

**KHMER RELIGION.** The majority of Khmer, the dominant ethnic population of Cambodia, identify themselves as practitioners of Theravāda Buddhism. As in other contemporary Southeast Asian cultures with strong Theravadin identities, the Buddhism practiced in Cambodia is characterized by two trends. Although the Theravadin history of Cambodia is understood by most Khmer to extend back to ancient times, the self-conscious construction of Cambodia as a Theravadin nation is largely a modern development. Khmer Buddhism is (and has long reflected) a complex interweaving of local and translocal religious ideas, movements, rituals, practices, and persons. This history includes, first, the blurring of clear distinctions between Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Tantric historical development in Cambodia, and second, the incorporation of Buddhist values into local spirit cults and healing practices. As Buddhist scholars have only recently begun to recognize, the older normative presentation of a monolithic “Theravāda” tradition dominating Southeast Asia is largely a scholarly fiction.

Buddhism in Cambodia during the past two millennia has been marked by numerous transformations as it was blended, in different forms, with local and Hindu-influenced cults; as diplomats, missionaries, monks, and traders imported new interpretations, monastic lineages, and practices; and as Buddhism rose and fell from official patronage. There are striking continuities in Khmer religious history as well: the political potency of religion in various Khmer kingdoms, states, and regimes; the intertwining in all periods of Buddhist, Brahmanic, and spirit cults and practices; and, at least since the widespread popularization of Theravāda Buddhism after the fourteenth century, the important role of Buddhist ideas and values in the moral vocabulary and ritual practices of Khmer people.

Based on Pali scriptures, many Khmer Buddhists have understood their national religion to originate in the Aśokan missions of the third century BCE. Archeological evidence, however, suggests a somewhat later introduction of Buddhism, possibly as early as the second century CE, when Khmer-speaking peoples were congregated in small chiefdoms referred to in Chinese records as *Funan*. Buddhism was likely introduced into the Khmer regions by Indian merchants, explorers, and traveling monks, but the extent to which this movement should be regarded as a full-scale “implantation” has been debated. The theory of the importation and spread of Buddhism and other Indian ideas and cultural forms into Southeast Asia has been termed *Indianization* by scholars. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a historical account of the “origin” of Southeast Asian cultural forms through the mode of a dominant Indian civilization was widely accepted by colonial scholars of Cambodia, presumably because of its resonance with dominant colonial views of race and civilizational development. By the 1930s, the work of the French Indologist Paul Mus (soon joined by other historians) began to call into question the extent to which the Khmer and other Southeast Asian cultures were shaped by Indian influence, arguing instead that Indian forms had been easily absorbed in Southeast Asia because they complemented existing indigenous ideas and practices, and that the cultural influences moved both ways, not just one way.

More recently, a consensus has emerged among many historians that Indians probably never established a political and economic process akin to modern-era colonization by Europeans in Southeast Asia; nor is there thought to have been a large movement of Indian settlers to Southeast Asia. Rather, aspects of the language, arts, literature, and philosophical, religious, and political thought of Indians were assimilated and reinterpreted by Khmer and other Southeast Asian peoples during the first centuries CE, possibly through a combination of trade, diplomatic, and religious contacts both with India and Indians directly and also through trade and court relations with Southeast Asian neighbors. Among the most important borrowings from India for the Khmer was the introduction of Sanskrit writing and literature. Archeological evidence from the pre-Angkorian (seventh to ninth centuries) and Angkorian (ninth to fourteenth centuries) periods shows that the Khmer utilized both Sanskrit and Khmer for inscriptions: they used Sanskrit for expressive literary purposes, such as extolling the virtues of the gods, and Khmer for more documentary purposes, such as listing donations of slaves to temples. Sanskritist Sheldon Pollock has suggested that the attraction of Sanskrit as a cosmopolitan language was aesthetic; it provided a powerful medium for imagining the world in a larger, more complex, and translocal way. By the middle- or post-Angkorian period (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries), the use of Sanskrit for literary purposes had been replaced by the vernacular, which had developed its own cosmopolitan idiom. For the Khmer, this process of the thorough transformation of the Indian literary imagination is evident in the celebrated Khmer rendering of the *Rāmāyana*, known in Khmer as the *Rāmakerti* (pronounced “Ream-ker”), the *Glory of Rām*. The Khmer adaptation of the Indian epic transforms the hero, Rām, into a *bo-dhisattva*, reflecting Khmer ethical and aesthetic concern with the biography of the Buddha. The *Rāmakerti* appears as a frequent theme in Khmer art in temple murals and paintings and in bas-reliefs on the galleries of Angkorian temples. It has also been reenacted in elaborate traditional dance forms, composed as narrative poetry, and retold in many oral versions, including shadow puppet plays known as *spaek dham* and *lkhon khol* performances used ritually as spirit offerings.

