

Colonial Cambodia's 'Bad Frenchmen'

The rise of French rule and the life of
Thomas Caraman, 1840–87

Gregor Muller

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Colonial Cambodia's 'Bad Frenchmen'

At the same time a biography and a history of how Cambodia became colonized by the French in the nineteenth century, *Colonial Cambodia's 'Bad Frenchmen'* offers a captivating account of a little-known period of colonial history. Drawing on new materials from French, Vietnamese and Cambodian archives, it reconstructs a time during which France struggled to give meaning and substance to its protectorate over Cambodia. The book focuses on those sitting on the boundaries between the worlds of the colonizers and the colonized: indigenous interpreters, go-betweens, concubines and their *métis* children, and marginal Europeans who failed to fashion a proper colonial existence – *mauvais français* – notably Thomas Caraman. They all constituted a challenge to the colonial enterprise by muddling its social, cultural and racial boundaries. In its consideration of the critical role played by these groups, this book shifts away from governor-generals, grand discourses and the simple view of colonialism as 'colonizers' versus 'colonized', to explore how things actually worked themselves out on the ground. It examines in particular the 'civilizing mission' and educational initiatives; the slow destruction of the indigenous justice system; the policing of sexual relations between colonizers and colonized; the theft of Cambodian land and taxes by the colonizing power; and the brutal repression of resistance wherever and whenever it appeared. Overall, *Colonial Cambodia's 'Bad Frenchmen'* reveals the crucial role played by indigenous middlemen and marginal Europeans in the rise of the colonial state, and tells the fascinating tale of a Frenchman who came to represent everything that the colonial state dreaded.

Gregor Muller is an archivist at the National Archives of Cambodia and a delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross. He lives in Cambodia on a Mekong island near Phnom Penh.

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For Ingrid

Il est de ces gens qu'on connaît pour les avoir vus partout; on leur serre la main, on leur parle, on les écoute . . . Qui sont-ils, d'où viennent-ils, que font-ils? On se demande un instant, et ne trouvant pas la réponse on n'y pense plus.

He is one of those people that seem familiar because you've seen them everywhere; you shake hands, talk to them, listen to them . . . Who are they, where do they come from, what do they do? For a brief moment you wonder and then, left without an answer, you do not think of them again.

(Antony W. Klobukowski, Chief of Cabinet of the
Saigon Governor, 1885)

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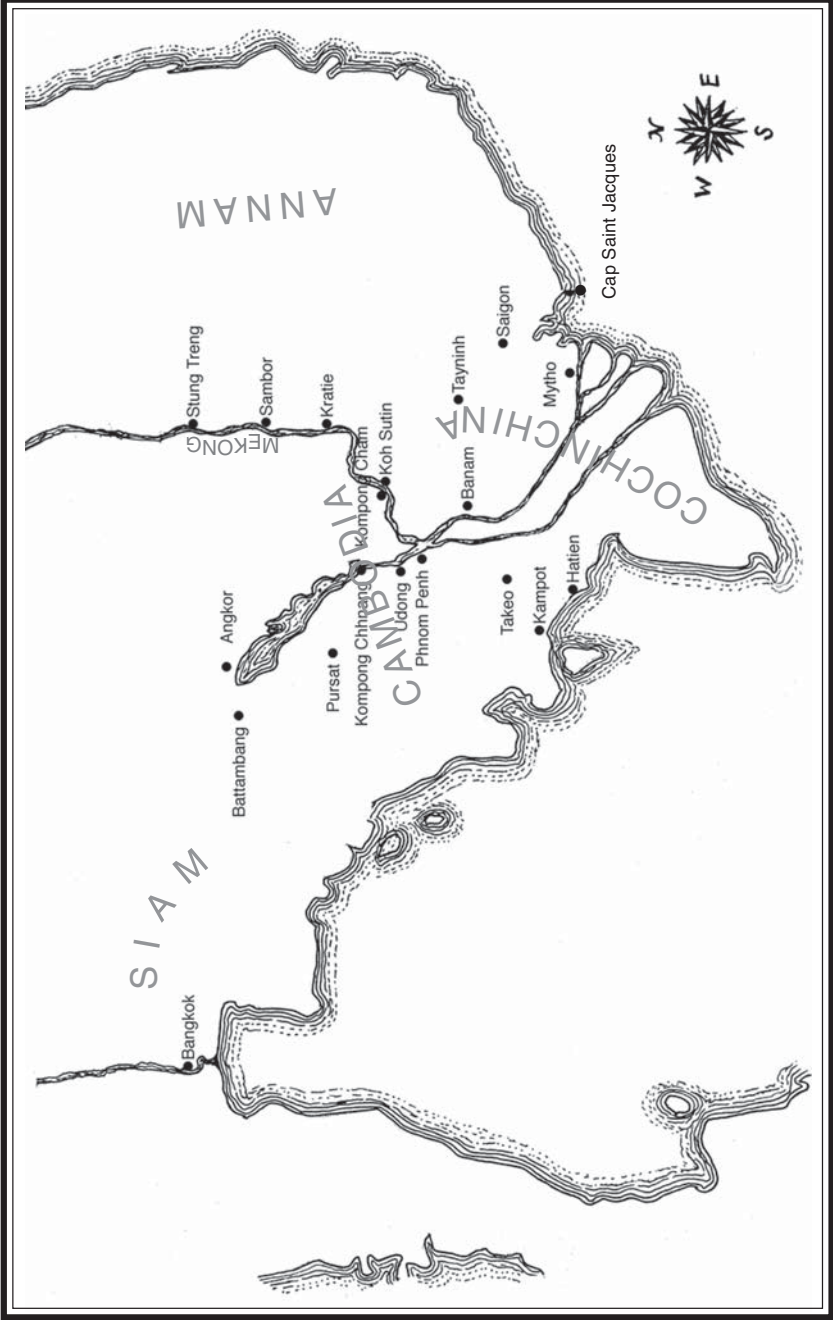
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Abbreviations

ANC	Archives Nationales du Cambodge, Phnom Penh
ANV2	Archives Nationales du Vietnam II, Saigon
AD	Archives diplomatiques, Quai d'Orsay, Paris
CARAN	Archives Nationales de France, Centre d'accueil et de recherche, Paris
CAOM	Centre des archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence
MEP	Archives des Missions Etrangères de Paris
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew, London
ASEMI	Fond documentaire Asie du sud-est, Madagascar, Iles de l'Océan indien, Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis
Aymonier Papers	Archives de la Société Asiatique, Paris: Collection Etienne Aymonier
Leclère's Diary	Bibliothèque municipale d'Alençon: Ancien fonds, manuscrits: Collection Adhémar Leclère, ms no. 696: Voyage au Cambodge 1886–87
GGI	Fonds des Amiraux et du Gouvernement Général
RSC	Fonds de la Résidence Supérieure du Cambodge
SL	Fonds des services locaux
Lr	Letter



Frontispiece Map of Cochinchina and Cambodia.

Introduction

I would have imagined her differently. Blonde and blue-eyed, with a round and open smiling face, she did not look like a typical southerner. German, maybe, or Scandinavian, I thought. “Madame Thomas-Caraman?” I asked cautiously. Neither the door nor the bell indicated the name of the inhabitant of this small two-story house, number twelve on a street off a boulevard that separated the historic town center from more recent neighborhoods. “*Mais oui, c’est bien moi,*” she replied warmly, ushering me into the hallway. From archival documents, I had calculated that she must be sixty-three years old, but she looked younger. A face without wrinkles, carefully enhanced with makeup, a necklace and patterned blouse matching the color of her eyes.

Once inside, it took me a few seconds to get accustomed to the dark. Because of the summer heat, all the shutters had been closed and the room was immersed in the golden light of an electric chandelier above our heads. Another woman appeared in the doorway to the living room, her frail figure slightly bent. “*Et voilà, ma mère, Madame Croizet,*” my host said happily, introducing me to her mother. More greetings.

I was led upstairs into a small room on the second floor. Still no daylight, the shutters closed, a naked bulb hanging over the table. The room was wallpapered with a pattern of flowers and leaves. There was a piano, a fireplace that had not been used for a long time, and a large mirror. Decorative porcelain plates lined the walls, and bouquets of artificial flowers stood on two small tables. A television set and an old radio were flanked by two armchairs, a cupboard and a small library. As I sat down at the table, I noticed papers and photographs piled up on the transparent plastic covering the tablecloth underneath. “*Vous allez être content, Monsieur Muller, je vous ai fait tout un dossier, vous allez voir,*” my host said cheerfully.

We talked about Cambodia. I asked her about her deceased aunt Simone. “You know, she had always been ashamed of her Cambodian heritage,” Marie-Thérèse said. “She never told me anything unless I asked. My father was the same: he never mentioned Cambodia, neither to me nor to my mother. Not a single word. You see, my family never talked about the past. I am the only one who’s different. I’m proud to have Cambodian blood in my veins.” She described her father: “He was violent. He always wanted a son to pass the name of the Thomas-Caraman on to another generation, but I remained my mother’s only child. He and his family could never accept that and took out their anger on my mother and

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me. One day, my father hit my mother so hard in the face that she fell over and almost lost consciousness. Since that day, she suffers from headaches and vertigo, a chronic condition that no one managed to cure. Eventually, she filed for a divorce. You know, my father was a *malheureux*, a tortured man who, in turn, had never been loved by his mother, and was thus unable to give love. There's always been a tradition of violence in the family of the Thomas-Caraman. Believe me, from one generation to the next there has been nothing but sadness. It is as if the name was cursed. You see, I'm the last one in the line, and once I'm gone, the name of the Thomas-Caraman will vanish from this earth for good. I'm not sad about this, quite the reverse. The thought to me is a relief."

We talked about the year she spent in North Africa as a young child, Bamako and Dakar, and then again about her father: "In the end, we left him there. When my mother and I came back to France, I was like an *enfant sauvage*. I was afraid of anything that reminded me of my father. For the first six months of my stay, I did not dare leave the house for fear of the many white men in the street. Whenever I caught sight of one I screamed out loud. *Vous voyez, j'en ai trop subi là-bas*. I screamed so much my neighbors were convinced that I was possessed by the devil. It's the dog that saved me. The dog never did anything bad to me. He calmed me, relieved me of my pain. Animals and nature are my real family. I always felt closer to animals than to humans. When I walk in the forest, I sometimes take a deep breath and feel as if I could become one with nature around me. Later I was told that this is an idea that is common in Buddhism. So there you go, I've been a Buddhist all this time without knowing!"

We reviewed the photographs and family souvenirs on the table, old yellowing picture postcards and portraits, men and women facing the camera, a wedding party, tombstones. She showed me the medals that one of her ancestors was awarded in the colonial service. There were letters from different periods and a couple of small envelopes from the late nineteenth century, addressed to the family by King Norodom of Cambodia. Proudly, she took a golden pocket watch from a box. It was a piece of rare beauty with the Cambodian coat of arms engraved on one side and a dedication from King Norodom to a family member on the other. "You know, this whole thing about Cambodia," she picked up the conversation again, "I have always felt attached to this place, although I have never been there. My father was born there, and so was my grandfather. But it's the mystery of my great-grandfather and his life over there that has intrigued me since my youth. I know hardly anything about him. My aunt dismissed him as megalomaniac, as a fantasist. They left me nothing of his papers. I inherited nothing from my father's side; where all the money and property went only God knows. The one thing I managed to save were a few pages that had been stored in a rat-infested basement, which I believe were written by my great-grandfather. *Regardez, voici ce que j'ai trouvé*," she said, pointing to a small pile of brown papers, which contained an essay on Thai grammar, according to the title. I recognized the handwriting. It was indeed that of her great-grandfather Frédéric. And while I flipped through the pages, she added: "I always felt that there was a link between him and me across the generations; that in several respects we were very much alike. You see, *lui, c'est le seul à avoir grâce à mes yeux*, the only one on my father's side that I can respect."¹

I had first heard of Frédéric Thomas-Caraman, my host's great-grandfather, five years earlier, when I was reading Milton Osborne's thesis on the early years of the French colonial empire in Southeast Asia.² Osborne's account, published in 1969, is based on extensive research in French and Cambodian archives. On page 151, a footnote referred to a particular file in the National Archives of Cambodia which, according to Osborne, contained a large quantity of letters documenting the life and commercial tribulations of one Frédéric Caraman from his arrival in the kingdom until his death a quarter of a century later. While Osborne's text reserved only a couple of passing remarks for Caraman, the footnote aroused my curiosity.

From Osborne's text, it appeared that Caraman was a marginal figure, an adventurer and carpetbagger at the fringes of the colonial project, who made a living through occasional deliveries of Parisian wares to King Norodom. He was neither a heroic officer nor a famous administrator; he was not an accomplished scholar and not a celebrated explorer. In fact, Caraman had achieved nothing worth recording in the annals of official historiography. At the time I was developing an interest in Frenchmen who had spent their lives on the fringes of colonial society and in the ways the colonial state dealt with them, in the belief that such a perspective would open up revealing views on the colonial period more generally. From Osborne's short reference it appeared that Caraman might have been just such a Frenchman.

In January 1997, I arrived in Phnom Penh and set out for the National Archives. I was unsure what to expect. Since Osborne's research in the 1960s, war and the four-year reign of Democratic Kampuchea had ravaged the country. I remembered pictures of the rubble of the National Bank, the symbol of the old order, blown to pieces in April 1975 when Phnom Penh was about to fall to the Khmers Rouges. I recalled stories about stacks of documents taken from the ministries and scattered across the streets of the deserted capital. I had read chilling accounts of the evacuation of Phnom Penh, the persecution of the local intelligentsia, the destruction and suffering wrought on Cambodians by a murderous regime. All this made me doubt that the National Archives had survived undamaged. My doubts seemed all the more justified since no new scholarly work on the colonial period based on recent research at the National Archives in Cambodia had been published since Osborne's book.³ Given all this, I was surprised when an employee at the National Library in Phnom Penh directed me to a building behind the library, asserting firmly that this was the National Archives. The building appeared somewhat neglected but otherwise in relatively good shape.

Inside, the smell of old paper filled the air. I was on the ground floor of a three-story building, packed from top to bottom with documents. Books and archival boxes lined shelves to the right and the left, while bundles of documents were piled in corners and aisles. From behind one of the shelves, a middle-aged woman approached and politely inquired about the reasons for my visit. Madame Chhem Neang, as it turned out, was vice-director of the archives and head of the repository. She soon led me upstairs to the second floor, where I was introduced to Mom Chien and Peter Arfanis, whom I interrupted as they were crouching on the floor sorting Chinese-language newspapers.

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I explained that I was, in addition to other things, looking for a file footnoted in a book by Osborne. In reply, I was told that although the file was probably still here, it was not sure that I would be able to find it. The archives had suffered from neglect, but had escaped systematic destruction during the political turmoil of the past few decades. Most of the documents from the colonial period had survived, but the catalogue of these files had mysteriously disappeared. It was thus possible to locate files only through intuition, since no records remained that could have revealed the content of thousands of bundles and disordered stacks of documents that made up the archives' colonial holdings.⁴

I left that day with Peter's assurance that he would have a look and see if he could find the file I wanted. When I returned the following day, much to my surprise, I found a thick bundle of documents sitting on a table in the reading area. "Found your file," Peter announced, welcoming me with a smile. It is from this happy moment that this book slowly began to emerge.

Later that year, I returned to Phnom Penh to help Peter and the archives staff in their effort to re-catalog the colonial holdings. In the course of the initial twelve months that I spent at the repository, and during further research at the National Archives of Vietnam in Saigon and in numerous archives across France, I encountered Frédéric Caraman's characteristic handwriting time and again. Four years of research unearthed more than 1500 pages of correspondence either written by him or addressed to him, or directly relating to his dealings. Altogether, I had found on average about one letter for every ten days of his life in the colonies, from his arrival in 1865 to his death in 1887. This makes Caraman easily one of the best-documented "bad colonists" – to borrow a term coined by Nicholas Thomas and Richard Eves – who has ever lived.⁵

Why call him a "bad colonist"? Although the sheer volume of Caraman's correspondence from his time in Cambodia is exceptional in itself, that alone would justify neither writing his biography nor taking his life as a basis for exploring the history of the early French Protectorate. What else can Caraman claim, other than being a prolific letter writer, to make his story worth telling?

Until quite recently, Caraman's experiences would have gone unmentioned in most scholarly accounts of colonialism. Earlier accounts usually presented colonialism as a history of European expansion through diplomacy and wars, focusing on metropolitan governments, the tactics of European political leaders and colonial governors, and the operations of contending armies. Their perspective has since been challenged by new approaches, today conveniently grouped under the term 'Colonial Studies', which have greatly enlarged and refined our understanding of colonialism, its inner workings and its driving forces.

In contrast to earlier accounts, more recent narratives have attempted to reclaim the experience of the colonized, not as a picturesque backdrop to accompany tales of Western heroism but as a history of resistance and accommodation to the challenge of occupation in its own right. A history of men was opened to the role of women in the colonial process. Where once colonial policy was thought to be designed in the European capitals, new perspectives stressed the active role of local administrators and populations in overseas territories. Finally, closer analysis of the agents of colonization revealed that they were not made up of a uniform group of administrators from elite backgrounds, but of

“eclectic communities deeply divided by local political frictions, class antagonisms, or competing cultural claims.”⁶ Europeans at the margins of such colonial communities became legitimate objects of scholarly interest.⁷

Such new approaches to colonial history were motivated in part by identification with the oppressed and indignation over the way in which large parts of humanity had been written out of narratives on colonialism. If today’s historians could not rectify the injustice and cruelty of colonial rule, they could at least work toward ensuring that those who had been deprived of their rights to land and freedom would not be deprived of their proper place in the history books.

Can one claim, in this light, that Caraman and his fellow merchants formed part of the mass of silenced voices that today’s historians need to recover from the sources? To put it like that would be an aberration. Caraman was by no means a member of the oppressed class; he was a European in a land that was to be colonized by his peers. This in itself would make him an oppressor, although he was a remarkably ineffective one. Much of his writing embodies the then dominant ideology: Caraman saw himself as part of a grand Western campaign to bring knowledge, technology, morality and order to degenerate Oriental societies unable in their decadence to realize their own potential.

But Caraman was also a colossal failure in projects that attempted to concretize this ideology. In countless commercial, industrial, agricultural, even educational ventures, he not only presaged future French designs for Cambodia but managed to fail spectacularly at all of them. In addition, his correspondence suggests character flaws that prevent us from easily identifying with him: he appears to have been a schemer, a narcissist and a liar. And yet, reading his letters from the periphery of the French Empire, at times one cannot help sympathizing with him.

When Caraman decided to emigrate, he envisioned a life of ease, but he never had it easy. Everything he touched invariably turned to dust. With each new failure, Caraman redoubled his efforts to achieve the kind of social and professional success that colonial beliefs of the time promised him, in the process taking these beliefs further and further, to the very edge of reason and common sense. Thus the tension between Caraman’s ideas of colonial triumph and his failure to live up to what was expected of him grew larger over the years, as did the feelings of embarrassment and ridicule that came with it. Caraman was painfully aware of this, as was the colonial government, which gradually moved from trying to limit the damage he inflicted on French prestige to ostracizing him from respectable society. Increasingly, Caraman found himself at the margins of local society and ruling ideology, and of what it meant to be French in Cambodia. This marginality makes his correspondence fascinating reading.

More recently, some authors have begun to rediscover their traditional objects of inquiry “from the margins,” that is to say by approaching them from their outer boundaries rather than focusing on their supposedly intrinsic essence.⁸ The outer boundaries, where definitions and categories stop being clear, fizzle out, and threaten to become ambivalent, became the focus of the kind of scrutiny that earlier had been reserved for the ‘typical’ and the ‘exemplary.’ In these new approaches, the margins were seen as the place where the core of an idea, a

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definition, or a category reasserts itself by deciding what has to remain outside of it, in order to protect the idea's inner coherence. They were recognized as sites of contest, of "exclusion and inclusion, integration and suppression of certain meanings" at the expense of others.⁹ Applied to the real world, margins were the sites where things, narratives, and people were excluded or included, integrated or suppressed if they happened to find themselves sitting on those margins. By focusing on 'marginals', on those living on the outer edge of particular communities, one can thus not only attempt to do justice to experiences and narratives that have rarely been told, but also learn a great deal about the society that chose to marginalize them in the first place.

In this sense, the experience of the colonial encounter described in Caraman's correspondence holds some surprises, which form an odd contrast to the kind of colonialism presented by some contemporary scholarship. As Ann Stoler has pointed out, much recent work has probed the nature of colonial discourse and the politics of language, while assuming that colonial 'texts' express "a shared European mentality, the sentiments of a unified, conquering elite":

With few exceptions, even when we have attended to concrete capitalist relations of production and exchange, we have taken colonialism and its European agents as an abstract force, as a structure imposed on local practice. . . . As a result, colonizers and their communities are frequently treated as diverse but unproblematic, viewed as unified in a fashion that would disturb our ethnographic sensibilities if applied to ruling elites of the colonized. Finally, the assumption that colonial political agendas are self-evident precludes our examination of the cultural politics of the communities in which colonizers lived.¹⁰

The cultural politics of settler communities tend to be overlooked by critiques of colonialism that are not grounded in the study of localized and historically specific colonial theaters. Instead, a faceless machine is proposed, which appears not only as exploitative but also as extremely effective in imposing its will on indigenous societies, whether through open military aggression or less visible 'discursive' means. A unified society of oppressors is then complemented by a neat dichotomy between colonizers and colonized. However, just like the unity of the white oppressors, this dichotomy appears less clear as soon as one descends from the heights of discourse analysis to the level of real life encounters between concrete individuals.

Caraman's story and the stories of his fellow merchants in Phnom Penh painfully illustrate that colonial rule in Cambodia was no well-oiled monolithic campaign uniting military, bureaucratic and economic aims in any preordained way. Instead, early colonization is shown to be a piecemeal affair composed of scattered and haphazard efforts, often initiated by individuals and sometimes resting on unexpected alliances across the ethnic divide. As such, these narratives are, I believe, worth telling. The goal is not to trivialize the injustice of colonial rule. But if these stories remain untold there is a risk, as Nicholas Thomas notes, that "not simply . . . a dimension of colonialism might be neglected, but that its coherence can be radically overstated."¹¹

Caraman is a peculiar example of the disjuncture described by Thomas between colonial expectations and early realities, and of growing despair among colonists who “found the space and social entity of the colony to be intangible, imperceptible and constantly untrue to the representations that might be fashioned of it.”¹² The more success failed to materialize, the more painfully Phnom Penh’s pioneers became aware that their images of Cambodia, of the indigenous society, and of their role as colonizers proved inadequate. The more they noticed the cleavage between the glorious role that the colonial credo assigned to them and the misery of their daily existence, the stronger became their anxiety. Caraman was no exception. Throughout his life, one can observe his mounting impatience with a Cambodia that declined to live up to expectations.

Interestingly, however, this tension is mirrored by yet another disparity: if failure was all that Caraman and the first generation of pioneers knew, it remains a fact that, somehow, at the end of their lives (toward 1900) Cambodia was firmly in the grip of the French Empire. As in the case of their visions of grandeur and their actual circumstances, a rift is evident between the failure of the early *colon* and the advance of state power. In a peculiar way, the two seem intertwined, as if the failure of the individual served the purpose of the state: as if settler failure somehow facilitated the triumph of imperialism.

The colonial authorities themselves felt certain that there was indeed such a link between the pioneers’ misery and broadening French power, albeit in negative form. At a very early stage, they expressed their indignation over the generally “pitiable reputation” of Phnom Penh’s European community and their “filthy affairs.”¹³ In their view, it was “a disgrace for France to count among [its citizenry] miserable fellows of this kind.”¹⁴ The colonial establishment’s consistently hostile terminology for their fellow countrymen in the Cambodian capital suggests that, to the former, these pioneers were anything but a *quantité négligeable*. They were a threat to French prestige and to the credibility of colonial ideology.

In the French theory of things, the colonial enterprise was motivated by the *mission civilisatrice*, a notion that transcended simple calculations of profits and returns. In this view, the early colonists were the apostles of this mission, the pioneers of colonialism, the carriers of what Kipling called “the white man’s burden.”¹⁵ If these men made no headway in even the most humble of their development projects, if they proved unable to outdo their Chinese competitors, if they were forced to live in shacks shoddier than those of their indigenous neighbors, if they had to rely on their indigenous mistresses for sustenance, how did that affect the myth of white intellectual, cultural, and racial superiority over the *indigène*? What, precisely, were the French doing in Indochina if they were not uplifting the natives? How could the French claim that it was for the Cambodians’ benefit to be ruled by a European power be legitimized, if the only immediate benefit to Cambodia seemed to be the presence of a motley crew of barely literate would-be merchants, living below the poverty line?

Between the lines of official reports and letters describing the state of colonization of the Khmer Kingdom in those early days, one senses a latent fear of ridicule on the part of the colonial authorities. Embarrassment over their

miserable compatriots in Phnom Penh was compounded by lack of enthusiasm on the part of indigenous society for what the French considered the superiority of Western civilization. Confronted with French claims to dominance, Cambodians neither surrendered nor fought back but instead turned away and went about their business, smiling politely and paying no further attention. Presented with the golden opportunity to be liberated from oppression and a feudal regime by rallying around the new masters and the promises of modernity, they seemed to prefer the status quo. When called upon to follow the French lead and help in overhauling the state apparatus to make it more efficient, the Khmer elite declined to respond. And if each of the successive French government representatives lost patience with the sluggish pace of the colonization process, proclaiming instead sweeping reforms, those proclamations were duly made but heeded by no one. Under the shiny surface of French imperial discourse, continued native indifference vis-à-vis the new era that they had ushered in slowly corroded French self-confidence. They had come to colonize, to civilize, to modernize, and no one seemed to care. It was hard to imagine an outcome to their colonial endeavor worse than this.

The Phnom Penh School, an early embodiment of the French ‘civilizing mission’, was a faithful indicator of the limited success the French enjoyed. Founded by Caraman with the Protectorate’s blessing, it grew only haltingly and never managed to produce the loyal native partisans of the French cause that its founders had hoped for. For most of the early period, the colonial authorities therefore remained dependent on a tiny group of Khmer and Vietnamese who, unlike their peers, had chosen at an early stage to throw in their lot with the French. This tiny group procured materials and resources for early French administrators, negotiated on behalf of the French with mandarins and commoners, gathered information on subjects of government interest, and translated an unintelligible environment, both culturally and linguistically, to the newcomers. Starting out as go-betweens between the colonial government, the royal court, and indigenous society, they developed over time into the nucleus of a new ‘national elite’ of French making that would come to dominate Cambodian politics in the early twentieth century. But for many years, they remained the exception: the overwhelming majority of the Khmer elite showed little interest in what the French had to offer in those early days (Chapter 3).

At the time, the French lacked adequate resources for patronage to persuade a greater number of Khmer to change sides. The authority to grant use of land, forests, and rivers, the right to award titles and government posts, the capacity to decide disputes and hand down verdicts, the power to punish and to reward – all of these were still in the hands of the king and his entourage. Social promotion, economic security, and legal assurances were not to be had outside the traditional network of patron–client linkages that made up the fabric of local society. During the first decades of the Protectorate, the French quest to dominate was successful only where they managed to reverse this balance and secure a greater share of patronage resources for deals with the local elite. The Cambodian justice system provides an example of how the French, through manipulation of perceptions and legal categories, managed to expand their influence over increasingly larger parts of the population. But even here, it was less thirst for power than the

fear of ridicule that served as a driving force for the advance of French rule. What resulted in French dominance over the Cambodian judiciary had its beginnings in a desire to restrain unruly Western merchants whose behavior often verged on the criminal, or was at least perceived as unbecoming for those who considered themselves beacons of progress and civilization in a savage land (Chapter 4).

Among the unbecoming features of Western merchant life, the most annoying in the official view were perhaps their domestic arrangements. European households in Phnom Penh at the time were barely recognizable as such. Virtually all Western traders had their quarters along the capital's main road, the 'Grande Rue', side by side with Chinese and Indian merchants, Cambodian and Siamese mandarins, market vendors, fishermen and coolies in a bustling world of shops, brothels, and gambling dens. They usually lived under the same roof with an indigenous wife or concubine, various in-laws and a growing brood of mixed-raced children. They did business with locals, ate their food and shared their bedsteads with them. They were prone to drink and generally a boisterous lot. New in town, they could be heard boasting about the grand development schemes and business ventures they would launch, and after a year or so of successive failures one could see them borrowing money from their Chinese neighbors to be able to buy a meal. This was not what metropolitan empire-builders had in mind when they first envisioned a French presence in Indochina.

Through their ineptitude in business and lack of character, the underlying criticism went, Phnom Penh's European traders muddled the rigid racial boundaries and social hierarchies without which colonialism was unthinkable. They blurred the distinction between the worlds of the colonizer and the colonized, and instead of uplifting the natives threatened to sink to their level, and below. This posed a problem were the French to maintain their claims to preeminence and preserve the prestige of the *Grande Nation* away from home. As things were, it did not seem immediately evident what the French could invoke to justify their privileged position if they proved to be neither more knowledgeable, nor more cultured, nor more effective than the natives, and if the only remaining distinction, their white skin, barely altered the dark complexion of the children of the colonists and their indigenous companions.

In response, beginning in the early 1880s, the colonial government began to police the domestic worlds of its compatriots. Previously tolerated long-term relationships with local women were declared undesirable and replaced in official discourse by the ideal of the all-white couple, he a public servant, or perhaps a successful plantation owner, and she a docile housewife. Locals were tolerated in those households only as 'boys', cleaners, laundresses and gardeners, in positions several levels below the one where their white masters planned to install themselves.

In the new order of things, a Frenchman who respected himself would abstain from sexual relations with locals. If he chose otherwise he would visit a brothel, out of sight of the public, rather than engage in a longer-term relationship with an indigenous mistress. More importantly, sexual relations across racial boundaries were not to leave a visible trace in the shape of mixed-raced offspring. From the 1880s, the colonial government thus began to outlaw concubinage, regulate

prostitution, and ‘solve’ the ‘problem’ of the *métis*, the children of the first generation of colonists, by sending them to state-sponsored orphanages where they could be ‘redeemed’ and prepared for a proper white existence (Chapter 5).

Beyond creating embarrassment and provoking new social policies, the early traders also contributed to the government’s rethinking of its economic plans for the kingdom. Initially, official statements asserted that the Protectorate had been established to stabilize the reign of King Norodom, and to restrain Siamese political ambitions, which, in the French perception, concealed those of the British. Within this framework, the exploitation of Cambodia’s economic potential was left to private Western initiative. The colonial government never made any serious effort to exploit raw materials, apart from the purchase of timber and chalk from local traders. When it became increasingly clear that the takeover of the domestic economy by French capitalists would not come to pass anytime soon, French long-term objectives shifted.

If the local economy could not be taken over, at least it could be taxed. Taxes would create the necessary revenue to make the Protectorate a profitable affair, while efforts to get to Cambodia’s wealth of natural resources matured. This revised approach meant that France would have to gain political power in the kingdom. Only if they controlled the state organs would successive Saigon Governors be in a position to draw revenue from Cambodian taxes, customs, land, and the state monopolies on opium, alcohol and gambling. It also implied that Saigon could now dispense with the pioneer society. Instead, a new breed of colonizers was needed: one that placed itself at a safe distance from the *indigène*. The art of taxation requires a relationship to local populations far more vertical in nature than the business and personal relationships of the pioneers. This allowed for the entrance of the colonial bureaucrat, a species that appears in Cambodia in the 1880s, at a time when the age of the pioneers was drawing to a close. The last traders of old stock unable to find a profitable business activity were incorporated around the same time into the colonial government’s rapidly expanding administration. The town’s European lumpenproletariat was thus drained, and the remnants transformed into Phnom Penh’s first force of small customs inspectors and municipal policemen (Chapter 6).

There remained Caraman. He and a handful of his fellow merchants had withstood the tide but found themselves increasingly isolated in a colonial society undergoing rapid transformation. Unable or unwilling to adhere to new standards of decency and bourgeois comportment, they drifted further towards the margins of Phnom Penh’s white enclave. Government subsidies, which had kept them afloat in previous years, thinned to a trickle and eventually ceased completely. Respectable residents and new members to the community were warned by the authorities to stay away from their unwholesome influence. Money became exceedingly scarce. The only thing that Caraman and his friends secured in abundance was the scorn and mockery of their fellow Frenchmen and their indigenous collaborators. To them, Caraman and his peers were henceforth “*des mauvais français*” (bad Frenchmen), a term coined by the colonial authorities as part of a systematic campaign to ‘shame’ unredeemable elements and political opponents, while securing the notion of ‘honor’ and respectability for the authorities’ supporters.

In the face of increasing government hostility, Caraman and his peers were thus forced to reconsider their political allegiances, gravitating slowly towards the traditionalist faction among the mandarin and the royal court, which opposed the growing French interference in the kingdom. In the wake of the so-called Thomson Reforms of 1884, which would have signed over most of Cambodia's state resources to the French, King Norodom and his allies enlisted Caraman and some of his friends to orchestrate a partly overt, partly covert campaign to thwart French official designs. Caraman authored several pamphlets denouncing the politics of the Saigon Governor and helped King Norodom draft a letter of complaint to the French parliament. Other members of the first generation of colonists embarked on steamers for Paris to lobby the *métropole* for the kingdom's independence and the removal of the Saigon Governor.

When war broke out the following year, the colonial government ordered Caraman to Saigon and put him under house arrest. From being threats to colonial ideology and French prestige, Caraman and his peers had evolved into enemies of the colonial state. More than ever, Saigon Governors believed that they had reason to label their compatriots in Phnom Penh "*des mauvais français*." Meanwhile, what was left of the promises of the French *mission civilisatrice*, a notion that Caraman had enthusiastically (if somewhat insincerely) subscribed to, was shot to bits on the battlefields of the Cambodian countryside (Chapter 7).

Thus, in the history of the early Protectorate the lives of the first settlers and the establishment of colonial rule are entangled in multiple ways and they are therefore studied alongside each other in this book. The biographies of Caraman and his peers show that in subjugating and regulating the peoples of the Far East, the colonizers had first to subjugate and regulate their own unruly peers. Colonizing Cambodia was not only about differences in race between colonizers and colonized but also about differences in class among those who set out to colonize others. Caraman and his fellow traders' position at the margins of colonial society offers interesting perspectives on such mechanisms of control and exclusion. Their life stories provide us with a window into the small cosmopolitan world of Phnom Penh in the early days of the Protectorate and with unauthorized views of the inner workings of the colonial government and its quest for power in Cambodia.

The following chapters are structured in different but parallel ways, reflecting of the study's biographical and analytical approach. Caraman's life story serves as the thread of the narrative from Chapter 1 to Chapter 7, taking him from his youth in central France to his emigration in the 1860s to his death in Saigon in 1887. The analysis of early colonial rule in Cambodia, by contrast, is organized thematically. In a first step, the narrative takes us on a tour of the political and ideological environments in Paris and Saigon in the early 1860s and to a small town in central France where Frédéric Thomas-Caraman's ambitions, as a boy, to become a colonist had first taken shape (Chapter 1). I then provide a rough sketch of Phnom Penh and its many different communities on the eve of the Protectorate and introduce readers to the Cambodian monarchy and the way the royal administration used to run the country (Chapter 2).

Subsequently, five areas that I find particularly revealing with regard to French encroachment on Cambodian politics and society are explored. These themes are

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education, justice, sexuality, *la mise en valeur* (exploitation) of Cambodia's resources and, lastly, war and the patriotic honor/shame binaries to which it gives birth. One by one, these themes are investigated in Chapters 3 to 7. As the biographical narration progresses from chapter to chapter, Caraman's wide-ranging activities touch upon each of these areas. At the intersections, the narrative elaborates on the given theme to include a more comprehensive account of the subject beyond biographical information. In this manner, Caraman's life story comes to exemplify the wider themes under consideration, while these, in turn, deliver the political, social, and cultural context to his biographical account.

1 Ideas and origins, 1840–67

The making of a nobleman

It was a Monday afternoon in early January 1865 when the steamer *Impératrice Eugénie* approached Saigon harbor. At 1500 tons, the majestic liner of the Messageries Impériales loomed tall over the small flotilla of ships anchored off the banks of the Saigon River. Passing the construction site of the floating docks, several warships and the Admiral's own vessel, the steamer moved smoothly upstream along the harbor front. At the end of the main pier, a large crowd of spectators observed the ship as it moved past them and pulled towards the docks of the Messageries. Opposite a small canal known as the *arroyo chinois*, which marked the end of the harbor front, the Messageries' docks jutted out at a right angle into the harbor basin. At the mouth of the canal next to the docks, the river teemed with small barges and pirogues gathering around the steamer and offering to take passengers and luggage to the landing pier. The ambiance among the spectators was cheerful and expectant. As they watched the ship and the disembarking passengers, the feeling of relief that the *Impératrice* had finally arrived was almost palpable. The ship had been overdue for several days, and rumors had spread that it had suffered a calamity at sea.¹

In fact, the *Impératrice* had encountered a series of mishaps during its journey from Suez to Saigon. Delays began in the Red Sea, on the way to Aden, when the poor quality of the coal resulted in a lower traveling speed than expected. Further delays for similar reasons followed on the leg to Ceylon, leading to a shortage of food and beverages on board. First class passengers, already unhappy with the quality and preparation of their meals, complained bitterly but to no avail. To add to the misfortune, a smallpox epidemic wrought havoc among the crew below decks. When a passenger's Indian servant succumbed to the disease, fear set in among those living in the upper decks. The panic was only temporarily calmed when sick crewmembers were evacuated in Ceylon. On its final leg to Singapore and Saigon, the steamer was battered by monsoon winds, culminating in a violent storm off the Cochinchina coast near the Cap Saint Jacques. Given this succession of events, it can be assumed that most of the passengers were happy to leave a boat that seemed haunted by bad luck.²

Among the disembarking passengers was a young Frenchman, twenty-four years of age. He appeared tall and imposing as he stood on the pier, surrounded by fellow travelers, company agents, local merchants, and Vietnamese and Chinese porters loading and unloading cargo. He had a pleasant face, with a long

nose and fine moustache. Under a tuft of chestnut-brown hair, a pair of watchful eyes observed the commotion of people and cargo around him. He must have been elegantly dressed. And as he walked toward the horse carriages waiting to take passengers from the pier to their hotels, his bearing and manner of speaking may have set him further apart from the noisy crowd. Not to distinguish himself would have been inappropriate for a man of his standing. For after all, Frédéric Thomas de Caraman was a count, not a simple commoner. From what we know, he made every effort always to make that perfectly clear to his environment.³

Moreover, Count Frédéric Caraman had not come to Saigon on vacation. During the long journey from France, he had read countless books and articles and conversed at length with fellow travelers in order to prepare himself for the mission he had been charged with. Under the patronage of the Ministry of Education, he was to collect animal specimens and local artifacts for Parisian museums, among them prestigious institutions such as the Museum of Natural History. Those who had sent Count Caraman on his voyage did not know, however, that he also had other, more pragmatic, projects on his mind. In his baggage, he carried two letters from a local dignitary, Pétrus Truong-vinh-Ky, detailing common plans to launch a wide range of business ventures in other parts of the Kingdom of Annam further north, which at the time were not yet under French control.⁴

Caraman's first concern was to find proper lodging. The choice in Saigon was limited. To his right, on the main quay facing the river, the restaurant of Miss Marrot featured a couple of furnished rooms, offering "all the luxury and the comfort one could wish for" as well as a billiard room. Next to her establishment the Café de Paris was able to lodge a few guests. A few meters further down the pier, the Rue Catinat branched off to the left. This tree-lined boulevard was home to the Hôtel du Commerce, an establishment already several years old and popular with Saigon's French community because of its large selection of Parisian newspapers.⁵

The count opted to rent a room in a lodging house on the Rue du Grand Canal, parallel to the Rue Catinat and closer to the piers of the Messageries. Rue du Grand Canal was located in Saigon's commercial district next to the main market. On the ground floor of the modest two-story brick buildings lining the street on both sides, a good many shops were open for business. Next door to Count Caraman's temporary home, the Grand Bazar Parisien and Miss Mille's "shop of beverages, tinned food, Parisian and any other wares" were catering to a European clientele. Monsieur and Madame Nogaroles had opened their "Novelties Store" on the same street. Marx, another neighbor, dealt in guns, shirts, linen goods, cloth, shoes, ties, walking sticks, stereoscopes and ice machines. He also housed Mr Mayr, Saigon's only watchmaker. Hermann Legrand, the town's biggest real estate broker, also had his quarters on the same street. All of these humble establishments, however, were clearly outdone by the magnificent three-story brick building located at the lower end of the street where the Rue du Grand Canal met with the harbor's quay and opened up on to a large square. The building's proprietor, the Chinese Wang Tai, was Saigon's most powerful and influential merchant, and he used it as his headquarters from where he controlled a fair part of Saigon's China trade as well as the colony's most lucrative business, opium.⁶

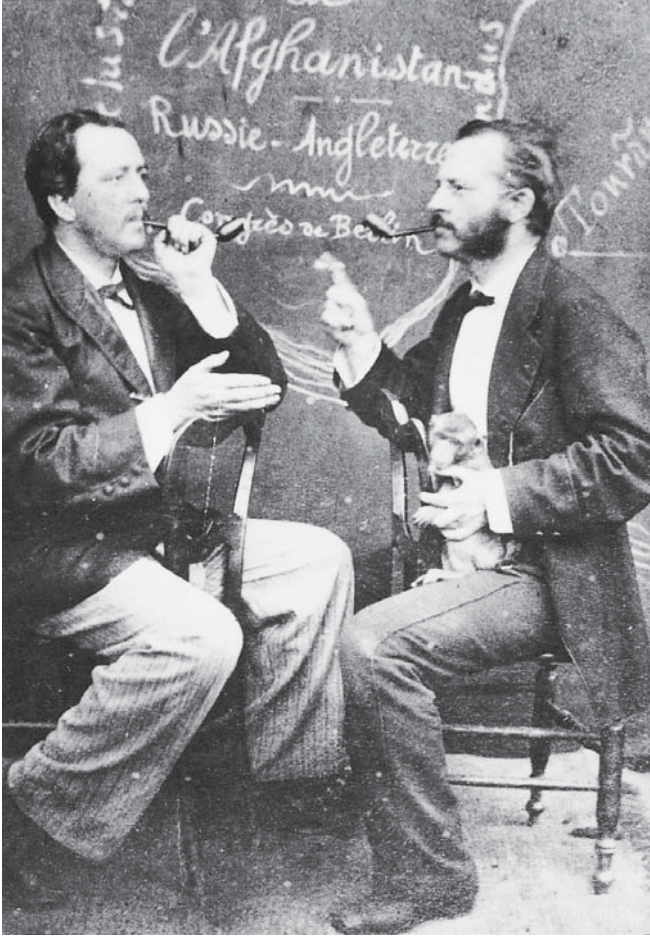


Figure 1.1 Frédéric Thomas-Caraman, with a monkey on his knee, in the late 1870s (Archives personnelles Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman).

