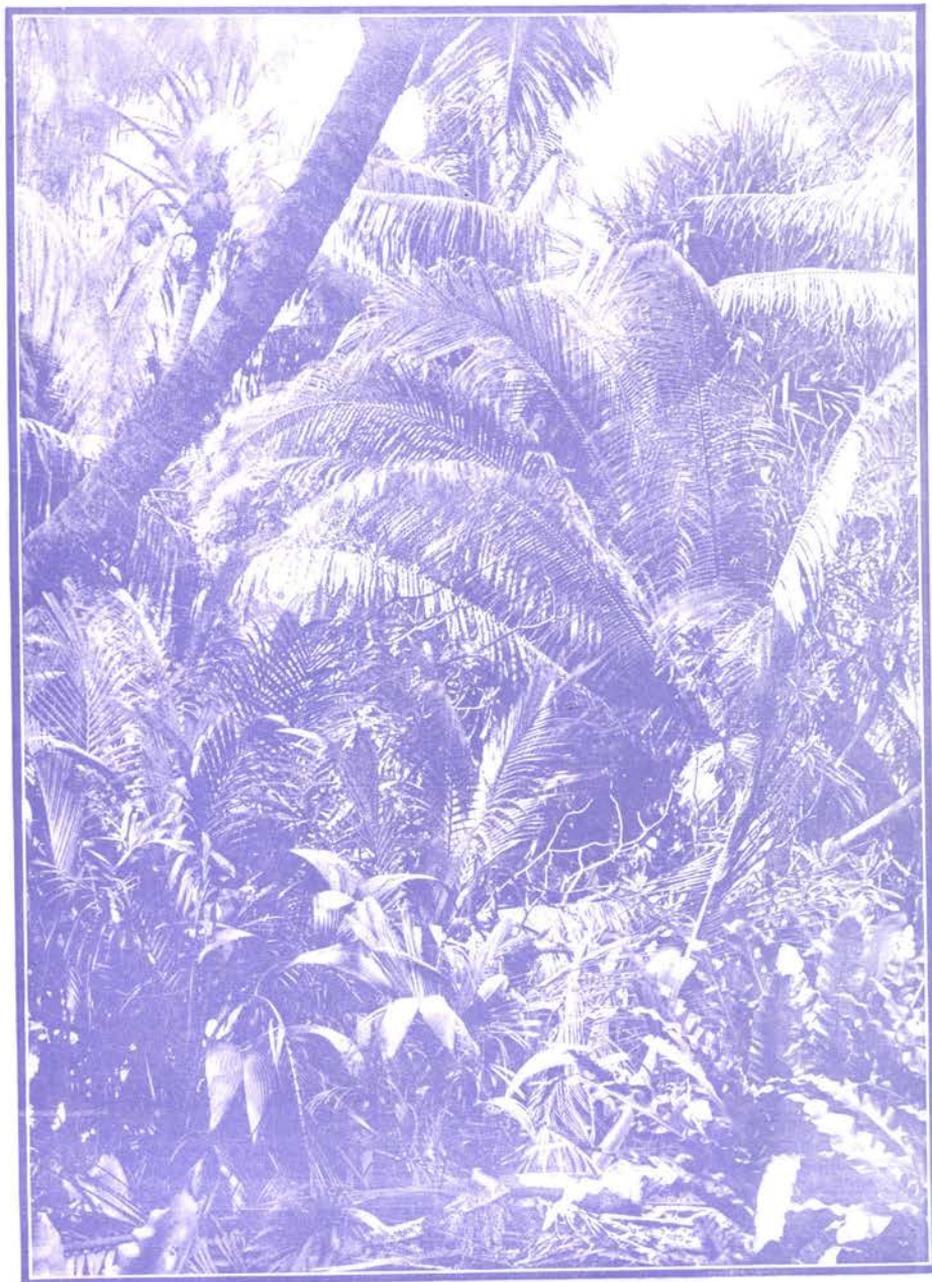


# MID-PACIFIC MAGAZINE



*A bit of Palmyra Island*

# The Mid-Pacific Magazine

CONDUCTED BY ALEXANDER HUME FORD

Volume XLI

Number 3

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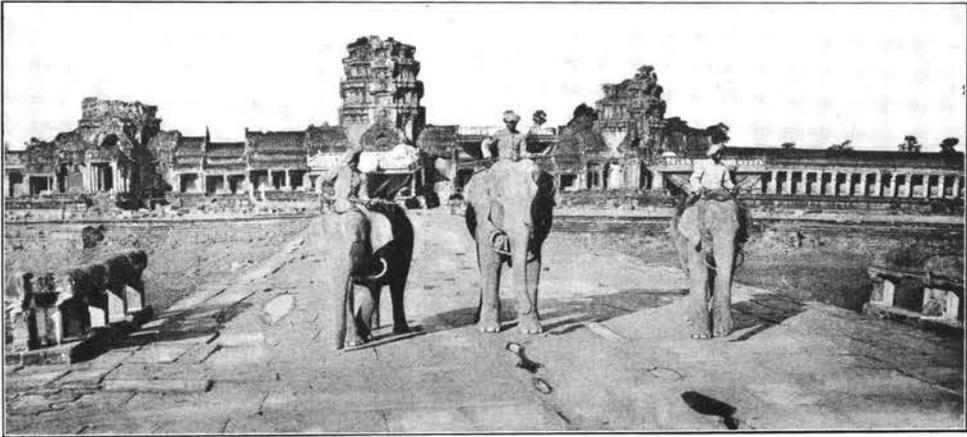
Published monthly by ALEXANDER HUME FORD, Alexander Young Hotel Building, Honolulu, T. H.  
Yearly subscription in the United States and possessions, \$3.00 in advance. Canada and  
Mexico, \$3.25. For all foreign countries, \$3.50. Single Copies, 25c.  
Entered as second-class matter at the Honolulu Postoffice.

Permission is given to reprint any article from the Mid-Pacific Magazine.

Printed by the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Ltd.



*The ruins of Angkor in French Indo-China, like the long-buried temple of Borobodor in Java, lay buried and forgotten for centuries.*



*Today as yesterday and centuries ago, the elephant is supreme at Angkor.*

## The Ruins of Angkor

By MILE. CECYL HOLLIDAY

It is a great pleasure to share my impressions of Indo-China with the members of the Pan-Pacific Union, as I feel that part of the enjoyment of my travels is owing to my connection with the Pan-Pacific Union. The scientists from Indo-China who came as delegates to the Pan-Pacific Food Conservation Conference in 1924 were particularly eager to show me the wonders and beauties of Nhatrang and of Pnom-Penh. Through them I received a letter of introduction to Rabindranath Tagore and a resultant cordial invitation to visit his remarkable and unique outdoor university for a few days, which invitation I accepted. Through them, also, I was entertained by Sir J. C. and Lady Bose who showed me not only the wonderful experiments in plant breathing, about which the whole scientific world was talking at the time of my visit to India, but also Lady Bose's school for young girls, her workshops, where young married Indian women are

taught trades and handicrafts—quite an innovation—and the weaving and domestic art school for widows, a wonderful and devoted ministry which speaks well for the progress and advancement of Indian women.

It felt like being back home when I arrived at Saigon, the Paris of the East, and saw the cafe tables on the sidewalks of the boulevards, and heard everybody speaking French.

Saigon, the capital of Cochin-China, is a splendid city, with stately thoroughfares, impressive buildings, luxurious homes and innumerable gardens. It is a very active port and possesses an important maritime arsenal. Rice is the great industry of the whole country.

French Indo-China, which is the official government name for the French colonies, includes Cambodia, Laos, Cochin-China, Annam and Tonkin.

