

## SECTION IV

### SOCIAL STRUCTURE

#### **General Social Organization**

Khmer society is organized into the basic units of nuclear family and personal kindred or extended family. The nuclear family usually has its own house, which is surrounded by the houses of the married daughters, a son-in-law usually establishing his home near his in-laws. The membership of the personal kindred varies and may include grandparents or grandchildren where present, parents' siblings, first cousins, and the children of siblings. Relatives (generally the spouses of close blood relatives such as aunts and uncles, or the relatives of a spouse) are usually included among personal kindred.<sup>1</sup> Extended families are not necessarily concentrated in villages, but live scattered over the countryside.\*<sup>2</sup> The Khmer distinguish between kin and nonkin; stronger bonds of affection and obligation presumably characterize relations between the former than between the latter. The closeness of the family relationship supposedly determines the intensity of these sentiments. Friction among relatives is condemned by public opinion and is believed to be punished by supernatural beings.<sup>4</sup>

The kinship system is patriarchal in theory, but although the father is the legal head of the family, his influence over it is actually not absolute. Divorce is initiated by either husband or wife; land and other property may be held in individual ownership by either husband or wife; inheritance is usually divided equally among the children.<sup>5</sup> Evidence of descent from an earlier matriarchal system is also present: lineage is traced through the mother; children take the mother's name (and her religion if they are issue of a religiously mixed marriage); in case of divorce, children remain with the mother; a woman is the principal personage in many domestic ceremonies; and she retains the right to select her husband.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Position of Men, Women, and Children**

The father is the legal head of the Khmer household, but his power is less absolute than that of the Vietnamese father.<sup>6</sup> He

\* Village organization and individual obligation toward it have never been as strong among the Khmer as among the Vietnamese.<sup>3</sup>

† One early source claimed inheritance among the Khmer descended in the female line.<sup>4</sup>

must obtain his wife's consent for any important action, such as becoming a priest.<sup>9</sup> Men and women share the field labor, the men tending to the more strenuous tasks, such as plowing, harrowing, and threshing. The men also collect the sugar palm juice, care for the cattle, and buy or sell cows, chickens, and land.

Women hold an honored position in the household. As controllers of the family budget, women wield almost as much authority as their husbands. They care for the children, do the housework and gardening, weave, and make mats and bins of thatch. In addition, they prepare paddy for planting, help harvest the rice, make sugar, help care for the cattle, pigs, and chickens, and buy and sell rice, pigs, and food.<sup>10</sup>

At an early age children are taught respect for their parents, an attitude strengthened by tradition and customary law. Both boys and girls help in the field and domestic work.<sup>11</sup> From adolescence, when they "enter the shade," until they are married, the girls lead chaste and retiring lives under their parents' supervision.<sup>12</sup> Village morality condemns premarital relations; a pregnant bride brings shame upon her whole family. In theory, if a girl objects to a proposed marriage, she has the right to refuse; in practice, however, the parents arrange the marriage and the children acquiesce in their parents' desires. Upon marrying, the children are free to live in a separate house without first requesting permission from their parents to establish themselves outside the family dwelling.<sup>13</sup>

### **Marriage**

The Khmer prefer village endogamy (marriage within the village group) as a means of ensuring a trustworthy mate, but in actuality exogamous marriages involving members of villages within the local area predominate. Ideally, a young man in love with a particular young girl asks his parents to initiate the marriage arrangements. More frequently, however, the parents select the girl, and the son will not even know her. He will abide by his parents' wish and marry her; but if after a year of marriage the couple prove incompatible, the son may choose a second wife and either keep the first wife or divorce her.

The betrothal, which may last as long as two years, involves several visits between the two families, the first visit being merely a courtesy call. The betrothal transactions are conducted by intermediaries who are usually relatives or neighbors of the young man's family. On the first visit they bring fruit to the girl's mother and discuss with her such unrelated subjects as the harvest or fishing. Meanwhile the mother inquires about the young man; if the reports are good, further discussions are allowed to take place. The second visit is also very casual.

On the third visit, the intermediaries and the boy's family arrive

at the girl's house bearing platters of betel and areca nuts which will seal the betrothal agreement. They are received by a venerable old man from the girl's family who assumes the position of the *meba* (literally mother-father). The intermediaries (in consultation with the boy's parents) and the *meba* discuss the final price to be paid by the young man's family on the wedding day; betel is chewed and the betrothal fixed. The *achar* or diviner, who must then be consulted, fixes the date of the marriage according to the signs of the births of the young people.\* The marriage is delayed until a lucky day occurs; a period of between 2 months and a year may elapse before the ceremony takes place. In the latter case, the boy's family must bring presents twice a month to the girl's parents. Formerly, during this time, the young man went to serve his future in-laws to show them his qualities as a worker. Although this custom is generally dying out, it is still practiced in some rural areas.

Several days prior to the wedding date, the young man and his relatives build a large hut near the girl's house and decorate it elaborately; they also erect a smaller one to serve as the kitchen. The marriage ceremony continues for 3 days, the last day being the date set by the *achar*. The first evening the groom, his parents, and relatives make merry—singing, feasting, and listening to music in the large hut.

The morning of the second day, the intermediaries go with much pomp to the girl's house bearing the trays of presents promised at the betrothal. The *meba* greets them and receives the gifts in the name of the girl's parents. Betel is passed around and chewed by everyone present except the very young; meanwhile, the girl remains in her room until the evening, when she will emerge to greet the Buddhist monks.

The morning ends with a great feast and a ritual haircutting session. At this time two hairdressers, a married woman and a married man, sing, dance, and click their scissors, then trim the hair of the bride and groom. Meanwhile, the musicians play the ritual tune called "Cutting the Leaves." A procession is then formed to gather the areca tree flowers to be presented to the *meba* by the groom when he enters the bride's room after the marriage.

After dinner the *achar* makes an offering called the *krong peali*. With prayers and invocations, he buries in the garden a tray of offerings and the crude figure of a man fashioned from gluey rice. After the Buddhist monks have consecrated the house, the *achar* prepares some gum lacquer which the girl rubs on her teeth. The *achar* ties a thread of raw cotton—for purification—on the girl's

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\* See "Birth," p. 1072.

wrist and returns to the wedding hut, where he ties a similar thread on the boy's wrist.

On the third day, before dawn, the intermediaries, accompanied by musicians, bring to the meba the "value of the milk sucked by the girl," represented by six or seven piasters. Meanwhile, the groom emerges from the wedding hut wearing his finest clothes over the traditional, brocaded, red tunic.

A mat is laid in the courtyard and on it are placed an overturned mortar, a pitcher of water, an offering of puffed rice, and a pig's head. The groom sits on the mortar; then, when the archar beats his gong, indicating the rising of the sun, the groom raises his hands, touches the mat with his forehead, extends his arms, and turns his palms around three times, after which the achar pours water on his hands and says a prayer.

The groom then proceeds to the bride's house where he gives the meba the areca flowers (gathered the night before) placed in three banana trunks or three pots. The groom sits on a mat in the center of the room and greets those present by turning his hands around. Before him are three trays containing threads of raw cotton, areca flowers, a knife or hatchet for the areca, and an empty platter to be filled with piasters by the guests.

After a ritual sword dance, the dancer draws back the curtain to the girl's room. While the musicians play the tune of Lady Neak, daughter of the Naga king who wed the first Khmer king,\* the bride emerges, wearing a tiara with scarab wings and a fake chignon, and takes her place on the mat. The bride and groom, together for the first time during the ceremonies, bow forward with their legs extended to the left, elbows resting on cushions, and hands joined. The shrewd bride will endeavor to raise her head higher than her husband's at this time to ensure having the upper hand in the household.

The guests, grouped around the bride and groom, now participate in the ritual by passing a cotton thread from hand to hand, eventually encircling the couple. Three lighted candles attached to a metal lotus petal disk, the *popil*, around which have been tied two betel leaves, are then circulated from guest to guest three times, each person blowing the flame toward the couple.

The bride and groom rise and the achar binds their wrists with two cotton bracelets and covers them with areca flowers. One by one, parents and friends bind the couple's hands, scatter flowers on them, and place money on the tray. An accountant records the sum, the equivalent of which must be given by the recipients when invited by the donor to some future family ceremony.

The couple retire to the back room; the bride precedes, followed

\* See "Legendary History," p. 1056.

by the groom holding the tip of his wife's scarf, as did the first Khmer king after marrying the Naga princess. The wife presents her husband with new garments and both feed each other a banana and a cake. They then return to the main room to serve the guests.

Young married couples generally prefer to establish a new house separate from that of their parents. In practice, however, the couple often live with the girl's or the boy's family either because they lack money to build a new house or because the parents desire to have one married child remain in the house to care for them—and eventually to inherit the house as compensation. Matrilocal residence is more commonly chosen because the women are more reluctant to leave their homes and villages than are the men.<sup>14</sup>

#### **Divorce and Second Marriages**

Divorce, although rare, occurs in cases of incompatibility, prolonged unjustified absence, failure to provide, or adultery on the part of the wife (but not of the husband). In the event of the death of a spouse, the remaining spouse takes over the household and may remarry.

Polygamy is legal but is usually practiced only by the wealthy. First wives are frequently opposed to polygamy; many try to prevent their husbands from taking a second wife.

Marriage is prohibited between members of the nuclear family—including step-relations—and between aunts and nephews and uncles and nieces. Also possible are levirate and sororate marriages—marriage between surviving spouse with a brother or sister of the deceased.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Birth**

Of the three principal domestic events—birth, marriage, and death—birth places the Khmer household in the greatest danger. If a woman dies in childbirth, the wickedness of her ghost is doubled by the fetus, which has been angered at not having been born. Before childbirth, certain precautions must be taken to protect the child from evil spirits. First, just prior to birth, everyone except the midwife and members of the family is excluded from the house. Then, to further protect the mother, the child, and the household, the achar places a 3-day prohibition on the house.

Shortly before delivery of the child, a basket filled with paddy, bananas, candles, incense sticks, grains of raw cotton, and pennies (also a knife and a pair of scissors, if it is the first child) is placed at the foot of the bed. The basket and its contents must not be touched until the Ceremony of the Churching, when it is given to the midwife.

In wealthy Khmer homes, when labor begins the mother is placed on a bed covered with a mat under which a fire is kindled.

The longer the mother remains over the fire, the better; this causes the bad blood to go away. But in poorer homes, the mother is placed on a mat directly on the floor and the fire is lit beneath the house. To prevent the evil spirits or ghouls from seeping through the floor in the form of heat or smoke to suck the mother's blood, the father, at the achar's orders, encircles the fire with brambles.<sup>16</sup>

After the delivery, the achar places a 3-day interdict on the house; with chalk he marks a cross at each of the four corners of the building and places a pineapple leaf on either side of the door. During this time, the mother must remain isolated from the outside world, not even exchanging a word with anyone.