The Saigon Caraman encountered was a town of considerable grace and beauty. Some years earlier, a soldier of the conquering army described it as “a mass of country houses in the middle of gardens and woods. Everything is clean and exudes the affluence and the tranquility of its interiors.”⁷⁷ The French siege and heavy bombardments in 1859 had destroyed parts of the town, but beneath the scars left by the fighting it had retained much of its original elegance. Beginning in 1861, the French had constructed a number of defense structures and buildings, popularly known as the *ouvrages neufs*, to the southeast of the former citadel. A hospital, a chapel and a printing house were established, and the French navy built warehouses and docks for the maintenance of its fleet. A

couple of houses were added in the vicinity of the port where most commercial activity took place. Some of the city streets were improved to allow access by carriages during the dry season. The local zoo, the most notable contribution of the French to Saigon's urban area, was nearing completion, its gardens and walkways neatly arranged to receive visitors, even though the animal population was still limited to a few pheasants, wild ducks and doves. On the whole, however, little construction work had been done in Saigon during four years following French conquest, and French rule seemed to have barely left a mark on the city's appearance. In local newspapers and public speeches, the new masters never failed to repeat that they had come to stay: that there was no going back on what had been achieved during the conquest. But a simple walk across town revealed to the discerning traveler that such claims still appeared to lack determination. There was a provisional and temporary feel to the French presence in Saigon that belied public assurances.⁸

As Count Frédéric made his first excursions around town, introducing himself to local government representatives and merchants and exploring shops and restaurants, word spread that a particularly refined and eloquent member of the French aristocracy had come to grace Saigon with his presence. Wherever he went, his compatriots welcomed him warmly. He liked to socialize and to converse with people of all walks of life, and in the eyes of everyone appeared to be an agreeable addition to Saigon's French community. The count seemed interested in just about any subject, particularly as regarded the future of the colony, its natural resources and economic potential, and the mores and customs of the peoples that the French had come to colonize. His interlocutors were impressed



Figure 1.2 A view of the Saigon harbor area from around 1870 (Musée Guimet, Paris).

with his learning and his noble demeanor, and they listened in awe when he told them offhandedly about the rich and influential personalities he counted among his close friends in Paris. His enthusiasm and faith in Napoleon III and the French Empire further endeared him to local residents whose own faith in the future of the Cochinchinese colony and their own business prospects had suffered over the last few years. It was reassuring to see that a man of birth and connections had decided to come to Saigon to explore the new possibilities opened up by French conquest, and perhaps to launch some business ventures of his own.⁹

Count Caraman came indeed from a family that had reason to be proud of its past. His granduncle Hippolyte Thomas had served under Napoleon I in Spain, Italy, Egypt, Prussia, Poland, Austria and Russia, winning praise for his comportment under fire and garnering an impressive collection of medals and titles. Hippolyte quickly rose to the rank of colonel of the Dragoons, an elite cavalry unit of the French army. His exploits on the battlefield also won him the ranks of chevalier, officer, and eventually commander of the Légion d'honneur, France's most prestigious honorary order. When he retired from active service in 1841 at the age of seventy his military career had spanned nearly fifty years. His name was legend, if not elsewhere at least in his hometown of Lavaur. Thanks in part to their courageous relative Hippolyte, the members of the Thomas family were respected citizens of honor and modest wealth in this small town in the province of Tarn in Southern France.¹⁰

When Hippolyte's nephew, Michel Thomas, decided to volunteer for the army in 1826, he thus had someone to look up to and a family reputation to defend. Michel also joined the cavalry, but since the times of the great wars fought by the empire were by then over, military promotions had become difficult to obtain. The life of a low-ranking officer had become less heroic, with less of an opportunity to excel in combat than to prove leadership in managing the intricacies of daily life in the barracks. Increasingly, the time spent in the army was "divided very unevenly between three tasks: the military instruction of the soldiers, often reduced to cursory inspection, the preparation of parades through rehearsals, [and] the administration of supplies (food, clothing, housing), complicated by book-keeping."¹¹ It is in this latter activity that Michel found his vocation. When he married his love, Anne Marie Clédière, in 1839, he was employed as an auxiliary accountant in Uncle Hippolyte's legendary Dragoon division.¹²

Even before his marriage, Michel's career seemed to have reached an impasse. For some ten years, his advance through the military hierarchy had been painfully slow. Soon after finally being promoted to lieutenant, he changed his affiliation to the Gendarmerie, the French army division responsible for public order and the repression of crime in a country where the police force was weak and with little influence beyond Paris and some larger cities. There, he continued to work as an accountant, moving occasionally from one station to another within his home region.

The Thomas family led a regulated life, separated from the rest of the population. Like other army officers at the time, Michel was not allowed to wear civilian clothes even outside of working hours. He could not travel or publish anything without prior authorization. According to regulations, he was not even allowed to marry before military authorities had approved his bride and her

family background. Military rules prescribed adequate dowries for officers' wives to ensure that they stemmed from the right class. Officers' wives were then prohibited from engaging in any professional activity, while single officers were expected to socialize only with their fellow officers, to the point of being obliged to take their meals with each other. Nineteenth-century French governments, wary of the military's ability to overthrow a regime not to its liking, were at pains to keep the officer corps free of non-bourgeois influence to ensure the army's fidelity, and a prestige untainted by the lower classes.¹³

This elitist prestige came under attack from the time of Restoration. In the absence of great wars, some liberals denounced the military as unproductive, deploring that it drained the civil sector of its brightest and most promising members. Others would have liked to see the army employed in large public works projects. Wearing a uniform lost some of its appeal in the salons of the capital. With officers' prestige and standing on the decline, the former aristocracy began to migrate into other sectors, favoring civilian careers for their sons over military ones. Napoleon's wars had further led to higher mobility within the army, with more commoners promoted to the rank of officer on the basis of their performance in combat. Over time, the number of officers from the lower echelons of society thus increased, while fewer and fewer sons of the elite chose the military path to status and recognition.¹⁴

Whereas the percentage of nobles among the officer corps decreased continuously, the wish of non-aristocratic officers to enjoy their newfound prestige to the fullest encouraged the more daring of them to assume an aristocratic title somewhere along the way. Bourgeois families throughout France ennobled their names with an aristocratic affix in these years. In a somewhat paradoxical development, the number of nobles in France actually increased after 1789. Some estimates put the proportion of false nobles among the aristocracy in the twentieth century at 75 percent.¹⁵ Apparently, Michel Thomas, too, felt at some stage in his career the desire to have a more ornate name. When his father died in 1847, he added to his surname the name of his grandmother Antoinette Caraman, linking the two with a "de." Overnight, Michel Thomas had become Michel Thomas de Caraman. His grandmother Antoinette's name stemmed from the village of Caraman near Michel's hometown of Lavaur. The patronym "*de Caraman*," however, suggested that he was related to the prestigious family of Duke Riquety de Caraman, which could trace back its roots to the twelfth century. The de Caramans also entertained links to the even more prestigious families of the Mirabeau and the Chimay. For a man like Michel, whose most prominent relatives included apothecaries, potters, rural health practitioners, salesmen, watchmakers and small landowners, this was more than just one step up the social ladder.¹⁶

The new aristocratic splendor of the Thomas family stood out in the social landscape of their home province. Their hometown Guéret, the provincial capital of the Creuse, was a small town with just over 5,000 inhabitants. The Creuse was part of the Limousin region, a mountainous area in central France of roughly 17,000 square kilometers, which included the provinces of the Corrèze and the Haute-Vienne. As the capital of the Creuse, Guéret presided over a local economy dominated by agriculture. Wheat, rye and potatoes were grown, with

cattle exported to neighboring provinces adding to the modest income of local inhabitants. The soil was poor, and so were the harvests. The climate was one of the harshest in France. A contemporary guide to the region, while emphasizing the picturesque beauty of the untouched landscape, described the weather as marked by “the altitude and the large number of springs and small creeks that irrigate the land all over. In general, it is cold and humid. The rains are abundant, storms frequent, the winters long and severe, the summers short.”¹⁷ Jobs outside the agricultural sector were few. Those who could not make a living as farmers migrated to other provinces to find seasonal work in sawmills or brick factories.¹⁸

Industrialization left the region largely untouched. The manufacture of tapestry, porcelain and rough textiles accounted for only a small part of the local economy and provided few jobs. Apart from labor, porcelain and tapestry, the only other products the region exported were butter and eggs.¹⁹ Not a single train line linked the Creuse and the neighboring provinces of the Limousin to the population centers on the Mediterranean coast to the south, to Bordeaux in the west, or to Paris in the north. Only three roads in the whole region could be used for travel throughout the year – two from east to west, and one from north to south. Dirt tracks allowing travel only by foot represented the bulk of public infrastructure.²⁰

The poverty of the population and the low level of urbanization were reflected in a high percentage of illiteracy. When Michel’s son Frédéric, born in 1840 in Guéret, finished primary school, most of the children in his age group were illiterate and would remain so into adulthood. In 1850, surveys among young conscripts for the army revealed a 90 percent literacy rate for boys coming from France’s north and east, while barely one in two recruits coming from places like the Creuse was able to read and write. Among girls, the situation was worse still.²¹ Child mortality was higher than anywhere else in France, and medical care difficult to obtain.²² Frédéric’s grandmother, for instance, had lost two out of her three children before they had reached the age of two years, his father being the only one to survive into adulthood.²³ The world in which Frédéric grew up was poor and held few promises. And given the chronic lack of government concern in creating educational and economic opportunities for the region’s inhabitants, there was little hope that Frédéric would see an improvement in this state of things in his lifetime.²⁴

Not surprisingly, the Limousin did not enjoy a good reputation in the capital. For the Parisians, the term “Limousin” stood for the world beyond the city walls, the other side of France, the universe of the backward, the provincial and the unsophisticated. Among Parisians, it was a long-standing tradition to hold in disdain all those whose manners, looks, and accent betrayed their rural origin. Rabelais and Molière, when playing on the theme of the stupid fool from the province, confirmed a commonly held belief, which asserted that outside Paris, generally speaking, stupidity reigned supreme. And nowhere, everyone concurred, was this more true than in the Limousin. In Paris, migrants from the Limousin were treated as “simpletons” (*oies*), “chestnut eaters” (*mangeurs de châtaignes*) or “boors” (*brutes limousines*).²⁵ A few years prior to Frédéric’s birth, a German temporary resident of the Limousin, “cut off” from “the cultured world,” wrote home to Germany how he had been warned that he “would not get a favorable opinion of France by staying in this province”:

No traveler likes to visit this inhospitable wilderness; for everyone, they say, should first write his last will, before touring the Limousin – in such terrible state are the pathways. In the center of France, a genuine *Limousiner* does not understand French; and even if with great pains he has learned the French language, upon uttering his first words, the Parisian will ridicule him as a close relative of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac.²⁶

It may have been due to these reasons – the harsh climate, the unfavorable image, the economic misery, the lack of opportunities and distraction – that the Thomas family decided to move further south to the town of Tarbes close to the Spanish border, after Michel retired from active service in 1852. It was the family's seventh move over a period of twenty-five years, following assignments to different army divisions. Although most of Michel's posts were located not too far from Guéret, the frequent transfers from town to town must have made it difficult for all family members to establish lasting social contacts. In a self-focused military environment, Michel was forced to seek friends among his fellow officers. Anne Marie had to make new acquaintances in each new post, only to cut ties a few years later when her husband was re-stationed. Jarnages, her native village near Guéret, was never very far away, but the lack of transport facilities in the region made it difficult to keep in regular contact with relatives and friends. Even more than his mother, young Frédéric must have suffered from the family's isolation. He learned early on that there was little point in building up relationships, for they were never to last. Upon arrival in each new post, he was sent to another school, with different classmates and a new set of boys in the neighborhood. In each new place, he had to establish himself within the pecking order of local youth, claiming a legitimate place for himself among groups of youngsters who had known each other since birth. He was the continual stranger, entering only to leave soon after.

We know little of Michel's character, and less about Frédéric's mother. One credible source describes Michel as an arrogant person, who liked to boast about his wealth, despite the fact that, in reality, the Thomas family barely managed to get by. He also appeared to have had a penchant for introducing himself as a colonel, although he had retired from active service as a captain.²⁷ This, together with his bogus aristocratic title, suggests that he was in constant need of recognition and deference from other people. His claiming of imaginary titles and ranks is perhaps indicative of a man who was simultaneously overly convinced of his abilities and fundamentally insecure of his worth. Possibly, he felt that he had failed by the measure of Uncle Hippolyte's example. He held elitist views, perhaps acquired in his years as a gendarme in a rural and poverty-stricken environment where the peasant folk used to look up to him and his uniform. A sense of entitlement, the idea that society and the world at large owed him something for who he was appears as a distinctive aspect of Michel's personality structure. It is not surprising that we find similar traits in his son Frédéric's character. In the case of Frédéric, these character flaws gradually developed into what some of his peers would later call delusional madness, but which at this stage appeared to be no more than a mild case of narcissism.

Following family tradition, Frédéric opted for a military career as he entered adulthood. He joined the army as a grenadier, but refused to work his way up

through the ranks, as his father had tried, unsuccessfully, to do. Instead he had decided early on that he wanted to join one of the army schools, the Ecole Polytechnique or the one at Saint Cyr, which prepared the sons of the rich and highborn for military duty. After graduation, students from these schools were integrated into the army at officer level, thereby replicating the civilian social structure in the army and ensuring that the power to command remained with those who had been born into wealth and power. To pass the entry exams at these military schools, one had first to spend several years in costly secondary studies. The Lycée Louis-le-Grand in the capital appeared to Frédéric to be best suited to help him acquire the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the army school's *concours*. Once again, therefore, he had to pack his bags and move from one place to the next, this time from the sleepy southern town of Tarbes to the bustling hub of French political, cultural, and social life: Paris.

The Lycée Louis-le-Grand was among the most prestigious Parisian colleges, and known to be particularly careful in selecting only students that came from the right social background. Frédéric would have felt alien in this privileged environment were he still Frédéric Thomas, a mere policeman's son from the backwoods of the Limousin. However, it was not Frédéric Thomas who entered the Lycée Louis-le-Grand. The Lycée's register of pupils for the year 1861 states that as of 1 January student no. 27, a young man by the name of Caraman, had joined the class of logic and sciences.²⁸

The move from Tarbes to Paris thus corresponds to a decisive break in Frédéric's life. The year before in Tarbes, a twenty-year-old adolescent had joined the army, signing the recruitment registers as Jean Frédéric Thomas.²⁹ The following year, at the other end of France, this young man had transformed into Count Jean Frédéric Hippolyte Comnène Thomas de Caraman, an aristocrat from one of the most prestigious families in France. He was no chestnut eater anymore, no stupid fool from the forests of the Creuse. Who would dare call him a "*brute limousine*" now?

Once settled in Paris, Caraman began to take classes in Hindi at the Ecole impériale des langues orientales vivantes to prepare him for his future career as a French navy officer with aspirations to be sent to India. His professor later confirmed that Caraman was a good and diligent student, "who has given proof of his intelligence and of his ability to successfully and advantageously work on oriental languages."³⁰ Over the following four years, Caraman focused all his efforts on his language studies in the hope of one day putting them to use in faraway lands. He saw himself in the role of an officer heroically commanding expeditionary forces in battles across the Orient, as part of Louis Napoleon's quest to expand French sway overseas.

However, despite his eagerness and diligence, somewhere in all this must have been a hitch. His plans to pursue a military education at Saint Cyr or the Ecole Polytechnique were not crowned with success. Even though he later claimed to have passed the exams of both schools, the records of at least the Ecole Polytechnique make no mention of his participation in the *concours*, let alone of his acceptance by the school.³¹ For reasons never disclosed in his letters, he at some stage decided to abandon a military career and travel to the East as a businessman rather than as an officer. Was it lack of money that kept him from pursuing his

studies in preparation for the exams? Was it that he felt free of paternal restrictions in Paris and could thus abandon a career chosen only to please his father? Or did the political debates he witnessed in the capital convince him that, better even than military honors, there were commercial fortunes to be gained in the Orient?

Beyond these possible causes, it is certain that above all the encounter in Paris with Truong-vinh-Ky, the interpreter of a Vietnamese embassy, three years after Caraman's move to the capital forcefully contributed to his change of plans. Led by the mandarin Phan-thanh-Giang, the embassy had come to Paris to negotiate the retrocession of Saigon and of the three occupied southern provinces to the Kingdom of Annam. The emperor of Annam, Tu-Duc, offered a cash payment of 100 million piasters and the transfer of the provinces' future revenues over fifty years in exchange for the recognition of his sovereignty over the whole lower Mekong region. It was a generous offer indeed, and Giang hoped with good cause that Napoleon III might eventually accept it.³²

Colonial truths

Giang and his legation received a state welcome when they arrived at the Gare de Lyon in September 1863. Escorted by a cavalry unit, they were driven to their temporary home near the Arc de Triomphe. A few days later, they were received by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to discuss Tu-Duc's offer.³³ After this first visit, the French decided that before considering political matters it was preferable to let the ambassadors first learn to fully appreciate their new environment. An audience with Emperor Napoleon was repeatedly postponed. Instead, Giang and the other Vietnamese dignitaries were taken on tours around Paris to visit the botanical gardens, gas manufacturing facilities, factories, museums and theaters, monuments and other attractions. This sightseeing was obviously geared toward impressing the foreign visitors with what the French thought would be visible proof of their technical genius and cultural prowess. The press duly reported that confronted "with the superior civilization of France," the ambassadors could on such occasions not help "expressing their feeling of surprise and admiration."³⁴

Interestingly, the arrival of the Vietnamese embassy in Paris received relatively little echo in the Parisian press. At the beginning, the local papers honored them with nothing more than a few lines under the column "miscellaneous news" (*variétés*).³⁵ One of the reasons for this was a balloon named the Giant, *le Géant*, a truly gigantic airship with two superimposed balloon chambers, filled with hydrogen and measuring ninety meters in height, only slightly smaller than the towers of the Notre Dame. At the time, the balloon was being prepared for its maiden flight on the Champ de Mars in the center of the city, not far from where the Vietnamese mandarins had their quarters, and *tout Paris* was ecstatic about the daring experiment. When on Sunday afternoon on 4 October 1863 the *Géant* slowly lifted its enormous weight from the ground and majestically drifted over the Champs-Élysées, it did so to the frenetic applause of a crowd estimated at 100,000. Across the city's center, people halted their activities, turning their eyes toward the sky, blocking the streets in all directions. The visit of the Vietnamese embassy, important as it was on a diplomatic level, was dwarfed by the spectacular event.³⁶

The launch of the *Géant* was symbolic for a society championing science as the tool for exploring humanity and its natural environment. Prevailing beliefs of the time held that observation and logical interpretation would eventually unveil all of nature's mysteries, and do away with any remaining metaphysical explanations. Botanists and zoologists fanned out across the continents, enumerating and classifying species in an unprecedented effort to name and categorize every manifestation of life. Charles Darwin had published his work *On the Origin of Species* only three years previously, powerfully postulating that an evolutionary process held life's seemingly unlimited diversity together, with the human being as its pinnacle.³⁷ In the same spirit, geologists and geographers strove to chart the remaining unexplored areas on the world's maps in minute detail, while engineers and physicists worked fervently on new technical inventions, in the firm belief that they would advance humanity and improve the quality of life. With equal enthusiasm, travelers and explorers ventured to the outer corners of a world in which the West was posed as central. They surveyed and described remote territories, traversing jungle and desert in search of the wild and undiscovered. Henri Mouhot exemplified this spirit in his travel accounts of the same year from Siam, Cambodia and Laos, published posthumously in *Le Tour du Monde*.³⁸

The spirit of the time premised that there were no limits to the grasp of human reasoning and that it should strive for mastery over nature, with that concept understood in the widest terms. All that was not yet known, not yet named, not yet tamed, not yet civilized in the eyes of the West faced an all-out effort by the various disciplines of science and lay curiosity to subjugate it to the Western mind, its judgment, and eventually its regulations and rules. With regard to foreign cultures, a skewed interpretation of Darwin's argument was merged with "scientific" doctrines of race and culture à la Gobineau, underpinning Darwin's conclusions with racist connotations.³⁹ There were fundamental differences between labeling butterflies, mapping territories, making chemical experiments in a laboratory, and studying the mores and customs of a tribe in a faraway colony, but the quest for mastery over nature, over the unknown, over the uncivilized united all scientific disciplines. The *Géant's* attempt to conquer the airspace, the last sphere of the earth where humanity was still absent, epitomized this spirit.

Another reason for the relative lack of interest in the Vietnamese embassy was that newspaper columns were already packed with reports from the Mexican front where Louis Napoleon's troops were trying to install the Austrian Archduke Maximilian as the new emperor. The conquest of Mexico had turned out to be far more difficult than expected. The French forces had to overcome fierce resistance and suffered numerous casualties.⁴⁰ From Madagascar, more disturbing news of military failures reached Paris around the same period, contributing to a rising tone of criticism of Napoleon's foreign adventures. Military campaigns, while contributing to the glory of his reign, drained the state's resources. In light of the events in Mexico, some metropolitan commentators had second thoughts about Cochinchina and chose to support Tu-Duc's offer.⁴¹ At the other end of the spectrum of opinions was the colonial lobby whose most outspoken members had their own investments at stake. Bordeaux's lobby of shippers and trading houses was probably the most vocal among them. Bordeaux-based merchant houses such as Eymond & Delphin Henry petitioned the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

only days after the arrival of the Vietnamese embassy in Marseilles, to reject any demands for retrocession of the colony. Eymond and his fellow traders had recently established branches in Bangkok and Saigon, with large sums of money in the balance. They were ready to press their case against skeptics in Parliament who claimed that Cochinchina cost more than it could ever possibly deliver.⁴²

Eymond and his fellow merchants were therefore overjoyed by Napoleon's remarks during the opening session of the Senate in November 1863 in which he said that

the faraway expeditions, objects of such a lot of critique, did not happen as the execution of premeditated plans: the force of circumstance (*la force des choses*) has brought them about, and in spite of that, they're not to be regretted.⁴³

Mexico, although facing some “unexpected resistance,” would eventually turn out to be a success. How could France ever extend its foreign trade, Napoleon continued, if it was not willing to fight for its position in the world? As for the colony of Saigon, “we have conquered in Cochinchina a position, which, without subjecting us to the difficulties of local governance, will allow us to exploit the immense resources of these lands and to civilize them by means of trade.” It becomes clear in such statements how quickly accounts of immense resources and trade opportunities in Indochina had circulated and spread in the *métropole*, and then gradually solidified into a universally accepted truth.

Books such as Charles de Paravey's *Du Royaume fort riche de Tchîn-La ou du Cambodge près Saïgon et de l'importance de son occupation* (Of the very rich kingdom of Tchîn-La or Cambodia near Saigon, and of the importance of its occupation), published only months after Napoleon's speech at Parliament, found a wide audience in Paris, promoting such engineered truths still further.⁴⁴ Unburdened by personal knowledge of the country he described, de Paravey praised Cambodia's rich resources and fertile soils. Trading goods ranging from pepper to ivory to precious stones promised guaranteed profits, while rubber and cotton would provide cheap raw materials. Not everything was up to standard though in Paravey's view:

The furniture, uncommon and coarse; the carriages and chairs carried by porters; the vessels made of roughly cut planks; the boats, mere trunks hollowed out with fire; [all this] shows the barbarity of this burning hot country, where people go about almost naked, where the soldiers carry only spear and shield, where the leper still exists.⁴⁵

Cambodia, he concluded, was still a barbarous country, but England's example had shown that one could only become

prosperous thanks to trade with semi-barbarous peoples, like the Indians, the Australians and the Negroes of Africa. Let us imitate them, let us stay in Saigon; let us civilize the rich Tchîn-la, let us bring there the benefits of Catholic charity, and let us send there, like we did in Mexico, a mission of enlightened scholars, who . . . will make useful and unexpected discoveries.⁴⁶

In addition to writing books, de Paravey was also involved in debates among self-styled scholars of the Orient as to what direction their studies should take. Paravey believed that scholars of Oriental sciences were “presumptuous” as they dealt in their research “only with boring novels and Buddhist pathos.”⁴⁷ He believed that the times when scholars could smugly indulge in studying only linguistics and poetry were over. Today’s researchers should instead focus on practical issues, to aid trade and commercial development. As a leading member of the Société Asiatique, he contended that scholarly societies like his own needed to follow this new route if they wanted to remain relevant. New learned societies, such as the Société de géographie commerciale, which saw scholarly research and commerce as intimately related and mutually supportive, mushroomed across the country. Frédéric Caraman embodied the views of this new generation of traveler–scholars when he stated that, in the colonial context, European ventures in the fields of industry, commerce, and agriculture were nothing but direct applications of “science.”⁴⁸

Publications such as the immensely popular *Le Tour du Monde*, launched in 1860, likewise began to promote a new *esprit colonial*, providing a wide audience with armchair access to foreign lands via richly illustrated articles. Publicized through museums and colonial exhibitions, this new spirit blended a range of motives into a potent mix. While Parisian capitalists wished to expand foreign trade and colonial merchants wanted to secure their assets, the imperial government sought a project to regain face after recent mishaps. The Catholic Church and the Paris-based Missions Etrangères perceived the permanent occupation of Cochinchina as a unique opportunity to proselytize, and a new generation of scholars hoped to find there a wide field in which to build their academic careers. All of these concrete motives found support in the prevailing belief that ‘civilization’ as the West knew it had continually to expand and open up new frontiers, just as the *Géant* had done when lifting its load high into the sky where no one had ever ventured before.⁴⁹

The oldest and most prestigious of geographical societies, the Société de Géographie de Paris, also changed its policy to be in tune with the ideological currents of the age. Around 1864, it mutated from a body focusing mainly on the geography of France into an interest group studying non-European territories, and lobbying for their importance in utilitarian terms.⁵⁰ In that year, Chasseloup-Laubat, Minister of the Marine and Colonies and a fervent imperialist, was elected president of the society. Simultaneously, the society’s membership, restricted initially to a chosen few, began to increase sharply, doubling its numbers every few years. The board of the society began to sponsor expeditions around the globe, promoting an overtly pro-colonial stand in its bulletins and publications.⁵¹ It was in this context that the Société de Géographie invited Truong-vinh-Ky, the principal interpreter of the Vietnamese embassy, to attend one of its meetings on 16 October 1863.

An advanced native

Ky was given a warm welcome. Fluent in French, he addressed a few words to the audience and promised to provide them with information on his homeland

on another occasion. Three weeks later, he attended another meeting of the Société, a short text on Cambodia in hand. As was the custom at the conferences of the Société, someone other than the author read the text to the listeners, on this occasion the distinguished Monsieur Cortambert. When Cortambert had finished reading, the audience turned to Ky, congratulating him for this excellent research and asking him if he would agree to have it published in the society's bulletin. Members present were greatly impressed with their guest of honor. There could be no doubt that Ky was a man of exceptional learning and language skills. What was more, he seemed well disposed to continued French involvement in Cochinchina and was pleasantly French in his general demeanor, which endeared him even further to his audience. Was it not encouraging to see that, after less than half a decade, the French presence in Saigon had produced such a splendid specimen of what contemporary theorists of colonialism liked to call an "advanced native" (*indigène évolué*)?⁵²

Truong-vinh-Ky was not only someone with an astonishing gift for languages, but also a leading member of the small emerging Catholic elite who owed their position both to their alliance with the missionaries and to the arrival of the French expeditionary forces in the Mekong Delta. The presence of missionaries in the Kingdom of Annam dated back to the seventeenth century. Their persecution by local authorities over the years had been one of the pretexts for the joint Spanish–French intervention in 1859. During the conquest, the French had hoped that the missionaries and their Vietnamese disciples would be effective allies in fighting forces loyal to Emperor Tu-Duc. Initially, such hopes met with



Figure 1.3 Pétrus Truong-vinh-Ky in the 1860s (ASEMI, Nice).

disappointment. It was partly for this reason that Tourane had to be evacuated by the French for the strategically better-located Saigon. Once the French were firmly established in the latter town, however, the Catholic community grew quickly in size and importance. The same was true of the extent of their cooperation with the naval administration.⁵³

One of the main reasons the missionaries and their Vietnamese disciples were indispensable to the naval administration was language. The missionaries, at least initially, were the only Westerners who spoke some Vietnamese, and were thus able to act as intermediaries between the local population and the army. Furthermore, the missionaries wielded influence over significant parts of the Vietnamese population in the vicinity of Saigon. Catholic Vietnamese following the expeditionary forces from Tourane had settled in the village of Choquan near Cholon and in some eleven other villages formed more recently around Saigon.⁵⁴ By 1864, missionaries served in numerous government positions, and Vietnamese priests dominated the corps of interpreters. The same year, the naval government decided to allocate a monthly salary to all missionaries and to subsidize the corps of indigenous priests. Although the move raised some concerns within missionary circles about their independence, the government's offer was eventually embraced, and the link between secular and religious authorities thus further secured.⁵⁵ For the missionaries, this link meant an increase in authority and prestige vis-à-vis the local population as well as easy access to other privileges, such as allocations of land. For their part, the Church authorities soothed any troubled conscience in their Sunday Masses, reassuring military personnel that it was God's will for France to rule over Cochinchina. The protection by the French navy provided the missionaries with a better environment for their proselytizing efforts than they had ever before enjoyed. How could it be other than God's will that Cochinchina be colonized if this allowed the church to reach out to millions of benighted heathen who had never heard the truths of the Gospel?

Whereas many French missionaries worked part time for the military authorities, this avenue initially seemed closed to Catholic priests of Vietnamese descent. Vietnamese preachers had been trained primarily in Latin, in order to be able to read religious texts.⁵⁶ Their teachers had actually taken great pains *not* to teach their disciples French, so as to stop them becoming distracted from Bible reading, or gaining access to unsolicited secular knowledge. In the face of an acute shortage of interpreters, however, the French began recruiting increasing numbers of Vietnamese seminarians. As Charles Lemire remembered:

At the beginning of the colony, we were hard-pressed to find them [the interpreters]. The Catholic missions lent out quite a large number of their students, coming for the most part from the school in Pinang. Many of them stayed on with the government service. The interpreters often translated only from Vietnamese to Latin, so that quite a few local commanders were forced to rely on their memories from college in order to be able to dispense justice or deal with other issues.⁵⁷

It appears quite natural, then, that Vietnamese ex-seminarians who managed to achieve proficiency in French would quickly attain a privileged status, and

Pétrus Truong-vinh-Ky was one of them. Originally trained at the missionary college in Ponhea Lu near Phnom Penh and later in Penang, he was a promising young candidate for a career as a priest. In 1861, at the age of twenty-four, he began translating for the French expeditionary forces. He then left the clergy, married Vuong-thi-Tho, the daughter of a physician, and settled in the Catholic village of Choquan. In 1862, he was chosen to accompany the French embassy to the imperial court of Hue, serving as interpreter during the negotiations on the three occupied provinces. A year later, Emperor Tu-Duc sent Phan-thanh-Giang to France for further negotiations; Ky was once again chosen to serve as interpreter.⁵⁸

Ky's rise to fame had only just begun. Many people noticed the young and ambitious interpreter among Giang's entourage. When the government inaugurated the Collège des interprètes in Saigon to train future administrators in indigenous languages, Truong-vinh-Ky was nominated professor, and in 1866 he became its director.⁵⁹ Ky played a leading role in the promotion of *quoc ngu*, the phonetic transcription of the Vietnamese language into the Latin alphabet, which was meant to replace the former Chinese characters. In 1865, the first edition of *Gia-dinh Bao*, a monthly newsletter in *quoc ngu*, was published and distributed free of charge in French-controlled primary schools. Truong-vinh-Ky was director of this new newsletter, and his Catholic colleague Paulus Huynh-thinh-Cu was named editor-in-chief.⁶⁰ Ky also collaborated with the newly founded Comité agricole et industriel, serving as a jury member for the first Saigon commercial fair the following year.⁶¹ He became a prolific writer and authored a number of important scholarly works on Cambodia and Annam, which were widely read in Saigon and Paris.⁶²

The members of the audience listening to Ky's text on Cambodia during the October 1864 meeting of the Société de Géographie de Paris thus witnessed the early beginnings of a remarkable scholarly as well as social career. By that time, Ky was already considered a prototype for the Europeanized, Francophile Vietnamese intellectual. He was important not only in his role as mediator between the Vietnamese and the French colonial worlds, but as living proof that the introduction of French language and culture in Cochinchina would produce beneficial results. People like Ky served as examples to the French that the colonial process would eventually lead to the local population's assimilation of French language and laws, and of a French way of living. In exchange for this crucial role, Ky and other members of the emerging Francophile elite were given positions of considerable power and prestige within the developing colonial society.⁶³

Somewhere among the listeners, a brooding young man followed the society's proceedings with particular attention. He was almost the same age as the young Vietnamese scholar, and like him he was ambitious and convinced that he was destined for great things. Frédéric Caraman was not a member of the Société but a regular in the pro-colonial scholarly milieu, and had perhaps gained access to the meeting by invitation. In the wake of the October meeting he acquainted himself with Ky, and soon after wrote a letter to Emperor Napoleon requesting that "his friend," Truong-vinh-Ky, be elevated to the order of the Légion d'honneur. Caraman's letter stressed Ky's invaluable services as an interpreter to the government in Saigon, noting that Ky was in the process of "preparing at this moment for the Navy a list of frequently used phrases together with Count

Hippolyte de Comnène Caraman.”⁶⁴ The letter made much of the collaboration between Ky and Count de Caraman, claiming that Caraman would henceforth represent Ky in all future exchanges with Paris’s learned societies.

It is unclear how – or even whether – Frédéric Caraman had become Ky’s “friend.” The evidence is sketchy. From two November letters addressed by Ky to Caraman, it seems that Caraman had a meeting with Ky and Phan-thanh-Giang at some point in October, during which he presented himself as an influential businessman and an accomplished scholar with wide connections in the political realm. At the meeting, Caraman proposed plans to establish gold and silver mines in the north of Annam, as well as offering to establish factories in the kingdom to provide indigenous populations with European merchandise. In addition, Caraman requested land concessions near Tourane and asked to be appointed head of the port authority in charge of overseeing foreign trading ships.⁶⁵

Phan-thanh-Giang seems to have been intrigued by Caraman, if Ky’s two letters are any indication of the ambassador’s true impression. As Ky put it, Giang would see “with pleasure” if Caraman could accompany him on a stretch of the journey:

[His Excellency] intends to talk to you about the great affairs that you have so generously submitted to Him, and that He approves of completely. He will do His utmost to present you to His August Sovereign when the time comes, that is to say at the moment of the ratification of the treaty of commerce concluded between the two Empires of France and Annam.⁶⁶

The “treaty of commerce” alluded to by Ky was the Vietnamese term for Tu-Duc’s cash offer to recover Cochinchina. In a second letter, Ky reiterated that Giang approved all of Caraman’s plans and was inclined to present him to the Emperor if Caraman decided to make the journey to Hue. He added that the ambassador felt that, in exchange, Caraman could perhaps “exercise a certain influence on the ratification of the treaty of commerce concluded between the two Empires”:

Please try therefore to obtain from Your government to be accredited vis-à-vis the first Ambassador Phan-Thanh-Gian, who, besides, expects to have the pleasure to see you again in Egypt at the latest and would see this with pleasure. He asks me to convey to you his high esteem and his special affection.⁶⁷

It thus appears that Caraman’s assertion that he was on intimate terms with the high and mighty had swayed both Giang and Ky. Who else but a man of influence and high birth, after all, would dare to write directly to Emperor Napoleon? Who else but someone who had the Emperor’s trust could ask in such an informal fashion for “a friend” to be nominated to the Légion d’honneur? Caraman, for his part, left those meetings firmly convinced that virtually anything was possible for him in this fabled Kingdom of Annam, of which he knew next to nothing. At the time, Caraman was still inscribed as a student at the Ecole impériale des langues orientales, studiously working on his language skills to prepare him for a posting in Pondicherry, or perhaps another of the French *comptoirs* along the Indian

coast. Never had places further east entered his mind as possible options for his prospective career. The meetings with Ky and Giang pulled Caraman's life in a new direction. It was obvious that his future lay in Saigon. With the assurance of such powerful patronage, it was time to leave Europe behind and begin the great journey to Indochina, a magic place promising wealth and fame.

Caraman had barely bid goodbye to his Vietnamese friends when he was immersed in preparations for his journey. As a first step, he got in touch with members of the Société de Géographie as well as the head of the Museum of Natural History. He informed them that he had plans to establish himself in Cochinchina, combining commercial activities with in-depth studies of the kingdom's culture. He pledged to delve into a wide range of scientific disciplines, from botany and zoology to history and linguistics. His proposals were met with some support, particularly at the Museum of Natural History, where he had a faithful supporter in the person of director Chevreul.⁶⁸

In the following months, Caraman promoted his project through countless letters to the Ministries of Education, of Foreign Affairs, and of the Marine and Colonies, as well as among Paris's scholarly circles. He was impatient to leave France as quickly as possible to catch up with the Vietnamese embassy in Egypt. Ky and Giang had left France and were traveling across Spain and northern Africa towards Indochina. Time was therefore of the essence. Caraman was exasperated by the government's slow pace at providing letters of recommendation, diplomatic passports, and subsidies for travel and research expenses. Exposed to a sustained barrage of letters, requests and petitions coming from Caraman's desk over the course of several months, the government eventually gave in. Caraman received a letter of recommendation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Marine Minister Chasseloup-Laubat contacted the Governor of Saigon to ask him to facilitate Caraman's research as well as he could. Money, however, was more difficult to obtain. All that Caraman could squeeze out of his ministerial benefactors was a 30 percent rebate on the Messageries Impériales' fare for the trip to Saigon. It was not much, but good enough to claim, once in Saigon, that he was traveling on an official mission.⁶⁹

The struggle to obtain endorsement for his journey to Cochinchina had taken Caraman almost a year. It was only in mid-November 1864 that he could finally leave Paris for Marseilles. On 18 November, he embarked on a steamer that took him in a few days across the Mediterranean to Alexandria in Egypt from where passengers had to continue their trip overland to the Red Sea port of Suez. In Suez, the ocean liner *Impératrice* was waiting for them, one of three sister ships of the Messageries Impériales catering to the growing number of European travelers to the Orient. On the evening of 26 November, Caraman and some 150 passengers took their quarters on board. Some cargo shipments sent from Alexandria had not arrived in time, forcing the *Impératrice* to postpone its departure for thirty-two hours, and it was not until early the following morning that it finally left Suez to begin its voyage south. On the evening of 5 December, the port of Aden came in sight, several days behind schedule. Eventually, more than a month and many storms and disasters later, the *Impératrice* pulled into Saigon harbor, welcomed by a cheerful crowd on the pier waving handkerchiefs in delight that the ship, long overdue, had finally arrived in port.⁷⁰

Uncertain times

So there he was, in the city that had been described to him in France as the gateway to a land of immense riches and unlimited opportunities. Caraman's excitement at having finally set foot in the Promised Land knew no bounds. Barely arrived, he wrote home in ecstatic language how he had not wasted a single minute in exploring his new environment.⁷¹ He made contact with a number of residents to learn from their experience and had begun to collect photographs of the colony's major sights. His dictionary of local medicinal herbs was making progress, he wrote, and so were his preliminary studies in the region's geology. Furthermore, he was preparing himself for an anthropological expedition to a remote jungle location where someone had apparently sighted a savage tribe living in tree tops, whose members – half humans, half apes – still sported a tiny tail.⁷²

Caraman had also learned some less encouraging news. In his first contacts with local European merchants, he often found them filled with apprehension and uncertainty. When no officer was nearby, some of them complained bitterly about the naval government, which they found to be unsupportive, or openly hostile, to their business ventures and to the development of the local economy. Many claimed that the navy officers secretly despised their civilian compatriots and were primarily concerned with ruling undisturbed over their oversized naval base.

