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Lucien Hanks titled this symposium a “quest” into the nature of Southeast Asian societal organization prior to the eighteenth century. This paper represents such a quest in the sense of a journey of inquiry into post-Angkorean Cambodia of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to explore the basic problem posed by Hanks: whether pre-colonial society was organized into horizontal castes/classes *or* vertical “entourages/circles”.¹ My attention will be directed primarily to sociopolitical organization, while David Chandler focuses more on norms and ideology.

As an anthropologist accustomed to studying contemporary Khmer peasantry, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were very much terra incognita to me when I began this endeavor, and much of the terrain is still shadowy. Available source materials are not always clear about social organization; in particular, they tell us little of the way things actually worked as compared to formal structure and norms, and of the lives of common folk as contrasted to the élite. At various points there must be inference or reasoned speculation on the basis of available evidence and comparative data. While there is temptation to project Angkorean material “forward” into later centuries or, conversely, to infer “backward” from nineteenth-century sources, I have been warned that this is problematical, given changing historical circumstances. For this reason I paid primary attention to legal codes dating from the seventeenth century,² sixteenth and seventeenth century inscriptions,³ a collection of *chbap*, a poetic genre of moral didactic texts developed during the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries,⁴ and some folktales.⁵ In

I wish to express my deepest appreciation and thanks to David P. Chandler for his generous aid and advice in directing me to historical materials and guiding me through the terrain of sixteenth and seventeenth century Cambodia. He was a wise and patient *kru* without whose help this paper could not have been written.

¹Lucien Hanks, “The Thai Social Order as Entourage and Circle”, in *Change and Persistence in Thai Society*, ed. G. William Skinner and A. Thomas Kirsch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 197–218.

²Adhemard Leclère, *Les Codes cambodgiens*, 2 volumes (Paris: E. Leroux, 1898). I used in particular the following: in Volume I the “Krâm Srok” (A.D. 1693), pp. 89–122; the “Chbap Tûmnîn Pî Bauran” (A.D. 1692), pp. 123–75. In Volume II, portions of the “Chbap Kaul Bântop” (A.D. 1693), pp. 479–501; “Krâm Sauphéa Thipdey” (A.D. 1618), pp. 502–56; and “Krâm Pohulla Tep” (A.D. 1693), pp. 357–83.

³The following are all by Saveros Lewitz. “Les Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor Wat”, *Journal Asiatique* CCLX, nos. 1–2 (1972): 107–29. “Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 17–25”, *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient* [hereafter *BEFEO*] 60 (1973): 163–203. “Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 26–33”, *BEFEO* 60 (1973): 205–42. “Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 35, 36, 37, 39”, *BEFEO* 61 (1974): 301–37.

⁴The following are all by Saveros Pou and William Jenner. “Les Cpāp ou ‘Codes de conduite’ khmers: I. Cpāp Kerti Kāl”, *BEFEO* 62 (1975): 369–90. “III. Cpāp Kun Cau”, *BEFEO* 64 (1977): 167–215. “IV. Cpāp Rājaneti ou Cpāp Brah Rājasambhār”, *BEFEO* 65 (1978): 361–402. “V. Cpāp Krâm”, *BEFEO* 66 (1979): 129–60.

⁵G.H. Monod, *Contes khmers, traduits du cambodgien* (Monans-Sartoux, Alpes-Maritime: Publications Chitra, C.A. Hoegman, 1943).

addition, I used Groslier's discussion of Portuguese and Spanish accounts of sixteenth-century Cambodia,⁶ as well as various anthropological and historical works, including some on earlier and later periods of Cambodian history, although I have tried to keep inferences forward or backward to a minimum.

I confess to some diffidence at venturing into the historian's turf, but my very naïveté was perhaps useful in that I approached the terra incognita with few preconceptions as to what I would find. In exploring the historical material I tried to construct a partial ethnography (not a holistic one because the sources give only bits and pieces of life) of sixteenth and seventeenth century Cambodian social organization.⁷ I shall try to sketch, with admittedly broad strokes, what I take to be the nature of society in these two centuries.

To turn to the question raised by Hanks, I will state at the outset that I would not characterize Cambodian society as one of caste. While the term *varna* was borrowed from India, the Indian social system of strictly hereditary, endogamous, occupationally specialized and segmented castes with fixed membership (*jati*) — i.e., a caste system as I understand it — was not reproduced in Cambodia.⁸ It is possible to delineate horizontal levels or strata of some sort, though how exactly to characterize and what to call them is a matter I shall return to later. But in Cambodia there appears to have been a fluidity of membership in these strata, as well as a permeability between layers, so that people moved in and out of higher and lower levels. This differentiated Cambodian social organization from the more rigidly structured Indian castes. The presence of horizontal distinctions, however, by no means precluded the coexistence of entourages/circles or patron-client relationships. Given the complexities of Cambodian society, it is untenable to phrase the question as an either/or proposition. Clearly, we must see Cambodia (and other Southeast Asian cultures) as having both "horizontal" and "vertical" modes of organization forming a social fabric embroidered with an intricate design of titles, ranks, and other distinctions at various levels. We must also recall that the term "social organization" as contrasted to "social structure" involves process, accommodation and adaptation to changing circumstances, as well as individuals acting to achieve their ends.⁹ Thus, Cambodian society was not a static structure but subject to variations in both space and time.

Until recently, the received wisdom was that Cambodia entered a period of decline after the abandonment of Angkor. However, Cambodia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was, at least periodically, strong enough to hold its own against pincer plays from the Thai and Vietnamese, to engage in active trade relations with various countries,

⁶B.P. Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVI^e siècle d'après les sources portugaises et espagnoles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958).

⁷In this effort, a critical background source was chapter 5, "Cambodia's Dark Ages", in David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983), pp. 77–98. The Khmer derivative of *varṇa* is *vannak*, a term that is often translated as "class" (David Chandler, pers. com., 28 June 1983).

⁸See also I. W. Mabbett, "Varnas in Angkor and the Indian Caste System", *Journal of Asian Studies* 36 (1977): 429–42, and "Kingship in Angkor", *Journal of the Siam Society* 66 (1978): 1–58; L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Dumont distinguishes between *varṇa* and *jati* (pp. 72–75), and certainly the Indian system of *jati* did not exist in Cambodia; see also Dumont, pp. 215–16. I would agree with Mabbett's argument that *varṇas* may have existed as part of an élite ideological model of social organization, but not as on-the-ground reality; see "Varnas", p. 440 and "Kingship", p. 29.

