

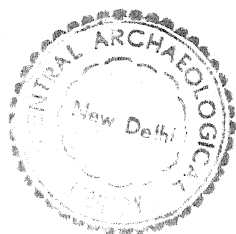
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GEOGRAPHY OF CAMBODIA.

WE have lately received the following interesting letter from Monseigneur Miche, Bishop of Dansara, one of the Missionaries of the Propaganda, who have been labouring with so much earnestness and success in the interior of Cambodia. The little map alluded to by Mgr Miche appeared in the number of this Journal for May 1851; and, as stated in the accompanying notes, "was compiled for the purpose of registering some items of geographical information obtained from Constantine Monteiro, a Native Christian in the service of the King of Cambodia, who was sent to this Settlement in July last, to solicit the aid of the authorities in ridding the Cambodian coasts of the pirates who infested them. The positions of many of the places in the interior of Cambodia may probably be incorrect, as they are not fixed by scientific observations, but in the total absence of all authentic information concerning that country, Mr Monteiro's contribution must be considered as a valuable addition to our geographical knowledge of the Indio-Chinese Peninsula."

Cambodia, Feby. 3rd 1832.

Sir,

I received in the course of last year a little map of Cambodia, recently lithographed at Singapore under your direction, after the information of a certain Mr Monteiro, who has the defect of speaking with equal assurance on subjects with which he is, and is not acquainted. Although I have not the honor of being personally known to you, permit me to offer you some rectifications with the view of promoting geographical science to which you are so devoted.

1. The first Cambodian village which figures in the northern part of the map on the right bank of the *Mécon*, the great river which descends from Laos, is Somboc;—but in this there are two errors, for Somboc is situated on the left bank, and lies to the south of Sombor. From Somboc to Sombor, the distance is not more than six leagues. Monteiro has never penetrated thus far. Between Somboc and Sombor the bed of the river is composed of rocks throughout its entire breadth, over which the water is precipitated in cataracts (rapids) thus rendering the river impassable by vessels during the greater part of the year. I ascended this cataract in 1849 and therefore speak from personal knowledge.

2. Bontiai, (this is a Cambodian word signifying "town" but the true Cambodian name is Penompeuk, the Cochin Chinese call it Namvang) is placed in your map far inland to the west of Bati. There is no truth in this. This Bontiai or Penompeuk is situated at the point where the river which descends from the great lake joins the main stream. Bati, on the contrary, is to the south, and lies inland. It is impossible to find a position more

beautiful or more advantageously situated as a place of commerce than that which is occupied by the city of Penompeuk. To the north it communicates with Laos by the Mécon; and to the northwest it has access to all the provinces of Cambodia proper, as well as to those which are subject to Siam, by the river which traverses the Great Lake. To the south, the two rivers before mentioned which unite at Penompeuk, afterwards subdivide into two distinct branches, which open out an easy channel for commercial operations with the whole of lower Cochin China and the Delta of Ancient Cambodia.

3. There is actually a canal from the port of Hatien, (designated in your map by the name of Cancao, which is further to the south) to Mot Kruk, a Cambodian name, which has been replaced by that of Chau Doc by the Cochin Chinese:—it is now the capital of the province of Angiang. This canal is the only passage by which the river which descends from Penompeuk can be reached from Hatien, and consequently the pretended river, the course of which is indicated to the north of the canal, and which disembogues at Hatien, has no existence. The said canal is situated within the Cochin Chinese territories, and as the Cambodians are not allowed the right of passage through it, all commerce with the exterior is impossible.

4. In the explanatory notes which accompany the chart of Cambodia, the port of Cochien is briefly spoken of, which is described as a pretty good anchorage. This might have been the case formerly, but now, if a little schooner of 25 or 30 tons were to set out with these incorrect data, for the purpose of resorting to Cochien, she would infallibly be wrecked, as the road is filled with sand, which is incessantly brought down by the great river of Laos, so much so that even the small vessels of the Cochin Chinese do not venture there. They have also removed the Custom House which was established there, owing to its having become useless.

I will not expatiate here on the respective distances in latitude and longitude between the different cities laid down in your chart, in which as many errors could be pointed out as there are places, but were I to attempt to correct these errors, I should expose myself to commit others; as in this matter, to be exact, it is necessary to be provided with the instruments which science places in the hands of geographers, for without these, the traveller can only give approximative positions. But Mr Monteiro has not given you even approximative positions, of which it will suffice to give you only one example, which I take by chance. In the map he places the Royal Residence in the same latitude with Chalong, which is situated on the left bank of the great river. There is so little truth in this, that one reaches Penompeuk from the Royal Residence in 5 hours, while the journey from Chalong to Penompeuk occupies 4 or 5 days, yet the direction of these places with

reference to each other is such that the difference of longitude made is not greater on proceeding to one than to the other.

