also reshuffled.³⁷ At the end of 1840, the Vietnamese army stationed in Cambodia, including the latest reinforcement troops, totalled about 20,000 men.³⁸ Ming Mang also despatched two imperial envoys, Le Van Duc and Duan Uan, to Phnom Penh to investigate the situation and assist Truong Ming Giang in dealing with the rebels.³⁹

Before the military strength of the Vietnamese, the rebels had no chance to sustain the struggle for long on their own, as their forces were scattered throughout the country without strong and unified leadership. Messengers were sent by the rebel ocnha to Bodin Decha Singh in Battambang, telling him that the Vietnamese would probably attack the Thai garrison there and in Siemreap around November and also requesting the Thai king to release Prince Duong from house arrest in Bangkok to lead the Cambodian people fighting against the Vietnamese.⁴⁰

When Bodin Decha Singh learnt about the rebellion, he started raising a sizable army in preparation for the next expedition. By November, 1840, the Thai army began to intervene in Cambodia. Bodin Decha Singh divided his army, made up of Thai, Lao and Khmer, into two columns. One was directed towards Chikreng and Kampong Thom in the eastern region of the lakes; the other, led by Bodin Decha him-

37 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.290.

38 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.314; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.43; see also Kulap, p.944.

39 Ca-Van-Thinh, 'Le mandarin Doan-Uan'pacificateur de l'Ouest' (1794-1848), in BSEI, Vol.XVI, 1941, pp.41-46; see also Le Huong, Su Cao Mien, Saigon: 1970, p.188, footnote; DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.329.

40 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, pp.20 and 25; see also Kulap, p.849 and Nupparot, p.188.

self, took the route to Pursat.⁴¹ According to Thai sources, when Bodin Decha Singh reached Pursat, he was met by a delegation of 18 ocnha who presented him with petitions for Rama III, in which they requested the return of Prince Duong to Cambodia as king to lead the fighting.⁴²

The Thai army attacked the Vietnamese position in Pursat but was unable to overrun it since the Vietnamese of the garrison were fighting a defensive battle. During the siege, Bodin Decha received a number of Vietnamese prisoners who were handed over by the Cambodians. These prisoners had been captured in the region of Phnom Penh by the rebels. During interrogation, they told Bodin Decha that the Thai column which headed for Chikreng and Kampong Thom had disintegrated before entering into battle with the Vietnamese forces led by Truong Ming Giang himself, and that the soldiers were running into hiding in the jungle because they were frightened when they saw a big Vietnamese army coming and when they heard impressive noises of 'gongs, drums, horses and mules as well as the sound of cannons'.⁴³ They also told Bodin Decha that Truong Ming Giang's army was now heading towards Pursat after pacifying the region of Kampong Thom and Chikreng.

Unable to overrun the Vietnamese garrison by force of arms and faced with the news of the coming military expedition led by Truong

41 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, pp.24-25.

42 Ibid; see also Kulap, pp.867-68 and 915-16; Nupparot, p.188; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.III, p.41. For details of Bodin Decha's letter to Moha Ammat (royal attendant) for Rama III in support of the ocnha demand, see Chotmaihet in Prachum Phongswadan (PP), Vol.42, pp.244-265.

43 Kulap, pp.879-880.

Ming Giang, as well as with food shortages for his men, Bodin Decha sent a delegation to negotiate with the Vietnamese commanding officers of the post for their surrender in exchange for a safe conduct for all Vietnamese troops and officers to return to Vietnam. In his letter to the Vietnamese, Bodin Decha Singh exaggerated the strength of his army and the power of his armaments. He wrote that he had not taken over the garrison by force only on moral grounds. 'The Thai do not want to commit a sin by killing the Vietnamese... They still have pity on their enemies', added Bodin Decha in his letter.⁴⁴ Most likely because of communication problems, the Vietnamese agreed to surrender to Bodin Decha. The latter arranged the retreat of the Vietnamese from Pursat.⁴⁵ Before Bodin Decha let the Vietnamese go, he forced the commanding officers of the garrison to sign an agreement in which they pledged that their troops would return to Chaudoc, that they would write to all Vietnamese commanding officers whose troops were engaged in the repression of the rebel ocnha throughout the country asking them to withdraw to Vietnam, and that they would petition the Emperor of Vietnam to send envoys to Bangkok to re-establish relations as of old.⁴⁶ A Vietnamese source related that Bodin Decha Singh told the Vietnamese General Vu Duc Trung and his deputy, Nguyen Song Thanh, of the garrison in Pursat that:

44 For details of Bodin Decha's letter of persuasion sent to the Vietnamese in Pursat garrison, see Kulap, pp.885-890. Two copies of the letter were sent to the Vietnamese, one was written in Khmer and the other in Chinese script.

45 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.30; DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.383-384; see also, Leclère, p.428.

46 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, pp.28-29; see also, Kulap, pp.891-903.

Your country and Thailand, formerly, were always maintaining good and friendly neighbourly relations with each other. In the old days, when The To Cao Hoang de [Gia-long] stayed in Thailand, he pledged with the King of Thailand that the two countries would make sacrifices to help each other for ever... At the present time, if [we] want to have peaceful neighbourly relations as of old, let Cambodia be vassal of both of our countries; to stop all military activities, would not that really be advantageous to both of us?⁴⁷

Truong Ming Giang was not aware of the surrender of the Pursat garrison. He was very angry when he learnt the news. The three commanding officers of the garrison were deprived of their titles and locked up pending trial when they reached Phnom Penh. They were later executed on orders from Hue'.⁴⁸

The course of events in Cambodia worried Ming Mang, who despatched an imperial envoy, with 5,500 men to Phnom Penh in order to persuade the rebels to lay down arms and return to their homes and villages. The Vietnamese envoy issued letters, and commissioned Cambodian monks to hand them over to the rebel ocnha, pleading for their surrender. According to a Thai document, the letters read:

The Emperor of Vietnam ordered [me] to inquire into the grievances of the ocnha that have led to the rebellion throughout the country. Was it because of oppressions perpetrated by the Vietnamese officials? The Emperor asks all of you [the rebel ocnha] to come and explain [to me] in Phnom Penh, so I can petition the Emperor about the business of Cambodia which he has cherished, and continues to do so, for the well-being of the Cambodians.⁴⁹

The appeal had no response. In the meantime, the Vietnamese in Phnom Penh and Bodin Decha kept corresponding with each other about peace proposals, as probably both were stalling for time. As

47 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.384.

48 Kulap, p.912; see also DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.383.

49 Kulap, pp.911-912; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, pp.31-32.

for Bodin Decha, he had problems of food supplies for his army to sustain a Vietnamese offensive now, while for the Vietnamese the surrender of the Pursat garrison constituted a blow to the morale of their troops who had been harassed without respite by the rebels.⁵⁰ Bodin Decha returned to Battambang at the end of 1840 as food supplies for his men were running short.⁵¹ Soon after Bodin Decha reached Battambang, Rama III released Prince Duong from Bangkok where the latter had been kept under house arrest since 1837, as the result of his abortive attempt to join the Vietnamese in Phnom Penh in response to Truong Ming Giang's direct approach and promises to make him king while he was governor of Mongkulporey.

In Hué, Ming Mang died in January 1841, at the age of fifty as the aftermath of a fall from a horse. His eldest son succeeded him to the throne under the reign name of Thieu Tri.⁵² The new Emperor recalled the Vietnamese Imperial Envoy and his army from Phnom Penh, leaving Truong Ming Giang to be in charge of Cambodia as before.⁵³

50 See, 'Chotmai het Kiev kap Khamen lek Yuan nai Ratchakan thi 3', in PP, Vol.42, pp.231-237, about letters of the Vietnamese in Phnom Penh sent to Bodin Decha and the latter's letter of reply.

See also, Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, pp.38-43 and Kulap, pp.928-941.

See also DNTL, Vol.XXIII, pp.66-67. The exchange of letters between the Vietnamese and the Thai continued throughout early 1841.

51 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.30.

52 DNTL, Vol.XXII, p.388. Ming Mang had 78 sons and 64 daughters.

53 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.43; Kulap, p.942; see also DNTL, Vol.XXIII, p.64 which relates that Thieu Tri rehabilitated Truong Ming Giang and Le Van Duc; see also Khamhaikan Ruang Thap Yuan nai Ratchakan thi 3, Bangkok: Department of Fine Arts (Comp.), 1976, pp.3-4.

During the first few months of 1841, the situation in Phnom Penh was chaotic. Vietnamese troops, demoralised by constant harassment from the rebels as well as by famine and disease, deserted by hundreds to the Thai or to the Cambodians. Vietnamese civilians who had been brought in earlier as settlers also returned by the hundreds to Saigon.⁵⁴ In a testimony given to the Thai in Pursat, two Vietnamese officers who had deserted with a group of 106 Vietnamese soldiers, said that there was shortage of food in the garrison and that the Vietnamese troops as well as the settlers were stricken by dysentery which killed many people every day. They also said they had heard that the Thai 'had compassion and did not kill' the Vietnamese troops who were defeated earlier in Pursat and that now the Thai and Cambodian troops had besieged Vietnamese garrisons throughout the country.⁵⁵

Duong reached Battambang in early February 1841. Rama III bestowed upon him the style of Neak Preah Ang Duong and provided him, besides food provisions, with royal costumes and regalia (gold bowl, trays, betel service...) 'according to the honours of a Khmer king'. A crystal statue of Buddha in the seated position about a metre high, dressed in a golden robe, and a letter of advice were also included in the gifts for Duong.⁵⁶ Besides this, the Thai King sent with Duong presents to be distributed to the ocnha who had

54 'Chotmaihet Kiev Kap Khamen lek Yuan nai Ratchakan thi 3', in PP, Vol.42, pp.241-244; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, pp.37-38.

55 'Chotmaihet Kiev Kap Khamen...', pp.243-244.

56 See Kulap, p.917 for list of gifts from Rama III for Duong; see also 'Ruang Hetkan Muang Khamen Tonset', in PP phak 56, Vol.31, pp.175-176.

given allegiance to Duong, according to the discretion of the Thai general. These presents included a few hundred sets of clothes, some thirty sets of betel-trays, money etc...⁵⁷ As soon as Duong established himself in Battambang, Bodin Decha wrote to the ocnha telling them that Duong had now returned as king to Battambang as was requested by them and asked them to come and proclaim their pledge of allegiance to the Prince and at the same time to receive his 'blessings' for victory in the struggle against the Vietnamese. The letter also specified that those who were busy fighting, and so unable to come personally, should be represented by their sons.⁵⁸

In the letter for Duong and for the Thai general as well, Rama III gave profuse advice. He urged Duong, besides not behaving like his brothers, King Chan and Prince Im, who had betrayed the Thai kings by siding with the Vietnamese, to 'listen to and obey' Bodin Decha's orders, to 'agree' with him on all matters, not to 'act' beyond Bodin Decha's initiatives, to 'respect' him and always to 'carry out duties honestly and conscientiously' and to be 'grateful' to the Thai king.⁵⁹ This piece of advice reflected the Thai King's wishes which had a parallel in those of the Vietnamese emperors during the reigns of King Chan and Queen Mei in the 1830's. For all occasions, both during the tributary missions to Hué and in letters sent to the Cambodian court, the Vietnamese emperors never once failed to remind their protégés, i.e. Chan and

57 See Kulap, pp.917-918 for list of gifts from Rama III to the Ocnha; see also PP phak 56, Vol.31, pp.177-178.

58 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.35; Kulap, p.919.

59 PP phak 56, Vol.31, p.169.

Mei, to be 'loyal, submissive and grateful to the imperial court', hence to be obedient to the Vietnamese officials stationed in their kingdom.

Rama III, also in his letter, ordered Bodin Decha to make Pursat the capital city for Duong and to consult the latter about appointing the ocnha to office. Rama III also urged Duong to examine carefully the backgrounds of all ocnha before he proposed their names to Bodin Decha who officially appointed them to office.⁶⁰ Concerning the relationship with the ocnha, he warned Duong not to be 'credulous and easily influenced' by the latter. However he pointed out that once the ocnha had accepted him as king, he must treat them with respect, while keeping them in fear of punishment, and in awe of his merits and his intelligence in being able to detect their intentions beforehand. He must punish those ocnha who had committed mistakes according to their crime, with evidence to support each case, and not let them oppress or upset the people. He also urged Duong to maintain solidarity among the ocnha as the main strength in the fight against the Vietnamese.⁶¹

On military aspects, Rama III reminded Duong that the main aim of the Vietnamese was to prevent the Cambodian people from having a king; when the Cambodian people had no king to rely upon, they could occupy their territory. 'The Vietnamese are good in waging naval war, the Cambodians are good in fighting on land', the Cambodians must therefore think of preventing the Vietnamese from reaching towns and cities by water, warned the Thai monarch. He also wrote that when the Vietnamese could not do anything from out-

60 Ibid, pp.169-170.

61 Ibid, p.171.

side, they would send disguised Cambodians whom they could trust to stir up troubles from within. He warned Duong to be 'most careful, not to underestimate things, to know beforehand the intentions of the enemy' and accordingly to be fully prepared to attack them.⁶²

'If you are in short supply of rice, salt and other provisions, send messengers with letters to Bangkok; the King [Rama III] would be pleased to order the town of Trat, because Trat and Pursat are close to one another, to arrange elephants and carts to transport food to feed the country until it gradually returns to normalcy'. The letter said that Rama III had no desire for, or any other interest in Cambodia, but only cared about his prestige (of the Thai king) in the future for having salvaged Cambodia and preventing Buddhism from disappearing.⁶³ Rama III ended his long message by ordering Bodin Decha, in consultation with Duong and the ocnha, to reappoint members of the Buddhist clergy, most of whom had abandoned monkhood or fled the Vietnamese repression to safety in the areas under Thai control.⁶⁴

In a memorial to Bangkok in reply to Rama III's letter, the Thai general Bodin Decha requested a reinforcement army to back up his campaign in Cambodia. He wrote that:

If the army were only mainly made up of Lao and highland Khmer, it would not be strong, therefore unable to fight the Vietnamese. I beg that able military cadres with four to five thousand good fighters be sent in addition... This could help vanquish the Vietnamese.⁶⁵

62 Ibid, pp.172-173.

63 Ibid, p.173.

64 Ibid, pp.173-174.

65 Ibid, p.180.

The Thai were determined this time to take back Cambodia from the Vietnamese. In his letter, Bodin Decha added:

As far as the situation at this moment is concerned, either talking of establishing a relationship with the Vietnamese - no matter if it is a real and sincere one or only as a stratagem - or waging war of any kind would both be good... according to my humble viewpoint, since the final aim is to take over, no matter what, the control of the Cambodian country and its people. If we can not have Cambodia back, we will not leave it to the Vietnamese any longer either.⁶⁶

He also reported food shortages in the Thai camp in Pursat and the sending of the 5,000 odd strong army now stationed in Battambang to rebuild up the city of Pursat for Duong. He informed the Thai King that there were many pro-Thai ocnha who were ready to bring back their srok under the control of Duong and the Thai, but, he added, there were many srok too still under the control of the enemy and 'I still can not be sure that all the Cambodians will dissociated themselves from the Vietnamese'.⁶⁷ Bodin Decha said that he had sent out Cambodian messengers throughout the kingdom to encourage and sustain the fighting spirit of the Cambodians. He predicted that the enemy would launch a big offensive during the peak-time of the coming flood season in August-September.⁶⁸ In the rest of his memorial, he presented summarily the military strength and situation of the Cambodians, especially in the region of central Cambodia.

The Thai general moved Duong and his army to Pursat in March 1841 after they had been only for a month or so in Battambang.⁶⁹

66 Ibid, p.181.

67 Ibid, p.184.

68 Ibid, p.185.

69 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, pp.43-44.

The military fortune of the Vietnamese seemed to work against them with passing of time, as Duong and Bodin Decha now had gathered strong support from the inhabitants of the central and north-western regions of the country. In an attempt to counterbalance this, Truong Ming Giang requested Thieu Tri to send back Queen Mei, her sisters, Prince Im and other ocnha (all of whom had been detained since the previous year in Vietnam) in order to gain the support of the ocnha and the people.⁷⁰ However, only Queen Mei and her two sisters and Duong's mother were allowed to return as requested by Giang. The 'band of Yem [Im], Giao [?], Tra Long [Talaha Long], Nham Vu and La Kien, all have committed crimes; they cannot be forgiven'⁷¹ was the decision of the Vietnamese Emperor.

Mei's party arrived in Phnom Penh at the end of April 1841. Truong Ming Giang allowed her to use the official royal seal and returned to her the 'sacred sword', both of which symbolised the legitimacy of a monarch.⁷² He also allowed Mei to appoint the talaha, the kralahom and officials to essential posts in the administration, and had her issue letters to the ocnha and people throughout the kingdom pleading for their support.⁷³ Her call was of no avail.

70 DNTL, Vol.XXIII, p.133. Duong and Im were full brothers; their mother was neang Ros. Chan and Snguon were full brothers too; their mother was neang Out. Chan and Snguon's mother died in 1828 (see Nupparot, p.173; Veang Thioun, p.787; Moura, p.107; Nhu Vien, Vol.I., book 132, pp.66-67.

71 Ibid, p.134.

72 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.46; Kulap, p.950.

73 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, pp.46-47; Kulap, p.951; Nupparot, p.189.

The Vietnamese move worried Bodin Decha, who saw with good reason that Duong must be moved from Pursat, an inland town thinly populated, to Oudong, the former royal capital situated in the lower and southern part of the kingdom where lived the majority of the population. In concert with Duong and his ocnha, Bodin Decha and his five thousand strong army moved from Pursat and reached Oudong only two days after Mei and her party arrived in Phnom Penh.⁷⁴ Duong hurried, as did Mei, to appoint and distribute ranks and titles to the ocnha who had pledged him allegiance, and despatched them to various srok under the control of the rebels and the Thai.⁷⁵ Cambodia, at this particular time of her history, had two courts established about thirty kilometres or so away from one another, with two administrations competing for the support of a population under the direct command of two powerful foreign generals and their armies. However, in fact only the Thai and the Vietnamese, and to some extent a number of ocnha, were enemies to one another, and not the two Cambodian monarchs in Phnom Penh and Oudong.

According to a Thai chronicle of the Third Reign, as soon as they returned to Phnom Penh and learnt about Duong establishing himself in Oudong, the three Princesses and Duong's mother secretly sent a letter to Duong asking him to send an army to pick them up as they were preparing to escape from the Vietnamese. Unfortunately, the source added, a pro-Vietnamese ocnha knew about the plan and

74 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.46; Kulap, pp.948-950.

75 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.47.

denounced it to Truong Ming giang who accordingly put the 'conspirators' under tight watch.⁷⁶

The two contending armies in Phnom Penh and Oudong were roughly equivalent in strength. Testimonies of two Cham-Malay fishermen, captured with a group of ten others, all of them from Chruoy Changwar, who were sent to the Thai in Pursat for interrogation, provided a good account on the situation in Phnom Penh in mid-1841. They said they heard the Vietnamese saying that between 5,000 to 6,000 troops, along with more than a hundred warships, had been sent from Phnom Penh to Preah Trapeang [Travinh] in the Mékong Delta region to quell the rebellion of the Cambodians there, and only about the same number of Vietnamese troops were still left behind in Phnom Penh to defend it. Apart from the Vietnamese troops, they said that there were about two to three thousand Vietnamese, Chinese, Cham-Malay and Cambodian civilians.⁷⁷ These two eye-witnesses also reported that the Vietnamese were preparing all their fortresses, from Phnom Penh down to the south, for a defensive war. All Chinese, Cham-Malays and Cambodians were forbidden to enter their defences. Food was short every day in the towns, because local security was threatened by the rebels. The Vietnamese dared not go out of their camps looking for food to supplement their diet for fear of being murdered by the rebels who controlled the land and the forests. They also said that the Vietnamese were 'weary and weak'. They heard them saying 'we [the Vietnamese] will not attack

76 Ibid, p.48; see also Kulap, pp.955-956.

77 Khamhaikan Ruang Thap Yuan nai Ratchakan thi 3, testimony no.5, p.6 and testimony no.6, p.8.

the Cambodians; if the Thai and Cambodian armies attack the garrisons, we will fight them back'.⁷⁸ They also said that the Chinese, Cham-Malays and Cambodians in Phnom Penh were waiting for the Thai and Duong armies to strike the Vietnamese positions. 'Whenever the Thai and Cambodian armies attack the Vietnamese garrison [in Phnom Penh], they [the Chinese, Cham-Malay and Cambodian civilians] will rise up and kill the Vietnamese and then join Ang Duong'.⁷⁹

The Vietnamese were not only facing revolt in Cambodia but also inside Cochinchina itself where a significant proportion of the Cambodian population stirred up trouble which necessitated the withdrawal of a major force from the Vietnamese military establishment in Phnom Penh.

The testimony to the Thai of a group of Vietnamese prisoners captured by the Cambodian rebels in Banteai Meas, revealed that there was dynastic trouble after the death of Ming Mang over the nomination of Thieu Tri as the new Emperor of Vietnam. This group of prisoners said that they had heard Vietnamese mandarins and commoners saying that:

When Ong Mien Tong [Thieu Tri]⁸⁰ became emperor, Ong Kien An, uncle of Thieu Tri, was not happy, so ... he led an army and attacked Hue'.