⁹Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization*, 3rd ed. (London: Watts and Co., 1961), pp. 35–40.

and even to form contacts with European powers.¹⁰ The shift of the capital from Angkor to locales (Phnom Penh, Lovek, Oudong) near the “Quatre Bras” confluence of the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers may reflect not only the ascendancy of new rulers but Cambodia’s transition in the sixteenth century to a “trading kingdom” with increasing involvement with the outside world.¹¹ The political history of these two centuries is notable for its succession of kings and conflicts over the throne, alternate periods of alliance and struggles with the Thai, Vietnamese, and Laotians, and the first forays of European penetration into the area.¹² But Chandler, following Vickery, suggests that even in the seventeenth century, which seemed to be more unsettled than the sixteenth, the crises were “periodic rather than perpetual” and affected some parts of the country but not others.¹³ This speaks to my earlier point: it is important to keep in mind the probability of regional variation and changes through time in examining Cambodian social organization at this stage of its history. It would appear to fit the pattern of what Eric Wolf, following Samir Amin, has called the “tributary mode” with a “continuum of power distribution” between two polar possibilities: “one in which power is concentrated strongly in the hands of a ruling élite standing at the apex of the power system; and another in which power is held largely by local overlords and the rule at the apex is fragile and weak”.¹⁴ Clearly, the sociopolitical organization of a particular society at a given time will fall at different points along this continuum depending on the endogenous and exogenous factors that impinge upon it at various historical moments.¹⁵ It is likely that Cambodia experienced an oscillation toward one pole or another: some periods evidently had powerful rulers and higher degrees of concentration;¹⁶ some saw a wobbly balance between central power and local lords; and still other periods saw the latter holding primary sway. There is also a question as to whether outside the surrounding area of the capital city, the king’s control over outlying regions was always somewhat precarious at best.

I turn now to examine the major categories of people in sixteenth and seventeenth

¹⁰See Chandler, *History*; Groslier, *Angkor*; M. Vickery, “The 2/K. 125 Fragment, A Lost Chronicle of Ayutthaya”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 65 (1970): 1–80; D.G.E. Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 233–37; G. Coedès, *The Making of Southeast Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 193–203.

¹¹Chandler, *History*, pp. 77–79; Vickery, “2/K.125”; see also Groslier, *Angkor*, pp. 143–44, 152–54, 162–63, on trade goods and traders.

¹²See Coedès, *Making*; Groslier, *Angkor*; Hall, *History*; Chandler, *History*; but cf. M. Vickery, “The Composition and Transmission of the Ayudhya and Cambodian Chronicles”, in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, ed. A.J. Reid and D. Marr (Singapore: Heinemann, 1979), pp. 130–54.

¹³Chandler, *History*, p. 93.

¹⁴Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 80. Similar points have been made also by A. Leclère, *Recherches sur la législation cambodgienne (droit privé)* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1890), p. 26; Mabbett, “Kingship”; Stanley Tambiah, “The Galactic Polity: The Structure of Traditional Kingdoms in Southeast Asia”, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 293 (1972): 69–97; James C. Scott, “The Erosion of Patron-Client Bonds and Social Change in Rural Southeast Asia”, *Journal of Asian Studies* 32 (1972): 5–38; Reinhard Bendix, “Inequality and Social Structure: A Comparison of Marx and Weber”, *American Sociological Review* 39 (1974): 149–61; Edmund Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954).

¹⁵In this case there were not only shifts of power within the Khmer élite, but also changing relationships with other (non-Khmer) polities. See also Vickery, “2/K.125”; Tambiah, “Galactic”; Wolf, *Europe*, p. 82.

¹⁶The relatively long reign of Ang Chan in the first part of the sixteenth century may be one of those periods (see Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 14). But Groslier (*Angkor*, pp. 120–21, 124) and Chandler (*History*, pp. 95, 97) suggest that through the 16th and increasingly through the 17th centuries, kingly power weakened. Chandler also wonders, however, whether Angkorean kings were really as powerful as their own words would lead us to believe (*History*, p. 98).

century society, who comprised these, and what was their articulation with one another. My basic argument will be that although certain categories/strata can be delineated on the basis of both objective criteria and subjective Khmer distinctions, these were not strictly bounded, exclusive, hereditary groups. Rather, membership within these categories was somewhat fluid and movement between strata was possible.

The King and Royalty. Royalty, i.e., the king and his kinsmen holding royal titles, constituted a distinct social category. (Leclère translates the term *préas vongsa* as “royal family”, although the boundary of this “family” is not clear.¹⁷) Two factors, however, prevented the development of a clear-cut royal descent group with circumscribed membership and continuity over generations, i.e., a ruling lineage such as exists in some societies. First, there was no strict rule of succession; the history of this period shows the throne passing variously to sons, brothers, and an uncle, as well as periodic contests for the kingship.¹⁸ Second, I believe that the Khmer had a basically bilateral kinship system.¹⁹ While there was a patrilineal “tinge” to royal succession, claimants to the throne could invoke maternal as well as paternal ties to preceding rulers. This is consistent with what anthropologists call an ambilateral system in which descent can be traced through male and/or female links, depending on whichever confers advantage.²⁰ Given, then, such bilaterality, it would seem that in each reign the category of “royalty” would include whatever members of the king’s personal kindred (i.e., relatives on both sides of the family) who were thought to be trustworthy.²¹ Kin relationships helped people to identify who could be considered royalty and who might be enlisted in the king’s supporting circle, but kinship in and of itself was no guarantee of loyalty. With intrigues and factionalism at court, even among siblings, those relatives who were in and out of favour could change during the course of one reign, to say nothing of successive ones.²² Those kin who were on losing sides or otherwise incurred the king’s disfavour could find themselves (and their families) reduced from royalty to slavery.

Kinship is one means of drawing distinctions between strata, and endogamy promotes social distance between rulers and ruled.²³ Some Cambodian kings evidently married

¹⁷Leclère, *Codes* I: 90, 91, 96, 128, 137, 138, 140, 141, give terms/titles for particular kinsmen of the king. But it is possible that other relatives not listed (e.g., cousins) were also considered royalty.

¹⁸See Groslier, *Angkor*; Coedès, *Making*; Hall, *History*; though cf. Vickery, “Composition”. Given the existence of polygyny, these were, moreover, half-brothers and an uncle who was father’s half-brother. Several times during this period, an incumbent king abdicated in favor of a son. This could be seen as a maneuver to avoid contest for the throne when the king died.

¹⁹There has been debate as to whether the ancient Khmer were matrilineal, patrilineal, or bilateral; for an overview of this controversy see May Ebiara, “Svay, A Khmer Village in Cambodia” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York, 1968), and A. Thomas Kirsch, “Kinship, Genealogical Claims, and Societal Integration in Ancient Khmer Society: An Interpretation”, in *Southeast Asian History and Historiography*, ed. C.D. Cowan and O.W. Wolters (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 190–202. I have long assumed, along with Kirsch, that ancient as well as modern Khmer were fundamentally bilateral at both top and bottom levels of the society. Although the term “lineage” has been used in some discussions of ancient Cambodia, I would question whether these were the sort of unilineal descent groups that anthropologists customarily designate by this term.

²⁰See Kirsch, “Kinship”; of various anthropological works on ambilateral descent, one good source is R. Firth, “A Note on Descent Groups in Polynesia”, *Man* 57 (1957):4–7.

²¹Kirsch, “Kinship”, pp. 197–98, suggests that citing of genealogy served not simply to legitimize claims to the throne but to indicate the king’s kin network of support. See also Wolf, *Europe*, p. 93.

²²See, for example, Coedès, *Making*, pp. 195 ff., and Chandler, *History*.