On the morning of the 4th day, when the interdict is lifted, the Ceremony of the Churching takes place, at which time the mother must receive the midwife's forgiveness. The officiating midwife makes an offering, announces the end of the 3-day interdict, and extinguishes the fire beneath the bed.<sup>17</sup> The mother begs the midwife to "wish me no evil, neither me nor my child because I have caused you trouble and fatigue, and made you touch the blood." When the midwife replies, "I wish you no evil," the mother ties a strand of raw cotton on the midwife's right wrist and wishes her good health. The midwife ties a thread on the mother's right wrist, and the father ties the mother's left wrist; then the child's wrists are tied while the midwife bids the infant to "stay a long time near your mother. . . ." The ceremony ends when the basket of gifts is presented to the midwife and after the father buries the afterbirth at a crossroads.

#### **Child-Rearing Practices**

A child's name is provided either by a monk familiar with the stars or by the father who suggests several names to the mother who then selects one. The birth and name are registered officially on the 7th day after the birth.<sup>18</sup> Parents generally choose a common name which will not arouse the evil spirits. A name such as "dog" or "pot" is believed to disgust the evil spirits and to cause them to seek vengeance.

The sign under which the child is born is extremely important, more so even than the name, for the sign will be considered many times during the person's lifetime. Before the child marries, for example, the diviner must be consulted to determine whether the signs of the two to be married may be safely joined; if so, when the crossing can propitiously occur.<sup>19</sup>

Two childhood ceremonies, the "Cutting of the Topknot" and the "Retreat Into the Shadows," although still practiced in some remote rural areas, are being abandoned by the Khmer. Until the age of 12, children in some remote areas wear a topknot, while the rest of the head is shaved. Girls twist the topknot into a chignon; boys let

it fall freely. The date for the solemn cutting ceremony is set for a propitious day. After a procession and a recitation of prayers, the ceremony takes place in an area marked out by a thread of white cotton to ward off evil spirits.<sup>20</sup>

The "Retreat Into the Shadows" refers to the practice of the withdrawal of the girl upon reaching puberty or "as soon as the sun has touched her." In regions where this custom survives, the girl must remain shut in her room for 6 months, hidden from the sun and the sight of men. During this time she is forbidden to eat meat, fish, or eggs; she must speak little and refrain from anger. The end of this confinement was, and in some areas may still be, marked by a celebration in which the girl, without looking, pulls an object from a pile of rice prepared by the diviner: a silver object presages a rich husband; a spoon, much work; a bottle, a drunken husband. The girl participates ritually in the pantomime of a portion of the marriage ceremony, in which a sword replaces the husband. Dancing and singing take place while the girl blackens her teeth with lacquer; the ceremony terminates with the girl saluting the rising sun.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Education**

The Khmer receive most of their education informally in the home. There they learn respect for their elders and rules of etiquette to guide their actions in society. Girls learn the principles of cooking, weaving, housekeeping, and child rearing from their mothers. Boys learn to build homes, make tools, and raise animals. Both girls and boys assist their parents in the fields and acquaint themselves with agricultural techniques by observing and working alongside their parents.

Current information relating to the formal education of the Khmer is fragmentary. Before the arrival of the French, education was limited to that provided by the temple schools, under the direction of the monks. The French laid the foundation for a modern educational system by establishing Franco-Vietnamese schools in an effort to expand the formal education of the population. Free elementary education was available in the delta and in 1927 became compulsory for children of both sexes. Despite this decree, education prior to independence was contingent upon the initiative of each community.

The Khmer refused to send their children to the Franco-Vietnamese schools, where the language of instruction was either French or Vietnamese. Instead, they promoted the development of traditional instruction in the temple schools, three types of which already existed: independent schools entirely free from French control; French-subsidized schools; and reformed schools almost exclusively religious in their teaching. By 1944, the reformed schools

numbered 209 and included 7,274 pupils of which over 1,000 were girls, who were until that time excluded from all formal education. The monks, who were instructors in these schools had received their higher education in Phnom Penh, Tra Vinh, or Soc Trang (now Khanh Hung).<sup>22</sup>

Following independence, the Vietnamese Government officially abolished previous methods of education and redesigned the system to promote a spirit of unity and patriotism. The new objectives sought to develop the mental and physical capabilities of each child in order to make him a good citizen. These worthy aims and the principle of compulsory education were decreed, but the degree of implementation in Khmer areas is uncertain.

A few public primary schools are known to exist in areas having predominately Khmer populations. The lessons are taught mainly in Cambodian by Khmer teachers, Vietnamese serving as a secondary language. As the students gain familiarity with the Vietnamese tongue, the use of the Cambodian language tends to decrease in favor of the official language used in courses taught by Vietnamese instructors. Statistics are lacking on the number of secondary schools especially devoted to Khmer children.

Some Khmer children still attend the temple schools (sala), where they receive mainly religious instruction (precepts of Theravada Buddhism) from the monks, who, as teachers, are highly respected for their knowledge, which in reality is quite limited; they learn as they teach—by rote.<sup>23</sup>

#### **Death and Cremation**

A death, although less of a jeopardy to the household than a birth, still requires certain precautions to ward off evil spirits. A corpse is feared because it is believed that ghosts, ghouls, and birds of evil augur rise from its flesh, bones, and blood. A dissatisfied soul is capable of returning to haunt the family and of seeking vengeance. Through love, respect, and fear, the family honors the deceased in a ceremony as fine as their means will allow.

The Khmer cremate their dead unless the deceased desired to be buried. But a buried corpse is all the more baneful; the Khmer believe ghosts and ghouls are more readily born from a slowly decomposing body.

When a Khmer is dying, the son or closest relative brings the objects used by the sick man to a table beside the bed; a pot of rice, a pot of salt, dried fish, a mat and cushion for his head, cloth, bowls, etc. Later, on the day of cremation, these objects are presented to the local monastery as the last offering of the deceased.

Rituals are performed to ensure that the dying man will be freed from the earth: images of Buddha are placed before his eyes and a canopy of white cotton is suspended over his bed to help him forget

his house. Any amulet is removed and given to the family. The monks lead those present in repeating Araham! Araham! (the Saint! the Saint!) to replace any evil thoughts in the sick man's mind with holy visions; this is to prevent him from being reborn in hell or in the shape of an animal.

When the sick man appears to be dying, an areca flower is placed in his hands; a leaf of the sacred fig tree, inscribed with a verse written by the achar, is placed on his lips. The moment the man dies, the achar lights a candle at the head of the bed and a lamp at the foot of the bed; the latter will bear the flame to the pyre. The achar inserts a piece of silver between the dead man's teeth and places sacred fig leaves on his eyes, nostrils, ears, chest, and hands as a symbol of purification.

The body is washed and wrapped in a white sheet; the face, which has been covered with saffron-colored rice flour, is veiled. Then the body is placed in a leaded coffin, where it may remain several months before being transported to the pyre. A cotton thread intricately wound around the body must hang out of the coffin. During their watch over the deceased, monks, either in twos or fours, hang onto the thread and recite prayers. Two tall bamboo poles are raised outside the house; from each flies a white streamer, indicating a death in the family.

On the morning of cremation, the parents, attired in white mourning dress, their heads shaved, place pieces of white cloth over the coffin. One of these will be taken as the supreme gift or *bangskol* from the deceased by the monk who offers the invocation.

A procession forms to escort the coffin to the pyre. As soon as the dead man is taken out of the house, the achar throws three pitchers of water and a stone to prevent the soul from returning to torment the family. The nature of the procession varies according to the region and the wealth of the family concerned. A rich urban family might, for example, include in the procession a dragon bier, or a European hearse driven by a coachman clad in white silk pajamas, and some monks, each in a rickshaw, advancing to the tune of a Chopin funeral march.

According to one description, the funeral procession of a poor peasant might include the following: the musicians playing buffalo skin drums and xylophones; the abbot of the local monastery dressed in a yellow robe; the achar bearing a shovel and the standard of the dead man—a long bamboo cross wrapped in white cloth; an old woman carrying the paddy basket and lamp which rested at the foot of the dead man's bed; the son of the deceased leading the body by a cotton band extending from his head and tied to the thread hanging out of the coffin; the flower-covered bier escorted

by four monks; a little girl sprinkling paddy along the path; and finally, the widow and her neighbors.

The procession moves around the pyre three times; the body, facing east, is placed on the pyre and the achar lights the fire. When all has burned, the achar uses his spade to collect the ashes and fashion them into the form of a man with the head facing west. He inquires of those present, "It is well so?" to which they reply "Not bad"; he re-forms the figure with the head to the east and receives the approval of the mourners. The people then collect the unburned bones, which the son carries home after they have been purified by the achar.

The following day, and every year thereafter, the monks will be invited to recite prayers before the urn containing the purified bones. When the family has accumulated enough money for the ceremony, the urn will be solemnly carried to a stone cone called stupa or chetdey. One stupa generally serves a whole village, but wealthy families may have one of their own.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Property Ownership Within the Family and Inheritance Customs**

Land and other property may be held individually by either husband or wife and is subject to bilateral inheritance or purchase. Sugar and coconut palms can also be inherited from either the father or the mother and may be purchased or sold at will. Joint property consists of that earned by husband and wife together; in case of divorce, this is divided equally between the two.

Ideally, inheritance is divided equally, in value if not in goods, among all the children. Actually, inheritance varies according to individual circumstances; parents may, for example, favor a child who has taken good care of them or one who has not made a prosperous marriage. Land is usually distributed to children as they marry, whereas goods are apportioned at the death of the parents. If there are no descendants, property reverts to the parents or to the brothers or sisters of the deceased, who will sell it to pay for an elaborate funeral.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Level of Civilization**

Prior to any major event, the Khmer consult the achar, who in turn studies the horoscope and the calendar to establish a propitious date for the occasion. Hence, an understanding of the Khmer measurement of time is of considerable importance.

The Khmer have known several eras. The present one is Buddhist, beginning with the entry of Buddha into Nirvana in 483 B.C.\*

The Khmer have a lunar-solar calendar, based on the movement of the moon, but corrected to accord with the solar year. This is achieved by periodically adding either a few days or a month.

\* See "Religion," p. 1089.

Time is measured by the duodenary cycle; each of the twelve months is named for an animal. The animal presiding at the birth date of an individual determines such questions as sacrifices for curing a disease; the day for entering a new house; the possibility or impossibility of a marriage. Depending on the year in which he is born, the Khmer belongs to the "race" of men, gods, or *yakh*:† Buffalo, Hare, Serpent, and Boar are years of men; Rat, Dragon, Horse, and Goat are years of gods; Tiger, Monkey, Cock, and Dog are years of the *yakh* race. Like the Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese, each Khmer year has a corresponding natural element, such as fire or water. But the Khmer make more subtle distinctions between the elements; they distinguish between rain and sea water, for example.