From the second century onward, historical evidence suggests that Buddhist and Brahmanic practices coexisted and became intertwined with local animist traditions and spirit beliefs in the Khmer regions. Chinese records indicate that Khmer court rituals during the Funan period included the worship of Śiva-lingam, suggesting devotion to Śiva, as well as evidence of local spirit cults. The transregional movements of Buddhist missionaries and pilgrims may well have introduced Buddhism into Southeast Asian courts. Chinese histories reveal that Chinese monks en route to India by sea visited sites in Southeast Asia, and likewise that a Buddhist monk from Funan named Nāgasena traveled to China in the sixth century. At

Oc-Eo, a port city of the Funan era, archeologists have discovered Buddha images associated with the Mahāyāna tradition.

Epigraphic records of religious life began to appear in the seventh century, during the period referred to as *pre-Angkor*, when the Khmer regions were apparently dominated by a group of chiefdoms or kingdoms referred to in Chinese sources as *Chen-la*. These inscriptions, primarily composed in Khmer and Sanskrit, suggest that the pre-Angkorian rulers were for the most part devotees of Śiva or Viṣṇu. Contemporary historians warn against over-interpreting this evidence to suppose that an Indian-like “Hinduism” was in existence. Rather, drawing on persuasive linguistic evidence, Michael Vickery has pointed to the practice among pre-Angkor Khmer of attributing Indian names to their own indigenous deities.

These inscriptions also suggest the simultaneous practice or at least the presence of diverse religions, including Buddhism, which was tolerated and to different degrees supported by most pre-Angkorian rulers. Buddhism was apparently practiced alongside or synthesized into the activities of indigenous cults with some Indian features. These sources also reveal that pre-Angkorian Buddhist influences were drawn from India, China, Sri Lanka, and other parts of Southeast Asia, such as Dvaravati and Champa, with more than one form of Buddhism in evidence. Numerous Avalokiteśvara figures, as well as a reference to the name *Lokeśvara* in an inscription from 791 (found in present-day Siemreap), indicate Mahayanist influence. Yet some early Pali inscriptions from the pre-Angkor period have also been found along with Sri Lankan and Dvaravati style Buddha images showing Theravadin presence.

The end of the pre-Angkor period was a period of political and economic expansion and centralization in the Khmer region. As kings enlarged their territories, the Khmer political linking of king and deity began to emerge, a concept referred to in Sanskrit inscriptions as *devarāja*, which may have grown out of older indigenous traditions linking rulers and local deities of the earth. This association developed more fully during the Angkor period, starting with the kingship of Jayavarman II (802–854). While the ideological details of the *devarāja* cults remain unclear—whether or to what extent kings understood themselves as embodied deities or as supplicants to or patrons of particular deities remains contested—scholars have surmised that the considerable political and economic influence wielded by Angkorian kings was inseparable from their close ties to cycles of agricultural production and fertility, their roles as moral exemplars and protectors and patrons of religious life. These dimensions of kingship were manifested in the building projects undertaken by the Angkorian kings, in reservoirs, images, and mountain temples such as Angkor Vatt, the fabulous religious monument constructed by Sūryavarman II (1113–c.1150) and dedicated to Viṣṇu.

Most of the early Angkorian kings were Saivites or devotees of Harihara, a Khmer deity incorporating aspects of both Śiva and Viṣṇu. But Mahāyāna Buddhism was also in evidence and became increasingly connected with royal patronage and political power during the Angkorian period. Yaso-varman, regarded as the founder of Angkor (889–900), dedicated hermitages to Śiva, Viṣṇu, and the Buddha; Rājendravarma II (c. 944–968), Jayavarman V (c. 968–1001), Sūryavarman I (1001–1050), and Jayavarman VI (1080–1107) all patronized Buddhism in addition to other religious cults. Mahāyāna Buddhism came to the forefront, however, toward the end of Angkorian predominance, during the reign of Jayavarman VII (1181–c.1218). Historian David Chandler has suggested that Jayavarman VII may have developed an interest in Mahāyāna Buddhism during a stay in Champa, where Mahāyāna Buddhism was flourishing. Influenced by Buddhist ideas, Jayavarman VII followed a period of bloody warfare in his reign by constructing public works, such as rest houses, hospitals, and reservoirs, as well as the temples Ta Prohm and Preah Kan to honor his parents in combination with the goddess of wisdom, Prajñāpāramitā, and the Bodhisattva Lokeśvara (symbolizing compassion). He also erected the Bayon temple in the center of his capital containing the central image of the Buddha, with four-faced images of Lokeśvara on its towers and exteriors, an image that has been widely associated in modern times with Cambodian identity and with a widespread romantic fascination with Angkor. This image has sometimes been interpreted as a likeness of Jayavarman VII as well, possibly representing a further reinterpretation of the earlier *devarāja* concept, now connecting king and *bodhisattva*.

