

Music and Dance in Ancient Cambodia as Evidenced by Old Khmer Epigraphy

by SAVEROS POU

In 1965 the late Bernard-Philippe Groslier published an article entitled 'Danse et musique sous les rois d'Angkor' ⁽¹⁾, the first research paper ever made first-hand on the subject, and also the last of its kind, because other similar papers produced thereafter turned out to be mere compilations. In actual facts, Groslier concentrated exclusively on ancient Cambodia's epigraphy which, as everyone knows, contains inscriptions written in Sanskrit and Khmer (6th-14th centuries). In the first instance, he insisted on the main feature of music and dance of old as emerging from the documents, i.e. the sacredness of those art forms which is not to be questioned, now. And he devoted the last part of his paper to a brief survey of Old Khmer vocabulary.

With its title, my paper might appear to some as a replica of Groslier's. In fact, it is not, definitely, neither in approach nor in mind. I am no archaeologist and even less a musician. A linguist, I am obviously concerned with linguistic analysis, particularly with semantics, and its cultural implications. What Groslier wrote in his short linguistic analysis was at that time undeniably admirable. But since 1965, we have made an amazing progress in Khmer. We have turned nearly all the stones in the field of O.Khm. texts; we have succeeded in defining Middle Khmer spanning over nearly five centuries (14th-mid 18th centuries); and in so doing we achieved the junction between Old, Middle and Modern Khmer. This particularly opened the way to a better understanding of O.Khm. texts. These, to my mind, supply better information on every-day reality of the olden times than the beautiful Sanskrit poems called *kāvya* which make up ancient Cambodia's *prāsasti*.

So I am going to carry on from Groslier's paper in leaving out those *kāvya*, in order to concentrate only on the plain O.Khm. texts viewed through my own reading and translation. Indeed, over many years I have carried out lexicographic research on a large scale. I published the first result thereof as an article, 'Lexicographie vieux-khmère' (1984). All told, this lead gradually to a compilation of *An Old Khmer-French-English Dictionary* in 1992.

⁽¹⁾ In *Journal of the Siam Society*, II, 1965, pp. 283-92.

The present paper is based on this enlarged field of data. I shall examine them all through in close connection with their modern counterparts, if any. Then I shall make some general comments to conclude my survey.

I. DOCUMENTS AND RESEARCH METHOD

In Khmer epigraphy there is no such text as dealing with history (chronicles, diaries, annals, etc.), let alone with art. All Khmer stone inscriptions relate facts connected with three main themes: a) religion, b) the rulers of the land, i.e. kings, and c) the land itself. It must be added that no straight line can be drawn between these, since religion was the main motivation of human behaviour and activities in our traditional society.

1. All the information we have collected on music and dance is of an incidental nature. Words related to our subject appear here and there — if we care to scrutinize the texts — like pieces of a jigsaw-puzzle, and we know as a matter of fact that any puzzle can be reconstructed sooner or later.

It must be pointed out to those who are not familiar with Khmer epigraphy that our data look ludicrously meagre at first glance. Indeed, there are over a thousand inscriptions known so far in which less than one hundred bear some information pertaining to our subject. And worse, words of the vocabulary of music and dance occur sporadically in a kind of mute fashion. Therefore, to the eyes of some superficial readers, it might appear senseless to dwell and rely upon such data. In fact, despite their small number and their casual occurrence, they strike one as fundamental because linguistically they belong to the basic vocabulary.

I was concentrating on forty-odd inscriptions ranging from the 7th to the 14th century. Most of them belong to pre-Angkorian time (6th-8th centuries), then the 9th and 10th centuries. Now, this fact should not be given a wild interpretation to the effect that music and dance prevailed in those periods of time: it is rather fortuitous, and this is particularly true of the 9th and 10th century texts. Regarding p.A. inscriptions, if they provide much information, it is a matter of course. They are short texts written by, or on account of, citizens of the kingdom who were interested in recording on the stone their religious pious deeds (*punya* or *dharma*), such as celebration of 'sacrificial ceremony' (*sattra*) centered round *yajña* performance, or building of divine statues and temples. Each deed entailed a good deal of offerings (*amroy*, *jammon*), carefully listed, topping with land and rice-fields, and mostly servants (*knun*). Among these I found many artists (dancers, musicians, singers) who were to serve the gods in daily worship. In Angkor-time, we find such pious deeds as accomplished by kings and highest officials, along with the rise of Angkorian monarchy. As a result, Angkorian engraved texts bear even more information on law and customs connected with the land and various institutions.

Whatever their difference, epigraphic texts form the corpus on which I have based my study. The great majority, about 37, are well-known inscriptions edited, i.e. transcribed, translated and annotated, by George Coedès in his *Inscriptions du Cambodge* and other articles. But eight of them are among those left out by Coedès, therefore unknown to the public. They belong to the Roluos group of monuments, mainly Bakô and Lolei, dated from the 9th century ⁽²⁾, and they deal with the erection of divine images and temples by two kings, Indravarma and Yaśovarman, and some princes and dignitaries.

2. The corpus of words here examined consists of Khm. basic verbs along with Khm. derivatives, and also Skt. loans. Unlike Groslier, I extended my survey as far as to include proper names. In this respect, the first idea belonged to Coedès but he only made casual observations at random on onomastics, obviously for lack of time. It is well known that he left out the so-called 'slave-names' (*sic*) in his translations. Yet when some items struck him as informative and useful to other scholars, he set them off with a few comments, for instance in stating apropos K.155 that some names of artists were fit for their functions ⁽³⁾. It was from that vantage point that I extended my research, the result of which proved very gratifying. Some proper names, indeed, have a tremendous cultural significance, because they speak of ancestral custom, or at least of a certain mentality in our ancient society.