I visited Hué, 50,000 inhabitants, capital of Annam, with six million inhabi-



*The ruins of the temple of Angkor are the most extensive of their kind in the world and well worth the journey by rail, motor, and boat to reach them.*

tants, which is under the protectorate of France though still keeping emperor and mandarins. Owing to the recent death of Emperor Khai Dinh and the absence of his son, there were no court festivities and ceremonies; unfortunately, for I was entitled to special privileges at court by virtue of the order of Kim Boi which Khai Dinh had so graciously conferred upon me. Prince Vinh-Giac, nephew of Khai Dinh, was my escort to the various palaces and the sumptuous tombs of the emperors. He did the honors of his city with grace and dignity. He was evidently greatly loved by the Annamese, but my remark that he was the next in line to the royal succession and might be called to the throne as the next Emperor of Annam was answered by a very emphatic "God forbid!"

At Pnom-Penh, capital of Cambodia, 103,000 inhabitants, Monsieur Guibier, Chief of Forests, whom I am sure you will all remember, did everything in his power to repay in my person some of the courtesies extended to him in Honolulu by the members of the Pan-Pacific Union. I was introduced to the Governor, who placed his automobile at my service and entertained me at dinner, where I had the pleasure of meeting several distinguished Frenchmen who appeared greatly interested in Honolulu and the activities being carried on in the islands. Monsieur le Resident Superieur also facilitated my inspection of the government schools, my visit to the Khmer Museum, school of art, royal library, palaces, silver pagoda, and so on.

From Pnom-Penh the journey to Angkor, the city of mystery, takes several hours. There are good roads now, though formerly one had to travel, except for a few months in the year, up the Mekong, that great river which has its source among the llanos in Thibet and empties into the China sea through no less than nine mouths. On the way one passes houses built on tall piles, for when the Mekong overflows, the whole country is

under water, and the houses are just so many little islands. The inhabitants let down their nets and get as much fish as they need without going beyond their own doors.

The first sight of the great lotus bud towers of Angkor takes one's breath away and if one should live for a thousand years one would never have another such experience.

Who were the Khmers who built this magical pile? There are conventional explanations but all guesses as to whence the Khmers came or where they went are but flimsy theories.

The Angkor group (discovered in 1850 by Father Bouillevaux, a French missionary, as he trudged mile after mile through the silent, stifling jungle and stumbled upon a forsaken temple, the remains of a moat, an abandoned fortress, miles of ruins, a vanished civilization), is comprised of Angkor Wat, the temple, and Angkor Thom, the city, completely in ruins and about three centuries older than Angkor Wat, which is still a building more classic and more ornate though smaller, naturally, than the ruins of the city.

The French scholar E. Aymonier gives the date of the founding of the capital at Angkor Thom as 860 A. D. At Angkor Thom are to be found the stupendous ruins of the royal palace and of the temple of Bayon.

Angkor Wat, the temple, was probably begun during the first half of the twelfth century. There was no continuance of this mighty building following its completion. Whether the Siamese or the Annamese eventually captured and sacked Angkor Thom is a debatable point. The downfall probably came at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The ruins give evidence of an orgy of pillage. Was there also one of the greatest massacres in the world's history? Were the million or more inhabitants of the capital so disposed of? Why was this most magnificent of cities utterly abandoned by both victor

and vanquished and handed over to the jungle and the wild beast? That the jungle did close in upon Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat we do know.

The Khmers left no record except in stone. Khmer architecture is unique, the characteristic features are the conical pyramidal towers and the ogival vaulted roofs; the increase in height from the circumference inward to the central tower, the stairways unlike the stairways of India, enclosed within the thickness of the walls, the sense of moderation of detail in statuary or in bas-relief, unlike Madura or other temples of India. These distinctive characteristics are entirely original. The Aryan did not bring them from India, there is no trace of Mussulman influence. The inspiration is not of the Far East. There is no suggestion of the tent-like, pagoda roof of the Chinese nor of the Islamic dome.