78 Ibid, pp.6 & 8.

79 Ibid.

80 See Bui Quang Tung, 'Tables synoptiques de chronologie vietnamienne', in BEFEO, Vol.LI, No.I, 1963, pp.58-59.

The mandarins and commoners who wanted Ong Kien An to be emperor were more numerous than those who supported Mien Tong, they added.⁸¹

It was likely all of these internal troubles, aggravated by increasing military pressure from French naval forces,⁸² that forced Hué to withdraw substantial forces from Phnom Penh. Since Le Van Duyet's death in 1832, Ming Mang's policy of persecution of the Christian missionaries had irritated the French. His successor, Thieu Tri, continued this policy with even greater rigour. The French were no longer willing to submit to the treatment meted out to their missionaries by the Vietnamese court. As the result, French warships increased their presence in the vicinity of Hué standing by to intervene and save the life of their nationals. The entering of France into the scene had altered the balance of power in the region.

Towards the end of 1841, in the last attempt by Truong Ming Giang to improve this balance of power to the Vietnamese advantage, the latter succeeded in having Prince Im return to Phnom Penh.⁸³ Im was housed in the same compound as Mei and her sisters. As earlier in the year, Giang had Im send out letters to the ocnha and the population as soon as he arrived in the capital pleading once

81 Khamhaikan Ruang Thap Youn nai Ratchakan thi 3, p.4; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP III, vol.II, p.78.

82 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.36. A Khmer official, who deserted Im in Hué, where the latter was detained, and joined Duong, said that the French war-boats had attacked Hué around March-April 1841.

83 DNTEL, Vol.XXIII, p.349; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.54.

again for support. Like the previous calls, this did not work either.⁸⁴

At the same time, an outbreak of dysentery and malaria in Phnom Penh took a heavy toll among the soldiers, and the civilian population as well, and food shortages were acute for the Vietnamese as they were confined to their camps while the countryside was controlled by the Thai and the Cambodian rebels.⁸⁵ Food shortages also affected Duong's and Bodin Decha's troops, for the population had not been able to grow crops properly for many years in a row due to insecurity and war. Nevertheless, Thai and Duong's soldiers could complement their diet with roots, bamboo shoots and tubers from the forest where they had control.⁸⁶

Truong Ming Giang realised that fortune did not favour him any longer, and in a memorial to the emperor about the desperate situation in Cambodia, he requested Thieu Tri's permission to withdraw his troops from Kampong Thom and Phnom Penh, to which Thieu Tri agreed. The Vietnamese armies pulled out from Cambodia in November 1841.⁸⁷ They demolished their military installations in Kampong Thom, Chruoy Changwar and Phnom Penh and carried off the civilian population of Phnom Penh with them on their way to Chaudoc. They also took elephants, horses and cattle with them. As well, Mei, her sisters, Im and their ocnha followers went along to Chaudoc.⁸⁸

84 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.54; Kulap, pp.958-959.

85 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.55; Kulap, pp.959.

86 Kulap, p.960.

87 Ibid, pp.960-961; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.55. DNTL, XXIII, p.351 dates the event in September 1841.

88 Kulap, p.961.

The 'Vietnamisation' policy of Ming Mang in Cambodia, carried out by Truong Ming Giang since early 1835, after the death of King Chan, had completely failed. The Vietnamese general did not wait long to take the blame for the failure. Shortly after he arrived in Chaudoc, Truong Ming Giang took poison and died.⁸⁹

As soon as they arrived in Chaudoc, the troops from Cambodia were sent off with their commanding officers and Im to subjugate the revolt of the Cambodians in the region of the Mekong delta. The expedition was a success as the rebels were no match for the Vietnamese forces. It was alleged in Thai sources that Im was allowed by the Vietnamese to control the Cambodian population of these regions who had now pledged their allegiance to Im.⁹⁰

When Bodin Decha learnt about the Vietnamese withdrawal from Phnom Penh, he first contemplated making Ponhea Lu, a river port located on the west bank of the Tonlé Sap river in the vicinity of Oudong, the capital city for Duong. But he later decided to move to Phnom Penh because of strategic advantages that Phnom Penh offered, being at the junction of navigable rivers. Duong, Bodin Decha and their armies moved to Phnom Penh in December 1841.⁹¹

In a letter of reply to Bodin Decha's memorial informing him about the Vietnamese withdrawal and Duong's transfer to Phnom Penh, Rama III wrote:

89 Ibid, p.962; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.56. DNTL, Vol.XXIII, p.351 said that 'In the ninth month, officers and enlisted men withdrew (from Cambodia) to An-giang province'.

90 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.56; Kulap, pp.962-963.

91 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.57; Kulap, pp.965.

Now, since Ong Ta Tuong Kun [Truong Ming Giang] has withdrawn all his troops from Phnom Penh, therefore the city of Phnom Penh belongs to Ang Duong. You should, in consultation with Ang Duong, send troops to build dams to block the new canal [Vinh-té canal] in various sections and then fill it up to make it shallow in order to prevent the Vietnamese boats from sailing up and down the canal...⁹²

The Vietnamese were aware of the plan,⁹³ and Thieu Tri acted swiftly by reinforcing Vietnamese positions in the vicinity of the canal.⁹⁴

The idea of Rama III was to isolate the Vietnamese camps in Banteai Meas and Chaudoc. The garrison in Banteai Meas would be attacked first and would be easily defeated as it could not get help from anywhere else. The defeat of this camp would boost the morale of the Thai-Cambodian troops which would then attack Chaudoc.⁹⁵ Two military contingents would be involved in the expedition. An infantry division, made up of Thai and Cambodian soldiers, was assigned to attack Chaudoc and all Vietnamese posts along the canal, while a naval force made up entirely of Thai soldiers, would destroy Vietnamese warships and attack posts in the coastal region of Hatien and Banteai Meas.

Bodin Decha knew that the coming expedition to cut off the canal and defeat the Vietnamese in Chaudoc would be a difficult one. In his reply to Rama's orders, he singled out the lack of able commanding officers in his army and requested the Thai king to appoint additional capable cadres for both the infantry and the

92 Kulap, p.966; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.57.

93 DNTL, Vol.XXIII, pp.401-402.

94 Ibid, pp.402-403.

95 Kulap, p.967; Thiphakarawong PRP III, Vol.II, p.58.

navy.⁹⁶ He also stressed that the Vietnamese had up to nineteen military posts along the canal, each of which was manned by two to five hundred soldiers.⁹⁷ He demanded that food supplies and other provisions for the forthcoming expedition be sent to Kampot.⁹⁸ When the expedition was about to begin at the end of 1841, Bodin Decha fell ill and was unable to lead the campaign. Rama III appointed a high-ranking official from Bangkok, the Phraya Yumarat, to take over the command of the infantry from Bodin Decha, and one of his brothers as commanding general of the naval forces.⁹⁹ Duong and the Cambodian army were also going along side Phraya Yumarat's army. Thai and Cambodian armies, totalling up to about 12,000 men, left Oudong in the direction of Kampot to pick up provisions before heading off towards the canal which they reached in March 1842.¹⁰⁰ In the meantime, the Thai naval forces of more than 3,000 men, led by Rama III's brother, had been in Kampot since late January.¹⁰¹ The strategy of the Thai and the Cambodians was to lay siege to the Vietnamese garrisons in Banteai Meas, Chaudoc and all posts on the canal while the Thai naval forces were attacking the enemy flotilla in the coastal regions to prevent them from getting reinforcements and supplies through the canal to

96 Kulap, pp.971-972; Thiphakarawong PRP III, Vol.II, p.59.

97 Kulap, pp.971-972.

98 Ibid, p.986 for details of the provisions.

99 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.61; Kulap p.979; see also Nupparot, p.191.

100 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.63; Nupparot, p.191.

101 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.62; Kulap, p.982.

relieve the siege. Phraya Yumarat and Duong divided their troops into 27 and 25 companies respectively and dug in in the vicinity of the enemy posts.¹⁰² The ensuing battles were fierce and the Vietnamese seemed to be well prepared for this offensive. 'We could not set up our posts close to the Vietnamese because of their incessant artillery shellings', complained a Thai commanding officer on the front.¹⁰³

The Vietnamese counter-offensive to the Thai naval force in the coastal regions was more decisive. After a few successes at the outset, the Thai naval force was forced to retreat to Chanbury.¹⁰⁴ In a letter to Bodin Decha informing him about the retreat, the Thai deputy commanding general of the naval forces justified this for two reasons: the first one was that the Vietnamese had been strengthening their defensive, and the second that the monsoon season had ended and the westerly wind started to blow strongly which caused the boats to sink.¹⁰⁵ The retreat occurred only a few weeks after the expedition on land started. After the Thai navy retreated, the Vietnamese concentrated their forces to repel the Thai-Cambodian armies in the canal regions. They succeeded doing this in only a couple of days after the Thai withdrew from the sea.

On Friday the 13th of the waning moon of the fifth month [being the 8th April 1842] at dawn, the Vietnamese and the Thai were engaged in battle for a [short] period, and just

102 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.63; Kulap, pp.983-984.

103 Kulap, p.984; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.63.

104 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.69; Nupparot, p.191.

105 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.67.

when the sky was bright at the horizon, the Thai army was overrun and dispersed everywhere.¹⁰⁶

The Thai and Cambodian armies suffered very heavy casualties as a result of this surprise attack by the Vietnamese. Seventeen high-ranking Thai officials, 1,200 soldiers, nine ocnha, including Preah Ang Keo, the highest-ranking ocnha of the Cambodian hierarchy, and 2,000 Cambodian soldiers were killed. The Thai commanding general, Phraya Yumarat, himself was wounded during the battle and his son was killed.¹⁰⁷ The Vietnamese army did not pursue their enemies after this débâcle. A Thai chronicle said 'If the Vietnamese had chased behind, there would have been many more casualties'.¹⁰⁸ The Thai and Cambodian troops retreated to Phnom Penh in complete disarray. Here, they faced a shortage of food. The main cargo of provisions for the expedition only reached Kampot in late April by which time the Thai forces were no longer there following the débâcle earlier in the month, so the provisions convoy returned to Chanburi.¹⁰⁹ Bodin Decha reported to Bangkok that the shortage of food in Phnom Penh was critical. Many inhabitants, including monks, took to the forests to look for roots and leaves. In a more dramatized picture of the situation, Bodin Decha said that more than 1,000 soldiers had died of starvation.¹¹⁰ In addition to the famine, Bodin and Duong lived in constant fear of being

106 Kulap, p.1002.

107 Ibid, p.1003; see also Thiphakarawong PRP III, Vol.II, p.70 and Nupparot, p.192.

108 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.71; see also Kulap, p.1006.

109 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.71-72; Kulap, pp.1008-1009.

110 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.74.

attacked by the Vietnamese. They therefore decided to move their armies, and the capital, to Ponhea Lu, near Oudong.¹¹¹ Before leaving Phnom Penh, the Thai general had four forts built on the banks of the Mékong river in the region of Phnom Penh itself, and he left behind about 8,000 men to secure these posts.¹¹²

Probably encouraged by the recent victory over the Thai-Cambodian armies, Thieu Tri allowed Im to return to Cambodia, indeed under Vietnamese escort, to try once again to rally support from the Cambodian people. This time the Cambodian ocnha who had been kept prisoner in Vietnam since early 1840, i.e. the former talaha and his two other colleagues, were allowed to go too. Im and these ocnha sent out letters to their friends and relatives pleading for their support. Their call was ignored and they withdrew to Chaudoc soon afterwards.¹¹³

The Thai-Cambodian expedition of 1842 in the Chaudoc regions was the last attempt of the Thai to fight a battle in the Vietnamese's own stronghold. For the rest of the war, the Thai-Cambodian armies were not able to undertake any new offensive, but concentrated on consolidating their bases in Oudong instead.

This disastrous end to the expedition stemmed mainly from bad co-ordination between the naval and infantry forces involved, and this bad co-ordination was most likely caused by the sudden illness of Bodin Decha at the eve of the operation. Communications and

111 Ibid, p.73. Ponhea Lu is adjoining to Oudong. Cambodian and Thai sources refer later to the Cambodian capital as only Oudong; see also Kulap, p.1010; Nupparot, p.192.

112 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol. II, p.74; Nupparot, p.192.

113 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol. II, p.75; Kulap p.1018.

transport between Oudong and Bangkok had also contributed to the failure of the expedition. As far as the naval forces were concerned, the Thai were not good in battles on water. Earlier, during the expedition of 1833-34, the defeat of the Thai naval forces, and also of the whole expedition, was as disastrous as this recent one.¹¹⁴

For 1843 and 1844, neither the Vietnamese nor the Thai took any offensive against one another. Both sides seemed to spend their time consolidating their stronghold in their respective regions. Famine and disease were still dangerously threatening both camps. It was probably these two factors that prevented the Vietnamese from attempting to recover Phnom Penh in the aftermath of the Thai-Cambodian débâcle in 1842.

While in Chaudoc, Prince Im died in 1844. His death did not discourage the Vietnamese from the idea of bringing back to Phnom Penh by force of arms the three Cambodian princesses whom they still looked upon as an advantage to them in their struggle to regain the control of Cambodia. Towards the end of 1844, the Vietnamese started to engage in a campaign of persuasion and intimidation of the ocnha and the population. In letters they distributed throughout the kingdom, they said that the Vietnamese would bring back Queen Mei and her sisters to Phnom Penh soon to reign over the kingdom. They warned that if the ocnha, who were in the provinces not directly firmly under control of Thai-Cambodian forces, did not support the princesses and refused to help the Vietnamese fighting the Thai, they would arrest and kill these ocnha.¹¹⁵

114 See Chapter 2, p.52 ff

115 Kulap, p.1032; Thiphakarawong PRP III, Vol.II, p.88.

In 1845, when he saw no real threat of any enemy offensive, Bodin Decha left Oudong for a trip to Bangkok, a trip that he had planned to do since early the previous year. He arrived in the Thai capital in early May.¹¹⁶ Along with Bodin Decha to Bangkok, Duong sent an embassy composed of three high ranking ocnha and led by the talaha Prom, with presents for Rama III. It was the first embassy sent by Duong to the Thai king since he had returned to Cambodia in early 1841.¹¹⁷

As soon as Bodin Decha had left Oudong, a group of eighteen ocnha, led by the chakrei, plotted against Duong. They secretly sent letters to the Vietnamese asking them to bring in the three princesses and promised them help. The plot was discovered in time by Duong's followers, and all but seven ocnha were captured and executed later. The rest fled and joined the Vietnamese.¹¹⁸

When the Vietnamese learnt about the abortive plot, they sent troops into Cambodia in May 1845. Their armies were under the overall command of a generalissimo, the Hau quan linh tong doc de Gia-dinh, Vu Van Giai, and the direct command of Nguyen Tri Phuong and Doan Uan.¹¹⁹ The Vietnamese armies overran Thai-Cambodian fortifications on the banks of the rivers and sailed up to near Phnom Penh in July.¹²⁰ On Duong's demand, Rama III despatched

116 Thip PRP III, Vol.II, p.96; Nupparot, p.193.

117 Nupparot, p.193.

118 Op. cit., pp.193-195; Thiphakarawong PRP III, Vol.II, pp.96-97; Kulap pp.1036-1037.

119 DNTL, Vol.XXV, p.295.

120 Thiphakarawong PRP III, Vol.II, p.98; Kulap p.1048; see also Ca Van Thinh, 'Le Mandarin Doan-Uan', in BSEI, Vol.XVI, 1941, p.44.

Bodin Decha back to Oudong with a sizeable reinforcement army.¹²¹

In September 1845, taking advantage of an unusually severe flood which inundated all the surroundings of Phnom Penh, and informed about Bodin Decha's reinforcement army soon reaching Oudong, the Vietnamese moved swiftly to attack the Thai-Cambodian garrisons in Phnom Penh, about five thousand odd soldiers.¹²² The fortifications fell into the hands of the Vietnamese after a few days of fierce fighting and their defenders were forced to retreat to Oudong, where were stationed Duong and the main corps of Thai-Cambodian armies. The casualties were enormous. Kulap asserts that 2,000 soldiers were killed: 1,400 Cambodians and 600 Thai.¹²³ When Thieu Tri learnt about the victory of his army in Phnom Penh, in order to boost the morale of the army in service in Cambodia, he rewarded Vu Van Giai, Nguyen Tri Phuong and Doan Uan with gifts and promoted them to higher ranks and honours.¹²⁴ The Vietnamese had by now taken over the control of all Thai-Cambodian posts in the regions surrounding Phnom Penh, and they continued their operations upstream towards Oudong. They occupied the river port of Kampong Luong, from where they launched their next offensive against Duong and Bodin Decha' stronghold in Oudong.¹²⁵ In the meantime, Thieu

121 Nupparot, p.195; Thiphakarawong PRP III, Vol.II, p.99; Kulap, pp.1047-1048.

122 Thiphakarawong PRP III, Vol.II, p.100; Kulap, p.1050; Nupparot, pp.195-196.

123 Kulap, p.1054.

124 DNTL, Vol.XXV, p.331.

125 Kulap, pp.1056-1057; Thiphakarawong PRP III, Vol.II, p.100; Nupparot, p.196.

Tri allowed Mei, her sisters and Duong's mother to move back to Phnom Penh in order, as previously, to gather support from the population.

The Vietnamese offensive to dislodge Duong and Bodin Decha from Oudong was a decisive one. It involved on the Vietnamese side more than twenty thousand men and more than a thousand war-ships.¹²⁶ Their strategy was to attack Oudong from all directions with vanguard units made up of a few thousand men each, while the main corps of a thousand war-boats with 10,000 men struck a decisive blow from (the river port of) Kampong Luong.¹²⁷ Bodin Decha was already very worried since the enemy had dealt a severe blow to his troops in Phnom Penh. The testimonies of some twenty-eight Vietnamese prisoners captured in the aftermath of the fall of Phnom Penh, provided the Thai general with valuable information about the coming enemy offensive.¹²⁸ Bodin Decha based his defensive strategy on elephant units, as he put it:

Whenever the Vietnamese army attack Oudong, Chaomeoun Sanphet Phakdei [Thai title of the commander of elephant units] will lead these 300 war-elephants to break and destroy the enemy. They [the Vietnamese] probably will have no elephants with them because they come by boat...¹²⁹

According to Kulap, when the offensive began, the Vietnamese general responsible for the overall operation whose troops were to deal a decisive blow on the enemy, fell suddenly very ill just when he reached Kampong Luong. Therefore he ordered his army to withdraw

126 Kulap, pp.1056-1057.

127 Ibid, pp.1057-1058.

128 Ibid, p.1059.

129 Ibid, p.1060.

to Phnom Penh without engaging in combat, while the vanguard units were encountering a fierce counter-offensive from the Thai-Cambodian army.¹³⁰ As the offensive lacked command, troops already engaged in combat were demoralised and started to panic. Bodin Decha and Duong's army easily defeated the Vietnamese who retreated to their base in Kampong Luong, taking with them many casualties.¹³¹

Duong and Bodin Decha soon afterwards proposed a truce to the Vietnamese general in command of Kampong Luong, but the latter turned down the proposal.¹³² As the enemy refused to negotiate, and encouraged by his recent victory, Bodin Decha intensified the harassment of the enemy positions. In December 1845, the Vietnamese general in Kampong Luong tried in turn to enter into negotiation with Bodin Decha and Duong for a peaceful settlement.¹³³

After more than five years of fightings, the Vietnamese and the Thai were at a stalemate in Cambodia. Nevertheless, the Thai

130 Ibid, p.1058.

131 Nupparot, p.198; Thiphakarawong PRP III, Vol.II, p.101. Kulap, pp.1062-1063 gives the following comments: 'The Vietnamese débâcle was mainly due to the illness of Ong Ta Toeun Kun, the imperial general commanding the operation, which demoralised the troops and destroyed their fighting spirit. If Ong Ta Toeun Kun had not been ill, the garrison of Oudong would surely have fallen into his hands, because this time the Thai army was small while the Vietnamese army was as many as up to ten thousand men and the intelligence, thoughtfulness and ability of Ong Ta Toeun Kun were extremely sharp. He fought much more courageously and skilfully than Ong Tien Kun who committed suicide by taking poison [that was Truong Ming Giang]'. The author also attributes the victory of the Thai army over Truong Ming Giang on this occasion to the personal merits of Rama III.

132 Nupparot, p.198; Leclère, p.432; Moura, p.118; Ca Van Thinh, 'Le Mandarin Doan-Uan...' in BSEI, Vol.XVI, 1941, p.44.

133 Nupparot, p.199; Kulap, p.1073; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.106.

had scored substantial gains over the previous five years or so in terms of territory, and political advantages as well, in this war-torn kingdom to the detriment of the Vietnamese. The Thai had extended their control to Oudong; and the north-eastern banks of the lakes regions were completely free of Vietnamese presence.

CHAPTER FOUR

A THAI-VIETNAMESE MODUS VIVENDI AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CAMBODIA, 1846-1853

The year 1845 ended with the hopeful prospect of an end to the fighting for Cambodia as both warring sides, the Thai and the Vietnamese, whose armies totalled up to a couple of tens of thousand men each, had realised that neither side could win through a military offensive.