Lunar months, like the years, are numbered, but the number one corresponds with *maksir*, which falls in November-December, rather than with the 1st month in the year. These numbers are used to make certain predictions; however, fortune and misfortune are especially determined by trimester, according to the animal of the cycle. Of still greater importance, from the point of view of ritual, is the distinction between months having 29 days, "male months," and those having 30 days, "female months." Such ceremonies as marriage and ordination can only occur during female months.

The month is divided into two periods: the first 15 days, or *khnót*, end with the full moon; the next 14 or 15 days, or *ronóc*, correspond to the waning moon. The days are numbered from 1 to 15 with the addition of the word *kót*, "to increase," or *roc*, "to decrease," depending on whether they belong to the first or the second period. The 8th and last days of each period are considered holy days; the devout go to the pagoda to receive the Buddhist commandments, and, on the 2d and 4th holy days, the monks confess their sins.

The week consists of 7 days, named for the same planets as are the days of the occidental week. A number and a color correspond to each day. The success of a venture depends, generally, on the day of the week. On Mondays, for example, one must avoid proposing marriage or borrowing or lending money; on Thursdays, the more one speaks, the less value is placed on one's words; Saturdays are unlucky days, but since spirits and demons like them, ceremonies in honor of them are preferably performed on that day.

The lucky and unlucky days of a particular individual depend on his *tonsa*, the day which, for a given cyclical year, determines the fortunate and unfortunate days and serves as a base for the calcu-

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† The *yakh* usually has a human form, is repulsive in appearance, and devours men; he can fly and can assume any guise he chooses.

lations necessary to establish the predictions. For example, on a Sunday, success is predicted for those born in the year of the Rat and the Goat, whose tonsa it is; but Sunday is dangerous for those born in the year of the Buffalo. Likewise, a man born in the year of the Dragon will beware of Saturdays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays.<sup>26</sup>

#### Sophistication in Use of Tools and Machines

Depending on the region and the degree of Vietnamese influence in the area, the Khmer use either Vietnamese implements or those used traditionally by the Khmer, which are essentially the same as those used centuries ago by the civilizations of Angkor.\* The latter are described below.

To prepare the soil for planting, the Khmer use a swing plow (*nongkol*) light enough to be carried on the shoulders. Drawn by buffaloes, this plow penetrates the soil no deeper than 10 centimeters, a distinct advantage in the clay soils which are best suited to rice cultivation. But when the ground is dry and hard, the Khmer plow is useless until the next rain.

The Khmer harvest their rice with a long-handled sickle (*trakan*) shaped like a winged serpent. The short blade, fashioned from wood of the guava tree, is bent to permit straightening the overturned stems of the paddy before cutting them. Working with this type of sickle, the average Khmer needs 10 days to harvest a hectare (not quite 2 acres) of rice. Threshing is accomplished by a pair of oxen yoked together and forced to walk over the paddy. Little girls follow the oxen, gathering the straw left behind in the threshing process. The rice is then winnowed, cleaned, and stored in a bamboo enclosure until it can be husked.

The Khmer, unlike the Vietnamese, usually husk their own rice. A homemade mill, now disappearing from areas near towns, is composed of two superimposed cylinders, into which are inserted strips of wood; the rice is husked by rubbing these sticks together and then is pounded in a mortar with a pestle formed from a tree trunk. In some areas, the women pound the rice with their hands.

In addition, the Khmer make their own hoes, spades, harrows, and irrigation equipment. The last includes the *noria* (*rohat teuk*), used in the dry season to raise the water a yard or more from the ditches to the ricefield. The *noria* is a narrow box 2 yards long, containing a chain on which revolve wooden scoops. The peasant farmer sits on the ground and pedals the *noria* to activate the chain. The use of these farm implements is generally restricted by lack of capital.<sup>27</sup>

Pirogues and oxcarts provide transportation, as do the common

\* See "Factual History," p. 1057.

sampans. Pirogues, traditionally, are made from a single trunk of the koki tree, which, according to legend, can be planted only by a monk or a prince. The Khmer makes the pirogue by hollowing out the tree trunk with an axe and fire. The oxcart, a great source of pride, is so carefully assembled from pieces of carved and polished wood that nails are not used to put it together. The body rests on a triangular chassis and on a cradle in the form of sleigh runners. The runners, one on each side, enclose the wheels and prevent the cart from sinking into the mud. The cradle and chassis serve as springs between the body and the axle. A beam, carved in the shape of a serpent's tail, curves upward between the heads of the oxen and is attached to them by cords; the movement of the oxen's heads causes the beam to bob up and down, supposedly to frighten away elephants.<sup>28</sup>

## SECTION V

### CUSTOMS

The customs discussed in this section prevail among the Khmer of rural Cambodia and probably resemble, in a general way, the beliefs and practices of the rural Khmer in the Republic of Vietnam. Regional variations of customs may exist, depending on the degree of influence wielded by neighboring groups as well as by Western cultures.

#### Dress

Both men and women generally wear either a *sampot* or a sarong. The former consists of a piece of cotton or silk cloth draped around the loins and tied on the stomach; the two ends are rolled together and passed between the legs from front to back and tucked in behind. The sarong consists of a piece of cloth whose ends are sewn together to form a cylinder; worn like a skirt, the remaining cloth is gathered into vertical pleats and tied in front.

Formerly, women covered their chests with a band of cloth passed over the left shoulder, leaving the right shoulder bare. These garments may still be seen in some rural areas, but where Western influence is strong, the women wear a blouse over the sampot. In some rural areas, the women wear a long skirt and tunic different from either the sampot or the sarong. Young women generally wear their hair long; elderly women often shave their heads to indicate that they can no longer bear children.

For festivals and ceremonies, men wear snug-fitting white jackets which button down the front. Men and women frequently wear a long scarf of madras-type fabric, shaped into a turban, about their heads.<sup>1</sup> The *krama*, as it is called, also serves as a swaddling cloth for babies or as a sack for fish; it is washed every day.<sup>2</sup>

Children usually remain nude until the age of 6 or 7, when they begin to wear the sarong or sampot and the *krama*.<sup>3</sup>

The monk's costume comprises three yellow or saffron-colored garments: a loincloth, a shoulder sash, and a toga. To resemble the robes worn by the early monks, which were made of dusty rags picked up from along the road, the togas are fashioned from several pieces of cloth, sewn end to end, rather than from a single piece of

fabric. The monks supposedly go barefoot, but most of them wear sandals. To protect their bare, shaven heads from the sun the monks often carry yellow or white parasols; they shave their heads, chins, and eyebrows.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Folk Beliefs**

Folk beliefs relating to every phase of Khmer life are evident in urban as well as rural areas. Specific fears or taboos may vary according to region and even family. The following are examples of the types of beliefs which have been reported by persons working with the Khmer.

Certain words are entirely taboo; other words may be spoken only at night. In a particular family, the hare is called a "wild buffalo," and betel nuts are referred to as "white flowers"; failure to use these epithets may bring unhappiness to the family.<sup>5</sup>

Odd numbers are generally favorable, and even numbers unfavorable, except in the case of months which number alternately 29 and 30 days; only the latter are considered complete and propitious enough for marriage and for entry into a new house. Even numbers, the direction to the left, and facing the west are usually affiliated with death.<sup>6</sup> Orientation is extremely important to the Khmer, who associate direction with mythical correlations between space and time. Each day of the week and hour of the day, certain cosmic forces (such as the "fire that strikes" (lightning), the "breath of life," and the "breath of death") emerge from one of the cardinal points. For this reason, the Khmer often speak in terms of direction: for example, when asked the question, "Where are you going?" they answer, "North," or "South," rather than saying, "Home" or "To the fields."<sup>7</sup> At night they sleep with their heads pointing south; all other directions, they fear, expose them to the powers of evil.<sup>8</sup> One source of information, however, claims that the peasant farmer sleeps with his head to the east and his children sleep with their heads pointing south.<sup>9</sup> The peasant works his fields moving from south to north.

Certain rules of etiquette have interdicts of sacred or magic origin. A Khmer's head is thought to deserve great respect; that of a monk is sacred. Patting a child on the head was traditionally not only impolite but also extremely dangerous, for it was believed that the harm to the child could only be averted by the death of the person who committed the impious act. Stepping over a Khmer squatting or lying down in a crowd is also considered reprehensible.<sup>10</sup>

The Khmer believe that supernatural beings control all of nature and that, like themselves, all creatures seek to ensure a favorable destiny by placating the spirits through certain rituals. Monkeys, for example, are believed to pay an annual tribute to the crocodiles

at a certain hour and place. Failure to appease the spirits in the prescribed manner can only bring harm.<sup>11</sup>

Some Khmer beliefs are associated with houses, their construction, and use. The important parts of a house—the pilings, the main post, and in some areas the ladder—must remain in contact with the earth at all times; visible and invisible dangers are believed to enter by way of these features. The pilings must always measure an odd number of meters—usually 2.5 or 3—because even numbers are considered unfavorable. Symbols are drawn on the pilings and ladder, and flour or oil is rubbed on them in the ritual of purification. If one of the rungs of the ladder snaps when the husband steps on it after the marriage ceremony, he must refrain from touching his wife that night or one of the couple will die. In areas where the ladder is drawn up at night, the last rung must remain outside; the guardian spirit of the house perches there and protects the inhabitants from vampires and ghosts.<sup>12</sup>

#### Drinking and Smoking Customs

The alcoholic beverages preferred by the Khmer are palm wine or *sra thnot* (made from sugar palm juice) and rice wine or *sra angha*. The latter is made from dried cooked rice mixed with rice flour, a leaven, a type of ginger, and the bark of a tree which tastes like licorice. The mixture is allowed to ferment in a large crock, and water is added when the wine is drunk.<sup>13</sup> Buddhist law prohibits monks from drinking any alcoholic beverage; tea is served when the monks are invited into private homes for ceremonies.<sup>14</sup>

Both men and women chew betel quids—an areca nut and a bit of lye wrapped in betel leaf; a small amount of tobacco is sometimes added—to relax and to forget their daily cares, the effect being between that of tobacco and that of opium. Betel is also reported to have medicinal properties.<sup>15</sup> The importance of betel in the life of the Khmer is emphasized by the amount of paraphernalia used to prepare and store it: a tray holds the leaves and nuts; special pruning shears cut the nuts; boxes of all shapes hold the chopped betel nuts. Betel is included in offerings to the spirits and is used to seal an agreement as, for example, in the marriage ceremony.<sup>16</sup>

Cigarettes are also popular among the Khmer. Strong dark tobacco is grown extensively in the delta and is rolled into cigarettes by the Khmer themselves. The peasant often keeps a box of tobacco under his pillow and, upon waking, rolls a cigarette with a fresh *sangker* leaf.<sup>17</sup>