3. Whatever their origin and their category, all the words and names have been submitted to the same close semantic examination as follows. First a good semantic analysis within the context. Then, as earlier stated, they went through a contrastive analysis bringing face to face old and modern vocabularies. For no serious scholar by now would contest the continuum in the evolution of the language and culture of Cambodia. The final operation would bring in history of art, mainly iconography, along with some Indian references, in order to compare the words and their referents.

These operations have not been equally successful, as we shall see in the following chapters. Some words resisted identification for insufficient evidence, both internal and external; others had to be defined, or re-defined as the case might be, in close connection with Khmer cultural facts which sometimes had considerably diverged from their Indian sources. Consequently, this first epigraphic exploration in the field of music and dance could expect amendments and improvements from further research works.

⁽²⁾ They have been studied by myself and recently published, in *Nouvelles inscriptions du Cambodge*, II, 1996.

⁽³⁾ 'Danseuses et chanteuses portent des noms sanskrits appropriés à leurs fonctions', in *IC*, V, 67: n. 5.

II. EPIGRAPHIC DATA

I shall start with basic words, i.e. verbs, then examine nouns, and end up with proper names.

1. Verbs

1.1. My predecessors listed 4 verbs which they already commented upon in a rare uncontroversial way. Thus:

- *ram*, *rām* ‘to dance’,
- *cryañ* (<*creñ*) ‘to sing’,
- *tiñ* ‘to pluck strings of musical instruments’,
- *toñ* ‘to beat, strike, play on drums’.

1.2. These verbs are straightforward in all respects and have survived until the present day ⁽⁴⁾. But while my predecessors seemed quite satisfied with this group of verbs, I have been puzzled, if not bothered, by a missing one which should have topped the others, because it is shown in the present-day vocabulary as a generic verb: *leñ* ‘to play’ in the most comprehensive sense in Khmer, i.e. ‘to play games, to play on musical instruments, to act of perform anything on the stage, etc.’. From *leñ* derived, as evidenced by Mid. and Mod.Khm., the nouns *bhleñ* ‘music’, and *lpaen* ‘games, entertainment, amusement, etc.’. We must always bear in mind that games and music have been the most significant instruments of worship in Cambodia’s ritual system (Fig. 1), whether people worshipped brahmanic gods, animistic spirits, or even the Buddha.

Regarding Old Khmer, p.A. K.90 mentions some offerings made during *utsava*, or ‘festivals’, which could take place ‘four times in a year’ (IC, V, 26: 8). Skt. word *utsava* occurred often in O.Khm. texts throughout centuries, sometimes specifically prefixed, e.g. *pañcotsava* ‘the 5 religious festivals’, *mahotsava* ‘the great festivals’, etc. And some of them were celebrated by the kings. This seems to tally with a post-Angkorian Khmer tradition whereby the monarchs, during ‘great festivals’ called *mahosrab* ⁽⁵⁾, entertained their subjects with games, music and various spectacles such as drama et puppet performance. In another p.A. inscription, K.155, we read about offerings to Sarasvatī, the goddess of eloquence and arts ⁽⁶⁾, among which a *ku tuktar* ‘a female puppeteer’ (IC, V, 66 (II): 5). From this evidence, we should be able to reconstruct a verbal base **leñ* meaning ‘to play’ ⁽⁷⁾, inasmuch as two derivatives from *leñ* occurred all right in inscriptions: *pleñ* and *lampeñ*.

⁽⁴⁾ Mod. counterparts: *rām* /rɑm/, *crieñ* /criəŋ/, *teñ* /deŋ/, then doublets *tuoñ* /tuəŋ/ and *thañ* /thəŋ/.

⁽⁵⁾ Corrupted form of O.Khm. *mahotsava* borrowed by Siamese, then back borrowed by Khmer.

⁽⁶⁾ See more details in Pou 1986.

⁽⁷⁾ For a detailed analysis of *leñ*, see Pou 1995: 1-3.



Fig. 1 - Angkor Thom (beg. 12th century). A sword-swallower flanked by a female cymbalist and a drum-beater.

Plen occurred as proper names of servants. But we could safely link it with a noun meaning ‘music; he who plays music, who is crafty or artful’. As for *lampeñ*, it is full of significance despite its scarce occurrence. In 12th century K.254 (IC, III, 185: 19, 23), we read about a *guru lampeñ* which was glossed by Coedès as ‘the voluntary guru (i.e. unpaid)’. This is by no means warranted by the text. I for one would regard this word as a secondary derivative of *leñ*, via **lpeñ*, thus meaning ‘a game-performer’, with a ritual connotation. Therefore, a *guru lampeñ* would be ‘a master, or teacher of games’ in that sense. Later, I came across *vrah lampeñ* as a village-name. This time there is no doubt about the religious connotation in this word on account of the sacred head-word *vrah*, and consequently I should gloss *vrah lampeñ* as ‘sacred games, sport, or entertainment’ (cf. *infra*, 2.).

2. Nouns: Generic Notions

While the basic verbs belong exclusively to Khmer vocabulary, nouns stem from both Khm. and Skt. Those collected so far fall into three main groups referring to: generic notions, instruments and other artifacts, and performers.

2.1. After digressing on generic term *plen* ‘music’ (*supra*, 1.2), I must add synonyms of it taken from Skt., i.e. *vāditra* and *tantrī*.

Vāditra occurs only in a village-name, to wit *vāditrapura* as from 10th century K.554, (IC, II, 14: 5) which could be glossed ‘the town of music’.

Tantrī occurs as a noun, e.g. in 11th century K.277 (IC, IV, 158: 30), and Coedès translated it by ‘string instrument’, obviously according to Skt. To my mind, this gloss is unnecessarily narrow when applied to Khmer of all times. Mod.Khm. *tantrī* for instance means ‘a band, an orchestra’.