²³Wolf, *Europe*, p. 98; see also p. 92 on various political and economic functions that can be served by kinship and marriage to acquire access to resources and claims to privileges.

sisters, nieces, and aunts,²⁴ and such incestuous unions are commonly viewed by anthropologists as a means of maintaining power and wealth within a royal line. Royalty did not, however, constitute a strictly endogamous group. Marital alliances were also used to create social bonds with, and get political support from, both local élite and foreign powers,²⁵ as in the case of Chetta, who married Laotian and Vietnamese “princesses”.²⁶

In addition to kinship and partial endogamy, social distinction between king/royalty and the ordinary populace was also, of course, reinforced by ideology. Wolf suggests that societies characterized by the “tributary mode” typically have religious systems in which “domination is ... inscribed into the structure of the universe”; power holders have supernatural validation and those who are ruled are “invited to win merit by maintaining order through the regulation of [their] own conduct”.²⁷ Certainly Cambodian kingship — and, indeed, hierarchy in general — was reinforced by Theravada concepts of merit and power that legitimated both the authority of those in high positions and the modest condition of the lowly.²⁸ The king was, theoretically, an absolute ruler to whom respect, deference, and obedience were due on pain of death.²⁹ Nonetheless, the same moral/religious codes that validated high rank also sanctioned paternalistic rather than despotic rule for both king and officials; power carried with it, at least at the level of norms, responsibility for people’s welfare.³⁰ Neither was the king totally inaccessible: a sixteenth-century Portuguese source (Gaspar da Cruz) comments that King Ang Chan held audiences for common folk to submit their cases and was kept informed of the least “fait et geste” of his subjects.³¹ There are also numerous instances in the “Chbap Tûmnîn Pî Bauran” of the king being consulted on and drawn into a surprisingly large number of legal proceedings.³² There was indeed sacred and social distance between the king and ordinary people, but evidently not an unbridgeable gulf.

²⁴Leclère, *Codes* I: 123–25; cf. also Etienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1900), I: 59, 62.

²⁵Polygyny was clearly practiced at this time (see Leclère, *Codes*, vol. I, p. 125; Groslier, *Angkor*, pp. 14, 160), and I assume that concubinage also occurred. It is therefore likely that there were marital alliances between the king and élite families for mutual benefit, such as reported for earlier and later periods of Cambodian history; see, e.g., Mabbett, “Kingship”, pp. 28, 30; Kirsch, “Kinship”; Aymonier, *Cambodge* I: 59–60.

²⁶Coedès, *Making*, pp. 198ff. The sons of the Vietnamese wife ultimately deposed their half-brother (the Laotian-wife’s son) with support from their Vietnamese cousins. King Satha also may have had a Laotian wife (Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 18).

²⁷Wolf, *Europe*, p. 83.

²⁸See in particular many of the *chbap* in Pou and Jenner, “Les Cpāp” and Chandler’s paper on *chbap* in this symposium.

²⁹See, e.g., Récit 23 in Leclère, *Codes* I: 140. Indeed, disrespectful or disobedient behavior toward the king’s emissaries or even servants of royalty was also punished; see Leclère, *Codes* I: 128f. and *passim*.

³⁰See, e.g., Leclère, *Codes* I: 100: “Un gouverneur ... doit être avec eux [des habitants] comme un père à l’égard de ses enfants”; see also p. 101 and *passim*. See also Pou and Jenner, “Les Cpāp”, as well as Mabbett, “Kingship”, on the moral ideals of kingship and officialdom. While such norms were not necessarily reality, it could be to powerholders’ advantage not to be overly oppressive.

³¹Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 155. Such audiences were also held in 13th-century Angkor. (It is unclear, however, how open such audiences actually were; i.e., did people have to go through lower officials to get there?) Chandler (personal communication 19 May 1983) believes that kings were out and about the countryside during the 16th and 17th centuries more than in the 19th century.

³²See various cases in Leclère, *Codes*, vol. I, the “Chbap Tûmnîn Pî Bauran”, *passim*. Cf. also Mabbett, “Kingship”, p. 39, on Angkorean kings.

Dignitaries and Other Élite. In reality, of course, the king's power was not absolute. While there were stronger and weaker monarchs, greater or lesser degrees of centralization and decentralization, all kings had to cope with the problem of administration. Lacking an institutionalized bureaucracy or mandarinat, administrative responsibilities such as tax collection, levies of corvée labor, mobilization of troops, adjudication of legal cases, etc., lay in the hands of a staggering array of dignitaries and title-holders appointed by the king.³³ Ideally, officials were men of wisdom, generosity, courage, modesty, honesty, and the like;³⁴ and they doubtless had to have a modicum of wit (or cunning) to achieve their positions. But mainly, it would seem, the king's appointments to title and office were a critical means of enlisting and rewarding support and loyalty to the throne.³⁵ (Such appointees then, of course, made their own appointments to lesser offices to reward their entourages, and so on down the line in interlocking, descending networks of patrons and clients.) At the same time, the complexity of the system of offices/titles may have served, as Mabbett has suggested for the Angkorean period, "to prevent the consolidation of power at any point by dispersing functions, creating overlapping roles, and fostering crosscutting loyalties".³⁶

However, just as the king could appoint at his pleasure, so could he revoke at his displeasure and reduce an official "au nombre des simples habitants" or even, in some extreme cases, to slavery.³⁷ (Chandler comments that the "Chbap Tûmnîn Pî Bauran" gives an image of a king who often seemed to govern "by pique", with officials rising and falling "from one day to the next".³⁸) Thus, membership of this stratum/category of dignitaries — titles/positions that carried social prestige, political power, and economic resources — was not totally closed. Clearly there could be and was movement into and out of these ranks, with both upward and downward mobility.³⁹ (There was also a sort of sideways or diagonal mobility when officials left secular for religious office, i.e., entry into the *sangha*.)

Titles and administrative positions were supposed to be non-hereditary, and there is a curious point in one Portuguese source, Gaspar da Cruz, regarding a law that the king would take back an individual's property upon death, leaving his wife and children to find

³³Leclère, *Codes* I:91, gives the general term *namoeun* for "dignitaries", who are then subdivided into four broad "classes": (1) *pohau sakh* who belong to the royal family, (2) *borana sakh* whose father or grandfather were dignitaries, (3) *réachéa sakh* who were "elevated by the reigning king to the rank of dignitary", (4) *piphûp sakh* ("grade accidental, occasional") who were "named and compensated for services rendered and from families that had never furnished dignitaries to the kingdom" (my translations). On various titles, positions, and duties, see Leclère, *Codes* I:91ff, 98ff, 115–18; Lewitz, "Les Inscriptions" (1972), p. 111; Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 156.

³⁴See Leclère, *Codes* I:100ff, and various *chbap* in Pou and Jenner, "Les Cpâp". See also Leclère, *Codes* I:104 and passim, on punishments for dereliction of duties or misconduct in office.

³⁵For example, Barom Reachea II granted titles and provinces to Diego de Velosa and Blas Ruiz (Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 155), and they were also given Khmer princesses as wives (Chandler, *History*, p. 85).

³⁶Mabbett, "Varnas", p. 40. See also Récit 18 in Leclère, *Codes* I:134–37, for an example of multiple and overlapping administrative and patron-client relationships. David Webster, "On Theocracies", *American Anthropologist* 78(1976):812–28, discusses some historic polities and offers points that are relevant to Cambodian sociopolitical organization; see, for example, pp. 818–19, 822 on dispersal of titles among the élite and on relations between élite and local leaders.

³⁷Leclère, *Codes* I:184. The specific term *mohat* is given for "des esclaves d'État descendants des fonctionnaires révoqués et condamnés à l'esclavage d'État" (*ibid.*, p. 99).

³⁸Chandler, *History*, p. 94.