#### Eating Customs

Meals are sacred to the Khmer; they believe lightning will spare those who are eating. Among the wealthier Khmer, cooking is refined to a complicated art.<sup>18</sup>

Rice is not only the staple food of the Khmer, but also the object of a special cult. The Khmer vocabulary emphasizes the quasi-religious nature of rice: the verb "to eat" is translated by "to eat rice"; the peasant calls himself the "man of the ricefield"; a kitchen is "the house where the rice is cooked." Moreover, each stage in the development of the rice has a specific name; for example, one for the plant itself, one for the unhusked paddy, one for the cooked rice, one for rice popped over the fire. The paddy is given poetic names and names describing the size, shape, and color of the rice; such names as Little Fish, Elephant's Tail, Young-White-Girl, and Red Cat are among those commonly ascribed to the paddy. Rice, the Khmer believe, is as "sensitive as a woman"; one must flatter it, fete it, offer it gifts and libations periodically. Numerous rituals are performed throughout the year in honor of the rice and the goddess of rice.<sup>19</sup>

*Prahok*,\* or dried or fresh fish, is eaten with the rice. *Nuk-nam*, fish sauce made from fermented prahok, is popular with the Vietnamese, but is less important to the Khmer.<sup>20</sup> The sugar palm provides fruit, juice, and sugar as well as the palm wine. Local fruits include coconuts, mangoes, bananas, guavas, papayas, sapodillas, tamarinds, tangerines, jackfruit, and grapefruit. Small gardens provide mint, ginger, turmeric, peppers, sweet potatoes, yams, white potatoes, gourds, cucumbers, squash, beans, tomatoes, and eggplant.<sup>21</sup>

The average Khmer peasant eats two meals a day; one is eaten in the ricefields at midday; the other, at home in the evening. The farmer's son brings him his noon meal, which consists of a bowl of rice with dried fish or prahok and a few vegetables. The family takes the evening meal together in the kitchen, on a sort of bamboo bed. Each person is given two bowls; one for the rice, the other for soup. The men eat with a spoon; the women and children, with their fingers.<sup>22</sup>

### Entertainment

The Khmer, heirs to a rich aesthetic tradition, express their emotions through the arts of music, acting, and versemaking. Music, the preferred type of entertainment, forms an inherent part of Khmer daily life. They sing spontaneously while working at home or in the fields and during their leisure time. Their songs comprise improvised and ancient tunes; the latter, both comical and melancholy, are learned by heart and transmitted from generation to generation. In the evening, a group of singers often presents a concert while those in the audience clap their hands in rhythm; amateur musicians sometimes accompany them. Orchestras ac-

\* A fish paste, which forms the base of many soups and is kept from one season to the next.

company all festivals and rituals, each moment of the ceremony having its own special tune.<sup>23</sup>

Theatrical productions presented by troupes of itinerant actors are a popularized version of the famed Khmer dancing now principally confined to the Court of Cambodia. Every troupe includes musicians, stage helpers, and a kru who wards off any ill health and bad luck which might plague the group. He guards the masks worn by the actors and offers invocations and gifts to them. The troupe presents a sort of ballet—a melodrama interspersed with dance scenes—in which the actors are given a theme to guide their improvisations.<sup>24</sup>

In some areas, verse-making takes the form of alternating chants, an ancient form of entertainment whereby men and women engage in rhymed repartee, combining riddles with quotations of poetry. Each group begins by linking its first rhyme with the final rhyme of the preceding group, exchanging at each turn a scarf rolled into a ball.<sup>25</sup>

Other forms of entertainment include kiteflying, gambling, and fishing. Kiteflying once served as an offering to the heavenly spirits, but merely provides a source of amusement today. A little three-noted organ attached to the kite produces mournful sounds when the wind blows over it.<sup>26</sup> The Khmer are avid gamblers and often risk losing a year's earnings in a single night of gambling, which takes the form of roulette, cards (especially poker), cock-fighting, and chess.<sup>27</sup> Fishing and basket weaving are popular with the whole family, serving as a means of relaxation during the work-day in the ricefields.<sup>28</sup>

Children sing and compete in games of skill. A form of battledore and shuttlecock is played almost everywhere; the shuttlecock is thrown and caught with the side of the foot. Sometimes at night, two groups of children armed with sticks attempt to push a piece of lighted wood to the opposing camp. Ballplaying is popular near towns, the ball being made of rags.<sup>29</sup>

#### **Attitudes Toward Women**

As soon as the Khmer girl reaches the age of puberty, she begins to lead a sequestered, closely supervised existence. She withdraws from society for a varying period of time, called the "Retreat Into the Shadows"; her emergence from this confinement is marked by a ceremony which in effect announces her readiness to marry.\* The Khmer girl is expected to lead a chaste life until her marriage; should she disobey the moral codes and become pregnant out of wedlock, she brings shame upon her entire family. Married or unmarried, she is expected to be modest at all times. Adultery com-

\* See "Child-Rearing Practices," p. 1073.

mitted by a wife—but not the husband—is just cause for divorce.

Women hold respected positions in Khmer society and in the home. They are legally subject to their husband's desires, yet they share equally in important family decisions.†

#### Etiquette

When greeting each other, the Khmer traditionally place their hands together at lip level and execute a half bow. The higher the hands are raised, the greater the expression of deference. A child before an adult, an adult before a superior, repeats this gesture a number of times. The Khmer rarely shake hands among themselves, but may do so with Westerners. It is considered especially rude for a younger Khmer man to shake hands with an older one.

Inside a house, people usually sit while talking. It is considered ill mannered for a younger person to stand while conversing with an older person who is seated; but a young person may talk, while seated, to an older person who is standing. A young man may talk with an older person when standing on the street or in the market place, but he must bend his upper body and neither stand up straight nor come too close.

For magico-religious reasons, the Khmer do not pat children on the head and do not like outsiders to do so. They believe that the "life-essence" or "soul stuff" of the individual is planted in the head and can be easily injured. Children's names are generally not mentioned, for fear of drawing the attention of evil spirits and thereby inviting misfortune.<sup>30</sup>

Before mentioning a proper name, an appropriate term designating age, rank, or sex of the person being addressed is used. The names of male children, when used, are preceded by an "A," which is a term of scorn when applied to an adult, but which becomes benevolent when used by a father toward a son or when a master uses it paternally toward his servants.<sup>31</sup>

Rules of courtesy require that a man speaking with someone of higher rank lower his eyes; the same applies to a woman speaking with a man. Friends and relatives, however, do not abide by this rule. A woman, according to Buddhist doctrine, should never attract the glance of a monk or engage in light conversation with him: conversations between women and monks do occur, but usually pertain to religion or to serious problems. When contributing alms to the monk, the Khmer woman lowers her eyes and assumes an attitude of complete quiet and restraint.

In formal conversation, the woman's proper position for conversation is to be seated, with legs bent to the left, hands together. Men may assume this position but may also converse from a squat-

† See "Position of Women," p. 1065.

ting position. Gesticulation of the hands is avoided, as is all body contact—a slap on the back, for example.

In conversation, it is acceptable to interrupt a speaker, but disagreement with or sudden criticism of what has been said may arouse suspicion toward the challenger.<sup>32</sup>

#### Customs Relating to Outsiders

The Khmer are a polite, friendly people; they treat a stranger with utmost hospitality once they realize he has no evil intentions toward them.\* When a stranger arrives in a rural Khmer settlement, the inhabitants will rush out to meet him and ask why he has come to this particular hamlet. If his answer is sufficiently reassuring, he may be invited into the temple compound and directed to the sala, the building where weary travelers may rest and receive a glass of water or a bowl of rice from the monks. If invited into a private dwelling, the visitor, in some areas, is expected to remove his shoes before sitting on the mat spread on the floor.<sup>33</sup>

The laws of Khmer hospitality dictate that before any conversation with a stranger can take place, he must drink the coconut milk offered him by the family. After the initial exchange of salutations, a young son will bring a fresh coconut. The family will offer the visitor whatever food or beverage they have. The visitor is expected to accept it, even if he does not want it, realizing that the offer emanates from a sincerely generous heart.<sup>34</sup> A visitor will not stay overnight in a Khmer dwelling, but will be escorted to the sala and will be given a mat on which to sleep.<sup>35</sup>

A natural alliance appears to bind the Cham and the Khmer; both groups, descendants of great, ancient empires, espoused the religious practices, customs, and mores of Indian civilization in their early history. Now both are minority groups, struggling to eke out a living and to retain their cultural identity. There is a symbiotic relationship. The Khmer, for example, raise cattle, but, in accordance with their religion, refuse to slaughter them; the Cham drive the animals to market, slaughter them, and collect the profits. The Cham and Khmer, however, seldom intermarry.<sup>36</sup>

The Khmer consider the Chinese intelligent and exceptionally astute in business. Ironically, the small Khmer farmer remains perpetually indebted to the Chinese merchants. Without capital to modernize his farming practices, the Khmer farmer is dependent on the Chinese merchant for seed and for transportation of his produce to market. Hence, the merchant is in a position to fix his own price. He lends the farmer seed, cloth, or food and at harvest-time expects reimbursement at a high rate of interest (sometimes as much as 100 percent). Despite this relationship, the Khmer and

\* See "Psychological Characteristics," p. 1065.

Chinese maintain a pleasant rapport and frequently intermarry.<sup>37</sup>

#### **Customs Relating to Warfare**

From antiquity, warfare has occupied a prominent position in the life of the Khmer. They waged both offensive and defensive wars against the neighboring Cham, Vietnamese, and Siamese. The French recruited many Khmer soldiers to fight the Viet Minh during the Indochina War. Currently, a sizeable number of Khmer are serving in the ranks of the Vietnamese National Army.

The Vietnamese Government also employs able-bodied Khmer men to serve as Provincial Guards, a sort of local militia organized to combat banditry and subversive groups in and near Khmer settlements.\*

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\* See "Paramilitary Capabilities," p. 1107.

## SECTION VI

### RELIGION

The majority of the Khmer subscribe to a religion based essentially on the dogma of Theravada Buddhism rather than that of Mahayana Buddhism, the doctrine espoused by most of the Chinese and Vietnamese. This form of Buddhism, also called Hinayana (Little Vehicle) Buddhism is also practiced in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Burma, and Ceylon.