2.2. ‘Theatre’ (playhouse or dancing-hall) was called *raṅga* in Skt. and *kralā rām* in Khm.

2.3. The word *rpam* occurring in many of the earliest inscriptions was mistaken by Coedès as a synonym of *rmam* ‘dancer’ (cf. *infra*, 4.3.3). And yet, the context of *rpam* is quite clear in K.155, since it is preceded by *pedānātaka*, or *pedānāta* (ll. 9 and 13). *Pedā*^o is a khmerized form of Skt. *petaka* ‘multitude, company’, or even better Pkt. *peḍa* ‘collection, troop’⁽⁸⁾. From this Indo-Aryan compound word *pedā-nātaka*, it is easy to infer the meaning of Khm. *rpam*, as ‘group or company of dancers’. We come across other passages of texts whereby the king or officials offered *rpam* or ‘ballet-troop’ to the gods, and most dancers there mentioned were girls, hence the partitive sense of ‘ballet-girl’, too.

2.4. 11th century K.222 (IC, III, 62: 15) reports on a lady named Pañ of the *varṇa rnam*, the second term being left unglossed by Coedès. Since *varṇa* means ‘a corporation, i.e. a professionally based group of royal servants’, I suggest we regard *rnam* as another derivative of *ram* ‘to dance’, having a nasal dental infix, and

⁽⁸⁾ Cf. Turner 1973: 475.

consequently to gloss it as ‘dancing’. Thus, we are now able to discriminate the three derivatives of the same base as follows:

- *r-m-am* ‘he or she who dances’,
- *r-p-am* ‘dancing, dance, ballet’,
- *r-n-am* ‘dancing, profession of dancer’.

2.5. The word *bhāṇī/bhanni*, obviously of Skt. origin, means ‘a dramatic performance with recitation’. In K.270 (*IC*, IV, 70: 16), it follows Khm. *tmoñ* ‘a percussion player’; and in K.99 (10th century, *IC*, VI, 110(N): 8), it does Khm. *rmām* ‘dancer’, consisting of three men. Bearing in mind that in the Khm. culture there is no dancing without time-beating with some kind of percussion instruments, I suggest we link *bhāṇī* with Skt. *bhāṇa* meaning ‘recitation; a sort of dramatic entertainment with narrative told by a reciter’. At this juncture, one is reminded of Khmer traditional types of theatre including recitatives, such as *yīke*-theatre, also the performance of dramatized religious or other sacred stories, and most of all our popular theatre of *Rāmāyaṇa*, nowadays called *lkhon khol* ⁽⁹⁾. The troop of *lkhon khol* consists solely of males: actors-dancers, percussion-players and narrators. The recited texts worked out on various metres required different rhythms given by the sound of a kettle-drum which accompanies the recitation. There are chances that *thmoñ bhāṇī* and *rmām bhanni* of old referred respectively to ‘timpanists’ and ‘actors-dancers’ of a *bhāṇī*-theatre, the ancestor of our modern *lkhon khol*.

3. Nouns: Musical Instruments

3.1. Old Khmer borrowed three Indo-Aryan words for general purpose: Skt. *vādya*, *tūrya* and Pkt. *vajja* (= Skt. *vādya*) ⁽¹⁰⁾. The Pkt. word is the most straightforward and interesting one, although short-lived and only found in onomastics. For instance, in p.A. K.78 (*IC*, VI, 13: 20) and K.786 (*IC*, VII, 107: 10) the name *drañ nām qvbajja* was borne by two female servants. It should be understood ‘she who leads instruments’, or better ‘she who leads an ensemble of instruments’.

As for *vādya* and *tūrya*, they went through a metonymic expansion quite early, and will be examined *infra*, 4.2.1.

Otherwise, names of musical instruments belong to both Khm. and Skt. vocabularies. They are easily categorized by means of the context, but some cannot be specifically identified.

3.2. Wind instruments

One Khm. word can be traced so far: *kluy* ‘flute’, mentioned as an offering in 10th century K.742 (*IC*, V, 161: 10). Otherwise, the ritual instrument par excellence, ‘conch shell’ was named in Skt. *śaṅkha* which has survived till now, pronounced /saŋ/.

⁽⁹⁾ Meaning literally ‘Monkeys’ theatre’.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Cf. Turner 1973: 671.

It should be added that iconography of the following centuries, mainly in the reliefs of Angkor Vat and Bayon, shows many more wind instruments, such as horns and buysines of various types (Fig. 2), and maybe a kind of oboe, too ⁽¹¹⁾.

3.3. String instruments

Several words in inscriptions referred to string instruments, unmistakably so, owing to the context represented by the verb 'to pluck strings' (*tiñ*), or the noun 'pluckers of strings', a derivative from the preceding (*tmiñ: infra*, 4.2.2).

The most familiar one is *vīṇa* occurring in many inscriptions since the outset. In Angkorian texts it is mentioned first among offerings, frequently, then also as proper name, e.g. *kaṃsteñ vīṇa* 'Sir Vīṇa', in 11th century K.205 (*IC*, III, 5: 14); and finally as an instrument in the hands of artists.

In India, *vīṇa* has applied to a wide range of string instruments ⁽¹²⁾. As regards Cambodia, Groslier suggested 'a lute' (1965, II: 287). Now, unlike the Indian word, O.Khm. *vīṇa* has never stood as a generic name, because it occurred in several inscriptions together with other names of string instruments (cf. *infra*). Moreover, there are chances that one of those, *kinnara* (*infra*), would apply to 'the lute'. Turning to iconography, one string instrument strikingly stands out, which has enthralled more than one scholar and even art lover. It is a bow-shaped harp having various types, and is played on by celestial beings, court ladies as well as *paṇḍita* or 'learned men' who were apparently accompanying reciters or singers. I, therefore, suggest O.Khm. *vīṇa* refer to a 'bow-shaped harp' (Fig. 3). This could be further supported by Mod. Khm. word *biṅ* designating this iconographic item or any harp.