During the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, as inhabitants of the Southeast Asian maritime regions were adopting Islam, people in mainland areas, including Cambodia, were turning to Theravāda Buddhism. Although there is a general acknowledged acceptance among scholars of the “ascendancy” of Theravāda Buddhist ideologies and practices during this period, it is not exactly clear why or how. Victor Lieberman explains the popularization of Theravāda Buddhism after about 1400 in connection to expanding trade and prosperity moving from coastal to inland regions. He suggests that Theravāda Buddhism became associated with this movement and that it perhaps provided a larger, more cosmopolitan and universal vision of the world for its new adherents. Given the syncretic nature of Khmer religion in general, it is likely that Theravadin ideas and practices continued to intermingle with other Buddhist forms. As the dominant political and economic influence of Angkor waned and the kingdoms of Pagan and Sukothai (in present-day Burma and Thailand) replaced it as regional powers, trade, diplomatic, and other cultural contact with these Theravadin kingdoms spread Theravadin ideas to Khmer-speaking people. A Khmer prince, possibly a son of Jayavarman VII, is supposed to have been among a group of Southeast Asian monks who traveled to Sri Lanka to study Buddhism at the end of the twelfth century and ordained in the Mahaviharin order, a lineage that was carried back and established in Pagan. During the next two centuries, Theravāda Buddhism became assimilated into all levels of Khmer society and synthesized with older Brahmanic and spirit practices, such as agricultural and life-cycle rites, worship of *gnak tā* (local spirits), spirit mediumship, alchemy, and healing practices.

During the post-Angkorian or “middle period,” the population and agricultural centers of the Khmer region gradually shifted southward. While Khmer religion retained its syncretic character, Theravadin forms and idioms dominated. Cultural historian Ashley Thompson sees this movement reflected in the appearance of wooden Theravadin *vihāras* built adjacent to Angkorian Brahmanic stone temples, and in the shift in iconography from images of deities such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Harihara to images of the Buddha. Pali replaced Sanskrit as the language of inscriptions and literature along with Khmer, and much of the classical Khmer literature was composed during this time. Along with the development of Buddhist interpretations of the *Rāmakerti*, Khmer art and literature began to assume Theravadin ideas of the relationship between Buddhist virtue and kingship, and merit-making and *karma*; they also developed an emphasis on the cosmic biography of the *bodhisattva* perfecting virtues in his different rebirths on the path to buddhahood, and a cosmology and ethical orientation reflecting notions of rebirth and moral development in the three-tiered world of the *Trai Bhūm*. A sixteenth-century inscription translated by Thompson, for example, refers to the merit produced by a royal couple, the king’s subsequent rebirth in Tusita Heaven, and his resolve to become an *arahant* at the time of the Buddha Maitreya.

While Khmer scholars tend to situate the end of the middle period and the beginning of the modern period in the mid-nineteenth century with the advent of French colonial rule in 1863, a significant shift in the fate of modern Khmer Buddhism began to occur toward the end of the eighteenth century. From this point until the early nineteenth century, Cambodia was involved in almost continual warfare with its Siamese and Vietnamese neighbors, followed by unrest and violence later in the nineteenth century, as a result of internal revolts, Buddhist millenarian rebellions, piracy, and banditry. The Buddhist material culture that had developed during the middle period was damaged or destroyed as a result of this warfare and social chaos. A nineteenth-century Khmer official wrote in his memoir that in the late 1840s, once a relative peace was restored for the first time in more than a century, the countryside of Cambodia was “shattered,” poverty and starvation were apparent everywhere, and Buddhist temples were destroyed or broken apart. Orphaned and poor, he recalled, “I knew only suffering and misery and my heart was broken. I wanted to ordain in the discipleship of the Lord Buddha... But in Vatt Sotakorok there were no *Dhamma-attha-sāstra-pali* [Buddhist scriptures] and in the *vatt* [temple] where I was ordained as a *bhikkhu*, there remained only ignorant and backward monks.”

The destruction of Buddhist texts, temples, educational facilities, and generations of scholar-monks over a sustained period of time, as well as the weakening of the Cambodian monarchy, the influence of Thai Buddhist reforms, and the colonial religious policies imposed by the French, all contributed to a shift in the religious landscape of Cambodia during and after the reign of King Ang Duong (r. 1848–1860). In his path-breaking work on Khmer Buddhism, which has also held wider repercussions for challenging a rigid historiography of a dominant Pali Theravadin tradition in the region, François Bizot has argued that Khmer Buddhism prior to the period of renovation initiated by Ang Duong was characterized by strong Tantric influences, which were largely eradicated during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bizot’s current translations seek to preserve remnants of these traditions, marginalized and preserved in the esoteric teachings, texts, and meditation practices of small numbers of adherents.

Beginning in 1848, when Ang Duong was installed on the Khmer throne under Siamese patronage, he initiated a Buddhist purification movement that lasted for nearly a century, and which formed the basis for the creation of modern Khmer Buddhism during the early decades of the twentieth century. Ang Duong, who composed a number of well-known literary works himself, gathered Buddhist-trained literati in his court, and turned his attention toward revitalizing Buddhist education and rebuilding Buddhist material culture. The strong court ties with Siam, affinities between Khmer and Thai Buddhism, as well as the vibrancy of Buddhist literary culture in Bangkok during much of the nineteenth century, led the Khmer to turn to Bangkok for Buddhist texts and education. Modern Khmer Buddhism, as it developed, was thus also strongly influenced by the Thai Buddhist reforms introduced in the nineteenth century by King Mongkut and his sons, King Chulalongkorn and (in the Khmer transliteration) Supreme Patriarch Vajirañāṇavararasa.