Other sources similarly called for caution. At some point during the first few days of his stay, Caraman most likely read a copy of the *Courier de Saigon*, the local bi-monthly newspaper. The editorial of the latest issue opened up on the line that the editors saw it as their duty to “combat, among our partisans and on the appropriate occasion, an exaggerated enthusiasm, which could entail some serious negative aspects.”⁷³ The *Courier* reminded its readers that one had to keep a sense of the realities of the local market. Imported European goods were still of little importance. The situation of exports looked somewhat better thanks to the trade in rice. However, whatever the prospects for future trade, Saigon seemed unlikely to be able to compete with Singapore or Hong Kong for some time to come. There were some opportunities for enterprising newcomers, but to profit from them, the most important prerequisite was sufficient financial backing. Given the necessary capital for commercial ventures, the editorial concluded, success was possible, if only the entrepreneur avoided the pitfall of “believing that it suffices to set foot on the Promised Land to be endowed with the fabled virtue of King Midas.”⁷⁴

On other occasions, the same *Courier* had contended that “the best way to gain the confidence of industry and commerce is to make known the numerous resources that Lower Cochinchina represents” back in Europe.⁷⁵ The problem was that Saigon was still “little known in France and in the neighboring colonies” and that “inexact accounts given by badly informed newspapers” had in the past “jeopardized the true interests and development of [the] colony.” When addressing a metropolitan audience, one should therefore never fail to “explain the final [character] of our presence in the Far East, . . . to dissipate the prejudices that oppose the development of our new possession,” and thus “reassure

metropolitan capitalists.⁷⁶ It appears that the *Courrier* wanted a metropolitan public to believe that Cochinchina was a land of boundless riches, while asking those who had come across the seas to exploit these riches to start by lowering their expectations. And since the *Courrier* never wrote anything that had not been approved by the governor, who had founded it in 1864 and came up with its budget, it appeared that this somewhat contradictory stance was government policy.

The *Courrier* was certainly correct in reminding its readership that the local market was still minuscule. Greater Saigon and its Chinese sister-town Cholon held roughly 80,000 indigenous inhabitants, many of them peasants and laborers with little purchasing power. Apart from lodging and food, the goods that the people demanded were cloth, seeds, animals, agricultural tools, basic household items, and construction materials. All were locally available or imported from China and Singapore, and the trade of these goods was concentrated in the hands of Chinese and Indian merchants. Much of the meager income of the urban working class went for opium and visits to the brothels in Cholon, and both the sex trade and the opium trade were firmly in the hands of Chinese syndicates. Europeans had recently attempted to compete with the Chinese in the opium business. Within a couple of years, however, the venture of the French trader Ségassie, in which many of the richer European merchants held stakes, had resulted in failure. The profound impression left on local merchants by Ségassie's downfall could still be felt when Caraman arrived in Saigon. It is almost certain that Caraman would have heard stories about how Ségassie and his associates were framed by the naval administration, allowing the government and their Chinese lackeys to take over the lucrative opium business.⁷⁷

The Chinese and Vietnamese capitalists who ran Saigon's economy, in turn, showed little interest in goods imported from Europe, and there seemed little hope that indigenous consumers would ever develop a taste for Western merchandise. Whenever European traders found something that local consumers wanted, Indian and Chinese shop owners outpriced them effortlessly, with the Indians generally offering the lowest price of all.⁷⁸ The main export was rice, with China as the largest buyer. In this trade, Chinese junk-owners and Hong-Kong-based shippers sailing under British flag had cornered the market, leaving little room for the French. Other local products suitable for export – dried fish, salt, coconut oil, matting, and animal skins – were not in demand in Europe. Thus prospects for Saigon's Western businessmen looked rather gloomy, and importers of European goods could turn only to their compatriots as their key clientele.⁷⁹

The bulk of this potential local European clientele was the roughly 10,000-strong French expeditionary force. Despite their numbers, the soldiers, as a rule, were poor consumers. Members of the army and navy were poorly paid, and in addition had their essential needs covered by the military service corps, the *intendance*. Local merchants occasionally garnered a contract as official suppliers to the *intendance* for a given period but, as individual consumers, Saigon's many soldiers and officers were an insignificant market. Merchants were reduced to covering their peripheral needs: knick-knacks, entertainment, and alcohol. As a consequence, the economy in downtown Saigon in 1865 was dominated by bars, restaurants, and those small shops that sold miscellaneous *articles de Paris* of little use to anybody but the homesick. Import records for the first six months of 1865



Figure 1.4 The Saigon Quay in 1866 (ASEMI, Nice).

show more than 1,000 chests of vermouth, 628 chests of absinth and 429 chests of cognac, kirsch, rum and other spirits entering Saigon. In addition 1,172 barrels of red wine were unloaded, along with 596 chests of beer and 1,568 barrels of “miscellaneous liquids,” most of which were likely to be alcoholic as well. In comparison to the amount of imported liquor, the demand for other forms of entertainment compared rather unfavorably, with only thirty-six chests of books imported to Saigon over the same period.⁸⁰

In addition to French military personnel, the only other people that European merchants could look toward as potential customers were their own peers. Population counts for the colony from 1864 revealed that there were 342 Western residents not on French government payrolls.⁸¹ Most of these independent Westerners were French, although there were also groups of German, English, Spanish and Greek descent as well as some Americans. Like the troops, most of them were male, young, and single. As such, they further contributed to the male-dominated climate in Saigon’s foreign social circles, which altogether counted only eighty women. In short, European merchants faced stiff competition from Chinese and Indian traders; an indigenous population that was too poor or simply uninterested in their wares; a large number of French military personnel who purchased little except alcohol; and a tiny group of Westerners outside the naval administration that proved too small to constitute a viable market.

In the four years since the French capture of Saigon, merchants had learned that becoming rich in the colonies was harder than they originally expected. Careers advertised as guaranteeing quick rewards actually required capital, skills, an understanding of local customs and business practices, and a proficiency in

local languages. Many former conscripts, who left the army in Saigon to try their luck in business, lacked all of these basic requirements. Others, like Caraman, brought a few years' savings or the proceeds of property sold in France, with the hope of quickly multiplying this money in the supposedly more lucrative environment of the colony. However, opportunities for quick gain were few and far between, and the cost of living in Saigon was exceedingly high. Modest assets vanished within months, and before long, would-be entrepreneurs found themselves at the mercy of Chinese merchants or more fortunate fellow countrymen who made a living by managing the failures of their peers. Moneylenders, brokers, property dealers, developers, innkeepers: these were the kind of non-governmental European residents who welcomed newly arriving hopefuls to Saigon, lodging them, feeding them, and selling them various investments, only to collect after some months the fragments of another broken dream, which could then be partially re-assembled and resold to yet another novice entrepreneur.

As a consequence of this state of affairs, a small exodus of merchants occurred when Caraman was arriving in Saigon. Most prominent among those departing were the Roque brothers, Victor, Henri and Xavier, who had left France in 1858 to establish themselves in the Philippines. In the footsteps of the Spanish intervention force sent from Manila to support the French in their invasion of Annam, they had moved to Saigon in 1860. The three brothers were among the most active of the first trader generation, and they dealt successively in supplying flour, bread, biscuits and meat to colonial troops. They also engaged in construction and trade, as well as maintaining a towing service up the Donnai River for incoming and outgoing ships. Together with the Denis brothers, they formed a core group of merchants originally from the Bordeaux region.⁸² The Roques were considered to be among the most talented and respected merchants in town, and their departure filled many with a sense of despair. Shortly after the closure of their business, a local missionary wrote to a friend in Hong-Kong that it was hard to “imagine the emptiness that is left here by this [merchant] house, the only one that still added a bit of life to Saigon.”⁸³

Those who stayed in Saigon had to begin to imagine ways of overcoming the local constraints on their business ventures. Many residents believed that through the promotion of cash crops, such as cotton, tobacco, indigo, sugar, pepper, soybeans, cacao and coffee, they were more likely to find buyers on the world markets, outside the reach of Chinese trading networks. Increasing the production of these crops would supply a wider range of export commodities and thus provide a viable business opening. The more creative thinkers among Saigon's Western community were soon studying the possibilities for expanding the variety of local produce. Later that year, when the *Comité agricole et industriel* was founded, the study of this issue was one of its primary concerns.⁸⁴

Another route to profitability, cherished by both naval officers and merchants, was the extension of Cochinchina to the west and the north. Further conquest, they argued, would enlarge the local market, adding to the number of potential consumers for European imports.⁸⁵ The naval administration also hoped to increase tax collection and revenues, in the hope of balancing a budget perpetually in the red. Rumors that, to the north and west of the colony, enormous natural resources waited to be exploited thrived throughout the 1860s too.

Merchants and military personnel alike began to look for business opportunities beyond the borders of the colony. The Roque brothers returned to France, and those they left behind talked endlessly of the unoccupied provinces of Cochinchina as well as the northern lands of Tonkin.⁸⁶ Nothing, however, fired their imagination more than the Kingdom of Cambodia to the west.

The Cambodian dream

Little was known in Cochinchina about Cambodia, and only a handful of Saigon residents had ever ventured up the Mekong River to Chaudoc or even further to Phnom Penh. The local trader Andrew Spooner undertook a study of the topography and resources of the country for the naval government in 1862. Although the report remained unpublished for three years, Spooner's prominent role in Saigon ensured that by 1865 his observations would have been common knowledge in the colony. His journey had taken him up the Mekong River to Phnom Penh, Koh Sutin and Stung Treng. After returning to Phnom Penh, he continued up the Tonle Sap River to Kompong Chhnang at the mouth of the Great Lake in the geographical center of the Cambodian plains. Across the lake, he pushed forward all the way to Battambang.

Upon his return to Saigon, Spooner painted an optimistic, yet prudent, picture of the economic potential of the kingdom. While he noted the relative lack of commercial activity and agricultural production due to recent unrest following the death of King Ang Duong in 1859, he praised the lush cotton and tobacco fields on the island of Koh Sutin as well as the flourishing silk industry closer to Phnom Penh. He noted that Cambodia's endless forests were rich in timber, and that there were limestone quarries in the vicinity of Krauchmar. He was also struck by the richness in fish of all kinds of Cambodia's rivers and lakes.⁸⁷

Cambodia's capital appeared to Spooner to be the chief market place of the kingdom, with an active population of Chinese, Malay, Khmer and Vietnamese engaged in the trade of rice, dried fish, cotton, and tobacco. He was told that the government was partly financed by Chinese syndicates, which paid large sums for the right to deal in opium and run the country's gambling industry, and partly by customs and a 10 percent tax on harvests. Spooner further noted that he found Cambodia's majority Khmer population to be essentially "less intelligent than the Annamites, or to be more specific, less civilized; . . . they all seemed to me, besides, excessively *doux*, even in the remotest regions."⁸⁸ "*Doux*" – a term satiated with meanings, such as gentle, charming, submissive, malleable – would become one of the most enduring French adjectives used to characterize the Khmer. In terms of European trade, Spooner concluded that "in spite of rather unfavorable present circumstances," Cambodia, and particularly Phnom Penh, could offer some "attractive operations . . . , and one can only encourage the establishment of a number of European factories [there]." It can safely be assumed that, over the three years prior to Caraman's arrival, he had been promoting this encouraging view far and wide across Saigon and its Western trader community.⁸⁹

Further contributing to the appeal of Cambodia were the temple ruins of Angkor, an enigmatic place evoking fantasies of antique splendor and secret treasures. Situated near the town of Siem Reap, at the northern tip of Cambodia's

Great Lake, Angkor had sparked the imagination of previous European visitors to Cambodia. The French missionary Bouillevaux had published an account on his visit to the temples in 1858, followed by the Britons King and Forrest, who published theirs in 1860 in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*. A couple of years later, Spooner made his 1862 tour, and Henri Mouhot's account of his expedition across the whole peninsula was published posthumously and hailed in Saigon as well as overseas as one of the greatest feats of adventure travel in recent times. Finally, only a few months before Caraman, a German scholar, Adolf Bastian, had arrived in Saigon after a winding journey from Siam to Cambodia, during which he had also visited the ancient site.⁹⁰

At the time of Caraman's arrival, word of Angkor's magnificent beauty and scientific importance had spread to every nook and corner of the colony. The local newspaper *Courrier de Saigon* began running its first 'Angkoriana' articles, stating that, in comparison to the splendor of Angkor, Paris and London paled into mere small market towns.⁹¹ In such tales of a mysterious city, abandoned and overgrown by jungle, visions of timeless grandeur combined with more down-to-earth desires for monetary rewards, turning Saigon's western neighbor into, in the eyes of many Saigon residents, a new and enticing destination for travel and business.

The lure of the majestic Mekong River only added to this growing interest in Cambodia. The river's source was thought to be somewhere far north in Tibet, from where it flowed across Yunnan, Laos and Cambodia all the way to the Cochinchinese delta. Little accurate information was available on the navigability of this waterway or on its course beyond Phnom Penh. Everyone banked on the notion that the Mekong River could open up trade routes from Saigon to China. Chinese wares on sale in Phnom Penh markets added to hopes that the river was navigable all the way to the Heavenly Kingdom, thus turning Saigon, at least potentially, into a center for world trade. It is difficult to overstate the inspirational force that the word "China" had on merchants and adventurers at the time. It stood for boundless wealth in resources as well as millions of potential consumers of European merchandise.⁹²

In order to open up a trade route to this land of plenty, Governor de la Grandière was keen to explore the river as quickly as possible. His plans were endorsed by a small lobby of young and ambitious officers, among them Francis Garnier, the French mayor of Cholon.⁹³ In 1866, Garnier would participate in the legendary Mekong River Expedition led by Doudart de Lagrée, who at the time served as the head of Cambodia's naval station near Oudong. Saigon's merchant community strongly supported the expedition, hoping that its results would not only boost the local economy, but also invigorate interest in Cochinchina among Parisian capitalist circles.⁹⁴

Amidst such debates about the sluggish growth of the colony's economy and tales of new opportunities to the west, where mysterious temples and a great river held promises yet unfulfilled, merchants unhappy with the situation in Saigon began to re-evaluate their plans. The trader Imbert, a former employee of Ségassie's ruined opium venture, ran an advertisement in the *Courrier de Saigon*, announcing the establishment of a new company with its head office in Nam-Van, as Phnom Penh was called in Vietnamese.⁹⁵ He was not the only one to choose this path. Cambodia was becoming fashionable.

Similarly, in his first letter home, Caraman expressed how shortly after landing in Saigon he felt “an urge to make excursions to far-away places,” in particular to Cambodia, a country that had never been mentioned in his previous correspondence:⁹⁶

It seems that in Cambodia, the ruins of Angkor were of the greatest interest to Science, I must, on the occasion of my visit to the King of this State, gather all the necessary information in order to make a special report . . . His Cambodian Majesty will help me, I hope, in my research, because He likes a lot to instruct Himself.⁹⁷

Having learned that the Cambodian sovereign had recently accepted a French protectorate over his kingdom, Caraman decided that it could do no harm for his planned journey to enjoy the patronage of the French governor. Caraman still had his letter of recommendation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and knew that the Ministry of the Marine and Colonies had announced his arrival to Governor de la Grandière to recommend him to the authorities’ particular attention. Shortly after his arrival, he therefore contacted the governor in an attempt to cash in on the ministerial patronage. The governor’s response to Caraman’s plans was unenthusiastic. At the end of January, Caraman was informed that the naval administration was unwilling to support his Cambodian venture if Paris did not provide extra money for the journey. Caraman had apparently also requested porters and other staff from the government to undertake his journey; this request was also denied.⁹⁸

Towards the end of his stay in Saigon, Caraman once again approached the governor, asking for a letter of introduction to facilitate his first contacts with the officer in charge of the French naval station in Cambodia. A letter was granted, but the phrasing left some room for interpretation. The governor wrote:

Monsieur de Caraman, a Frenchman who has been staying for some time in Cochinchina, will travel to Cambodia. I only have a very vague idea of the goal of his voyage. I give him this letter in order to introduce him to you; he will explain his projects to you, and you will then see what you can do for him within the limits of your influence.⁹⁹

As Caraman was preparing for departure in May 1865, the rains set in, a little early compared to other years, easing the sultry heat that had weighed down on Saigon for more than a month and settling the dust of the town’s unpaved roads.¹⁰⁰ Caraman had by then received what he thought was a letter from the Cambodian King Norodom, inviting him to come to visit his kingdom. The letter produced mixed reactions in Saigon. As Doudart de Lagrée, the commander of the naval station near Oudong, remembered later:

Do I need to mention a letter, hawked about in Saigon in order to deceive the public before the journey of Monsieur de Caraman to Cambodia? This ridiculous letter, carrying a Chinese stamp, was supposed to be written by the King, who invited Monsieur de Caraman to come to Cambodia to do

business with him! The people to whom Caraman showed it ascribed it to a swindler and told him so. However, he continued to make use of it and had the immodesty to show it to me, [too].¹⁰¹

With the king's supposed letter of invitation in his pocket, Caraman set forth on a two-day trip via Mytho to Phnom Penh.

Pomp and circumstance

Boats from Mytho heading upriver to Phnom Penh usually began their trip around noon. By the next day, they would find themselves in Khmer territory. They passed settlements set back a small distance from the riverbank, surrounded by rice fields and vegetable gardens. Every few hundred meters or so, sugar palms planted along the fields' embankments rose towards the sky. Groves of bamboo and palm trees alternated with thickets of grass, brushwood and reeds several meters tall. Like countless European visitors before and after him, Caraman was enchanted by the lush scenery. By the time the second night fell, a string of lights had appeared on the left bank, and a gradual increase in noise and miscellaneous odors announced the proximity of a larger settlement.

The ship passed junks and smaller fishing boats, moored to the left shore in such numbers that they appeared almost like a separate town rising from the river. Behind this floating quarter, a steep slope led to the edge of the embankment. Sitting atop the bank, a row of houses wound from the far left, where the Mekong made a soft curve and branched off into the Bassac River, to the *phnom*, a hilltop crowned by a pagoda on the far right. On the opposite side of the waterway, on the banks of the Chruy Changvar peninsula, which separated the Mekong and the Tonle Sap Rivers from each other, more boats were anchored along the shore.

The French navy and Cambodian custom officials maintained separate posts on this peninsula, overlooking Phnom Penh's riverfront. Most ships coming up from Cochinchina traveled no further. Gunboats bringing supplies to the French naval station near Oudong, fishing boats heading for the Great Lake, and passenger ships bound for the royal capital continued their journey up the Tonle Sap River to Kompong Luong, an important landing point upstream. Caraman, too, wanted to push on north rather than stay in Phnom Penh. He had a letter in his pocket inviting him to the court of King Norodom, and a second letter recommending him to the head of the French naval station. Since both of them resided at the royal court, Oudong had necessarily to be his first destination.¹⁰²

After a brief journey during which his boat passed the station of the French missionary society Missions Étrangères on larboard and a string of Muslim Malay and Cham villages on the opposite shore, Caraman arrived in Kompong Luong on 25 May 1865.¹⁰³ The town had only a couple of thousand inhabitants, but was abuzz all year with travelers, peasants, mandarins, and monks on their way to or coming back from a visit to the royal court in Oudong. Lemire wrote that there was a

continuous to and fro of Cambodians, of Malay, Annamites and even Chinese, of monks in yellow-orange frocks, of mandarins on litter beds, on

cattle carriages, [or] mounted on elephants, . . . followed by a mass of servants carrying their parasol, their insignia and their betel and tobacco utensils. . . . One can hear the axe of the wheelwright, and the hammer of the blacksmith. . . . The market, which opens in the morning, does not end before the middle of the night. In the evenings, torches illuminate each small stand, and gambling stalls are rustled up overtly in the street, next to fruit vendors, food stalls, [and] tobacco sellers.¹⁰⁴

Upon arrival, Caraman headed straight to the house of Doudart de Lagrée, commander of the French military post. De Lagrée's house was located on the banks of the river, with a small chicory and radish plantation next to it, giving away the European tastes of the owner. De Lagrée's wooden mansion, spacious and open to the elements, was less than a year old. After months of waiting, he had been able to leave his temporary home on a gunboat and move onto firm ground.¹⁰⁵ The change to a more stately looking residence was reflected in his new title. He was the highest-ranking French officer in the area, and the political circumstances demanded that someone step in to represent France's diplomatic interests. From then on, Captain Doudart de Lagrée was allowed to call himself, rather grandly, "Representative of France in Cambodia."

The circumstances of de Lagrée's new title and the construction of his new residence were related to the recent visit of the Saigon Governor to Oudong. Originally, de Lagrée was sent to Cambodia as the commander of the steamboat *Giadinh*, joining a Doctor Hennecart, who served as a physician at the Cambodian court. De Lagrée was meant to facilitate purchases of wood and cattle in Cambodia for the troops based in Cochinchina. The Saigon Governor also expected him to uncover more accurate information on Cambodia's natural resources as



Figure 1.5 Phnom Penh in 1866 (Musée Guimet, Paris).

well as the state of political affairs at the court. Both out of fear that British influence in Siam could extend into Cambodia, and because of the growing interest among Saigon traders in its western neighbor, Governor de la Grandière was willing to assume a more active role in Oudong. His visit to the Cambodian capital in August 1863 stemmed from his heightened awareness that Cochinchina needed a buffer zone to the west, both to protect it from British interference and to ensure its future economic development. The visit concluded with the signing of a treaty between Governor de la Grandière and King Norodom.

The treaty summarized in twelve paragraphs the mutual willingness of Cambodia and France to maintain friendly relations and to facilitate trade between their respective territories. Six more paragraphs enumerated unilateral rights of the French, obliging the kingdom to facilitate the work of missionaries and researchers and giving France free access to Cambodia's forests in order to gather supplies for its navy. The treaty also allocated land on Chruy Changvar, opposite Phnom Penh, for the installation of French warehouses. It further obliged King Norodom to inform the Saigon Governor prior to the accreditation of any foreign consul at his court. In exchange for these concessions, France recognized Norodom as the King of Cambodia and promised to protect his rule.

To ensure proper compliance with the treaty, official representatives would be exchanged, with a Cambodian representative serving as ambassador to the Saigon government and a French representative serving as ambassador-cum-protector-cum-judge at the Oudong court. A clause in the treaty granted the Representative of France the right to mediate in disagreements occurring in Cambodia between Frenchmen and Cambodians, urging that settlements be reached *à l'amiable* – that is, in a spirit of conciliation. Both sides were probably unaware at the time how crucial this latter paragraph would become for the advance of French rule in Cambodia. Finally, on a more practical note, the king was promised a steamboat for his personal use, with a French captain, a mechanic and a cook.¹⁰⁶

The treaty thus laid the groundwork for what would become the French Protectorate over Cambodia, and Doudart de Lagrée became Representative of France. However, his satisfaction about this unexpected promotion did not last long. Initially, he had expressed enchantment with his appointment: “I am perfectly happy with my fate! I am free, I see novel things, I'm well.”¹⁰⁷ His excitement soon waned, and he wrote of his fatigue over the endless reports that he was obliged to write to Saigon.¹⁰⁸ A visit by a compatriot such as Caraman, coming virtually straight from France, promised distraction and news from home. Unfortunately, the first encounter between de Lagrée and Caraman turned out rather badly. Caraman outlined his plans to launch a number of business ventures in Cambodia with the help of King Norodom, asking for de Lagrée's advice and support. In a letter sent to Saigon some two weeks later, de Lagrée wrote:

Monsieur de Caraman, of whom I have been notified, in fact arrived in Cambodia in the last days of May. He presented to me a project of a contract that he intended to submit to the King. This contract, set up without the slightest knowledge of the country, of its resources, of its customs, could not be of a serious [nature]. And as a matter of fact, in terms of form as well as content, it represented nothing but a mix of childishness and absurdity.¹⁰⁹

De Lagrée noted that Caraman had drawn up plans to acquire land as “hereditary fiefs,” and had given documents to the king about the construction of railway lines in the kingdom and other major projects. All of those documents were signed

with a string of names [that were] certainly very resounding, but naturally very little known in Cambodia. I have given him every advice I could; but he seemed so little sincere, so unsteady, so ignorant with regard to practical things of the most simple kind, that I had to make it clear to him that I would no longer busy myself with his affairs. He then turned to Monsieur Le Faucheur, a French trader established in Compong Luong, who has taken it upon himself to prepare for him a new contract and to accompany him to the King. . . . None of this is finished, can yet crumble or change, and I would have waited to tell you about it. But the big noise that these gentlemen make here could travel all the way to Saigon, and I believe it necessary to let you know what has happened up to now.¹¹⁰

In presenting his plans to local audiences, Caraman proved to be quite a salesman, doling out promises of “extravagant remuneration” to those who would support him. Local residents were easily taken in by his aplomb. Among his new collaborators was the aforementioned merchant Le Faucheur, the first French trader to settle permanently in Cambodia. Boat mechanic Fleurier, on duty on the *Giadinh*, was similarly impressed with the eloquent visitor. Years later, he recalled that Caraman had told him

about an important company that he would put together. His self-endowed title was at the time Count Thomas Comnène de Caraman. He said that his father had a fortune of two million [francs], [and] that he was a retired colonel in the Gendarmerie. “Look,” he said to me, “go back to France, I will come to find you, and after a few months I will take you back with me and we’ll start to work.”¹¹¹

Less than a week after his arrival in Kompong Luong, Caraman set out along the elevated pathway linking the town with Oudong, accompanied by Le Faucheur. When they arrived at the main entrance to the palace and passed into the enclosure, they found themselves in front of an array of mansions, warehouses, ponds and hallways inhabited by mandarins, guards, servants and palace staff. As they entered the hall where King Norodom gave his audiences, Caraman was surprised to see mandarins crouching around the king with their foreheads touching the floor.¹¹² The ambiance was similar to the one described by Lemire, in which

around the King, mandarins and servants remained on their knees, the hands held together . . . They smoke cigarettes and relax from time to time on their heels. In the lateral halls, there were people who were not yet invited into the audience, [crouching] in the same position, as well as those who came out of curiosity to contemplate the august face of their sovereign.

Every morning the King thus held sessions . . . on the state of the provinces, and gave his orders.”¹¹³

During the audience, Caraman told King Norodom that he represented important metropolitan capitalists willing to form a company in order to develop the kingdom’s resources. Caraman requested land concessions and exclusion of other competitors as special privileges for his future company, asking the monarch to put these privileges in writing in an official contract.¹¹⁴ King Norodom replied that Caraman had the right to harvest natural resources and cultivate the land, like any other Frenchman and as stipulated in the 1863 treaty. A year later, the king recalled:

I said to Monsieur de Caraman that in this affair I was dealing with him like with every other Frenchman and that it was unnecessary to write anything. Monsieur de Caraman told me: “In France nobody knows that the King loves and protects the French in this way, I would like to ask the King to be so good to write.” Monsieur de Caraman came to see me often and told me that he would show the treaty to the commander [de Lagrée] and the [Governor in Saigon].¹¹⁵

Eventually, King Norodom relented and put his royal seal on a paper that Caraman presented to him. De Lagrée suspected that Caraman had added to this, “without doubt, some gifts to the mandarins, promises, [and] lots of lies.”¹¹⁶ Whatever the details of the transaction, only eight days after his arrival in the capital, Caraman was in possession of his first royal contract. The pact granted Caraman’s company the right to develop Cambodia’s forestry and agricultural resources on “all the land that it can cultivate, under the same conditions like [Norodom’s] subjects with regard to tax.” Other rights included the exploitation of copper, iron “and any other mines,” the construction of railway lines across the kingdom, and the development of the maritime region of Kampot. The contract carried King Norodom’s seal and the signature of “Monsieur Jean Hippolyte Frédéric Gustave Laurent Thomas Comnène de Caraman”, a string of names perhaps meant to counterbalance Norodom’s impressive list of royal titles. Together with Caraman, three French nobles – two Marquises and a Duke whom Caraman vaguely knew from Paris – were allegedly forming the board of the firm together with Caraman’s father Michel. James Rothschild, Paris’s most famous banker, and Emile Ollivier, an influential politician and Member of Parliament, made up a consulting body, which would guide the board in its decisions. The personalities involved were a fairly impressive sample of those considered to be highborn, rich and influential in Paris at the time.¹¹⁷

After the contract was signed, Caraman stayed for a month in Oudong. He spent most of his time close to the king and his entourage. If he is to be believed, Norodom expressed “great affection” in his presence, leading him personally around the palace and discussing various subjects with him.¹¹⁸ An interpreter, most likely Col de Monteiro, a French-speaking Khmer with Portuguese ancestors who had served Norodom’s father King Ang Duong, apparently translated their conversations. For Caraman and some of his fellow merchants,

Col de Monteiro would later become a sought-after business partner and powerful facilitator in their dealings with the king.

During his month in Oudong, Caraman managed to woo King Norodom and his court into signing yet another contract, sealed and delivered on 3 July 1865. The document had two parts, the first listing amendments to the previous contract. The second part was a simple shopping list for French merchandise, which Caraman was to buy for King Norodom in France. The list was substantial and included water pumps, a generator, a telegraph with 300 kilometers of wire, six fire engines, two ice machines, a camera, a globe, a clock, stationery, cutlery, gilded furniture for the reception hall, wine, tinned food, cigars, and photographs of the Emperor's palace. Caraman was granted the right to negotiate these purchases in France in Norodom's name.

The modifications to the previous contract at first sight seemed limited to a change of name, with Caraman's company henceforth called "Compagnie Générale du Cambodge." The clauses of the contract signed a month earlier were summarized in a slightly more grandiose fashion. The company was thus to be "in charge of the exploitation of all the kingdom's riches. . . . We [Norodom] take it under Our eminent and omnipotent protection and We engage Ourselves to contribute with all Our efforts to its development and its prosperity."¹¹⁹ The pompous tone was continued in the next paragraph, which stated that "Our Royal affection for France and Our love for the Emperor Napoleon caused Us to associate Ourselves to the grand ideas that Monsieur Commène de Caraman has conceived, this to the glory of Our Kingdom as well as [to the glory] of his own [kin] and of his country."¹²⁰

In Caraman's view, when King Norodom "in the presence of his entire court delivered to [him] his royal letters of the 3rd of July, he [thus] sealed the past" of a kingdom that had been mired in political anarchy and economic stagnation for too long.¹²¹ Caraman was jubilant. It may have been due to this youthful exuberance that he subsequently heard how "the canons of the citadel announced to the people an era of revival full of dedication," because apart from him, no one else remembered to have witnessed such a ceremonial ending to the day.¹²² His overflowing enthusiasm might also have been at the root of some striking inaccuracies in the translation of the royal documents from Khmer to French, embellishing a text that seems plain and quite unceremonious in Khmer.¹²³

Two days after signing the second contract, Caraman left for Phnom Penh where he explored the markets and visited the French military post on Chruy Changvar. From there, he continued on to Saigon to take a steamer back to France. He left the colonies with two firm convictions: he had seen "the most beautiful and the richest area of the world," and his *Compagnie Générale* would turn a complacent and unproductive kingdom into a land of profit and opportunities.¹²⁴

The contract

In November of 1865, the French Minister of Education and the Minister of the Marine and Colonies found a number of documents on their desks: a voluminous report on the Kingdom of Cambodia, a booklet with maps, a Khmer vocabulary with French translations, and a treaty between the Cambodian king

and a company previously unknown to them. Both Ministers vaguely remembered the author of the documents, recalling that a Count Thomas de Caraman had set sail a year before to scientifically explore Cochinchina and bring back to Paris specimens for the Museum of Natural History. Checking their files, they found that they had provided Caraman with letters of recommendation for this purpose. The contents of his reports thus came as a surprise.

In his reports, Caraman presented a panorama of Cambodia and its impending colonization by France that left few issues untouched. He mapped out the spatial boundaries and internal provincial divisions, noting the present lack of clearly defined borders. He described the lush and pristine beauty of the scenery, and the country's countless rivers, some of which he assured them were rich in gold. There were paragraphs dealing with anthropology and linguistics, and others recounting the country's history and speculating on the reasons for the fall of the Khmer Empire.

According to Caraman's reports, development was currently hampered by the lack of indigenous techniques to exploit the agricultural and mineral resources of the country, and the fact that traders had not yet taken full advantage of the Mekong River to access the Chinese market. Caraman saw another obstacle to development in the remarkable laziness of Cambodia's male population, only partly redeemed by the beauty of their women. An anecdote concerning an attack by a wild tiger highlighted the dangers of an undomesticated environment, while French missionaries were congratulated for their efforts to convert the heathen as well as for their role as forerunners of the colonial movement. Turning to his own role, he concluded that, within a few years, his "Compagnie Générale du Cambodge . . . [was] going to become the point of departure for France of a grand colonial empire, [which will] prosper and flourish." He would thus, he wrote, "have added a grand page to the history of [his] country."¹²⁵

Caraman had touched upon several familiar colonial tropes. Once upon a time, there was an incredibly rich but largely forgotten country, stretching out towards ill-defined borders and inhabited by a population of lazy natives, who refused to take possession of their land or to exploit the fertile soils. There were attractive native women waiting for manly conquest, and a majestic river opening up new frontiers. There was savage wilderness that needed to be tamed, and there was the promise that Western science and Christian faith would eventually reawaken a dormant land and deliver a degenerate society from its state of torpor. And in the midst of it, there was Caraman himself, explorer, visionary, valiant pioneer, adding another page to the annals of glory of the motherland.

The two Ministers would probably not have objected to the general tenor of Caraman's texts, reflecting, as they did, Parisian mainstream thought on colonial matters. Caraman's claims that his *Compagnie Générale* had been assigned "perpetually the exploitation, with all privileges, of all the riches of the kingdom," with "full authorization to negotiate in [Norodom's] Royal name with the French government" would however have raised surprise and suspicion. For the time being, the two Ministers decided to be circumspect, limiting their reply to a brief letter acknowledging receipt of the reports and thanking Caraman for their content.¹²⁶

Caraman was more prolific in his writing. From mid-November to the end of 1865, he sent six more letters to the Ministry of Education and Culture, two to the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one more to the Ministry of the Marine and Colonies. In these, he requested private audiences with the Ministers in order to prepare for a meeting with Emperor Napoleon. He expressed impatience and a desire to show in detail how he planned to develop Cambodia's resources, while wishing to obtain their blessings for his plans to "make in Cambodia what England has made in the Indies." While the Ministries remained outwardly silent, inside the wheels of bureaucracy were beginning to turn.¹²⁷

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Drouin de Lhuys, was particularly displeased by Caraman's letters. In internal correspondence, he politely blamed the Minister of Education for supporting Caraman's voyage in the first place. He was joined by the Minister of the Marine and Colonies, Chasseloup-Laubat, who was irritated by Caraman's meddling in diplomatic matters. Several ministerial departments were assigned the task of obtaining more precise information on Caraman's doings. Emile Ollivier was contacted and asked why he had lent support to the company without first informing the government, while banker James de Rothschild was also approached and interrogated about his involvement in the scheme. Only Duruy, the head of the Education Ministry, maintained a neutral position, sending Caraman's Khmer-French dictionary to renowned orientologists to obtain information as to its scientific value. Despite this inner flurry, the government maintained an unruffled appearance.¹²⁸

In the face of ministerial silence, Caraman's imagination constructed an entirely different reality. From a room in a lodging house on the Rue Richepanse (which Caraman habitually promoted in his correspondence to "Grand Hotel"), he wrote a letter to King Norodom, dated 17 November:

I have seen several of our Ministers. They were amazed by the richness of Your states, and above all by the civilizing spirit, which animates Your Majesty. Introduced by a prince, a relative of mine, and by the Minister of Education, my former professor, I will be invited by the Emperor Napoleon to his Palace of Compiègne, where I will stay with His Majesty for ten days. Trust me that on this occasion, I will neglect nothing [which would be] in the interest of Your Royal Majesty. . . . I must inform Your Majesty that the Government of the Emperor Napoleon will recognize all the ancient rights of the sovereigns of Cambodia, and thus, You can claim them as soon as the time comes.¹²⁹

By mid-December, Ollivier and Rothschild had replied to the government that they had never heard of the *Compagnie Générale* and had nothing to do with it. Ollivier remembered that Caraman had paid him a visit before leaving France on a voyage to Asia, but they had never talked of a *Compagnie Générale*, nor had he given his consent to be on the board. Rothschild could not remember having met Thomas de Caraman.¹³⁰

In the meantime, Caraman had moved from his hotel room to a private address at the Rue Bourgogne in the Saint Germain neighborhood of Paris where he convened the board of the *Compagnie Générale* to discuss the situation, which was, to put it mildly, less than great. A letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs had arrived, addressed to the board of the *Compagnie*, in which he compared

Caraman's initial mandate for a research mission to his present claims in a highly sarcastic tone.¹³¹ A similarly critical letter had been received from the Ministry of the Marine and Colonies.¹³² As a result, the assorted nobles on the company's board, who had only recently been informed by Caraman about their nomination, all declined to take up their posts. Caraman's list of allies shrank to include only his father, Michel, and the former boat mechanic of the *Giadinh*, Fleurier, who had left Cambodia to work in Caraman's service; together, the three tried to salvage what they could, beginning with Caraman's reputation and honor.

In a letter to the Ministry of the Marine and Colonies two days later, Caraman contended that his sense of duty, but above all his "honor as a gentleman," obliged him "to protest vigorously against [ministerial grievances], determined to provide all desirable explanations."¹³³ After all, "the descendant of the Riquety de Mirabeau . . . and of the Riquety or Riquet de Caraman . . . would be dishonored to let such suspicions linger any longer upon him." Point by point, Caraman refuted the charges against him. Contrary to allegations, he had never acted without the Saigon government's explicit consent. Every step of his voyage in Cochinchina and Cambodia had the approval of local authorities. After "my Cochinchina affair did not work out according to my hopes," he explained, "turning my eyes toward Cambodia, in order not to lose assets that had already suffered too much, I decided to shift my efforts to this country."¹³⁴

As for Ollivier and Rothschild, Caraman noted that Ollivier had encouraged him during their meeting prior to his departure for Saigon. The name of Rothschild, on the other hand, had come up because of past business ties between him and one of the nobles whom Caraman planned to nominate to the board. Some may say that these were flimsy arguments to justify the fraudulent use of famous personalities in official documents, but in a faraway kingdom, "at 3,000 leagues from France," could he, Caraman queried, have asked them if they wanted to be on the board of his company? Under the given circumstances, he had no option other than to assume their wholehearted support for his noble venture. He had acted "in good faith and loyalty" and deserved praise and support, rather than censure.¹³⁵

There was no reply, and the government closed the case. Caraman spent the next two months writing an ethnographic study on hill tribes living along Cochinchina's periphery, about whom he knew next to nothing, as well as developing a proposal for a mission to Siam, Tibet and Burma.¹³⁶ In early March, he once again approached the Ministry of Education to obtain official endorsement for his return to Southeast Asia. Having heard of preparations for a colonial exhibition in France in 1867, Caraman proposed that part of his mission should be to persuade governments of countries in the region to participate. He received no reply. Instead, he had to confront new accusations against him after his November letter to King Norodom, boasting the full support of the French government and an imminent ten-day stay at Emperor Napoleon's residence to discuss Cambodian affairs, had been leaked to the public. The content of this letter was difficult to justify, and Caraman subsequently conceded that, in the view of some, he might have committed

some entirely personal mistakes; but, on the shoulders of a twenty-four-year-old, would one want to place the head of an old man? The laws of

nature stand against it. Youth can only be guilty of the most beautiful enthusiasm, [youth] is generous by nature. By contrast, [in] its vengeance, it defends itself loyally without attacking those who misjudge it. . . . I am young, and desirous to succeed, in order to gain merit in the eyes of France and the Emperor.¹³⁷

Chasseloup-Laubat scribbled a terse note in the margin of Caraman's reply: "No need to do anything." Caraman was facing a wall of silence. In his view, the Ministers seemed maliciously determined to thwart his projects, leaving him no option but to disregard them altogether. In May, he wrote directly to Emperor Napoleon III, submitting his new mission proposal, which had, in the meantime, changed in character from "scientific" to "industrial and commercial."¹³⁸ The longed-for private audience with the emperor did not materialize, nor did his plan to return to Asia gain any headway. Letters sent by Caraman to King Mongkut of Siam, proposing the founding of a "Société Internationale de Siam," were intercepted by the French consul in Bangkok and sent back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris, together with stern warnings.¹³⁹ Everything, it seemed to Caraman, was working against him when all that he desired was to advance the French cause in Indochina, placing himself at the forefront of a "veritable campaign of intelligence" led by his own company. It was disheartening that no one seemed to grasp the visionary breadth of his plans.¹⁴⁰

Caraman decided to try his luck one last time with the Ministry of Education. Announcing his departure the following month, he requested support for research in Siam, Tibet and Burma. His intended research focused on geography and archeology, and the proposal presented his plans in a somewhat baroque style. Caraman wrote that he planned to wrench hidden secrets from tombs and ancient temples, in order to shed light on "some of the issues of concern to mankind, [and] to discover the mystery of his establishment in the different corners of the globe." His research also aimed to clarify the grand population movements since the Greek and the Roman era: "Science rips apart the mysterious veils, elevates mankind by rendering it its dignity, and carries the light to all corners of the earth. It is [science], which inspires grand matters with devotion, and shapes the martyrs of civilization."¹⁴¹

Despite this eloquence, the Ministry remained unwayed. With the September date for his departure approaching, and with no funds in sight, Caraman dropped his travel plans, and stopped lobbying for the *Compagnie Générale*. He sold the rights to the contracts with King Norodom to a group of Parisian capitalists, with whom he later maintained only sporadic contact.¹⁴² In a shift of tactic, Caraman resorted to a spirit of modesty, writing to Governor de la Grandière in Saigon:

I'll admit with complete sincerity that my inexperience in business, a lack of judgement in a great deal of things, and maybe this spirit of adventure inherent in youthful zeal have . . . done me a disservice. . . . The lesson was a good one. I thank God and also Your Excellency; for I have taken in a dose of circumspection that was lacking from my twenty-four years.¹⁴³

He hoped that a page could be turned on past sins to give room to novel and more promising projects; after all, Caraman had not been idle in the meantime.