Another Angkorian name of string instrument, the above mentioned *kinnara*, seemed familiar too. As just stated, it stood separately from *vīṇa* on any list. For instance, 10th century K.669 reads: *vīṇa 20 mvāy vluk kinnara 10 mvāy*, '21 *vīṇa* in ivory and 11 *kinnara*' (*IC*, I, 171: 26).

In many of the 9th century inscriptions from Roluos were listed frequently *tmiñ kinnara* among artists and other servants of temples. In the past, scholars of Skt. gave a rather general definition of *kinnara*, e.g. Böhtlingk: 'ein best. Saiteninstrument' (I: 165); and Monier-Williams: 'a kind of musical instrument' (283). Then Groslier suggested 'a kind of harpsichord' (1965: 285) without further comment. This was obviously far from satisfactory, and the word itself completely disappeared along with the Angkorian culture.

However, if once again we examine iconography carefully, we notice another familiar plucked instrument, the body of which is made of one or two gourds. Now,

⁽¹¹⁾ G. Groslier made excellent reproductions of various musical instruments from temples' bas-reliefs in his book (1921: chapt. XII). See esp. pp. 125-28, fig. 82. The few illustrations included in this paper have been provided by Mr Th. Zéphir of Musée Guimet (Paris) to whom I address my sincere thanks.

⁽¹²⁾ See mainly Marcel-Dubois 1941, Tarlekar 1972, and Duflos 1979.



Fig. 2 - Angkor Vat (first half 12th century). Scene of Lañkā Battle with a monkey blowing a kind of trumpet.



Fig. 3 - Bayon (12th-13th century). Court-orchestra with a *vīṇā*-player.

Tarlekar listed an ancient Indian instrument of a lute-type having two or three gourds named *kinnarī vīṇa* (1972: 34). I am therefore inclined to see a 'lute' in O.Khm. *kinnara*. Besides, although the word has not survived Angkor, the lute has, till the present day but under a new name, *khsae t̄iev* or *sāṭ̄iev* /sədiew/, made of one hollowed half-gourd which is held by the musician pressed on his chest.

9th century K.315 mentions a female *tmiñ trisarī*, lit. 'plucker of *trisarī*', beside a female player of *kinnara* (C, IV, pl. CLIX: 7). *Trisarī* clearly means 'a 3-string instrument', but we cannot specifically describe it, nor can make the slightest suggestion as to relate it to any iconographic item.

Two Khm. words, *kañjañ* and *lāv*, occurred since p.A. time as designating string instruments on account of the player *tmiñ*^o. They have not been identified so far, as both are unknown nowadays. The word *kañjañ* has been a hapax, therefore there is no hope of identifying it. As for *lāv*, it re-appeared in some 9th century texts, definitely as a plucked instrument, and again in some Mss. dating back from 17th century. But we have no further information as to describe it properly.

Another mysterious word is *chko*. The first recordings known to us belong to two 10th century inscriptions (K.669, IC, I, 171: 27; and K.741, IC, V, 161: 10)

where *chko* was listed among offerings. Coedès suggested the sense of ‘drum’, obviously for onomatopoeic reason. This guess did not turn correct, because much later I read in some of the Roluos inscriptions *tmiñ chko*, or ‘pluckers of *chko*’, listed beside other players of string instruments. This being said, *chko* remains a puzzle, and only future research could help to work out the specificity of instruments cited: guitar, lute or harp?

The same can be said of *śikharā*, obviously a Skt. word, and left unglossed by Coedès. I made a few attempts at it in scrutinizing some roluos inscriptions, and came across for instance *camryañ śikharā*, lit. ‘a singer with a *śikharā*’. In addition, these male singers were not listed with the other artists performing divine service. Instead, *camryañ śikharā* were included in what we might term domestic workers in a temple, and together with *gandharva*, another type of singers well known in Indian culture as celestial musicians holding, and playing on, string instruments of the cittern-type (Pou 1976: 354-55). It looks thus as if *camryañ śikharā* were entertainers of the small temple-community, of the ‘bard-type’. This guess is not really outrageous, because at present there exist bards singing poems or narrating lengthy stories, accompanying themselves with a type of guitar called *cāpī* (< Skt. *kacchapī*), and our bards are said to do the *criēñ cāpī*, lit. ‘sing with guitar’. I, therefore suggest we temporarily relate *śikharā* with *kacchapī vīṇa*, ‘a guitar-type of instrument’.

3.4. Percussion

The most current words are those referring to the group of drums, and quite naturally so, because these instruments are absolutely required in both artistic and ritual performances, thus nearly on all occasions.

3.4.1. The generic term is Khm. *sgar*, known in the past, e.g. in 10th century K.814 (Coedès & Dupont 1937: 406, 34-36), as well as at present.

3.4.2. Another instrument of percussion is *huduga*, also spelled *hūdūka*, as exemplified by *thmañ huduga* ‘beater of *huduga*’ (10th century K.356, BEFEO, XLIII, 10: 19). Coedès glossed it by ‘tambourine’, obviously following the Skt. *hūdūkka*, and I concurred at first (1976: 348-50), overlooking a few serious predicaments. For, judging, from post-Angkorian culture, Khmer ritual tambourine has jingles and a handle, therefore is manipulated by shaking. Now, in the above mentioned passage, the player was termed ‘a beater’ (*thmañ*). Consequently, *huduga* could not refer to a small jingling tambourine. I was then left with two options: — a) The word might have applied to a larger drum, maybe a ‘kettle-drum’. Indeed, mod. name of the large ritual ‘bronze kettle-drum’, *mahoradhik*, can be traced back to Angkorian *huduga* prefixed by *mahā* ‘large, big’, the whole compound being corrupted by Siamese pronunciation. b) Or else, it was a ‘tambourine’ all right, but without handle or jingles, like our modern *rmanā* ⁽¹³⁾ which is ‘beaten’ by the player.