The French archaeologist, Tournereau, has traced fanciful analogies to the Khmer and Egyptian temples, and to the Khmer and Assyrian sculptures and bas-reliefs. This cannot be. There was no architecture in Cambodia prior to the Aryan invasion—this dismisses the supposition that the architects could have derived their model from the primitive Khomen or Malay. Yet, if the principles of Khmer architecture were introduced by the Hindus, how could they have introduced a style unknown in their own country? The Indian builders have never copied or adopted the salient features of the Khmer temple.

The Cambodian of today is not initiative or resourceful, just a complacent drudge. When the native builds a house he drives four piles into the earth, or perhaps six or eight, not more, and stretches across them a bamboo floor and a slanting roof, also of bamboo. No wonder that the Cambodians believe that Angkor Wat was conjured up out of the earth by giants or by the gods. And so, these buildings still keep their secret, in spite of all the books and treatises that have

been written, for the language of the builders is still undeciphered.

For more than half a century French savants have been working, industriously and enthusiastically, to uncover every source of material about the civilization and history of the Khmers. Virtually the only contemporary account—aside from the last story as it may be traced through the stone carved pictures on the palace walls—is contained in the notebook of a Chinese envoy who visited the capital of the Khmers during the height of its prestige. This notebook was discovered in China's archives and the gorgeous picture of pomp and luxury presented reads like the invention of an extravagant imagination.

The fascination of Angkor Wat is inexpressible. The temple is almost intact in spite of thirteen centuries and the ravages of encroaching forests. Its isolation, the mystery of its origin, its beauty of architecture, and the massive solidity of its stonework, can only be dimly suggested by illustration.

Angkor Wat stands in a walled enclosure of 400 acres, defended by a broad moat, traversed by causeways. One crosses a 1200-foot viaduct, 40 feet wide, and passes under a gateway guarded by huge stone lions, opening into an inner-raised causeway which leads to the main entrance.

The foundations, built of volcanic rock, are ten feet in height. The whole building, including the roof, is of stone without cement, so close fitting that the points in many places can scarcely be seen. This sandstone resembles marble in closeness and fineness of grain, and stands weathering admirably.

All these tons and tons of stone were brought from Pnom Coulen, nineteen miles away. How? Overland? Impossible. Probably Coulen and Angkor of that time were situated upon the margin of Lake Ton-le-Sap and barges went to and fro between them, carrying loads of stone to Angkor, but the triumphant for-

est has driven back the sea and left only a marsh.

The main details of the ground plan of the Wat are two encompassing galleries and the cruciform temple building proper. The four towers at the angles of the court are 150 feet and the central one 250 feet above the foundations. It is not until one enters the galleries and begins to measure distances relatively therefrom that the grandeur and impressiveness of the conception begins to make itself felt.

Angkor Wat is an oblong, 796 feet long and 588 feet wide, and within, the galleries form another oblong at a higher level. Within that again is still another oblong, also higher, so that the roof of the former is on a level with the base of the latter. Each corner of the last two terraces is adorned with an elaborate tower covered with carvings of seven-headed cobras, medallions, deities and chains of dancers.

The great tower which surmounts the central and highest part of the building is reached on four sides by distinctive stairways of high, steep steps from terrace to terrace, which contribute impressively to the general plan.

Centuries of tropical rains have washed away these steps until they are the merest ledges, and one climbs to the top with difficulty. The view from here, however, is well worth the effort. Miles of jungle stretch unbroken on to China. It is astonishing that with such profusion of ornament—stone tapestry, hundreds of stone-carved barred windows—the general impression is harmonious. One is struck by simplicity and restraint shown, though every inch of the galleries is richly carved in bas-reliefs.