Over the last few months, he had familiarized himself with two recent inventions with great potential, which he planned to introduce to Cochinchina. One was a new type of steam train capable of climbing steeper slopes. Despite the fact that the environs of Saigon are dead flat, Caraman envisioned this type of train linking all the major population centers of Cochinchina, provided that he received the necessary government subsidies for such a project. Another promising recent invention, enabling the extraction of gas from charcoal, would allow Caraman to light the streets of Saigon at night, again provided he was given sufficient government funding. The only thing he desired was the encouragement of the governor, but such encouragement never came.¹⁴⁴

After months of waiting for an official reply, Caraman retreated to Guéret. Among his relatives and friends there, he could expect to find a more welcoming environment and an audience more likely to admire his daring feats in the colonies. Surrounded by the Limousin's forests and meadows, there would have been ample time for introspection, and to forge new plans. There was no denying that his attempts to secure support for his *Compagnie Générale du Cambodge* had failed. His dream to become the flag bearer of a "veritable campaign of intelligence" to transform the Khmer Kingdom had to be shelved for the time being. But he would not give up on Asia.

Early lessons

Caraman was still convinced that the Orient, and more particularly the Kingdom of Cambodia, held the answer to his desire for fame and fortune. Over the past two years of travels across France and Indochina, he had spoken about Cambodia with merchants, soldiers, missionaries, scholars, politicians, ministers, mandarins, and a king. And everything he had heard had only further reinforced his faith in the promise that this Asian kingdom held for a man like him.

Two years earlier, in the Saigon of 1865, he had heard of merchant frustration caused by a sluggish economy and hostile attitudes among officials of the naval government. Such disappointment about Saigon made some merchants project their hopes beyond Cochinchina, into a land to the west where they imagined that their business prospects would be better. Travelers coming from that direction brought home tales of immense temple ruins, the vestiges of a mysterious ancient empire. Young navy officers aspired to make their mark by exploring the colony's hinterlands and sailing on the Mekong River all the way to China. Rumors began to circulate, contending that Indochina was far richer than anyone could imagine. The navy had no interest in opposing such rumors. It had grown considerably under Napoleon III, in parallel with the growth of the French Empire, and the two developments formed a symbiotic relationship. Given the danger that Cochinchina might be given back to the Kingdom of Annam in exchange for monetary compensation, these tales of riches, even if unsubstantiated, helped to deflect criticism of imperial adventures in Saigon and Paris. Navy self-interest and merchant frustration fused to create an ambiance in which Caraman found it necessary to reconsider his initial travel plans after only five days in the colony, and include Cambodia on his itinerary.

If Caraman's contracts with King Norodom are any indication of his mood while in Oudong, it can be assumed that he felt confirmed in his initial optimism about the prospects for French business in Cambodia. The Cambodia that Caraman believed he had seen and subsequently described in countless reports and letters was promising in the extreme: rich, decadent, underdeveloped, inhabited by a population lacking understanding, willpower, and industriousness but hospitable to Westerners, the natural carriers of these qualities.

The groundwork for such perceptions had been laid in Paris. During the years that he had spent in the capital studying Oriental languages and patronizing the capital's pro-colonial scholarly circles, he witnessed an apparently spontaneous trend in presenting the Orient increasingly as a place worthy of French interest. More concrete motives lay behind this trend, such as the agenda of Parisian capitalist investors, the interests of trader lobbies, government embarrassment over unsuccessful foreign expeditions, the ambitions of a new breed of traveler-scholars, and the hopes of the Catholic Church to convert the Asian continent. A new *esprit colonial* spread across France, promoted by geographical societies, travel magazines, museums, and grandiose colonial expositions. Caraman and his peers were sent to the colonies as collectors and hunters to build up an arsenal of Oriental paraphernalia as tangible evidence for colonial fantasies. The dominant spirit declared that Western knowledge and power had to claim all those aspects of nature not yet domesticated and regulated by the Western mind, including the uncivilized parts of humanity. Caraman enthusiastically subscribed to all these notions, so much so that he believed that with his *Compagnie Générale du Cambodge* and only a little bit of government backing, he would be able to colonize Cambodia almost single-handedly.

The images of Cambodia that Caraman encountered in Saigon, Oudong, and Paris, even though full of promise, would not have sufficed to turn him into a colonist, just as they would not have sufficed to turn the French into a colonial force overseas. Another ingredient was necessary to move from vision to act: personal ambition. Caraman's modest origins in rural France where his ambitions and his self-perception had evolved were typical of many of the early colonizers. Not all of them had Caraman's aplomb and boldness in creating a new identity for themselves when they grew up. All of them, however, shared with Caraman the will to reinvent a new life in the colonies: to be a new person with rights and a position in the colonial society that were unachievable for people of their social standing in France.

In this ambition, Caraman is joined by Truong-vinh-Ky on the other side of the colonial divide. Ky's career illustrates that the colonization of Indochina was not a unilateral enterprise of Frenchmen, imposed onto an indigenous population standing firm in resistance. To the contrary, from the first day, parts of the indigenous population embraced the new state of things and rallied to the French cause and the corresponding benefits. This emerging elite were to play a central role as mediators between the rest of the population and the French, gaining positions of considerable power over the years. At the end of the day, the vision of a phantasmal Indochina cherished in the salons of Paris was turned into a concrete colonial enterprise because of the wish of people like Caraman and Ky to break out of the circle traced by their social origin.

2 In Phnom Penh, 1868–69

Social divisions . . .

When, towards the end of 1867, Caraman traveled for the second time to Marseilles to embark on an Asia-bound steamer, the Saigon Governor had been warned in advance about his impending return. Governor de la Grandière did not look forward to Caraman's arrival. He was determined not to let him cause any further embarrassment either for the colonial government or for the Cambodian crown.

The governor had already sent instructions to that effect to his representative at the Cambodian court.¹ The day after Caraman's arrival in Saigon, he sent a second missive to Phnom Penh, which had in the meantime become the capital of the Khmer Kingdom. "It seems appropriate," he wrote:

that the King remains on his guard against the enterprises of this industrialist, whose morals you know already, and that you do not neglect the support you owe to the King, in order to enlighten him whenever he could become the dupe of Monsieur de Caraman.²

There was in fact no need to alert King Norodom of Caraman's arrival, since Caraman had taken it upon himself to inform him of his return in a letter sent from Paris. Recent unrest in Cambodia, Caraman wrote, was the main reason that he had been unable to obtain any "serious result" in France. Parisian capitalists found the royal contract too vague to deserve significant investments, and were further discouraged by the unhelpful attitude of the Ministry of the Marine and Colonies. In short, it would be necessary to start again and establish a "new royal charter, [that was] less wide-ranging, but more precise and above all more specific."³ Despite these setbacks, he hoped that he remained in King Norodom's "royal affection" and could pursue future business affairs with the king's blessing.

With the rainy season coming to an end, Caraman disembarked in a Saigon that was pleasantly cool and sunny. Further upstream, Cambodia's new capital in Phnom Penh was also enjoying the end of the monsoon rains. As the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers retreated from the flooded land around Phnom Penh, a watery landscape slowly gave way to rice fields and meadows. The flood had been particularly high and prolonged in 1867, and observers expected only a mediocre harvest.⁴

Phnom Penh's location at the *chatomuk*, the point where the Mekong and the Tonle Sap Rivers meet, was a logical and improbable location for establishing a capital. Most of Phnom Penh's neighborhoods were well below the level of the flooding. For Cambodia's peasant communities, the rainy season's floods were a blessing, allowing them to grow rice and other crops on fertile soils renewed year after year. For a town and its urban population, however, the floods represented a scourge responsible for the proliferation of disease and the rapid decay of streets and buildings. It appears that when the site was chosen in the fifteenth century, the founders felt that the disadvantages of the *chatomuk* site were outweighed by its strategic location at the center of the kingdom's trade routes, which ran along the two major waterways. Since that time, Phnom Penh had been a town drawing its main strength and appeal from the opportunities it offered for trade.⁵

As a result, foreign merchants had flocked to the *chatomuk* for four hundred years, most prominent among them the Chinese whose commercial contacts with Cambodia dated back to pre-Angkorian times.⁶ From the seventeenth century their community prospered and spread rapidly, with more and more Chinese immigrants establishing themselves in Phnom Penh and the coastal town of Kampot where, in addition to trade, they engaged in the cultivation of pepper.⁷

During the same period, the Emperor of Annam sent soldiers of Chinese descent to the Mekong Delta to secure newly occupied lands in an area that at the time was considered frontier territory, populated predominantly by Khmer and Cham.⁸ The emperor's forces set up base around Mytho and Saigon, expanding their presence a few decades later to neighboring Cholon. With the advent of new steam-driven ocean vessels too large for Southeast Asia's rivers, Cholon became a major market place where goods from further inland were traded and trans-shipped from river junks to ocean-going craft.⁹

Originating from different provinces in China, the Chinese communities in Cochinchina and Cambodia were organized by language into largely homogenous speech groups of Hokkien (Fukienese), Cantonese, and Hainanese, and possibly some Teochiu and Hakka.¹⁰ In Kampot, for instance, Hainanese ran the pepper plantations, while in Phnom Penh the most powerful faction was made up of Cantonese.¹¹ Large business syndicates operated across internal group boundaries, and also across the boundaries of influence of neighboring empires. They thus ignored what the French perceived as ill-defined borders of distinct states. This ability to transcend the administrative and economic units that the French colonial administration went about creating in the occupied territories was one of the typical features of Chinese business. It was also one of its strongest assets in competing with other traders, who were impeded by the French desire to map their new dominions, and to demarcate clear and increasingly impermeable borders.¹²

It is for this reason that Saigon rather than the Cambodian capital was home to Phnom Penh's most influential Chinese businessman: Wang Tai, whose palace was one of the first buildings passengers arriving in Saigon harbor would see. In the late nineteenth century, some two hundred local Chinese families dominated Phnom Penh's commercial life, but Saigon's Wang Tai, a business tycoon of great wealth and power and head of Saigon's Cantonese *congrégation*,

towered high above them all.¹³ He ran brick factories and engaged in construction and trade, much like his most ardent competitor, Banhap, a prominent member of Saigon's *congrégation* of Fukien.¹⁴ Both men held great influence in Phnom Penh, as did Luu Chap, Afoune and Watseng, three more Chinese entrepreneurs who plied their trade between Cholon and Phnom Penh.¹⁵

Other Chinese merchants, such as Focyo and Choi Fat, focused their business primarily in the Cambodian capital. As contractors for King Norodom and the Protectorate, these local Chinese were responsible for a good many of Phnom Penh's construction projects from the early days of the Protectorate to the 1880s.¹⁶ While all these merchants had stakes in construction, shipping and trade, 'revenue farming' was at the core of their business conglomerates. Opium, alcohol, gambling, fisheries, customs, pawnshops, slaughterhouses: almost all the major revenue-generating schemes of the Cambodian as well as the French colonial government were subcontracted to Chinese entrepreneurs who exploited them against an annual fee. Across Southeast Asia, huge business empires were based on proceeds from such 'revenue farms.'¹⁷ Wide networks spanning their home provinces and the Chinese diaspora across Southeast Asia gave them access to credit and capital, which in turn saved them a competitive advantage over others desiring portions of their businesses.

However, the might and wealth of these business moguls should not obscure the fact that the majority of Chinese living in Saigon and Phnom Penh were generally no better off than their indigenous neighbors. As in other Southeast Asian towns, most Chinese owned small boutiques or toiled as carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, bakers, launderers, cart pullers or porters. They lived off poorly paid jobs, sustained by the hope that by working long hours, day after day, they would over time manage to accumulate the minimum amount of capital necessary for a more promising future.¹⁸

The power and financial clout of Chinese businessmen such as Wang Tai and Banhap left little room in the more profitable trades for Phnom Penh's non-Chinese merchants. Still, some Indians, Malay, Vietnamese and Europeans managed to carve out niches in less rewarding areas of the local market, keeping Chinese competition at bay. Malay had migrated to the Khmer Kingdom over the centuries, mixing with Cambodia's Muslim Cham. By the nineteenth century, Cham-Malay settlements were found primarily to the northwest of Phnom Penh along the Tonle Sap River and upstream on the Mekong River between Koh Sutin and Krauchmar, as well as downstream around Chaudoc and across the delta. Larger Cham settlements had their own mosques, and imams served as both religious and political leaders. They engaged in fishing, boat building, weaving, brick production, and small-scale trade.¹⁹

Indians living in Cambodia were found almost exclusively in the capital, Phnom Penh.²⁰ Their presence in the Cambodian capital was noted by travelers like Leclère who in his diary wrote of

Hindus [Indians], clothed in long white shirts falling over a pair of large trousers and a brown waistcoat, with white-skinned faces and short-cut hair, their heads covered with a fez, strolling around in groups of two or three, tacitly, with a very calm, very serious expression.²¹

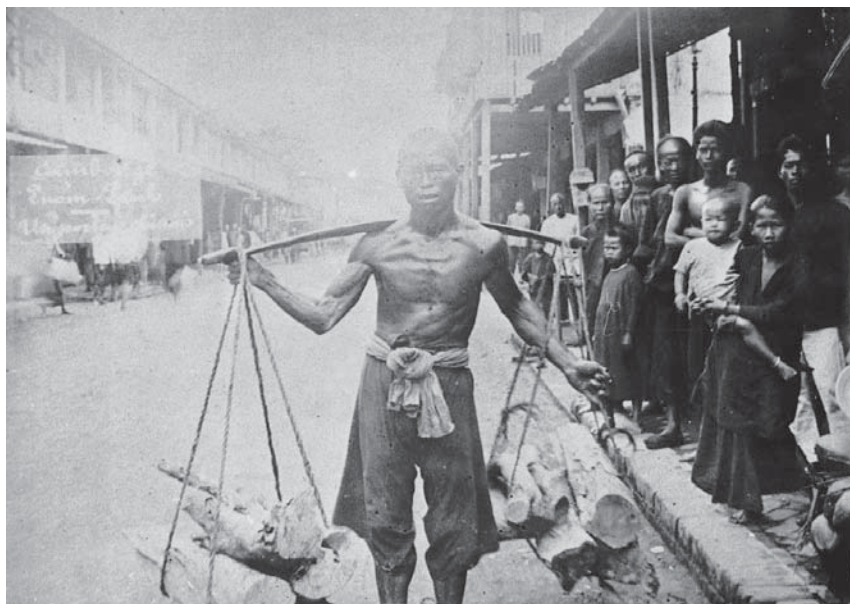


Figure 2.1 A Chinese porter in Phnom Penh's Grande Rue in 1893 (Bibliothèque nationale de France).

The Indian community was made up predominantly of Muslims and possibly included Gujerati and Sindhi, Pachtunes, as well as Muslim Tamils from the Malabar Coast.²² In comparison to the Chinese community in Phnom Penh, their number was very small.

From what can be gleaned from the evidence, their most prominent member was likely the Bombay-born Ibrahim 'Roy' Suleiman who, among other activities, made money through the recruitment in Siam of young women for King Norodom's court.²³ Apart from this, he was in the money-lending business, owned a ship serving destinations along the Mytho–Phnom Penh run, and occasionally dabbled in opium.²⁴ Further afield, a Hussein Daodjee Patail appears at times in the archives, notorious for his bad temper, and utterly disliked by his peers. There was an Abdul Hussein alias Kamruddin and his son Abdul Ali, merchants from Surat and owners of another boat serving the ports along the Great River, and Mougamadou Cassim from Karaikal, one of the few Indian residents originating from a French trading post.²⁵ A Pestonjee ran a monthly boat service from Bangkok via Hatien to most major ports in Cambodia and Cochinchina.²⁶ Other names appear now and then, but on the whole, little is revealed beyond the fact that most Indians engaged in petty trade, shipping, money lending, and the import of cottons.²⁷ In all these areas, they undersold the local European traders effortlessly.

Three centuries earlier, Spanish and Portuguese sailors had furnished the first generation of such European traders in Cambodia. Some decades later, English,

Danish and Dutch ships followed them up the Mekong to Oudong.²⁸ Forced to compete with Chinese traders, these Europeans fared poorly and spent their time maneuvering against Chinese competitors and each other to gain influence at court. Within little more than a century of their arrival, European trading ships largely disappeared from Cambodian waters.²⁹ The British were in 1657 among the last to leave Oudong, followed ten years later by the Dutch.³⁰ By then, however, some Spaniards and Portuguese had intermarried with local families to form the nucleus of a hybrid Catholic Khmer community, preserving their Christian faith and European patronyms over the next two centuries, but assimilating in every other respect to Khmer customs. Apart from the occasional missionary sent from Europe to look after the spiritual well-being of these Portuguese-Khmer, Europeans remained largely absent from the area until the mid-nineteenth-century conquest of neighboring Cochinchina by a joint French–Spanish expeditionary army.

The first Europeans to resurface on Cambodian territory were cattle traders and mercenaries. Unwilling to forgo a customary diet of meat, bread and wine, the French occupation force had within a short period consumed the entire cattle population of the occupied provinces of Cochinchina, with some traders venturing further west looking for more livestock to feed the troops.³¹ Mercenaries came to Cambodia looking for trouble, of which there was no shortage in those days. In 1862, for example, a group of nine Frenchmen – “two sergeants off duty, a Negro from Martinique, two cooks, two hotel employees, and two sailors” – traveled to Oudong to offer their services to King Norodom, who was struggling to stay on the throne in the face of rebellions against his rule.³² Under the command of their leader, Gelley, this motley lot waged war against the rebels with some success, before being forced to leave the country under a hail of accusations by missionaries and the French government as to their exceptionally poor conduct.³³

The Frenchman Paul Le Faucheur appeared in Oudong a little over a year later. After traveling throughout Cambodia, he established a sawmill near Chhlong, south of Kratie, in an area of extensive forests. Within a short time, his travels and commercial activities had brought him into conflict with both the missionaries and the Representative of the Protectorate, especially since Le Faucheur had a tendency to settle arguments with physical violence.³⁴ With King Norodom, Le Faucheur maintained excellent relations. After Norodom had moved his court to Phnom Penh in December 1865, Le Faucheur won the contract to provide wood for the construction of the new palace. As a sign of the favor he must have found with the king, he was also allowed to build his own house and a sawmill in front of the royal residence.³⁵ Even more substantial business deals approved by the king followed for Le Faucheur, the largest being a contract allowing him to purchase pepper below market price in Kampot and transfer it to Saigon on behalf of the merchant house Denis Frères. The transaction eventually led to a bitter dispute between Denis Frères and King Norodom, but left Norodom’s apparent friendship with Le Faucheur intact.³⁶

Another early European trader was Emile Imbert, a former employee of Ségassie’s failed opium farm, who opened an office in Phnom Penh in 1864.³⁷ King Norodom went on to hire the Spaniard Boniface Ferrer and an Irish Jew,

Arthur Rosenthal, as interpreters for French, Spanish and English, while Spooner returned from time to time to Cambodia on behalf of his business associate Watseng.³⁸ On the whole, however, no more than a handful of Europeans had ventured up the Mekong to Cambodia before 1870, and even fewer decided to settle in the kingdom. Their tiny group of independents was still far outnumbered by French naval personnel and missionaries.

In the early 1870s, Phnom Penh's European community began to expand significantly, and some of the new arrivals merit mention. A native of Nice, Félix-Gaspard Faraut had worked for the Public Works department in Saigon as a draftsman before joining the so-called Delaporte mission in 1873 to explore (and plunder) Angkor.³⁹ Faraut then returned to Phnom Penh with the aim of becoming a merchant. Instead he drifted into palace circles where he found employment as King Norodom's secretary, architect, and political adviser. A free spirit and active freemason, Faraut was a knowledgeable and cultured man. Together with Ferrer, Rosenthal and occasionally Le Faucheur, he translated Western languages and mentalities for King Norodom and provided information on issues discussed in French circles.⁴⁰ Like Le Faucheur, he set up house on the riverbank only a few hundred meters from the palace, where visitors, particularly those of non-conformist stock, always found a warm welcome.⁴¹

Alexis Blanc probably came to Cambodia in 1872 as a mechanic for the newly founded Messageries de Cochinchine, a company running the weekly boat service between Phnom Penh and Saigon.⁴² The company opened an office in the former house of Emile Imbert who had died shortly before; Blanc, together with his associate Cadet, took over a dwelling that Caraman had leased from King Norodom some time earlier.⁴³ The two men subsequently formed a partnership and successfully bid for the monopoly on local pig abattoirs, one of those 'revenue farms' traditionally rented out to Chinese entrepreneurs.⁴⁴ As the new pork czar of Phnom Penh, Blanc decided to put down roots, married a daughter of a Sino-Khmer family and began to study local languages. In later years, Blanc became a sought-after interpreter, proving instrumental during French military interventions in the late 1870s, while pursuing various less patriotic personal ventures.⁴⁵ He soon forged a close personal relationship with Caraman. The two remained friends for many years.

An even closer friendship bound Caraman to Madame Marrot and her son Bernard, known locally as Raoul. At the time of Caraman's first trip to Saigon, Madame Marrot had owned a *café-restaurant-hôtel* on the Saigon harbor front, but in the early 1870s she decided to relocate to Phnom Penh.⁴⁶ The only white businesswoman in the Cambodian capital, Madame Marrot was an exceptional figure in many respects. Joined a couple of years later by her partner, Julien Bras, she built up a prosperous business supplying King Norodom with Parisian wares.

Apart from Faraut, Blanc and the Marrots, a half dozen more Europeans settled in Phnom Penh during these years. Some were proven entrepreneurs; others had a more dubious history, like Alphonse Mercuro, who introduced himself as a former croupier and bartender from Yokohama.⁴⁷ Despite the increase, Europeans accounted by 1875 for only a tiny fraction of Phnom Penh's merchant class, and they were by no means the wealthiest or the most respectable within the city's business community. The European community grew by



Figure 2.2 Marie Antoinette Marrot in the early 1880s (Archives personnelles Patrick Leray, Nantes).



Figure 2.3 Bernard Marrot in 1883 (Archives personnelles Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman).

about twenty people in the second half of the 1870s, and another fifty or so during the following years, to reach about one hundred European men and women, all professions combined, by the mid-1880s.

A rapidly growing number of Vietnamese were settling in Cambodia during the same period. For some two hundred years, Vietnamese migrants had been moving southward from Hue toward the delta of the Mekong and upriver into a vast zone between Tay Ninh, Chaudoc and Hatien where by the late nineteenth century Vietnamese settlements mingled with villages inhabited by Khmer, Cham and other ethnic groups.⁴⁸ A large itinerant population of Vietnamese lived along the rivers of the region, fishing, cutting bamboo, and making charcoal, which they sold in Phnom Penh, Mytho, and elsewhere. They lived on their boats, traveling up and down Cambodia's rivers in search of timber, while the Great Lake attracted a large number of Vietnamese fishermen.⁴⁹ Several thousand Vietnamese lived in Phnom Penh. Many of them remained on boats moored to the bank near the market.⁵⁰ Although some Vietnamese settled permanently in Cambodia, in general Vietnamese communities remained mobile, categorized as a "floating population" in colonial censuses.⁵¹ Their kinship and business relations with the southern provinces led them to cross the newly drawn colonial borders frequently.

The Catholic missionary society Missions Etrangères de Paris had established several Vietnamese villages in Cambodian territory, since Vietnamese proved more amenable than Khmer to Catholic proselytizing. Before the advent of the Protectorate there were Vietnamese Catholic parishes in Ponhea Lu, Kampot, Phnom Penh, Banam (Peam Meanchey), and Culao Gieng. They were inhabited for the most part by people recruited on the margins of Vietnamese society, who had previously been forced to leave their home community because of debt or other reasons.⁵² The truth of the matter was that the payment of outstanding debts and the provision of rice by missionaries often preceded any spiritual instruction or conversion. As a result, many Vietnamese mistook the missionary stations for places dispensing welfare in exchange for participation in rituals, and Catholic parishes ended up being dominated by “purchased souls, people crushed by their debts, who receive their baptism only because *Monseigneur* buys them off.”⁵³ Not surprisingly, some of these Catholic Vietnamese villages were short lived.⁵⁴

The principal mission in Ponhea Lu was a relatively prosperous station, accounting in 1865 for a little less than half of the country’s estimated 3,160 Christians. The station was divided into two separate communities, a Vietnamese and a Khmer-Portuguese village.⁵⁵ In 1866, in the wake of the transfer of the capital, the inhabitants of the two villages moved to Phnom Penh, settling on land granted by King Norodom to the north of the town where they joined an established Vietnamese Christian village. This new Catholic neighborhood grew rapidly; within a short period of time, land disputes had become commonplace along its expanding boundaries.⁵⁶

The head of the Cambodia Mission, Bishop Miche, deplored this move from Ponhea Lu to Phnom Penh. In January 1866, he wrote:

There we see what we reap from the *cruel* affection of the King for our Cambodian Christians. He wants them next to him, and I, I would like to see them far away; for I know, de visu, what the Asian courts are worth, they’re vile courts! . . . Poor Cambodian people, their masters pen them up like a herd of buffalos: habit makes them think that this is perfectly normal.⁵⁷

King Norodom’s “cruel affection” was reserved not so much for the Vietnamese section among Miche’s flock, but rather for the Catholic Khmer-Portuguese community, which had long served as praetorian guards for Cambodian kings.⁵⁸ Their military leadership was crucial to the political survival of King Norodom, as it had been to many of his predecessors. To reward their loyalty, the Khmer-Portuguese enjoyed a number of privileges at the court. Most of them held minor roles in the palace administration, which allowed them to support their families. Over generations, some had managed to accumulate small capital reserves, allowing them to operate as moneylenders for fishermen working on the Great Lake.⁵⁹ The intimate relation between the monarchy and these Khmer-Portuguese families also provided some of their members with access to political careers, rising up to ministerial level. Thus Col de Monteiro, for example, stemming from a family of former refugees whose ancestors had fled from Sulawesi in the seventeenth century, served in the 1860s as a clerk in the

treasury and translated for the king when he received European visitors such as Caraman. He and his peers were to play a central role in the shaping of the Protectorate and the reaction of the indigenous elite to French claims for hegemony.

Finally, there were the Khmer. In the rest of the country, the Khmer formed an overwhelming majority, but in the capital Phnom Penh, they were easily outnumbered by the other ethnic communities, which in addition to Chinese, Indians, Cham-Malay, Europeans, Vietnamese and Khmer-Portuguese also included the occasional Thai, Lao, Burmese, Japanese, Mnong, Jarai, or Rhade, as well as a royal guard and brass band made up of Filipinos. Exact figures are not available, but for most of the late nineteenth century Phnom Penh had a Khmer population of somewhere between 5,000 and 15,000.⁶⁰ The vast majority of them were linked to the royal family or to palace services. Khmer served as mandarins and clerks in the royal administration, while providing services as guards, artisans, elephant drivers, pages, cooks, musicians, dancers, and courtesans. Khmer merchants were exceedingly rare, and were generally either Portuguese-Khmer or related through kinship to Chinese families.

Although culturally homogenous, the Khmer distinguished themselves from each other according to family origin, social prestige, political power, and the extent and nature of access to economic resources. Their community was highly stratified, with patron–client and kinship ties cutting across different hierarchical levels and subgroups.⁶¹ At its most rudimentary, the Khmer belonged to one of six ‘classes’: the core royal family, the large group of more distant relatives and in-laws of the royal family, the ancient group of Brahman priests or *bakhus*, the members of the *sangha* (the Buddhist clergy), the free commoners or *neak chea*, and finally, the ‘slaves’ (*neak ngea*). Slaves were, in turn, subdivided into three distinct categories: those sentenced to perpetual service to the crown either for rebellion or as prisoners-of-war; bonded servants unable to pay off debts incurred by themselves or by family members; and captured and trafficked members of minority tribes from the kingdom’s periphery who were prized as domestic servants.⁶²

The ‘class’ of an individual, however, did not necessarily reveal much about that person’s position in society. The boundaries separating one ‘class’ from another were porous and an individual’s status seems to have been temporary and modifiable. A good deal of mobility, particularly downward, existed in Khmer society. The existence of a royal pedigree, for instance, did not prevent a family from falling into the lower class of the *prea vongsa*, if a certain number of generations passed without an heir being named to high office.⁶³ Usurious interest rates or bad luck at gambling, to give another example, could overnight turn mandarins of wealth and standing into debt servants.⁶⁴ The reverse was less common, and in the absence of clear procedures for reimbursement, debt servitude often proved permanent. And the *pol* and *komlah*, hereditary slaves of the crown, who came to number more than 16,000 by the late nineteenth century, could only escape their fate through royal pardon.⁶⁵

These forms of ‘slavery’ were mitigated, however, by what appears to have been the relatively benign nature of ‘enslavement’ in late-nineteenth-century Cambodia. Hereditary slaves working as rice farmers on the king’s estate or

harvesting cardamom for the crown were exempt from taxes other than *corvée* labor, and could end up being economically better off than their free neighbors.⁶⁶ Domestic slaves were in many ways considered part of the master's extended family, and were traditionally treated as such.⁶⁷ And any man could enter monkhood for a limited period before returning to his previous occupation, as is expected of all Khmer men at certain points in their lives up until this day. In short, Khmer society was in reality a very complex and fluid web that escaped monochrome static classification.

With so many communities living alongside each other, each with its own internal ways of functioning, late-nineteenth-century Phnom Penh was a cosmopolitan place. Viewed from the outside, it appeared to be a perfect example of what John Furnivall later defined as a "plural society," that is "a society . . . comprising two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit."⁶⁸ In plural societies, the marketplace becomes the sole organizing force, since the unrelated cultural backgrounds of its citizens impedes the formation of shared opinions and social demands across ethnic boundaries, while the different communities tend to differentiate their economic activities in a division of labor that assigns a set of trades to each group.⁶⁹ To some degree, Phnom Penh was such a plural society where each community appeared to have found its specific place and role, but had comparatively little to do with one another. In the absence of a general consensus, it was a society constantly under threat of disintegrating into its constituent elements, held precariously together by the market and the notion of the monarchy, which together managed to ensure its survival over the centuries despite inherent centrifugal forces.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, there were some common bonds and interactions between Phnom Penh's different communities. Early European colonizers, for instance, either collaborated with Chinese merchants, as in the case of Spooner, Imbert and Mercuro, or entered into the service of King Norodom where they integrated into the palace world, as in the case of Faraut, Rosenthal and Ferrer.⁷¹ In doing so, they were joined by the Filipinos of Norodom's guard who assimilated easily to their Khmer environment.⁷² The local Siamese, in minor mandarinal positions at Norodom's court, were given Khmer wives by the king, while Chinese merchants intermarried freely with Khmer to form, over generations, a commercially powerful group of Sino-Khmer, which controlled much of the local trade as a result of their cultural proficiency in both the administrative realm and the world of commerce.⁷³ Together with the Portuguese-Khmer, they formed what has been called 'secondary colonists': a buffer group that mediated between the European colonial segment and the indigenous society and made colonial rule viable, administratively in the case of the Portuguese-Khmer, and economically in the case of the Chinese.⁷⁴ Intermarriage was also frequent between Khmer and Cham-Malay, in which case the Khmer spouse, man or woman, converted to Islam and assimilated to Malay custom.⁷⁵ Frequent social exchange and intermarriage between ethnic groups rendered boundaries vague and ethnic identity ambiguous.

Moreover, the difference between, for example, Khmer and Chinese or Khmer and Cham, was one based on cultural practice, not 'ethnicity.' Members

of distinct communities lived according to different customs, ate different food, followed different religions, styled their hair in different fashion and clothed themselves in different garments. None of these practices were unchangeable or biologically determined. ‘Ethnic’ identity was, to a large extent, based on choice: one could choose to belong to a specific community by conforming to its rules, or renounce membership by abandoning a specific customary practice.⁷⁶ Sino-Khmer, for instance, could be counted as either Khmer or Chinese, with dress code and hairstyle as the outer symbols of their preference.⁷⁷ Chinese nominated to government positions were at times required to abandon their traditional hair and clothing style and to assimilate to Khmer looks and habits.⁷⁸ Similarly, Vietnamese could switch sides if need be, as shown by the example of a community leader in Phnom Penh, who in order to further his professional prospects had by 1872 “degraded to the point of wearing the *langouti* and shaving his hair short according to the fashion of the Cambodians and the savages,” as one of his compatriots complained.⁷⁹ Shifting ethnic identities were a recurrent phenomenon in traditional Cambodian society.

Phnom Penh’s multi-ethnic society was a plural society in Furnivall’s sense, yet one with blurred and permeable boundaries, and with a good deal of interaction and interdependence between the different groups comprising its body.⁸⁰ Although fragile and prone to conflict, it managed to prosper over the centuries and to incorporate successive waves of immigrants from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, in the face of ever-changing regimes, incessant rebellions, and military occupation. When the French began arriving in the 1860s, Phnom Penh appeared to be a small and precarious place, perched on the banks of the *chatomuk* and flooded by the Mekong River every year. Yet it was home to a society that over the years had shown a remarkable amount of resilience to new challenges. This time, however, its capacity to incorporate every new generation of foreigners without damage to the finely woven social fabric would be put to a hard test.

... and common ground

American traveler Frank Vincent was quite unimpressed when he first visited Phnom Penh in 1872. The town, he wrote, was

dull, nothing breaking the uniformity of its bamboo huts excepting a slender, pyramidal pagoda, one of the palace buildings, and two blocks of brick stores, recently built by the king; it resembles many of the villages along the banks of the [Tonle Sap River], only differing from them in size – in number of dwellings and shops.”⁸¹

On approaching the *chatomuk* from the north, his description continues:

As we sailed down the river, the first objects that attracted my attention were the small but neat buildings – chapel and schools – of the Roman Catholic Mission. Next we passed an old dilapidated steamboat, and back of this, on the shore, waved the national Cambodian flag – blue with a red

border, and emblems of peace and plenty in the center ground. Then came the barracks, where are stationed a company of French troops, and the residence of the Commandant, or *Protecteur*, as he is styled, who represents French interests *versus* His Majesty's. . . . The city extends along the bank of the river for a distance of about three miles, and perhaps not more than half a mile at the farthest into the interior; on that side there is a low embankment of earth, erected recently – at the time of the Annamite trouble. There is no wall about [Phnom Penh], not even around the palace. The main road runs north and south along the river; there are a few cross-roads, but this is *the* street. It is about thirty feet wide, macadamised with broken brick and sand, and lined throughout its entire length with little bamboo shops, the greater part owned by Chinese, many by Klings [Indians], and the remainder by Cambodians and Cochin Chinese. Many of these shops are 'gambling hells'; some are used by opium-smokers, the Klings offer for sale miscellaneous European goods, and the Cambodians silk and cottons: the Cambodians are celebrated for their manufacture of silk. The population of [Phnom Penh] is about 20,000, and embraces Chinese, Cochin Chinese, Klings, and Siamese, besides Cambodians. As we walked along, the street was crowded with natives.⁸²

Phnom Penh was made up of several separate neighborhoods, each inhabited by a specific set of ethnic communities. Dwellings differed in style and function between neighboring quarters, and each neighborhood exuded a distinctive ambiance. The street described by Vincent, nicknamed "Grande Rue" by the French, ran through the central merchant quarter where, as a French journalist noted in 1884, "Chinese, Malabars, Malay, Siamese, Annamites and Europeans live in the most abject *promiscuité*" (a term difficult to translate, defined by one standard dictionary as a "shocking mixture of people").⁸³ In 1865, Imbert moved into a house on this street, allegedly a "large shed divided into four or five rooms."⁸⁴ Near Imbert's house, Caraman built a one-story cabin on the riverbank, belittled by local residents as shabby and unsuitable for a European.⁸⁵ South of Caraman's house lay a plot of land belonging to the German trader Russel, and facing him stood the mansion of a Siamese mandarin.⁸⁶ Speidel, another German merchant, was his neighbor to the north.⁸⁷ Not far away, the Marrot family moved into two adjacent shophouses next to Indian neighbors, as did Ferrer and his Vietnamese wife whose residence was situated at the lower end of the street.⁸⁸ Throughout the first two decades of the Protectorate period, all Europeans arriving in the Cambodian capital gathered in the central market area together with their Chinese and Indian fellow merchants and the odd Khmer and Siamese mandarin. Some Europeans on intimate terms with Norodom, like Le Faucheur and Faraut, were allocated plots of land next to the palace. Housing for French staff of the Protectorate clustered around an administrative post in the north of town. A small number of European peddlers, so impoverished that they could not afford anything but a bamboo hut, remained at a respectable distance from the Grande Rue.⁸⁹

To the south and west of the Grande Rue, four Khmer villages – Chruy Rolous, Beng Tacho, Bac Tuc, and Beng Kac – surrounded the merchant quarter.⁹⁰ The

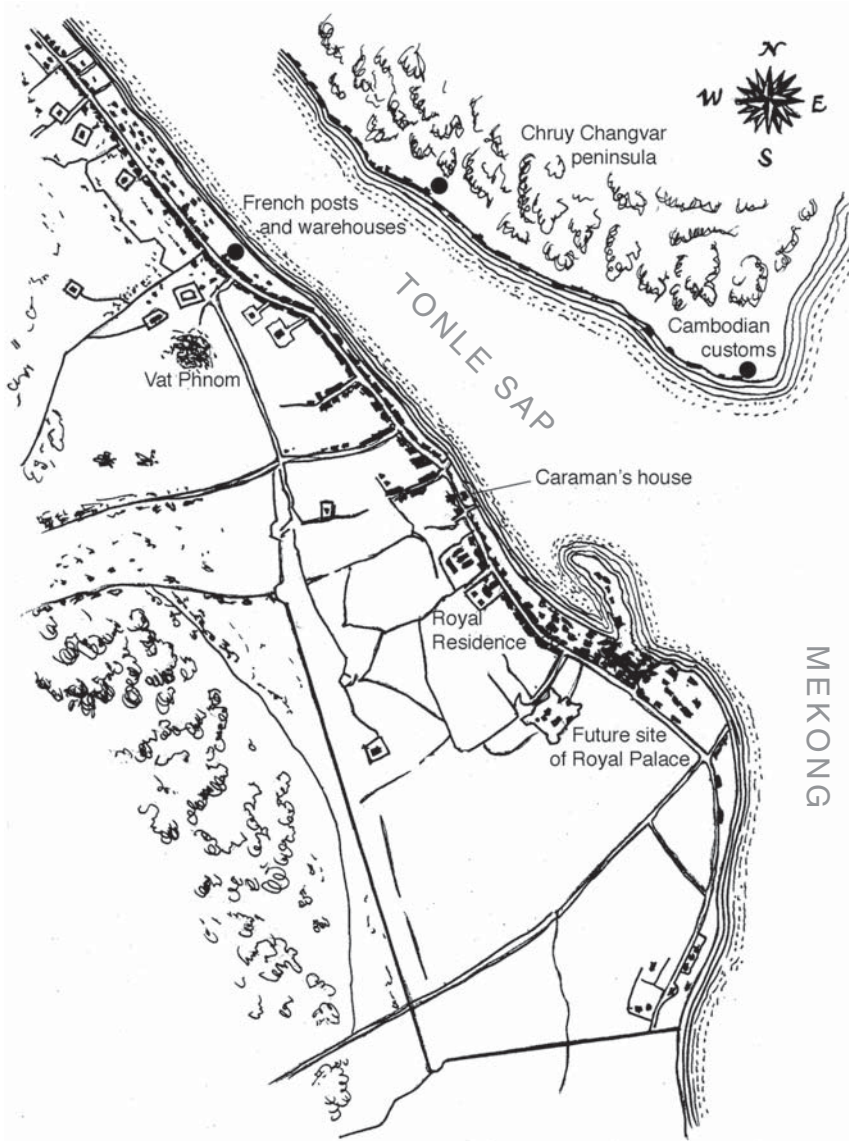


Figure 2.4 Map of Phnom Penh based on a French sketch from 1866 (CAOM).

extension of the Grande Rue to the north ran through a cluster of French administrative buildings located near the *phnom*. Further north, along the riverbank, Norodom's half-brother Sisowath had taken up residence with his small court, while still further to the north, the Portuguese-Khmer neighborhood was found on a strip of land roughly 800 meters long, next to the

Catholic Vietnamese, who occupied another 2,200 meters of shoreline.⁹¹ In the two Christian quarters there were small stores, workshops and a few metal forges as well as some larger mansions of Chinese landlords who rented out huts to those too poor to construct their own houses.⁹² To the south of the merchant quarter, the shoreline gently curved out before turning inward along the banks of the Bassac River. It was here that King Norodom had built his new palace. Other Khmer followed suit, constructing their own neighborhood around the royal quarters. Gardens, trees and shrubs dominated the space between the palace and the riverfront. The farther south one went on the Grande Rue, the less defined this road became, before yielding to vegetation somewhere to the south of the palace grounds.