According to Buddhist doctrine, worldly life cannot give eternal happiness. The extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification are to be avoided in favor of The Middle Way which alone can produce true insight, knowledge, tranquility, and Nirvana. Deliverance from universal suffering can be achieved by rightness of thought, conduct, and inner discipline. Buddhism denies the existence of a permanent soul or self that transmigrates unaltered from one life to the next. The individual encompasses five groups of changing components: corporeality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. The whole universe is in continuous flux, with no fixed underlying essence. All is subject to universal causality, the law of deeds, karma or *kamma*, by which each act results in an inevitable end. Hence good deeds produce good results; evil deeds, evil results. By following the teachings of Buddha, personal change can be directed upward through successive lives toward the goal of Nirvana, a transcendent state where suffering, desire, and sorrow cease.<sup>1</sup>

A brief explanation of the Buddhist conception of man is given here as background information. Buddhist texts extol the virtues of being human; man alone is capable of acquiring supreme understanding and of rising to a moral level worthy of being "the master of one of the worlds." Such a position is unattainable by inferior beings concerned solely with satisfying their basic needs. Superior beings are equally excluded, for they are too absorbed with immediate joys to abandon themselves to contemplation. For this reason, it is all important to be born a human being. In our transmigratory existence, we are born hundreds of times in many forms, but rarely in human form. Men must, therefore, take full advantage of their brief human existence. They have the inherent capacity to probe the cosmos and discover its deepest truths. Only one being has

reached the elevated state of Nirvana—Buddha, the best of men and the most evolved of beings. Those who reach the highest moral, spiritual, and intellectual level—*bouddha-bhava*—differ as much from men, as men do from animals. These summits are reached only by men who have worked to develop their abilities throughout their many lives. Every being, therefore, has the innate possibility of becoming a *bouddha-bhava*. For this reason, man must be humble, optimistic, and refrain from killing any being whatsoever.<sup>2</sup>

Disagreements developing within the Sangha (the order of monks established by Gautama Buddha himself) after Buddha's death resulted in the split of Buddhism into two schools: Theravada and Mahayana, conservative and liberal, respectively. Changes in interpretation of Buddha's teachings prompted the Mahayanists to call their own school the Great Vehicle (that is, conveyance) to salvation and the earlier, orthodox Theravada teaching the Hinayana or Little Vehicle, a name suggesting inferiority and shallowness.

Major differences characterize the Theravada ideas revealed by Pali texts and Mahayana beliefs set forth in Sanskrit tradition.

Theravadans honor most deeply the personality and teachings (*dhamma*), of the historic Buddha and the order he founded—Sangha. Mahayanists recognize Gautama Buddha as only one of many Buddhas who have appeared, all being manifestations of one Buddha nature, and teaching variously according to needs of beings in their different realms.

Theravadans believe that the ideal Buddhist is a follower of the teachings of Buddha, the layman going as far as he can, the monk striving further to fulfill all conditions for the perfected saint whose goodness is manifested in universal love. To the Mahayanists, the ideal Buddhist is a Bodhisattva, that is, one vowed to become a Buddha, inspired by great compassion to work for the good of others through perfecting himself in the six virtues (*paramita*) of generosity, morality, patience, vigor, concentration (in meditation), and wisdom.

According to Theravadans, each Buddhist devises his own salvation by following the ways of Buddha. Mahayanists hold that supramundane Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, endowed with mercy, goodness, and unbounded readiness to help, may be called upon to assist in this intent.

Theravadans believe that faith is essentially confidence in truth, taught by the Buddha, and gradually achieved oneself. Faith, to Mahayanists, is trust in the availability of merit transferred from a superhuman Buddha or Bodhisattva whom one worships with devotion and gratitude.<sup>3</sup>

Buddhism is classified as an atheistic religion because "Buddha is not a divinity to whom one prays, but an example of supreme wisdom with which one seeks to imbue oneself through meditation before his image." <sup>4</sup> Yet the majority of the faithful Khmer consider Buddha a supernatural power whose good favor they must obtain by offerings or by conduct conforming to the precepts which he taught and which the monks transmit.<sup>5</sup>

In actuality, few Khmer other than exceptionally well-instructed monks know the Buddhist doctrine; the religion of the remaining Khmer takes the form of a popular devotion limited to simple ritualistic observances. To the average Khmer, the purpose of religion is to provide the individual with an opportunity to perform meritorious services, thus ensuring a better reincarnation. In this respect, to support the clergy is the most laudable activity of Buddhist laymen. Religious observance consists of making offerings of flowers, candles, and incense to the image of Buddha and attending the principal religious ceremonies at the temple.<sup>6</sup>

Theravada Buddhists surround their clergy with exceptional reverence, addressing them with a special vocabulary. As long as he wears his traditional saffron robe, the monk is considered sacred and inviolate. Even if a monk has committed a crime, he cannot be tried until he has first been defrocked.<sup>7</sup> The monks warrant the respect they receive by virtue of the exemplary, moral, and self-abnegating lives they lead.

Traditionally, all Khmer men, rich and poor, were required to spend some portion of their lives in the monastery as novices or monks, depending on their age. The purpose of this retreat from the world was to amass as many merits as possible to guarantee a better reincarnation. For centuries the monastery served as the center for all religious, social, and educational activity. With the advent of public education, however, its primary function, that of instruction, became secondary in importance. As a result, the custom of retiring to a monastery has been dying out, particularly in the towns.

The influence of the monks, however, remains supreme, especially in the rural areas. The monks preach among the laymen, and sanctify with prayers such domestic ceremonies as the cutting of the hair at puberty, marriage, birth, and funerals. In addition to their religious functions, the monks teach children the basic principles of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The fact that most monks are of peasant origin enables them to communicate with the Khmer and exert (though unofficially) a political influence over them.<sup>8</sup>

The monk is exempt from all public responsibility; he is not subject to conscription and does not vote. In theory he remains divorced from politics; he may not appear in court, serve as witness,

or initiate legal action when robbed, beaten, or injured.

A non-Buddhist may become a monk by making the appropriate vows, thus automatically renouncing his own religion.

Traditionally, elaborate festivities, including a feast and a procession, accompanied the ordination of a neophyte into the clergy.<sup>9</sup> Ordination occurs only during certain months of the Khmer year, usually from April 15 to July 15; in years having thirteen months, ordination occurs sometime between April 15 and July 15. This period precedes Vossa, the holy season, which lasts three months usually from April 15 to July 15; in years having thirteen months, ordination occurs sometime between April 15 and July 15. This period precedes Vassa, the holy season, which lasts three months and coincides with the rainy season.<sup>10</sup>

When he is ordained, the novice vows to observe the ten principles or rules of the Buddhist faith, which are:

- I. Do not kill.
- II. Do not steal.
- III. Do not sin against virtue.
- IV. Do not lie.
- V. Do not drink alcoholic beverages.
- VI. Do not eat other than at times permitted.
- VII. Do not assist at spectacles which excite the senses, such as dancing, singing, music.
- VIII. Do not use cosmetics, perfumes, ornaments, and do not wear flowers.
- IX. Occupy neither high chairs nor soft beds.
- X. Do not touch silver or gold.

Laymen must observe the first five laws; monks must abide by them all.

The first rule explains why monks do not work in the fields; when working the soil they might accidentally kill a worm or an insect. Moreover, monks are prohibited even from cutting trees.

The third rule obligates a monk to maintain absolute chastity; he must neither meet a woman's glance nor stay alone in a room with her, nor be on the same path with her.

In accordance with the fifth rule, monks may not drink fermented beverages. Generally, a monk who is ill may drink alcohol if it serves as an excipient to a medicine, such as quinine wines used against malaria.

Monks may eat two light meals a morning: one at daybreak, the other just before noon; then may not eat solid food again until the following morning. But certain juices, orange or cane sugar, and tea are usually allowed. Even when he calls on a layman's family, the monk must refuse all snacks.

Despite the interdict against exciting the senses, many temples

have small orchestras which play on festival days to regale the faithful.

Monks generally sleep on mats placed on the floor of their cells or *kaut* which are usually devoid of any furniture.<sup>11</sup> Only important priests may sit on elevated chairs.

A monk may not accept any gold or silver for himself, but he may do so for the temple. Since the temples depend on public support for their maintenance, visitors place donations beside the altar or give them to an intermediary, never directly to the monks.

The monks, awakened by bells at dawn, arise, bathe in a pond within the temple enclosure, recite their prayers, and clean their cells and the temple compound. At about seven, dressed in their saffron-colored robes, they emerge from the monastery in single file and, bearing their bowls, go off to beg for their food. When the faithful have filled the bowls, the monks return to the temple to pray and to eat. Prior to eating, they throw a bit of food on the ground for any birds or animals present.<sup>12</sup> Then they pursue their respective occupations, which include teaching the novices or children from neighboring hamlets (if the temple has a school), studying sacred texts, praying, meditating, or maintaining the temple. At about 11:30 a.m., the monks have their final meal of the day, which usually consists of a bowl of rice and a little water. After the meal, they wash their hands and brush their teeth until no trace of what they have eaten remains. They may nap until two o'clock when they return to their occupations. Traditionally, monks were forbidden to leave the temple confines after dark—except in emergencies when they had to tend a sick person.

In Cambodia and perhaps also in the Republic of Vietnam, there are elderly men and women dressed in white who want to observe the Buddhist precepts without taking vows. The women (*don chi*) resemble nuns in that they shave their heads and live as ascetically as the monks. They live outside the sacred enclosure but frequent the temple, assiduously doing services for the monks, sewing, and arranging the altar.<sup>13</sup>

The Buddhist religion comprises few rituals; no rites or sacraments correspond to those of the Christian church. The faithful come to the temple to dream and meditate before colored pictures depicting the life of Buddha, to hear the monks psalmodize the saga of Buddha, and to pray. They bring food to please Buddha and to provide nourishment for the monks. Generally, the monks play less of a role in the religious ceremonies than the achars or officiating laymen. Instead of intervening actively between the divinity and the faithful, the monk exemplifies the saintly life merely by his presence. When he does intervene, it is to recite prayers.

On the first and eighth days of the waxing and waning moons,

*thngai sel*, the role of the monk as the vehicle of Buddhist law becomes more evident. Normal activity within the temple is suspended. The faithful, bearing offerings of food, fruit, flowers, and incense, gather to hear prayers and sermons. At these ceremonies, the monks exhort the congregation to live according to the teachings of Buddha, to adhere as much as possible to the first eight commandments, and to obey absolutely the first five. This preaching visibly affects the faithful, causing them to feel much improved as individuals. Everyone is especially charitable on those days. They avoid arguing and making unkind remarks. Some of the most devout abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages, others fast.