After they had turned down Duong and Bodin Decha's approach for a negotiated settlement after the failure of their offensive to dislodge the Thai-Cambodian armies from Oudong, the Vietnamese in their turn proposed to enter into negotiations in December 1845.¹

Thai sources assert that Bodin Decha and Duong did not consider the Vietnamese move a genuine desire of the latter's for a peaceful settlement, because the Vietnamese had recently rebuffed their own proposal for a settlement. They regarded this suspiciously and saw it rather as a stratagem of the Vietnamese to distract Thai-Cambodian army's attention so that they could make another surprise attack.² However, the desire of the Vietnamese to settle the conflict through negotiation was a genuine one. They renewed their approach, this time with Duong only. They suggested that Duong should send an embassy with a letter to the Vietnamese imperial representatives in Saigon for transmittal to the Emperor in Hué, offering allegiance and loyalty to the Vietnamese court and

1 Nupparot, p.199; Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.432 f; Moura, p.118 f.

2 Kulap, Vol.II, p.1073; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.106.

requesting the return to Cambodia of Duong's mother and other members of the royal family, i.e. Queen Mei and her sisters, all of whom had been kept by the Vietnamese since 1840.³ Duong informed Bodin Decha about this. The Thai general agreed to allow Duong to send a delegation with a letter to the Vietnamese Imperial envoys in Saigon in which Duong, besides expressing his gratitude to the Thai King, Rama III, for having sent him back to Cambodia with Bodin Decha and a Thai army to 'care for the well-being of the Cambodian people' in the aftermath of the anti-Vietnamese revolt a few years back, wrote that:

... we [that is Duong] realise that this is a good opportunity to request the wisdom of both of you [the Vietnamese imperial representatives] ... in Saigon for care and assistance and to beg Your Excellencies to petition on our behalf to the Emperor of Vietnam to suspend all military activities. We would depend on the power of both the Emperor of Vietnam and the King of Thailand for the well-being of, and a happy and peaceful life for, the Cambodian people. As for the ocnha and those people in various towns [throughout the country] who have committed unlawful acts against the Vietnamese, they are stupid, ignorant, unable to know the right and the wrong; we beg for the clemency of the Emperor to forgive all of them this time.⁴

The Vietnamese seemed to be satisfied with Duong's move.

After receiving the letter acknowledging the mistakes on behalf of the rebel ocnha, and at the same time pleading for the restoration of Vietnamese suzerainty over Cambodia, although concurrently with that of the Thai court, the Vietnamese started to withdraw their troops from Kampong Luong and its surroundings to Phnom Penh in early February 1846. They carried with them all the rice stocks

3 Ibid; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.107.

4 Kulap, Vol.II, p.1077; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.107; 'Ruang Hetkan Muang Khamen Tonset Sangkram Thai kap Yuan', in Prachum Phongswadan (PP), Phak 56, p.199.

available in the region.⁵ The Vietnamese withdrawal did indeed ease pressure on Duong and Bodin Decha's army in Oudong. This was the first important step towards a settlement between the two contending armies after five years of warfare carried out mercilessly on Cambodian soil. As another gesture of goodwill, in October of that year the Vietnamese released Duong's mother, Neang Ros, one of Duong's wives, his daughter and thirty-four other people and allowed them to leave Phnom Penh to join Duong in Oudong. However Queen Mei and her two sisters were not included in this arrangement and were still retained in Phnom Penh. If Duong wanted the three of them back, as well as all other members of the royal family and the ocnha, said the Vietnamese, he should send a tributary embassy to Hué and return some forty-four Vietnamese and Cham-Malay prisoners who had been captured earlier by the Cambodians in the region of Travinh in Cochinchina.⁶ Duong and Bodin Decha replied to the Vietnamese that before any tributary embassy was sent to Hué as was suggested, they had first to seek approval from Bangkok. As far as the forty-four prisoners were concerned, they had been sent to Bangkok long ago and to have them returned would need a longer time.⁷

Towards the end of 1846, the Vietnamese still had received neither the forty-four prisoners nor any word from Duong that a tributary embassy would be despatched to Hué as was requested. Impatient at the slow progress in the settlement in Cambodia and as

5 Kulap, op.cit., p.1077; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.108.

6 Kulap, op.cit., p.1078 f; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.110.

7 Kulap, op.cit., p.1078.

they were in need of their forces stationed there to cope with other more urgent tasks in Vietnam, the Vietnamese issued a strong ultimatum warning Duong that if the prisoners were not returned soon and an embassy was not despatched to Hue at the beginning of the coming Vietnamese New Year, that was, around February-March 1847, they would resume the offensive against the Thai-Cambodian armies.⁸ They sent in some reinforcements and also more than two hundred boatloads of food supplies to alleviate the food shortage in Phnom Penh. In the meantime they also encouraged the markets to operate in Phnom Penh and other places under their control where the Cambodian people and also ocnha from Duong's side went to buy salt and other commodities they needed.⁹

In order to verify the seriousness of the Vietnamese threat, Bodin Decha sent out spies to gather information in the Vietnamese camp, especially about their military preparations. The latter confirmed the Vietnamese threat of a renewed offensive. They said they saw the Vietnamese war-boats manoeuvring in the Mékong river and provisions being brought in to Phnom Penh.¹⁰ They reported that the Vietnamese had also brought in their elephant units totalling more than three hundred war-elephants with substantial supportive infantry that they scattered in the forests around Phnom Penh and even as far as the vicinity of Kampong Luong.¹¹ Bodin Decha himself had noticed that the ocnha and Cambodian people seemed

8 Kulap, op.cit., p.1080; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.113.

9 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.113.

10 Kulap, op.cit., p.1081.

11 Ibid, p.1082.

losing courage and the fighting spirit, mainly due to shortage of food on the Thai side while on the enemy side they could get supplies of staple commodities without discrimination because there were markets where they could buy and sell freely.¹² These factors urged Bodin Decha to write to Bangkok requesting the Thai King's authorisation to send a tributary mission to Hué and to expedite the return of the prisoners.¹³

In his reply to Bodin Decha's letter, Rama III warned the Thai general of a Vietnamese bluff to blunt the alertness of the Thai-Cambodian armies and argued that he saw no reason why the enemy would indeed hand back Mei and her sisters. Nevertheless, he said:

If the Vietnamese send back the princesses to be reunited with Duong and the Cambodian Royal Family, and allow Duong to rule over Cambodia in order to restore the happiness and well-being of the people as during the reign of King Eng, not only these forty-four Vietnamese-Cham-Malay prisoners but even all the Vietnamese who were sent to be detained in Bangkok earlier, no matter how many they are, will be all returned.¹⁴

As soon as he received permission from Bangkok, Bodin Decha despatched a delegation of three ocnha and two interpreters to inform the Vietnamese in Phnom Penh that Duong would send an embassy to Hué as requested and that the prisoners would be handed over as soon as they arrived from Thailand.¹⁵

Duong's embassy to Hué left Kampong Luong on the 6th day of the waxing moon of the third month, being the 22nd of January 1847.¹⁶ The embassy was led by a 59-year-old high ranking ocnha,

12 Ibid, p.1082; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.113.

13 Nupparot, p.203.

14 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.114 ff; Prachum Phongsawadan, phak 56, p.200 ff; Kulap, Vol.II, p.1084 ff.

15 Kulap, Vol.II, p.1090; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.116.

16. Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.117.

the Chakrei Nong, and seconded by two deputy envoys, one of whom was the ambassador's son, the 37-year-old Ocnha Thammea Thipadei Ros, a high-ranking ocnha in charge of the treasury of the Upayureach. The delegation also included three interpreters and thirty officials.¹⁷

In a joint report to the Thai in Bangkok, the ambassador, the Chakrei Nong, and his son, Ros, soon after they returned from Hue in May of the same year, provided a detailed account of the mission. This report was somewhat in the style of a travel diary of the Embassy. According to it, the envoys were not keen to go, fearing that they might be apprehended by the Vietnamese and kept as hostages like the Talaha Long and others.¹⁸

Soon after the Embassy had left Oudong for Hue, Bodin Decha despatched another mission to Bangkok led by a Thai Phraya named Kham, and consisting of Yumareach Prom, promoted to the rank of Talaha for the occasion, and another ocnha named Pich. The purposes of the mission were to inform Rama III about the situation prevailing in Cambodia and to justify the reconciliatory gesture of Bodin Decha and Duong towards the Vietnamese. In the letter for the Thai King, Bodin Decha wrote that the lack of able and experienced military cadres to lead his army, while the enemy were reinforcing their troops with elephants and additional infantry units, on the one hand, and on the other hand the shortage of food for the troops

17 Khamhaikan Ruang Thap Yuan nai Ratchakan Thi III, testimony no.18, pp.33 to 57. See also Kulap, Vol.II, p.1091; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.117.

Cambodian chronicles however, recorded the sending of the embassy only after Duong's investiture ceremony; see for example, Nupparot, p.206; Veang Tioun, p.821.

18 Khamhaikan Ruang Thap yuan nai Ratchakan thi III, p.34.

as well as for the civilian population, a shortage that forced many people to flee to the forests or to the Vietnamese zone in order to get staple commodities for their living, had destroyed the courage and the fighting spirit of the Cambodians. According to his assessment:

An all-out military confrontation with the Vietnamese at this time would be to the advantage of the enemy because the Cambodians are weary and exhausted by warfares and famine. Now they want Duong to re-establish a good relationship with the Vietnamese, so they will be able to work again in the rice-fields and to buy and sell things for their living in peace as of old, without troubles and sufferings.¹⁹

He also added that:

If the Vietnamese are not honest and do not keep their word that they will return the princesses as they have promised, the Cambodian people will rise up courageously and accept voluntarily again to fight [the Vietnamese] fiercely, because they want the return of the Princesses; therefore the determination to fight will be much stronger than ever before. Your servant [Bodin Decha] will depend on the Cambodian people as the [main] force to fight [the Vietnamese].²⁰

He ended his letter by saying that, in view of the above-mentioned facts, he and Duong had complied to the Vietnamese request by sending off a tributary mission to Hue and begging Rama III to release the forty-four prisoners to Cambodia as soon as possible.²¹ Rama III agreed to Bodin Decha's demand, and the prisoners were brought back by the delegation to Oudong soon afterwards.²² From here they were escorted to Phnom Penh and handed over to the Vietnamese.²³

19 Kulap, Vol.II, p.1093; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.118.

20 Kulap, p.1094; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.118.

21 Kulap, p.1094.

22 Ibid, p.1095; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.119.

23 Kulap, p.1095; see also Nupparot, p.204; Moura, p.120.

The embassy led by Nong reached the Vietnamese garrison in Phnom Penh in the morning of the following day. The tribute it brought for the Emperor of Vietnam consisted of the same products, and in the same quantity, as those determined by Hué in 1807 during King Chan's reign.²⁴ These were a pair of elephant tusks, a pair of rhinoceros horns and other forest products such as cardamom, nutmeg, yellow wax, lacquer, gum resin and two male elephants of more than five cubit high each.²⁵ On the top of this, there was a letter from Duong to Thieu Tri pledging his allegiance and loyalty to the Vietnamese court.²⁶ The two male elephants were escorted over land to Phnom Penh by two ocnha and fifteen men. From here they were transported across the river to the eastern bank of the Mékong to continue their journey by land through Baphnom to Saigon.²⁷

The embassy stayed in Phnom Penh for a week, probably waiting for the two tribute elephants to arrive before proceeding further on the journey. While in Phnom Penh, the tribute was checked and repacked by the Vietnamese. The boxes containing the goods were painted in red by the Vietnamese.²⁸ The Vietnamese general also checked the content of Duong's letter to Thieu Tri and had it translated into Vietnamese, keeping a copy for his file.²⁹ He

24 See Chapter II, p.29

25 Khamhaikan Ruang Thap Yuan nai Ratchakan Thi III, p.34; see also Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, p.112 f.

26 Duong had also a letter to be handed over by the embassy to the Vietnamese in Phnom Penh; see Khamhaikan, p.34.

27 Khamhaikan Ruang Thap Yuan nai Ratchakan thi III, p.37.

28 Ibid, p.36.

29 Ibid, p.35.

also asked the Cambodian envoys whether the mission and the tribute had been approved by Bodin Decha.³⁰ The report of the envoys provides a detailed account of the ceremonial treatment of the embassy, and Duong's letter, by the Vietnamese authorities in Phnom Penh.³¹ The day before the embassy left for Gia-dinh, the envoys were escorted to see Queen Mei and her sisters, who were living in the Vietnamese headquarters, guarded by some three hundred men. They also saw Prince Phim, a son of Prince Im, the Talaha Long and some thirty other Cambodians living in different residences from those of the Princesses. Queen Mei asked the envoys about the purpose of their trip and inquired about the health and well-being of Duong. She also said that 'if friendship could be restored, it would be good; we would be able to live together with our uncle...'³² The envoys had exchanged the usual greetings with the Talaha and other Cambodians living with him but they had not been able to talk to Mei's sisters or Prince Phim.

The embassy left Phnom Penh and continued its trip by boat on the Bassac river to Chaudoc. The two tribute elephants had arrived in Phnom Penh on the previous day and were transported across the Mékong river to the eastern bank to proceed on their trip over land to Gia-dinh the following day. The Vietnamese had reduced the size of the embassy by allowing only ten retainers, out of the original

30 Ibid, p.35.

31 Ibid, p.35.

32 Ibid, p.36.

thirty from Kampong Luong, to travel with the delegation. The twenty others were making their return trip to Oudong.³³

The embassy was escorted down the river by the Vietnamese. They provided the Chief-Envoy with a boat with sixteen rowers, and his two deputies with another boat with fifteen rowers, all of whom were Vietnamese. Two other boats, all painted in red, were arranged especially, one to transport Duong's letter for Thieu Tri and the other to transport the rest of the tribute. Both boats were decorated with red flags and armed with guns, lances and spears, most likely for ceremonial purposes rather than for defensive ones. The convoy consisted of eight boats, all rowed by Vietnamese dressed in ceremonial red uniforms with red caps.³⁴ The itinerary from Phnom Penh to Gia-dinh (Saigon) was via Chaudoc, Sadec, Long Ho or Vinh Long and Mytho. The journey lasted only eight days.³⁵

In Saigon, the embassy stayed for a week, waiting for the arrival of the elephant party who were travelling over land through Baphnom. While in Saigon, according to the report, the Cambodian envoys asked to pay a visit to Gia-dinh's Viceroy. Their request was turned down because, it was said, the Cambodian envoys were 'not able yet to perform royal salutations in the traditional Vietnamese way'.³⁶

From Saigon, the convoy sailed off to Bien Long, from where the party proceeded by land to Hue.³⁷ The tribute was split up

33 Ibid, p.37.

34 Ibid, p.38.

35 Ibid, p.38 ff.

36 Ibid, p.43.

37 Ibid, p.44.

into two parts. The boxes containing Duong's letter for the Vietnamese Emperor, the elephant tusks and cardamom seeds, travelled along with the embassy overland. The other boxes containing the rest of the tribute were to be sent to Hué by boat.³⁸ The overland itinerary was along the coast via Phu-yen and Quang-ngai. Eighty-six men were assigned as carriers to transport all members of the Cambodian embassy and the boxes of tribute and twenty-six others for the transport of the three Vietnamese officials accompanying the mission. In addition to these 112 carriers, fifty armed soldiers were in charge of the security of the party during the journey.³⁹

The trip to Hué lasted about a month. During the trip the embassy had met a group of eleven Cambodians, five men and six women, in Binh-hoa. These people had been sent into exile in Vietnam by Truong Ming Giang. They were among the thousands of officials and inhabitants of Battambang province who followed or were carried off during Prince Im's flight to Phnom Penh in late 1839.⁴⁰ The envoys said that the men were dressed and had their hair cut like the Vietnamese, but the women still wore hair and costumes in the Cambodian style.⁴¹ These men and women complained to the envoys about the hardship in eking out a living in Binh-hoa and the lack of Buddhist monks to perform religious ceremonies, and they expressed their desire to return to Cambodia.⁴² They also

38 Ibid, p.43.

39 Ibid, p.44.

40 See Chapter II, p.63.

41 Khamhaikan Ruang Thap Yuan nai Ratchakan thi III, p.45.

42 Ibid, p.45.

inquired about the purpose of the embassy's trip and demanded that the envoys ask Duong on their behalf for their return.

Upon their arrival in Hué, the embassy was received by a high-ranking Vietnamese official of the Ministry of Rites or Le-bo. The envoys were questioned once more as to whether this tributary mission had been approved by the Thai general, Bodin Decha, or not. The Vietnamese host also inquired about Duong's and Bodin Decha's efforts to restore order and security in the country.⁴³ He then introduced the Cambodian envoys to Vietnamese ceremonial.

The next day, being the fifth day of the waxing moon of the fifth month, Thieu Tri received the Cambodian envoys in his palace where the latter performed the 'five salutations' or ngu-bai according to the Vietnamese ceremonial.⁴⁴ Then the Cambodian chief envoy handed over Duong's letter with the copy of its translation in Vietnamese to the protocol officer who read it in Vietnamese to the Emperor.⁴⁵ During the ceremony, the envoys noticed that the Emperor, dressed in yellow silk costume with yellow turban around his head, was neither fat nor thin and was of medium height. He sat on a desk, about half a metre high, covered with golden patterned cloth, and in front of him there was another table on which were burning incense sticks and candles. On each side of the Emperor stood fifty colourfully dressed officials.⁴⁶ In their report, the envoys also gave a detailed account of the palace and

43 Ibid, p.48.

44 Ibid, p.49; see also Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 132, p.36 f.

45 Khamhaikan Ruang Thap Yuan nai Ratchakan thi III, p.49.

46. Ibid, p.49.

its defense forces, including armaments, and the uniforms worn by the guards.⁴⁷

Five days later, the high-ranking Vietnamese official of the Ministry of Rites asked the envoys to come to see him to receive the 'orders' of the Vietnamese Emperor for King Duong. The ceremony on this occasion was as formal as during the imperial audience with Thieu Tri himself. The envoys had to salute the Vietnamese official or Ong Le-bo who acted as the imperial representative, in kneeling position and then to bow five times (ngu bai) to the 'imperial orders' which were in the form of a letter. When the salutation ceremony was over, Ong Le-bo read the 'orders' in Vietnamese which the interpreter translated it into Cambodian. The letter said:

The emperor has had mercy on King Duong and allows him to reign over Cambodia, just the same way his ancestors, father and brother did, [in order] to prevent the disappearance of the Cambodian dynasty. The queen [Mei] will also be allowed to remain as such at Duong's side so that they can protect together the territory of Cambodia.⁴⁸

The embassy stayed about ten days in Hue and then returned home by boat, escorted by a hundred Vietnamese troops.⁴⁹ Mid-way to Saigon, in the province of Quang-nam, the envoys met another group of Cambodians who had been sent into exile in Vietnam at the same time as the previous one. The return trip from Hué to Saigon took twenty-eight days. From Saigon, the party sailed for eight days more to reach Phnom Penh. Here it stayed for another day during which time all the boxes containing presents from Thieu Tri for the members of the party, except those for Duong and Mei, were

47 Ibid, p.50.

48 Ibid, p.50 f.

49 Ibid, p.54.

opened by the Vietnamese and distributed to each person according to the list.⁵⁰ The embassy left Phnom Penh on the following day, escorted as usual by Vietnamese troops, and reached Kampong Luong at dusk of the same day, the third day of the waxing moon of the sixth month, being the second day of May 1847.

During their long journey to and from Hué, and while in the Vietnamese capital, the envoys and members of the embassy were very well treated and cared for by their hosts.⁵¹ Only twenty days after the embassy had returned from Hue, the ambassador and his son were summoned by Rama III to Bangkok.

The Vietnamese were obviously satisfied with the approach that Duong and Bodin Decha had made; the imperial court of Hué was willing now to co-operate and accept sharing its suzerainty right over the Court of Cambodia with Bangkok as it used to in the years before the 1810's. As far as the vassal Court was concerned, Duong had to send, as before, a tributary embassy once every three years to An-giang (Chaudoc) only, with the same quantity of the same products as of old, in the first days of the second month, so that the tribute could reach Hué in the early days of the fourth month.⁵²

50 Ibid, p.55; for details of gifts from Thieu Tri for Duong and all members of the embassy, see Khamhaikan, p.53 and Nhu Vien, Vol.I, book 133, p.214 ff. Thieu Tri also sent presents to Queen Mei under house arrest in Phnom Penh. Presents for Duong and Mei consisted mainly of brocaded satin, coloured fabrics, clothes; while for the envoys and their staff, these included money and fabrics as well.

51 Khamhaikan, p.36 ff; see also Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 135, pp.178 ff and p.208 f.

52 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, p.78 f; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.120; Kulap, Vol.II, p.1097.

The satisfaction of the Vietnamese about the arrangement in Cambodia was illustrated by the fact that Thieu Tri had already ordered his troops in Phnom Penh to prepare to withdraw when the embassy arrived in Hue'. When the envoys spent a day in Phnom Penh on their return journey in order to receive their share of presents from the Vietnamese Emperor, they had noticed that the Vietnamese of the Phnom Penh garrison had already tied up their rafts, five to six to a unit, and they were told that the Vietnamese troops would return home soon.⁵³

Since all preconditions imposed by the Vietnamese had been fulfilled by Duong and the Thai, i.e. the return of the forty-four prisoners and the sending of a tributary mission to Hue' asking for assistance and protection from the Vietnamese court, soon after the return of the Cambodian embassy, Thieu Tri despatched two delegations to Cambodia to perform investiture ceremonies installing Duong and Mei as King and Queen of Cambodia, thus formalising his rights as a suzerain king. He said:

Now since the descendant of the kings of this country [Cambodia] has repented of his guilt, offered his loyalty, pleaded for the opening of the borders of Vietnam to bring in tribute..., Sa-Ong-Don [Ang Duong] will be made Cao-man Quoc-vuong [King of Cambodia] and be bestowed upon imperial edicts with seals. Also the daughter of the late King Nac Ong-Chan [Ang Chan], Ngoc-Van [Ang Mei], who formerly received the title of Cao-man Quan-chua, and later - because this country has had troubles became My-lam Quan-chua, now the Imperial Court decides to restore the title of Ngoc-Van and makes her Cao-man Quan-chua again together with Sa-Ong-Don in order to take care of the people and to preserve the heritage of the late king Nac-Ong-Chan, so that the vassal country [Cambodia] be always willing to submit [itself] to the Imperial Court forever.⁵⁴

53 Khamhaikan, p.57.

54 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, p.28 ff.