⁽¹³⁾ Actually borrowed from Perso-Arabic, probably via an Indian language. See Jones 1978: 73.

Turning to India, we note with Tarlekar a word *huḍukkā* designating a kind of drum suspended from the shoulder with a sling (1972: 76, figs. 92, 93), and this type of instrument has always existed in Cambodia, past and present ⁽¹⁴⁾.

As matters stand, there is no way to sort out the question. However, we could keep in mind for further research the options of ‘bronze kettle-drum’ or ‘a two-head drum’ (now called *sgar yol*).

3.4.3. Two words referred to metallic instruments of percussion, to wit Khm. *cheñ* and Skt. *tāla*, which have been glossed as ‘cymbals’. Regarding *cheñ*, the player is termed ‘manipulator’, *chmāp*, a derivative of *cāp* ‘to grasp, to hold, manipulate or operate...’ (Fig. 4). And Mod.Khm. *chiñ* designates a pair of brass cups which are struck together for marking rhythm. So it seems quite safe to relate the two words to each other.

As for *tāla*, there is some uncertainty about it. It is sometimes specified as being made of ‘bronze, or brass’, Khm. *saṃrit* or Skt. *kaṃsa*, hence the word *kaṃsatāla* mentioned in earliest texts. In modern times, we have ‘cymbals’ made of a pair of circular discs, as shown in *Musique khmère* (Commission de Musique 1969: 93), and called *chāp*. Whether *chāp* has evolved from *tāla* or has been an import, this remains to be investigated.

Moreover, other percussion instruments of the gong-type were frequently depicted on reliefs of monuments, and they are shared in common by different peoples of Southeast Asia. They are of various types, and in Cambodia are nowadays designated by the generic term *gañ* [ក្លង] ⁽¹⁵⁾, which is obviously an Austronesian loanword. Now this loanword was not present in O.Khm. texts. We could then suggest that Skt. *tāla* of old designated the ‘gongs’.

4. Nouns: Performers

We shall conveniently consider three groups: vocalists, instrumentalists and actors.

4.1. Vocalists

4.1.1. Generic term for ‘singer’ is *camreñ*, *camryañ*, a derivative of *cryañ* ‘to sing’ (*supra*, 1.1). On the whole, most singers mentioned were females, employed in divine service. However, Angkorian texts suggest the presence of some male singers of a high social status, since they were addressed as *vāp*, the equivalent of ‘Sir’. For instance, in 10th century K.831 (*IC*, V, 147: 8), one *vāp myañ* was a singer and land-owner, and in 11th century K.693 (*IC*, V, 205: 18) a *vāp rājadāsa* had the same status and job.

⁽¹⁴⁾ See Groslier 1921: 127, fig. 81, items N, O, P, Q. Also, Commission de Musique (1969: 91).

⁽¹⁵⁾ See Groslier 1921: 126, fig. 81, items D, E, F, G, H. Also Commission de Musique (1969: 94-96).

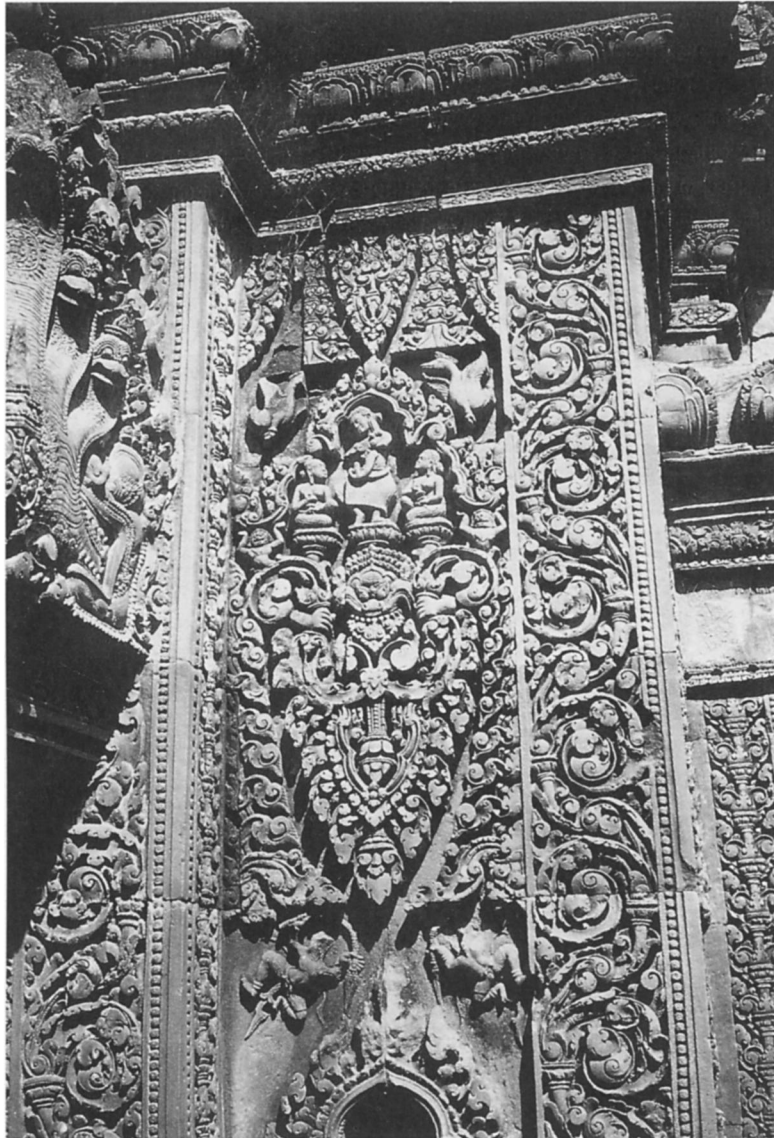


Fig. 4 - Banteay Srei (10th century). A dancer flanked by two cymbalists.