Within the life of the monastery, 2 days are especially important: the last day of the waxing moon and the last day of the waning moon. The monks fast on these days, which are marked by the reading of the *Patimokkha* and the solemn confession by the monks of their faults before all the members of the monastery. After sunset they assemble before the altar around the one who will read the *Patimokkha* and enumerate the 227 faults contained in this manual of confession. During the reading, each monk who feels he is guilty of one of the sins advances to the head of the monastery and, prostrating himself, confesses his sin. Depending on the gravity of the sin, the superior will either reprimand him or impose penance on him by asking his suspension or his expulsion from the order.<sup>14</sup>

The outstanding annual event in the Buddhist monastery is the *Vossa*, a 3-month period of retreat and fasting, meditation, and prayer, which corresponds to the rainy season. The monks may neither travel nor leave the order at this time. At the beginning of the retreat, the faithful laymen proceed to the temple bearing a candle which must burn continuously for the 3-month period. The end of the retreat is marked by another procession when the faithful go to the temple to offer saffron cloth with which to reclothe the monks as they emerge from confinement.

Coexistent and intermixed with Theravada Buddhism are native, animistic beliefs.\* This mixture is evident within the temple proper where beside the statue of Buddha a small altar is often erected to the *neak taa*, local spirits.<sup>15</sup>

The earth, according to the rural Khmer, is dominated by all sorts of supernatural beings which affect every phase of life. Spirits or genies inhabit the waters, ricefields, houses, carts, buffaloes, and a multitude of other elements, objects, animals, and regions. There are benevolent and malevolent spirits; both must be appeased through appropriate offerings, prayers, and rituals. To

\* See Dr. O. Migot, "Le bouddhisme en Indochine: pénétration, développement, diverses formes actuelles." *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, for the historical explanation of this religious admixture.

day, just as prior to the advent of Buddhism, and even of Brahmanism, the Khmer worship the forces of nature. The sun, the moon, the winds, all have human or animal faces. The earth, the waters, and the sky or storms are particularly worthy of veneration: Nak supports the earth; the king of the Nagas, a many-headed serpent, haunts the waters; Indra, mounted on his white elephant, controls the storms.

The *neak taa*, or local spirits, are objects of a special cult. Each hamlet has its own hierarchy of *neak taa* who guard the crossroads, mountains, rivers, islands, and forests. In each hamlet a shelter, a house containing a statue of the *neak taa*, is erected on a pole or in a tree to honor the spirits. Red and white flags, emblems of the genies, are often attached to a pole near the house. This is only one of the dwelling places of the spirits; they may also live in a root, a stone, or in the ruin of an old statue.<sup>16</sup> Before the advent of Buddhism, the peasants sacrificed animals, and even human beings, to these irascible spirits; now, before and after every important human event, they bring offerings (rice, bananas, and flowers) to these spirits, burn incense on their altars, and pray to them. A person afflicted with disease may be cured by rubbing himself with water left overnight in a jar near the shelter.<sup>17</sup>

Evil spirits take many shapes. The *kmoch long* are ordinary ghosts; the *kmoch preay* are male or female carriers of plague. These may take the form of lights which wail and call like human beings and change the course of paths and the locations of crossroads to lead travelers astray. When they take animal or bird form, their cry foretells death or illness. A clever sorcerer may sometimes imprison them in a vial.

The *beisac* are tall and thin demons with mouths the size of the eye of a needle. These are condemned souls who wander the countryside in search of food. When they do not feed on excrement, they eat rice thrown on the ground to them or placed in a pitcher near a bush.<sup>18</sup> These beings, together with the *chmnuing pteah* or house guardians and the ancestral spirits, must be propitiated or exorcized by special rites.<sup>19</sup>

#### Religious Practitioners

In addition to the Buddhist clergy, the Khmer have a number of other religious practitioners. The *achar* is a priest and diviner who designates, by consulting horoscope and magical drawings, the days on which festivals can safely take place. Monks participate in the ceremonies, but only with prayers; the *achar* is the officiant. The *achar* is the principal actor at all rituals marking the important phases of a person's life; at births, he places a 3-day interdict on the house and determines the sign under which the child is born, a fact which must be considered before each occasion in the person's

life. He shaves the topknot from a child's head, marks a girl's emergence from the confinement of the "Retreat From the Shadows," officiates at marriages, funerals, and house constructions. In short, he seeks to counteract the influence of evil spirits and so ensure the protection and prosperity of those who have requested his intervention.<sup>20</sup> The achar is capable of denying to the spirits access to certain places, but if they succeed in causing illness, he is powerless and must summon the shaman or kru.

The Khmer have recourse to several types of practitioners or sorcerers and sorceresses who have jurisdiction over particular beings or spirits. The kru, the most important, usually inherits from his father the ability to prevent and to cure illness, to find lost items, and to make charms and aphrodisiacs. The *tmop*, most feared of sorcerers, is a kru who specializes in magic capable of killing people from any distance.\* Less powerful than the kru and *tmop* is the *bangbot*, either male or female, who can cover the body of a thief with burns until stolen goods are returned. By reading omens, the *bangbot* is able to divert evil spirits; like the kru, he can make amulets, but he specializes in philters to make their users either invulnerable or amorous.

The *ap*, a sorceress-ghoul, is able to cast spells that often result in death. Ghouls are rarely seen, but this one is easily recognizable; she has bloodshot eyes and at night takes off her skin and flies off with only her head, her intestines trailing behind.<sup>21</sup>

Each family has its own *rup-arak*, usually a woman, chosen by the *arak* or protecting spirit who is generally a distant ancestor. Araks are benevolent spirits, but are sensitive and fastidious about their rights. Disrespect causes them to seek revenge, and araks, both male and female, use the *rup-arak* as an intermediary through whom to transmit their desires to the living. She alone can communicate with these spirits and does so when a member of the family falls ill, seemingly because of a genie's vengeance.

On a certain day each year, the family honors its araks at the ceremony of Loeng Rong. When the spirit has entered the *rup-arak*, the audience asks for protection and appeals to the spirit to receive the offerings they have prepared. The *rup-arak* seeks to satisfy any preferences the *arak* is known to have; for example, if he uses alcohol, she drinks several cups of it; if he likes flowers, she rubs her face in them to absorb their fragrance.

The *neak taa*, as noted, are objects of a special cult. Special offerings are made to these local spirits, who are endowed with a variety of powers and who also make their wishes known through

\* See Guy Porée and Eveline Maspéro, *Mœurs et coutumes des Khmers*, pp. 225-26, for a description of some of the *tmop*'s methods of killing people.

mediums or *rup-neak taa*, who perform rituals similar to those of the *rup-arak*.<sup>22</sup>

#### Rituals

Numerous rituals attend even the simplest Khmer activity; as, for example, the construction of a house. The *achar* determines a propitious date—houses may be built only on certain days of certain months—to initiate the building by considering the sign under which the owner was born. Only on particular days can the lumber for the house be cut. Special attention is paid to the number of knots or “eyes” in the wood. An odd number of eyes is considered auspicious, an even number unlucky. Hence, a piece of wood with three knots indicates that the owner will triumph over all his enemies; wood with six knots foretells discord within the household. The *achar* offers sacrifices to the spirit of the ground to appease the good spirits and drive the bad ones from the appointed site. The ritual centers on the master post which the *achar* wraps and unwraps, with appropriate invocations to the spirits.<sup>23</sup> When it is completed, the entrance into the house must occur on a day designated by the *achar*, and it is usually the occasion for a solemn procession and prayers to Buddha.<sup>24</sup>

#### Religious Holidays

The Khmer celebrate the New Year (*Chol Chnam*) in mid-April, according to the tradition of the region. In Cambodia, and perhaps also in Vietnam, 3 days before this greatest event of the year everyone participates in cleaning his house and the temple. Within the temple enclosure, the Khmer place nine little hills of sand, one at each cardinal point and the ninth in the center, representing Mount Meru, center of the world. These nine mounds represent the cosmos. The faithful walk around each pile and throw a little sand, saffron, and rice on it to atone for each sin they have committed. On New Year's Day, the monks wash the statue of Buddha. In general, the New Year festival combines Buddhist ritual with agricultural rites to obtain rain and with rituals of propitiation to expel evil spirits.<sup>25</sup>

Other Khmer festivals include the anniversary of the birth, enlightenment, and death of Buddha (*Visak Bochia*) in May; the entrance of the monks into retreat (*Chol Vossa*) in July; the festival to honor the dead (*Prachum*) in September; the emergence of the monks from the retreat (*Cheng Vossa*) in October; the giving of gifts to the monks and the temple (*Katum*) in October; and the

\* For a detailed description of rituals concerned with selecting the site for a house and initiating construction of the building, see Pierre Bitard, “Études Khmères,” *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, New Series XXX, 2 (1955), pp. 137-57.

† For a detailed description of the New Year festival, see Guy Porée and Éveline Maspéro, *Moeurs et coutumes des Khmères*, pp. 229-31.

anniversary of the last sermon of Buddha (Miak Bochia) in February. These ceremonies, observed in the temple, are attended by the faithful, who bring food, offerings, money, and incense as a means of gaining religious merit.<sup>26</sup>

## SECTION VII

### ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

The Khmer economy is primarily oriented toward irrigated rice cultivation. Rice crops, covering most of the land in the delta, provide 90 percent of the Khmer diet and most of the fuel and fodder for their livestock.

Many types of rice are planted; for example, in the Ca Mau region, an early maturing variety for harvesting in late November is preferred. The rice must grow rapidly, because brackish water threatens the crops at the end of the rainy season. Varieties of rice which can be transplanted twice are sown along the banks of the Mekong near Vinh Long and Can Tho. River and tidal water, reaching a depth of 40 centimeters, submerges the land during the flood period in October. In such deep water, the rice plant must have a long stalk (70 centimeters in height), achieved by double transplanting, which results in a longer growing period for the stalk itself. This type of rice has a long maturing period; it is sown in June or July and harvested in February or March. In areas having flood waters too deep for normal cultivation, as along the banks of the Mekong in the northern part of the delta, "floating" rice predominates. The seed is thrown on dry land during the dry season in March or April, and is submerged during the rainy season. This variety of rice is harvested in December or January.<sup>1</sup>

Khmer agricultural implements are very crude.\* Oxen or buffalo draw plows and harrows. After the rice is harvested with small sickles, the grain is laid out in the sun to dry. The paddy is then put into baskets to be carried either by means of a bamboo pole or it is placed in carts drawn by buffaloes.<sup>2</sup> Threshing, either in the fields or in the hamlet, is accomplished with buffaloes or oxen. The women then winnow, clean, and store the rice until it can be husked and pounded.

Secondary crops are cultivated along the fertile depressions or *chamkars* on riverbanks; although the produce from the *chamkars*—tobacco, cotton, fruits, and vegetables—is primarily for family consumption, any surplus is marketed. The harvest in the *chamkars* is biannual, once in the dry season and once in the rainy season.<sup>3</sup>

\* See "Sophistication in Use of Tools and Machines," p. 1079.