Thieu Tri appointed two delegations to perform separately the investiture ceremonies for Duong and Mei. For Duong, the delegation consisted of an Imperial chief envoy with the title of Kham-sai Chanh-su, his deputy, six high-ranking mandarins, ten military officers and five hundred guards. The mission of the delegation was to proclaim Duong King of Cambodia and to remit a gilded silver seal inscribed with six words Cao-man Quoc-vuong chi an, literally 'the Official Seal of the King of Cambodia', an ivory seal made of elephant tusk inscribed with two words Cao-man or 'Cambodia', a cao sac or imperial decree conferring the title, a sac du or imperial order and a sac thu or credentials.

For Mei, the delegation was headed by a court official with the title of Kham su or literally 'governor', three mandarins, four military officers and two hundred guards.⁵⁵

Preparations for and performance of the investiture ceremonies were identical to those of the previous one carried out by Gia Long's envoys in Oudong in 1807 for the former king, Chan, or by Ming Mang's representatives in Slaket in 1835 for Princess Mei. Duong had to kneel down in front of and bow to the long-dinh representing the imperial command of the Vietnamese Emperor, thus acknowledging formally his status as a vassal king.⁵⁶ It was not

55 Nhu Vien, p.30 ff; see also 'Ruang Hetkan Muang Khamen Tonset Songkram Thai kap Yuan', in Prachum Phongsawadan, phak 56, p.204. According to this document, the Vietnamese imperial envoys and their party arrived in Kampong Luong with the former Talaha Long and other Cambodian ocnha, who had been detained by them since early 1841, only a week after the Cambodian embassy had returned from Hue.

56 Nhu Vien, Vol.II, book 134, p.32 ff. This document did not specify the place where Mei's investiture was performed.

clear if Mei's investiture ceremonies happened at the same time as Duong's or later, however it is most likely that it was performed in the Vietnamese headquarters in Phnom Penh. For the third time in exactly forty years, the Vietnamese emperors had directly exercised their rights as suzerain kings in the making of the kings of Cambodia. Cambodian sources only mention briefly the ceremonies in a few lines, as on previous occasions. They report:

Emperor Thieu Tri sent Ong Kham Mang [the imperial representative] to bring in a quadrangular seal weighing 5 nen for Ang Duong and to bestow upon him the title of Cao-man Quoc-vuong.⁵⁷

Queen Mei's reinvestiture was simply omitted, in both Cambodian and Thai sources. On a Vietnamese request, Duong sent a delegation to escort Mei, her sisters and their party from Phnom Penh to Oudong, thus ending seven years of captivity with the Vietnamese, during which warfare, famine, disease and the consequent misery had destroyed the kingdom economically and socially.⁵⁸

The Vietnamese completely withdrew their armies from Cambodia by mid 1847, since the arrangement with Duong and the Thai had been completed to the satisfaction of both sides. That meant that Thai

57 Nupparot, p.206; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.2; Manuscrits de Dpudart de Lagrée, Rabal Khsat Ang Chan et Ang Duang, p.107; Veang Thiun, p.820.

58 'Ruang Hetkan Muang Khamen...', in Prachum Phongsawadan, phak 56, p.204 f. See also Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.120. The Vietnamese escorted Mei and her party to Kampong Luong later, after Duong's investiture. According to these sources, Mei's investiture was most likely performed in Phnom Penh separately from Duong's.

See also Aubaret, Gia-dinh Thung Chi, p.131. From this time onward, Mei and her party were totally phased out of the political scene in the Cambodian history. Chronicles mention neither their names nor their titles among the court officials. It was likely that Mei held the post of Upayuvareach during Duong's reign.

and Vietnamese courts became again, as they had been up until the early 1810's, 'father and mother' together raising Cambodia, a state of affairs which lasted until the arrival of the French in the early 1860's who imposed a new type of protection over the country.⁵⁹

The Thai were in no hurry to follow suit, however. Only some seven thousand odd men were sent back to Thailand 'just in time to work in the rice fields'. About 6,500 members of the Thai army were still left behind.⁶⁰ Bodin Decha would have liked to keep his army at full strength after the withdrawal of the Vietnamese, in order to secure the take-over of the control by the Thai-Cambodian forces of the regions formerly under the Vietnamese administration and to impose peace and tranquillity to a country which had been so badly socially disturbed for many decades. However, the main factor which forced the Thai general to reduce the strength of his army by half was famine.⁶¹ Famine had forced the army of Snguon and the Thai to withdraw from Oudong during the 1812-13 expedition, and it forced the Vietnamese to abandon military confrontation with Bodin Decha and Duong in favour of negotiated settlement in the 1840's.

Hué and Bangkok were obviously satisfied with the settlement in Cambodia. Thieu Tri and Rama III hailed the ending of the military confrontation between their two armies as a great success for their wise policy and the dexterity of their generals in the field.

59 Prachum Phongsawadan, phak 56, p.205; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.120 f; Kulap, Vol.II, p.1099.

60 Prachum Phongsawadan, p.205 f.

61 ibid, p.205.

Thieu Tri promoted all his generals and military cadres involved in the 1840's expedition in Cambodia. The main figures were Vo Van Giai, Nguyen Tri Phuong and Doan Uan.⁶²

Acting on behalf of Rama III, the Thai Chao Phraya Chakry wrote to Bodin Decha in Oudong, praising him for his achievement in Cambodia; he said that the Thai general had been striving painstakingly for fifteen years, since 1833, to get Cambodia back from the Vietnamese who had taken over for thirty-six years, since 1812.⁶³ He urged Bodin Decha to watch out 'not to let the situation turn to our disadvantage in a short time ahead'. He also told Bodin Decha that 'it is not fair too, to let the troops suffer further', probably a reference to the famine that was prevailing in Cambodia. He asked Bodin Decha to speed up the consolidation and re-organisation process in Cambodia, so that he and his army could be withdrawn as early as possible to be reunited with their families and to receive rewards from the king.⁶⁴

Bodin Decha and his army therefore stayed in Cambodia until after the coronation of Duong in early March the following year. In the meantime, in Hue', Thieu Tri died in November 1847, only a few months after his investiture of Duong.⁶⁵ He was succeeded to the throne by his son who took the reign name of Tu Duc. Duong sent off a delegation to Hue' to pay last respects to the late Emperor and

62 Ca Van Thinh, 'Le Mandarin Doan Uan, pacificateur de l'Ouest', BSEI, Vol.XVI, 1941, p.46.

63 Prachum Phongsawadan, phak 56, p.207.

64 Ibid, p.207 ff.

65 Bui Quang Tung, 'Tables synoptiques de chronologie Vietnamienne', BEFEO, Vol.LI, 8, 1963, p.59; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.121.

homage to the new one, as a king of a vassal country should do on such an occasion.⁶⁶ Tu Duc concentrated all his efforts on facing the increasing French pressure on his country, since Cambodian affairs had been already settled by his father. The Cambodian court had acknowledged its vassal status by agreeing to continue sending a tributary mission once every three years as usual to the Vietnamese court in exchange for the withdrawal of all Vietnamese military forces from the kingdom in accordance with the modus vivendi agreed upon earlier with Duong and the Thai.

The relations between Oudong and Bangkok, on the other side, were similar to those during King Eng's time at the end of the eighteenth century.

In January 1848, Rama III sent a delegation led by a Phraya Phichey and a Brahman to Oudong, bringing the insignia of royal title and other regalia for Duong. Bodin Decha was appointed as Rama III's representative to preside over the coronation of Duong:

On the third day of the waxing moon in the fourth month of the year of the goat (being the 7th of March 1848), Prince Duong, who had been ruling Cambodia for seven years since 1841, now at the age of fifty-two, ascended the throne of Cambodia.⁶⁷

Duong chose Oudong as his capital and renamed it Oudong the Victorious. Tributary missions to Bangkok on a yearly basis were resumed and the presents taken included silk fabrics, white calico, wax, dye, lacquer, cardamom etc...⁶⁸

66 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.121.

67 Nupparot, p.209; see also Veang Tioun, p.825; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.4 f; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.122. This document places the event on the fourth day of the fourth month, being the 8th March, 1848.

68 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.123.

By early April 1848, Bodin Decha had withdrawn all his army (and cadres) from Cambodia to Thailand.⁶⁹ His army was needed at home to help to put down a rebellion fomented by Chinese secret societies in the province of Chachoeungsao in the region east of Bangkok.⁷⁰ However, Bodin Decha left behind in Oudong a Thai Phraya to escort Duong's son to Bangkok later.

The Thai restored their cautious old practice of ensuring loyalty and a closer control of the Cambodian Court by asking Duong to send his sons and other members of the Royal Family to Bangkok to be kept as hostages or, rather, allegedly to be educated at the Thai Court. Soon after Bodin Decha had left Oudong, Duong sent his son Reachea Vatei, later known as Norodom, along with Prince Phim, a son of the late Prince Im, to Bangkok.⁷¹ In connection with this,

Moura wrote:

The Thai had always demanded that the Cambodian princes, as well as the children of other tributary kings, should be raised up at the court of Bangkok where they were accustomed, at an early age, to [demonstrate] respectfulness and obedience to, and adoration of the suzerain king, and it was there that high-ranking officials [of the vassal states] were appointed and given honours and titles to perform their duties in their country.⁷²

The withdrawal of the Vietnamese and Thai armies and the subsequent investiture and coronation of Duong by Hue' and Bangkok's

69 Nupparot, p.211 f.

70 Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.126.

71 Nupparot, p.212; Veang Tioun, p.827; Thiphakarawong, PRP III, Vol.II, p.128; Moura, p.127; Leclère Histoire du Cambodge, p.437, was mistaken about the identity of Phim. He took him for Duong's youngest son who was later known as Sivotha. See Nupparot, p.206.

72 Moura, p.127.

representatives in 1847 and 1848 respectively, marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. It was the end of four decades or so of military confrontation between Vietnam and Thailand inside Cambodia, and most importantly the end, at least temporarily, of an attempt by the Vietnamese to 'Vietnamize' Cambodia and incorporate it into Vietnam. It was the beginning of a new era of uncertain future for a depopulated country with a weary and exhausted people who had suffered so much from successive wars, disease, famine and exactions and oppressions from all sides including the ocnha themselves.

The first gesture of Duong after the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from the kingdom was to pull down all the Vietnamese fortifications, which symbolized the occupation of the kingdom and the mistreatment of the Khmer population. He used the bricks to build Buddhist temples around Oudong.⁷³

Moura, as well as Leclère, asserted that during Duong's coronation, the Thai had demanded formal cession of two provinces in the northern part of the kingdom, Mlou Prey and Tonlé Repeou, both of which they had controlled for more than three decades, since soon after their withdrawal from Cambodia in 1813.⁷⁴ 'The chronicle is silent about this matter', wrote Moura, 'but we have from a reliable source the following details concerning this historic fact'. The allegation goes that a Cambodian governor of Kampong Svay was acting on behalf of Thai interests as a go-between in approaching the Cambodian court. Duong had replied to the request in these words:

73 Nupparot, p.205; Veang Tioun, p.819 f; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.2; Leclère, Histoire, p.434.

74 See Chapter II, p.36.

I will not give away anything; however, as they [the Thai] are the stronger, they can take or keep these provinces as they wish.⁷⁵

It was alleged that the governor of Kampong Svay acted on his own initiative in formally remitting these two provinces to the Thai by a written act with his own signature and his seal of office on it.⁷⁶

Such an arbitrary act of cession of territory had a precedent in Cambodian history at the end of the eighteenth century, just after the return of King Eng from Bangkok to Oudong in 1794. A Cambodian ocnha named Ben, appointed Apheiphoubes by the Thai King Rama I, who was during Eng's reign governor of Battambang province, had on his own authority surrendered the territories of Battambang and Siemreap provinces to the control of the Thai administration because Ben feared that Eng would take revenge on him for being involved in a civil war which resulted in the death of Eng's father during the 1770's.⁷⁷ Ever since, Battambang and all its dependent territories became ipso facto part of Thailand. Bangkok appointed its successive governors and the latter were totally independent from the Cambodian Court and were solely accountable to the Thai authorities for the whole of the nineteenth century.

75 Moura, p.121; see also Leclère, Histoire, p.434.

76 Moura, p.121.

77 See Leclère, Histoire, p.401, f; Moura, p.99. Veang Tioun, p.749 ff. asserted that Rama I wrote to Eng demanding that Battambang, Siemreap and other regions under the jurisdiction of the governor of Battambang be placed from that date onward under the Thai court, and this on the request of Ben and Kan. These two ocnha feared that Eng and his entourage might take vengeance on them for they were involved in the death of Eng's father; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP I, p.243.

Duong's attitude towards Rama III was similar to that of his father, King Eng, towards Rama I, as both of them, besides owing their throne to the Thai kings, symbolised the restoration of Thai influence over the Cambodian court after it had faded away during the Burmese attacks on Ayuthya in mid 1760's in the first case, and during the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia in Chan and Mei's reigns in the second case. The cases of the governors of Battambang and Kompong Svay were good examples of the impotence of the king vis-à-vis those of his ocnha who were favoured by the suzerain king, in these cases the Thai king. This was a direct result of the Thai king's policy to appoint and bestow honours on the officials of the vassal court. As for Duong, who had been living, willingly or unwillingly, in exile for so long at the Thai court, he was so well accustomed to the rules and practices of the suzerain Court that when he became King of Cambodia, his first gestures were to comply with such rules. Cambodian sources record that during 1848, soon after he had sent his son to be educated at the suzerain court, he realised that he needed to fill two of the highest positions in his court: one was the position of Talaha or Prime Minister, and the other was to head the administration of the Upayuvareach, the post of Samdech Chau Ponhea. Duong despatched an embassy to Bangkok, with tribute as usual, to demand the Thai king to appoint two ocnha to the positions. Rama III nominated an ocnha named Ma who was at the time an official of the local administration of Battambang where Ma's father-in-law was later appointed in 1860 as governor of the province. The post of Samdech Chau Ponhea was occupied by Ocnha Suokea Kas, the former governor of Pursat who had fled to Bangkok in 1832 and who later participated with Bodin Decha in the expeditions

of 1833-34 and the 1840's.⁷⁸ It was probably in this connection that Francis Garnier, in his Chronique royale du Cambodge, wrote:

At this moment, the Siamese influence seemed absolutely preponderant in Oudong, where resided a Siamese mandarin in charge of communicating to Ang Duong the will of Bangkok.⁷⁹

Although Chan and Duong were both crowned by Bangkok and received investiture from Hué, the difference between them was that Duong had succeeded in liberating the country from Vietnamese domination during which Chan himself had become prisoner of his 'protectors'.

The withdrawal of the Vietnamese from Cambodia in 1847 was not compensated for only by an insignificant tributary mission once every three years, and an acknowledgement of suzerain rights of Hué over Cambodia, but more importantly by a de facto definitive take-over of the provinces in the lower Mékong and along the present borders of Cambodia by the Vietnamese who were consolidating their administration and encouraging the Cambodian inhabitants of these regions to abandon their lands and to move deeper into the interior of Cambodia. Even today, these territories known now as Cochinchina still have an important number of Cambodians called 'Khmer Krom' or Khmer of the Lower Cambodia. Leclère wrote:

78 Nupparot, p.220; see also Ratchaphongsawadan Krung Kampucha (a Thai translation of Nupparot), p.301; 'Phongsawadan Muang Pratabang', in Prachum Phongsawadan, phak 16, p.149; Leclère Histoire, p.442 (footnotes). Ma held the title of Phraya Phichey Rong Ruang Rithi Sithi Songkram in the local administration of Battambang. His father-in-law became Apheiphoubes of Battambang in 1860. It was not known whether Ma was of Cambodian or Thai origin. See also Veang Tioun, p.838.

79 Francis Garnier, 'Chronique Royale du Cambodge', Journal Asiatique, 6e série, Vol.XX, 1872, p.140. Probably it was Phraya Phichey Ma whom Garnier referred to as a 'Siamese mandarin'. Cambodian and other sources did not mention the presence of any Thai resident representative in Duong's court during this time.

It was under this agreement [of 1847 between the Vietnamese, Duong, and Bodin Decha] that the Cambodians began to evacuate the provinces, now become part of Cochinchina, that the Yuons [Vietnamese] had annexed in the past and that these abandoned lands were immediately occupied by Annamese peasants. The latter, very active, insinuating, very quarrelsome, trouble-makers and especially night plunderers, made life impossible for the Cambodians who lived in the neighbourhood.⁸⁰

After performing diverse religious ceremonies to mark the return of peace and after restoring Buddhism by building new wats and appointing members of its clergy to be in the capital, as well as in the provinces, as did his father nearly half a century ago, Duong began to undertake a series of social and administrative re-organisations in order to re-glorify the tarnished image of the Court, and to revitalize and reconstruct the kingdom after nearly four decades of foreign occupation, warfare and destruction. He started first a reform of Court protocol regarding the terms used to address the King and members of the royal household, and also the costumes of the ocnha with their distinctive signs of honours and precedence. Leclère commented:

These reforms in the protocol appear to us puerile; however they were well received by those concerned, and rendered to the Royal Court of Cambodia a bit of vainglory necessary to a monarchy which needs to recover the prestige it has lost in the eyes of the people in the past.⁸¹

Again, Duong had done what his father King Eng did during his short reign in the mid-1790's.

Concerning the administration of the kingdom, Duong tried to restore the authority of the Court by taking pains to restructure the administrative division of the country and appoint the ocnha to

80 Leclère, Histoire, p.434 ff; see also Moura, p.122.

81 Leclère, op.cit., p.441; see also Nupparot, p.215 ff. and Veang Tioun, p.830 ff.

head the more than fifty provinces which formed Cambodia during that time.⁸² Apparently this administrative reform was also aimed at replacing what the Vietnamese had done in their transformation of the administrative structure of the country since the 1830's. These reforms constituted examples of the independence of action that Duong enjoyed in managing the business of his kingdom. Such a relative independence of action had been lacking to the Cambodian Court since the early 1810's.

Nevertheless these reforms did not change at all the basic power structure of the kingdom nor did they provide an improvement in efficiency in the administration, which did not seem to have changed much throughout time. As Chandler has stated:

In fact, it seems likely that nineteenth century administration in Cambodia, although more fitful and more poorly financed than in the past, resembled Cambodian government at Angkor more closely than it resembled a centralized state like France, China or Vietnam.⁸³

The authority of the king was always based upon the loyalty of the ocnha and especially of those chauvay srok, upon whom Duong bestowed honours and titles, for Duong saw the importance of restoring and strengthening this chain of loyalty among the ocnha. His policy seemed to work for the rest of his reign, which brought relative peace and tranquillity to the kingdom, although towards the end of his reign a rebellion, led by an ocnha of Cham-Malay origin, broke out in 1858. Another factor which probably contributed to the restoration of this relative peace and stability, besides the Thai-Vietnamese agreement resulting from the stalemate in their warfare,

82 Nupparot, p.216 ff; Veang Tioun, p.834 ff.

83 D.P. Chandler, Cambodia before the French, p.3.

was that Duong had no threat from any potential pretender to the throne as he was the only male descendant alive in the family.

The kingdom was almost completely destitute. Its economy had been disrupted for decades. Its agriculture could not sustain the needs of the population who spent most of their time fleeing from warfare, or were conscripted if they were able-bodied men, or carried off by retreating armies as prisoners. Commerce was almost non-existent. The Royal Treasury, which was the treasury of the kingdom, was empty.

Cambodia was no longer a rich country, as it used to be, whose reputation of wealth reached the borders of China. Warfare with foreigners and civil wars especially, had ruined the country. All its wealth, all its gold, all its silver and its inhabitants were carried off to Cochinchina or to Siam. The land was destitute and those who lived on were skinny and poor and they always feared the return either of the Siamese or the Annamese, who murdered men, raped women, pillaged temples and houses of the poor people and who often, before carrying off thousands of thousands of prisoners, chopped down fruit trees and palm trees and burnt down villages, so that the ruin was complete.⁸⁴

Despite these difficulties, Duong tried his best to rebuild his country with whatever resources were left. With the corvée-labour that each able-bodied man owed to the king each year, he had a road built from Oudong to the sea-port of Kampot in order to have access to the outside world without relying solely upon the good disposition of the Vietnamese in the use of the Mékong river.⁸⁵

Another road was also built to link this important port to Phnom Penh through Pochentong. The road linking Oudong to Phnom Penh was built later by paid workers towards the end of his reign. In addition, in 1853 he introduced coins minted in Oudong into

84 Leclère, Histoire, p.438 ff.

85 Leclère, Histoire, p.439; Moura, p.128; Veang Tioun, p.839.

circulation to replace the Vietnamese and Thai coins and the barter used hitherto in Cambodia.⁸⁶

Duong also took pains to revise and amend important laws that had remained unchanged for nearly two centuries.⁸⁷ These ranged from the regulation of honours and titles for the ocnha, and form for official correspondence between them, to laws concerning slavery and regulations governing marriage, disputes, debts and the law of appeal.⁸⁸ Perhaps the most useful revision was that of the krâm Bâmnol or law concerning the debts.⁸⁹ The new law required a written attestation of the contract between the lender and the

86 See Veang Tioun, p.826; Nupparot, p.220; Moura, p.128; Leclère, Histoire, p.441.

87 The last revision had occurred in 1690, in the reign of Chey Chetha IV; see Leclère, Histoire, p.364; Moura, p.67.

88 For full texts of these laws, see Leclère, Les Codes Cambodgiens, Paris, Leroux, 1898, 2 vols.

Duong introduced the:

- Krâm Tumrong Sakh or 'Law concerning honours and titles of the ocnha' in 1852; see Leclère Les Codes Cambodgiens, Vol.I, pp.223-34.