On the second terrace there are 1025 yards of sculpture, half a mile of unbroken bas-relief. Hundreds and thousands of figures, as many as 50,000 are represented with little repetition. The warriors draw bows and slash swords in wildest fury and hate; the ferocity displayed in feature and gesture is most real-

istic. One wall, 350 feet long, depicts the battle scene between a Khmer king and his enemies—hundreds of fighters with shield and sword, on foot, on horseback, chariots and elephants, not one figure is passive. It is a battle in action.

Angkor Thom, the city, is three miles north of Angkor Wat. It is right in the heart of the forest, half smothered in the jungle. The sacred fig tree, or fromage, has overgrown the buildings, and arches of foliage interlace the arches of stone. The ruined city lacks the sublimity of the temple owing to this decay, but in wonder and mystery and suggestiveness, it transcends it. The city is spread over more than five square miles, and is nineteen times the size of Angkor Wat, the temple. One creeps through crumbling galleries in this city, scrambles over fallen pillars, and in the struggle to keep one's feet, one finds one's self clasping the knee of an elephant, or the waist of some Hindu goddess.

Everywhere one meets the cobra design and decoration, symbol of snake worship, the sacred seven-headed "Naga" with its fan-shaped head erect, the genius of Angkor. Sometimes it forms an immense horizontal balustrade supported by squat archers, its head the newel; or it rises lifelike from the center of a tank. Rows of them guard the terraces and causeways of Angkor, and figure on its friezes.

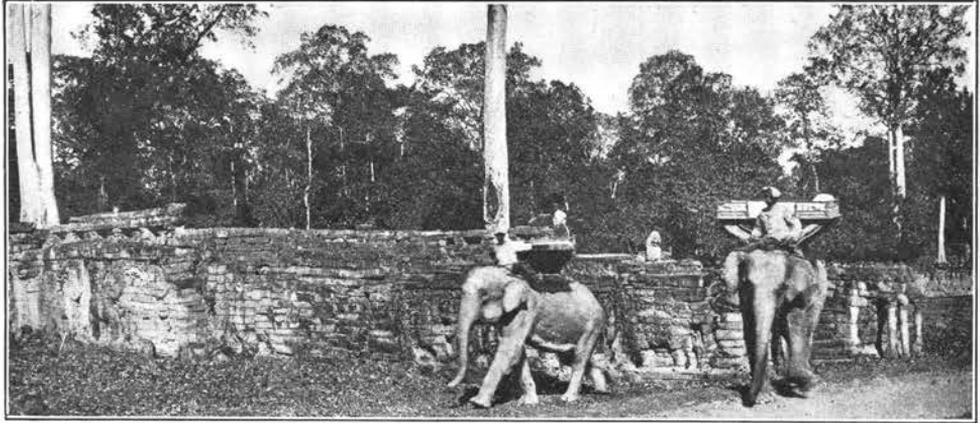
The Bayon is the most important ruin at Angkor Wat. It is supposed to have been the royal treasury though as yet no treasure has been found. In the Bayon, as in the Bapuon, with its 37 towers, the towers are grouped around a central sanctuary. Each tower has four Brahmanic faces, looking north, east, south and west.

There are five great portals to the city of Angkor Thom. Four of them mark the points of the compass and through them pass thoroughfares which converge at the Bayon, the fifth gate, in the eastern wall, was for the convenience of the palace. These gates are imposingly mag-

nificent. Beyond the north gate of the city walls are the ruins of Prah Khan, a temple built four centuries earlier than Angkor Wat and one which must have been almost as stupendous. Here, however, the jungle has been more ruthless in its conquest.

In concluding this little talk I wish for each one of you the opportunity to visit

the ruins of Angkor, but let me say from my own experience, that in order to know the uttermost of Angkor's enchantment, you must return to its galleries when the moonlight falls between their columns, then reverie will recreate as though by magic from the carved tapestry of gray sandstone the scene of a worldly magnificence rivaling the pomp of the Pharaohs.



*Elephants marching past the Elephant Terrace, Angkor.*