The Khmer neighborhoods were composed of wooden houses on stilts, about two meters above ground, surrounded by gardens, fruit trees and flowering bushes. Small pathways linked one house to another, with each dwelling set at a respectful distance from the next. This habit of space, coupled with the lush vegetation, gave a rural quality to the Khmer districts, which according to one observer were always marked by “a perfect calm.”⁹³ The Khmer-Portuguese quarter to the north differed only slightly from these Khmer neighborhoods; it featured a missionary church and a couple of adjacent structures built of bricks. To the north, Vietnamese dwellings were similarly built of wood and palm leaf, like those of their Cambodian neighbors, but with variations in layout and design. Thatched shacks erected directly on the ground served as dwellings for the poor. The uniformity of leaf-covered bamboo and wooden huts was interrupted only in the central market area where two long rows of shophouses had been built around 1870. These two-story hangars followed the winding course of the Grande Rue, with each row divided into six-meter-wide *compartiments*, which served simultaneously as stores and homes for the town’s trading community. King Norodom had ordered Paul Le Facheur to help erect these new structures, which led one visitor to the town to suggest that the King wanted “to ‘haussmanize’ (*haussmanniser*) his capital for his own benefit.”⁹⁴ King Norodom reaped considerable profits by renting out the storefronts to Chinese, Indian and European traders who had previously been hard pressed to find adequate lodging in the central market area.⁹⁵ However, in order to truly ‘haussmannize’ the Cambodian capital, far more than two rows of shophouses would have been required.

Penny Edwards has recently presented a refreshing study of the Protectorate period that includes an analysis of colonial urban planning in Phnom Penh.⁹⁶ She chronicles the French drive to build a European-style administrative quarter for the Protectorate from the early 1880s, arguing that through legislation and town planning, the French attempted to partition the capital along ethnic lines. Conscious of Phnom Penh’s ethnic plurality, French officials designed policies (particularly tax policies) and decreed legal statutes that would no longer allow members of different communities to choose their ‘race.’ Instead, the French legislated that race be seen as an unchangeable fact of every human being, expressed by skin pigment, physiognomy, and other biological characteristics.⁹⁷ Pigeonholing the natives into racial categories was never without difficulties, given the permeable and fuzzy quality of ethnic boundaries in Phnom Penh’s existing society.



Figure 2.5 Phnom Penh's Grande Rue with the rows of merchant *compartiments* in 1884 (Société de Géographie de Paris).

The messiness of the Cambodian capital and its social structure were of great concern to French officials from the very early days. By the 1880s, they believed it was high time for *assainissement*, an effort that as a first step aimed at improving the unhealthy and swampy conditions prevalent in most neighborhoods and thought to cause all kinds of tropical diseases.⁹⁸ It was also hoped that *assainissement* would do away with the *paillottes* of the less fortunate inhabitants, which were perceived as a constant eyesore. These bamboo structures were the prime source of the fires that ravaged the town during the dry season, wiping out entire streets in no time. As a threefold threat to public health, private property, and the colonial sense of order and esthetics, it was obvious that the days of Phnom Penh's *paillottes* were numbered.

As in many of the preceding years, cholera spread through Phnom Penh in 1884 with the onset of the rainy season. The Saigon Governor Charles Thomson reacted by ordering his local representative to “make sure that serious *assainissement* measures be taken in Pnom-Penh, in view of public salubrity, constantly threatened by the dirtiness of the *indigènes* and the carelessness of the Cambodian government.”⁹⁹ It was to be desired that “we witness, through the creation of new streets in certain parts of town, the disappearance of the disorderly and unhealthy agglomeration of indigenous huts.”¹⁰⁰

Thomson's orders left Representative Fourès to wrestle with local resistance to such plans, a resistance that he came to ascribe entirely to “the lazy and indolent character of the Cambodian race.”¹⁰¹ Luck seemed to be on the side of the Representative of the Protectorate, however, since a major blaze in Phnom

Penh's market area a few days later turned at least seventy-seven shophouses and numerous *paillettes* to ashes, killed three Chinese citizens, and destroyed property worth in excess of 300,000 piasters.¹⁰² Three days later, a petition by a group of Chinese merchants asked Fourès to help the victims and to ban wooden dwellings in the vicinity of shophouses and brick buildings.¹⁰³ The French were thus joined by the Chinese community in their quest to build a brick and concrete Phnom Penh, with both camps united in their concern for public safety and the desire to control Phnom Penh's real estate and construction market. Construction and real estate signified revenue, and revenue was not only what the Chinese were interested in but also what the cash-strapped Protectorate was most in need of.

Within hours after the blaze, the local Chinese entrepreneur Focyo had signed a contract with King Norodom to reconstruct half of the destroyed *compartiments* on the king's behalf, in exchange for the right to collect rent payments over the course of the next five years.¹⁰⁴ The blaze turned out to be good business for construction entrepreneurs like him, as well as for vendors of bamboo and wood.¹⁰⁵ A couple of days later, the Saigon Governor Thomson embarked on a gunboat to Phnom Penh "in order to form his own opinion of the measures that need to be taken to come to the rescue of the victims of the terrible fire," as the Saigon newspapers told their readers.¹⁰⁶ It seems, however, that Thomson too had profits as much as compassion on his mind when paying his visit to the Cambodian capital.

Thomson's thoughts were primarily occupied with issues of how customs, taxes, opium, and land could be used to turn the Cambodian Protectorate into a more profitable endeavor than it had been up to this point.¹⁰⁷ During his visit, Thomson planned to end the existing land regime, which had been in place, more or less unchanged, for a thousand years. By virtue of a convention imposed on King Norodom, and spelled out by a decree in October of the same year, "the territory of Cambodia, up to today the exclusive property of the Crown, [was] declared property of the State."¹⁰⁸ Several categories of land were established, and the French gave themselves the right to determine in which category given lots and existing buildings were to be placed. All Cambodians across the country were required to register any land titles or other papers supporting claims to property or usufruct with the colonial administration. Land and buildings could be expropriated at the discretion of the administration if deemed necessary for state purposes. Most importantly, all land neither allocated to the construction of roads and government buildings, nor to Buddhist temples or the king's real estate, could be sold to private investors. Article 8 of the October decree was music to the ears of Thomson and other advocates of 'progress' in Cambodia: "Revenue of all sorts, the rentals of all the buildings belonging to the State's domain . . . will be to the profit of the State budget, which will also be the beneficiary of the proceeds from the sale of alienable buildings."¹⁰⁹ In other words, with the exception of Buddhist temples and royal real estate, all land in the Khmer Kingdom had overnight become French property and was now up for sale.

The two-year war that followed Thomson's *coup de force* made any attempt to implement the new land regime in the provinces illusory. In most places, the

French were holding on to their forts only with considerable difficulty. Putting the province up for sale to its inhabitants was out of the question until the same province – the object of the sale – had been ‘pacified’; a task that absorbed the newly instated French provincial administrators and several thousand heavily armed colonial troops.¹¹⁰ In Phnom Penh, however, the decree brought about considerable change, although with long delays. The former system of temporary land grants and rental agreements with the palace gradually gave way to a real estate market that allowed for the purchase and trade of urban property. To a greater extent than under the old system, housing was integrated into a capitalist economy.

Another decree of December 1884 ordered the immediate demolition of all wooden dwellings within fifty meters of a brick building.¹¹¹ This decree completed what the blaze in May had left unfinished and what the market proved unable to accomplish as expeditiously as the French desired. Inhabitants lacking either the necessary capital or the desire to rebuild their homes in concrete were pushed inland from the riverfront, towards areas that were “little in demand,” as one author put it, “because of their insalubriousness.”¹¹² A Phnom Penh where the new and stately mansions of well-to-do merchants had stood next to shacks of day-laborers was replaced by a town where social divisions were reflected in the urban landscape. With social stratification and access to capital often linked to ethnicity, the spatial separation turned out to be ethnic, too, a fact that pleased French observers since it established ‘order’ on yet another level. Henceforth, the Grande Rue became the domain of Chinese, Indians and Europeans, while Khmer and Vietnamese drifted towards the southern, northern, and western peripheries of the town.

Decrees of 1887 and 1889 firmly established Phnom Penh’s new real estate market, with the colonial state and Chinese capital as the main beneficiaries.¹¹³ While the 1880s had seen the erection of only a handful of essential administrative buildings – the prison, the court, a telegraph post, and barracks – the 1890s were marked by a veritable construction boom. Large government edifices, among them a hospital, a new market, the treasury and the customs authority, were built, reflecting the new optimism. Chinese investors developed a perpendicular street leading away from the Grande Rue, while corporations such as Messageries de Cochinchine and Borelly & Cie built branch offices and warehouses.¹¹⁴ A canal was constructed circling the central parts of town and separating them from the French administrative quarter to the north. Within a few years, the frenzied construction activity transformed the capital completely. By the turn of the century, Phnom Penh bore little resemblance to the town that Caraman had first visited in 1865.

The building boom provided a bonanza for merchants dealing in construction materials. Three new sawmills under European management churned out planks and beams, while brick factories in Phnom Penh’s environs enjoyed a roaring trade. According to one account from 1893, they “could hardly keep up with the numerous orders that they receive for the construction of Pnom-Penh’s new neighborhoods.”¹¹⁵ Caraman perhaps would have felt vindicated had he lived so long. For a quarter of a century before, he had already envisioned a new and grander Phnom Penh, built from bricks coming from his own local factory.

Making business with Kin Quan Lee

The idea of the establishment of such a brick factory was probably floated in December 1868 in one of the many rooms of what had been Wang Tai's Saigon mansion. The colonial government had recently acquired the splendid structure on the Saigon Quay to serve as offices for the Municipality and as headquarters for the police force.¹¹⁶ In the absence of stately French-made structures, Wang Tai's mansion also functioned as a government hotel for receiving official guests. In December 1868, various Frenchmen and local staff were pacing up and down its rooms and hallways, mopping floors, rearranging furniture and decorating the interior: King Norodom and his entourage were due for an official visit.

A crowd of spectators waited on Saigon's pier for the illustrious guest to arrive. The French planned to receive the monarch with pomp and military honors. French, Vietnamese and Chinese onlookers shoved each other aside to get a view as soon as the colorful procession of royalty and mandarins began walking down the gangway. Navy officers nervously straightened their breeches, while cheering crowds waved handkerchiefs and French flags. Caraman was standing somewhere in those crowds, and he could see how his old acquaintance Le Faucheur set foot on the pier as part of Norodom's entourage. King Norodom had brought him along to ensure that the Cambodian silver bars would be exchanged into local currency at an advantageous rate.¹¹⁷ The money was needed for some essential shopping on Saigon's Rue Catinat.¹¹⁸

There was also Jean Moura, a young French naval officer, who had replaced de Lagrée when the latter was appointed head of the Mekong River Expedition, which was meant to explore the river up to its source in Tibet.¹¹⁹ A trained mechanic, Moura had worked in Saigon in the early 1860s, outfitting French gunboats at the docks.¹²⁰ Following a short stint in equatorial Africa, Moura volunteered to return to Indochina in 1866 and was posted at the Cambodian court. He was an intelligent, sincere and hard-working officer who combined these qualities with a gentle personality.¹²¹ He got along well with King Norodom and had traveled to Saigon to keep him company.¹²²

Over the course of a week, the king attended a string of official receptions, dinners and balls, interrupted by a splendid parade of the colonial troops and some sightseeing and shopping. At the end of his visit, the colonial hosts were confident that their objectives had been met. The esteemed visitor and his advisers left town, according to an official report, "after spending on the local market a substantial sum" and apparently "struck by everything they saw." The authorities were relieved that the visit had gone so well and presumed the royal travel party would take the impression back to Cambodia "that we are much superior to them, and that it is only reasonable on their part to let us guide them a little."¹²³

Caraman felt relieved to have spent some time with the Cambodian monarch whose visit filled him with renewed hope. In a way yet unforeseen, his royal mentor would help him tackle a number of challenges that had recently threatened to overwhelm him. A few months before King Norodom's visit, Caraman had traveled to Tourane, a major town in the Kingdom of Annam.¹²⁴ From Tourane, he intended to continue his journey to the capital Hue where he hoped to be granted an audience with Emperor Tu-Duc. It is difficult to reconstruct the precise purpose and itinerary of this voyage. From the available

evidence, it appears that the trip was yet another fantastic, confusing scheme to lead Caraman to wealth and fame. From various letters we learn that his ‘friend’ Pétrus Truong-vinh-Ky and a Saigon-based Spaniard called Andres Fris were somehow involved, as were sales contracts for a large steamboat and various merchandise, as well as concessions of iron- and coalmines in Tonkin. The trip resulted in allegations of spying, piracy, and unpaid bills in excess of half a million piasters.¹²⁵ In the end, an official complaint about the unsolicited visit was lodged with the Saigon Governor by the court in Hue, followed by a request from the governor for Caraman to justify his actions.

Later in the year, gunpowder was at the center of another controversy involving Caraman. From his hotel room on the Saigon Quay, Caraman had ordered a large quantity of gunpowder that he intended to sell to the King of Siam.¹²⁶ Once again, the colonial government was not amused by such independent trade.¹²⁷ Around the same time, he proposed the establishment of a boat service between Saigon and Phnom Penh, another project that came to nothing.¹²⁸ This string of debacles had left Caraman vulnerable to criticism. To make matters worse, a number of letters had recently arrived in Saigon from Paris, which risked ruining his reputation with the local public once and for all.¹²⁹ One of them contained news that a Parisian court had handed down a verdict against Caraman’s father, Michel, finding him guilty of using a false name and title. Michel’s punishment was light: the court ordered him, in a show of “extreme indulgence,” to pay a fine of fifty francs.¹³⁰ For Caraman, however, the ramifications were far more damaging. News spread quickly in the colony that a notorious Saigon resident, the honorable Count Frédéric Comnène Thomas de Caraman, had been exposed as an impostor and was, in reality, the son of a policeman. King Norodom and his court therefore arrived in Saigon at an exceedingly delicate period of Caraman’s career.

Ridiculed for his lack of success in business and mocked for his claims to high birth, Caraman felt the urge to leave Saigon behind and start anew. His correspondence from this period reveals that Cambodia and the kingdom’s business opportunities were once again on his mind. Among those opportunities, construction appeared to him to be particularly promising. Caraman knew from Le Faucheur that there were grand plans to improve the Cambodian capital. Construction materials would be in high demand in the years to come, so Le Faucheur would have argued, and builders and suppliers were bound to make a fortune, a hope Le Faucheur also harbored for himself and his newly established chalk quarry near Chaudoc.¹³¹ Caraman began dreaming of brick factories and modern, steam-driven sawmills, of construction companies and urban development projects, always picturing himself as the person in charge. His letters to the French authorities in Saigon and Phnom Penh were imbued with refreshed enthusiasm and a strong sense of purpose. Not surprisingly, when a clerk from the treasury knocked on the door of Caraman’s hotel room two months later to request payment for his merchant license, no one answered the door.¹³² Caraman had already left for Phnom Penh.

Only days after his arrival in the Cambodian capital, Caraman requested that the French government give him the southern part of its land concession on the Chruy Changvar peninsula, opposite the market.¹³³ His request was signed as

the local representative of a company called Blum Brothers & Cie, which was to provide a “supply of bricks for the palace and for the town of Phnom Penh.”¹³⁴ Even before construction of his brick factory began, Caraman was already petitioning King Norodom to consider him as the supplier of bricks for all future construction projects in the capital. Caraman also contacted Chinese merchants in Saigon and Phnom Penh for support in setting up his factory. In Saigon, his business partner was one of the leaders of the Fukien *congrégation*, while in Phnom Penh, Kin Quan Lee, a local entrepreneur, was hired to manage production and sales.¹³⁵ Caraman further employed a group of Vietnamese to ensure a regular supply of clay, the raw materials for his bricks, and of wood to fire his kilns.¹³⁶ Unable to communicate with any of his staff, he hired Alfred Rosenthal, the Irishman in King Norodom’s service, to translate his grand visions into Khmer, Chinese and Vietnamese.¹³⁷

Having initiated everything necessary for a successful venture, Caraman returned to Saigon to ask the governor for further concessions on Chruy Changyar. He already had plans to add a range of “other industrial establishments no less serious” to his brick factory and sawmill as soon as both had been put in place.¹³⁸ Operations in Phnom Penh, however, met with almost immediate difficulties, and within a couple of months, Kin Quan Lee and Rosenthal found themselves in increasingly unpleasant situations. The execution of Caraman’s instructions entailed considerable expenditures, which Caraman had yet to pay. Lee was attacked and beaten by his own unpaid employees, while Vietnamese woodcutters besieged the Protectorate offices, complaining that Caraman refused to pay for their deliveries.¹³⁹

Having been promised funds to pay rent to his Filipino host in the palace, Rosenthal found himself compelled to ask Representative Moura for protection in order to escape a similar fate to Lee’s.¹⁴⁰ Moura eventually resigned himself “to sort out these gentlemen’s dealings, which are quite messy and unfortunate,” reporting to his superiors in Saigon that it was “through such behavior that the majority of Europeans who do business in Cambodia create for themselves a deplorable reputation, compromising for a long time to come the trust that we strive to acquire for our citizens.”¹⁴¹ There could be no doubt that, in Moura’s eyes, Caraman and Rosenthal’s commercial misfortunes also carried political implications.

Moura not only denounced such dubious dealings by local merchants, but also came to forbid his staff from associating with them, prohibiting visits to their homes for any reasons except business.¹⁴² European newcomers to the Cambodian capital were briefed by him upon arrival of this community of “vagrants and tramps” (“*des va-nu-pieds et des Rasta*”) who were best avoided altogether.¹⁴³ Moura and the Saigon Governor further wished to prevent these traders from socializing with and influencing King Norodom. To their chagrin, however, the merchants continued to frequent the palace, and King Norodom appeared to encourage them to stay in the kingdom and do business. To ensure their presence in Phnom Penh, the king disbursed considerable amounts of money in aid and loans to the least fortunate among them.¹⁴⁴

Both Moura and the Saigon government found it hard to understand the rationale behind such royal affection for Phnom Penh’s European lumpen-

proletariat. Unwittingly, they were witnesses to an early expression of King Norodom's talent to continually recruit to his circle of intimates new members whose objectives differed from those of his existing political supporters. As such, the king established a kind of divide-and-rule policy within his sphere of influence. While it was obvious to anyone that, for the colonial government, some of Phnom Penh's European merchants were a political nuisance as well as a moral and economic eyesore, the same renegades represented a political asset to King Norodom in his upcoming battle against Saigon's interference in domestic affairs. The signs for such a strategy were evident almost immediately after Norodom ascended the throne.

The juggler

In French circles, the man who seemed so fond of Caraman, Le Faucheur and their peers was generally dubbed "our kinglet" (*notre roitelet*). The deprecating epithet had originally been coined by French missionaries who sneered at Norodom's fondness for opium, alcohol and women.¹⁴⁵ French government staff joined them in censuring Norodom's carefree attitude to state affairs, noting a lack of seriousness about developing the country's economic potential and what they claimed was his treachery in diplomatic matters. Some European visitors belittled his lack of stateliness and his bad taste, which they said ranged from clothing and palace furniture to his choice of confidants. Caraman, in the wake of one of many fallings-out with his royal protector, characterized him as a man who had

nothing but the arrogance, the silliness and bad faith of Asian kings. In that respect he is the most accomplished prince. . . . Shabby and penny-pinching, he looks for any means to deny his signature, because he regrets the morning after what he did the night before. Without aim and purpose, he pushes ahead but does not wonder where he is going; undecided about everything, of a marvelous duplicity, caprice serves as his only guide.¹⁴⁶

Other foreign visitors, more favorably disposed to King Norodom, described him as "a pleasant-looking person . . . , a little man with intelligent and expressive features; teeth blackened from the use of betel, wearing his hair after the Siamese fashion, the head shaved excepting a small tuft upon the crown."¹⁴⁷ Still others wrote that "he seduces you from the moment you arrive, as he comes toward you in order to greet you and familiarly shakes your hand on the doorstep of his private chamber."¹⁴⁸ Noting the king's "jovial character," these commentators felt that he gave "the impression of a good sort of fellow, with a vivid spirit, sharp gaze, [and a] playful and slightly vulgar sense of humor."¹⁴⁹ While criticizing King Norodom for his perceived ineptitude as a ruler, many Frenchmen nevertheless appear to have been impressed by his charismatic personality.¹⁵⁰

French sources assert that many mandarins and parts of the Cambodian population at large were less charmed by their king than were these European visitors. Throughout his reign, French sources repeatedly stress how unpopular he was among his subjects.¹⁵¹ Norodom had two half-brothers, Sisowath and



Figure 2.6 King Norodom in the 1860s (ASEMI, Nice).

Sivotha, with whom he had been on bad terms for years because of competing ambitions for the throne and because of amorous affairs gone awry.¹⁵² The French always claimed that Sisowath enjoyed more support in the public. Since Sisowath had always shown himself to be more Francophile than Norodom, this was a biased view; but it was shared by some local non-Western observers, and appears credible to a degree.¹⁵³ Under French supervision, Norodom and Sisowath arrived over the years at a somewhat shaky entente. In the case of Sivotha, the estrangement between the siblings was beyond repair. Until his death, Sivotha would keep on defying his brother from his jungle hideouts in Kompong Svai to the north of the capital, inciting rebellions every few years.

The shakiness of Norodom's rule in the 1860s sprang from political events in the first four years of his reign. From the very beginning, rebels under Sivotha had marched against Norodom's partisans. In 1861, a decisive battle occurred in Phnom Penh, in the course of which Sivotha's troops sacked and pillaged the town, partially burning it to the ground. Royal troops retreated in confusion to Oudong.¹⁵⁴ The Christian General Pen tried to set up a defense ring protecting Ponhea Lu and Oudong. He drew on his guard of Portuguese-Khmer that had been instrumental in expelling Sivotha from Oudong only a few months earlier.¹⁵⁵ This time however, his soldiers abandoned him within hours, and the rebels began looting the Catholic village.

The French garrison in Mytho, upon learning of the missionaries' misfortune, sent a gunboat to Ponhea Lu to dissuade the attackers, while King Norodom escaped to the Siamese-administered province of Battambang where he appealed to the court in Bangkok for military support. With the backing of Siam and some Cham regiments Norodom managed to re-enter Oudong in early 1862, while fighting in the provinces continued.¹⁵⁶ The French mercenary Gelly and his eight companions appeared on the scene and an influential Chinese ex-privateer from Kampot threw his support behind Norodom.¹⁵⁷ In the end, in spite of the number of participants and the lack of coordination, royal forces gained the upper hand and Sivotha escaped to the north. By 1863, a precarious calm reigned in Cambodia.¹⁵⁸ The same year, Norodom signed the Protectorate Treaty with France and granted them military posts in Phnom Penh and Kompong Luong.

Only months later, another contender for the throne, Achar Sva, a millenarian leader who claimed to be of royal origin, took up arms against Norodom, assembling a numerous following in the area of Hatien, among them Malay and Vietnamese. Former mandarins who had been compromised by their allegiance to Sivotha joined his ranks, as did the governor of Kampot, *oknya* Chet. From Hatien, the rebels conducted raids toward the Khmer heartlands, capturing the coastal area and moving rapidly closer to Phnom Penh, before French military interventions eventually managed to push them back.¹⁵⁹

The previous abstract on political and military events during the first years of Norodom's reign reveals the extent to which his position remained precarious and contested. By the time Caraman first arrived in 1865, Norodom had ruled for four and a half years, during which he confronted daily challenges. To tackle them, he was forced to appeal for and accept Siamese and French assistance. When it came to raising troops, leaders of the Portuguese-Khmer community, powerful provincial governors and mercenaries were of crucial importance. The Cham-Malay and the Portuguese-Khmer could influence the balance of power decisively, according to their conduct in times of crisis. In this situation, Norodom continued to seek strong partners, who, in turn, needed to be neutralized by other strong partners with differing objectives so that in the middle of it all the king could maintain some sort of rule. It was rule of the most delicate kind, resting on constant negotiations between competing aspirations, with strategic dispensation of scarce resources to an array of allies, none of whom should be allowed to become too powerful. To govern the Khmer Kingdom meant a daily struggle to balance various groups with differing agendas, each trying to dominate with its own objectives. Doudart de Lagrée's analysis of the state of affairs at Norodom's court at the time of Caraman's first visit is revealing:

I believe that no means, no chance whatsoever remains for [this small kingdom] to reorganize through its own strength. Left to itself, it will immediately fall into complete anarchy. . . . No middle class exists in Cambodia. There are only the mandarins who do not work, and a miserable population, [which is] exploited to the extreme. All the commerce is in the hands of foreigners, Chinese, Malay, Annamites. In the absence of any security in the country's laws, and completely impoverished by the exactions [taxes and

corvée labor], the population is incapable of offering the slightest resistance to armed revolt. The class of mandarins, two or three times more numerous than necessary, can only be partly satisfied by the King. He can divide authority in smaller and smaller parts and increase [the number of] officials in the provinces as much as he likes, the number of malcontents remains always considerable. The result is a genuinely unattached party available to anyone (*un véritable parti en disponibilité*), ready to throw itself into the arms of the first pretender that shows up, under the condition that the latter promises, in the case of success, to make *tabula rasa* and to hand to his friends the exclusive right to exploit Cambodia (*de donner à ses amis l'exploitation complète du Cambodge*).¹⁶⁰

De Lagrée's impression that anarchy was imminent should France not intervene is understandable given his political affiliation and the tendency among French navy officers to compare the unintelligible structure of Khmer administration to the remnants of a sophisticated bureaucracy in the conquered Vietnamese provinces. His description suggests that whereas the French liked to depict King Norodom as the Oriental despot *par excellence*, the king was, in fact, anything but master of his destiny, let alone of the country he was supposed to govern. At the heart of the problem were mandarins and provincial governors, this "genuinely unattached party available to anyone," whose loyalty was never certain and had to be continuously fostered and maintained.

May Ebihara aptly described post-Angkorian and pre-colonial Cambodian history as a continuum that vacillated between two poles. At the one end, there were times of relatively strong central governments reaching out into the provinces and exercising effective control over local overlords; at other times, rule at the top was weak and provincial overlords governed with few restraints.¹⁶¹ David Chandler notes that in the nineteenth century prior to the Protectorate, provincial governors (*chaovay srok*) "controlled the balance of power in the kingdom."¹⁶² Fifty-six provinces with as many governors stood nominally under Norodom's sovereignty.¹⁶³ Forty-three of these provinces were overseen by his cabinet of ministers, five were allocated to the *obbareach* (a member of the royal family designated by an incumbent king as his successor), and three made up the personal fiefdom of Norodom's mother, who remained in Oudong after 1866.¹⁶⁴ Within the palace, seventy-one government services employed more than eight hundred minor mandarins, while *obbareach* Sisowath's court, with its own five ministers, comprised twenty-one services staffed by one hundred and twenty bureaucrats with mandarin status.¹⁶⁵ The Queen Mother's Oudong court consisted of another three ministers and sixty-six mandarins. A number of Siamese functionaries pried into government affairs on behalf of the Bangkok court, which at the beginning of King Norodom's reign still retained considerable influence over local affairs.¹⁶⁶

In addition, an alternative hierarchy existed, extending from each mandarin, governor, and official down to the lower social strata and from the capital to faraway village communities in the provinces. This second hierarchy, called *komlang*, consisted of overlapping networks of clients where protection was exchanged for loyalty and the provision of services.¹⁶⁷ Such patronage networks



Figure 2.7 Sisowath with part of his retinue in the 1860s (ASEMI, Nice).

expanded, overlay, and modified the grid of power cast upon the land and people of Cambodia by the royal administration. From the palace chambers to the kingdom's periphery, a plethora of higher and lesser dignitaries acted not only in the name of the royal family to expedite matters of government concern, but also (and often in contradiction) to promote their own business. It seems reasonable to assume that a large share of their activities escaped King Norodom's control. Whenever an affair did come to the king's attention, he was further greatly limited in his actions, for he depended on the continued support and loyalty of bureaucrats and provincial overlords to ensure his rule.

Further constraints were imposed on the king by custom and traditional perceptions of kingship. To Leclère, the king's clout was illusory, for he was

restrained, obligated, mastered by the rites, customs, even the habits, by superstitious fear of infringing upon these, [and by the fear of] thus shrinking in the appreciation of his people, displeasing the ancestors and bringing upon himself the wrath of the *devatas*.¹⁶⁸

To give an example, King Norodom's reign was contingent on a coronation ceremony that required a complex protocol and the presence of royal regalia then in the hands of the Bangkok court.¹⁶⁹ Since a contender to the throne could not be invested with monarchical power without having royal insignia, they had always been considered "as the true source of regal clout."¹⁷⁰ The first years of his reign, during which he had not been sanctified by proper ceremony, were

thus seen as highly insecure. Even with his coronation accomplished in 1864, Norodom's rule was shaped as much by events and processes that derived their meaning from the *dharma* as by politics in a Western understanding of the term.¹⁷¹

His limited latitude in directing government affairs stood in sharp contrast to the powers ascribed to the king by palace tradition and, to a lesser extent, by popular opinion. When Norodom was consecrated as King of Cambodia, he was ordained with a series of traditional titles, which convey none of the constraints weighing down on his rule. According to his titles, Norodom was the

grand King with divine feet, superior to anyone, descendant of the deities and of Vishnu . . . , of supreme power on earth, full of qualities like the sun . . . , great among the great, the one whose power extends over the whole of Cambodia . . . , grand King whose power has no limits.¹⁷²

The king was thus endowed with quasi-divine qualities and powers, omniscient and omnipotent, but in practice he was left with relatively little room to maneuver, creating conflicting features of Cambodian kingship that were at times difficult to bring into harmony.¹⁷³ The crucial point was that strengths and weaknesses were given to different facets of what he was and stood for: the divine powers were bestowed in the king's office, in which the chosen successor was incarnated as the supreme protector of the *dharma*, while as an actual individual he was dealt the office's worldly constraints. As a result, kings were replaceable, and very easily so.

Nothing had predetermined Norodom as the only candidate to succeed the late King Ang Duong. In the Cambodian tradition, there was no such thing as a presumptive heir to the throne, no rules of primogeniture or blood lineage.¹⁷⁴ A king could designate a prince as *obbareach*, his personal favorite to succeed him on the throne, but once he died, it was a council of the principal mandarins that decided the successor. They could choose their candidate freely among the members of the royal family, unconstrained by the recommendations of their late monarch. A Cambodian king was thus always an elected king who had received his position by virtue of the power of others. Implied in this was the notion that this privilege could be withdrawn if the king failed to live up to his role, as was in fact quite frequently the case in Cambodian history. At the very least it meant that challengers like Sivotha or Achar Sva could base their regal aspirations on the accepted idea that while the monarchy was inviolable, the king was not.

Norodom himself was well aware of the limits of his sway. The multiple dependencies of his rule shaped many moments of his reign that, in the view of the French, seemed to reveal nothing but ill will. One of those moments came when he signed a Protectorate Treaty with France, followed, a year later, by a secret treaty with Siam that went diametrically against the one signed with the French, a move that earned him the reputation of disloyalty. It was similarly because of the nature of Cambodian kingship that, throughout his reign, his ability and readiness to implement reforms of any kind remained limited. Yet it was again the same quality of kingship that gave Norodom the capacity to strike

up a formidable countrywide rebellion against the French as soon as he presented their interference as an attack against the old ways and the institution of the monarchy. The French had to learn this painful lesson in the course of the uprising of 1885–86. At that time, they were already convinced that they no longer needed to reckon with their Cambodian ‘kinglet’.

Even though beleaguered from all sides, the Cambodian monarchy remained strong enough to fight French attempts to radically alter the way the country was being run. It soon became apparent that King Norodom and the traditionalist faction of the mandarinat had the determination and capability to block any substantial reforms of the administration imposed by the colonial power. Thus other, subtler ways to eventually conquer Cambodia needed to be explored. Raphaël Barquissau once said that the “real conquerors are the conquerors of the soul: apostles, doctors, magistrates, professors,” all of whom we will meet further on in the narrative.¹⁷⁵

3 Educators and collaborators, 1870–73

Swan song

In March 1869, a young Frenchman named Pierre-Laurent Larrieu-Manan, a native of the Pyrenees region near the Spanish border, took up his new post as clerk of Saigon's Superior Court. One of Larrieu's first acts was to register a ruling of the 17th of the month, levying a 200-franc fine against the local resident Frédéric Thomas. The ruling was based on his violation of articles 259 and 463 of the Penal Code pertaining to the fraudulent use of honorary titles and unlicensed name changes.¹ Letters from France detailing the conviction of Caraman's father had induced swift local action.² By the time a local newspaper reported on the verdict, *tout Saigon* knew of the scandal. In addition to chronic shortages of money and a reputation for commercial incompetence, Caraman was publicly labeled a charlatan. Things were looking gloomy, to say the least.

Worse still, Caraman's brick factory never managed to produce any bricks, nor had his proposed steam-driven sawmill ever processed any trees into boards and beams. Because of a bout of dysentery, Caraman had been unable to return to Phnom Penh in time to resolve the problems his business had encountered.³ In his view, the fault was entirely that of Kin Quan Lee, his Chinese associate, who had squandered his money and abused his trust. Kin Quan Lee, Rosenthal, and the Vietnamese workers, in turn, felt that the fault was Caraman's because he had failed to provide any funds and know-how to turn his visions into a concrete enterprise.⁴ Faced with mounting accusations, Caraman acknowledged that he might have committed a few "youthful errors," but that, regardless of this, his "honorability . . . had been and always will be unassailable."⁵ He felt that "an empire of influence" was plotting against him, that ill-willed detractors were trying to "crush [him] in such an unjust manner." The only thing he was ready to admit was that he might have been "unlucky" in his "various commercial undertakings,"

but never will anyone be able to say that I was a miserable person. A man, his back bent under the weight of bad fortune, may stumble and fall; but it is of no import, if he never strays from the path of honor.⁶

Funds were short, his reputation compromised, his health less than good. Caraman wondered what had become of his colonial life. What was it that prevented him from realizing the dream of social advancement, prosperity and

ease that had made him come to Asia years earlier? His hopes temporarily lowered, he wrote at the time that if his life “was not meant to be happy,” at least he “needed to leave behind a memory that was honorable.”⁷⁷ A new occupation was thus required, offering a more tranquil lifestyle and a guaranteed income. Toward the end of 1869, with his Phnom Penh brick factory succumbing to unpaid bills, worker riots and confusion, he and King Norodom arranged for him to become a private tutor to some of the king’s children. Merchant-turned-industrialist-turned-teacher, Caraman embarked on his third colonial career since returning to Asia two years earlier.

It is not clear from the sources who took the initiative for the creation of a palace school. Caraman later claimed that he had been “invited by King Norodom to be the tutor of his children in the wake of several commercial and industrial failures.”⁷⁸ Perhaps it was Caraman who offered his services to the palace to ensure a living while recovering from his illness. Once the nucleus of a school had been established, he persuaded King Norodom to open it to sons of ministers and mandarins, “thus founding, for his glory, the royal college that carries his name.”⁷⁹ Caraman later claimed to have instructed thirty-five boys, five of whom belonged to the Norodom family. The others were sons of *obbareach* Sisowath and of various minor mandarins.¹⁰

Whereas Norodom’s attitude to the school was reported to be positive, the archival record is inconclusive concerning the French authorities’ view of Caraman’s new undertaking.¹¹ A report from 1911 states retrospectively that the Protectorate school was inaugurated in 1869, without mentioning Caraman.¹² A report from the turn of the century begins its narrative in 1872, noting mistakenly that Caraman directed the school from 1876 to 1877.¹³ In the years prior to 1873, correspondence between Phnom Penh and Saigon contains occasional allusions to the desirability of a French school; these remarks seem only to have resulted in several young Cambodians studying for short stints at the schools of Soctrang and Saigon.¹⁴ French officials were generally quick to draw the attention of their superiors to any educational achievements that could be illustrative of the *mission civilisatrice*. Thus the absence of any mention of Caraman’s school in official correspondence between 1869 and 1871 makes it hard to believe that the school was directly connected to or sanctioned by the Protectorate. Instead, we may assume that it sprang from a personal arrangement between the king and Caraman, perhaps enjoying the unofficial acquiescence of Representative Moura, who would have been pleased to see Caraman occupied in an area less prone to controversy.

French officials, however, had not remained idle with regard to education during the early days of their presence. In a letter of 1867 to Representative Pottier, Governor de la Grandière noted that he had always been interested in “intelligent Cambodian children, in order to instruct them, teach them French, and form them into interpreters.” The governor requested that the representative “urge the lower rank mandarins to make this sacrifice, which will be their future and will render a great service to Cambodia.”¹⁵ That same year, de la Grandière approached Bishop Miche in Saigon for help in establishing a school in Phnom Penh. The Missions Etrangères ran a good number of schools in the colony, two of which were already situated on Cambodian territory. These

schools were part of the missionizing drive to baptize poor children and “abandoned orphans,” “collected” by missionaries among the local population.¹⁶ A special budget was provided to the mission by the Paris-based society of the Sainte Enfance, in order to establish orphanages and schools throughout the region.

The kind of school de la Grandière had in mind, however, was something quite different. His school was intended for children of the Cambodian elite with the double aim of inculcating these future rulers with the ideology of the French cause, while at the same time, more practically, training capable local interpreters. In compliance with the governor’s request, Miche recruited a French-speaking *Khmer kraom* among his converts, and early the following year accompanied him to Phnom Penh to introduce him at court and help establish this school.¹⁷ Yet, for reasons that remain unclear, nothing came of this initiative and the Khmer teacher in question is never mentioned again in archival records.

Before long, de la Grandière approached the missionaries a second time and asked them to dispatch five clergymen from France to serve as private tutors for children in the palace.¹⁸ As with his first request, de la Grandière claimed he was acting at King Norodom’s behest, a claim that is difficult to verify, as no other sources from the time document Norodom’s opinion on the matter.¹⁹ There was certainly agreement between the Catholic mission and the government, since the missionaries’ ambition to corner the market for Western education in Cambodia and de la Grandière’s desire to further the word of God and French influence meshed well. Yet, once again, the path of the five missionaries who were to leave France on a Saigon-bound steamer trails off into oblivion; wherever they went after boarding in Marseilles in February 1869, it wasn’t Phnom Penh, and by the end of that year, the Protectorate school had not yet materialized.²⁰

Caraman was thus the first to offer secular French education in Cambodia when, from late 1869, he began teaching his royal pupils basic arithmetic and French language. If he is to be believed, his teaching fell on fertile soil. Thanks to his allegedly ingenious methods, “at the same time simple, fast and appealing,” he achieved results that would have made any teacher in France pale with envy: “within fifteen days, I had students that knew how to read, had begun to write, knew around one hundred of the most common words, and could count.”²¹ With such “unhoped for” achievements, the curriculum had to be expanded. In June 1870, he requested five large world maps from Saigon and a *planisphère*, as well as small Michelot atlases, French grammar books, and fables by Lafontaine. In addition to a core of language skills and math, geography and French literature had apparently been added to the program of study.²²

In Saigon, meanwhile, the municipal school, which catered to the less literate among mariners and Western merchants, offered exactly the same fare to its students. Established in the premises of the former town hall on Boulevard Isabelle II, Saigon’s municipal school offered groups of adults, on four nights per week, classes in French grammar, algebra, basic notions of natural history, and readings of French prose.²³ The similarity of the two schools’ syllabi illustrates that, at the time, French education was deemed universal, fit for any audience, be it Western adults or Khmer children. That year, 1870, students of

Saigon’s municipal school noted with surprise how the street signs in front of their school building on Boulevard Isabelle II were suddenly being changed to read Rue d’Espagne.²⁴ More streets named after European royalty suffered the same fate. The changes illustrated a new era back in France: Napoleon III had abdicated, and the Prussians were marching on Paris. Frenchmen back home and in the colonies once again shouted “Vive la République,” instead of “Vive l’Empereur,” whenever a display of patriotic fervor seemed fitting.