Pardon me, Sir, if I have allowed myself to correct several inexactitudes which are in no way attributable to you. In publishing this map you have been actuated only by a desire to render yourself useful, and believe me this letter has been dictated by a motive equally pure.

Accept the assurance of the distinguished consideration with which I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your most devoted,

† J. C. Miche, Ev. de Dansara.

Our correspondent can scarcely have perused with attention the notes which accompanied the little map, or rather sketch, to which he alludes, or he would have perceived that it was not put forth as a perfect map of Cambodia, but rather to show how small was the amount of authentic information we possessed concerning one of the most fertile countries of Eastern Asia, and how acceptable would be the contributions of travellers who like Monseigneur Miche could bring a liberal education to aid their geographical researches. And we are happy to say that our call, for such it was, has been well responded to, as may be seen from the contributions which have already appeared in this journal.

In justice to Constantine Monteiro, we feel bound to state, that his information was furnished at our request and given with a candour and modesty which were calculated to produce a strong impression in his favour, and this impression has been confirmed by the reports of gentlemen who have travelled with him in Cambodia, where he holds a high position in the estimation of the King, by whom he seems to be employed as a commissioner to visit the different provinces to settle differences and report their condition. His journeys from town to town are generally performed on elephants, (the rivers being in the possession of the Cochin Chinese) a mode of travelling unfavorable for tracing a labyrinth of rivers and water courses, so that Monseigneur Miche's corrections which are confined to the Cochin Chinese portion of the Peninsula, are probably founded on better data. But on the other hand, Mr Helms, who visited the Royal Residence in the course of last year, and a narrative of whose journey appear in the number of this Journal for July last (Vol. V. p. 434) found that its position in the map was correct, and that Mr Monteiro's sources of information were of the best description.

Monseigneur Miche in his letter alludes to an ascent of the river Mécon which he made in 1849, and he has given a very interesting account of his journey in a letter which appeared in the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* for March 1851. We subjoin a translation of his narrative, which we have no doubt

will be received as an acceptable contribution to our knowledge of this little known region:

I set out from Pinta-lu on the 12th February, and arrived on the 16th at the mouth of the river Chilang, which has its source in the mountains of Nuoi-stieng and which falls into the Mécon about 11° 40' North Latitude. My principal object was to ascend this river as far as the wild tribes, but to my great disappointment I found the bed of the torrent so dry that it was impracticable even for boats of the smallest size. The way by the Chilang being thus closed to me, I resolved to follow up the Mécon as far as I found it navigable. Knowing that the further I went towards the north the easier I would find it to realize my design, I continued my route to the province of Conchor, from thence I went to that of Créché, then to that of Sambor, where I was obliged to remain for some days waiting for the governor of the province, who was absent, and whose assistance was indispensable to my further progress. I had arrived at the pillars of Hercules, the navigators of the country dared not to venture further, because the river was filled with reefs and everywhere presented great dangers.

I was, however, extremely desirous not to stop here, for two reasons: in the first place, I was only two days journey from the province of Samboc, to which M. Levassieur penetrated about 1770, and where he built a small chapel. I felt a strong desire to question the old people there about this chapel and the results of the expedition of this zealous missionary. In the second place, I proposed to visit the first Laos tribes, who bordered on the limits of Samboc. Many difficulties however required to be overcome. All the Cambojans who saw my boat told me it would be necessary to turn back again, or to embark with five or six men in a small canoe, in order to continue my journey across rocks and to surmount the cataract from which I was only distant about two leagues. I could not with prudence resolve upon the last, as I could scarcely hope to pass four entire days in a canoe, exposed to a burning sun and the damp cold of the night, deprived of rest and sleep, without falling sick. I caused the two guides who had been furnished to me by the Governor to examine my boat, showing them that it only contained two bags of rice and a little dried fish, that it scarcely drew a foot of water, and that I proposed to take out the mast and sail to lighten it still more. This being done, my guides told me that they could slide over the rocks and surmount the fall without much difficulty, and we took our departure. The oar was nearly useless. My people provided themselves with poles, by the aid of which they struggled against the current and avoided the visible and invisible rocks. Thanks to the transparency of the water, the danger was always noticed in time, and if sometimes our boat ran upon a reef, as we were going against the stream, she only grounded slightly and was very easily got afloat again.