This Siamese influence is evident in the biographies of the two leading Khmer monks of the nineteenth century, who both received their ordinations in Bangkok. Samtec Brah Sangharāj Dīeñ (1823–1913), the *sam gha* chief who oversaw most of the Buddhist renovation in Cambodia, was captured as a prisoner of war by the Siamese army as a young boy and taken to Bangkok as a slave, where he became connected to the entourage of the exiled Ang Duong. Dīeñ was ordained as a novice at the age of eleven, and by the time he was ordained as a monk in 1844, he had already won the notice of Rama III for his brilliance. By the age of twenty-five, his reputation as a scholar and monk-scribe was well established in monastic circles in Bangkok, and his works included a translation of the *Trai Bhūm* from Thai, as well as the *pātimokkha*, a section of the Vinaya or monastic code regularly recited by monks. Dīeñ returned to Cambodia at the request of Ang Duong to head up the restoration of Buddhism in the kingdom, and following a Thai model of administrative centralization, he began to conduct the first of several reorganizations of the *sam gha* that occurred between the 1850s and 1880. Appointed to the rank of supreme patriarch in 1857, Dīeñ also instituted monastic Pali exams, beginning in 1858. He retained his close connections with the Khmer throne during Norodom’s reign (r. 1864–1904), and was venerated by the general populace until his death in 1913.

The other highly regarded Khmer monk of the nineteenth century was Samtec Brah Sugandhādhipatī Pān (c.1824–1894), the monk credited with the importation of the Dhammayutnikāy (Mongkut's reformist sect) to Cambodia. Born in Battambang, Pān was ordained as a novice in 1836 at Vatt Bodhivāl in Battambang; in 1837 he went to Bangkok to study Pali, his biography states, because of “the deplorable state of Buddhist education in his [natal] pagoda.” He was ordained in the Mahānikāy sect as a *bhikkhu* at the age of twenty-one, but in 1848, he was exposed to an influential teacher of the Dhammayut sect; one biography states that he also studied Pali under the direction of Mongkut, who was still in the monkhood at this time. Pān reordained as a Dhammayut *bhikkhu* in 1849, with Mongkut presiding at the ceremony.

The date of Pān's return to Cambodia and the founding of the Dhammayut sect in Cambodia has been attributed to the reigns of both Ang Duong and Norodom, either in 1854 or 1864. While the exact date is uncertain, it is clear that in symbolic and political terms, the erudite monk Pān—and with him, the establishment of the Dhammayut sect—emanated from the highest court circles in Bangkok. Pān was accompanied on his return to Cambodia by a number of Siamese monks, who presented the kingdom with a collection of eighty Siamese texts, presumably the *tipitaka*, which had been “lost” in Cambodia during the years of warfare. Under Norodom, Pān constructed the seat of the Dhammayut order in Vatt Bodum Vaddey in Phnom Penh. He was apparently literate in Pali, Sanskrit, Thai, Lao, Burmese, and Mon, and could also read ancient Khmer inscriptions. Dhammayut sources suggest that he was an important compiler of Vinaya commentaries, monastic training manuals, and manuals on merit-making rituals.

While these two widely-respected and well-educated monastic leaders were able to foster the renovation of Buddhism envisioned by Ang Duong from the 1850s onward, monks and novices seriously interested in advanced Pali studies were still better served in Bangkok, usually after receiving a basic primary and novitiate education in Cambodia. Monastic biographical sources suggest that prior to about 1910, young boys studying in Khmer temples learned Khmer literacy, writing, arithmetic, vernacular religious literature such as *cpap* (didactic poetry), *jātaka*, *lpaen* (narrative poetry), and sometimes *kpuan* (manuals) or *tamrā* (technical treatises) on astrology, medicine, or ritual procedures. Monks and novices who traveled to Bangkok for study or text collection purposes, such as Ukñā Suttantaprija Ind (1859–1924), Brah Mahāvimaladhamm Thoñ (1862–1927), and Brah Mās-Kaṅ (1872–1960), encountered new methods of Pali grammar instruction, translation, and textual analysis that went beyond the older pedagogical traditions employed in most Khmer monasteries of the day of rote memorization, often without clear understanding of the Pali verses being chanted.

Although the Dhammayutnikāy imported from Siam and patronized by the royal family never took wide hold out-

side of urban areas, the wider imprint of Thai reformism influenced young Khmer monks in the more traditional Mahānikāy order in Cambodia. These young monks, led in particular by Chuon Nath (1883–1969) and Huot Tath (1891–1975), pushed for a series of innovations in the Khmer *samgha* beginning in the early twentieth century: they advocated the use of print for sacred texts (supplanting the traditional inscription of palm-leaf manuscripts mandated by *samgha* officials for Buddhist texts into the 1920s in Cambodia); a higher degree of competence in Pali and Sanskrit studies among monks; a vision of orthodoxy based on understanding of Vinaya texts for both *bhikkhu* and laypersons; and modernization in pedagogical methods for Buddhist studies. As the modernist and reformist ideas of Nath and Tath developed, the two monks came to champion the understanding and practice of a rationalistic, scripturalist, demythologized Buddhism, similar in many respects to the reformed Buddhism of Mongkut.