- Krâm Tous Piriyea or 'Law concerning the offences of the wife' in 1853; see Les Codes Cambodgiens, Vol.I, pp.235-89; and revised in 1853 the:

- Krâm Teasa Kamokâr or 'Law concerning the slaves, their conditions in work, their rights, their relations with society, in Leclère, Les Codes Cambodgiens, Vol.I, pp.404-27.

- Krâm Viveat or 'Law concerning the dispute', in Leclère, Les Codes Cambodgiens, Vol.II, pp.451-64.

- Krâm Bier or 'Law concerning games', in Leclère, Les Codes Cambodgiens, Vol.II, pp.465-78.

- Krâm Prohmotont of 'Law concerning punishments', in Leclère, Les Codes Cambodgiens, Vol.II, pp.347-56.

- Krâm Otor or 'Law concerning the Appeal', in Leclère, Les Codes Cambodgiens, Vol.II.

- Krâm Preas Reachea Khant, containing seven laws, four of which were concerned with slaves, in Leclère Vol.II, pp.611-20.

- Krâm Bâmnol or 'Law concerning Debts', in Leclère Vol.I, pp.458-76.

89 Krâm Bâmnol, in Leclère Vol.I, pp.458-76; see also Nupparot, p.222; Moura, p.128.

borrower for the sum concerned, with evidence of acknowledgement by both sides in the form of finger-prints made beside their names in front of an ocnha who witnessed the contract with his official seal. Formerly, a person holding a certain position of power could claim without foundation that another person owed him a certain sum of money; the latter and his family could then be easily reduced into slavery to pay a debt that he had not contracted as there was no evidence to deny the claim of the accuser. Duong's reform in this field brought real benefits to the population, most of whom were poor and defenceless against abuses and exactions by unscrupulous ocnha. The revision of the laws concerning the conditions of work of slaves and their rights in society was another beneficial reform to be credited to Duong's reign.

Other reforms that Duong undertook were on religious and cultural grounds. He was described by chroniclers as a very devoted Buddhist, a learned and wise king and a friend of scholars. He urged his ministers and officials of the court to observe the five basic teachings of Buddha.⁹⁰ He encouraged the people to send their children to school and urged educated monks to set up as many schooling centres as possible in the wat throughout the kingdom. He provided support to those in need who were devoted to learning. He held scholars and learned monks in great esteem, and he himself was an accomplished writer and poet.⁹¹

90 See Nupparot, p.221; Leclère, Histoire, p.437.

91 Nupparot, p.222; Moura, p.135; Leclère, Histoire, p.440. One of Duong's famous works was 'Kakey', a piece of melodrama written in verse in his youth. 'Kakey' became a classic in modern (post-Independence) Cambodia and was incorporated in the curriculum for high school.

Duong's efforts to rebuild his kingdom and to revive the glory of the past were greatly thwarted by lack of funds and manpower. The kingdom became so poor and so depopulated that Duong was able 'to get only as much as needed to keep his court, his palace and his family going'.⁹² Faced with such problems, and in order to encourage the people to produce more, he reduced taxes for farmers and peasants, and sometimes exempted them altogether, especially during the first years of his reign.

In 1850, Bodin Decha died in Bangkok after a long and glorious career in the service of his King and country. Bodin Decha was directly militarily involved in Cambodia twice. His first campaign of 1833-34 in Cambodia and in Cochinchina, during which his troops committed brutal exactions against the Cambodian people, ended up in only a short period of time in a most disastrous *débâcle*.⁹³ However his second and last expedition during the 1840s had brought him real success, partly because of his troops had behaved themselves *vis-à-vis* the local population and partly because of the rebellion of the Cambodian people against the Vietnamese. When Duong learned about the death of the Thai general, his friend-in-arms to whom he owed so much, he had a statue of Bodin Decha built in Oudong. It was the highest homage paid to Bodin, as in Cambodia 'erecting a statue in honour of statemen was not a custom of the

92 Leclère, *Histoire*, p.437 and p.439. Leclère also mentioned that in 1849 bubonic plague ravaged the Oudong district and took a heavy toll, up to 500 persons daily. The disaster lasted three months until the rainy season. Outbreaks of such diseases, i.e. bubonic plague, dysentery and malaria, happened almost every year. It depleted the country of its population, already small because of incessant warfare over many centuries.

93 See Chapter II, p.52ff.

Cambodians, even for their kings'. He also sent messages of condolences with presents to the Thai general's family.⁹⁴

A year later, in early April 1851, Rama III himself died at the age of 63 after twenty-seven years on the throne. His half-brother abandoned the monkhood to succeed him to the throne under the reign name of Moha Mongkut or Rama IV. Duong did not go to Bangkok personally to pay last respects to Rama III and at the same time to attend the coronation of the new King. Instead he sent a delegation with presents, led by the Chakrei and the Yumareach, to attend the funeral ceremonies. The delegation returned soon afterwards.⁹⁵

The reasons for Duong's absence at Rama III's funeral and at the coronation of the new Thai King, Rama IV, are not known. Chronicles do not provide any hint, and Cambodian ones do not even mention the attendance of the Cambodian delegation at that coronation ceremony.⁹⁶ However, a Thai chronicle of the Fourth Reign noted that during Rama IV's coronation:

All guests from different countries, the Khmer, the Lao from the hill tribes of Northern Thailand, the Lao from Luang Prabang and from the town of Nan, who were vassal states presented gold and silver trees as tribute...⁹⁷

The same source also mentions that Duong soon wrote to the Thai King requesting him to alter Duong's title and reign name. Duong knew Rama IV very well and used to respect him while he was

94 Moura, p.127.

95 Nupparot, p.222; Veang Tioun, p.840.

96 The Cambodian chronicles also played down the sending of the tributary embassy to Hué in 1847. They recorded the event after the investiture of Duong.

97 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.17.

living in exile in Bangkok, during which time Rama IV was in the monkhood. 'When Duong learnt that Rama IV had ascended the throne, he was very pleased...', asserted a Thai chronicle of the Fourth Reign.⁹⁸

The absence of Duong at the funeral and at the coronation of the Thai king is indeed intriguing. He mainly owed his throne to Rama III and, ever since he returned to Cambodia in 1841, he had not made a single trip to the Thai capital. Both events provided him more than an appropriate occasion to do so. This is an indication that relations between Oudong and Bangkok were not as smooth as was expected. Duong's feelings towards the Thai and the Vietnamese may be best described in these words of Leclère's:

The King [Duong] seemed to be happy; however in his heart, I was told one day by an old dignitary with whom the king often chatted, he had no confidence in the future [of his kingdom] and he feared the Siamese, whom he considered as his enemy almost equally as much the Annamese, whom he detested...⁹⁹

He saw the future of his kingdom as very dark. 'We should not think of recovering what has been taken away from us, but to look after what has been left', he said. He believed that one day the Thai would take over the north and north-western part of his kingdom, including Pursat, Kampong Svay, Oudong, Sambaur, Kratié, Thbaung Khmum, while the Vietnamese would occupy the rest of the country in the south, the regions of Baphnom, Treang and Phnom Penh.¹⁰⁰ Obsessed by these ideas and realising that the Cambodian people were in no way able to defend themselves against the Thai and the Vietnamese, Duong turned his eyes towards a far-distant power,

98 Ibid, p.65.

99 Leclère, Histoire, p.442.

100 Leclère, Histoire, p.442.

France, whose missionaries had been working for quite some time in Cambodia and who had been for many decades directly involved in Vietnam in the defence of the Christian missionaries against persecution by the Vietnamese Court.

In his attempt to get help from the French Emperor, Duong received assistance from a French priest, Bishop Miche. Towards the end of 1853, he made his first move by despatching a delegation to Singapore with a letter and presents for transmittal by the French consul there to Emperor Napoleon III and thus set in motion a train of events which was to completely alter the situation for the next century.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE MONTIGNY'S MISSION & THE LAST YEARS
OF DUONG'S REIGN, 1854-1860

This delegation, led by a Cambodian Catholic ocnha of Portuguese origin, was despatched sceretly by Duong to Singapore with the letter to be handed over to the French consul there for transmittal to Paris.¹ The presents they brought for the French Emperor consisted of two pairs of elephant tusks, a pair of rhinoceros horns, gamboge, sugar and pepper, half a ton of each. These presents never reached Napoleon III.²

Duong received no word from the French Emperor in reply to his letter or to his approach. It was only in early October 1856 that a French Imperial envoy, Charles de Montigny, made a short visit to Kampot. Montigny was commissioned by the French Emperor, Napoleon III, to conclude an agreement with the Thai king on friendship, commerce and navigation between France and Thailand, following similar agreements signed earlier by the United States and Great

1 Leclère in L'Histoire du Cambodge, p.443, dated this event in November 1853, and Moura in Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, p.128, placed it in 1854; see also George Maspéro, L'Empire Khmer, Phnom Penh, 1904, pp.71 and 85.

It has also been suggested that Duong had sent in 1850 an envoy of a Portuguese origin, a certain Constantin Monteiro, to England allegedly to seek help and protection, see G. Maspéro, L'Empire Khmer, p.85, footnote 2, and also Antoine Brébion, Dictionnaire de Bio-bibliographie générale, ancienne et moderne de l'Indochine, published by A. Cabaton, Paris, 1935, p.10.

2 See excerpts from Montigny's letter of November 18, 1856, and Duong's letter of November 25, 1856 to Napoleon III, In 'La politique coloniale de la France au début du Second Empire (Indochine, 1852-1858), Henri Cordier, T'oung Pao, série II, Vol.X, 1909, pp.678 and 691; see also Leclère, L'Histoire du Cambodge, p.443.

Britain. While in the region, Montigny was also commissioned by the French Emperor to go to Cambodia in order, in Montigny's own words, to 'straighten out a little misunderstanding with the King of that country [Duong] and to pick up an interpreter for Cochinchinese [Vietnamese], and Bishop Miche, if possible' for the next leg of the mission to Vietnam.³ Montigny was eager to see his mission in these regions satisfactorily accomplished. He thought that his mission in Cambodia and Vietnam must have been prepared long before hand from Bangkok and with the help of the Thai king, the suzerain of Cambodia, whose army had fought not long before against the Imperial Army of Hué. He also thought that an introductory letter from the Thai king to the Vietnamese emperor announcing his forthcoming arrival in Hué would contribute greatly to the success of his mission there.⁴

Montigny arrived in Thailand in early July 1856.⁵ His mission there was a complete success, thanks on the one hand to the fact that it was only a replay of what had happened twice already, with the British and the Americans, and on the other to the goodwill the Thai had shown towards the French.⁶ However, the next Montigny mission in Cambodia was not as successful as he wished it to be. First of all, and this was probably the main cause of his

3 Montigny's letter from Singapore to Bishop Pallégoix in Thailand, Henri Cordier, 'La Politique coloniale de la France', in T'oung Pao, serie II, Vol.X, 1909, pp.306-307 and 678.

4 Ibid, p.307.

5 Ibid, p.312.

6 Ibid, p.672.

failure in Cambodia, Montigny did not have a clear idea of what his mission in that country was, nor, more importantly, of the desires of Duong and the Cambodian people. In a letter to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs in May 1857, after his mission in Cambodia had failed, Montigny acknowledged that, in reply to the Thai King's many questions, while he was in Bangkok, about his mission to Cambodia, he had said, 'not knowing at that time that I would have to negotiate in Cambodia a commercial and religious agreement, that I went there only to straighten out some business of the missionaries and to inform the King [Duong] that the presents he had sent to His Majesty the Emperor had not arrived yet'.⁷

Montigny left Bangkok for Cambodia on the morning of September 21, 1856. His ship Le Marceau reached Kampot⁸ in the afternoon of October 5, 1859.⁹ A French naval ship, La Capricieuse had arrived there on the previous day. Montigny was fully confident of the success of his mission in Cambodia, for he had announced it to the Thai King and had requested the latter's assistance when he was in the Thai capital.¹⁰

When Rama IV learned about Duong's attempt to enter into relations with France without his knowledge, he was indeed surprised, if not outraged, by such a move, as this would inevitably affect the Thai suzerainty rights over Cambodia. As a suzerain king, Rama IV should not only have been informed, but consulted

7 Ibid, pp.673-74.

8 For a description of Kampot, see ibid, pp.678-79.

9 Ibid, pp.677-678; Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.169.

10 Henri Cordier, p.673; see Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.443, and Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, p.130.

beforehand on any matter related to the business of the vassal state, let alone have his approval sought.

The handling of the Cambodian mission, as well as the Vietnamese one, by Montigny showed if not his naivete, at least his absolute ignorance of the historical backgrounds of those nations with which he had to deal. How could the French envoy have expected the Thai King - who now exerted almost unchallenged suzerain rights over Cambodia, and moreover had annexed an important part of this kingdom, as well as keeping as hostages in Bangkok three of the children of the Cambodian king - willingly accept seeing his vassal slip out of his control by giving the assistance requested by Montigny in arranging his mission in that country?

While Montigny was in Bangkok and as soon as the Thai king had learned about the French representative's next mission to Cambodia, Rama IV despatched officials and sent a personal letter to Duong in Oudong as early as July 1856, obviously to warn Duong that his attempt no longer remained secret and to remind him that he owed his throne to the Chakry kings, so by implication that any move to enter into relationship with France was not in Duong's interest.¹¹

In his letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Paris in May 1857, Montigny wrote:

... I learned later that during my stay in Bangkok, he [Rama IV] sent many agents to the King of Cambodia and to the Siamese Governor of Battambang, a town of a Cambodian province bordering the Kingdom of Siam, that was usurped by the Siamese more than a decade ago. I even now have the conviction that the delay the First King [Rama IV] caused me in Bangkok in the sending of letters and presents to His Majesty the Emperor

11 See letter of Rama IV to Duong in Praratchahatthalekha Phrabat Somdet Phra Chomklao Chao Yuhua, Vol.I, p.19. See also Montigny letter to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs in T'oung Pao, Vol.X, 1909, p.674.

[Napoleon III] had no other reason than his desire to receive replies from Cambodia before my departure from Siam.¹²

On the request of the Thai King, nine Cambodians were accepted on board La Capricieuse on its trip from Bangkok to Kampot.¹³

These Cambodians were allegedly among the entourage of Duong's children who were living in the Thai court. They were returning home because of nostalgia. They were disembarked from La Capricieuse in Kampot on October 7. On the same day, Montigny also went ashore and was greeted by Bishop Miche. He and his party were escorted to the rest-houses built for the purpose. Soon afterwards, Montigny was informed by the French Bishop that among the nine Cambodians who had travelled on La Capricieuse was a Thai official, sent by the Thai King to 'spy on' the activities of the French envoy on his mission in Cambodia. In an excerpt from his long letter dated May 8, 1857, to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs in Paris, Montigny related in detail the incident:

A few moment after my arrival [on shore], Bishop Miche came to inform me that among the Cambodians brought in by 'La Capricieuse', there was a Siamese, sent by the First King, to spy on my activities in Cambodia; that this man behaved very insolently, had already questioned and even threatened the Cambodian authorities and was just questioning the bishop, personally in a manner the most improper, on the motives of my voyage to Cambodia... His Highness [Bishop Miche] added that the arrival of this man was most troublesome and that he was going to dictate his will to the King [Duong] who trembled on only hearing the name of his suzerain, the First King of Siam.¹⁴

12 Henri Cordier, 'La politique coloniale de la France au début du Second Empire (Indochine, 1852-1858)', T'oung Pao, Vol.X, 1909, p.674.

13 Ibid, pp.678-679.

14 Ibid, p.680.

Montigny recognized the Thai spy, at first sight for he had met him on many occasions in Bangkok during his talks with the Thai kings and especially on the occasion of the presentation to him of Duong's children by the Second King.¹⁵ He himself had demanded the reasons for this man's presence on the French ship and, according to Montigny's own account the Thai spy talked to him in a standing position in front of many Cambodian officials including a representative of Duong sent to Kampot to welcome the French envoy, while all of these people had prostrated themselves in the traditional Cambodian way before him. Montigny ordered him to take the same posture like the rest of the audience and threatened to send him to Vietnam on the next leg of La Capricieuse's trip. Again, according to Montigny's account, this Thai official confessed that he had been sent by the Second King, the brother of Rama IV, to spy on him.¹⁶

However, Montigny did not send the Thai spy on La Capricieuse to Vietnam as he had threatened to do, instead he let him continue on his way to Oudong. In a long letter to Duong warning him that his attempt to enter into relations with France was known, Rama IV recalled Duong's first attempt at the end of 1853 in these words:

... Montigny, the envoy who was able to speak English, and his daughter, both came many times to the Palace to talk with me without interpreter, and informed me that the French Emperor was aware that Duong had expressed his desire to enter into a relationship with France and had sent presents consisting of local products, i.e. gamboge, cardamom, etc...¹⁷

15 Ibid, p.680.

16 Ibid, p.680.

17 Rama IV, Praratchahatthalekha Phrabat Somdet Phra Chomklao Chao Yuhua, Vol.I, p.18.

He also brought to the attention of his vassal conversations that he had had with the French representative about the latter's planned visit to Cambodia. He wrote that the French Emperor had ordered Montigny:

when he arrived in Thailand to inform [the Thai King] about the affairs of Cambodia and to ask Thailand to agree to allow him to pay a visit to the Cambodian King on his way from Thailand to Vietnam, because the French Emperor knew very well that Cambodia was a small country and a vassal of Thailand; therefore, he [the French emperor] gave orders that Thailand should be informed beforehand [about Montigny's visit to Cambodia].¹⁸

According to the letter, Rama IV had also told Montigny, in reply to the French envoy's questions concerning the trip to the Cambodian capital, that from Kampot to Oudong the trek would last four to five days across forests and flooded plains, as this time of the year was in the middle of the rainy season, and would be most difficult. He also told the French envoy that the alternative would be to sail through Preah Trapeang [Travinh] to Phnom Penh and from there either to continue the voyage on land or to sail up to Oudong in small boats. However, said the Thai King, this alternative must have prior permission from the Vietnamese authority because Preah Trapeang had been taken over by the Vietnamese during the reign of the late king, probably a reference to Chan's reign.¹⁹ He told Montigny that in Oudong there was 'no reasonably clean guest-houses in bricks for foreign official visitors, but only wooden houses covered with palm leaves...'²⁰ This information provided by the Thai king, although it was true (as was confirmed later by the

18 Ibid, p.19.

19 Ibid, p.20.

20 Ibid, p.20.

French explorer Henri Mouhot who visited Oudong in 1859, in his Travel's Diary²¹ in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos), most probably influenced the French envoy's impressions of Cambodia and his decision not to undertake the overland trip from Kampot to Oudong when he arrived in the sea-port of Cambodia in October of 1856. Rama IV also said that he had told Montigny that he had already despatched a messenger to inform Duong in Oudong about his forthcoming arrival in Kampot and to allow Duong to send officials to welcome him there.²² According to Rama IV's letter, Montigny asked the Thai King whether he could have a letter from Duong, once he was in Cambodia, introducing him to the Vietnamese Emperor and asking the latter to conclude a commerce and friendship agreement with France, like the one the Thai king had arranged for him with the King of Cambodia.²³ Allegedly Rama IV replied that he 'would not know', however he said he had drawn the attention of the French envoy to the following situation:

It is true that the Cambodian King established his capital close to Vietnam, but this Cambodian King is a genuine pro-Thai [king]. In his early youth, he came to live in Bangkok for 29 years. He was a good friend of mine and used to play with me when I was also young. Rama III appointed him and allowed him to return as King of Cambodia twelve years ago. He [Rama III] agreed to allow the Cambodian ocnha to bring tribute unflinching every year and to discuss business concerning Cambodia on many occasions each year. At the present time, three sons of the Cambodian King have also come to stay in the capital [Bangkok].²⁴

21 Henri Mouhot's Diary: Travels in the Central Parts of Siam, Cambodia and Laos During the Years 1858-1861, abridged and edited by Christopher Pym, Oxford University Press; Kuala Lumpur, 1966.

22 Rama IV, Praratchahatthalekha, Vol.I, p.21.

23 Ibid, pp.21-22.

24 Ibid, p.22.

This was a broad hint that Bangkok was the undisputed suzerain of Cambodia and that any business concerning it must be discussed and decided upon at the Thai court instead of in Oudong. As far as the relations between Thailand and Vietnam were concerned, Rama IV wrote that he had told Montigny that the Thai would not establish friendship with the Vietnamese because the latter were enemies of the Thai.²⁵ However, as far as Cambodia was concerned, 'because of its closeness to Vietnam, the Thai accepted that they should allow the Cambodians to have friendly relations with the Vietnamese according to their wishes in order to permit Cambodia to have peace and happiness...'²⁶ Rama IV ended his letter to Duong by informing the latter that the clauses of the agreement he had signed with the French envoy were similar to those of two agreements he had signed earlier with the British and the Americans, copies of which had been sent to Duong by the Thai King too.²⁷

From the Thai King's account, Montigny's approach to the Cambodian affair was most awkward and reflected his complete ignorance of the traditional background to the relationships between the countries concerned. According to a Thai chronicle of the Fourth Reign, Rama IV met the French envoy's request and provided him, on his mission to Cambodia and Vietnam with two Cambodian and two Vietnamese interpreters from Bangkok.²⁸

In his letter to the French Foreign Affairs Minister, Montigny wrote that when the Thai spy had left Kampot for Oudong, the

25 Ibid, p.22.

26 Ibid, pp.22-23.

27 Ibid, p.23; see also Nupparot, p.228.

28 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.169.

governor of this province and other Cambodian dignitaries came to visit him in his quarters and informed him that Duong was to come there to meet the French representative in ten or twelve days' time.