Having spent close to a year as a teacher at King Norodom’s court, Caraman felt that a career move was in order. He had in early 1870 applied for a post at Saigon’s municipal school to teach algebra, geometry and trigonometry, but the authorities felt that “the reputation of Monsieur Frédéric-Thomas in Saigon leaves him with little hope of success.”²⁵ For Caraman, after all his efforts to further the French cause in Cambodia, this rebuttal hit hard, and “a long outcry of sorrow and indignation” flowed from his quill in reply. “It may well be that one lynches a man by means of five handwritten lines,” he wrote, “but it is inadmissible to then keep him from singing his swan song.”²⁶ No one listened when Caraman tried to rectify the accusations levied against him. In addition, he was broke, and perhaps his frail health also made him long for milder climes. There was war in Europe, and newspapers informed their readers that the navy was offering free rides to France for volunteers ready to defend the motherland.²⁷ The opportunity was a godsend.

In early 1871, the steamer *Corrèze* carried Caraman back to France. By the time he arrived in Europe, the French army had been defeated at Sedan and hostilities were petering out. While Caraman walked the streets of a Paris ravaged by the bloody battles of the Commune, his palace school, robbed of its only teacher, closed its doors.²⁸ It was not until two years later that it would come to new life.

Sowing the seeds of civilization

In early 1873, Representative Moura tried to establish another French school under government control. Ferreyrolles, a corporal temporarily stationed in Phnom Penh, was appointed headmaster, while a room in the Protectorate building was set aside for the purpose. Moura’s initiative met with his superiors’ enthusiastic support, and he was granted the first official budget to finance colonial education in Cambodia, a one-franc daily supplement to Ferreyrolles’ pay. The gesture eventually proved unnecessary, as King Norodom soon offered to put Ferreyrolles on his payroll and the colonial government gladly accepted royal patronage for the school.

Moura observed after a few months that the recently opened school was “beginning to produce satisfactory results”:

The King sends five of his children there, and the total number of pupils is at twenty. They belong to all races present in the population of Cambodia. The [Khmer] form a majority, but we also have Annamites and Chinese. Every day, entry applications abound; but it is only gradually that this establishment will be able to expand. For the time being, I believed it necessary to

limit the number of students to the number of twenty-five to thirty. . . . Monsieur Aymonier looks actively after this school of which we may expect a lot of good, in several respects.”²⁹

According to Moura, the “intelligent” (in his view, this meant “Francophile”) segments of Phnom Penh’s indigenous population reacted with joy to the opening of the school, and reports to Saigon were filled with cautious optimism. Five years later, however, disillusionment had set in. In a private letter to Aymonier, then directing the Collège des Stagiaires in Saigon, Moura reviewed the institution’s recent history in a defensive tone:

You express surprise that we have still not trained any interpreters over here [in Phnom Penh]; but, my dear friend, you know very well that this is my sole aim, an idea that in my mind has become virtually a mantra. I have founded this school of my own private initiative, with insufficient means, and the great interest I take in it has never lagged. But this institution has never done better than to hobble along, often with illiterate corporals of varying capacity constantly replacing one another, be it for reasons of health or because they had to be dismissed. Furthermore, there is this indifference of the natives for everything, and most of all for everything intellectual. The youth who were doing well were snatched at a much too early stage by the merchants, and some by your Collège; others, like some of the princes and the sons of mandarins, felt themselves too old, or rather too big, to continue to go to the school.³⁰

The school’s slow progress was all the more frustrating given that Moura had recently begun to build a modest bungalow to house it.³¹ With the new building nearing completion, he wanted to hire a capable director and was promised a qualified Frenchman; a Monsieur Leroux soon arrived in Phnom Penh to fill the position. While, officially, Moura had supported his candidature, noting Leroux’s “age, his attitude, his comportment [which] recommend him here,” privately, he gritted his teeth over the appointment:³²

I thought that with the new building, which is superb, and a European director, I would achieve a better result, but I didn’t reckon with the *Bonapartistes* in France. Now that they cannot place their creatures anymore over there as easily as before, they send them to the colonies where they still have some credit. They presented us with a man who is too old to adjust to the tropics; moreover, he is sanctimonious and unbearable . . . As for his aptitude for teaching, better not to think of it: he hides carefully what he knows, if he knows much at all. No one has ever bothered to ask him what his credentials were for this position. I’m afraid that our future achievements will be little better than the paltry results of previous times.³³

Dogged by such difficulties, it seemed that nothing good would ever come of the French school. It had not generated new Francophone assistants for the administration, nor had its successive professors imparted to the pupils much

intellectual prowess or admiration for French culture. When Moura left his post to return to France in early 1879, he could look back on a decade of failure in the educational field. The same year, however, the school's fortunes took a turn for the better.

The heyday of the Protectorate School began in 1880 with the arrival of two new teachers, Bergier and Fontaine. Bergier, a genuine school director from the Loire County, assumed overall responsibility for the school, while Fontaine joined the following year as his assistant. As principal, Bergier developed ingenious measures to increase the school's appeal and raise its low attendance rate. He proposed a complex system of rewards and punishments, promoted parental control by introducing fortnightly reports informing families of the pupils' progress and behavior, campaigned for free boarding for students coming from the provinces, and pleaded with King Norodom to support his activities, both morally and financially. The king's stance was crucial, for the majority of Khmer students still came from the palace, sent either by mandarins or by royal servants. To extend the reach of his school, Bergier targeted an intermediary class of Khmer who were neither mandarins nor royal servants; to Bergier, the children of this class currently lived "in complete idleness."³⁴

By 1880, Bergier's initiatives had increased the number of students studying at the school to about one hundred.³⁵ The following year, the number more than doubled to 250, of whom roughly one hundred were Khmer, twenty Cham-Malay, forty Chinese, and ninety Vietnamese.³⁶ The school offered two meals a day for some eighty of its pupils, delivered by the local Chinese merchant Fo To Tuong, mornings and evenings, to the school's premises. Needless to say, his



Figure 3.1 The Protectorate School in 1881 (Auguste Pavie, *Mission Pavie: Indochine 1879–1895: Géographie et voyages I.: Exposé des travaux de la mission*, Paris: Leroux, 1901).

contract with the Protectorate stipulated the mandatory use of forks and knives, rather than chopsticks, during mealtimes.³⁷

Meanwhile, the school had moved to the sawmill of Paul Roustan, which after five years of changing fortunes had halted operations.³⁸ The new premises were spacious and offered a far better environment than the previous structure. Quality of teaching seems to have improved along with material conditions. Bergier and Fontaine had assembled a small group of zealous Khmer assistants. One of them, Svai, already served as the instructor for the beginners' classes, while another student, Penh de Monteiro, was said to be rapidly approaching the point where he could begin to teach as well.³⁹ Within a year, both Penh and Svai entered the Protectorate's service and began working as interpreters in the same way their lone predecessor, Alexis Chhun, had done for years.⁴⁰ Penh and Svai were the first graduates of the school to actually fulfill the goals intended by its founders. Previously, students proficient in French had disregarded the Protectorate's job offers, preferring instead to join the businesses of local Western merchants. The school graduate André de Diaz, for instance, worked throughout the 1870s for Paul Roustan, while Pou, who received his first French lessons from de Lagrée, assisted local mechanic Andrieu in his business ventures.⁴¹ By 1881, however, the Protectorate appeared to have gained appeal as an employer, to the extent that entering into the colonial service was now understood to be a viable career choice.

To better understand the motivations of Penh and Svai in joining the Protectorate school and subsequently the colonial service, it is useful to consider the nature of existing education in Cambodia at the time. In principle, Khmer boys could choose from three educational paths: to attend classes at the village pagoda and possibly join the *sangha*, to become an apprentice of a *krou* (master-teacher), or to enter into the service of a mandarin. Subjects studied included cultural values, Buddhist teachings, reading and writing, proper conduct and specialized 'technical' skills.⁴² Girls had little access to formal education and generally only learned gender-specific rules of conduct, remaining largely illiterate.⁴³ For girls, education was limited to what community life, parental guidance, cultural events and religious rituals offered in teachings, for example when attending a public theater performance or making offerings at the village pagoda.⁴⁴

The village pagoda remained the cornerstone of formal education. In *vats* spread across the country, young Khmer were taught reading and writing as well as Buddhist values.⁴⁵ The latter were enshrined in the *satras*, lessons in human wisdom, often presented in the form of short allegories concerning everyday conflicts and their resolution through just and wise mediation.⁴⁶ Students were also inculcated with the *chbap pros* and the *chbap srey*, rights and duties of husbands and wives regulating gender relations in Khmer society.⁴⁷ Outside the classroom, students emulated the monks, accompanying them on their alms rounds and other daily chores. In order to access a higher level of learning, boys could enter a monastery and take up a master-disciple relationship with an elder monk. In doing so, they had the opportunity to learn the ancient Pali script, a skill that provided them with access to texts on Buddhist philosophy and mythology.⁴⁸

A second branch of the traditional education system dealt with technical skills such as medicine, astrology, architecture, and carpentry. As in learning at the pagoda, the teaching process was a highly personalized one. A youth could approach a *krou*, a master in a particular field, and ask to be accepted as his disciple. This relationship often transcended the simple transfer of technical knowledge, providing the student with the opportunity to emulate the master's art and wisdom, and to garner knowledge and skills through careful observation.⁴⁹

A third educational path ensured that the royal administration did not run out of bureaucrats. Depending on their previous education, young Khmer could enter the service of a mandarin or prince as aides or scribes and thus acquire competence in administrative matters, including law, accounting, and diplomacy.⁵⁰ Traditionally, this path was reserved for the sons of the elite, ensuring that power in the kingdom remained in the hands of the same families over generations.⁵¹ For some three centuries, Catholic Khmer-Portuguese had provided a large number of such recruits for mandarin duty.⁵² Col de Monteiro, Norodom's personal secretary and treasurer, whose biography will be examined in more detail below, is but one example of this powerful group of royal helpers.

For the young Khmer Penh and Svai, then, where would the new Protectorate school fit into this educational structure? Given its secular nature and goal of producing administrators and interpreters, the new school was perhaps most comparable to an apprenticeship in the service of a mandarin or a prince. Despite French allegations to the contrary, early students at the Protectorate school, such as Penh and Svai, learned little about culture other than how to eat *à la française* using knife and fork. Morals, religion, and traditional sciences did not figure in the curriculum. Rather, Penh and Svai learned French. In doing so, they learned the new administrative language, the new language of power, just as their ancestors had had to become proficient in existing administrative languages – law for instance – in order to work in the palace and access power. Thus, students like Penh and Svai might have viewed their studies at the Protectorate school, and their becoming interpreters, in a similar light to the activities of their peers entering into the service of princes and mandarins, something Penh and Svai probably would have done as well if it hadn't been for the arrival of new – colonial – mandarins.

The main question for prospective students was therefore whether they believed that the new French patrons would be able to deliver on their promises in the same way that the mandarin had done in the past. Only then would it be worth entering the school in a society where, as Népote notes, “education [was] a sign, a rite of passage to gain access to ‘clienteles’, rather than a route leading to a particular competence.”⁵³ Could the French provide the same kind of ‘clientele’, resources, and opportunities so that working for the Protectorate would be worthwhile?

While in 1881 Penh, Svai and a small number of their compatriots answered this question affirmatively, many were still unconvinced. In general, the Khmer remained a fickle lot whose enthusiasm for the school was far less pronounced than that of their Vietnamese and Chinese counterparts.⁵⁴ In a letter of 1881, Fontaine expressed disillusionment that “no new [Khmer] have come, but only

Chinese and Annamites who are drawn to the school by the prospect of being well fed, in my opinion.”⁵⁵ This was partially the result of differing notions of the benefits of French patronage. Many Vietnamese had moved to Cambodia temporarily, in order to engage in fishing, woodcutting, or charcoal burning. Their presence in the country, tolerated by the Cambodian authorities, produced considerable tax revenue for the royal treasury. The Vietnamese had little access to positions in the government hierarchy, even at the lowest level. Consequently, from the Vietnamese perspective, the Cambodian government was an authority that extracted money from them, but provided no opportunities for careers. From the 1860s onward, as we shall see later on in the narrative, the colonial government had taken it upon themselves to ‘protect’ Vietnamese business interests in Cambodia because of the French subject status of Vietnamese in Cochinchina. By the 1880s, the Vietnamese in Cambodia had therefore come to look toward the French rather than the Cambodian mandarinat when choosing their patrons. Hence their faithfulness to the French school.

The Chinese had easier access to Cambodian government positions, although they remained focused on commerce rather than politics. Many Phnom Penh Chinese engaged in the import and export of agricultural produce and merchandise, facilitated by their close relationships with Saigon’s Chinese merchant houses. Like their peers in neighboring Cochinchina, they were not opposed to French rule as long as it brought peace, stability, and a decrease in piracy along trade routes, without directly interfering in their business. In general, rather than associating themselves with either the new or the old order, Cambodia’s Chinese adopted an attitude of wait-and-see, while adroitly maneuvering between the two camps, ready to team up with new patrons as soon as the balance of power shifted.

The Khmer, on the other hand, showed little interest in business and trade. The majority of Phnom Penh’s Khmer community were linked to the palace and the royal administration. As a result, they perceived the Cambodian government as a source of opportunities and resources, rather than as an oppressive tax apparatus.⁵⁶ For urban Khmer, the keys to social advancement – invariably linked directly or indirectly to government posts – were still held by King Norodom and the mandarinat. It is thus not surprising that unconditional allegiance to the French was the exception rather than the rule.

As a result, the French renewed their efforts to woo their Khmer constituency. As Saigon Governor Bégin put it: “In fact, it is not at all my wish that Annamites and Chinese be instructed in Phnom Penh on the Protectorate’s budget. The education of [Khmer] must be the focus of all our attention.”⁵⁷ Simultaneously, and by no means coincidentally, the French began to address the state of affairs that so far had prevented the school from being a success with the Khmer public. The early 1880s mark a decisive shift in French attitudes toward Cambodia: a regime that had combined ‘influence’ at the highest level of the Cambodian government with sporadic military intervention was replaced by a regime aiming to take over the kingdom’s administration. By the early 1880s, Cambodian tribunals had lost most of their former prerogatives, and the French gradually replaced Cambodian judges as arbitrators.⁵⁸ During the same period, French authorities commandeered the Cambodian alcohol and opium farms and soon thereafter took over the customs service, thus seizing King Norodom’s



Figure 3.2 A Certificate of Excellence for studious pupils, undated (Société Asiatique, Paris).

principal sources of revenue.⁵⁹ Finally, in the wake of Thomson's attempted coup d'état of 1884, they appropriated King Norodom's authority to appoint provincial governors.⁶⁰

The king in this way lost control over most of the resources he had employed for patronage. The French now controlled the principal structures grounding patron–client relationships: the dispensation of justice, taxes, customs, 'revenue farming', and appointments to the government hierarchy. By the early 1880s, the colonial authorities were about to be transformed into the supreme patrons of Cambodia. This new state of affairs made some young and ambitious sons of the elite, such as Penh and Svay, reject a conventional palace career, and instead enter into the service of the rising new masters.

The curriculum of the Protectorate school underwent major renovations during this period of shifts in material power. Initially, the school had sailed under the flag of the *mission civilisatrice* as a locale for lofty intentions couched in ornate prose, making manifest "our grand humanitarian, pacific, and French idea: the civilization of the peoples of the Far East," as proclaimed by Phnom Penh school teacher Pelletier at a graduation ceremony.⁶¹ Beneath such slogans promoting the cultural uplift of the downtrodden peoples of the Orient, French educational plans soon took on a more utilitarian aim. In these new formulations, as articulated by Governors Thomson and Bégin, a "rational education" was offered to Khmer attending the Protectorate school:

The program to follow can be summarized in a few words: to teach the pupils French. This is in fact the only goal to achieve at this point in time.

Above all, our preoccupation should be that we train indigenous staff of which we can rapidly avail ourselves.⁶²

A “summary education” was all that was needed to train interpreters able to:

accompany our troops, fulfill the task of telegraph operator, translate documents regarding the collection of taxes, facilitate the delicate task of the *Résidents* and the judges of the new tribunals, finally, help spread the use of our language in this country, which so far has remained closed to our civilization.⁶³

The “civilization of the peoples of the Far East” remained limited in Thomson and Bégin’s mind, it seems, to training subaltern indigenous auxiliaries for the tasks of collecting taxes, dispensing justice, and waging war.

Complementing this new French practicality and interest in day-to-day administration, native education took on three specific objectives: the production of clerks and interpreters for the emerging colonial apparatus, the prevention of rebellious tendencies, and the preparation of a French-directed ‘market’ economy. By the late 1880s, the goals of colonial education had been refigured in the name of colonial administration, pacification, and the gradual transformation of Cambodian rice farmers into consumers and wage laborers.

We find variations on these three themes in a number of internal reports on the state of education in Cambodia. Writing in July 1887, Pelletier’s successor and new director of the Protectorate school proposed disseminating Khmer leaflets across the country, singing the praises of the French motherland and enumerating the advantages of modernity to the rural population. These leaflets were to be distributed through the network of the village pagodas, spreading word that the French occupation of Cambodia was a good thing, and adding “commercial and miscellaneous information for the use of the villages,” in order to broaden the intellectual horizon of the farming population. After all, the school director noted, “when you think about it, what a great publicity tool for French products!”⁶⁴

French educational efforts, the director continued, should aim to “transform the native, accustom him to [the idea of] productive energy and, subsequently, ally him in such a way that Europeans find themselves in a position to carry on the struggle against the Chinese.”⁶⁵ Another teacher of the Phnom Penh school later concurred that in order to do so successfully, it was necessary to “develop the Cambodians’ taste for manual work” through vocational training (*enseignement professionnel*), thus providing “the colonization [process], that is to say industry and trade, with something that . . . it had completely lacked.”⁶⁶ Agricultural schools in the provinces could train workers and foremen for “European-directed plantations,” while the school in the capital would furnish a “slightly advanced education” (*un enseignement un peu élevé*) in two separate sections: one producing future indigenous teachers, and the other training “indigenous auxiliaries: accountants, telegraphers, secretaries, interpreters, employees for the various administrations, for the *colons*, and for the traders.”⁶⁷

One obstacle remained in the way of such plans: the perceived natural

‘indolence’ and ‘laziness’ of the Khmer ‘race’, diagnosed by French commentators since the 1860s. This difficulty could be overcome, however, since

this indolence will doubtlessly cede in the face of attractive remunerations and, above all, in the face of the need for comfort that the contact with a prosperous colony will impose as a necessity. Apace with the needs, the necessity of new revenue will grow and, as a result, so will [the amount of] activity and work. Accordingly, we will not only find in this vigorous population a new source for the exploitation of the Cambodian soil, but even an easy and inexpensive support to the colonization of the virgin and fertile lands that are still plentiful in French Cochinchina, and where a man, so to speak, merely needs to plant to reap a good harvest.⁶⁸

In the 1880s, visions of Cambodian peasants, transformed through French education into consumers and inexpensive plantation labor, were decades away from being realized. In the short term, the danger of rebellion was far more pressing. The 1885 war made French administrators lose many of their innocent ideas about the benefits of Western education for a docile and lazy Khmer population. From 1887 onwards, education went hand in hand with repression or, in the universal language of power, ‘security’. In less conspicuous ways, this link had been there all along. In 1877, when the first pavilion for the French school went up in the Cambodian capital, two other buildings were built alongside it: a prison and military barracks.⁶⁹ When a cholera epidemic hit Phnom Penh, and the barracks were deemed unhealthy, soldiers moved onto the premises of the Cambodian school.⁷⁰ In the second year of the war, the French agent in charge of Public Works drew up a list of current maintenance work on French buildings where he detailed repairs to the blackboard of the *Ecole cambodgienne* alongside the installation of another blackboard in the Cambodian militia camp.⁷¹ The spatial proximity of schooling and warfare, of education and repression, reflected a rapprochement of the respective concepts in the French mind.

To the French, the 1885 rebellion was an effective reminder that they were in a “*colonie de domination*,” despite all the talk of a civilizing mission and native craving for deliverance from degeneracy.⁷² “As such, we have to preoccupy ourselves, as it is proper, with this question of training and education,” wrote one Phnom Penh school director, “where our interest – and above all – our security is at stake.”⁷³ The state of affairs called for a bifurcated strategy. To endear the elite to the new regime, their sons were sent on expensive state-sponsored stints to Paris where they joined the newly founded *Ecole cambodgienne* and enjoyed a lavish educational program of excursions and soirées.⁷⁴ For the non-elite, alas: “No scholars, above all no half-scholars!”⁷⁵ According to an 1897 report on the objectives of education in the kingdom, French schools should avoid creating “*des déclassés*” who could later use their knowledge against the colonial state. Based on past experience, caution was called for: “Giving the Cambodians a complete education, attempting to elevate them to our level . . . More than just useless, I believe this to be dangerous!” Rather, one should concentrate on “simple and practical” skills, so as to prepare Khmer for the subaltern functions reserved for them in the new colonial hierarchy.⁷⁶

As for children of the elite, they were to be reminded not to “lose sight of the fact that the French Protectorate created these schools for [their] own good,” in order to “turn [them] into [their] nation’s elite.”⁷⁷ Alexis Chhun and Col de Monteiro were two members of this new-old national elite *à la française*, and their life stories provide further insight into how education related to the aspirations of this new class of intermediaries, their role, and the spoils of collaboration.

The rise of the new mandarins

When *oknya akhamahasena* Col de Monteiro passed away in November 1908, his kin wasted little time in mourning. Within days, sons, daughters, grand-children, nephews and nieces popped up in the most unexpected places, while a growing number of wives and concubines laid claim to the estate of the deceased. At stake was a fortune of considerable size: an inventory of Col’s numerous possessions, drawn up by the *sala lukhun* on thirty-four pages of handwritten Khmer, listed “money, miscellaneous objects, servants, ships large and small, houses, stables, carriages, horses,” as well as other assorted properties.⁷⁸

In the course of investigations over estate claims, it turned out that Col de Monteiro had maintained a household of at least eight wives and fifteen concubines. Seven wives lived in one of Col’s mansions in the capital, while Col had resided in another residence with his primary wife, Neang Salio, who died one year before him. The fifteen additional concubines worked as “singers” for Col’s personal entertainment, as a court verdict later put it. Over the years, Col’s love for choral music produced a minimum of twenty-six sons and daughters, all of whom, together with their respective mothers, expected a share of his estate. Not surprisingly, the affair proved knotty and the courts were kept busy for the better part of two years.⁷⁹

More than a decade later, another Phnom Penh celebrity passed away with his affairs in much better order. Alexis Chhun left a will, which specified in detail who was to receive how much and what the grantees were to do with their new-found wealth. More ascetic than Col, Chhun was survived by only two wives, four children and two grandchildren. These heirs divided an estate far larger than Col’s: in addition to the large family residence, Chhun left twenty-six merchant houses (*compartiments*) along Phnom Penh’s Quai Norodom and Rue Fésigny.⁸⁰ On Chruy Changvar, facing Quai Norodom across the Tonle Sap River, Chhun owned another expanse of land, which covered roughly forty-two hectares and stretched across the peninsula from one riverfront to the other.⁸¹ In addition, Chhun owned assorted plots of land in the northern part of the capital. These city holdings were complemented by ownership of various rural properties in the nearby provinces of Somrong Tong and Kien Svai. It was an impressive list, even without the addition of other assets, such as jewelry, furniture, servants and cash.⁸²

There could be no doubt that Col and Chhun were rich men when they died, and Chhun was probably Phnom Penh’s biggest private landlord at that time. Yet it was not only riches that they had in common. Col and Chhun had known

each other well, having pursued parallel careers in the Cambodian government for years. Eventually, Col had become Minister of the Marine, then of Justice, and finally of Interior, while Chhun served as Minister of Justice, and of Interior, and as head of the Treasury. After starting out as interpreters, both rose quickly through the administration's ranks. Both further belonged to Phnom Penh's community of Catholic Khmer. They differed, however, in terms of their employer: Chhun had spent roughly two decades in the colonial service whereas Col remained in the service of King Norodom, never leaving the palace. At the beginning of their professional lives, in the early 1860s, they appeared to have chosen different career paths. It is all the more intriguing that these paths converged four decades later, when they both had become wealthy and held top government posts under the French. A closer look at their trajectories will show how this was possible.

In mid-1863, Doudart de Lagrée took up his post as representative at the Cambodian court in Oudong. Apart from heat and humidity, he grappled with what he called “truly, the Tower of Babel.”⁸³ Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Malay, Thai, Burmese, and Laotians circulated around his house, with neither he being able to communicate in a local language nor his neighbors able to speak French. While building his house on the riverbank, de Lagrée befriended the two sons of the local merchant in charge of construction.⁸⁴ The older of the two was called Chhun, and was a boy who turned out to have a remarkable gift for languages. Together with his brother Khuon and a friend, Pou, Chhun often played near the building site and, before long, knew how to “stammer French quite suitably,” becoming de Lagrée's customary interpreter for life's daily affairs.⁸⁵ Barely weeks had passed since the establishment of the Protectorate, and Chhun, still a boy, had already taken up the role of interpreter, a role through which, as de Lagrée foretold, “he promises to one day become highly useful for us.”⁸⁶

During the same year, another young Khmer began to assist de Lagrée with communicating across cultural boundaries. Col de Monteiro, the seventeen-year-old son of a prestigious Khmer-Portuguese family, joined the small French group in Oudong.⁸⁷ De Lagrée had previously approached the king to ask if he could “borrow” (*kchey*) the young Col from the palace service to serve as an interpreter for a few months on his ship.⁸⁸ Col was fluent in English and knew some French as well. Some years earlier, he had been sent by Norodom's father, King Ang Duong, to study European languages in Singapore. He stayed for three years; upon his return, he was appointed to serve as a clerk at the royal treasury. During the tumultuous years following Ang Duong's death, when several contenders competed for the Cambodian throne, Col's loyalty to Norodom endeared him to the new ruler. A man of intelligence and political instinct, Col quickly became indispensable to the king in his dealings with the French.⁸⁹

In 1866, de Lagrée left his post at the Cambodian court to venture upstream as head of the Mekong River Expedition, and was replaced by the young naval officer Jean Moura. By the time Moura arrived in Phnom Penh, Chhun was the only permanent Khmer interpreter at the French military post. Col had returned to the palace to continue his career as an aide to King Norodom, and no new Khmer had come forward to help the French overcome language and cultural

barriers. Despite efforts to recruit additional Khmer staff and train them as interpreters, Moura and his small party of French soldiers remained almost completely dependent on Chhun for several more years. Occasionally, French missionaries would help to translate documents, but Moura accepted their help only reluctantly, preferring to make use of Chhun who by now was fluent in French.⁹⁰ The year Moura was nominated to his new post as representative thus marked the beginning of a symbiotic relationship between two men, one French, one Khmer, which was to last for more than ten years.

In 1877, Moura summed up the debt of gratitude that he and the Protectorate owed to Chhun in the following words:

Chhun has been in the service of the French Government since 1863; he was then only 12 years old. Since that period, neither commandant de Lagrée, nor Pottier, nor Philastre, nor I had ever had reason to make him the slightest reproach. . . . On the contrary, we have always been very pleased with his service, with his discretion and his dedication. . . . Since 1863, this interpreter has only had two months of vacation; he had been subjected to incessant work, every day, regardless of Sundays and public holidays.⁹¹

Chhun translated letters and documents, received visitors and heard their pleas, interpreted during meetings, assisted in court proceedings, informed the French of current rumors, and volunteered his ideas on developments on the political front. He also found spare time to edit a French-Khmer dictionary that Moura later published under his own name.⁹² In 1877, during a rebellion against King Norodom's rule, Chhun proved crucial to the French war effort by coordinating royal and colonial battalions. This feat won him a seat at the table of the French *Etat-major*, side by side with French generals. Once again, his mentors were full of praise for his services and his unfailing support for the French cause.⁹³

Around the time of this military campaign, it became apparent, however, that pure disinterested loyalty was not all that sustained Chhun's commitment to Moura and the French. Some alleged that Chhun used his central role in court cases involving indigenous parties to extract financial advantages. Caraman was among the first to suggest that the power-hungry Chhun, "*cet espèce affranchi du pouvoir,*" extorted money from defendants; he also accused Chhun of using his insider knowledge and the help of an uncle, Am de Lopez, a powerful local businessman, to engage in speculative land deals.⁹⁴ While Caraman's allegations against Chhun were never corroborated, these charges are not that far-fetched. Archival sources provide ample evidence that some translators engaged in thriving businesses besides their official occupations. At times, Khmer translators were caught accepting bribes, but the investigations of these problems were usually covered up.⁹⁵ A knowledgeable observer noted that interpreters

before the courts translate according to their interest, with an open hand [extended] to the highest bidder. In addition, they are money lenders, or otherwise their wives do it for them. Many have become rich, very rich, owning 25, 50 or even 60,000 piasters, after starting out on a salary of ten piasters per month.⁹⁶

Although Chhun's record displays considerable professional integrity, suspicion of his corruption and dubious side-activities lingered. What appears certain is that over the course of his first ten years in the colonial service, his appetite for professional success had been whetted. In 1879, when Moura departed Cambodia, Chhun asked for an extended leave, citing frail health. Moura's successor suspected that Chhun's resignation was rather triggered by undisclosed ambitions. He noted that Chhun "had enjoyed a promotion that was as rapid as it was deserved. But he is now convinced that he is *too big* to be an interpreter."⁹⁷ With Chhun's resignation, the Protectorate was forced to find a replacement for its only translator. After a year, as we have seen, Penh and Svai, the first graduates from Phnom Penh's French school, entered the colonial service to replace him.⁹⁸

Following his resignation, Chhun plunged into a wide range of business activities. Together with his uncle, Am de Lopez, he constructed a string of two-story houses (*compartiments*) along Phnom Penh's Grande Rue and rented them out to local merchants. At the same time, he petitioned the king for the rights to strategically located plots of land in and around Phnom Penh. Chhun's familiarity with French plans for Cambodia proved useful. When in the early 1880s his former employers contemplated the extension of their administrative quarter southward, they learned to their surprise that Chhun had already acquired the land in question.⁹⁹ The French and Chhun thus had to agree on a land exchange whereby Chhun received part of the French concession on Chruy Changvar as repayment for his plot adjacent to the administrative quarter.¹⁰⁰

With his real estate and construction dealings thriving, Chhun expanded his activities into other areas, including opium. In 1881, the French merchant house Vandelet, Dussutour and Faraut had outbid Chinese contractors for the kingdom's opium concession. Unfamiliar with the local terrain, the firm asked Chhun to assist them in setting up the business, happily counting on Chhun's expertise and translating skills.¹⁰¹ Chhun could thus observe how a business of a larger scale than he was used to was being managed. Meanwhile, he continued his other operations in trade, real estate, and construction.

By the late 1880s, Chhun had established himself as a major player in local business. In French yearbooks, he was regularly listed among the top local merchant houses and construction businesses, and his name was always included on lists of the most respectable entrepreneurs in the capital.¹⁰² As his real estate holdings in Phnom Penh's commercial center expanded, his rent income increased. By 1890, Chhun felt ready, both financially and in terms of his commercial savvy, to make his biggest bid so far. Not surprisingly, he bid for opium.

Chhun's new role as Cambodia's opium baron was not assured without some help from the French. Since 1883, colonial authorities had taken control of the opium monopoly, but seven successive years marked by problems and little or no profit had forced the French to reinstate the former system in 1890. In November 1890, the rights to the import and retail distribution of opium in the kingdom were thus once again up for sale to the highest bidder. On the day of the public auction, four local entrepreneurs joined the bidding: Vandelet & Dussutour's former Chinese associate Luong Hoa, the Saigon tycoon Wang Tai, the local merchant house of Luu Chap, and Chhun and his uncle Am de



Figure 3.3 Alexis Chhun in his late years (Archives Nationales du Cambodge).

Lopez.¹⁰³ When the four competitors' tenders were opened, the French declared that no offer had met their minimum expectations, and the auction was called off. Soon after, without calling another auction, however, the French gave the opium concession to Chhun, a surprising decision given the desires of heavyweights like Wang Tai and the former opium farm holder Luong Hoa.¹⁰⁴ One is

led to think that Chhun's past service to the French, and his familiarity with the colonial administration, had been taken into consideration.

Chhun was now busier than ever. Selling opium meant dealing with huge sums of money, with several hundred thousand piasters in the balance. In a letter to a French merchant, Chhun wrote that he would no longer be in a position to represent other people's business interests in Phnom Penh as he had done previously: "I have just taken the tender of the opium farm in Cambodia, and you can imagine how much work this means for me."¹⁰⁵ It also meant profits, with which Chhun bought more land. On the Chruy Changvar peninsula next to Phnom Penh, he added constantly to the initial plot given to him by the French years earlier, so that, by the end of the century, Chhun was the biggest landholder on the peninsula.

Chruy Changvar had seen rapid development, and by 1897 had 15,000 inhabitants, or roughly a third of the population of the city.¹⁰⁶ In 1897, the French took over the rights to appoint all Cambodian government officials kingdom-wide. In that same year, Alexis Chhun is listed for the first time in the yearbook as the mayor of the burgeoning town on Chruy Changvar.¹⁰⁷ Courtesy of the French, Chhun now directed the further development of a neighborhood in which, as it happened, he also owned most of the land.

From this first public office as mayor of Chruy Changvar, Chhun's political career advanced rapidly. At the turn of the century, he became head of the treasury, and moved on from there to other cabinet positions. His properties on Chruy Changvar continued to expand. By 1920, the Municipality of Phnom Penh had realized that it needed to take control of the peninsula to "ensure [Phnom Penh's] rational development."¹⁰⁸ Chhun's personal fiefdom on Chruy Changvar stood in the way of such development; he ruled the peninsula virtually undisturbed, levying his own private taxes on boats and ships mooring along the shore, within sight of the Protectorate offices.¹⁰⁹

Through a costly deal, the colonial administration gained a small strip of riverbank in exchange for allocating another twenty hectares of land on the peninsula to Chhun.¹¹⁰ Soon thereafter, the Municipality decided to purchase Chhun's entire Chruy Changvar property, in order to develop a new European neighborhood; after some hesitation, Chhun eventually agreed to sell at the exorbitant price of ten piasters per square meter.¹¹¹ From a small plot of land, acquired in the 1870s next to the Protectorate building, Chhun's land holdings had grown to be worth the equivalent of several million francs. The administration noticed with bitterness that their faithful former collaborator was now in a position to make "excessive and unacceptable requests . . . with the sole aim of making, at the expense of the city of Phnom Penh, a veritable fortune."¹¹²

Col de Monteiro's rise to office, fame, and wealth was no less spectacular. During his six-month stint as interpreter for de Lagrée, Col began laying the groundwork for the pivotal role that he went on to play in all negotiations between the French and King Norodom. Throughout the first decades of the French presence in Cambodia, no road to the king bypassed Col de Monteiro. European visitors to Phnom Penh appreciated his translating skills, while local merchants sent their business proposals to the king through him. Successive French representatives resigned themselves to the fact that convincing the king

required first persuading de Monteiro. Behind his unassuming attitude, Col regulated European access to the palace. Perhaps because of this position of power, he never contemplated leaving his employer to engage more freely in business, as Chhun had in 1879. As the principal gatekeeper to King Norodom's favors, Col already *was* in business.

Caraman was among those who made liberal use of Col to grease the wheels of the palace administration. When Caraman reappeared in Phnom Penh in 1872, he tried with the help of Col to broker a loan of one million piasters between a French bank and King Norodom. Supposedly to be used for improvements to the Cambodian capital, the scheme would also have provided a windfall for Caraman, but eventually fell through.¹¹³ With the help of Col, Caraman also made various deliveries to the royal warehouses of wines, clocks, chocolate and other wares, some of which had never been ordered.¹¹⁴ Col had also been involved in contracts between Caraman and Norodom on pepper trade deals, the construction of another brick factory and the establishment of a silk workshop.¹¹⁵

Other European merchants emulated Caraman's use of Col in dealing with the king. While many traders managed to extract money from the palace through various deals, their liaisons also provided some people inside the palace with profits. Col was, according to one observer:

of ordinary intelligence but with a well-developed sense for intrigues; he serves as the serviceable go-between of the European, Indian, and Chinese traffickers who entertain business relations with the King; his job is highly lucrative, every contract, every purchase yields him a bribe, whose figure is commensurate with the importance of the interests at stake.¹¹⁶

Despite his close contacts with French merchants, Col de Monteiro maintained a distance from the French. He was one of the king's men, and in case of conflict between Norodom and the colonial authorities was always to be found on the side of the royalists. When tensions between the king and the Saigon Governor increased in the early 1880s, Col continued to support the crown against the French. At one point, he was even arrested and forcibly removed from the palace by French soldiers, after being accused of translating to the detriment of French interests.¹¹⁷

With the lines thus clearly drawn, one would expect Col's fate to be tied to King Norodom's. Indeed, during the rebellion of 1885–86 against rising French interference in Cambodia, Col was suspected to be one of the principal engineers of resistance.¹¹⁸ In the second year of the war, he was promoted within the palace hierarchy, and King Norodom firmly believed that Col remained one of his most loyal allies.¹¹⁹ However, although the war ended in a truce rather than a victory for the colonial forces, it was now obvious that the French were in Cambodia to stay. Men like Col, with strong survival skills and an acute political instinct, began reconsidering their allegiances.

A few years later, the French wrenched the last remnants of King Norodom's power from his hands and transferred all authority to the Council of Ministers, a figurehead for French rule. By then, Col had been promoted to the five-member

body and did not oppose the changes. The king would never forgive him for this perceived treason, and no longer listened to his advice.¹²⁰ The French, on the other hand, showed their appreciation by rewarding Col with further cabinet positions and assorted medals of honor. When Col was awarded the Officer's Cross of the Royal Order of Cambodia, the tribute stated that he "has never ceased to render the greatest services to the Protectorate in the high positions he [held]."¹²¹ His role as one of the alleged architects of the 1885 rebellion had been forgotten by then. Col was too important to the colonial enterprise not to be given a role in the new order.

Ronald Robinson has highlighted the irony of collaborations between colonizers and colonized to maintain foreign rule; while white invaders exerted leverage on ruling elites, they were also unable to do so without their mediation.¹²² Even if the exchange was unequal, both sides recognized their mutual interests and interdependence. The balancing act in which indigenous collaborators, such as Col and Chhun, engaged was the coordinating of two systems of power. One consisted of managing and maintaining their use to the colonizing power, while the other consisted of managing and maintaining their own constituencies and personal interests. As middlemen, they had to square the two, while remaining in control of flows of resources from one side to the other – information, money, land grants, appointments, political support, favorable court verdicts, and so on. Chhun and Col were virtuosos at this balancing act. The quality necessary for such a role changed over time. Initially, both had little more than a proficiency in the French language. By the turn of the century, however, they each had mastered large networks, combining tactics of business, politics, and patronage.

The resources available to such middlemen transformed during the late nineteenth century as well. Initially, the French had almost no control over the Cambodian government, and collaborators' benefits were limited to occasional business deals or kickbacks from a court case. As the French hold on the Cambodian administration tightened, they were increasingly able to use government resources for patronage.¹²³ Judicial powers, government appointments, and land concessions were important additions to the basket of patronage resources that the French could mete out to their partisans.

Given that it took the French two decades to gain influence in these domains, the allegiance of the Khmer elite materialized slowly, particularly in comparison with the Vietnamese and Chinese communities. Once the French had achieved greater control, however, even former political opponents like Col migrated to their side. Col's influence and status in the palace made it advisable for the French to include him, regardless of his past. The same applied to Chhun, who controlled – courtesy of the French – not only a good deal of Phnom Penh's real estate market, but also a Phnom Penh neighborhood of 15,000 inhabitants. Middlemen like Col and Chhun ended up controlling such resources only because of the unique situation created by the Protectorate and the presence of Frenchmen in Phnom Penh. They represented a new "national elite," an elite of the kind that the professors at the Protectorate school would have liked, owing enough to the French to become a faithful partner in the future colonization of Cambodia.

Norodom's shopping list

At the end of 1873, Col de Monteiro received a letter from Caraman addressing him as “my dear Col,” posted in Paris two months earlier. The letter described Caraman's adventures in France and recent business deals, which he had concluded in Paris in King Norodom's name. He spoke of machinery that he planned to buy for his brick factory, of pepper and of plans for a silk workshop. A delivery of tinned foods was on its way, and Caraman noted that he was still waiting for confirmation from King Norodom as to ordering a ship, a purchase Caraman had apparently suggested to his royal mentor on his last visit to the palace. The letter ended with pleas for Col's “activity and . . . good amity” to ensure that money from the royal treasury would come through for these expenditures and plans.¹²⁴ Enclosed in the envelope was another letter to the king himself, beginning with the line, “Sire, I have arrived in Paris and have looked after all your affairs. Everything will be fine.”¹²⁵ A word of reassurance was indeed in order, for there was ample reason to worry that things would not be fine after all.