On our arrival at the foot of the cataract we found a reinforcement; the chief functionary of Sambor had gone by land with one of his officers, and waited for us there to give us assistance. I place this fall very near $12^{\circ} 40'$ of north latitude. The bed of the Mécon here enlarges itself considerably and may be about one league from one bank to the other. The waters thus spread over such a large surface offer little depth. All is picturesque in this place; a number of islets, crowned with green thickets, occupy all the breadth of the river for an extent of twenty or thirty minutes. It may be called a forest placed in the water. The latter is only visible at intervals, but the noise of the waves, which break with violence upon the rocks, reveals it at a distance. These islands, intersected by a number of channels, form an inextricable labyrinth to any one who is not accustomed to the place. My people chose the deepest channel. We had before us a magnificent sheet of water, of a dazzling whiteness, which rolled its foaming waves over a stony and greatly inclined bed.

The poles with which we were provided were here useless, and my people plunged into the water. Four of them hauled at the head of the boat, and the other four pushed it from behind. I only remained on board, as I would have been of very little use in the water; for even my Cambojans, although clinging to the boat and with feet much less tender than mine, could not keep themselves upright amongst the sharp stones with which the bed of the river is strewn. When pain forced them to quicken their pace, they slipped over the rocks, falling into the holes, and the boat deprived of their help, was driven back at the will of the current. At length, after an hour's labour and perseverance, we reached the summit of the fall. Our course continued all the rest of the day through islets, which hindered us from seeing more than 30 paces before us. Sometimes we went forward, sometimes we were stopped by barriers of granite which formed a rampart seemingly without any outlet, and obliged us to retrace our steps and seek at random for another passage.

The night surprised us in these solitudes. We passed it very tranquilly upon a bank of sand, where we were awakened at sunrise by the cries of crocodiles which abound in these parts. On the morning of the following day we issued from this labyrinth, and the river lay before us in all its breadth, but more encumbered with rocks than ever. From a distance, they had the appearance of an army of soldiers immersed to the neck in the water. We proceeded on our journey leisurely, and reached Samboc in the afternoon. Since leaving Sambor we have made a distance of about four leagues, in the space of thirty-six hours.

At Samboc there is a governor of the province, but alas! what a province. It is composed of four or five small villages of only about 150 persons each. This country was formerly the richest part of Cambodia, but now it is the most desolate. At the time of

the last war, the Siamese general, after having put the Cochin Chinese to flight, seized six thousand Cambojans who inhabited this country and transferred them to Bangkok. At present we only find at Samboc persons very recently established there and I could gain no information regarding the Christian church formerly erected in this village. I believe Samboc to be placed in the latitude of *Cua da-ran* of Phu-yen. The kingdom of Cambodia terminates here on the east bank of the Mécon.

During the rainy season, that is to say in September and October, all the difficulties of which I have spoken above disappear. At that time each river, each canal, which discharges itself into the large river, is accessible to all kinds of boats. We can then reach the wild tribes either by Chilang or by Chlong. Going further up, the rocks disappear under the inundation to a great depth, henceforth there is neither rapid nor cataract, because the level is re-established between the upper and under course of the Mécon. All the persons whom I consulted affirmed that at this time it was easy to go from Nam-vang to Laos in nineteen hours, and to proceed under sail all the way without danger from a single reef.

From the borders of Chilang to Samboc, I found throughout small villages, the inhabitants of which belonged to four different nations, Malays, Chiampas, Chinese and Cambojans, living mixed up together. The Malays and Chiampas are Mahomedans.

On my return to Thmacré, a little hamlet situated half a league to the south of Samboc, I learned that there were some wild people at a short distance. I proceeded to the village where they resided, and which is known under the name of Calop. I found Cambojans as well as wild people here. Most of the latter spoke the Cambodian language. Packed in small huts, they offered a spectacle of the greatest wretchedness, having scarcely a rag of clothing to cover them.

All the women wore necklaces of glass beads and bracelets of brass-wire. I saw one whose arm was entirely covered with one of these spirally rolled bracelets; it was like the sleeve of a dress. The arm charged with such a weight had become useless, and was supported upon a bambu. Both men and women had the hair long, and as it is never combed except with the five fingers of the hand, it may be easily imagined what elegance this long head of hair adds to their person, already very far from pleasing. Further, their ears are pierced and have a large tube of bambu or a piece of ivory stuck in them, which makes them hang down to their shoulders. As to morality, it would be difficult to speak correctly upon the point without a more extended acquaintance with them. On this head, nevertheless, I may remark that their habitual wretchedness, their manner of living and above all the absence of all religious principle, ought to make these wild people very corrupt. It appeared to me from the conversation I had with them that they were not addicted to a single kind of superstition, a thing difficult of believe.