³⁹See the categories of *piphûp sakh* and *réachéa sakh* in Note 33.

other means of subsistence.⁴⁰ Such a dictate would obviously prevent concentration of wealth in family lines and contribute to fluidity of membership in the stratum of prosperous élite. However, questions can be raised regarding da Cruz's statement. First, among the four kinds of dignitaries noted in the "Kram Srok" are the *borana sakh*, "dignitaries whose father or grandfather were dignitaries".⁴¹ Second, laws of inheritance in two seventeenth-century legal codes certainly provide for inheritance by wife and children, or other relatives if there were no lineal heirs.⁴² Third, inferring from the preceding, it is more than likely that there were élite families of wealth and rank whose children obviously had better life chances for a privileged future.⁴³ All this suggests the existence of an élite of prosperous and/or titled families with special access to land, manpower, and other resources (e.g., in the case of officials, income from rights to a portion of taxes and fines) acquired through inheritance and/or royal patronage.⁴⁴

Furthermore, given periods of relative decentralization and the question of how far even a strong king's power extended, it is not unlikely that local lords/élites may have been firmly entrenched in some areas.⁴⁵ Gregory Johnson, an archaeologist, has made an intriguing suggestion that, during the middle Uruk period of Mesopotamia, the effective span of control of an administrative center encompassed only those settlements to which a round-trip journey could be made in one day's travel time.⁴⁶ While Cambodia is certainly not Mesopotamia, Johnson's notion raises an important question regarding

⁴⁰Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 155. It is possible that this was meant to refer to what Wolf, following Weber, has called a prebendal domain in which land was given to an official to provide income during his term of office; the reversion of property to the king asserts "the eminent domain of the ruler" and "curtail[s] heritable claims to land and tribute"; Eric Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 51. Aymonier, *Cambodge*, p. 85, speaking of a later period, also notes a "curious right of retaking by the king [which] must go back to a very distant past", whereby the king inherits from an official or someone with a "succession of some importance" who dies without male children. Nonetheless, he also notes that "one part [?] is left to daughters and possible heirs" and the widow is given "usufruct".

⁴¹Leclère, *Codes* I:91.

⁴²Leclère, *Codes* II:460–62, 525–27, 550–55. While the nature of property ownership in ancient Cambodia has been debated (see Ebihara, "Svay", p. 346 for some of the participants in this discussion), various scholars believe that an effective system of private land ownership existed. See, e.g., Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 155; Mabbett, "Kingship", p. 14; M.C. Ricklefs, "Land and the Law in the Epigraphy of Tenth Century Cambodia", *Journal of Asian Studies* 26 (1967):411–20; P. Wheatley, "Satyāṅṛta in Suvarṇadvīpa: From Reciprocity to Redistribution in Ancient Southeast Asia", in *Ancient Civilization and Trade*, ed. J. Sabloff and C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), p. 265, n. 34.

⁴³See Leclère, *Recherches*, p. 29; see also Aymonier, *Cambodge*, p. 65 on a later period.

⁴⁴I say "and/or" because, following a point made by Mabbett in "Kingship", p. 30, for the Angkorean period, it seems not unlikely that there were families with property and relative wealth but no titles or official positions. See also a statement in a 17th century law code that distinguishes between "dignitaires" and "des gens riches" (Leclère, *Codes* I:99).

⁴⁵Chandler, *History*, p. 79.

⁴⁶For the Susiana Plain region of Iran, where Johnson has conducted archaeological investigations, 19th-century travellers' accounts had indicated that forty kilometers was about the maximum distance one could cover in one day, given the terrain and primitive modes of travel. Hence, it was hypothesized that in earlier times one could get from an administrative center to settlements twenty kilometers distant and back to the center in one day, and that these settlements could then be fairly closely linked to (and superintended by) central authorities. This hypothesis seems to be supported by archaeological evidence from the Middle Uruk period in the Susiana Plain. Gregory Johnson, personal communication 2 Feb. 1983, and "Strutture Protostatali: Cambiamenti Organizzativi Nella Amministrazione della Pianura di Susiana Durante el Periodo Uruk (c. 38–3100 A.C.)", in *Annali dell' Istituto Universitario Orientale de Napoli*, pp. 1–62, in press. A similar point is made also in Colin Renfrew, "Trade as Action at a Distance: Questions of Integration and Communication", in *Ancient Civilizations and Trade*, ed. J. Sabloff and

the extent and strength of centralized control in a pre-modern polity. Even during the Angkorean period, “Cambodian rulers occupied a largely symbolic position. Outside the palace, orders frequently went unheeded; armies frequently failed to reach the field”;⁴⁷ and Chandler postulates that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, poor communications would have prevented smooth, systematic functioning of the administrative apparatus and permitted the existence of strong regional élites, especially in outlying areas.⁴⁸ He further proposes that, with the relative weakening of kingship in the post-Angkorean period, “very little power or riches filtered past provincial leaders either to the people they ‘consumed’ or to the king they theoretically revered”.⁴⁹

Generally speaking, then, there was an élite that was more or less powerful at different times and places, probably self-perpetuating to a large extent, and partly endogamous but also involved in marital/concubinage relations with royalty. Nonetheless, there was still some possibility of movement into and out of the ranks of the élite through the king’s prerogative to grant and revoke titles and property.⁵⁰

Ordinary Commoner Free Persons. One law code, using a seventeenth-century Cambodian version of the organic analogy, refers to dignitaries as forming the eyes, mouth, and bones of the kingdom, rich people as constituting its flesh, and its skin as made up of “all the other inhabitants who have few resources, but who put their bodies and life in the service of the [king]”.⁵¹ Most of these “other inhabitants” were ordinary commoner “free” persons, variously referred to as *réas*, *prey nhéa*,⁵² *brai* (cf. the preceding *prey*), *anak ja*,⁵³ and *neak chea* (cf. the preceding).⁵⁴

Given a pre-modern agrarian society in which probably only the capital city could be considered any sort of “urban” center, most of the population were undoubtedly peasants cultivating rice paddies and *chamkar* fields, tending livestock and poultry.⁵⁵ There is also

C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, pp. 12–21, on “administrative modules” in early states. The ease of travel and communication in 16th and 17th century Cambodia is not clear; e.g., was the road system constructed during the Angkorean period maintained? But it is likely that areas distant from the capital may have been relatively independent of strong central control.

⁴⁷Mabbett, “Varnas”, p. 440.

⁴⁸Chandler, personal communication 28 Jan 1983. Several laws prohibited unauthorized mobilization of manpower (i.e., without approval by the king or central ministers) and the levying or seizing of troops by “princes”, dignitaries, and officials; see Leclère, *Codes* I:107–109. The existence of such articles suggest fear of rival concentrations of power. See also Mabbett, “Kingship”, p. 37, on “great men of the provinces” in the Angkorean period, and Scott, “Erosion”, pp. 12–37 on patron-clientage in pre-colonial Southeast Asian states.

⁴⁹David P. Chandler, “The Tragedy of Cambodian History”, *Pacific Affairs* 52 (1979):417.

⁵⁰See, e.g., several cases in Leclère, *Codes* I:139, 145–46, 161–62, in which titles, etc. were revoked, but also restored in two instances.

⁵¹Leclère, *Codes* I:99, my translation.

⁵²The two terms are from Leclère, *Codes* I:91, 104. *Réas* is translated “gens du peuple” and may include more than simply free persons.