A couple of weeks before sending these letters, Caraman had paid a visit to the firm of Denière Frères on Rue Vivienne, a renowned foundry for high-quality metal artifacts.¹²⁶ He presented himself as acting on behalf of King Norodom of Cambodia, on temporary mission to Paris to purchase essential supplies for the palace. Earlier in the year, under circumstances that remain obscure, Caraman had somehow obtained Col de Monteiro's signature on documents attesting to this mission. The documents enumerated items to be purchased that were as diverse as tinned food, half a kilometer of carpets, irrigation pumps, a dictionary, steamrollers, fifty copies of paintings by Rembrandt and other European masters, woodcutting machinery, Louis XVI furniture, and the published account of the Mekong River Expedition.¹²⁷ Caraman was visiting Denière Frères, France's most prestigious foundry, to place an order for the most important article on the list, a richly decorated gilded copper folding screen to embellish the royal throne chamber.

At the foundry, discussions were held, plans were drawn up, letters of intent were signed. All sides were pleased with the prospect of business with one of Asia's fabled monarchs. Documents attesting to Caraman's status as King Norodom's emissary appeared convincing, and questions of payment procedures and delays were dismissed with reference to King Norodom's allegedly limitless wealth. By November, a firm order had been placed, and the following month, Denière confirmed that the throne chamber screen would cost 220,000 francs, a fortune in Cambodian as well as metropolitan terms. Six months later, one observer wryly commented that King Norodom had probably not expected “that the price of this screen would exceed the value of the throne, or the value of the palace that encloses the former.”¹²⁸ Yet documents bearing Col de Monteiro's signature gave no indication of upper price limits, and Caraman thus apparently felt that he had been given free rein to exercise his exquisite taste.

In addition to the commission at the Denière foundry, Caraman made purchases and commissions at a number of other Parisian manufacturers and stores. Allard & Chopin received an order for a set of golden chairs and tables featuring engravings of the king's monogram “N.”¹²⁹ The engineering firm

Cullas took an order for two steamrollers, six lumber carts, and a water truck to hose down Phnom Penh's dusty streets during the dry season. Another engineering company, Neut & Dumont, was awarded the contract for an irrigation pump, while Boulez Frères provided machinery for Caraman's proposed brick factory. Duval, Mahut & Cie in Bordeaux were asked to fill crates with fruit, jams, biscuits, butter, cheese and pickles. The order for carpets went to Caraman's home province of the Creuse, benefiting the flagging company of one of his cousins.¹³⁰

A Parisian banker and amateur painter, Rossignol, volunteered to oversee the production of the oil paintings requested by the king in exchange for the promise of a generous commission.¹³¹ Rossignol then opened a credit account with his bank, which enabled Caraman to pay for first installments on some of the other orders. One of Rossignol's colleagues, Roulina, in return for the promise of future pepper deliveries from Cambodia, lent Caraman another 90,000 francs, a sum that Caraman apparently used as a down payment for Denière's gilded screen.¹³² Less credulous investors were told that Caraman's wealthy relatives would vouch for their investments, such as Caraman's brother Doctor Charles Thomas-Caraman for example, allegedly proprietor of the well-known thermal resort of Forges-les-Eaux in Normandy. Duly impressed, these investors forgot to verify the claim; if they had, they would have found that Caraman's brother was an ordinary employee of the resort, not its owner.¹³³ Boulez Frères were informed that Caraman's cousin, allegedly director of a ceramics factory in Limoges, would likewise vouch for his solvency.¹³⁴

By boasting of wealthy relatives and showing royal seals, while immediately spending what was loaned and keeping partners and contributions distant from one another, Caraman managed to pull off deals of quite staggering proportions. From all over France, manufacturers dispatched several hundred thousand francs' worth of merchandise to the ports of Marseilles and Bordeaux, without Caraman having to spend a single franc of his own money. All these frenetic purchases were guaranteed with the promise that the sovereign of a faraway kingdom would one day settle the bills. This sovereign, however, had yet to be informed of the size of the debts he had incurred.

Upon receiving news from Paris of the expenditures, Col's fellow interpreter in the palace, Boniface Ferrer, was asked to write to Caraman, warning him that excessive cost could result in King Norodom's refusal of the deliveries.¹³⁵ The letter arrived too late to influence the course of events. Even before Boniface's letter had left Phnom Penh, a telegram reached the palace: "Business terminated, will leave again January. Send cable to newspaper *République française* if you need anything."¹³⁶ When Boniface's note eventually did reach Paris, it was delivered to a friend of Caraman's who had been put in charge of his business interests in the capital. Caraman himself was already on his way back to Phnom Penh, content with a short but very productive visit to his homeland. Not only had he provided a number of manufacturers with lucrative contracts and himself with commissions but, so he assumed, he had also fulfilled his task as King Norodom's ambassador in political matters. For King Norodom had his own reasons for sending Caraman to Paris, and those had little to do with carpets and gilded screens.

The king wanted the French to annul the treaty of 1867, which had allowed Siam to gain control over the provinces of Angkor and Battambang.¹³⁷ In addition, he resented a recent French move to allocate disputed territories around Hatien to Cochinchina. Moreover, King Norodom was facing increased pressure to contribute toward the costs of the Protectorate expenditures, which he acquiesced to *à contrecœur*. The latest instance of the French pressuring him to make ‘voluntary donations’ for colonial projects was a new weekly boat service of the Messageries de Cochinchine from Saigon to Phnom Penh.¹³⁸ The royal treasury was required to contribute 20,000 piasters annually toward the steamer service. To address these and other grievances, King Norodom felt that he had to bypass colonial authorities in Phnom Penh and Saigon and appeal directly to the government in Paris, a path he would choose time and again until the end of his reign. In later years, he used his sons as ambassadors for these missions.¹³⁹ For now, his choice of envoy fell on Caraman.

In January 1874, Caraman presented the Ministry of the Marine and Colonies with a printed document entitled *Rapport sur le Cambodge*, in which he argued forcefully against both the cession of the northwestern provinces to Bangkok and territorial claims of Cochinchina in the Gulf of Siam.¹⁴⁰ According to the report, these territorial claims diminished French prestige in Cambodia and endangered the future of local trade and economic development. It was also entirely unworthy of the *Grande Nation* to coerce King Norodom into subsidizing the regional steamer service, which primarily served French interests and was of little value to the king. In arguing these points, Caraman claimed to act as “spokesperson of the Cambodian populations.” In reality, he was probably acting as spokesperson for King Norodom to whom he wrote cryptically that he would return to Cambodia only “when certain affairs you have entrusted me with in private . . . are concluded.”¹⁴¹

In his report to the Ministry, Caraman further outlined how Cambodia’s resources should be developed. He enumerated the kingdom’s untapped agricultural potential: rice, cotton, tobacco, indigo, pepper, sugar, coffee, cacao and vanilla were all potential products, and if the French government followed the right path in opening up the local capital and labor markets, Cambodia’s agricultural potential could be easily exploited.¹⁴² “The time for grandiose renovations has come for Cambodia,” he wrote.¹⁴³ After emphasizing his own contribution as beacon of progress and innovation, Caraman suggested that Col de Monteiro and Boniface Ferrer be awarded the rank of Chevalier in the Légion d’honneur as a reward for their services to France.¹⁴⁴

In a way that was characteristic of his lifelong dealings, Caraman, self-interested middleman for all causes that promised to be profitable, blended business and politics during his Parisian visit. Col de Monteiro would certainly have understood his logic. Once it was clear that King Norodom’s power had become ineffectual, Col de Monteiro collaborated with the French and loyally served a government that he had fought tooth and nail only a decade before. Caraman and other renegade merchants played a similar balancing act, associating themselves increasingly with the traditionalist faction in the palace, and eventually becoming crucial figures in the struggle to stem the expansion of French colonial rule.¹⁴⁵ Collaboration, then, had many faces, and not all of them

were indigenous. Alliances were constructed across sides by all parties, and if some Vietnamese, Chinese and Khmer favored French rule, some local Frenchmen felt that their interests were best served if King Norodom retained his power and kept French authority somewhat at bay.

The delivery of Caraman's purchases unfolded as had to be expected. The first shipment of wares to arrive in the Cambodian capital was the Louis XVI furniture, which, because of inadequate packaging, had decomposed into a moldy heap. King Norodom expressed outrage over the price of the gilded screen, which he could have had made locally for the equivalent of less than 40,000 francs (a sum that would barely have covered the shipping and handling charge added onto the cost of Denière's masterpiece). The king refused to foot the bill. In order to solve this impasse, Caraman suggested that he be paid in pepper instead of cash, hoping that he could sell the pepper in France with sufficient profit to make up for potential losses. But such deals were blocked by a summons from Saigon, ordering his current and future assets to be seized until he settled liabilities stemming from the failed one-million-dollar loan of two years before. To secure Caraman's compliance, the food crates from Bordeaux were intercepted in Saigon, where they joined the Louis XVI furniture in going to rot. From Paris, letters poured in urging Caraman to pay his various business partners back home. Creditors were closing in on his brother, while his bankers, Rossignol and Roulina, grew increasingly impatient with the incessant delays. Penniless and beleaguered on all sides, Caraman tried to sell his Phnom Penh house but found no buyer. With his prospects looking increasingly grim, relief was essential but nowhere in sight.¹⁴⁶

In September 1874, Saigon's state attorney Augier was sent to Cambodia to intervene in the conflict between King Norodom and Caraman, which was turning uglier day by day. Made up of Augier, the Representative of the Protectorate, and a mandarin nominated by King Norodom, an ad hoc tribunal was established to arbitrate between the two parties. The three-man panel was supposed to gather evidence, hear witnesses, and eventually find a solution to the situation.¹⁴⁷ In a rare instance of agreement, King Norodom and Caraman both agreed to accept this tribunal's decision, and by the end of the year, it was ready to hold its first session. The story of the gilded screen was about to metamorphose from an ill-fated business anecdote into a decisive moment in the history of the French quest to take over the Cambodian justice system.

4 The meaning of justice, 1874–76

Where there ain't no ten commandments

The first meeting of the tribunal, on 14 October 1874, was a solemn occasion, but it is doubtful that those present were fully aware of the historic nature of their meeting. Representative Moura opened the session at four in the afternoon. Seated facing him in the main office of the Protectorate was a grand mandarin in the service of the royal government. Saigon's state attorney Augier sat next to him flanked by Chhun, the chief interpreter of the Protectorate. The plaintiff, Thomas Caraman, listened intently as Moura and Augier declared in their opening speeches that the tribunal was competent to try the case in question, emphasizing that the two parties in conflict had agreed to accept the tribunal's ruling. After opening statements, the dates for subsequent sessions were agreed upon. The following day, the two parties could hand in evidence, while four more days were reserved for the questioning of witnesses. At five, one hour before sunset, the tribunal went into recess for the night.¹

The beginning of these proceedings marked a new chapter in the conflict over the payment for the gilded screen. It was the first time that King Norodom had formally been challenged by a European, and it was the first time that the king would have to comply with a ruling by a mixed Franco-Cambodian court. Obviously, the situation posed a number of legal and political problems in a country where tradition held that the king was to reign supreme.

It is quite possible that Moura, sitting in his office on that October day in 1874 and listening to the opening statements, might have felt nostalgic for earlier times when the supervision of his fellow countrymen and the arbitration of conflicts had still been a straightforward affair. The first representative, Doudart de Lagrée, writing home to his sister-in-law after a long workday, complained that he was overwhelmed with the paperwork that running a Protectorate involved:

My kingdom is not large and the affairs are not that important; but I am alone here and have to do everything; here, I am ambassador, grand-judge, grand-admiral, grand-general etc. etc.; well, a great grand nothing much; and when the hour of the dispatch of correspondence is near, I'm losing my head.²

Orders from Saigon requested de Lagrée to provide reports on Cambodia's resources and colonization potential as well as on the inner workings of the

Cambodian court. De Lagrée was also required to act as wholesale purchaser of cattle and wood for the expeditionary forces in Saigon, and to serve as a diplomatic liaison between the Saigon Governor and King Norodom in all matters related to the 1863 treaty. In addition to his tasks as government merchant, informant and diplomatic envoy, de Lagrée was to dispense justice in all cases involving Europeans.

There was no lack of work for de Lagrée in this domain. He had hardly taken up office when he was confronted with the case of a group of French sailors who after a night of heavy drinking had raided the palace in search of women. Apparently, the tumult was calmed without undue harm, but the diplomatic fallout was considerable and called for precedent-setting punishment. Because of their status as members of the French navy, de Lagrée did not need to take recourse to the provisions of the 1863 treaty and instead dealt with the case as a breach of military regulations.³ Shortly thereafter, however, another incident involving civilians gave de Lagrée his first chance to act as a civil judge. An argument between a French merchant and his Chinese business partners had deteriorated into a brawl on the streets of Phnom Penh. The merchant had suffered serious injuries, narrowly escaping death.⁴ De Lagrée acted swiftly, ruling in favor of the Frenchman. Although the details of the disagreement and the reasoning behind his decision remain obscure, the sentence survives in the records:

On the basis of article 7 of the treaty, I have tried this affair with the grand mandarins designated by the King. I have demanded: . . . The immediate removal from office of the chief of the Chinese . . . A compensation of 40 silver bars [for the Frenchman] . . . The arrest of six culprits, one of whom was identified by name . . . A compensation, according to Cambodian custom, for the wife, the mother-in-law and an Annamite servant of [the Frenchman], injured while defending him . . . The abolishment of the arms depot that the chief of the Chinese had up to now in his house.⁵

The verdict was sweeping indeed. Besides the arrest and punishment of the culprits, and payment of damages to the victims, de Lagrée's ruling requested that one of the heads of Phnom Penh's Chinese community, a leader of considerable power and influence, be dismissed from office and his arms stock confiscated. Since court records have not survived, we are left to speculate as to why de Lagrée deemed the head of the Chinese community responsible for the actions of the six accused. Even if we assume that de Lagrée's analysis was sound, it seems difficult not to see the political objectives behind his ruling. Local observers must have felt this as well, since de Lagrée noted that the Cambodian mandarins co-adjudicating the case found his penalties "considerable." While "acknowledging the justness of my requests and the objective of my demands," Lagrée wrote, they preferred to refer the case to King Norodom who endorsed his ruling.⁶

De Lagrée's first act as a French judge in Cambodia reveals the potential of legal authority over Europeans. As French representative, de Lagrée had no

right to interfere in domestic politics, nor did he command any influence over indigenous communities living in Phnom Penh or Oudong. As soon as Khmer, Chinese, Malay or Indians came into conflict with Europeans, however, his influence broadened considerably. By meting out verdicts to parties in conflict, de Lagrée could sentence indigenous plaintiffs or defendants, temporarily imposing the authority of his ruling on them. More importantly, he apparently could also request far-reaching changes to the local political landscape, like the removal of a Chinese community leader, and present such demands either as punishment for some indirect responsibility for a crime or as a cautionary measure to prevent similar incidents in the future. Judicial authority thus became a means by which French officials could display to the indigenous population that their influence went beyond ambassadorial duties or occasional military assistance, to include aspects of law and order in a broader sense. It could be used to foster fear, deference and debts of gratitude among those affected by French rulings.

One man most frequently embroiled in such court cases at the time was Phnom Penh's foremost European merchant, Paul Le Faucheur. In de Lagrée's first year in office, Le Faucheur was allegedly involved in two major incidents. During a planned excursion to Laos along the Upper Mekong, a local governor refused Le Faucheur passage without a proper Siamese passport. Displeased by the governor's resistance, Le Faucheur allegedly fired his shotguns onto villagers, raped two of the governor's daughters, and incited his companions to ransack the village and rob the inhabitants of their belongings.⁷ Le Faucheur denied these allegations repeatedly, and it appears that the evidence unearthed by subsequent investigations remained insufficient to try him for the crimes.⁸ In the second case, Le Faucheur was accused of bullying a group of workers in the service of the Catholic mission of Ponhea Lu who had been sent by missionaries to cut bamboo along the Mekong River near Chhlong, where Le Faucheur was building a sawmill. Le Faucheur was said to have commandeered their labor while forcibly recruiting local inhabitants to work at his mill. Subsequent hearings organized by the French authorities were filled with contradictory testimonies concerning physical violence, verbal abuse, threats, and unpaid salaries. The facts were sufficiently complicated and obscure to keep Doudart de Lagrée from reaching a conclusive verdict.⁹

The charges of rape, lingering over Le Faucheur's head since his excursion to Stung Treng, were reasserted three years later when he was accused of abusing an underage girl in the premises of the Queen Mother in the former palace at Oudong.¹⁰ This time, the new representative carried out a thorough investigation, interviewing both the victim and witnesses at the location where the alleged crime had occurred. Once again, however, the evidence remained inconclusive. While it could be established that the girl was likely to be underage and was indeed bleeding when released by Le Faucheur, in her testimony she denied having been raped. It was also alleged that she had obtained payment for sexual favors in other instances, and that it was such an arrangement that had been the basis of her encounter with Le Faucheur. These insinuations were apparently sufficient to outweigh her status as a minor or any bruises that she may have had; the case was dismissed.¹¹

Over time, with the addition of similar cases, Le Faucheur became the object of complaints and rumors ranging from manhandling pepper growers in Kampot to burying one of his servants alive during an alcoholic delirium.¹² In the end, Le Faucheur's reputation was so bad that almost anything people said about him was thought to be true, including those accusations that were based on flimsy evidence or hearsay. There is little doubt, however, that Le Faucheur was a violent person, and that unease with his presence in Cambodia was growing among colonial authorities. It was no longer only the fates of Le Faucheur's laborers, servants, and sexual partners that were at stake: French prestige in Cambodia had suffered, and that was an exceedingly serious matter.

Early on, the Saigon Governor proposed that Le Faucheur be removed from Cambodia if he did not change his ways. His early quarrels with missionaries, and his interference in their bamboo-cutting enterprise, angered the pious Governor de la Grandière. He instructed the representative in Cambodia to send Le Faucheur back to Cochinchina if he kept on transgressing laws and customs or "if he cooks up intrigues or does bad things."¹³ When Le Faucheur's misbehavior in Stung Treng was revealed, the representative believed he had finally found an excuse to expel his disgraceful countryman. He wrote to Saigon, "it is time to chase Monsieur Le Facheur from Cambodia, for which this complaint should provide a very good opportunity."¹⁴ The Saigon Governor quickly gave orders to dispose of Le Faucheur once and for all. In a letter of September 1867, he wrote, "it is important to finish things off with this Le Faucheur, who will always be the source of trouble and disorder in Cambodia."¹⁵ The representative was to gather sufficient evidence to justify Le Faucheur's expulsion from Cambodia, but failed yet again to do so, much to the chagrin of his superiors in Saigon.

By the late 1860s, the matter had become more urgent, since Le Faucheur was no longer alone. An increasing number of complaints were lodged against the small but growing company of Western merchants in Phnom Penh. Caraman's name recurs repeatedly in court records, beginning with complaints by workers of his defunct brick factory and sawmill.¹⁶ Other newcomers to Cambodia similarly did little to improve the negative view that colonial administrators had of their independent compatriots in Phnom Penh. Representative Moura summarized their behavior in 1869 by saying that they spent their time "killing and stealing," and that their "deplorable reputation" was likely to compromise the local society's trust in French leadership for a long time.¹⁷ The Saigon Governor also made it clear that weighty issues were at stake even in the individual mishaps of Frenchmen. France was being exposed to ridicule by the constant scandals involving the merchant community:

It is always painful to me, sir, to see some Frenchmen positioned at the forefront of civilization pass their time by denigrating each other through their unfavorable judgments. Their love for their motherland should allow them to bear with patience the small injuries of their vanity, given the immense interest there is for the country that we should stay united. Our divisions are detrimental to the objectives of our colonization and make the inhabitants of these lands laugh, to whom we claim to teach a superior civilization.¹⁸

To de la Grandière, merchants who committed crimes or engaged in disputes with other Westerners lacked not only moral integrity but also patriotic spirit. By breaking laws and indulging in petty quarrels, they undermined the only reason for their being there, which was to colonize in the name of France.

By the early 1870s, the French authorities felt it was time for reform. In 1873, they drafted a royal ordinance, which they soon after submitted to King Norodom for ratification. It redefined and modified the rights and duties of the representative in legal matters, separating them from the prerogatives of the Cambodian courts. The ordinance, twenty-seven paragraphs long, eight clauses longer than the original Protectorate treaty, described the legal procedures to be used for resolving disputes involving Europeans. Criminal cases against Europeans became the exclusive domain of the colonial authorities, who could hear the case, decide the ruling, and execute the sentence without the intervention of a Cambodian magistrate, even if the victim of the crime was Cambodian. Cambodian authorities were to lend assistance to French authorities where required, helping, for example, to apprehend culprits, who were then to be handed over without delay to French authorities. Crimes committed by Europeans, even if involving locals, were thus moved beyond the reach of Cambodian judges. They could only refer them to the representative, and it was only he who had the authority to take action.¹⁹

In civil disputes between Cambodians and Europeans, the representative could also initially rule without the assistance of an indigenous judge; parties could, however, appeal his verdict, and a mixed Franco-Cambodian bench could reconsider the initial sentence. The ruling of the mixed court could, in turn, be appealed to King Norodom for a final decision.²⁰ In all cases involving only Europeans, the Cambodian judiciary was excluded. In addition, a conspicuously large portion of the royal ordinance was devoted to spelling out procedures for expelling Europeans. Three paragraphs dealt with circumstances that could lead to expulsion, and while expulsion was still restricted to those who failed to comply with court rulings, it reflected the determination of the colonial authorities to no longer tolerate misbehaving Frenchmen in Cambodia.²¹

Of ignorance and corruption

French desire for tighter control over the community of self-employed Westerners in Phnom Penh was occasioned primarily by the embarrassment they represented to the colonial government. The official response to this problem, however, was still couched in terms of protecting nationals from an erratic indigenous judiciary. It was thought that Oriental judiciaries were run at the whim of mandarins less interested in justice than in kickbacks. Verdicts were, this viewpoint held, based on payments and caprice rather than investigations and legal codes. That Westerners would need to be protected from the consequences of such arbitrary systems appeared self-evident. Clauses in the 1863 treaty and the 1873 ordinance allocating jurisdiction over his countrymen to the French representative were thus not based on any actual evaluation of the performance of Cambodian courts; rather, they assumed the worst, based on European accounts of previous experiences in British India, China, and elsewhere.

In Cambodia, notions of the arbitrary nature of Oriental despotism found their local validation in anecdotes of human heads decorating bamboo poles along the avenues leading to the royal palace. Throughout the nineteenth century, French observers developed a morbid obsession with this supposed habit, combining it with tales of illicit romances involving women of the royal harem. As Doudart de Lagrée wrote to his sister-in-law in 1864:

The wicked side of this little man [King Norodom] is that he is jealous like a tiger, – which personally I do not mind – but this fact engenders constant hangings and beheadings. He has forty-five women to himself; sometimes domestic mishaps occur; no one is safe from such things. Alas! Instead of enduring this peacefully with the forty-four other [women], he goes berserk with anger. Last week, for a pip of Eve's apple, he had seven people slain.²²

Such tales of Cambodian barbarity are a bit ironic given that French authorities regularly chopped off heads in neighboring Cochinchina.²³ In addition, French attitudes also revealed a remarkable degree of ignorance regarding Cambodian legal codes and court procedures. It was not until the late 1880s that the gifted administrator Adhémar Leclère began a systematic survey of existing indigenous laws and processes.²⁴ Prior to Leclère's work, French naval officers in Phnom Penh based their fragmentary knowledge of local legal practice on procedures encountered during French-Cambodian co-adjudication in cases involving indigenous plaintiffs. Such insights were often fraught with fundamental cultural misunderstandings rooted in the French magistrates' ideological baggage.

If in pre-Enlightenment Europe positions in government had been obtained by virtue of one's origin, wealth, family relations and proximity to the king, de Lagrée and others grew up in a more modern Europe in which careers were, at least in theory, achieved on the basis of education, aptitude and professional performance. Obtaining an office and carrying out official representation once implied close and lasting relationships with both one's patrons in the government hierarchy and the clients one dealt with in the name of the state. Previously, relations between a citizen and an office-holder, an office-holder and his superiors, were personal in nature. As a petitioner, one approached a person who held this position because he was one of the king's men. By the late nineteenth century, however, the secularization and rationalization of the relationship between governors and governed had separated the office-holder as a person from the office itself. Explicit rules and regulations now defined the duties of an office, while cash wages replaced gifts of land and honors. A modern bureaucrat was meant to have two lives, one public and one private.²⁵

Although, in reality, the French bureaucracy and the imperial navy were riddled with favoritism and proved more complex than this ideal, the idea of a modern meritocracy informed the vision of government of Doudart de Lagrée and his fellow officers. It is not surprising that, when confronted with the Cambodian judiciary, their opinions were negative. As throughout the Cambodian government, in the Cambodian judiciary office and office-holder formed a whole, drawing authority from personal relation to the king or his representatives,

instated and reaffirmed through kinship, service, ritual and gifts.²⁶ The duties of an office were only loosely defined, and the government was not divided into rigidly distinct portfolios. Just as the king was the supreme ruler of all his subjects, so a provincial governor was, as the king's representative, responsible for all aspects of the people's lives within his sphere of influence.²⁷ This authority was understood to be singular down to the village level; thus it naturally included judicial powers.²⁸

In practice, then, the number of judges in the kingdom was equivalent to the number of government officials. Cases were dealt with by the immediately concerned authority, and were only passed up to higher levels if this was required by the complexity of the case or there was an appeal by one of the parties. Even though the king appointed the *sophea* (judges who were to serve in the provinces), they did not form a separate judiciary. Instead, *sophea* supported provincial authorities in complicated and important cases as members of the bench of judges. In the case of an appeal, the bench included the officials who had made the previous ruling. To French observers, then, it was clear that "the separation of powers, the dream of our civilized countries, does not exist in Cambodia."²⁹ The lack of separation of powers in Cambodia, and the confusion regarding who was to dispense justice in the kingdom, were thus the first items on the French list of criticisms.

Problems with the judiciary were further aggravated by what the French perceived as a lack of clarity in the categorization of plaintiffs. Early travelers to Cambodia had noted that the urban worlds of Phnom Penh and Oudong were inhabited, apart from Khmer, by a range of other ethnic communities, such as Chinese, Vietnamese and Cham-Malay. These travelers had been told that each community had its own chief who could mediate disputes within the community. Indeed, as seen earlier, separate communities did exist in Phnom Penh, but membership in these communities was based on an individual's cultural practice and therefore, at least to a certain degree, a matter of choice. In addition, the margins of each community remained vague, as a result of frequent intermarriage and official tax and recruiting policies favoring some communities over others, a fact that made some locals desire an 'ethnic' identity other than the one they had been born with.

Upon examining the Cambodian justice system, however, the French were unable to find a legal code reflecting the different categories of people that they believed they saw when walking the streets of Phnom Penh. What culture was to Cambodians, biology was to the French: the defining factor of belonging to one group or another. The French held dear that the Chinese were Chinese and the Vietnamese were Vietnamese by virtue of their 'race.' The mutability of ethnic boundaries was a deeply troubling idea to French administrators, since colonialism depended on clear-cut divisions between rulers and ruled, colonizers and colonized. While French colonial discourse initially argued that this segregation was required because of the cultural inferiority of the natives (thus leaving open the possibility for the co-optation of particularly advanced specimens of the indigenous society), racial definitions became increasingly popular as the century drew to a close.³⁰ 'Chinese', 'Khmer', 'Vietnamese' or 'Indian' became god-given racial attributes to be registered in tax records and

other profitable ways of cataloguing natives. Much to the chagrin of the French, the Cambodian justice system did not account for these categories.

Some of the unease with this messiness as regards ‘racial’ categories is palpable in the aforementioned 1873 ordinance on the division of tasks between the French representative and Cambodian judges. Whereas the original 1863 treaty had consistently spoken of Frenchmen, the 1873 ordinance replaced this term throughout the text with “Europeans.” Over the first twenty-five paragraphs, the counterpart to these “Europeans” were “Cambodians.” At the end of the ordinance, however, the text stated that the representative was to abstain from interfering in disputes between “Cambodian subjects, that is to say between the Asians who reside in Cambodia,” which were to be heard by Cambodian judges only.³¹ Introduced awkwardly in this last portion of the text, the phrase reveals an uncertainty over the meaning of the term “Cambodian.” Was it to be understood in racial, cultural, or ‘national’ terms? Were Vietnamese, Chinese, and Indians to be perceived as Cambodians, Cambodian subjects, or as something entirely different? Who was to arbitrate their conflicts?

Beyond these unanswered questions, there were other aspects of the Cambodian justice system that French observers disliked; among them were the practice of giving gifts to judges and the slow pace at which verdicts were declared. The practice of gift giving had its roots in the symbiosis of office and office-holder, and the relations of patronage that linked Cambodian officials to their clients. Plaintiffs who brought a dispute to the attention of their *mesrok* (provincial official) or to more senior members of the administrative hierarchy became intertwined in much more complex relations to these dignitaries than a French citizen would have to a French judge.³² The exchange of gifts was an integral part of such relations, symbolically confirming and strengthening the bond between patron and client.

Gifts to persons of authority, social, religious or secular, were embedded in a set of moral conceptions of the social and spiritual universe that assigned each individual a specific place within the existing order and defined his or her resulting obligations towards others. Within this universe, patronage relationships and kinship were closely interrelated concepts, with the former reinterpreted as an extension of the latter.³³ When a person donated a gift to the monks of the local *vat*, the village headman, or a judge, he thus created and maintained relations that were part of his wider network of patronage, reinforcing the reciprocal obligations that the recipient of the gift had to the donor. Cambodian judges were no strangers to corruption, and rulings were often for sale to those with the money to buy them. But not every gift given to a judge was corruption of the kind that French officials knew from home. Just as the donation of rice to a monk was not meant as a mere payment for a prayer, the gift to a person of power was not always a simple payment for a particular act that the latter should perform. Obviously, gifts carry with them strategic interests. No gift is given without reason, intention or interest. A gift to a judge in a court case certainly held the hope for a positive impact on the process underway. But it was not necessarily a mere bribe.³⁴

French administrators also objected to the slowness with which the system rendered verdicts. It seems true that there were a low number of verdicts,

and that long periods of time often elapsed prior to a final ruling. Those defending the Cambodian justice system argued that it had a particular capacity to resolve conflicts *through* delay, since the parties in conflict, tired of waiting forever for a verdict, would often decide to settle their dispute outside the court.³⁵ The majority of French observers, however, cited European ideals of efficiency and due process and found the Cambodian tribunals to be a travesty of justice.

Based on these perceptions, French officials condemned the existing Cambodian judicial system for its disorderliness, inefficiency and corruption. It required only a small leap to assume that the *mission civilisatrice* must also establish true justice in the kingdom. From the French standpoint, Cambodia was a society made up of “mandarins who do not work, and a miserable population exploited to the extreme,”³⁶ a society “subjected to the most extravagant despotism, prey to the most abhorrent social inequalities”³⁷ as a result of a “system of extreme exploitation.”³⁸ Natives who decided to fight oppression in court faced a judicial system that was “the negation itself of every idea of justice,” having “no other rule than the personal whim of the mandarins for whom it represents the principal source of revenue.”³⁹ In the more poetic words of a French traveler to Cambodia in 1880:

There is no political life, because the regime is despotic; public life is rudimentary, for half of the people are slaves and the other half live in fear of the courts; personal security is a myth, because it depends on the venality of a judge or the fantasy of a tyrant; to say it all in one word: the Cambodian, always ready to sacrifice his life or the little possessions he has, vegetates in a kind of half-sleep, made of resignation and the hope for a better life.⁴⁰

By dismantling the indigenous justice system, early French administrators sought to bring this “better life” to the natives. Early representatives always claimed that they would feel morally guilty if they refrained from interfering in Cambodian court cases. To them, “staying silent and letting the common people be exploited beyond any imagination” was not an option, and they confirmed this view so frequently and with such verve that one wants to believe that they were sincere.⁴¹ Strategies of dominance were thus underpinned by a strong sense of moral obligation toward an oppressed indigenous population. It is partly this moral calling that explains why a good many attempts to wrest authority from Cambodian courts and extend French jurisdiction over sections of the indigenous society were rooted less in orders from Saigon or Paris than in the personalities of the French representatives in Phnom Penh, chief among them the long-serving Jean Moura and his assistant Etienne Aymonier. The two men began their quest with Cambodia’s Vietnamese.

Thanh’s moving story

An 1872 complaint by a family of Vietnamese woodcutters from the village of Long Khanh provides one of the few indigenous voices to shed light on the inner workings of the Cambodian judiciary and the legal situation of Vietnamese in

the early years of the Protectorate.⁴² The complaint relates the family's trials and tribulations during an excursion up the Mekong River to Kratie.

Thanh and his family had left their village in the Mekong Delta in mid-August 1871 and traveled to Phnom Penh to obtain permits for woodcutting along the Upper Mekong. Their permit was granted by a Cambodian mandarin in exchange for a tray of pork meat and some other gifts. After sailing upriver for a few days, Thanh and his family met near Kratie other small bands of woodcutters, who were making a living sending cut timber down the Mekong. Local hardwood species, particularly the *sao* tree, were quite valuable on the markets in the Mekong Delta, where durable wood for construction was scarce. Typically, cut trees were dragged to the riverbank and bound together into large rafts, which were then tied to pirogues for the journey downriver. Aided by the current, these pirogues dragged the log rafts toward Phnom Penh, where the custom duties were paid to Cambodian officials. Thanh and his family cut trees and then apparently joined a team of pirogues for the trip down the Mekong. Along the way, a dispute arose between Thanh's group and a Vietnamese called Dong over how many of the *sao* trees of the raft belonged to each party. Insults were traded back and forth, and hard feelings apparently remained on both sides.⁴³

When the pirogues with their rafts arrived in Phnom Penh in January 1872 and moored off the tip of the Chruy Changvar peninsula in order to pay the customs fees, the head of Thanh's group, his father, Thiet, was called to the house of a Vietnamese called Toan. When Thiet arrived at Toan's house he was arrested and shackled. It turned out that Dong, with whom Thiet's group had previously fallen out, was a friend of Toan. Arresting Thiet was meant both as revenge for prior insults and as a way to extract ransom. However arbitrary it seemed, Toan was, according to existing practice, legally within his rights when he arrested his unfortunate compatriot.⁴⁴

Toan was no ordinary Vietnamese inhabitant of Phnom Penh. In the early 1860s, he seems to have worked for King Norodom as a builder of richly decorated royal longboats. When the French arrived in Cambodia, they were in need of interpreters to communicate with the indigenous population and, long before 1872, they had chosen Toan's son, Xuan, to serve as Vietnamese language interpreter. Xuan's father profited from the arrival of the French as well. By 1872, he had become one of the principal leaders of the capital's Vietnamese community responsible for administering his compatriots, a position that he held, as the author of the complaint contends, mainly thanks to French sponsorship. This seemingly informal arrangement was later made official when the French asked King Norodom to nominate Toan to the rank of a minor mandarin within the Cambodian administration. At that point, Toan decided to shave his head, wear the *sampot*, and change his name to Ang Lon, thus assuming a Khmer appearance.⁴⁵

After Thiet was arrested, his son, Thanh, begged Toan again and again to release his father, but did so in vain. In his despair, he remembered that "we had heard that the French government had recently published a proclamation to make the inhabitants of the French provinces know that if any of them were oppressed when going to Phnom Penh on business by the savage inhabitants of Cambodia, they would only have to complain at the house of the French three

stripes captain [representative] who oversees the country.”⁴⁶ The morning after his father’s arrest, Thanh thus went to the Protectorate office to demand justice.

Upon arrival, he found the representative and Xuan together discussing something on the doorstep. Thanh explained to the representative what had happened to his family lately, and the representative appeared to listen attentively to his grievances. But to Thanh’s utter disappointment, the representative afterwards refused to take any further action, a decision that Thanh attributed to the fact that “Toan is the father of the interpreter, and the captain puts a lot of trust in these people and relies on them . . . , because in all affairs, big or small, everything depends on the translation of the interpreter Xuan, who translates always in a manner that provides Toan’s band with means to blackmail the Vietnamese.” Later, when Thanh was questioned by “a Frenchman clothed in white,” Xuan again served as translator and Thanh ended up being slapped in the face and thrown into the street by the Frenchman.⁴⁷

The narrative of the complaint continues to detail Thanh’s struggles with predatory Cambodian custom officials, who tried to overcharge him and eventually confiscated his timber, leaving him with nothing. He then decided to borrow money to pay for his father’s release, giving first his little sister and later his two younger brothers as security to creditors. Meanwhile, Thanh kept pleading with the Protectorate authorities to intercede and put an end to the injustice, but failed time and again. His many complaints and petitions to the representative were always handled first by Xuan; “and then we do not know if [Xuan] translates wrongly or how he does it, but he always manages to achieve an outcome where the [representative] orders the plaintiff to be judged by Toan, his father.”⁴⁸

Thanh’s story offers a rare glimpse into the judicial administration of the Vietnamese in Cambodia during the first years of the Protectorate. It appears from his account that by the early 1870s the French had taken up the role of protectors of the Vietnamese in dealing with the Cambodian bureaucracy. Some Vietnamese embraced this offer, hoping to thus be able to lower the costs associated with working and living in Cambodia.⁴⁹ The deputy representative, Etienne Aymonier, wrote at the time that “above all our Annamite subjects are in need of protection at every moment, in order to escape the veritable banditry, which appears to be the only well established rule here.”⁵⁰ Aymonier felt strongly that providing such protection was “very important with regard to our prestige and our influence.”⁵¹ To further such goals, the French had managed to place Vietnamese clients, such as Toan, in positions of power within the Cambodian administration, offering, in addition, that Vietnamese who encountered difficulties with the Cambodian authorities could request assistance from the Protectorate. French support appears, however, to have still been limited to Vietnamese of the six southern provinces of Cochinchina temporarily in Cambodia on business, who were considered French subjects. In the French interpretation, such Vietnamese were ‘foreigners’ in Cambodia, as such deserving consular support in case of trouble from the local authorities.

In reality, however, the ‘foreignness’ of Vietnamese in Cambodia was a complex issue, and it remains so today. By the time the French appeared in the region, Vietnamese had been migrating to formerly Khmer territories for at

least two hundred years, and a large itinerant Vietnamese population lived on boats, moving frequently from one location to the next, disregarding new and old borders. The question therefore was, at what point should the presence of a Vietnamese individual in Cambodia be considered permanent, with all the rights and duties that this entailed. To the Cambodians, any person, except for the French, who lived or worked in an area where local authorities had pledged allegiance to the Cambodian king was subject to these authorities in legal matters. The French, however, saw the Vietnamese population in Cambodia divided into two categories based on their length of residence. This view was imposed on a reluctant King Norodom in 1877.

Through the proposed reform package, Vietnamese from Cochinchina could make a “*déclaration de présence*” to the Representative of the Protectorate upon arrival in Cambodia. For up to one year, they would be considered French subjects and therefore remain under French jurisdiction. If they did not leave the country after a year, these Vietnamese were then considered Cambodian subjects to be judged by Cambodian courts. With each new departure and arrival, a new declaration could be made to the French authorities, which would again be valid for one year. In the absence of efficient border controls or proper passports, the declaration thus became renewable from year to year, if the holder could establish that he or she had returned to a village in Cochinchina at least once in the course of the past twelve months. Given that most Vietnamese had kinship relations in villages that lay on the French side of the colonial border, almost all Vietnamese became eligible for this new status.⁵²

King Norodom and his mandarins were not pleased by the intended reforms, which also suggested alterations to the collection of taxes, the gradual abolishment of debt slavery, and a redrawing of the territorial division of the country. Indeed, King Norodom was reported to have been “devastated” when he first learned of the proposed reform.⁵³ The king knew, however, that it was an inopportune moment for an outright refusal, since he was still fighting a rebellion led by his half-brother Sivotha. King Norodom urgently needed French assistance to ward off Sivotha’s attacks, and the French made it clear that he could only expect military support if he complied with their demands.⁵⁴ This state of affairs eventually forced King Norodom to issue a set of royal ordinances based on the French proposal. By doing so, the king obtained the military reinforcements needed to retain his throne, while most of Cambodia’s Vietnamese obtained a new status as French subjects.