4.1.2. 10th century K.270 (IC, IV, 69-70) mentions some fifteen female *camryañ* serving god Śri Trailokyanātha, i.e. Viṣṇu, and beside them six male *camryañ stutiy* (l. 19) ‘singers of songs of praise’.

In p.A. K.155, one of the female singers was called *ku kītākī*. This could be related to Skt. *kīṭaka*, a kind of ‘bard or panegyrist’, hence *ku kītākī* could likely be understood ‘a female panegyrist’.

In p.A. 78, a woman was named *gāyatrīya* (IC, VI, 12: 3), and her daughter likewise. We know that *gāyatrī* was used in O.Khm. as meaning ‘a sacred hymn; a magical *mantra*, a coat made of precious materials adorning divine statues’ (Pou 1984: 90-91). Thus a lady *gāyatrī* could have been in the earliest inscriptions ‘she who sings hymns’.

4.1.3. A puzzling term for ‘singer’ is *gandharva*. It occurred several times in p.A. texts; it was in use in the 9th and 10th century ones; and it is still known nowadays in literature as a mythical personage as it was in ancient India. Now, the *gandharva* of ancient Cambodia were living creatures, mostly males — but some females are also recorded. They certainly formed a particular class of singers, and we can surmise that their particular quality was a sweet heavenly voice like that of their Indian mythical prototypes. And it is absolutely clear from the texts that *gandharva* performed at temples.

However, I am tempted to go further and suggest that they had also performed at wedding-ceremonies as the ancient Indian *gandharva*, too, because of the evidence of later Khmer culture. Indeed, wedding-singers are among the best artists, very skilled, celebrated for their voice and their competence in poetry and folklore.

4.1.4. Skt. loanword *vāca* means ‘reciter’ performing a divine service, as in 10th century K.356 (Coedès 1943-46: 17). It could thus have referred to soloists performing some sort of oratorios, or particularly to narrators in *bhāṇī*-theatre (cf. *supra*, 2.5).

4.2. Instrumentalists

4.2.1. There were two generic terms for ‘musician’, both borrowed from Skt. since p.A. time: *vādya* and *tūrya*. No doubt that they initially meant ‘instrumental music’ (cf. *supra*, 3.1.), but they soon developed a partitive meaning as ‘he who plays on an instrument in orchestra’. We have evidence that they were agential nouns listed beside other divine servants such as *camryañ* ‘singers’, or *pūjapāla* ‘temple wardens’, etc. However, we cannot go further as to tell the difference between the referents of *tūrya* and *vādya*, viz. what type of instruments they respectively played.

4.2.2. From word bases *tiñ* ‘to pluck strings’ and *toñ* ‘to beat’, O.Khm. derived *tmiñ* ‘she or he who plucks strings’, and *tmoñ* ‘beater’.

Regarding *tmoñ*, excellent illustrations are provided by many texts. For instance 9th century K.415 (IC, V, 86: 7), mentions: *tmoñ ghoda 1 tmoñ oñ 1*. Now, *ghoda* had definitely a connotation of strength and virility (Pou 1984: 93), while *oñ* was an appellation of elderly women. Thus a *tmoñ ghoda* was surely a strong male playing

on a sort of timpanum, while *tmoñ oñ* a player of smaller drum or tambourine. We have also noted (*supra*, 2.5) *tmoñ bhāñī*, i.e. a male beating the timpanum in *bhāñī*-theatre. And finally, 10th century K.181 (*IC*, VI, 140: 20) reports of a high-ranking man termed *upādhyāya thmoñ*, ‘a professor of percussion music’.

4.3. Stage-performers

4.3.1. Skt. loanword *kāri* is mentioned in a few inscriptions in connection with ceremonies, such as in 10th century K.659 (*IC*, V, 143: 20) or 11th century K.989 (*IC*, VII, 178: 23, *passim*), but without specific illustrations. Undoubtedly, it comes from Skt. *kārin* ‘actor’.

4.3.2. In p.A. K.78 (*IC*, VI, 13: 19), a male servant was named *bhanda* which is not a Khm. word, but could be traced to Skt. *bhaṇḍa* ‘buffoon’. Since G. Groslier had pointed out the presence of buffoons in parades or processions depicted in Angkorian reliefs (1921: 128). I must then avail myself to stress upon the omnipresence of buffoonery in Khmer theatre of all types and at all times, and even digress in mentioning the important part of buffoonery in the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theatre, performed by monkeys, and tremendously appreciated by the popular audience. As a result, the audience, at one point of history, coined for that theatre the name *lkhon khol* or ‘theatre of monkeys’ (cf. *supra*, 2.5).

4.3.3. I include in stage-performers the term *rmām*, the most current one for ‘dancer’ in inscriptions. Dancers could be male or female; they acted and danced; they performed either at temples or in dance-halls. We have seen ‘ballet-girls’ (*supra*, 2.3) and also male dancers of *bhāñī*-theatre (2.5). Further, 10th century K.831 (*IC*, V, 147: 6) mentions a *vāp ānanda rmām*, ‘Sir Ānanda dancer’, which suggests the fact that some dancers reached a good social position in the community, and even at the court.

4.3.4. I would not leave out the word *tuktar* (*supra*, 1.2) which I have already analysed in 1984 (150-52). It means ‘puppet’, then metonymically is expanded into ‘puppeteer’. Some female servants, *ku tuktar*, were thus offered to goddess Sarasvatī. And there is no need to stress upon the ritual implication of puppet-show in the Khmer culture.