⁵³The two terms are from Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), pp. 113, 116.

⁵⁴Chandler, personal communication 28 Jan. 1983. *Brailprey* and *anak ja/neak chea* are evidently different transcriptions of the two terms. With regard to *brailprey*, cf. the Thai term *phrai* (see, e.g., Akin Rabibhadana, “Clientship and Class Structure”, in *Change and Persistence in Thai Society*, ed. G.W. Skinner and A.T. Kirsch, p. 95). Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), p. 116, has an interesting commentary on the polysemy of *brailprey*, which can also mean “uncultivated lands”, “rustic” person, or “second-class person”.

⁵⁵*Chamkar* are fields growing vegetables, fruits, and various crops other than rice. The “Krâm Pohulla Tep” mentions sugar palms, areca, beans, bananas, sugar cane, potatoes, cucumbers, gourds, cotton, maize, eggplant, mangoes, and other cultigens; the keeping of oxen, buffalo, horses, elephants, pigs, ducks, and chickens; and various implements/traps for catching fish; see Leclère, *Codes* II:357–84 passim. Various sources

mention of fishermen, artisans, small-scale tradesmen, etc. in various sources. While the king was nominally and symbolically owner of all lands, the previously noted laws on inheritance imply a system of de facto property ownership and inheritance.⁵⁶ At the least, peasants undoubtedly had access to and usufruct of agricultural lands since their produce was necessary to support the élite, other non-agriculturalists, and external trade.⁵⁷ Despite the lack of an irrigation system such as existed at Angkor, rainfall agriculture was evidently sufficient to sustain the population and to make rice, cotton, and hemp export items.⁵⁸ Produce was extracted primarily in the form of taxation of one-tenth of the rice crop, the bulk of which went (theoretically) to the royal treasury and from which a tenth was divided among provincial officials.⁵⁹ In addition, able-bodied free men were subject to corvée and to conscription into the army in time of military need.⁶⁰

All free men had to be registered as clients of a particular patron who might be an official with jurisdiction over a certain region, a member of royalty, or a person with local prestige and power.⁶¹ Such patrons presumably provided protection, influence, and aid of various sorts; reciprocally, clients owed their patrons respect, loyalty, support, services, and goods.⁶² Various *chbap* enjoin the common folk to accept their position in life, pursue their work diligently, and “submit [without resistance] to certain personal obligations”.⁶³

refer to wet-rice agriculture; Pou and Jenner, “Les Cpāp” (1975), p. 383, note 10, state that there was also dry rice cultivation in “terres hautes”. I think it not unlikely that swidden cultivation was practiced in frontier low-land areas as well.

⁵⁶See also Leclère, *Codes* I:129, 142–43, on land disputes between ordinary persons; one case also indicates the existence of tenancy.

⁵⁷In addition to free person peasants, there were also of course slaves involved in agricultural production, whether privately owned slaves or those attached to royal and temple estates (see below; also Leclère, *Codes* I: 102 on *pol tep*).

⁵⁸Also exported were betel, fish, and meat, as well as luxury items such as ivory; see Groslier, *Angkor*, pp. 153, 162.

⁵⁹Royalty and officials were not exempt from this tax; neither were certain kinds of slaves, although they were taxed less. See Leclère, *Codes* I:102–103, for aspects of taxation. Two interesting points are raised in this section. First, proper tax collection received religious sanctions insofar as misconduct in this regard was considered a sin that would leave the guilty officials without any fund of merit. Second, it was forbidden to requisition a number of items essential to peasant existence, e.g., oxcarts, boats, domestic animals, poultry, the produce of kitchen gardens and trees, etc.

⁶⁰Leclère, *Codes* I: 105–109. The importance of keeping track of people for tax and corvée purposes is implied by the extremely severe punishment inflicted on a census-taker who draws up an incorrect list: if errors or omissions were found, he would be beaten and, along with his family, reduced to slavery; see Leclère, *Codes* I: 104–105.

⁶¹Pou and Jenner, “Les Cpāp”(1975), p. 343, n. 3. Chandler, however, wonders how many persons were so registered, especially in hinterland areas, given a small “patronage class” (personal communication 28 Jan. 1983).

⁶²Various cases in the “Chbap Tûnnin Pî Bauran”, Leclère, *Codes*, vol. I, involve persons going to what appear to be their patrons for aid in legal matters and other problems. See also Aymonier, *Cambodge*, p. 91, on the 19th century; Scott, “Erosion”; Eric Wolf, “Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-Client Relations in Complex Societies”, in *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*, ed. M. Banton (London: Tavistock, 1966). Passing comments in two sources suggest that patrons and clients were sometimes spoken of as “uncles” and “nephews”; see Lewitz, “Inscriptions” (1974), p. 323, and Gerald Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 138–39. Such use of what anthropologists call a “kinship idiom” would reinforce the moral ideal that those in power should be paternalistic toward their subordinates; it also expresses conceptions of superiority-inferiority and nurturance-dependence that inhere in the relationship between elder and younger kinsmen.

⁶³Leclère, *Codes* I: 101; brackets in the original; my translation. See also various *chbap* in Pou and Jenner, e.g., “Les Cpāp” (1975), p. 383 (no. 6) and p. 388 (no. 30), and Chandler’s paper on *chbap* in this symposium.

Still, several “*récits*” in the “Chbap Tûmnîn Pî Bauran” show that ordinary people were not always slavishly submissive. On the contrary, on occasion they exhibited feisty spirit, grumblings, and sometimes even outright attacks on royal servants.⁶⁴ Individuals could presumably change patrons if so desired; they might also escape “to the forest” because of “vexations” or exactions;⁶⁵ or, assuming that population density was probably not great and unoccupied lands were available during this period, they might move elsewhere.⁶⁶ But to what extent such situations actually occurred is unknown. Hanks has suggested that the patron-client relation is not hereditary and persists so long as mutual advantage is served, but there is probably least mobility at the bottom ranks.⁶⁷ As for social mobility from rice fields to riches, this was something that might be hoped for in the next reincarnation if one were very virtuous, but it was probably very unlikely in this lifetime for most common folk.⁶⁸

Slaves. If upward mobility was probably limited, downward movement into the category of slaves, *khnum* or *prey ngèr* (literally: task/job/work person),⁶⁹ was not. Two main types might be distinguished: debt (redeemable) slaves and hereditary slaves. While the two were designated by the same general terms and were similar in their condition of servitude, one important point about the former was that the status of debt slave was, at least in theory, a temporary one. A free person could become a debt slave through penury which necessitated pledging the labor services of oneself or a family member to work off a loan or interest;⁷⁰ and, legally, a debt slave became a free person again when the debt was repaid.⁷¹ Thus, while *prey chea* (free persons) and *prey ngèr* debt slaves were separate social categories, there was a dotted line between them that permitted movement from one to the other. In reality, however, it is probable that redemption

⁶⁴See, e.g., Leclère, *Codes I*: 128–29, 137–38, 157–58. Also of interest are folktales which, if one can assume they are the creation of a Little Tradition, offer an interesting view from the bottom up. In the “Thmenh Chey” stories (Monod, *Contes*, pp. 51–97), the commoner hero consistently outwits his social betters (including the Cambodian monarch and even the Emperor of China) with his superior intelligence. In the tale of “Sophéa Tonsai” (Monod, *Contes*, pp. 21–50) the hero is a rabbit (a small and vulnerable creature) whose sagacity makes him a renowned jurist consulted by eminent people. In both folktales, the “lowly” protagonist outsmarts those of greater strength and superior status.