Water control in the Mekong Delta is accomplished by both natural and artificial means. Summer flooding of the Mekong never submerges the whole plain, since the waters are dispersed through the Song Hau Giang, the Mekong and its five channels, and through secondary streams which enter the Gulf of Siam.<sup>4</sup> A network of canals with low mud dikes provides gravitational irrigation and regulation of the flow of water into the paddies. When additional irrigation is needed, one of three types of manual irrigation implements may be employed: the sliding scoop, the scoop and tripod, and the pedal noria. The sliding scoop, a woven bamboo basket attached to a pole, is filled with water from a neighboring canal and emptied into the land to be irrigated. The same scoop, when suspended from a tripod and filled with water, is raised by pivoting about the point of suspension; it is then swung and emptied into the paddy to be irrigated from an adjacent canal. The noria,<sup>5</sup> worked by pedals, allows water to be carried by paddies from one part of the paddy to another.<sup>5</sup>

#### Predominant Occupations

The life of the Khmer revolves around the seasonal work of cultivation. During the rainy season, they are busy tending their fields and gardens; but during the five hot months of the dry season, the farmers must supplement their income by taking jobs in town, by fishing, or by engaging in small artisan industries.

The fishing is especially favorable in the delta where, from October to April, the waters of the Tonle Sap flow seaward, bringing much nutritious plant food on which fish can feed.<sup>6</sup> Most are content to catch enough fish to supply family needs; but surplus fish are sometimes sold in the local markets.<sup>7</sup>

Small artisan industries are important in only a few parts of the delta: at Go Cong, near Saigon, there is cotton weaving; basket weaving is practiced along the borders of the Plaine des Jones;<sup>8</sup> water palm † leaves are sewn together in the Ca Mau region to make blankets (*slek chamlab*) and roofs for pirogues and houses;<sup>9</sup> pottery work is conducted in Bien Hoa.<sup>10</sup>

#### Exchange System

For most exchanges of goods and services, the Khmer use the Vietnamese piaster. The farmers sell for cash any produce not reserved for home consumption. When he lacks cash, the Khmer farmer borrows against his crop. Either he takes his goods to local markets himself or he trades through a middleman, usually a Chinese. When farmers are dependent on itinerant Chinese merchants for seed and the transportation of their produce to market,

<sup>4</sup> See "Sophistication in Use of Tools and Machines," p. 1079.

<sup>†</sup> Water palms grow only in the delta; products made from them are widely exported.

the latter often exact high prices for their services, thus keeping the farmers perpetually in debt to them.

#### **Property System**

Large-scale development of the Mekong Delta dates from the last century, when the French constructed an extensive system of drainage ditches and canals. Throughout the colonial period landlordism and farm tenancy were prevalent, most large holdings belonging to a few favored French and Vietnamese. In 1954, 2.5 percent of the landowners held approximately 50 percent of the cultivated land; 80 percent of the land was worked by landless peasants, who worked plots of land of from 5 to 12 acres in size. Before 1954 no laws governed farm leases, rents, or loans; the tenants were at the mercy of the landlord, who could charge them high rents—often as much as 50 percent of the crop—and dispossess them at will.<sup>11</sup>

During the Indochina War, the Viet Minh lived off the peasants in the delta and in rebel-held countryside, imposed heavy tax burdens in grain on the peasants. The Viet Minh succeeded in coercing the populace and in convincing the landless peasants that they would own the landlords' property after the defeat of the French. Terrorized by the rebels, many of the landlords fled, and the peasants were encouraged to take over the land. The Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, quasi-military religious sects, seized much of the delta land along the Cambodian border and encouraged the peasants to occupy these areas.<sup>12</sup>

After 1954, the Republic of Vietnam initiated a program of land reform to reduce rents and to redistribute land. Rents were to be limited to no more than 25 percent of current average gross yield. Tenants would be assured security of tenure for a period of from 3 to 5 years. Large estates were to be broken up into plots of from 5 to 12 acres each and redistributed, preferably to the farmer already working them. The increase in Viet Cong action in the delta after 1959 reduced the benefits provided by the land reform programs.<sup>13</sup> However, the Khmer must have received some benefits from these programs, for today most of them own the land they work.<sup>14</sup>

#### **Standard of Living**

The Khmer standard of living is higher than that of the Cham, but lower than that of the Vietnamese. The Khmer appear content to grow enough food for their own consumption, with no wish for a surplus for trade. Indeed, in some remote areas, the peasants may have no revenue whatsoever, managing to subsist on the products they themselves grow or make. The peasant of the ricefield—the poorest of all—buys only a pair of oxen or buffaloes to help in the

farmwork; the rest of his needs he satisfies through his own production. For working the fields, he makes a plow, a harrow, a hoe, a spade, and an irrigation scoop or noria. Domestic utensils made at home comprise a variety of pots—for salt, water, rice, soup or offerings—, woven baskets of all sizes, a trunk for storing clothes, and woven mats for sleeping.<sup>15</sup> Local vegetation functions in several capacities to supplement the articles made at home: vines serve both as string to tie things and as food for animals; banana leaves are used to wrap rice cakes, fish, and other foods and to serve as cups and spoons; banana stems furnish food for the oxen; bamboo shoots serve as straws, containers for liquids such as sugar palm juice and resin, and even as channels for irrigation.<sup>16</sup>

## SECTION VIII POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

### General Political Organization

The hamlet, led by a chief or mayor and an informal council of elders, is the important political unit in Khmer society. The chief is usually elected by the members of the hamlet. If the inhabitants so choose, the chief's position is hereditary, passing from father to son. The chief's duties consist of apprehending minor criminals; registering birth, marriage, and death statistics; making any decisions affecting the welfare of the hamlet; and, with the aid of the council, settling disputes.<sup>1</sup>

The Khmer Buddhist clergy, although lacking the hierarchical organization of the clergy in Cambodia, wield considerable spiritual and moral authority over the people. The monks are obliged by Buddhist law to divorce themselves from politics, but they undeniably exert considerable political influence over the Khmer populace.<sup>2</sup>

As part of its effort to integrate the Khmer into Vietnamese society, the Government has required the Khmer either to accept Vietnamese citizenship or to register as aliens. Some Khmer have been assimilated into the mainstream of Vietnamese life; but most, preferring to retain alien status, have remained distinctly Khmer, although surrounded by a Vietnamese majority. Unlike the Chinese, however, the Khmer have not been militant about preserving their culture; they have established neither schools nor newspapers of their own.<sup>3</sup> Officially, the Khmer are to be free from discrimination; Saigon no longer views the Khmer as problematical and sees no need for a separate minority policy for them.<sup>4</sup> The Vietnamese manner of referring to the Khmer—"Vietnamese of Cambodian (or Khmer) ancestry"—reflects the official belief that the Khmer are Vietnamese citizens who have for centuries formed an integral part of the Vietnamese nation.

### Subversive Influences

The Khmer have often resisted Communist subversive activities which have threatened their way of life. When Communist infiltration is openly supported by the Chinese or Vietnamese, the Khmer appear to make a determined resistance. The Communists have tried to include a few Khmer in the superstructure of the Viet Cong organization.

## SECTION IX

### COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES

Modern methods of public communication are still concentrated mainly in the cities and larger towns of the Republic of Vietnam. A few rural Khmer may have radios, but the majority of the population depends on word-of-mouth communication as the primary means of transmitting information. In the provinces, village elders and officials, military personnel, and religious leaders are chief sources of information.<sup>1</sup>

The temple and the marketplace, as foci of Khmer community activity, are key points of information dissemination. The monks are highly venerated and their advice is frequently sought. During their sojourn in the temple school, boys often establish lasting bonds of friendship with particular monks who may, in later years, serve as channels for relaying grievances which the people are incapable of doing for themselves. Bulletin boards, books, and perhaps newspapers and radios may be situated within the temple, which serves as a meeting place for the local peasantry.<sup>2</sup> Peasants selling their produce at the markets exchange bits of news and communicate to their friends and neighbors what they have heard.<sup>3</sup>

The Khmer tend to be tightlipped before strangers whom they do not completely trust, but they keep few secrets from one another. Information spreads rapidly throughout the community. Only within their own social strata do the Khmer talk frankly and openly; in conversations with people of superior status, they are polite but discreet.

The Khmer are reputed to seek hidden meanings in speech and action, perhaps because of the subtlety and flexibility of their own language. An idea may be expressed in a number of ways, with due consideration for the social status of those addressed.\* Through context, and knowledge of the personality of the speaker, the listener finds clues to indicate the intended meaning. The nuances of the language are enriched by allusions to symbols and legends commonly known by the Khmer.<sup>4</sup>

In Cambodia, and doubtless among the Khmer of the Republic of Vietnam, word-of-mouth persuasion has proved to be a most

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\* See "Language," p. 1054.

effective psychological operations technique. Use of the Khmer language is important, although most of the Khmer understand Vietnamese. Face-to-face communication has been more successful in reaching the peasantry than have radios, which are impersonal and fairly scarce in rural areas. Loudspeakers have been used effectively in villages and cities.

The Khmer relish information, but are suspicious of what they know to be propaganda. To gain the confidence of the Khmer, strict honesty about facts and limitations of knowledge should be observed. A pretense of knowledge is quickly discovered; for example, if a proverb is cited incorrectly, the Khmer will consider the speaker or writer to be pretentious and unqualified and they will suspect his motives.

The Khmer enjoy hearing discussions and like to have the speaker reason with them. Before accepting a particular action or an idea they must be convinced that it is advantageous to them and that it conforms to their philosophy and religion.<sup>5</sup>

## SECTION X

### CIVIC ACTION CONSIDERATIONS

The Khmer accept innovation only if convinced that the results will benefit them and will not conflict with their philosophical or religious beliefs.

The Vietnamese Government has undertaken a number of civic action projects in the Mekong Delta. Included among these are intensive well-drilling projects to increase normally available quantities of potable water; the improvement of rice crops by the free distribution of improved seed to farmers in the area; and the establishment of provincial radio broadcasting stations to expand the national network.

Many civic action possibilities exist which could benefit the Khmer. Examples of such possibilities are the following projects:

1. Health and sanitation
  - a. Provision of safe water supply systems.
  - b. Eradication of malaria and other insect-borne diseases.
  - c. Public instruction in sanitation, personal hygiene, and first aid.
  - d. Rodent and pest control.
  - e. Increased availability of medical treatment.
2. Education.
  - a. Organization of additional schools for literacy training.
  - b. Organization of vocational training schools.
  - c. Increased distribution of textbooks and other instructional material.
  - d. Increased language instruction in Vietnamese and English.
3. Agriculture
  - a. Methods to improve crop yields.
  - b. Improvement of cattle breeding techniques.
  - c. Improvement of irrigation systems.
4. Public administration
  - a. Training programs for local government officials.
  - b. Assistance in organization of public services, such as agricultural extension services, medical and educational programs, which are available through programs promoted by the Vietnamese Government.