Chuon Nath, often considered to be the greatest Khmer monk of the twentieth century, was born in Kompong Speu and ordained as a *bhikkhu* at Vatt Bodhi Priks in Kandal in 1904; he was educated as a novice first at Vatt Bodhi Priks and later at Vatt Un n ālom. After his ordination as a *bhikkhu* he returned to Vatt Un n ālom, where he continued his Pali studies under the direction of Brah Mahāvimaladhamm Thoñ, who was in turn a student of Brah Samtec Sangharāj Dieñ. Nath's younger colleague and long-time collaborator, Huot Tath, was also born in Kompong Speu, and was ordained in 1912 at Vatt Un n ālom. Both men generated controversy and were held in scorn by some of their older colleagues within the Mahānikāy during their early years as reformers, but they rose to prominent monastic ranks during the late 1920s and 1930s, serving as professors at the Sālā Pali and as key members of the Commission for the Production of the *tipitaka*. Nath was appointed as *samgha* head in 1963; Tath followed as *sangharāj* in 1969, after Nath's death, holding this title until his execution by the Khmer Rouge in 1975.

The reforms envisioned by the faction of Nath and Tath were not uniformly accepted within the Khmer *samgha*. Early attempts by Nath to introduce print met with resistance from established *samgha* officials and led to increasing factionalism between modernists and traditionalists within the Mahānikāy that continued into the 1970s. The reformist efforts led by modernist monks did however coincide with both the pedagogical ideologies and political interests of French colonial administrators who backed Nath and Tath in an effort to reinvigorate Buddhist education within the protectorate. The French administration took on the role of *samgha* patron in part to foster European models of scientific education but also, fearing Siamese and Vietnamese influence, to stem the flow of Khmer Buddhist literati to Bangkok, as well as the movement of monks within French Indochina. The modernist agenda also helped to counter the influence of millenarian Buddhism in the provinces, which

threatened French rule. In French Cambodia, as well as in southern Vietnam, peasant insurrections linked anticolonialism with predictions of a Buddhist *dhammik* (“righteous ruler”) who would usher in the epoch of the Buddha Maitreya.

The Buddhist reform movement advocated by Nath, Tath, and their fellow professors and scholars at the Sālā Pali—known initially as Dharm-thmī (“modern *dhamma*”) and later as Dhammakāy or simply *smāy* (“modern”) Buddhism—shaped the contours of official scholarly Buddhism in Cambodia as these reformers taught in advanced Buddhist educational institutions and *dhamma*-Vinaya schools, and prepared textual compilations. But this textually-oriented Buddhism was never the only or even the dominant expression of religious life in modern Cambodia, and even while a figure such as Chuon Nath was widely respected as a great scholar, he was also venerated by the Cambodian populace as the possessor of extraordinary powers of *iddhi*, such as the ability to understand the speech of birds.

In urban as well as rural areas, Khmer religious life during most of the twentieth century was deeply ritualistic, involving the daily or seasonal worship of deities of the earth, water, rice fields, and cardinal directions, as well as local tutelary spirits and ancestors, along with the care and manipulation of the relationships between humans and these powerful spirit beings. (Some of these generalizations remain current, but since so many aspects of Khmer life were altered after 1975, it is more accurate to confine these descriptions to the pre-1975 religious context documented by ethnographers such as Eveline Porée-Maspero and May Ebihara). Spirit houses in fields and outside of houses were often attended daily, while shrines within the house were maintained for ancestor spirits, known as *mebā*, whose dissatisfaction or disapproval could potentially cause illness in family members. While Buddhist monks were invited to offer prayers and blessings or sprinkle sacred water at weddings, funerals, housewarmings, and other life-cycle events, other religious practitioners besides monks often presided at these kinds of events. These included *āchāry*, lay teachers at the *vatt* who assisted with life-cycle rituals, protective amulets, and so on; *grū Khmaer*, traditional healers who could diagnose and cure many illnesses, including those connected with the spirit world; *rūp arakkh*, spirit mediums who could communicate with the spirits of the dead, *arakkh*; and *chmap*, midwives who assisted with the rites and practices necessary to assure safety for mothers and infants during the highly vulnerable passage of childbirth.