⁶⁵Leclère, *Codes I*: 104, my translation.

⁶⁶Scott, “Erosion”, p. 27.

⁶⁷Lucien Hanks, “Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order”, *American Anthropologist* 64 (1962):1250. See also Scott, “Erosion”, p. 16, n. 24: “leaders who fail to establish legitimacy and generosity ... are likely to find their clientele switching to other leaders or simply striking out on their own”.

⁶⁸However, it would probably be invalid to conceive of ordinary commoners as constituting a homogeneous, and generally poor, stratum. Doubtless there were gradations of relative wealth within this level, and it may well have been possible to improve one’s socioeconomic position to some extent.

⁶⁹Chandler, personal communication 28 Jan. 1983; Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), p. 113; Aymonier, *Cambodge*, p. 99. (Leclère, *Codes I*: 107, 108, 113, translates *prey ngèr* as free persons, but this would seem to be an error; elsewhere, p. 104, he gives *prey nhêa* as “les hommes libres”.)

⁷⁰See Leclère, *Codes I*: 148–50, 159–60, and “Thmenh Chey” in Monod, *Contes*, pp. 54–55, for instances of what Akin Rabibhadana, speaking of Thailand, has called “interest-bearing slaves” in *The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period, 1782–1873* (Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper No. 74, 1969), p. 108. Such debt slaves could be ceded to others for payment of debt and could also be “owned” by one or several persons; see Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), p. 114. It has been suggested that the term “slavery” may be inappropriate for this practice; see, e.g., Akin Rabibhadana, *Organization*, p. 109, and Andrew Turton, “Thai Institutions of Slavery”, in *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, ed. James L. Watson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 263.

⁷¹Leclère, *Codes I*: 148–50, recounts an interesting case in which various authorities are called in to force a creditor to release a female debt slave whom he will not relinquish when her parents try to redeem her.

through repayment of debt did not occur that frequently, and flight from debt bondage was more likely.⁷²

There were also hereditary slaves variously attached to the state/king, temple estates, and individual owners.⁷³ While commoners and monks could have slaves,⁷⁴ it is likely that most of them were in the service of the king, royalty, élite, and temple estates, working as cultivators, artisans, retainers, domestic servants, musicians, animal tenders, porters, military personnel, and a variety of other occupations.⁷⁵ Slaves were undoubtedly important in primary productive activities such as agriculture, but they probably also served a very significant function as prestige items and status symbols bolstering the social as well as economic position of the élite.⁷⁶

The ranks of such slaves were filled by individuals sold into slavery (e.g., by poor families), captured war prisoners and tribal people, those condemned to slavery by court/royal action for misconduct, and the descendants thereof. The number of slaves relative to the total population is unknown, but evidently most were Khmer.⁷⁷ While hereditary slaves were probably self-reproducing to a large extent, they were not a totally closed group.⁷⁸ There was obviously some movement of formerly free persons into slavery (e.g., those condemned to slavery as punishment for criminal or other acts), and there was also the possibility of manumission. How frequently the latter actually happened is not known, but various inscriptions from this period record the emancipation of particular slaves (individuals or families), an act that was considered highly meritorious.⁷⁹ In some cases such manumitted slaves were sent into the *sangha*, committed to work at temples, or given responsibility for serving a former master's corvée obligations (although the freed man could otherwise do as he pleased).⁸⁰

⁷²Chandler, personal communication 19 May 1983; but cf. the preceding note.

⁷³In addition to the general terms for slaves given earlier, Leclère, *Codes*, vol. I, notes a number of specific terms for state/royal slaves: *mohat*, descendants of officials condemned to slavery (p. 99); *pol* of various kinds (pp. 95, 96, 102, 131, 134); and *kômlas* (pp. 105, 108, 109). Leclère does not define the latter, but Aymonier, *Cambodge*, p. 99, speaks of "*kamlah*" as "'young, strong, vigorous' royal slaves/serfs". Lewitz, "Inscriptions" (1974), p. 323, states that *bal* (cf. *pol*) seems to designate state slaves, but that the topic needs further research. Another term mentioned in Hickey, *Sons*, p. 140, is *nak-na* for slaves "descended from condemned persons and ... subject to corvée for the king", Terms given for temple slaves are *pol prah* (Hickey, *Sons*, p. 140) and *Bal Brahman sri* (Aymonier, *Cambodge*, p. 100).

⁷⁴Lewitz, "Les inscriptions" (1972), p. 114; Leclère, *Codes* I: 114 and passim; Monod, *Contes*, p. 55.

⁷⁵The number of specific positions/occupations for *pol* serving the king was particularly extensive; see Leclère, *Codes*, vol. I, e.g., pp. 95–96, 102, 131, 134. There were also *pol* and *kômlas* assigned to members of the royal family.

⁷⁶See, e.g., various *pol* connected with the palace who filled non-productive functions such as "keeper of the palace doors" or "carrier of the royal parasol" (Leclère, *Codes* I: 95, 127). In the folktale of Thmenh Chey, when the hero is a debt slave, one of his tasks is to carry his master's betel paraphernalia on visits to court (Monod, *Contes*, p. 55). See also Turton, "Thai", p. 280, and James Watson, "Introduction. Slavery as an Institution: Open and Closed Systems", in *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, p. 8.

⁷⁷Lewitz, "Les inscriptions" (1972), p. 114. Chandler suggests the possibility that the lowest rungs of slaves were made up of non-Khmer tribal people and war captives (personal communication 28 Jan. 1983); see also Lewitz, *ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷⁸It is uncertain what were laws regarding marriage/mating between slaves and free persons, or what status would be given the offspring of such unions (cf. an ambiguous statement in Leclère, *Codes* I: 122). It seems more than likely that sexual relations occurred between masters and slave women, and there are several cases in Leclère, *Codes*, vol. I, e.g., pp. 127–28 of fornication between slaves and free persons. For 19th-century laws regarding such matters, see Aymonier, *Cambodge*, pp. 99, 101.

⁷⁹Lewitz, "Les inscriptions" (1972), pp. 114–15, and specific examples in "Inscriptions" (1973, 1974).

⁸⁰Lewitz, "Les inscriptions", p. 117. Lewitz notes (p. 116) specific terms that were used for liberated slaves, and the latter also formed a distinct category in population registers (see Leclère, *Codes* I: 104). But I do not know whether freed slaves were otherwise treated differently than ordinary free persons.