## SECTION XI

### PARAMILITARY CAPABILITIES

The Khmer soldier is reportedly loyal, good natured, robust, and, with good leadership, brave. Although he is generally not aggressive, experience has shown that when his way of life is threatened, he will answer the threat aggressively. Since most Khmer are of peasant origin and are accustomed to hard work and a minimum of comfort, the Khmer soldier can endure considerable privation. Many have great manual dexterity and can be trained as technicians.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Military Experience**

Since the founding of the Khmer Empire, the Khmer have waged both offensive and defensive wars against the neighboring Cham, Vietnamese, and Thai. In 1945, when the Viet Minh began to operate openly, the French recruited many Khmer soldiers to fill their regiments. Organized in homogeneous units and led by subaltern officers of their own group, the Khmer were excellent soldiers. They did not yield to fatigue and were courageous in combat.<sup>2</sup>

The Cao Dai,\* with its headquarters located in an area heavily populated by Khmer (Tay Ninh), also recruited the Khmer for its armies.

Along the Cambodian border is a group of Khmer, who, after years of fighting and bloodshed, have turned more and more to banditry, pillage, and terrorism.<sup>3</sup> Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia has charged that the Communists, as early as the 1930's, organized a small number of these Khmer into fighting units. According to Sihanouk, this small contingent of Khmer auxiliaries was directed to infiltrate Cambodia to pillage and terrorize the populace.<sup>4</sup>

The Khmer are doubtless familiar with modern methods of warfare as a result of experience acquired through their association with the French, as well as through the military operations of the Viet Cong and Vietnamese Government forces in the delta region. Indeed, a sizeable number of Khmer are currently serving in the Vietnamese Army.

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\* An armed, politico-religious sect whose armies totalled 80,000 in the late 1950's.

## SECTION XII

### SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONNEL WORKING WITH THE KHMER

#### **Geographic Factors**

The seasonal alternation of the monsoons governs all activity in the delta region inhabited by the Khmer. During the dry season—Vietnam's winter monsoon—which lasts from December to March, temperatures may drop to 78.8 degrees Fahrenheit. The northeast winter monsoon blows along the China Coast, bringing little moisture inland. In the dry season, overland travel is hampered by networks of canals and streams and by vast areas of swamp, rain forest, and marshland infested with snakes, leeches, and insects. During April and May precipitation increases; in June the rainy season or summer monsoon arrives from the south-southwest and lasts through October, with a maximum of precipitation in August, slight regression in September, and an increase in October. During the rainy season, extensive areas of the delta are flooded, reducing transportation to watercraft and amphibious vessels. Air operations are impeded by fog, low-hanging clouds, and torrential rains, and leeches swarm in the rain forests during this period.

Most of the delta is cleared land, but some portions are covered with rain forest. Camping in tropical rain forests presents problems not encountered elsewhere. When local inhabitants are not available to advise personnel on local camping methods, the following notes may serve as a guide:

Essential stores include an axe, a large knife (cutlass or machete) with at least a nine-inch blade, matches, a hammock, a lamp, a blanket, and food. Medical supplies might comprise an antiseptic, atabrin or quinine (for malaria), a laxative, aspirin, ferric chloride (for leech bites), and potassium permanganate (for possible snake bites).

Temporary shelters may be erected from half a dozen or more palm or wild banana leaves laid on top of each other and tied or wedged into the fork of a small tree. These shelters are protection against the frequent short rains in the dense forest.

For protection over a longer period of time, shelters are constructed according to the kind of sleeping arrangements needed.

For hammocks, a framework is erected, with vines for the lashings. Vines vary in pliability, however, and can be strengthened somewhat by twisting, which also serves as a test, for the weaker vines will snap. A ridge pole is raised on two forked sticks, and the roof, thatched with palm or other large leaves, is secured with vines. Tarpaulins may be substituted for leaves as roofing and tied to stakes driven in along the sides. In especially wet weather, one or more sides can be covered with palm leaves secured by lacing between slender stakes of bamboo. It is easier to shelter a large party by constructing several huts, each with room for four hammocks, than to build one large, unwieldy shelter.

When beds are used, a light framework supporting a thatched roof is sufficient protection. Beds are less practical to transport and more accessible to ants and other pests. A light blanket is generally adequate covering for the night.

Depending on the type of pests prevalent in the area, as well as individual preference, the clothing used may vary. Trousers provide some protection against ticks and mosquitoes but fail to deter leeches. Shorts are cooler and more comfortable in the tropical climate and facilitate the detection and removal of parasites. Gym shoes are the best footwear. Personnel are discouraged from going barefoot even in their huts. Most raincoats are ineffective in tropical storms, and any additional garment causes the wearer to sweat, so he is just as wet with the raincoat as without it. Hats afford protection in the rain, but are unnecessary within the forest where the sun is not hazardous.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Health and Welfare**

The nonindigenous personnel may be particularly susceptible to malaria, intestinal ailments, venereal disease, and typhus. Most of these diseases can be prevented, to some degree, by observing rules of personal hygiene.

1. To avoid malaria, take the following precautions:
  - a. Camp at least half a mile from swamps, rivers, and irrigated lands—possible breeding places for the anopheles mosquito.
  - b. Sleep under a carefully tucked in mosquito net.
  - c. Keep arms and legs covered, especially after sundown.
  - d. Carry fly spray when possible to kill mosquitoes and other insects in tents.
  - e. Attempt to kill the mosquito larvae in water by using oils or poisonous dusts. When possible, drain bodies of stagnant water.
2. Intestinal ailments such as diarrhea, dysentery, typhoid fever, and cholera can be prevented by careful preparation and service of food. Water should always be boiled or chlorinated

before use; fresh milk should also be boiled.

3. Typhus and relapsing fever are transmitted by lice and, in some parts, fleas. These insects should be removed from clothing immediately.
4. If bilharzia disease (blood disease caused by parasitic worm) is known to exist in the area, do not allow unpurified water to come in contact with the skin in any way, since the worm embryo develops in the water and penetrates the skin.
5. Wash whenever possible and avoid walking barefoot.
6. Venereal diseases are common. Take no risks.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Relations With the Khmer**

A few suggestions for personnel working with the Khmer are listed below:

#### **Official Activities**

1. The initial visit to a Khmer hamlet should be formal. A visitor should speak first to the chief and elders, who will then introduce him to other important persons. On arrival, the visitor may expect to be asked what he wants and why he is there. Traditionally, the Khmer have associated outsiders with tax collectors or with those forcing them to change their way of life.<sup>1</sup>
2. Personnel should not, however, confuse the Khmer with the Vietnamese, even in conversation. He should remember, for example:
  - a. The Khmer eat with spoons and fingers, not with chopsticks as do the Chinese and Vietnamese.
  - b. The Khmer in general do not have slanted or Mongolian eyes.
  - c. They are not members of a "yellow" race.
  - d. The Khmer do not wear black trousers and conical, Tonkinese hats, as do the Vietnamese.<sup>4</sup>
3. Sincerity, honesty, and truthfulness are essential in dealing with the Khmer. Promises and predictions should not be made unless results are assured. The Khmer usually expect a new group of personnel to fulfill the promises of the previous group. †
4. Outsiders cannot gain the confidence of the Khmer quickly. Developing a sense of trust is a slow process, requiring great understanding, tact, patience, and personal integrity. To gain the confidence of the people, the outsider must avoid being impatient or too hurried, since the Khmer themselves are generally a quiet, slow-moving people.
5. An attitude of good-natured willingness and limitless patience

must be maintained, even when confronted with resentment or apathy.

6. Whenever possible, avoid projects or operations which give the people the impression that they are being forced to change their ways.
7. Local hamlet leaders should receive some credit for civic action projects and for improved administration. Efforts should never undermine or discredit the position or influence of the local leaders.

#### **Social Relationships**

1. The Khmer should be treated with respect and courtesy at all times.
2. Polite introductory conversation may include queries about local needs, the state of the harvest, the health of the cattle, and the attendance of children at the temple school.
3. A visit should be made to the monk-instructor at the temple school as a sign of respect.
4. The Khmer are a joyous people and are pleased if an outsider is jovial when the occasion warrants it.
5. Relationships with Khmer women should be avoided; the chastity of the Khmer woman is highly prized.
6. Aged men and women, highly esteemed by the Khmer, must be shown respect.
7. An outsider can frequently gain the confidence of the people, especially of the children, by distributing candy, matches, incense sticks, soap, cigarettes, or pictures. Outsiders have obtained important information by dressing wounds or providing very elementary medical services to the people, especially to the children.<sup>5</sup>
8. Outsiders should request permission to attend a Khmer ceremony, festival, or meeting from the persons responsible for the event.
9. An outsider should never enter a Khmer house unless accompanied by a member of that house; this is a matter of good taste and cautious behavior. If anything is later missing from the house unpleasant and unnecessary complications may arise.
10. Teachers should be careful to avoid seriously disrupting cultural patterns.
11. Outsiders should not pat children on the head, nor call them by name.

#### **Religious Beliefs and Practices**

1. The person of a monk is considered sacred and should never be touched, especially by an outsider.

2. The Khmer venerate their clergy and achars; outsiders are expected to do likewise.
3. The Khmer resent the use of the term "pagoda" to designate their temples or *wat*.
4. Money must never be offered to monks; Buddhist law prohibits its acceptance. If the visitor desires to give money he must use an intermediary, such as a layman or achar, specifying that it is a personal or official contribution for the maintenance of the sanctuary or for the development of the school.
5. It is considered polite, when entering a temple, where the visitor is usually received by monks of secondary rank, to ask to greet the head of the temple, usually a venerable old man. If he is dining or napping, however, it is courteous not to insist on this.
6. If the visitor wishes to discuss a particular matter with the inmates of the temple, he will be offered tea or coconut milk. He should accept it even if the cup is dirty or he is not thirsty, for the gift represents the generosity of the hosts.
7. If it is necessary to stay at the temple or to house personnel there temporarily, the men should be instructed:
  - a. Not to be too noisy, especially during services.
  - b. To construct any temporary buildings (latrines, etc.) outside the temple confines, even though the temple enclosure is large enough to accommodate them.
  - c. To avoid killing any animal whatsoever within the temple enclosure, where animal life is as sacred as human life.

#### **Living Standards and Routines**

1. Outsiders should treat all Khmer property and hamlet animals with respect. Any damage to property or fields should be promptly repaired and/or paid for.
2. Learn simple phrases in the Khmer language. A desire to learn and speak their language creates a favorable impression on the people and is an important means of gaining their confidence.
3. Whenever possible, outsiders should try to provide some medical assistance to the Khmer. Medical teams should be prepared to handle, and should have adequate supplies for, extensive treatment of malaria, dysentery, trachoma, venereal diseases, and intestinal parasites.

## FOOTNOTES

### I. INTRODUCTION

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