The planned rendezvous between Duong and Montigny in Kampot did not materialise; on the evening of October 12, a week after the arrival of the French envoy in Cambodia, messengers from Oudong reached Kampot with a letter from Duong for Bishop Miche. In his letter, the Cambodian King informed the French bishop that he had been prevented from coming to meet the French envoy because on the eve of the departure he was attacked by a 'very painful rash of boils'. Instead he was sending his Prime-Minister, Talaha Keo, two ministers, the chakrei and the kralahom, with an important party of fifteen high-ranking ocnha and two hundred elephants to Kampot to escort the French envoy to Oudong.²⁹ In order to encourage the French envoy to undertake the trip there, Duong stressed in his letter to the Bishop that the route from Kampot to Oudong was adequately prepared and that some twenty odd bridges had been repaired to make the journey more comfortable. This volte-face on Duong's part was undoubtedly the result of the Thai King's letter, and especially of the coming of the Thai spy who had reached Oudong in the meantime. In a letter he wrote later to the Seminary of Foreign Affairs, Bishop Miche said that Duong had not been attacked

29 Henri Cordier, 'La politique coloniale de la France', T'oung Pao, Vol.X, 1909, p.681; see also Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.169, and Nupparot, p.228. These two chronicles do not mention at all the intention of Duong to escort the French envoy from Kampot to Oudong.

by any disease and that he had cancelled his planned trip to Kampot because he was threatened by the Thai agent.³⁰

On the afternoon of October 14, 1856, the Talaha and his party arrived. The following day, he called on Montigny at his quarters. He also brought another letter from Duong for the Bishop as well as some presents consisting of a pair of elephant tusks and four boxes of fabric for the French Emperor. In the letter, the Cambodian monarch authorised the French bishop to treat with the French envoy on his behalf.³¹ Nevertheless, in his letter to Paris, Montigny complained that no one, not even the Talaha, was empowered with full credentials to act on behalf of the King. He added that he had taken the opportunity of the presence of these high-ranking officials at his quarters to inform them about 'the power of France and the feelings of kind interest that the French Emperor and government had towards Cambodia'.³² He also warned these Cambodian ocnha that 'the only way to consolidate and preserve forever these feelings, which could be useful to them and to the kingdom, was to protect and assist the missionaries and co-religionists and to help by all means within their power the establishment and expansion of commercial relations between Cambodia and France'.³³ He also gave a strong warning personally to the

30 Georges Taboulet, La Geste Française en Indochine, Vol.I, p.389.

31 Henri Cordier, 'La politique coloniale de la France', T'oung Pao, Vol.X, 1909, pp.681-682; see also Antoine Brebion, Dictionnaire de Bio-bibliographie générale ancienne et moderne de l'Indochine, Paris: Académie des Sciences Coloniales, 1935, p.259.

32 Henri Cordier, op.cit., p.682.

33 Ibid, p.682.

kralahom and two other ocnha, whom he was told had hostile feelings towards missionaries, of 'fatal consequences' if they continued to harbour such feelings.³⁴

The aims of Montigny's mission to Cambodia were now obvious, and were in fact quite different from Duong's aims in receiving him and Montigny did not seem to take any notice of the worries that Duong and the Cambodian people had about the survival of their country as an independant nation, even after the spy incident which he had personally witnessed.

Montigny justified his refusal to undertake the overland trip to Oudong by saying he lacked specific directives from his government and lacked power. In his letter to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs he complained:

It is with deep regret, Mr Minister, that I beg to say to you once more here, that an agent sent to completely unknown regions as I have been, has little freedom and power.³⁵

He prepared the draft of a commercial and religious convention to be sent to Duong in Oudong for approval, since neither of them had the opportunity to meet one another. He had the text of the proposed convention translated into Cambodian and also wrote Duong a letter in which he expressed his regrets and apologies for not being able personally to pay a visit to the King. Nevertheless, surprisingly, he acknowledged the state of affairs in Cambodia in these terms:

I completely agree with your Majesty about the deplorable state to which successive usurpations by the Annamese have reduced the kingdom of Cambodia, and the impossibility in the position in which they [the Annamese] have placed you of

34 Ibid, p.682.

35 Ibid., p.681.

developing commerce and exploiting [Cambodia's] many and rich natural products; I can only fully approve the wisdom of your approach to my powerful sovereign and Master, H.M. Napoleon III, Emperor of France.³⁶

Montigny referred only to the Vietnamese since he had acknowledged when he was in Bangkok the suzerainty rights of the Thai over Cambodia.³⁷ Along with this, he prepared another draft for the Cambodian King concerning the transfer to France of an island in the Gulf of Thailand, Koh-doot, known as the island of Koh Tral.³⁸ Koh-doot belonged to Cambodia but had been taken over by Vietnam and was now inhabited by a small colony of Vietnamese fishermen. The idea of transferring Koh-doot to France was brought up with Montigny by the Thai when the French envoy was in Bangkok. According to Montigny's account, the Thai were eager to see the French occupy the island. He related that at one stage during a special night-time meeting arranged by the Thai:

The [Thai] Kralahom came in with a big European map of the coasts of Siam, Cambodia and Cochinchina; after a few moment of conversation, he unrolled the map and pointed with his finger at the island of Koh-doot, situated at the mouth of the river of Kampot. For my information, he gave a description of it, praised its natural anchorages, its calm water, its beautiful forests, its arable land, etc... He told me that he had visited the island, and finally urged me to take possession of it on behalf of France...³⁹

Montigny added that on the following day the Prince Kroma Luong, the Thai King's brother, and the Phra Khlang urged him repeatedly to pursue the matter. He allegedly replied that he had 'no instructions or power' to take possession of any territory and

36 Ibid, p.688.

37 Ibid, p.694.

38 Ibid, p.696.

39 Ibid, p.683.

was inquiring whether the island really belonged to the Thai. He wrote that on the eve of his departure from Thailand to Cambodia, the Thai Kralahom called on him again, at two o'clock in the morning and tried to persuade him for the last time to take over the island.⁴⁰ Surprisingly, during his stay in Kampot, Montigny was informed by Bishop Miche that Duong was also inclined to hand over Koh-doot to France. Duong had expressed his desire on many occasions to the French Bishop, according to the French envoy's letter.⁴¹ If this was the case, Duong had probably acted on orders from Bangkok, on the one hand, and because the island in question had been already under the control of the Vietnamese authority on the other.

In his letter to the Cambodian King from Kampot, dated October 17, 1856, Montigny pointed out that 'the Ministers of State and high dignitaries, whom your Majesty has sent to me, have declared not only do they have no power to treat any affair with me, but also even expressed on many occasions their desire of not getting involved with anything whatsoever...'⁴² The attitude of the ocnha was quite understandable and showed how strong was the influence, and as far as these particular circumstances were concerned, the threat of the Thai king over Duong and his court.⁴³

40 Ibid, p.683.

41 Ibid, p.684.

42 Ibid, p.689.

43 Georges Taboulet, La geste française en Indochine, Vol.I, p.389. Letter of Bishop Miche to the Seminary of Foreign Affairs.

The text of the proposed commercial and religious agreement drafted, signed, stamped with his official seal by Montigny, comprised fourteen articles.⁴⁴ It was a 'one way' agreement devised by the French envoy to get the utmost in the way of privileges and advantages from a small, weakened country for the benefit of the French government and people. The first four articles concerned the rights and privileges of French nationals setting up residence, with full protection by the Cambodian authorities of their persons and their property, allowing them to move freely and practice their religion publicly, to trade without restriction in any place throughout the kingdom. French commercial shipping and warships were also guaranteed of free passage into all ports of the country without payment of any duty and were to be 'considered as the ships of the country [i.e. Cambodia] and of the King, stipulated Article 5.⁴⁵ The Cambodian authorities were also to provide all facilities, assistance and protection to French scholars in their research travel in the country. This was the object of Article 7.⁴⁶ As far as the missionaries were concerned, article 10 of the proposed convention stated that:

The French missionaries will have the right to preach and teach the Catholic Religion, to build churches, seminaries, hospitals and other pious buildings in any place of the kingdom of Cambodia. They will travel freely throughout the kingdom provided they bear genuine letters from the consul of France or, in his absence, from their bishop or superior...⁴⁷

44 Henri Cordier, 'La politique coloniale de la France', T'oung Pao Vol.X, 1909, pp.685 to 687.

45 Ibid, p.685.

46 Ibid, p.686.

47 Ibid, p.686.

and the following article 11 added that:

The Catholic Religion has been authorized in the kingdom of Cambodia for more than two centuries, so consequently must be considered as one of the religions of the State; the Catholic Cambodians must not henceforth be subject to any religious or other acts which are contrary to the Catholic religion and which could bind their conscience.

There must not in the future be any impediment, either by intimidation or any other means, to the free conversion of Cambodian subjects to the Catholic Religion.⁴⁸

The following article 12 concerned the exploitation of the forest products of Cambodia. The article stipulated that:

His Majesty the King of Cambodia concedes to H.M. the Emperor of the French, the right to select from the forests in the kingdom teak timbers and all other woods suitable for the construction of vessels of the Imperial Marine; to have these timbers cut up and exported to France without paying any overhead expenses apart from a duty of 10% to be paid either in kind or ad valorem, according to the established Cambodian laws in force at present.⁴⁹

In the whole text of the proposed agreement, there was not a single sentence, not to mention an article, referring to what the Cambodians get in exchange for these privileges and rights granted to France and its nationals. Probably what Duong wanted most to be written in the agreement was a pledge from France to protect him and his kingdom from the demanding suzerainty of both neighbours, the Thai with their jealous patronage and the Vietnamese with their territorial ambition. However, neither of these two countries was referred to in the proposed convention. The French envoy entrusted Father Hestrest, a French priest who had been in the country for only two years, and another priest whose knowledge of the Cambodian language was more adequate than that of Hestrest, with taking the

48 Ibid, pp.686-87.

49 Ibid, p.687.

draft of the Convention and Montigny's letter for Duong to Oudong. In his letter to Paris, Montigny wrote not without confidence that in order:

To help and guide father Hestrest in his mission to the court of the King of Cambodia, I have given him comprehensive written instructions. I have not therefore neglected anything at all in order to ensure the success of the mission; I have also added to these instructions some presents, consisting of firearms, hunting gear and various silver-plated tablewares for the King of Cambodia...⁵⁰

Montigny left Kampot for Vietnam on October 22, 1856,⁵¹

fully confident that his mission in Cambodia would be a complete success. He received word about the result of Father Hestrest's mission to Oudong in March of the following year: Duong had refused to sign the proposed agreement. According to his letter to Paris about his mission in Cambodia, he said that Father Hestrest was received by the Cambodian King before a 'large court'. He also wrote that Duong had said 'he had nothing to hide from the agents of the Thai king',⁵² when Father Hestrest requested a private audience with the King for he had a special message for him, a reference to the proposed commercial and religious agreement. He also mentioned in his letter that Father Hestrest had recognised the Thai spy who had travelled clandestinely on La Capricieuse and noted the presence of the Governor of Battambang province among the King's large entourage.⁵³ The Governor of the province of Battambang had been sent by Rama IV 'to watch over' the activities of the French

50 Ibid, p.684.

51 Ibid, p.689.

52 Ibid, pp.689-90.

53 Ibid, pp.689-90.

envoy and most likely to exert pressure on Duong not to enter into any agreement with France. Rama IV feared, not without reason, that any agreement concluded with France by Duong would diminish, if not deny, the suzerainty rights of Thailand over Cambodia. And more importantly, the pride of the suzerain King had been hurt as Duong had acted without consultation with, or authorisation from Bangkok. Montigny referred in his letter to the use of 'the most violent threat' by the Thai envoys to intimidate Duong into not signing the proposed agreement.⁵⁴ It was not known what kind of 'violent threat' the Thai had exerted against Duong as Cambodian sources are completely silent about the matter. Nevertheless what Duong replied to the French missionaries, Father Hestrest and his colleague, during the audience was repeated in his letter to Montigny. He said that 'if the King of Siam orders me to conclude a treaty with France, I shall conclude it; if the King of Siam orders me to transfer Koh-doot island to H.M. Emperor Napoleon, I shall do it'.⁵⁵ This statement is confirmed by a Thai chronicle of the Fourth Reign, which relates that

The contents of the letter [that was Duong's letter to Montigny] said that Cambodia, a small country under the patronage of Siam, could not conclude an agreement by herself alone. The text of the agreement should be sent to Bangkok for consultation [approval] first.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Duong had accepted all the presents from the French envoy and hurried to hide them from the sight of the Thai agents.

54 Ibid, pp.689-90.

55 Ibid, pp.689-90.

56 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.170.

Duong also sent a long letter to the French Emperor, along with his letter to Montigny, in which he explained the situation of his country vis-a-vis Bangkok and Hue.⁵⁷ These letters were written towards the end of November 1856 and were sent, like the previous letter in 1853, to the French consul in Singapore for transmittal.

In his letter to Napoleon III, Duong expressed his desire to enter into a relationship with France. He wrote that:

The French missionaries who have been living in Cambodia, have spoken to me in praise of the Emperor of France and of the French people, about their compassion towards all countries; [they told me] that they [French Emperor and people] have never oppressed any nation, but only helped and cared for them... I, the King of Cambodia, having heard this, am very pleased and I wished to enter into friendship with the Emperor of France, so that the people would greatly benefit from the advantages of a long-lasting friendship...⁵⁸

This time, as before, his letter was accompanied by presents consisting of four samples of Cambodian fabrics and four pieces of elephant tusks.⁵⁹ Duong did not give the reasons of his refusal to sign the proposed commercial and religious agreement prepared by Montigny nor did he even mention it in the letter, apart from expressing at the beginning of it his regard to the French Emperor

57 Ibid, pp.173-177. This is the full text translated into Thai of Duong's letter to the French Emperor, Napoleon III. See also the French version of the letter in Henri Cordier's T'oung Pao, serie II, Vol.X, pp.690-691 and in Rois de Kampuchea, Ang Duong, Norodom and N. Sihanouk, by the Ministère de l'Information, Phnom Penh, 1957, pp.3-5. This last version is a translation into French of the Thai version of Duong's letter, see Rois de Kampuchea..., p.2.

58 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, pp.173-174; see also Henri Cordier in T'oung Pao, Vol.X, p.691, and Ministère de l'Information, Rois de Kampuchea..., p.3.

59 Henri Cordier, 'La poliltique coloniale de la France', T'oung Pao, Vol.X, p.691.

for having sent Montigny to Cambodia. In the rest of his letter, Duong retraced how the Vietnamese had encroached upon the Cambodian territory bit by bit since the reign of his father, King Eng. He informed the French Emperor that Cambodia was formerly a big nation comprising vast provinces. However, 'later on, the dishonest Vietnamese, after making friendship with Cambodia, oppressed her and each time took over one or two provinces', wrote Duong.⁶⁰ He described the tactics that the Vietnamese emperor Gia Long had used to take possession of the province of Preah Trapeang [Tra-vinh] in the early 1800's to illustrate his accusations. Gia Long had demanded that the Cambodian King stop collecting taxes from the population of that province, a right given in recognition of their help given to the Vietnamese Emperor during his struggle against the Tay-son. Later, his son and successor, Ming Mang, had a canal dug to divide Cambodia for ever from Hatien and Mat Chrouk [Chaudoc]. He set up an administration in those provinces usurped from the Cambodians, and moved in Vietnamese settlers, continued Duong. He also called to the attention of the French emperor Ming Mang's attempt to take over his kingdom after King Chan's death, during the second half of the 1830's, by keeping Chan's three daughters prisoners in Saigon and having another one drowned, a reference to Princess Ben, the eldest daughter of Chan. Moreover, he added, Ming Mang had the Cambodian ocnha sent off to be imprisoned in Vietnam. As the result of these oppressive policies, pointed out Duong, the Thai king allowed him to return at the request of the Cambodian people, with the assistance of Bodin and an army of more than 5,000 men with armaments. He wrote that:

60 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.174.

The Thai king supported all expenses to help the Cambodians fight the Vietnamese for eight years, forcing them to enter into negotiation. The Vietnamese emperor agreed [then] to return all members of the Royal Family, the ocnha and all those who were sent to places throughout Vietnam, [he] was pleased to accept me as king and sent me two Vietnamese [official] seals, one big and one small. And he promised that the Cambodian provinces taken over by the Vietnamese would be surrendered. Bodin Decha and I thought it was reasonable to re-establish friendship because we have back our family, the ocnha and all the provinces; so friendship [with Vietnam] was restored in 1847. Later on, the provinces that the Vietnamese had promised to return were not handed back; on the contrary, [they] ordered me not to levy taxes any longer [on the population of those provinces]. Cambodians who built boats for trade with foreign countries were not allowed to sail in or out.⁶¹

Duong listed all the territories usurped by the Vietnamese and administered by them since then. They were Donnai, taken over more than two hundred years before, and more recently, Saigon, Long Ho, Sadek, Mitho, Chaudoc, Kramuon Sar, Oubon, Tukhmau, Peam [Hatien], Koh Tral and Koh Tralach.⁶² Finally, he closed his letter with the following plea to the French Emperor:

Henceforth, if the Vietnamese happen to surrender these provinces and others to the emperor of France, please do not accept them because they are genuine Cambodian territories. From the western bank of the Saigon river to Peam [Hatien], including the two islands, this portion must remain Cambodian territory as formerly. However we would not claim our rights over those territories on the eastern bank of the Saigon river, since the Vietnamese took them over long ago.⁶³

Duong's letters reached Singapore at the end of March 1857. As soon as Montigny learned that Duong did not approve his proposed commercial and religious agreement because he had not received beforehand authorisation to do so from the Thai king, he wrote a

61 Ibid, p.176.

62 Ibid, p.176; see also Henri Cordier, 'La politique coloniale de la France', T'oung Pao, Vol.X, p.692, and Rois de Kampuchea, p.5.

63 Thiphakarawong, op.cit., p.177.

long letter to Rama IV, denouncing what he termed 'an act totally beyond those of civilised nations',⁶⁴ and putting all the blame for the failure of his mission in Cambodia on the unfortunate 'spy incident' and on the co-ordinated action of the Thai King's envoys from Bangkok and from Battambang at the Cambodian court. He wrote that:

It was to the efforts of the agent of Siam, who was [travelling to Cambodia] on the corvette La Capricieuse, and to those of the very formal ones of Luang-phay, First mandarin of Battambang, who arrived for the purpose in Oudong, that I must attribute the refusal of the king of Cambodia to ratify and sign the agreement with France.⁶⁵

He added that he had nothing to conceal from the Thai King about the purpose of his mission in Cambodia, and that the latter had moreover given him a letter of introduction to Duong. He summarised the contents of the agreement for the attention of Rama IV and pointed out that:

This convention, furthermore, which does not interfere at all with the suzerainty rights of your Majesty over Cambodia, becomes a necessity for France which cannot afford, in concluding solemn treaties with the Kingdom of Siam and with that of Cochinchina, to leave without also establishing international relations with Cambodia, this small state forming an enclave between these two big kingdoms.⁶⁶

According to Montigny the presence of France in Cambodia was a necessity. This was due primarily to the presence of French missionaries in the country and to the increasing international commercial activities of this kingdom. He estimated that 'already between thirty to forty European ships have called yearly at the

64 Henri Cordier, 'La politique coloniale de la France', T'oung Pao, Vol.X, p.693.

65 Ibid, p.695.

66 Ibid, p.695.

port of Kampot and our French commercial interests have already been represented there'.⁶⁷ He warned the Thai King that unless he ordered his vassal, King Duong, to sign the proposed agreement promptly he would report to Napoleon III about the 'spy incident' which, he said, could endanger the friendly relations recently established between Thailand and France.⁶⁸

In this regard, Leclère's remark, in his L'Histoire du Cambodge, is most accurate. He wrote:

He [Duong] refused to sign a treaty which did not guarantee him anything, but, on the contrary, exposed him to the resentment of the Siamese.⁶⁹

Cambodian chronicles record that also in 1856 Duong's eldest son, Prince Vodey, living at the Thai court, was spending three months as a monk in a wat in the Thai capital during the Buddhist Lent before he left for Oudong via Kampot. He was sent to Cambodia, in fact, on Rama IV's orders, and was received with pomp by his father, as Duong himself was a very pious Buddhist. Vodey stayed in Oudong as a monk until early 1857 and then returned to Bangkok, where he soon afterwards left the religious life.⁷⁰ It is not known whether or not Vodey's journey to Oudong just after the departure of the French envoy, had anything to do with the abortive

67 Ibid, p.695.

68 Ibid, p.696.

69 Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.444. Thiphakarawong, PRP IV and Cambodian chronicles do not provide many details about Montigny's mission in Cambodia and are completely silent about the spy incident and the protestation raised by the French envoy to Rama IV.