To what extent slaves constituted a distinct and separate social stratum is not an easy question to answer, partly because of limited data and partly because there are several points to consider. It has been suggested that western conceptions of “freedom” and “slavery” are misleading and inappropriate for understanding historic Southeast Asian (and other) societies.⁸¹ It could be argued that the constraints of slavery were not radically different from the obligations owed by freemen to their patrons and the state, that there was a “continuum of types of labor control”.⁸² Tasks performed by slaves were in many instances identical to those of free persons (e.g., cultivation, artisanry, domestic tasks); and, except for some specific functions associated with royal service, there were no activities performed exclusively by slaves, no “slave mode of production”. Indeed, given variation in the socioeconomic positions of different kinds of slaves, those working, for example, as royal retainers and servants were owed respect by and probably had more comfortable living conditions than common freemen.⁸³ This confounds the notion that slaves as a whole constituted a homogenous or monolithic stratum uniformly low in social prestige and circumstances. Finally, it has been said that treatment of slaves was “not inhumane”.⁸⁴ *Chbap* encourage sympathetic treatment of slaves, and some inscriptions imply affectionate relationships, as when one master speaks of a slave as like “my own child”⁸⁵ — although there is also evidence that relations between masters and slaves were not always so kind and trusting.⁸⁶

On the other hand, despite some similarities between free persons and slaves, it could also be argued that the terminological distinction between *prey chea* and *prey ngèer* must have had some significance beyond mere linguistic categorization. Slaves were a kind of “property” insofar as rights to their services could be bought, sold, traded, and donated; and it might be suggested that their labor and produce was generally subject to greater control than that of freemen clients.⁸⁷ Certain laws applied specifically to slaves, and *pol* state slaves had their own “chiefs”.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, while *prey ngèer* constituted a distinct social category in some respects, its membership was not economically and socially homogenous, and its boundary was to some extent permeable.

The Sangha. I shall comment on the *sangha* only briefly, although they were clearly an important and highly respected segment of society in a country that was “profoundly

⁸¹See, e.g., Michael Aung-Thwin’s and David Chandler’s papers in this symposium; Turton, “Thai”; Akin Rabibhadana, “Organization”; and Igor Kopytoff, “Slavery”, in *Annual Review of Anthropology Vol. 11*, ed. B.J. Siegel, A. Beals, S. Tyler (Palo Alto: Annual Reviews Inc., 1982), p. 221.

⁸²Turton, “Thai”, p. 263; see also pp. 266–67, 278. Also pertinent are Kopytoff, “Slavery”, p. 221, and Chandler’s paper in this symposium.

⁸³See, e.g., cases in Leclère, *Codes I*: 128–29, 137–38.

⁸⁴Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), p. 114.

⁸⁵Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), pp. 114–15, “Inscriptions” (1973), p. 205. “Inscriptions” (1974), pp. 184–85, notes an instance in which a woman adopted a freed slave whom she sent into the *sangha*. See also *chbap* such as Pou and Jenner, “Les Cpāp” (1975), p. 386.

⁸⁶For example, Pou and Jenner, “Les Cpāp” (1975), p. 385: “To have trust in your slaves is like being totally blind” (my translation). Leclère, *Codes I*: 151, gives the case of a slave who runs away from her master because of a severe beating.

⁸⁷It is, however, difficult to discuss these points further, given lack of data. The question of “property” is in itself problematical (see, e.g., Kopytoff, “Slavery”, pp. 219–21), and I have no information on the labor demands made on different kinds of slaves during the 16th–17th centuries as compared to the Angkorean period or 19th century.

⁸⁸See, e.g., Leclère, *Codes I*: 95–96, 102. Turton, “Thai”, p. 268, suggests that since slaves could not enter the *sangha* they were considered less than human.

Buddhist”.⁸⁹ Portuguese sources estimated that monks comprised some one-third of the population under Ang Chan and numbered 1,500 in Phnom Penh in 1596.⁹⁰ The *sangha* formed a group separate and apart, one with its own organization, hierarchy, laws, and temple estates.⁹¹ But it was also inextricably linked with secular society in a number of ways. First, of course, the priesthood was not a hereditary closed group but one with a shifting and diverse membership since Theravada permits men from various walks of life, from royalty to peasants, to enter the *sangha* for temporary periods of time (although some may make a life-long commitment to the orders). Second, Theravada as a moral/symbolic system gave ideological legitimation to the sociopolitical order, as discussed earlier. Third, it is not unlikely that there were also important connections between members of the *sangha* and royalty/élite. While monks were presumably divorced from worldly economic concerns, there were temple estates that controlled (or had rights to the produce of) land and manpower, and that were also the repositories of material donations.⁹² While I lack clear evidence for the following, it seems not unlikely that the high-ranking monks (and lay managers) connected with temple estates would generally have been drawn from the more educated élite; that the donation of land to or establishment of temple estates by wealthy families may have been a means to achieve not only religious merit but to avoid civil taxation and yet maintain control over land and labor if kinsmen were involved with the estates; and that some portion of temple estate produce (especially from royal temples) may have gone to support secular royal/state needs.⁹³

Thus, although Theravada monks comprised a distinct and singular social group with special prestige, it was by no means a closed priestly caste.⁹⁴ Moreover, while the *sangha* was organized separately from lay society, the religious system and the state did not constitute two absolutely discrete spheres of life or competing centers of power; rather, they were connected at the levels of both ideology and social organization.⁹⁵

⁸⁹Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), p. 120. See also Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 160, and numerous allusions to Buddhism in Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1973, 1974), Pou and Jenner, “Les Cpāp”, and Leclère, *Codes*, vol. I.

⁹⁰Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 160.

⁹¹Groslier, *Angkor*, pp. 159–60; Leclère, *Codes* I:163–75 and passim; Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), p. 112.

⁹²See Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), pp. 121–22 on religious offerings.

⁹³Such linkages, which are far more complicated than indicated here, have been noted for the Angkorean period; see, e.g., Mabbett, “Kingship”, pp. 19, 25, 30–32; Wheatley, “Satyānṛta”, p. 242; and Kenneth Hall, “Temples as Economic Centers in Early Cambodia”, paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, 1981. Hall also cites works by M. Vickery and L.A. Sedov that I have not seen. I do not have the data to say whether temple estates in the 16th–17th centuries operated in the same manner, but I would nonetheless propose the above.

⁹⁴Nineteenth-century sources have noted the existence of court brahmans called *baku* who performed special ritual functions at court, enjoyed special privileges, and are said to have constituted a hereditary group with patrilineal descent; see Aymonier, *Cambodge*, pp. 63–64, Leclère, “Recherches”, p. 8; Leclère, *Le Bouddhisme au Cambodge* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1899), p. 498. While often spoken of as a “caste” (and thought to be the descendants of an ancient Brahman caste), it appears that they were not strictly endogamous (see Aymonier, *Cambodge*, p. 63; Chandler, personal communication 19 May 1983). The 16th-century “*pandit*” or “paraecclesiastics” mentioned by Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), p. 113, who served as masters of religious ceremonies at court, were similar to the *baku* (Chandler, personal communication 19 May 1983); but details of their organization are not known to me. Chandler notes a decline of the “brahmanical priestly class” during the 16th–17th centuries (*History*, p. 97). See also Groslier, *Angkor*, pp. 157–59.

⁹⁵This is in contrast to Burma; see M. Aung-Thwin’s paper in this symposium; also cf. Dumont, *Homo*, on India.