5. Proper Names

Khm. epigraphy contains thousands of proper names pertaining to all classes of people. It has been pointed out by various scholars that the choice of names is motivated by diverse considerations, such as physical or moral salient features of persons regardless of the ethics, their occupations and some particular circumstances.

Here we are concerned with artists who belonged to the common class of people, who were recruited, and even bought, as servants of temples. It is worth noting, incidentally, that some female singers were listed with their children, even sucking babies. On the whole, they belonged to the lowest stratum of society, and bore very plain Khm. names.

However, some texts provide lists of female artists — more rarely male — bearing Skt. names, strikingly beautiful and informative. They were undoubtedly nicknames, but they are worth analysing because of their motivation, and this could unveil the cultural facts behind the show.

According to their reference, proper names could be categorized as follows:

5.1. Specific performance and achievement

Ballet-girls could be called *caturikā* ‘clever, skilful’; *guṇadharī* ‘possessing good qualities’; *samarasenā* ‘(playing the part of) soldier in battle’; *sāvetrī* ‘singing hymns, or resembling goddess Sāvitrī’; *tīttaru* ‘dancing like a partridge’; *vṛttavālī* ‘moving in row, in circle’. One musician was named *vinayavatī* ‘the disciplined one’, and another girl *sāminī* ‘chanting hymns’.

5.2. Technical competence

One singer *gandharva* was called *vaṅṣigītā* ‘accompanied by a flute in his singing’. Otherwise, technical nicknames were mostly given to females, such as: *sugītā* ‘who sings beautifully’; *racitasvanā* ‘producing sweet sounds’; *madburasenā* ‘the servant with a sweet voice’; *haṅsavādī* ‘having the haṅsa’s voice’; *raktasvanā* ‘having an enamoured voice’; *kaṅṭhagītā* ‘who sings with a guttural voice’; *suvivṛtā* ‘producing well-articulated sounds’; *susamvṛtā* ‘having vocal cords well-contracted’; and most technically of all *gāndhārasvanā* ‘producing *gāndhāra*-sounds (i.e. third primary note of music)’!

5.3. Physical qualities

This sort of names were the most current in inscriptions; they were also the most fantastic on account on their sensual and sociological connotations. E.g., *manoharā*, *-rī*, *-rikā* ‘charming, fascinating’ (cf. *infra*, III, 2.5); *raṅgāśrī* ‘the pearl of the theatre company’; *suracitā* ‘beautifully adorned’; *haṅsamanikā* ‘jewel of a haṅsa’; *vasantamallikā* ‘spring jasmine’; *vasantavallī* ‘spring creeper’; *padmanī* ‘lotus-like woman’; *sārasikā* ‘heron-like (artist)’; *sāraṅgī* ‘antelope-like one’; *carumatī* ‘as pretty as a parrot’; *sītākṣī* ‘having Sītā’s eyes’; *bāriṅākṣī* ‘having gazelle’s eyes’; *payodharī* ‘having beautiful breasts’; *stanottarī* ‘having huge breasts’; *rativindu* ‘having the mark of love’; *ratimatī* ‘delightful’; *suviḥbhamā* ‘displaying beautiful coquetry’; *mandalīlā* ‘sporting oneself in a languid fashion’; *priyāsenā* ‘beloved servant’; *dayitavatī* ‘having a lover’; etc.

III. COMMENTS

As earlier stated, the amount of data collected is paltry when compared with the impressive epigraphy of Cambodia. To make matters worse, there is not a single text left, or at least passage of text, truly descriptive of ceremonies, shows, even of an incidental nature. Scholars have so far resorted to glean data painstakingly on the vast field of epigraphs. My own effort has been concentrated on semantics and

comparative studies, with a view to improve upon previous works on the subject. It must be borne in mind that epigraphy alone is not fully operative; a tight collaboration with archaeology is a requisite. Unfortunately, no thorough survey of iconography has been carried out so far as epigraphy has. Therefore, any uncertain definition in this paper should remain hypothetical until further discovery.

1. *Lacunae in Information*

1.1. There is a blatingly missing word among basic ones. We have come across 'to sing', 'to beat', 'to pluck strings', and I have made up for generic verb 'to play (games, music, parts, ...)'. But there is no such word as 'to bow on instrument', and nowhere is a hint at a 'bow-string instrument'.

Post-Angkorian vocabulary, though, contains all essential words on this score, to wit *kūt* 'to rub, to bow', *dra* /trɔɔ/ 'a viol, violin, fiddle, ...', *chāk* 'the bow, the stick'. Some writers suggested that the Khmer instrument *dra* was borrowed quite late from another culture, viz. from a Chinese prototype. In fact, very little has been ascertained about the Chinese viol itself, and its connection with the Arab one. Be this as it may, string instruments of the viol-type are nowadays omnipresent in orchestras, performing for deities or local animistic spirits. So, why such instruments were not mentioned in ancient epigraphy is a question we regretfully cannot answer at the moment.

1.2. As regards percussive instruments, the only unquestionable names have been *sgar* and *cheñ*. The others require further investigation extended to many related disciplines and countries.

2. These querying, negative, remarks will appear fortunately scanty if compared with the following positive results of our survey.

2.1. We must stress upon the identification of *bhāñī* and *rpam*.

With *bhāñī*, we know that in the 10th century, possibly earlier, there was a type of theatre performed by male dancers, along with recitatives accompanied by the beating of kettle-drum. That might have been the ancestor of our present-day *Rāmāyana*-theatre, as well as any performance of religious stories.