70 Nupparot, pp.229-230; Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, p.132; Veang Tioun, pp.849-850; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, pp.15-16.

attempt by Duong to look for protection from France. Nevertheless, in that year, following Vodey's departure, Duong despatched the usual delegation to Bangkok with presents for the suzerain King and also a personal letter for Rama IV pleading for the return of his sons, Vodey and his half-brother Sisowath, in order to 'help him in the administration and protection of Cambodia'.⁷¹ The two princes were sent back to Cambodia in the following year with an entourage of about 1300 persons, more than half of whom were Thai.⁷² Before their return, Rama IV made Vodey Moha Obarach with a new name of Norodom Prom Barirak, known later as Norodom, and his half-brother Sisowath Preah Keovea.⁷³ Duong received his two sons with pomp and organised an official ceremony to invest both of them with their new titles. The two were given individual living quarters in the palace compound, allowed to set up their own court and were given personal appanages.⁷⁴

Cambodian chronicles record that in that year, 1857, too, a revolt of the Cambodian population living in the region of Tay Ninh in the territory under the Vietnamese jurisdiction. It was asserted that this rebellion was supported by the population of the adjoining regions inside Cambodia. Tay Nihn was adjacent to Baphnom Province, where the anti-Vietnamese rebellion led by Kē had broken out in 1820. Unfortunately, this later rebellion is not documented and

71 Nupparot, p.230; Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.197.

72 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.197.

73 Nupparot, pp.230-231; Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.197. This was, as under the previous reigns, a routine act of exercising suzerainty rights by Bangkok over a vassal court.

74 Nupparot, p.232; see also Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, p.132.

almost nothing is known, either about those who instigated it or the strength of the rebels. Moura in his Le Royaume du Cambodge wrote that Duong was aware of this anti-Vientamese uprising beforehand and that because he wanted to encourage it or simply to avoid another invasion of his country by the Vietnamese, he had built up reinforcements in the region bordering Tay Ninh province in order to prevent the Cambodian population living inside Cambodia in Baphnom region getting directly involved with their fellow countrymen on the other side of the border.⁷⁵ The revolt was easily crushed by the Vietnamese as the rebels received no support. Fearing reprisals from the Vietnamese, the Cambodian inhabitants of the region involved in the revolt, fled across the border to safety inside Cambodia.

A new exodus [of Cambodians] from Cochinchina began and the poor people - who rose up because they could no longer stand the Annamese oppression, oppression not only from the authorities but [also] from their Yuon neighbours who stole from them, beat them and persecuted them with all means - crossed the frontiers and took refuge in Cambodia.⁷⁶

In the following year, another uprising broke out, this time of the Cham-Malay minority in the province of Thbaung Khmum. It was directed against Duong's administration and caused considerable trouble to the country. Again, Cambodian chronicles do not provide much detail here, either about the causes, or the importance of the armies involved on both sides. However, Moura was more specific, in his book cited above, about the root-causes of this uprising. He wrote that:

75 Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, p.132.

76 Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.445.

In 1858, the Cham and Malay, established on the eastern bank of the Mékong River, rose up in response to the call of their three leaders, Tuon-Him, Tuon-Su and Tuon-it, against the harshness and exactions of the Cambodian governor of the province of Thbaung Khmum.⁷⁷

These allegations seem to be close to reality; however, these rebel brothers were accused of trying to set up their own authorities over their co-religionists in the province and to create a 'state within the state' in order to escape from the authority of the local governor.⁷⁸ It was alleged that these three brothers commanded wide respect over their co-religionists in the province. They also had another brother named Tuon-li, an ocnha in charge of the Cham-Malay minority with Duong's administration in the capital. These brothers were, according to chronicles, the children of the former high-ranking ocnha named Tuon-pha, once chauvea in the 1810's in Chan's reign, who was executed by the Vietnamese in 1820 in the aftermath of the anti-Vietnamese rebellion of the same year.⁷⁹ These rebels succeeded in taking over control of the province and chased away its governor.

When Duong learnt about the event, he despatched an ocnha, the Yothea Sangkream with a small army to meet the rebels, either to work out a peaceful settlement with them or simply because he underestimated their strength due to lack of information. This army was disintegrated and the Royal Envoy murdered by the rebels. Duong was very upset at the news of the disaster. He organised and personally led another military expedition soon afterwards.⁸⁰ No figures

77 Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, p.133.

78 Ibid, p.133.

79 See Chapter II, p.44.

80 Nupparot, p.234; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.17; Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, p.134.

about the size of the royal army or how long the battle lasted are available; however, it is understood that Duong had a large army, moving especially by boat, and that the rebels had put up a fierce resistance. Finally, one of the rebel leaders was killed during the fighting and their army was routed. They made their retreat to Chaudoc.⁸¹ Ocnha Tuon-li, who lived in Oudong, fearing for his own security, took his family with him and joined his brothers in Chaudoc. The rest of the Cham-Malay population of Thbaung Khmum province and in adjoining regions who did not flee were carried off, on Duong's orders, to settle in Pursat, Lovek, Kampong Tralach, Kampong Luong and Phnom Penh.⁸² This decision was probably taken as punishment of these inhabitants for the direct or implicit support they gave voluntarily or unvoluntarily to the rebels, and also as a precautionary measure to cut off eventual link between the rebels and their co-religionists inside Cambodia, thus to deny them support for further disturbances. Nevertheless, a few months later, in 1859, the rebels succeeded in making a daring and lightning incursion into Phnom Penh and even further, up to Kampong Luong, to release their fellow co-religionists and brought them along to Chaudoc without alerting the Cambodians.⁸³ Duong was stunned by this coup de main. He felt somewhat ashamed of the inability to detect the intentions of the enemy beforehand, and so prevent the coup from happening, or at least to react in time to the raid.

81 Nupparot, p.234; Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.III, p.134; Veang Tioun, p.853.

82 Nupparot, p.234; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.18; Veang Tioun, p.853; Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, p.134; Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.446.

83 Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.18; Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.446; Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, p.134.

Duong summoned the Vietnamese authorities in Chaudoc and asked them to hand back the rebels and their followers.⁸⁴ The Vietnamese governor of Chaudoc refused to comply with Duong's request and began to arm the latter. Duong consequently prepared another military expedition, this time not only against the rebels alone but also against their supporters, the Vietnamese army in Chaudoc. He dared to undertake such a military action because at that time French forces had already overrun Saigon and were attacking the Vietnamese forces in other provinces of Gia-dinh.⁸⁵ He appointed a high-ranking ocnha named Kep, the Governor of Dey Treang, to lead the expedition. The Cambodians fought very well and were said to have gained substantial territory from the Vietnamese, according to Cambodian chronicles.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, Duong made a trip to Kampot, allegedly to inspect the construction of a sea-going junk that he had made as a trading-vessel with Singapore. It was during his stay in Kampot, which lasted several months, that Duong met the French explorer Henri Mouhot, whom he provided with assistance to continue his trip to Oudong.

Mouhot set sail from Bangkok on the 28th December, 1858, to Chantaboun, where he spent about two months exploring the region before he continued his journey to Kampot. He arrived there in March, 1859. In his diary, he wrote:

It happened to be the day fixed for the King of Cambodia, then in Kampot, to pass in review all the ships lying in the roads; however for some time he had been detained by the

84 Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, Vol.II, p.134; Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.446.

85 Nupparot, p.235; Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.446.

86 Veang Tioun, pp.853-854; Leclère, p.445; Moura pp.134-135.

rough weather in a sort of apartment erected for him on piles, in a place where water was shallow. As we passed the custom-house, we perceived the royal cortege advancing towards a large junk, which his Majesty was having built as a trading-vessel with Singapore.⁸⁷

He exchanged a few words of greeting with Duong during his royal tour of inspection, and when he had all the transportation assistance that the King had promised him, he left Kampot for the capital, about a four-day journey by land on the road that Duong had had built earlier and repaired not very long before for the French envoy, M. Montigny, during his visit in 1856. The French explorer gave a good and clear description of this road, probably the most important in Cambodia at that time. He wrote:

At this dry season a broad track in the middle of the road, which altogether is from twenty-five to thirty metres in width, is beaten hard by the frequent passage of vehicles and elephants, and the fine thick dust arising from it is very annoying. The remainder of the road is covered with grass and shrubs, and on either hand is the forest, with its trees tall, straight and majestic, surmounted by immense tufts of leaves. The effect is that of a magnificent avenue; and from the regularity of the intervals between the trees, one might almost believe that it had been laid out by the hand of art.

The stations are equidistant from each other, about twelve miles apart; and at all of them, besides the old caravanserais for the shelter of ordinary travellers, new ones, much more spacious and ornamental, have been erected for the accommodation of the King. There are also intermediate resting-places between every two stations, where travellers can obtain a welcome shelter from the midday heat.⁸⁸

Mouhot was well received by Prince Vodey, the eldest son of Duong, when he arrived in Oudong. In his diary, he gave a detailed account of his audience with this Prince and also about the daily life in the Cambodian capital.⁸⁹ He noticed that at the Prince's

87 Henri Mouhot's Diary: Travels in the Central Parts of Siam, Cambodia and Laos During the Years 1858-1861, p.33.

88 Ibid, p.40.

89 Ibid, p.46 ff.

court there were many Thai pages and retainers. He stayed in Oudong and Ponhea Luu, a town not far away from the capital on the north where Bishop Miche had established his diocese, for a couple of months before he continued his journey to Angkor. He left Cambodia towards the end of the year and returned to Bangkok from where he departed for the Lao kingdoms in the following year.

In the meantime, Duong fell ill soon after he returned from Kampot. He died towards the end of 1860 at the age of 65 after thirteen years on the throne and eight years of warfare, with the Thai General Bodin Decha, against the Vietnamese. Duong was survived by eighteen children, seven sons and eleven daughters.⁹⁰ When Rama IV learnt about the death of Duong, the Thai king allowed Prince Sivotha, younger brother of Vodey and Sisowath, who was living at the Thai court, to return to Oudong to pay his last respects to his father.

Duong's death had called off the military expedition led by ocnha Kep in the region of Chaudoc and all Cambodian troops were withdrawn to the interior of the country. A Vietnamese historian wrote, not very long after, that:

The Cambodians, having noticed that the Empire of Vietnam was being engaged in serious circumstances [during the French military expedition against Saigon and other provinces of Cochinchina] hurried up to bite treacherously. Heavens have punished this ingratitude by killing the King Neach-ong-duong, and now his sons are devouring each other, although they are of the same flesh and bones: so their misery is extreme.⁹¹

90 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.233; however, Veang Tioun, p.857, gives the number of Duong's children as seventeen, eight sons and nine daughters.

91 G. Aubaret, Gia Dinh Thong Chi. Histoire et Description de la Basse Cochinchine, p.131.

According to the same author, Cambodia ceased sending tribute to Hué from the death of Duong onwards. He also wrote that:

Cambodia has been a tributary of our empire for more than four hundred years. The empire of Annam [Vietnam] is always endeavouring to help it [Cambodia] out of misery by rendering peace and tranquillity to it. How many times haven't we handed back to these people their country! How many of its Kings haven't we appointed, supported and protected! Under the present reign we have given back the following territories belonging to the province of Hatien: chan-sum, Sai-mat, Linh-quinh, Can-vot and Vung-th'om. As a rule, our intention is not to take possession of this country at all: we want, following the example of Heaven, to leave men to live in peace; we do not want the destruction of this small country, as other persons with ill-will [Siam] scheme ... The empire of Vietnam has always had for Cambodia the solicitude of a mother who suckles her child, and up to now its feelings have not changed.⁹²

92 Ibid, pp.131-132.

CHAPTER SIX
NORODOM BEFORE THE COMING OF THE FRENCH
(1860-1863)

The death of Duong in October 1860 put an end to an era, an era of relative peace and prosperity that the kingdom and the Cambodian people had known since his coronation thirteen years before. Three of Duong's eight sons each of the three with a different mother played important roles in Cambodian history during the following few years before the establishment of the French protectorate over the kingdom, and for more than six decades after that under the rule of the French authorities.¹

The eldest son of Duong, Prince Vodey, was born in 1835. His two younger half-brothers, Sisowath and Votha, were born respectively in 1840 and 1841.² Soon after the death of the king, the council of high-ranking dignitaries, with the approval of Duong's mother, agreed upon the choice of Prince Vodey, currently Obarach Norodom, the title and name bestowed upon Vodey by Rama IV a few years before on the eve of Vodey's return to Oudong after a decade of exile in the Thai capital, for the throne of Cambodia. As soon as the choice had been made, the newly-appointed successor, who was in Oudong, despatched an embassy of three high-ranking ocnha to the Thai capital, bearing a personal letter to Rama IV to inform the suzerain king about the death of his father, King Duong, and at the

1 Sisowath became king after the death of Norodom in 1904. He died in 1927.

2 See Nupparot, p.185; Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.448.

same time about his appointment. The mission was also to seek approval from Rama IV and his blessing for the new ruler in Oudong.³ When the delegation returned home, Rama IV sent a representative along with some presents for the religious ceremonies to be performed on his behalf for the late King. He also allowed young Prince Votha, who had also been in Bangkok for more than a decade, to return with the delegation, allegedly, to pay last respects to his father. Votha was apparently well received, according to Cambodian chronicles, by his half-brother Norodom on his arrival and also was given money and living quarters in the palace compound, which he shared, at his request, with another younger brother, Sirivong.⁴ The good relationship between Votha and Norodom did not last long, and some sources suggest that Votha was jealous of his brother Norodom for being chosen to succeed to his father instead of himself, so he started to instigate a campaign against Norodom soon after his arrival in the capital, Oudong.⁵ 'After having tried to agitate the capital without great success', wrote Moura, 'Votha went down to Phnom Penh in March 1861 where he hoped to be able to recruit the followers he needed to carry out his scheme'.⁶ Votha and his brother Sirivong stayed in Phnom Penh for about a week and then returned to Oudong. There are no other

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- 3 Nupparot, pp.237-238; Veang Tioun, p.861; Wat Kork Kak, vol.IV, p.20; Leclère, Histoire du Cambodge, p.448; Moura, Le Royaume du Cambodge, vol.II, p.136.
- 4 Nupparot, p.238; see also Ratchaphongsawadan Krung Kampucha, p.326; Leclère, p.448; Moura, p.147.
- 5 Leclère, pp.448-449; Moura, p.137.
- 6 Moura, p.137; see also Nupparot, p.238; Veang Tioun, p.863; Wat Kork Kak, vol.IV, p.21.

details about the activities of these two brothers in Phnom Penh. However, soon after, a report from the Thammea Decho Chauvay Srok of Baphnom reached Oudong in which he informed Norodom that the Snang Saur of Baphnom had begun to recruit men on his own authority and had refused to submit to his own authority when asked to do so.⁷ Saur was described as a younger maternal uncle of Votha.⁸ On receiving the news, Norodom summoned Snang Saur to Oudong and set up a tribunal, presided over by the Talaha and composed of the Kralahom, to try this rebellious ocnha. Saur did travel to Oudong, but instead of presenting himself to the tribunal for trial, he took refuge in Votha's quarters and refused to appear before the court, while Votha made no move to hand him over for trial. This event aroused the suspicions of Norodom as to Votha's loyalty towards him. Moreover, Votha spread word that he was sent back by Rama IV to 'watch over' all princes and ocnha and keep Bangkok informed of those who betrayed the Thai king.⁹ He distanced himself from Norodom and refused to attend the usual audience with his brother. Another Thai delegation from Bangkok arrived at Oudong, at about this time, bearing a letter from Rama IV to Norodom, in which the Thai king gave his approval to the appointment of Norodom as Duong's successor. In this letter, he also referred to a dispute between Votha and Norodom, when both princes had been together at the Thai

7 Nupparot, p.239; Veang Tioun, p.864; Wat Kork Kak, vol.IV, p.21; Leclère, p.449; Moura, p.138.

8 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, vol.I, p.243; Nupparot, p.239; Leclere, p.449.

9 Nupparot, p.239; Wat Kork Kak, vol.IV, p.22; Leclère, p.449.

court, and gave latitude to Norodom as whether to allow Votha to stay in Oudong or to send him back to Bangkok when the funeral ceremonies for Duong were over.¹⁰ The delegation also brought a golden urn for Duong's ashes.

The dispute between the two brothers was open and reached a dangerous stage when Votha refused to attend the official religious ceremonies for his late father, King Duong, while the whole Palace and the Thai representatives were present at them. Norodom's patience towards his rebellious brother was running out, so he decided to send Votha back to Bangkok with the Thai delegation on its return journey.¹¹ However, Votha and Sirivong turned down Norodom's offer that they should leave the kingdom honourably with the Thai envoys and take along as many retainers as they wished into exile in Thailand. Instead, they took refuge in the Phnom Preah Reach Trap, a hill situated in the vicinity of Oudong.¹² In April, 1861, Norodom sent armed men to dislodge them with a view to forcing them to 'flee to Bangkok'.¹³ The rebel brothers put up resistance, however unsuccessfully, and after they had lost a few

10 Wat Kork Kak, vol.IV, pp.22-23; see also Nupparot, p.240 and Veang Tioun, pp.865-866; these two chronicles refer to a disagreement between Votha and Rama IV and not between Votha and Norodom. This is most unlikely. However, Ratchaphongsawadan Krung Kampucha, which is the Thai version of Nupparot, p.329, draws the attention of readers, in a footnote on the same page, to the fact that this point is not clear in the Royal Chronicle and that the letter did not say so.

11 Wat Kork Kak, vol.IV, p.24; Nupparot, pp.241-242; Leclère, p.449.

12 Wat Kork Kak, p.24.

13 Nupparot, p.242.

men during the battle, they escaped to Siemreap, taking along with them Votha's mother, his grandmother, his concubine and their followers, among them Snang Saur and the valiant ocnha Kamheng Reamea Yuthea Keo. Sirivong's mother did not follow her son. She was arrested and kept in Oudong on Norodom's orders. Some sources assert that the Court ocnha, ordered by Norodom to lead the military action against Votha were reluctant to carry out orders, and it was only thanks to a group of determined ocnha, descendants of Portuguese origin, who took over, that the rebel brothers and their followers were dislodged from the Phnom Preah Reach Trap.¹⁴ If this was the case, it suggested that Votha and his party received some tacit support among the ocnha.

About one month and a half later, the chauvay srok of Thbaung Khmum reported that Snang Saur and his party of 24 men, all armed, were heading towards Baphnom. The aim of these rebels, signalled the report, was to enlist relatives and the population of the region to fight for Votha's cause. The news was confirmed a few days later by the Thammea Decho chauvay srok of Baphnom itself, who had been chased away by the rebels under the command of Snang Saur and his deputy Reamea Yuthea Keo, and who had now fled to safety and stayed under the protection of the French Bishop in Raung Damrei, Tay Ninh, in Cochinchina.¹⁵ Saur and Keo quickly succeeded in establishing their authority over the territory situated on the eastern bank of the Mekong river and began to build up and strengthen their army.¹⁶

14 Leclère, p.450; Moura, pp.138-139.

15 Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, pp.25-26; Nupparot, pp.243-244.

16 Wat Kork Kak, p.26; Nupparot, p.244.

They appointed themselves respectively to the ranks of Akkamohasena Thipadei, or Prime Minister (also in charge of the infantry) and Reamea Yuthea Thipadei Kanchor Bavar Satha, probably Minister of War (in charge of the navy).¹⁷ They also appointed a Kralahom and 35 new chauvay srok to all srok in the eastern part of the kingdom as far as to Phnom Penh.¹⁸ Saur established his headquarters in a town named Kampong Khsach Sar in the territory of Baphnom, while his deputy Keo set up his in Peam Meanchey.¹⁹ Norodom reacted to the threat of the rebels by despatching an army under the command of the Kralahom to Phnom Penh as a vanguard army to protect the security of Oudong. He also appointed a new chauvay srok of Baphnom, to replace the Thammea Decho now in Tay Ninh, and sent him off with troops to fight the rebels. One chronicle alleged that the new chauvay srok and his men instead joined the rebels, who by now had succeeded in extending their control over the regions of Kien Svay and Lovea Em opposite Phnom Penh where was stationed the Kralahom's army.²⁰ In order to halt the advance of the enemy towards Oudong, Norodom, assisted by his half-brother, Sisowath, led a military expedition to Phnom Penh. During a three-day battle, they succeeded in breaking the rebel offensive led by Keo and pushed the enemy back from threatening the security of their headquarters. However, word reached Norodom that Snang Saur was on his way to relieve his

17 Wat Kork Kak, p.26; Nupparot, p.245.

18 Wat Kork Kak, p.27; Nupparot, p.245.

19 Wat Kork Kak, p.27; see also Nupparot, p.192 about Peam Meanchey.

20 Nupparot, p.246.

colleague Keo, after he had pacified Thbaung Khmum and other provinces in the north-eastern region of the kingdom.²¹ When Norodom learned about this, and because he had received no support from the local population for his cause, he withdrew all his army to Oudong, leaving Phnom Penh without any defence against the enemy who entered it without a fight.²² They pillaged it, mistreated its population and then, instead of advancing further up to the capital to attack Norsodom's army, they sent troops to take over the territory of Treang in the south and began to recruit more men for their army, apparently for their next offensive of Oudong.²³ In August, 1861, Norodom, in despair at receiving no popular support in his struggle against the rebels and realising that his army could not stop their advance, fled to safety in Battambang. In his flight he took along the Talaha, members of his family and his entourage. He also carried with him the royal regalia, without which a king could not be regarded as a legitimate one.²⁴ He left Sisowath behind in charge of the defence of Oudong. A Thai chronicler wrote that

Norodom, realising that he could no longer stay in Oudong [because] the population was not happy [with him], took his family, children, wives, ocnha totalling 30 persons, and more than 700 officials and servants in his flight on boats to Kampong Chhnang [from where] he sent a letter to inform the Governor of Battambang to come out to meet him.²⁵

21 Ibid, p.247; Moura, pp.140-141.

22 Moura, p.141.

23 Nupparot, p.247.

24 Leclère, p.450; Moura, p.141; Nupparot, p.248.

25 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, vol.I, p.244.