The ethical ideas underlying these religious practices reflect several central themes. First and perhaps most important, is a belief in the efficacy of the law of *karma* (*kamm* in Khmer). Summarized by the contemporary Khmer monk Venerable Maha Ghosananda, this law states: “*Karma* means action. . . . I am the owner of my *karma*. And the heir of my *karma*. I am related to my *karma*, and abide supported by my *karma*. Whatever *karma* I shall do, whether good or

evil, of that I will be the heir. What we do we will reap, what we sow we will reap.” Given this understanding, moral behavior and especially the attainment of high levels of moral purification—most often by monks and other religious virtuosos—were highly valued. But even for lay people, religious participation was marked by the frequent ritual invocation of the five Buddhist precepts (*sīl pram* in Khmer: to abstain from taking life, stealing, false speech, improper sexual relationships, and the use of intoxicants), as well as by ceremonies of homage and taking refuge in the “triple gem” (the Buddha, *dhamma*, and *sam gha*), and by merit-making through offering gifts of food and robes to monks, through the copying or dedication of Buddhist texts, and for those with enough means, through sponsoring religious building projects. Gratitude to parents or teachers, to whom one could dedicate merit, and veneration toward monks, the king, and the nation were increasingly intertwined with ideologies of merit-making during the twentieth century. A Khmer proverb translated by Bounthay Phath conveys the understanding of impermanence and *dukkha* that inscribed the religious ethos of her childhood in Phnom Penh during the 1950s and 1960s: “Wherever one goes, suffering will go along just as the shadow follows the body.”

While modernist *sam gha* officials and scholarly Buddhists in the 1920s and 1930s sometimes decried the religion practiced by the majority of Khmer as “non-Buddhist,” for the most part, the spirit practices, Brahmanist court rituals, ancestor propitiation, and healing cults amply documented by ethnographers coexisted with reformist forms of Theravāda Buddhism. This complementarity between “popular” and textual interpretations of Buddhism was visible even in 1930 when the Buddhist Institute was established under the directorship of French curator Susanne Karpelès, a French Indologist who promoted Nath’s and Tath’s reform Buddhism; Karpelès and her staff happily orchestrated colorful processions and merit-making festivals in the countryside as they collected copies of Buddhist manuscripts for the Buddhist Institute and Royal Library. The major project of the institute was to produce a critical Khmer-Pali printed edition of the Tipitaka, culled by a commission of Buddhist scholars from palm-leaf manuscripts donated by the Khmer populace, and finally completed in 1968. After 1930, the Buddhist Institute continued to lead the development of modern Buddhism in Cambodia, and historian Penny Edwards has argued for its role as a site for imagining Khmer nationalism. Monks were among the most prominent dissidents against the French colonial regime, and the institute also helped give rise to the development of the Communist Party in Cambodia; Mean (Son Ngoc Minh) and Sok (Tou Samouth), later leaders of Khmer communism, were both recruited by Susanne Karpelès for Buddhist education.

In spite of this early connection between Buddhism and the Communist Party, after the Khmer Rouge took power in April 1975, they quickly sought to eradicate Buddhism in Democratic Kampuchea. Ian Harris estimates that 63 per-

cent of monks died or were executed during the Democratic Kampuchea years; many others were forced to disrobe, Buddhist monasteries were destroyed or used for other purposes, Buddhist text collections were discarded, and Buddhist practices were forbidden. Nearly two million people died as a result of Khmer Rouge policies enacted between 1975 and 1979.

Since the Vietnamese invasion of 1979 that brought an end to the murderous Democratic Kampuchea regime, Buddhism has slowly reemerged in Cambodia, in some ways resembling Buddhism before 1975 and in other ways altered. The People's Republic of Kampuchea allowed the reorganization of the Khmer *samgha* under the Venerable Tep Vong, but imposed severe restrictions on Buddhist participation and expression. These were gradually lifted by the People's Republic of Kampuchea and the subsequent (1989) State of Cambodia government. Since 1989, many temples (*vatt*) have been rebuilt, often from contributions by overseas Khmer, and Buddhist life has been widely reconstituted.

Research by anthropologists John Marston and Judy Ledgerwood, among the first to begin to document the new religious context, suggests that older strains of Khmer Buddhist thought, such as tensions between "modernists" (*smāy*) and "traditionalists" (*purān*), as well as millenarian movements (connected in some cases with the nineteenth-century versions), have reemerged in this new period. Ledgerwood's work has also begun to document the ways in which contemporary political leaders such as Hun Sen are returning to the pre-revolutionary model of political rulers as patrons of the *samgha* in order to establish authority and legitimacy. On the other hand, the loss of so many monks, intellectuals, and texts and a whole generation of young lay people raised without any religious education during the Democratic Kampuchea period is seen by some contemporary Buddhist leaders as a major obstacle to the rebuilding process and an irreparable break with the past. The traumatic experience of the Democratic Kampuchea period and its aftermath has in some cases ushered in new kinds of cynicism and questioning of basic Buddhist truths, such as the efficacy of the law of *karma*; in contemporary Phnom Penh, the classic karmic formula, "If you do good, you will receive good in return; if you do evil, you will receive evil," is sometimes sardonically rephrased to reflect a widespread perception of governmental corruption: "If you do good, you will receive good; if you do evil, you will receive a car." Other contemporary Khmer now identify even more strongly with Buddhism; many seek to remember the dead through merit-making ceremonies or to ease traumatic memories through meditation practice. Lay meditation movements have begun to flourish in Phnom Penh, a trend already decades old in other Theravadin countries such as Burma and Thailand.