Non-Khmer People. I shall simply note in passing two other components of the Cambodian population: indigenous tribal groups and foreigners. The former led an existence largely separate, both geographically and socially, from Khmer society. There was, however, an intriguing tributary relationship, involving periodic ceremonial exchanges of various items, between seventeenth-century (and possibly earlier) Khmer monarchs and the so-called “Kings of Fire and Water” who were political leaders among the Jarai and other highland groups.⁹⁶ Such prestations evidently symbolized military-political alliance between Cambodian rulers and tribal peoples who were “guardians” of the mountainous regions lying between the Khmer and Vietnamese kingdoms.⁹⁷ Highlanders also undoubtedly engaged in trade of forest products with lowlanders,⁹⁸ and some tribal people were drawn into Khmer society as soldiers and captured slaves.⁹⁹

Foreigners resident in Cambodia at this time included Chinese, Malays, Laotians, Vietnamese, Cham, Javanese, Japanese, and some Europeans: Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and British.¹⁰⁰ While they were socially set apart in some ways, living in separate quarters in the capital and having their own “chiefs”,¹⁰¹ they played a significant role in the economy as foreign (and possibly local) traders. Wheatley has discussed the role of long-distance trade in the formation of early Southeast Asian states;¹⁰² and such trade was now important for the maintenance of post-Angkorean Cambodia in its change to a “trading kingdom”. In their roles as brokers (in the anthropological¹⁰³ and sometimes literal sense) between foreigners and local people/produce, the king and others in the élite of royalty and high officials could bolster their positions both economically and politically. Royal and élite coffers were enriched through taxation of (and probably rakeoffs from) trade,¹⁰⁴ and foreigners could also be used to bolster one’s support group.¹⁰⁵ Chandler suggests the likelihood that “Chinese and Malay traders, and their descendants, married into the Cambodian élite, ... tightening the relationships between the king, his entourage, and commercial profits”.¹⁰⁶

To summarize, I have suggested that there were categories of people in sixteenth-

⁹⁶For details, see Hickey, *Sons*, chap. 4. Also involved in this relationship was an interesting conception that the Kings of Fire and Water were caretakers of a sacred ceremonial sword that is a “palladium of the Khmer kingdom” (p. 127).

⁹⁷Hickey, *Sons*, p. 143.

⁹⁸Cambodia’s export trade included forest products such as ivory, wax, skins, and lac; see Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 162. While Leclère, *Codes* 1f96, mentions that certain *pol* royal slaves were charged with collection of forest produce, I would assume that some of these items were also obtained through trade.

⁹⁹Lewitz, “Les inscriptions” (1972), p. 113; Hickey, *Sons*, p. 141; Vickery, “2/K. 125”, pp. 62, 63. The latter also mentions “ethnic Pear” as monks, astrologers, or magicians (pp. 72–73).

¹⁰⁰Leclère, *Codes* I: 114–15; Groslier, *Angkor*, pp. 162–63; Chandler, *History*, pp. 79–80, 85.

¹⁰¹Leclère, *Codes* I: 114–15; Chandler, *History*, pp. 85–86.

¹⁰²Wheatley, “*Satyāṇṛta*”, pp. 225ff.

¹⁰³On the anthropological concept of “broker”, see, e.g., Eric Wolf, “Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society: Mexico”, *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 1075ff.

¹⁰⁴Groslier, *Angkor*, p. 155, states that the king controlled all foreign trade. Moreover, as Wheatley notes for earlier times in his “*Satyāṇṛta*”, pp. 238, 242, rulers can manipulate trade to their own advantages and are the ultimate beneficiaries of trade.

¹⁰⁵See in particular Groslier, *Angkor*, on Spanish and Portuguese involvement in Cambodia, and Coedès, *Making*, p. 198, on Prince Chan/Reameathipdei’s conversion to Islam and involvement with Malay and Javanese immigrants.

¹⁰⁶Chandler, *History*, p. 80.

seventeenth century Cambodian society that can be conceived of in terms of strata (or segments) and hierarchy. But they were not, in my view, castes. What to call them and how many layers are to be delineated depends on the analytical/theoretical model one chooses to use. A simple political economy model could distinguish two fundamental classes: the rulers and the ruled — or, as San Antonio succinctly observed of sixteenth century Cambodia: “there are nobles and commoners”.¹⁰⁷ The former included the king and an élite made up of both royalty and commoners with titles and/or wealth. (It would also include, accordingly to Democratic Kampuchean “class analysis”, the *sangha* as well.)¹⁰⁸ The ruled and exploited were, of course, ordinary commoners and slaves whose labour was mobilized and surplus produce extracted to support the élite and state. A Weberian approach, however, would produce a more complicated model (or models) differentiating several levels and segments of society in terms of differential social prestige, political power, and the extent and nature of access to economic resources.¹⁰⁹ Superimposed on these was a sort of ladder, a “hierarchy of fixed ranks” of titles, positions, occupations, and other general distinctions such as relative age or sex.¹¹⁰ I have suggested that although various strata perpetuated themselves to a large extent, their membership was not fixed, and there was some mobility up and down the system (or into and out of social categories/statuses such as monks and debt slaves).¹¹¹

At the upper levels of the royalty and élite there were, it strikes me, two basic and recurrent struggles through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. First, there was contention for the throne because of the concentration of the kingdom’s riches there, as well as the lack of clear, enforceable rules of succession. Second, there was constant tension between the power of the king and local lords/officials with, most likely, oscillation between periods of relative centralization and decentralization of power (viz. the concept of the “tributary mode” noted earlier).¹¹² In such struggles, entourages of patrons and clients were critically important as support for various actors on the sociopolitical scene as they pursued various goals. Common folk were not, of course, major protagonists in such maneuvers; but, as those who were ruled and exploited, they needed patrons for protection and aid in coping with the pressures that impinged on their lives. In return they provided — as did clients at all levels — fealty, services, and goods. Thus, cross-cutting the strata were interlocking, overlapping entourages/circles all up and down the system.

This type of social organization is not unusual either in Southeast Asia or other parts of the world,¹¹³ and my reading of the historical materials suggests that it was found also

¹⁰⁷Chandler, *History*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁸See, e.g., Laura Summers, “Cooperatives in Democratic Kampuchea”, paper presented at the Social Science Research Council Conference on Kampuchea, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1981, p. 17.

¹⁰⁹Each of these is, in itself, a complex topic, and there is also the question of the articulation between the emic (native) and etic (analyst’s) points of view. Aymonier, for instance, notes that one could differentiate seven “classes” or three for 19th-century Cambodia (*Cambodge*, p. 102).

¹¹⁰Hanks, “Merit”, p. 1252.

¹¹¹See also Chandler, *History*, p. 94.

¹¹²Mabbett, “Kingship”, p. 9, has proposed a “cyclic pattern” of change in Angkorean politics that seems quite applicable to the 16th–17th centuries as well.

¹¹³See, e.g., Tambiah, “Galactic”, Akin Rabibhadana, “Organization”, and Hanks, “Thai Social Order”, on Thailand; Scott, “Erosion”, on Southeast Asia generally; Wolf, *Europe*, pp. 79–83, and Webster, *Theocracies*, on other societies.

in Cambodia of this period. Pre-colonial Southeast Asian kingdoms were truly complex societies, and as such they manifested multiple modes of social integration and principles of organization, as well as tensions and contradictions that I have not considered. Various discussions in the past regarding the nature of Southeast Asian societies (e.g., debates over “loose structure”) have not taken sufficient cognizance of this point. They assumed — as did, indeed, a good deal of social science literature since the nineteenth century — that a society must necessarily be one thing or another. Obviously societies are bundles of many “things”, which are not always neatly integrated or consistent with one another. Moreover, societies are also constantly undergoing change in response to both internal and external factors, such that it is difficult and misleading to conceive of them in terms of static models. While such complexity is difficult to grasp, greater awareness of its existence will enrich our understanding of Southeast Asian social organization.