The Governor of Battambang set sail with 600 men on fifty boats to Kampong Chhnang to escort Norodom and his party to Battambang.²⁶ Votha, after staying for a while in Siemreap, had been here too, apparently under Thai guard. He had not been moving from place to place throughout Cambodia or directly involved in the battles like Snang Saur and Reamea Yuthea Keo. When Norodom arrived in Battambang city around the end of August, Votha and his party were removed by the Thai to Sisophon, a town located about fifty kilometres away from Battambang and close to the Thai border.²⁷

Learning about Norodom's flight, Keo took his army to Oudong while Saur returned to his headquarters in Baphnom. When Keo reached Oudong, Norodom's grandmother, the Dowager Queen, summoned him to the palace and ordered him to withdraw his army out of respect for the late King Duong, her son, whose body still lay in the palace.²⁸ In letters about this event from a Thai Phraya sent to Oudong soon after Norodom's flight, and from Sisowath, both of them wrote that

On the fourth day of the waning moon of the eighth month, when the army of 9037 men of Snang Saur, who was ocnha Rithirong Cheanhchey, and of ocnha Kamheng Yuthea, surrounded Oudong city, [the rebels] sent representatives to meet Sisowath telling [him] that they had brought the army here now not to plot against Norodom [or] Sisowath but to arrest Samdech Talaha and seven other ocnha.²⁹

Norodom had informed Bangkok about the trouble when it started. However, Rama IV did not hurry up to take appropriate action either by sending troops to help put down the revolt or by

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., pp.244-245.

28 Moura, p.142; Leclère, p.451.

29 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, vol.I, pp.245-246.

attempting to work out a settlement of the dispute between Norodom and Votha. The Thai King's attitude was understandable. Bangkok was by this time undisputable suzerain of Cambodia. Its suzerain rights over the Khmer kingdom were unchallenged since Hue had been busy in the struggle against the French military occupation of Cochinchina which was the direct result of Hue's anti-missionary policy since the reign of Emperor Ming Mang. By now, France had well established itself throughout Cochinchina, and it was recorded that the French authorities there had sent a gunboat to Phnom Penh, not to challenge the Thai, but to 'protect the French Catholic mission' in Cambodia during this turbulent time. This French presence in the Kingdom was seen by the rebels as an intervention in favour of Norodom, for the local Catholics were siding with the latter in this civil war.³⁰ Another explanation for the non-intervention of Bangkok at the early stage of the trouble was that both Norodom and the rebellious Votha were both the 'protégés' of the Thai court. Rama IV probably considered this quarrel as a family affair that would not endanger the Thai interest at the Cambodian Court. Only after he had learned about Norodom's flight to Battambang did Rama IV look into the matter more seriously. His special envoy to Battambang, Phraya Anuchit Chanhchhay, ordered the governors of Battambang, Siemreap and Kampong Svay to recruit troops and send them to different strategic points to prepare for an eventual advance of the rebels in these provinces. This Phraya also summoned Norodom and his followers and those ocnha who fought for Norodom's cause to a meeting in Battambang itself during which he

30 Leclère, p.451.

allegedly pleaded for an end to the civil war. At the same time he wrote to the rebels and all people throughout the kingdom calling for a halt to the fighting and killing, and mentioned that 'as to the quarrel between Votha and Norodom' on the one hand and 'the question concerning Thammea Decho [former] chauvay srok of Baphnom who had killed Snang Saur's elder brother' on the other hand were concerned, 'we have already petitioned to Bangkok. Whatever the Thai King decides, there will be orders coming out and you will be informed'.³¹

In a letter he wrote to Norodom and Sisowath, the Thai King blamed the worsening of the situation in Cambodia in favour of the rebels on the 'soft action taken by the Oudong group' to quell the rebellion and also on the 'soft action of the Thai Phraya in Battambang in forcing Votha and his brother Sirivong to return to Bangkok.³² Although Votha and Sirivong were apparently under Thai guard from the time they escaped from Oudong to Siemreap, then during their move to Battambang and now to Sisophon since Norodom himself had also taken refuge in Battambang, Rama IV believed that the presence of these two rebellious princes in Cambodia lent at least moral support to the rebels. In his letter, he also referred to the tacit connivance of the local authorities in Battambang in favour of Votha's cause and he gave the reason for his refusal to intervene militarily in favour of Norodom before the latter's flight to Battambang. He wrote:

31 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.I, p.247.

32 Phraratchahatthalekha Phrabat Somdet Phra Chomklao (hereinafter referred to as Rama IV's writings), Vol.I, pp.28.

Taking into consideration that the group of Snang Saur could succeed in cutting off all roads, thus most likely preventing news from coming out, Bangkok should have sent to Battambang an army with a renowned general who would inspire fear among the Cambodians who were in confusion, then brought back Votha and Sirivong [to Bangkok] and subdued the group in Battambang in order to restore normalcy there and to prevent them following Votha. However, because of not having informed both of you beforehand, if I had despatched an army to Battambang as I wished to do, I was afraid that you could see this action as Bangkok having sided with Votha and sent an army to help him, for Votha was so obstinate and pretexting that an illness had forced him to stay in Battambang and prevented him from returning to Bangkok.³³

He added that now he had ordered troops dispatched to Battambang and to Oudong as well to help Sisowath put down the rebellion.

Nevertheless, he said:

As far as the Snang Saur group and those who follow them are concerned, they said that they are not against Bangkok. If these words are true, they should surrender to the [Thai] army sent out [to Cambodia] when they meet it, or if they do not surrender, the Phraya who leads the army should send letters calling upon them to do so...³⁴

Rama IV also sent troops by sea to Kampot to 'protect the security' of French, English and other national merchants, and their ships as well, who traded with the only port of Cambodia, from pillage by the 'bandits'. He told Norodom and Sisowath that, in case of pillage,

The proprietors of the goods would ask [the government of] their country to send representatives to Bangkok to claim reparation from both of you; this would be very annoying.

Because I am worried about all of this, I have ordered Phraya Rithy Kray Kriang ... to lead two gunboats to help protect Kampot against pillages of these foreign merchants by bandits...³⁵

33 Ibid, pp.28-29.

34 Ibid, p.30.

35 Ibid, p.31.

He also added that these gunboats could be used by Sisowath in Oudong should the need arise.³⁶ He informed both Princes that a given quantity of ammunition and gunpowder, and fuses as well, were about to be sent to Oudong and insisted that 'loyal and trusty ocnha' be sent to Bangkok to escort this ammunition and that adequate measures must be taken to prevent these goods from falling into the hands of the rebels during their transportation to Oudong.³⁷

The Thammea Decho former chauvay srok of Baphnom who had been earlier taken refuge from the rebels with the French Bishop in Raung Damrey, Tay Ninh, now made a clandestine return to the provinces of Rumduol and Svay Tiep and started recruiting troops to fight Snang Saur, whose headquarters were in Kampong Khsach Sar in the territory of Baphnom, not far away from Rumduol and Svay Tiep. It was asserted in a chronicle that after a fierce fighting, Thammea Decho succeeded in carving out a piece of territory in the dey of Baphnom itself and re-established his authority as chauvay srok of Baphnom over the population of the region.³⁸

It was at this time that the Cham-Malay brothers, who had fled in 1858 to Chaudoc after the rebellion they instigated in the province of Thbaung Khmum was put down by Duong, returned to Oudong and offered their services to the cause of Norodom. Before his flight to Battambang, Norodom had tried in vain to enlist the support of their co-religionists in the regions of Lovek, Oudong and

36 Ibid, p.32.

37 Ibid, pp.35-36.

38 Nupparot, pp.249-250; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.28; Moura, p.143.

Phnom Penh. It was said that thanks to the call of the Queen Grandmother, who was widely respected and listened to throughout the kingdom these ethnic minority groups agreed to lend their support to Norodom.³⁹ Sisowath directed the leaders of the group to meet Norodom in Battambang where they were warmly received and reinstated in their former titles and functions by Norodom. They were, soon afterwards, sent back to fight the rebels Saur and Keo in Kampong Khsach Sar and Phnom Penh.⁴⁰

Reinforcement troops from Battambang and Siemreap, on Rama IV's orders, also arrived in Oudong to be at the disposition of Sisowath. These combined forces succeeded in dislodging Reammaea Yuthea Keo from Phnom Penh and forced him to withdraw his army to join Snang Saur in Kampong Khsach Sar.

While the fighting was going on in Phnom Penh and in Baphnom, Rama IV ordered that Norodom be escorted from Battambang to Bangkok. He arrived in the Thai capital on the 24th January 1862.⁴¹ According to a Thai chronicle of the Fourth Reign, Rama IV issued a decree putting Sisowath in charge of the affairs of Cambodia during his brother's absence from the kingdom, and thought at one stage of replacing Norodom, who had not so far been crowned, with Sisowath on the throne of Cambodia.

39 Moura, p.142.

40 Nupparot, pp.250-251; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, pp.28-29; Leclère, pp.450-451; Moura, p.142.

41 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.II, p.1; see also Nupparot, p.252; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.30; Moura, p.143.

Rama IV consulted members of the [Thai] royal family and high-ranking dignitaries saying that [we] will arrange for Cambodia to have a king. Norodom is the eldest son, but the [Khmer] people do not love him [because] he is temperamental; Sisowath, his younger brother is an honest man and is loved very much by the people. [If] we appoint the younger brother as king [of Cambodia], we must keep the elder brother in Bangkok. We cannot let both of them stay together [in Cambodia].⁴²

wrote a Thai chronicler.

However, Rama IV's entourage and advisers saw things differently. They suggested that:

If [we] promote Sisowath [as King], he will not acknowledge your [Rama IV] beneficence, for he will consider that it is thanks to the [Khmer] people who love him, that he becomes king of Cambodia. If [we] support Norodom and appoint him as king, he will be very grateful because he has no one to depend on [but only] to turn to your power to bring him back as king [of Cambodia], so he will remember your beneficence much more than Sisowath will.⁴³

Rama IV agreed to the suggestion and hurried to send Norodom back to Cambodia by boat to Kampot. Norodom and the Thai escort party, led by two Phraya, left Bangkok on the 11th February 1862.⁴⁴

Some documents written by French authors some decades after, asserted that Bishop Miche, at the request of the ocnha in Oudong, wrote to the French consul in Bangkok requesting his good offices in intervening with the Thai king on behalf of the ocnha, for the return of Norodom.⁴⁵ Cambodian chronicles relate that the ocnha were 'very happy' when they learned that Norodom had arrived in

42 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.II, pp.1-2.

43 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.II, p.2.

44 Ibid, p.3; see also Moura, p.145; Leclère, p.452; Nupparot, p.252; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.30.

45 Leclère, p.452; Moura, p.145. Cambodian chronicles do not mention at all such intervention from the Bishop, nor does the Thai chronicle PRP IV.

Kampot. They rushed to welcome him there and to escort him back to Oudong.⁴⁶ Norodom's trip from Kampot to Oudong was allegedly organised with pomp and in a manner that displeased the Thai Phraya who had escorted him from Bangkok. A Thai chronicle of the fourth reign relates that:

When leaving [Kampot for Oudong], Norodom himself arranged the procession to escort him. There were troops armed with guns, swords and spears, and there was also a French flag in front of the cortege; it seemed as though [Norodom] had not remembered the royal beneficence [of the Thai king] and also that he had forgotten, from this time onward, that the [Thai] king had kindly raised him and allowed him to return.⁴⁷

Rama IV soon afterwards appointed two Thai Phraya to Oudong, the Phraya Mouk Montry and the Phraya Ratchavoranukon, to 'protect' Norodom against the rebels led by Saur.⁴⁸

With reinforcement troops from Battambang and Siemreap, combined with an army made up of Cham-Malay ethnic minority people, Norodom succeeded in putting down the uprising led by Snang Saur and Reamea Yuthea Keo. The latter was killed during a battle, while the former, who succeeded in escaping from a cage, where he was held as prisoner, took refuge with the French stationed in Raung Damrey, Tay Ninh, in Cochinchina.⁴⁹ The Thai intervened with the French authority in Cochinchina, Admiral Bonard, requesting the extradition

46 See Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.30; Nupparot, pp.252-253; Veang Tioun, p.878. It is understandable since these chronicles were written or revised in 1869 and 1877 respectively in Norodom's reign, and the last one again in 1934.

47 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, vol.II, p.4.

48 Ibid.

49 Nupparot, pp.253-254; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.31; Veang Tioun, pp.879-880; Leclère, p.452; Moura, p.146; Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.II, p.4.

of Saur and others of his group. Admiral Bonard refused to hand over the rebels to the Thai; nevertheless, he sent Saur and his colleagues into exile on the island of Kon Tralach.⁵⁰ Rama IV recalled the Phraya Mouk Montry to Bangkok, since the threat was over, leaving behind in Oudong only Phraya Ratchavoranukon as a 'friend' of Norodom, and supported by Phraya Prachinbury.⁵¹

The uprising was completely put down in the second half of 1862. Nevertheless, calm was not yet entirely restored in the kingdom. In a letter to the two Thai representatives in Oudong towards the end of September, 1862, Rama IV referred to the necessity for the Thai presence in Oudong as long as order and tranquillity were not fully restored in Cambodia.⁵² He also gave his assent to the conciliatory approach undertaken by the Thai envoys in the Cambodian capital towards the followers of the rebels in the handling of the situation in Cambodia in the aftermath of the revolt, for the reason that those who were involved in the uprising against Norodom had also pledged their loyalty to Bangkok.⁵³

With the reinstatement of Norodom, Bangkok had strengthened its influence over Cambodia and became, since the withdrawal of the Vietnamese army in mid 1847, an unchallenged suzerain of Oudong. Norodom had not been crowned since he was chosen as the successor to this father, King Duong, in 1860. During his flight to Battambang

50 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.II, p.4; Moura, p.146.

51 Thiphakarawong, PRP IV, Vol.II, p.5; Rama IV's Writings, Vol.II, pp.56 and 60.

52 Rama IV's Writings, Vol.II, p.61.

53 Ibid, pp.63-64; see also Vol.I, p.30 and vol.III, p.171.

and later to Bangkok, he had taken with him the royal regalia and he did not bring them back when he returned to Oudong. These regalia were the symbol of the legitimacy of a king; without them, the coronation could not take place. Although there was no suggestion or reason given in the chronicles, Cambodian and Thai alike, why Norodom did not bring back these regalia, it is obvious that Rama IV kept these royal symbols in order to more effectively control the events in Cambodia. The Thai had good reason to be suspicious about the loyalty of the Cambodians towards them since Duong's abortive attempt to get rid of the Thai suzerainty over Cambodia in the mid-1850's. The establishment of France in Cochinchina and the frequent visits of French officials to Cambodia during the previous few years had also raised doubt in Bangkok about the real intentions of France towards this small kingdom.

The French authority in Cochinchina had been interested in the events in Cambodia for quite some time. After Norodom was appointed as successor to Duong, Admiral Charner sent a naval officer to Oudong in March 1861, to assure Norodom about the friendly intentions of France towards Cambodia.⁵⁴ In the same year, a French gunboat sailed up the Mekong river twice, in August and October, to the interior of the kingdom allegedly to provide protection to the missionaries and their co-religionists there who were apparently mistreated by the rebels on account of being on Norodom's side.⁵⁵ In September 1862, Admiral Bonard, governor of

54 Georges Taboulet, La geste française en Indochine, Vol.II, p.621.

55 Ibid, p.621; see also footnote 30 in this chapter.

Cochinchina, went to Oudong himself, and realised that the Thai resident envoys there were more powerful than Norodom himself. Bonard went further up to see the Angkor temples. On his return to Saigon, Bonard despatched a reconnaissance mission to Cambodia.⁵⁶ However, it was not until the middle of the following year that the French authority in Saigon decided to take any decisive action in Cambodia. Admiral Bonard was replaced by Admiral La Grandiere who gave serious consideration to the action to be taken towards Oudong. In July, 1863, he sailed to Kampong Luong and on the 11th August, forced Norodom in his palace in Oudong to sign a treaty under the terms of which Cambodia was placed from this time onward under the protectorate of France.⁵⁷

Towards the end of 1863, Norodom succeeded in getting rid of his half-brother, Sisowath, who apparently seemed to enjoy more popularity among the ocnha and the people than himself did. Sisowath was escorted by Thai Phraya, against his will, to Bangkok where he became a monk soon after his arrival in the Thai capital. Other members of his family, including his mother, and his close followers were sent to Battambang.⁵⁸

Norodom was finally crowned in Oudong on June 3, 1864, in the presence of a Thai envoy, who had brought back the royal regalia from Bangkok for the coronation, and of a French navy commander,

56 Ibid; see also Moura, p.145.

57 Georges Taboulet, p.621; see also pp.624-627 for full text of the treaty. For the period between this date and the turn of the century, see Milton Osborne, The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and Response (1859-1905), Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969.

58 Nupparot, p.256; Wat Kork Kak, Vol.IV, p.33.

representing the French Admiral who was governor of Cochinchina and taking the place of the Vietnamese representative at such ceremonies on the previous occasions.

CONCLUSION

Cambodia, a comparatively small kingdom sandwiched between Vietnam and Thailand, with its population so depleted and its ruling elites so divisive, was in no way able to maintain its existence as a relatively independent and peaceful nation without a great deal of goodwill from its two powerful neighbours and enemy, let alone to face up to territorial covetousness on their part.

The divisiveness of its élites weakened further the authority of the court and provided more incentive for the so-called 'southward movement' of the Vietnamese in the east, (which had been carried out steadily over the previous four centuries and was interrupted only by the French in the nineteenth century) on the one hand, and on the other to the Thai in the west, whose influence over the court of Cambodia had been although intermittent nevertheless very strong since the sixteenth century.

During Duong's reign, it seemed that the kingdom had apparently at least enjoyed relative independence and calm, thanks indeed to the defeat of the Vietnamese by the Thai as the result of the anti-Vietnamese uprising of the Khmer people in the early 1840's; and also mainly probably to the fact that for the rest of his life Duong was free of any challenger from his own family. Chan's daughters, the former Queen Mei and her two sisters, were no longer a danger to him, for they had never played positive roles on their own in the ruling of the kingdom and that only nominally, survived on the throne thanks to the Vietnamese, as they were rather their prisoners.

The Thai were more subtle in their relations with the Cambodians. They always insisted upon the Cambodian kings sending

members of their family, either their brothers, sisters or others, or their children, to the Thai court, allegedly to be raised and educated there. By so doing, they accomplished two goals. They could influence to some extent the events in Cambodia to their advantages by using these princes or princesses as hostages, and by bringing pressure to bear on the Cambodian monarchs over whom they had ascendancy because they had raised and appointed them to the throne of Cambodia.

It took four decades or so to get the Vietnamese out of Cambodia in 1847, and only after bloody and destructive wars and rebellions which had almost depleted the kingdom of its population and annihilated its economy and destroyed the social structure as well. The entering of the French into the scene had altered the balance of power in the region and probably contributed a great deal to the survival of Cambodia through the nineteenth century. Otherwise, Thailand and Vietnam would have shared Cambodia between them, or would have fought until the last Cambodian was dead if they could not work out a formula acceptable to both of them. Perhaps Prince Sihanouk was right when he said, in an interview with Jean Lacouture in Peking in 1971, a year after he was deposed by Lon Nol, that "... I do not forget that Cambodia was saved in 1863 from its rapacious neighbours on the west and on the east thanks to the treaty signed by my Great-Grandfather Norodom with France... I honestly believe that in 1863, we were in agonies."¹

1 Norodom Sihanouk, L'Indochine vue de Pékin: Entretien avec Jean Lacouture, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972, p.45. For details from this date onwards, see Milton Osborne, The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and Response (1859-1905).

The present situation in Cambodia in the 1980's might be compared to some extent with that in the mid-nineteenth century. The history of Cambodia during this period can serve as a lesson for the Cambodians themselves, especially the élite, at the present time, that divisiveness among themselves only harms their country and profits those whose interest in the disappearance of this unfortunate land is obvious, and a serious warning to the international community at large that the survival of Cambodia and its people as an independent nation is mortally threatened. The occupation of Cambodia by Hanoi army since early 1979 is somewhat similar to that one in the 1830's which resulted in the military intervention on the part of the Thai in the early 1840's. Only an agreement acceptable to both sides, the Thai and the Vietnamese, and the entering of France into the scene saved Cambodia from disappearing. 'Without using the term itself, the Thai-Vietnamese agreement of 1847 amounted to a neutralisation of Cambodia',² wrote Chandler. Perhaps this might also be the only acceptable solution for Cambodia, at the present time, with a guarantee from an international organisation, e.g. the United Nations, or the super powers involved now in the crisis taking over the place of France in the nineteenth century that Cambodia will not constitute a danger to, or will not be used by any power to threaten, the security of both Vietnam and Thailand. The Thai are most concerned about the continued military occupation of Cambodia now as they were nearly a century and a half before. The only difference between the situation at this time and in the nineteenth century is that now

2 Chandler, Cambodia before the French, p.184.

Vietnam and Thailand have on each side partners and allies involved in the current conflict, thus endangering further peace and stability in the region as a whole. The Vietnamese do not want to see Cambodia slips into the sphere of influence of ASEAN,³ or Thailand, and of China especially as the latter becomes a real danger to Vietnam since both countries now are enemies to one another.

If no acceptable solution for all parties concerned can be found soon, the Cambodian people will probably know the same fate as their ancestors did during the 1830's and 1840's.

3 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Philippines).

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