As diasporic Khmer establish new Buddhist centers around the world in cities such as Lowell, Massachusetts, and Long Beach, California, and as Japanese and Western Buddhists and aid workers visit Cambodia, new global Buddhist

ideas are reaching contemporary Khmer Buddhists, including "engaged Buddhism," models for Buddhist-led care for AIDS patients, and human rights education and conflict mediation techniques taught through the medium of Buddhist concepts. The internationally known Khmer monk, Mahā Ghosananda, a student of Gandhian ideas, began leading peace marches across Cambodia in 1989 known as *dhammayātrā* (*dhamma* pilgrimages), which crossed war zones and called attention to injustices in contemporary society. Nadezhda Bektimirova reports that after the 1997 coup, seven hundred monks marched for peace in Phnom Penh, carrying the slogan "May peace come to the home of every Cambodian."

**SEE ALSO** Buddhism, article on Buddhism in Southeast Asia; Hinduism in Southeast Asia; Samgha, article on Samgha and Society in South and Southeast Asia; Southeast Asian Religions, article on Mainland Cultures.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The classic, indispensable synthetic work on Khmer history is David Chandler's *A History of Cambodia*, rev. 3d ed. (Boulder, Colo., 2000). *The Khmers*, by Ian Mabbett and David Chandler (Oxford, 1995), emphasizes early Khmer history. The essays by Keith Taylor, Ian Mabbett, J. G. De Casparis, Barbara Watson Andaya, and Anthony Reid in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 1: *From Early Times to c. 1800*, edited by Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge, UK, 1992), along with Victor Lieberman's *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830* (Cambridge, 2003), can provide a picture of the history and development of the Khmer in a larger regional perspective. Chandler, a student of Paul Mus and strongly influenced by his theories about indigenous culture, reflects the turn toward producing "autonomous" histories of Southeast Asia. Together with Ian Mabbett, he translated and edited Mus's *India Seen from the East: Indian and Indigenous Cults in Champa* (Cheltenham, Australia, 1975). While Indianization theories have been challenged, George Coedès's *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, translated by Sue Brown Cowing, remains an important comprehensive regional treatment of Southeast Asia. Louis Finot's *Le Bouddhisme, son origine, son évolution* (Phnom Penh, 1956), which shares the Indianization bias, was written in the early 1920s in part to convey this notion to Khmer Buddhist monks. It deals primarily with Indian Buddhist history rather than Khmer Buddhism, and was influential for both Chuon Nath and Huot Tath, who studied Buddhist history and epigraphy with Finot in Hanoi in the early 1920s.

Bizot's most important work, in which he lays out his theory of Tantric influence in Cambodia, is *Le Figuier à cinq branches* (Paris, 1981); he continues to translate and publish vernacular works in this vein. Relatively few synthetic works are available on Khmer Buddhist history in European languages. Ian Harris' new *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice* (Honolulu, 2004), drawing primarily on European sources, provides a much-needed overview of Khmer Buddhist history. This work can be supplemented with Charles F. Keyes, "Communist Revolution and the Buddhist Past in Cambodia," in *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern*

*States of East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Charles F. Keyes, Laurel Kendall, and Helen Hardacre (Honolulu, 1994), and the topical essays on historical and contemporary religion included in *History, Buddhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*, edited by John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie (Honolulu, 2004). In Khmer, Huot Tath has a history of Khmer Buddhism called *Brah buddh-sāsanā nau Prates Kambhujā Sankhep* (An abbreviated account of Buddhism in Kampuchea; Phnom Penh, 1961).

Michael Vickery's brilliant and meticulous reading of Khmer epigraphy and other historical sources in *Society, Economics, and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia: The 7th–8th Centuries* (Tokyo, 1998) treats the pre-Angkor period, while Ian Mabbett's *Patterns of Kingship and Authority in Traditional Asia* (London, 1985) and Stanley Tambiah's *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* (Cambridge, U.K., 1976) examine historical relationships between kingship and religion in Cambodia and elsewhere in the Theravadin world. Helpful works on Angkor (and after) include the collected essays in *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, edited by Helen Ibbitson Jessup and Thierry Zephir (Washington, D.C., 1997); Charles Higham's *The Civilization of Angkor* (Berkeley, 2001); and Eleanor Mannikka's *Angkor Wat: Time, Space, and Kingship* (Honolulu, 1996). Michael Vickery's Yale University dissertation, "Cambodia After Angkor: The Chronicular Evidence for the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries" (1977), and Ashley Thompson's "Introductory Remarks Between the Lines: Writing Histories of Middle Cambodia," in *Other Pasts: Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia*, edited by Barbara Watson Andaya (Manoa, Hawai'i, 2000), both deal with post-Angkorian epigraphy. Reid's edited volume *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993), and Khin Sok's *Le Cambodge entre le Siam et le Viêt-nam (de 1775 à 1860)* (Paris, 1991), take different approaches, one broadly cultural and regional, one closely focused on Khmer social stratification and political history, but both help one to understand Khmer society in the late middle/early modern period. David Chandler's "Going Through the Motions: Ritual Aspects of the Reign of King Duang of Cambodia, 1848–1860" in *Facing the Cambodian Past*, by David Chandler (Chiangmai, Thailand, 1996), discusses royal patronage of Buddhism on the eve of colonialism.