Rpam is definitely to be distinguished from *rmām* 'dancer'. Both words stem from the same base, but they contain different infixes. *Rpam* means 'a ballet' in the plainest sense, i.e. a dance performed by a group of artists, not necessarily a large one. Nowadays, the number of dancers range from two to some twenty; and a large group performs usually at the court for sheer artistic purpose. Only the function of ballet prevails, as it mediates between the sacred and the profane. Ballet is performed as a prelude in which dancers invoke the main figures of the invisible world, invite them to join the humans (donators as well as the audience) and take part in their actions, and finally to ensure happiness and prosperity to all. Going back to p.A. time, when for instance K.155 mentions twelve ballet-girls (*pedānātaka*

rpan) amongst a huge servant-staff, this could mean that these dancers performed the first act of worshipping the gods, viz. effigies of Śiva, during ceremonies held in the precincts of temples, with or without a procession.

2.2. Despite the narrow title of my paper, music and dance should be viewed from now on more widely as to include also ritual 'games'. Semantically, these three forms of arts are based on three verbs sharing in common the concept of 'to play', *leñ*. Once minutely analysed (*supra*, II, 1.2), this verb proves potent as to have tremendous cultural implications, because it refers to the heart of a community seeking to express its sensibility, whether in entertainment or in worship. In other words, from the ancient Khm. concept of 'to play' evolved three types of spiritual expression and acting in connection with the sacred, always overlappings each other in history in the same mystical pursuit.

2.3. Some statements made by contemporary observers need amendments in the light of the present survey, if we want to keep Khmer culture in the right perspective. For instance, it has been pointed out that Khmer musicians are mainly, if not solely, males. Epigraphy, though, bears witness to the presence of female instrumentalists in ancient Cambodia, plucking strings of various instruments, and even beating drums. This apparently out-of-place picture was still to be seen in my childhood, and also recorded in many past publications and postcards. Therefore, scholars should remember to consult documents of the past before assessing facts of modern times.

The second instance regards the social status of musicians and dancers of old. They have been said to belong only to the low class, tied down — some would even say 'enslaved' — to serving the gods on behalf of their masters. Now, Angkorian texts provide a different picture altogether. Indeed, the master could be the state represented by the king. This alone suggests that music and dance had reached a climax to become an institution. We have seen the term *varṇa rnam* or 'corporation of dancers' (*supra*, II, 2.4), and to this *varṇa* belonged a lady Tāñ Pañ which, as the text added, was 'in charge of the concubines' (*kbloñ snam*) of the wealthy high-ranking man author of the inscription, probably the king.

We have also seen male artists among respectable members of the community, be they dancers, singers or music-teachers. They were well-off people, and could be called upon to witness important deeds. 10th century K.831 relates that a dancer named Sir Ānanda was given the task of inquiring about the true value of villages, rice-fields and land-revenue which some other distinguished men had offered to a Śivaliṅga. Among these men were another dancer and a singer, apparently related, who were also addressed as 'Sir', who owned land, servants, made fabulous offerings to the gods, and enjoyed interesting tax-exemptions. The deeds were eventually engraved on stone — probably our inscription — on behalf of those eminent artists. This Angkorian development of art and society would account for the institutionalization of music and dance at Cambodian court until recently.

2.4. What has gradually emerged from all the preceding is the continuum in the

life of art under examination, both in space and time. If this has been noted already by some scholars, I now want to point out something similar but never commented upon so far.

We all agree on the sacred aspect of music and dance — and games for that matter — in Cambodia. Ample evidence thereof is provided by epigraphy, in particular through numerous lists of servants. The present paper goes a bit further as to assess the purport of proper names. The first remark is that many are anything but sacred. Such names as *stanottarī* ‘having huge breasts’ or *rativindu* ‘bearing the mark of love’, borne by temple dancers might shock some foreign minds or lead them to some out-of-the-way interpretation. The same fact could be observed in modern Cambodia, too, actually.

There is then a discrepancy, apparently, between the sacred function of artists and the onomastic reference to their sensuality. In order to clarify the matter, we must evoke another dimension of it, i.e. the human one represented by the donator or patron who organized ceremonies, made lavish offerings to the gods, and owned large staffs of servants. This well-off master and donator was called *yajamāna* or *sthāpaka*, according to the sort of ceremonies he performed. Now, if a ballet-girl was called *ratimatī* ‘delightful’ or *priyasenā* ‘the beloved servant’, reference thereof should be made to the master, not to the god. This brings us very near to the 19th century, or even early 20th century, when many high officials, rich men, owned artistic troops, sometimes comparable with small harems, and had them perform for their own official duty and pleasure, and occasionally for worship.

Thus, the sensuousness as found in some artists’ proper names must be given a social definition, and does not by any means tamper with the sacredness of art.

2.5. A final onomastic remark concerns the names *manoharā*, *-rī*, *-rikā*, as meaning ‘ravishing, enrapturing, fascinating, charming’. This popular name of artist is not to be found in modern times. Nevertheless, the common vocabulary has kept after Angkor the form *manoharī*, shortened into *mahorī*, to designate a type of music. I have made a cultural survey of it (Pou 1995) which leads to the definition of a refined court-music, soft, sensuous, truly delightful, meant for relaxing and enjoyment. *Mahorī* used for royal pleasure gradually crept out of the royal palace and other residences to delight also commoners till the present day, pronounced /māhorii/, and reached as far as the country folk and even the diaspora of Khmer refugees.

ABBREVIATIONS

C	<i>Corpus (Fac similés des Inscriptions du Cambodge)</i>
IC	<i>Inscriptions du Cambodge</i> (G. Coedès)
Kh.m.	Khmer
Mid.	Middle (Khmer)
Mod.	Modern (Khmer)
O.Khm.	Old Khmer
p.A.	pre-Angkorian
Pkt.	Prākṛit
Skt.	Sanskrit

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