There are a number of helpful works in reference to Khmer literature, which is largely religious in nature. Saveros Pou's work is extensive, but of special note in reference to religion is her study, *Études sur le Rāmakerti (XVI–XVII siècles)* (Paris, 1977), and her translation and analysis of the *cpap'*, *Guirlande de Cpāp'* (Paris, 1988). François Bizot's *Rāmaker ou l'amour symbolique de Rām et Setā* (Paris, 1989) is a study and translation of a Khmer version of the text used as a manual for the practice of Tantric meditation in which the Buddhist adept follows the journey of Rām as a form of spiritual instruction. A contemporary oral version of the *Rāmakerti* used for ritual purposes has been collected and edited by Pic Bunin as *Rāmakerti bol daoy Tā Say* (*Rāmakerti* as recited by Grandfather Say [Phnom Penh, 2000]). Khing Hoc Dy has written a comprehensive survey of Khmer literature and authors, *Contribution à l'histoire de la littérature khmère: Littérature de l'époque "classique" (XV<sup>ème</sup>–XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècles)* (Paris, 1990), and *Ecrivains et expressions littéraires du Cambodge au*

*XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1993), as has Judith Jacob in her highly useful *The Traditional Literature of Cambodia: A Preliminary Guide* (Oxford, 1996). In Khmer, the most-cited work on literature is by Lī Dhām Teñ, *Aksarsāstr Khmaer* (Khmer literature [Phnom Penh, 1961]).

The classic work on colonial Buddhism is still Adhémard Leclère's *Le bouddhisme au Cambodge* (Paris, 1899); this work is particularly useful for its records of Leclère's conversations with Khmer monks of the period. His numerous translations of Buddhist vernacular works from the period are also available. Alain Forest's *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française: Histoire d'une colonisation sans heurts (1897–1920)* (Paris, 1990) touches on many aspects of Buddhist organization during the French Protectorate period, and *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and Response (1859–1905)* by Milton E. Osborne is especially helpful for understanding millenarianism (Ithaca, N.Y., 1969). Essays by Penny Edwards and Anne Hansen in *History, Buddhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia* (cited above) treat the role of religion in "imagining" Khmer identity during the colonial period. The most helpful published source in Khmer on the early twentieth century is Huot Tath's memoir *Kalyāmitta rabas' khñu* (*My Kalyāmitta* [Phnom Penh, 1993]). Bunchan Mul's essay "The Umbrella War of 1942" in *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942–1981*, edited by Ben Kiernan and Chantou Boua (London, 1982) considers later involvement of monks in anticolonialism, and the introductory chapters of Ben Kiernan's *How Pol Pot Came to Power* (London, 1985), offer a tightly condensed overview of Buddhist developments during the colonial period. Many Khmer reformist writings from 1914 and later are still available; they were often reprinted decades later (without revision) by the Buddhist Institute. These are largely Buddhist ethical works by monk-scholars such as Um-Sūr and Lvī-Em, as well as Nath and Tath. Tauch Chhuong's oral historical work, *Battambang during the Time of the Lord Governor*, which contains chapters on religious life in Thai-ruled Battambang, was translated by Hin Sithan, Carol Mortland, and Judy Ledgerwood (Phnom Penh, 1994).

In addition to the ethnographic works on Khmer ritual life discussed above, Eveline Porée-Maspero's *Étude sur les rites agraires des Cambodgiens* (Paris, 1962–1969), and May Ebihara's Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation, "Svay: A Khmer Village in Cambodia" (1968) and "Interrelations between Buddhism and Social Systems in Cambodian Peasant Culture" in *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism*, edited by Manning Nash et al., (New Haven, Conn., 1966); Ang Choulean's *Les êtres surnaturels dans la religion populaire khmère* (Paris, 1986); and Alain Forest's *Le culte des génies protecteurs au Cambodge: Analyse et traduction d'un corpus de textes sur les neak ta* (Paris, 1992), give a thorough treatment of spirit cults and practices. Work on Buddhism in the Democratic Kampuchea period is still emerging, but published works include Yang Sam, *Khmer Buddhism and Politics 1954–1984* (Newington, Conn., 1987), and Boua Chanthou, "Genocide of a Religious Group: Pol Pot and Cambodia's Buddhist Monks" in *State Organized Terror: The Case of Violent Internal Repression* (Boulder, Colo., 1991). Many works are available on diasporic Khmer religion, including several essays collected in *Cambodia Culture Since 1975: Homeland and Exile*, edited by May Ebihara et

al. (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994) and Nancy Smith-Hefner's *Khmer-American: Identity and Moral Education in a Diasporic Community* (Berkeley, 1999). Some of the work cited above is from unpublished sources; ethnographic research on Khmer religion by Judy Ledgerwood and John Marston (referred to above) is not yet available. An overview on contemporary religion appears in Nadezhda Bektimirova's "The Religious Situation in Cambodia in the 1990s" in *Religion, State, & Society* 30, no. 1 (2002): 63–72.

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