Based on the new arrangements, the French administration began to extend its influence into the interior of the country. Were it not for what they called the “protection” of their Vietnamese “subjects,” the French would have had no grounds to expand their authority from the capital into the provinces. As things were, however, a small French administrative post was established in Kompong Chhnang in 1879, at the mouth of the Great Lake where most Vietnamese fishermen gathered during the dry season.⁵⁵ Two years later, Banam, Koh Sutin, Kratie and Kampot all had French administrative stations, providing ‘consular protection’ to local Vietnamese.⁵⁶ The Saigon Governor pointedly summed up the duties of each commanding officer:

He will resolve differences between our subjects in case of litigations; have a few men at his disposal to execute his decisions; repress banditry, and prevent the exactions of the mandarins and the tax collectors.⁵⁷

Expenses from these duties could be partly recovered by delivering navigation permits and registration cards. Small fees levied on the protected thus helped to finance a system of control, while such ‘protection’, in turn, helped justify the stationing of small army units in provincial posts to execute rulings, ensure law and order, and constrain the Cambodian mandarins and tax collectors. It is not difficult to imagine where this development would eventually lead if it continued unchecked, although such aims were rarely stated candidly in official correspondence. In a private letter, however, Representative Fourès put his view in blunt terms:

We’re installing a post in Kampot, 20 soldiers and 50 *tirailleurs*, without informing the King; otherwise, where would be the thrill; tribunals and posts in Compong Chhnang, Banam, Kasutin, Kraché; a 2nd assistant is being nominated in Phnom Penh. . . . The King is idiotic; he does not realize the state of affairs and still believes himself solid.⁵⁸

Fourès’ judgment proved wrong, for the king was well aware of growing French appetites, although he was unable to curb them. However, Fourès’ comment certainly did capture the drift of French policies. Indeed, only days after writing this letter in 1881, an *arrêté* by the Saigon Governor proclaimed that all Vietnamese in Cambodia could register their names at the Protectorate, receive an identity card establishing them as Vietnamese residents of Cambodia, and thus become French subjects.⁵⁹ French ‘protection’ was thus no longer restricted to inhabitants of Cochinchina, and the time limit on their protected status was effectively abolished. The *arrêté* was justified as an attempt to clarify the identities of plaintiffs who had begun to flood French posts in search of ‘protection’, mainly because the status of French subject guaranteed a certain degree of immunity from Cambodian courts. In a land of flexible ethnic identities and porous boundaries, some reconsidered their identity in order to escape the authority of Cambodian mandarins and the decisions of indigenous courts. The French liked to emphasize that “this protection shall not be granted to unidentified persons who have renounced their nationality, [and who are] coming towards us, under a false name, only to escape the deserved chastisement that the local authority threatens to inflict on them”; but it was exactly this category of former ‘Cambodians’ that had the most to gain from the changes, and they flocked to the French posts in ever greater numbers to claim French subject status.⁶⁰

Other nationalities also profited from the new state of affairs. In the early 1880s, the *srok* of Loeuk Dek had seen tension between Vietnamese fishing villages that repeatedly threatened to erupt into violence.⁶¹ A number of fishing grounds were disputed by different parties, each claiming an exclusive right to the waters. The ensuing conflicts were bitter given the considerable sums of

money at stake. In May of 1884, a Phnom Penh merchant called Larrieu-Manan, sensing that this commotion and strife represented a promising potential for business, decided to get involved.⁶²

Larrieu-Manan had once worked as a clerk at the Saigon court, registering a verdict against Caraman for fraudulently claiming noble titles. He later became a police agent, but soon faced charges of embezzlement and extortion for which he served three years in a Saigon prison. After serving his term, he opened a downtown bar, which led to further fines for serving alcohol without a license. Unsurprisingly, he moved to Phnom Penh around 1880 to work as an agent of the opium farm. There, he quickly acquired a reputation for ruthless behavior, and eventually lost his job amid accusations of smuggling, embezzlement and manslaughter.⁶³

Larrieu-Manan was thus free of other obligations and looking for a job when the conflict between the Vietnamese fishermen of Loek Dek threatened to come to a head. Larrieu's solution to the problem was simple: he proposed to represent those fishermen who were willing to 'sell' their fishing rights to him before the courts; alternatively, Vietnamese fishermen could also agree to form a fictional company with him and appoint him as its director and representative. By thus substituting himself for the fishermen, he could plead their cause before a mixed Franco-Cambodian court and present the case as one of French business interests set against unruly natives. Precedent showed that he would probably win. The previous year, he had appeared at the Protectorate to have



Figure 4.1 The Phnom Penh tribunal in 1884 (Musée des Beaux Arts et de la Dentelle, Alençon).

signed over to him debt certificates, which their owners had agreed to ‘lend’ to him in an effort to get French courts involved.⁶⁴ Then as now, French authorities condemned such business strategies as “maneuvers that . . . have no other goal than to take away the litigations between Cambodian subjects from their actual jurisdiction.”⁶⁵ But such censure left Larrieu-Manan apparently unfazed.

A good many of Phnom Penh’s poorer Europeans engaged in similar schemes, profiting from contradictions created by French interference in the existing judicial system. Through their reforms, the French created double courts, responsible for the same felonies and complaints, with caseloads divided according to the ‘nature’ (European, French subject, or Cambodian subject) of the plaintiffs. If the system was to make any sense at all, ambiguities in determining the ‘nature’ of a plaintiff had to be eliminated so that each case could be clearly assigned to the responsible court. The French were soon forced to learn that this was a nearly impossible task, which, in turn, allowed Larrieu and other Europeans to step in and turn ambiguity into money, muddling colonial legal and racial categories by temporarily renting out their Frenchness to plaintiffs in exchange for an appropriate fee. Increasingly, however, French administrators began to consider Cambodia’s Vietnamese as French subject by virtue of their ‘race’, whether they were registered or not.⁶⁶ Larrieu and his peers were thus soon required to look for another set of potential customers. Cambodia’s Filipino community and, above all, Phnom Penh’s comparably rich Indian merchants seemed like a logical choice.

Why India is part of Europe

Phnom Penh’s Tagals, natives of the Philippines who had become part of a burgeoning community closely allied with the royal palace, had come to Cambodia during the conquest of the Mekong Delta by the French. At the time, Spain had assisted the French with troops and logistical support, prompted by pleas from the Catholic Church that missionaries faced devastating persecution in Vietnam. The Spanish expeditionary force included a large contingent of Filipino soldiers who fought side by side with the French at Tourane in 1859 and during the subsequent capture of Saigon. By 1863, Saigon and its surroundings were firmly in French hands and the support of Tagal soldiers was no longer needed.⁶⁷

While some returned to Manila, many decided to stay, engaging in a wide range of business activities. Those who set up house in Saigon often became *sais* in charge of the horse carts that made up Saigon’s downtown traffic.⁶⁸ Others entered the domestic service of French officers or rich merchants.⁶⁹ Still others preferred their former profession to the life of a civilian, entering into contracts of sometimes dubious nature. Le Faucheur, for instance, hired his own private army of Tagals for his trade expeditions into the Cochinchinese and Cambodian hinterland.⁷⁰ Others offered their services to Vietnamese mandarins in the unoccupied provinces and were put at the head of rebel bands, which harassed outlying French military posts throughout the 1860s.⁷¹

A number of Tagals found their way to Cambodia where they settled in Oudong and Phnom Penh. Some came on official missions, for example as part

of the small troop of mariners directed by Doudart de Lagrée.⁷² Others entered King Norodom's service, forming a palace guard and a new royal brass band.⁷³ King Norodom was particularly fond of the latter and treated many of his Western guests to swinging versions of the *Marseillaise* and other parade music.⁷⁴ The renditions were apparently somewhat compromised by the wide range of instruments in use, which made it difficult for players to stay in tune.⁷⁵ Despite such dissonances, the Tagals found their place in the palace and enjoyed a privileged position close to the king.

After the court had moved to Phnom Penh, King Norodom's Tagal guards carried out police duties in town, ensuring security, arresting offenders, watching over the prison and the palace, accompanying the king on excursions to the provinces, and taking part in military ceremonies. Despite the occasional Tagal fighting for the rebellions of the 1860s and 1870s, in general they remained loyal to the king, marrying into families associated with the palace and thus integrating into the palace world through kinship.⁷⁶ Although the Tagals tended to speak Tagalog and Spanish and kept their Spanish names, they also quickly became proficient in local languages.⁷⁷ By the 1870s, the leader of the Tagals in the palace was Pascual de la Cruz, a Filipino who knew how to speak, read and write Khmer and was married to a Laotian.⁷⁸ It is perhaps curious then that, despite their seeming status at the court and the degree to which they had assimilated to the Khmer community, Pascual and his peers should somehow depend on the French in all legal matters. However, it was this that the French claimed should be the case.

Under the French line of reasoning, it would be inappropriate to consider the brothers-in-arms in the conquest of the Vietnamese under the same status as the Vietnamese they had conquered. As Spanish subjects, as fellow Catholics, and as former allies, the Tagals were thus accorded the status of a kind of honorary European, answerable to the Napoleonic Code.⁷⁹ Theoretically, then, the French laid claims to legal authority over all disputes involving a Tagal, just as they did when a case involved a fellow European. This could hardly have been in the interest of King Norodom, who greatly disliked it when disputes concerning the palace and his employees spilled out from within the family.

Perhaps as a result of this, the archives contain hardly any record of complaints by Tagals filed with the Protectorate. At times, documents reveal affairs with the potential to attract French attention, but in such cases it appears that the palace stepped in quickly to calm things down and make sure that the French stayed out of royal matters.⁸⁰ The Tagals did register their newborns with the Protectorate, and married Khmer women with the blessings of successive French representatives; on more delicate matters, however, they seem to have been happy to forego the Protectorate's offer of judicial services.⁸¹

Like the Tagals, Phnom Penh's Indian merchants preferred to resolve their disputes without French interference. Competition between Indian and French merchants was stiff, particularly with regard to the import of textiles, and contact between the two communities, let alone business collaboration, were minimal.⁸² Up to the 1870s, French officials made no attempt to claim legal authority over the Indians. There was thus no precedent for a letter from the British consulate in Bangkok concerning problems of an Indian trader, sent to

Phnom Penh resident Berthier in March 1879. The letter was written in reply to a petition by Berthier, informing the British consul of the fate of one Ali Nullabay and his family, who were imprisoned in Oudong on trumped-up charges.⁸³ Ali had been in the Bangkok trade and was the former owner of a ship, which traveled regularly between Bangkok and Hatien.⁸⁴ For more than a year, he had been prevented from leaving Oudong and as a result, his business was now a shambles. Berthier requested the help and support of the British consul to press for his release, since Ali was ‘Indian’ and therefore a British subject.

Berthier was a somewhat curious choice as legal counsel. Like Larrieu-Manan, he belonged to the growing class of Phnom Penh’s European paupers. As merchant capitalists in Paris and Saigon realized that expectations for commerce in Cambodia were vastly inflated, more and more of those who had ridden these hopes to Phnom Penh were reaching the end of their credit. Berthier had been broke for quite some time. As Aymonier observed in 1880:

Ever since I arrived, I have seen Monsieur Berthier in a position of need, living off odd jobs. Owing to lack of success, he does not exercise the profession of businessman anymore. After signing a contract with the administration’s supplier of cattle, he received a thousand piasters up front, but could never furnish more than about a hundred cows. The money has long been used up and a clash between him and the supplier seems imminent. Monsieur Berthier is currently on a steamboat belonging to some Chinese, which is used for transport and towing between Kompong Chhnang and Phnom Penh. In addition, he has to make a living. . . . Monsieur Berthier has neither lodging nor furniture. His wife and child live in a shack, and he himself has only the shelter on the boat.⁸⁵

Berthier was thus neither a man of influence and prestige in Phnom Penh, nor did he have any particular knowledge of law. However, to everyone’s surprise, Berthier managed to stir up a campaign, which led to the release of Ali’s family, creating the first precedent for French jurisdiction over Indians in Cambodia.

The arrest of Berthier’s client had been ordered by one of King Norodom’s half-sisters over a dispute involving outstanding payments for deliveries of silk. Depending on the source, Ali Nullabay either had been unwilling to pay or had already paid long before for these deliveries.⁸⁶ To bring about a resolution in her favor, the princess ordered Ali and his family to be jailed. After more than a year of waiting, and unable to produce the sum requested for his release, Ali contacted Berthier and – possibly with his help – escaped to Saigon, leaving his wife and child behind in Oudong.

Such an affair typically would not have seeped outside palace circles. Discord involving princely offspring was an internal matter not to be interfered in by outsiders. Cambodian courts had been similarly reluctant to rule on cases involving royalty, since the wrong decision might well have ended a judge’s career. This did not mean that justice was not carried out, but informal mediation was considered preferable to public challenges. To the French representative, the reluctance of Cambodian courts to get involved in royal disputes was another example of injustice, and Berthier appealed to these sentiments in his pleas to the

Protectorate. The French authorities were morally obliged to intervene on Ali's behalf, Berthier argued, and he went so far as to call upon his contacts in Saigon to undertake a press campaign in Ali's favor. The Saigon lawyer Viénot was asked to publish two articles in the *Indépendant de Saigon* summarizing Ali's case and asserting that the Indians in Phnom Penh were, legally speaking, orphans, abandoned by Cambodian courts and neglected by the French.⁸⁷ Viénot even traveled to Phnom Penh to plead the case directly to the representative.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, Berthier solicited protection from the British in Bangkok. If up to this time, French authorities had disregarded Phnom Penh's Indian community, the mail from Bangkok with the threat of British interference changed all that.

Representative Aymonier was well aware of the stakes in the matter. If the Protectorate did not intervene, it would be seen as acknowledging that the Indians fell under Cambodian law and courts. As potential British subjects, the Indians should be treated the same way as the Tagals, who were Spanish subjects, or else the French position would appear incoherent.⁸⁹ Alas, the British authorities declined to vouch for Phnom Penh's Indians, stating that, with the exception of Ali Nullabay, they had no official knowledge of any British subjects in Cambodia.⁹⁰ Even Ali's status was rather obscure since his passport was apparently somewhere between Bangkok and Phnom Penh with a friend who had been temporarily in need of a British identity.⁹¹

Aymonier was thus caught in a conundrum. In the French system of classification, Ali and his peers were Indians, who, according to the British consulate in Saigon, were not considered at the time as British subjects. At the time the French still promoted the notion that proper identification (the *déclarations de présence* mentioned earlier) would turn ethnic Vietnamese residents into French subjects (thus subject to French courts), and the Cambodian judiciary still judged the Vietnamese who did not have the proper papers. With neither French nor British documents to certify their subject status, it seemed difficult to deny that Phnom Penh's Indians should still fall under local jurisdiction. They were, in the terminology of the applicable treaties of 1873 and 1877, "Asians" and thus subject to Cambodian law. However, if this was true for the Indians, then how could the Tagals, who often similarly lacked proper identification, be considered "Europeans?"

Aymonier's solution to the problem followed the same pattern of thinking that had already been applied to the Vietnamese community. Just as the Vietnamese in Cambodia had all eventually become French subjects because of their inherent Vietnamese-ness, so the Indians came to be considered inherently Indian, whether they were British subjects or not. In the case of Ali Nullabay, a comparison with the status of Indians in Saigon, coupled with a purported request from King Norodom for his opinion, convinced Aymonier that he could rightfully judge the affair.⁹² Thus he ruled against King Norodom's half-sister and found that Ali had paid all he owed.⁹³ From then on, all Indians in Cambodia, with or without passport, were considered, in Aymonier's terminology, "more or less British subjects," which put them under the jurisdiction of French courts.⁹⁴ Through a considerable stretch of geographic imagination, the French argued, Tagals and Indians were therefore no longer "Asians."

Berthier's crusade for Ali's freedom exposes a seemingly familiar pattern of French encroachment on Cambodian sovereignty. From an initial claim that some of Cambodia's Vietnamese should enjoy privileged treatment because of their subject status in Cochinchina there emerged in the 1870s a more formal prerogative, including progressively larger parts of the Vietnamese community. Simultaneously, ethnic identity as validated by personal documents gradually metamorphosed into ethnic identity based on 'race', whose primary defining elements in the French reasoning were skin color and physiognomy, and to a lesser degree notions of origin, religion, and language. Ensuing contradictions due to partial jurisdiction and legal categorizations with no equivalent in traditional law, in turn, allowed some Western merchants to act as intermediaries in giving plaintiffs access to another legal status. Ultimately, partial jurisdiction was progressively expanded to include the blurred peripheries. What started out as jurisdiction over a small number of individuals ends up covering an entire community, without eradicating the contradictions that appear now in comparison to other communities as yet beyond the French grasp.

Patrons of the disenchanting

The case for French judicial authority over Khmer, Cham, and Chinese was more difficult to make. Every treaty since the beginning of the French Protectorate had reiterated that the French would abstain from interfering in affairs between "Cambodians." Chinese were considered "foreigners" in French Cochinchina, and it was thus implausible to turn them into French subjects in Cambodia.⁹⁵ Logical consistency also stood in the way of claims to French judicial authority over the Cham. If the French wanted to change the previous state of affairs in which legally they could take "no action whatsoever regarding Cambodian subjects," a different avenue had to be found.⁹⁶

Around 1873, local French authorities began to involve themselves in court cases that implicated only Khmer, Cham and Chinese. This new, more aggressive attitude coincided with the appointment of Etienne Aymonier as Representative Moura's assistant. In later years, Aymonier would note that he began this job with "very wide-ranging ideas of my judicial competence."⁹⁷ These ideas are recorded in a notebook labeled "*Correspondance avec le Roi et les mandarins cambodgiens*," covering the period from April 1880 to April 1881, in which Aymonier wrote down a brief summary of each letter sent to members of the Cambodian government. Within the twelve months covered by the register, 203 letters were mailed to provincial governors, lower mandarins, ministers, and King Norodom, with an average of four letters a week. The majority of letters were addressed to members of the judicial hierarchy, ranging from the head of the Phnom Penh prison to the Minister of Justice. Interestingly, all the letters concern complaints by Khmer, Cham or Chinese against their fellow countrymen, with no involvement by Europeans in any of these cases. Apparently, Aymonier spent a good deal of his time on affairs that, according to all the treaties, were none of his business.⁹⁸

In Aymonier's private papers, we also find some 750 letters of complaint in Khmer language dating from 1879 to 1881, addressed to him by Cham, Chinese

and Khmer commoners.⁹⁹ Typically, these complaints contain an introduction stating the names and origin of the plaintiff, followed by an account of his dispute with another commoner or a member of the Cambodian mandarinat. After a summary of the case, the author denounces the inactivity or unjust decision of Cambodian officials involved in the case. Each letter ends in a manner similar to that of a plaintiff from the village of Kbal Koh, denouncing a local mandarin's role in a land dispute: "May I humbly ask you, master (*preah dechkun*), that you help me to prevent a conflict that would hurt my family, so that we can have peace and health through you."¹⁰⁰

Cases enumerated in these letters range from theft to fraud to murder.¹⁰¹ Accusations leveled against local judicial authorities include lack of interest, delays in verdicts, or unfair decisions appealed to Aymonier.¹⁰² Occasional letters from prisoners state that they have served their term and now wish Aymonier to force the prison ward (*srey nokorbal*) to release them.¹⁰³ Pascual de la Cruz, the head of the Tagal guard of the palace, is a frequent letter writer, acknowledging receipt of Aymonier's various comments and promises regarding defendants.¹⁰⁴ Short memos by Aymonier, in Khmer, appear to be cover letters for cases that he had examined and subsequently forwarded to the Cambodian court of justice.¹⁰⁵

This collection of letters, today part of the archives of the Société Asiatique in Paris, clearly suggests that Aymonier took an active interest in Cambodian court cases and that he began to exercise influence on the police as well as the prison services. His interest in the administration of justice seems to have left him with little time for much else.¹⁰⁶ As Moura explained in an 1878 letter to the Saigon Governor:

I have the honor to ask you to kindly let me give you some explanations about our way of doing things here concerning the daily complaints that the Cambodians submit to us. I insist on bringing this question to your attention at this early stage, in order to give you the opportunity to approve or to modify, according to your desire, Admiral, the course of action followed until today. Even though the treaty states explicitly that "the Representative of the Protectorate shall not interfere in litigations that Cambodians have between themselves," I listen, as does my assistant, to every individual that addresses himself to the Protectorate. This is how we act: If, as it often happens, the dispute in question is of slight or trivial importance, we dismiss the plaintiffs. If it involves a litigation between commoners, and if the case is worth the effort, we hand a lithographed note to the plaintiff, . . . who then takes this semi-official recommendation to the *présor sorivong*, who knows what that means and who will busy himself to bring about a verdict in the affair. If it is a complaint against the customs service, or against any public service, I examine the affair carefully myself and refer it then to the competent minister, or to the King himself, if necessary. Despite these restrictions, within the limits of which we try to remain, my assistant and I are overwhelmed by the daily petitions of the natives, let alone the lawsuits among Europeans and between them and the inhabitants. These judicial and individual affairs absorb 95 percent of our time, often to the detriment

of the Representative of the Protectorate's other duties of a more general interest.¹⁰⁷

Moura's letter is misleading, for while he still claims that all cases are referred to the Cambodian authorities for final judgment, annotations to complaints in Aymonier's handwriting suggest otherwise. On numerous complaints a final judgment is proposed, while other documents reveal that Aymonier undertook investigations and then proposed judgments in accordance with his findings.¹⁰⁸ Further correspondence reveals that Aymonier, whom petitioners now addressed as *metoap srok khmae* (commander of Cambodia), could indeed have prisoners freed, and that the colonial authorities were in the process of replacing Cambodian judges altogether.¹⁰⁹ It is with this in mind that one has to read a casual comment by Aymonier the following year:

The superior tribunal is more or less set up, organized according to the ordinances of 1877. I reunite from time to time the judges at the Protectorate in order to examine the affairs that they bring to me, for which a conclusion is overdue, in order to outline (*tracer*) such a conclusion to them, without, of course, making a judgment myself. I try above all to give them a little authority, which they are lacking.¹¹⁰

Moura and Aymonier were not the only ones meddling in the affairs of Cambodian judges. As in the case of the Vietnamese and Indian communities, Western merchants had discovered that there was money to be made in indigenous lawsuits, and the most destitute among them seem to have been the most active. Again, colonial authorities viewed their activities with suspicion if not outright hostility. The trader Alphonse Mercuriol was a prime target of colonial scorn. Mercuriol had lived in Cambodia since 1872, coming from Saigon by way of Yokohama where he worked as a croupier and bartender in casinos and restaurants. In Phnom Penh, he befriended Caraman, only to sell some of his estate during his absence and leave with the money for another trip to Japan. After his return to Saigon, Mercuriol tried to enter the cattle trade, apparently with little success.¹¹¹ Moving back to Cambodia at the end of the 1870s, he found himself penniless but was still determined to make it in the colonies, which by then meant falling back on the one asset that no one could take away from him: his skin color. As Aymonier lamented in a letter on Mercuriol's criminal record:

We have here a Frenchman named Mercuriol who has been, some say, convicted in Japan and expelled from that country. This man elevates to a cynical peak the art of living without working, and engages in underhand dealings that are difficult to come to grips with or not covered by the law; such [behavior] is always easy when one is in contact with weak or inferior races like these: going to the Cambodian tribunal, for example, in order to assist (devoid of the slightest competence) an indigenous plaintiff and trying to intimidate the judges; climbing on the roof of a junk in order to serve as ensign, as smokescreen for merchandise that is not supposed to be

examined too closely; assisting a native who proceeds to collect debts that are very hard to collect. In short, exploiting his status as a Frenchman, but not to the honor of the name of France whose standing gets thus lost. . . . Monsieur Mercuriol has already been in Cambodia for some years. He has no honorable means of existence.¹¹²

Mercuriol's "exploiting his status as a Frenchman" was in fact core to the impoverished and renegade end of the colonial presence. Mercuriol was left to exploit his last link to the *mission civilisatrice*, his Frenchness: flat broke, unable to compete in trade, with nothing to teach to the locals, incapable of an 'honorable' colonial existence, he was still French, and thus was entitled to deference from the natives. He could claim nothing more to his credit than his nationality, exposing all too clearly that, stripped of any embellishments of humanitarian or commercial discourse, the French had a right to rule simply because they were French. Colonial authorities and impoverished European merchants might have been different in appearance, attitude, capacity, and political views; they might have disagreed on most issues and disliked each other passionately; but they could not help but share this basic truth between themselves. Both French administrators and colonial theorists liked to think that things were more complicated, that somehow their cultural, intellectual, and technological superiority legitimized their claims to rule in Asia. But Frenchmen such as Mercuriol, Berthier and Larrieu-Manan – barely literate as they were, living in dingy shacks, and short of money, skills and good manners – powerfully suggested the contrary. It was this quality that made them so offensive to the French administration.¹¹³

Meanwhile, the Cambodian judiciary did not surrender to French attacks without a fight. The justice minister was known to put in irons people who had approached the French representative with a complaint or had helped others to do so.¹¹⁴ Still, the Cambodian judiciary faced an avalanche of discontented plaintiffs increasingly unwilling to accept rulings of its judges. Any verdict came to be seen as potentially contestable. The options for a desired settlement had multiplied, and so had the number of agents – French officials, merchants, and indigenous translators – offering to assist petitioners to get a better deal in the growing confusion of competing jurisdictions and responsibilities. With the indigenous courts losing legitimacy and the number of plaintiffs and brokers increasing steadily, the situation soon threatened to spin out of control. As Fourès, Aymonier's successor in the position of representative, wrote in 1884:

The complaints against the Cambodian judges become more and more numerous and the Protectorate is literally besieged every day by petitioners. The Prime Minister to whom I send many of the plaintiffs has decided to lock the door and chase everybody away.¹¹⁵

Only one thing could save the situation, Fourès wrote: the application of the Thomson Convention of 17 June 1884. With its detailed prescriptions on how to replace the current justice system with an elaborate network of French tribunals in all major Cambodian provincial centers, the Thomson Convention would indeed have been the logical conclusion to the French quest for mastery over the

Cambodian judiciary.¹¹⁶ However, these seemingly new policies and institutions, presented as a radical break with Cambodia's past, were really the result of two preceding decades of gradual French encroachment on the local justice system.

By 1884, years of French tinkering with legal categories, racial classifications, and the manipulation of public discontent had thoroughly undermined the legitimacy of Cambodian judges. Each time, expanding French jurisdiction was justified both as an effort to reform an inadequate indigenous system and as a way to clean up the mess of competing definitions and categories, which had been created precisely by initial French interference. It also appears that, though embedded in larger discourses of the superiority of European judicial procedures and French prestige, Moura and Aymonier's interference in the Cambodian justice system relied neither on orders from Paris nor from Saigon. Instead, their motives seem rooted in their own moral conviction that they had to come to the rescue of oppressed indigenous populations. Once their interference had effectively disabled the local judiciary, however, the Saigon Governor was in no mood to let go of this new "precious and powerful tool of control" to gain further influence in Cambodia and defeat resistance among the traditionalists in and outside the palace.¹¹⁷

The gilded screen

In the summer of 1874, letters from Saigon, posted by employees of the steamer company Messageries Maritimes, began to accumulate on the desk of the Representative of the Protectorate. The letters concerned a stream of crates and chests, arriving at their warehouses from France and addressed to the King of Cambodia. Fifteen massive chests had arrived on the steamers *Anady* and *Tigre*, and deliveries of more crates were expected. Although the Messageries repeatedly notified the king of their arrival, no one had turned up to collect the crates. What were they to do with all the merchandise piling up on the piers?¹¹⁸

The chests, part of Caraman's Paris order for King Norodom, were a mere foretaste of what was to come. A few months later, the French engineering company Neut & Dumont sent from Marseilles to Saigon a cargo vessel, which carried an irrigation pump so huge that the Messageries' steamers had been unable to carry it. Boulet Frères sent machinery for a brick factory, while a variety of manufacturers dispatched crates containing wines, spirits, cigars, and tinned food. Some of the crates were forwarded to Phnom Penh in the hope that King Norodom would receive them, while others had to be discarded when their perishable contents began to give off a putrid smell. Over the course of two years, countless crates for *Sa Majesté, le Roi du Cambodge* accumulated in the storehouses of the Messageries. The last twenty-two crates, arriving in 1876 courtesy of Denière Frères, contained the marvelous gilded screen for the royal throne chamber. But again, no one from the royal palace came to claim them. Warehouse employees were told not to allow Caraman anywhere near the crates either, because of several court orders by his creditors.¹¹⁹

By the time the crates with the gilded screen arrived in Saigon, more than two years had passed since the trial of October 1874, which featured Caraman as plaintiff and King Norodom as defendant. At the time, Caraman had high hopes

that the trial would bring a resolution to the disagreement and restore his credibility in the business world. His hopes were soon dashed when both arbitrators in the case, state attorney Augier and the Cambodian grand mandarin, removed themselves from the case after familiarizing themselves with its complexity and realizing the ramifications of a verdict. The grand mandarin declared that it would be impossible for him to express an opinion on a matter directly concerning his sovereign. Ultimate power lay with the king, and a humble subject had no right to rule over his own king. But while the trial came to an abrupt end, the legal ramifications of the affair around the gilded screen were only beginning to emerge.¹²⁰

The grand mandarin's final comment points to the heart of the predicament. Who had jurisdiction over the king when all power was supposed to be in his hands? King Norodom's rule was constrained by rules and traditions, and in this sense, the king was not entirely 'above the law'.¹²¹ But to challenge the king openly in court, as Caraman did, was unheard of. Only rebellious contenders for the throne dared assert that the monarch was violating laws and customs of the forefathers. The suggestion that the king should submit to the ruling of a court was thus a politically charged act.

Caraman, too, was aware that the case had political implications and urged Moura and Augier to consider them:

You are in the presence of a vital, international question, we are dealing with a question of government that could provoke an *interpellation* in our Parliament, you will resolve it while remembering the duties of protection that compel you vis-à-vis your compatriots. In the face of incontestable rights, you will rule in a way that is proper for the representatives of France in a foreign country. If it is necessary to give an example to these Asian sovereigns, so be it.¹²²

The hint that Caraman would consider parliamentary action in France to further his case was no empty threat. He still had some contacts among the metropolitan elite who had not yet heard of his many problems. By 1877, realizing that he was far from getting money from King Norodom, Caraman prepared for another journey to Paris where he pleaded with politicians of all stripes to help him in his struggle with the King of Cambodia.¹²³ When not working the corridors of Parliament, Caraman wrote to benefactors across France, interrupted only by occasional court orders calling him to account before his Parisian creditors. His feverish activity eventually bore fruit: in March 1878, six senators signed a letter to the Minister of the Marine and Colonies, asking him to bring about a resolution in favor of Caraman who was, according to the senators, "the victim . . . of a denial of justice on the part of the government of Cambodia."¹²⁴

From Paris, the Minister sent instructions to Governor Lafont, the last naval governor of Cochinchina, asking him to resolve the affair. Shortly after, the civilian Le Myre de Vilers replaced Lafont in Saigon; with the civilian governor came a new spirit more sympathetic to private enterprise and Western merchants.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, early veterans of the Protectorate were departing from Phnom Penh: both Moura and Aymonier left around that time, taking with

them a good deal of the government's memory of Caraman's life as a merchant.¹²⁶ Moura had declared shortly before his departure that Caraman's claims contained "nothing serious, nothing true, nothing real; . . . we would only laugh about this, were it not for the inconvenience of its taking up our time and obliging us to write long useless letters."¹²⁷ To Le Myre de Vilers, however, the ministerial letter represented an assignment by which he could prove his diplomatic skills and thus perhaps garner a promotion. Over the next two years, he worked hard to resolve the matter.

An initial proposal by Caraman suggested that the screen should be offered as a prize in a public sweepstake. The plan was to sell 100,000 tickets at one piaster each throughout Cambodia, with the proceeds from the raffle covering the cost of Denière's gilded screen. When Saigon objected that such a solution would net 500,000 francs, more than double the price of the screen, Caraman lost interest and the option of a raffle was discarded.¹²⁸ Later, Le Myre de Vilers sent the prominent Saigon politician Blanscubé to Phnom Penh to negotiate with King Norodom. However, "Big Belly," as Caraman called him, also failed to resolve the dispute.¹²⁹ A series of meetings between the French representative Fourès and Norodom was necessary in order to reach an agreement, through a process that increasingly resembled haggling in the local bazaars. In the end, the king resigned himself to accept the screen for the price of 25,000 piasters, half of what Caraman had initially asked. He emphasized that his acceptance should be understood as a token of friendship toward the Governor of Saigon, not as recognition of any debt.¹³⁰

Thus, in February 1881, Governor Le Myre de Vilers was able to notify the Minister in Paris that the affair had finally been concluded.¹³¹ He was proud of this achievement, since he had succeeded where three previous governors had all tried and failed. With his eyes set on new endeavors in the agricultural sector, Caraman had one fewer problem to worry about. Only King Norodom, who was forced in the end to pay for the whole affair, was thoroughly displeased. Moreover, the story of the gilded screen was not over with; for King Norodom, the worst was yet to come.

On 21 February 1881, the twenty-two chests containing Denière's masterpiece were finally shipped off to Phnom Penh. Despite the resolution, the Saigon Governor knew that the underlying dilemma had not been solved. To avoid similar impasses in the future, who was to judge disputes between European merchants and the king? Who had jurisdiction over the monarch of a country in which France had the role of protector, but was not truly in charge? For Le Myre de Vilers, the lesson to be learnt from Caraman's debacle was simple:

I believe that we render a real service to His Majesty if we give him the means to settle contentious litigations resulting from contracts made with Europeans. We thus shield His Majesty from ventures of schemers who will always end up abusing the Royal treasury; [and] we ensure for Cambodia the financial cooperation of respectable firms.¹³²

In December of the same year, Le Myre de Vilers thus imposed a convention on King Norodom, assigning to Saigon's Conseil Privé the power to rule over

disputes between Europeans and the king.¹³³ The Conseil Privé was a semi-democratic body staffed by Western merchants and government employees; it was, by all accounts, the main lobby of the local trader community. Framed in terms that made explicit reference to unsolved affairs of the past, this convention was perhaps the single most subversive act of the colonial government against King Norodom's authority to date. After a decade of struggling to gain jurisdiction over various ethnic communities in Cambodia, the king himself had suddenly become accountable to a French judicial body. The last to follow in the path of his subjects, even the king could now find himself subject to French courts; and the council that would judge him was the most biased toward European business that the colony had on offer.

With this event, the tale of French encroachment on Cambodia's judicial system comes full circle. It had begun two decades earlier with Doudart de Lagrée's judgment over a Phnom Penh street brawl between a French trader and six Chinese residents. It then continued as the story of attempts by the colonial government to gain control over Western merchants and contain the challenge to colonial ideology embodied in their unruly behavior, petty quarrels, and professional failures. From this base, French interference expanded into non-Western spheres, appropriating jurisdiction over various ethnic communities in a piecemeal fashion. The French advance, coupling sincere humanitarian motivations with a supremacist ideology and an obsession with prestige, revealed the subversive force of Western categorizations in a Cambodian context. And it revealed how Phnom Penh's impoverished French merchants – people like Caraman, Le Faucheur, Larrieu, Berthier, and Mercurol – at the same time challenged, facilitated, sabotaged, and benefited from the rise of French rule.

5 Rules of romance and reproduction, 1877–79

Immaculate conceptions

In late 1877, in addition to the conflict over the gilded screen, a range of other disputes about money, bad debts, and unpaid bills contributed to Caraman's worsening situation. The Protectorate wanted Caraman to pay for past deliveries of wine and bread from government stores.¹ The palace interpreter Boniface Ferrer and his Vietnamese wife, his former friends and neighbors, had recently turned against him over an old quarrel involving unpaid deliveries to the palace, and they now wished to never again have "the least rapport between us of whatever kind whatsoever."² A Malay neighbor called La held grievances against him, and Caraman still owed Thi San, a local fruit vendor, a compensation for minor injuries, to which he had been sentenced by a Phnom Penh court as a result of an accident involving his dogs.³

Money was also short at home, where Caraman's household had grown considerably. As part of another attempt to set up a brick factory, Caraman had hired a small group of workers, together with a cook, a servant and two night guards, most of whom had never been paid.⁴ A destitute Frenchman called Fourcros had joined Caraman's company, and ever since kept sending over small scraps of paper, asking Caraman to "please have the goodness to give [me] one piaster so that I can eat, I have nothing to buy food."⁵ Funds were running dangerously low, while more and more people appear to have been moving into Caraman's house on the Grande Rue. The most important among the new permanent inhabitants were a woman and a small baby boy, of whom we learn almost by accident in a set of instructions left by Caraman during a leave of absence. At the end of these instructions, Caraman added a line asking Fourcros to "please watch carefully over Gambetta and ensure that the mother eats in the European manner."⁶ It is the first time that Caraman's female companion surfaces in his writing, and the first indication of the recent birth of his son, Victor, whom Caraman liked to nickname Gambetta.⁷

In keeping with his views on eating habits, Caraman made sure that, more generally, Victor grew up in a European environment during his father's frequent absences. Soon after his birth, he arranged for Madame Marrot to become Victor's godmother. Madame Marrot, Phnom Penh's only white businesswoman, her partner Julien Bras and her son Raoul had been friends with Caraman ever since the Marrots had moved to Cambodia. Madame Marrot was shrewd enough to avoid investing in any of Caraman's projects, but did readily



Figure 5.1 Victor Thomas-Caraman around 1880 (Archives personnelles Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman).

accept his offer of half of all profits from his future endeavors in exchange for the care she extended to Victor. It is hard to believe that commercial motives guided her decision. Madame Marrot had a sharp sense of business matters and a good knowledge of Caraman's penchant for commercial disaster. It is more likely that she shared Caraman's concern for a healthy and happy environment for the newborn, as well as his belief that such an environment would necessarily have to be French.⁸

Three years later, in 1880, Caraman registered Victor's birth at the Protectorate. His child was only the ninth to be recorded in the colonial birth registry.

Half of the newborns previously registered were the children of the Catholic Vietnamese Maria Trong and her husband Boniface Ferrer, with whom Caraman had recently fallen out. The entries for their four children, Félicie, Jules, Jeanne, and Victoire, stand out in Phnom Penh's birth register for the simple fact that the records mention the children's mother. In contrast, Victor's entry reads: "There was born a child of male sex of which the birth has not been registered, and who has been raised . . . by Mister Thomas Caraman who has declared explicitly to be the father of this child."⁹ There was not a word on the mother whose existence is negated by the passive voice of the sentence.

As more children "were born" in European merchant houses along Phnom Penh's main road and registered with the Protectorate by their fathers, the phrasing chosen in Victor's case became standard. One year after Victor's registration, the palace interpreter Rosenthal informed the Protectorate that his son Edouard "had been born" a few months earlier, and soon after, Caraman's close friend Blanc reported his second child Auguste.¹⁰ Similarly, Faraut's sons, Léon and Emile, were "given birth" in 1878 and 1883, apparently without any female involvement. The omission of the mother's name meant that she was of indigenous origin and the child the result of concubinage.¹¹

Victor's mother also goes largely unmentioned in Caraman's correspondence. After asking Foucros in 1877 to make sure that she would use knife and fork at mealtimes, more than seven years passed before Caraman mentioned her again, in a note of 1884 confirming that she still lived with him in the same house on Phnom Penh's Grande Rue.¹² In Caraman's writings as well as in official documents, Victor's mother has no name, no face, no identity; she is conspicuous by her absence. *Congai* like her, indigenous female companions of European men, appear only in the margins of the colonial chronicles, normally when the relationship ended either in scandal or pregnancy.

In 1877, for example, the German trader Heinrich Russel tried to retrieve a girl who had run away from him after he had acquired her for two silver bars from her former master.¹³ Scandal also arose when Caraman's friends Blanc and Larrieu-Manan laid claims to a woman who had apparently been betrothed previously to a local dignitary.¹⁴ There are archival records documenting complaints to the Protectorate by *congai*, alleging that they were living with European men who kept ill-treating them.¹⁵ In other instances, the relationship as such posed a problem if visible to the public. Such was the case with missionaries who interpreted their oath of celibacy with liberality. Two such tales are recorded during the first two decades of the Protectorate; both times, they ended with the disgrace of the missionaries in question and their dismissal from the missionary society.¹⁶

Colonial records are thus not generous with information on the relationships that early colonists entertained with local women. Beyond birth registers and the occasional scandal, there is mostly silence. Racism certainly accounts in part for this silence and for birth certificates like Victor's, which lists an "unidentified mother" in the space reserved for the parents' names.¹⁷ Perhaps it was also concern for their children's future that kept local colonists from mentioning the mother in official documents. Many planned to return one day to a motherland that had grown increasingly racist as the century drew to a close, and where *métis*, half-castes from the colonies, were certain to face discrimination. However,

another initial suspicion, namely that the silence could have been caused by embarrassment about the relationships as such, does not appear to be borne out by the sources. Rather, it appears that concubinage relationships would under certain circumstances lead to scandal, but were not considered scandals in themselves. Part of the silence can thus perhaps be explained by the assumption that, locally, such living arrangements were perceived as sufficiently ‘normal’ not to merit mention as long as neither controversy nor pregnancy ensued.

Such an assumption appears to be supported by the sheer frequency of such relationships in Phnom Penh, as well as the fact that European men engaged in them regardless of their station. From Caraman we learn that Representative Moura, happily married and with one child in France, entertained a second relationship while in Phnom Penh.¹⁸ Another representative, Fourès, noted in 1881 in a private letter that he had finally returned his former concubine to her mother, having decided to live alone.¹⁹ Most of the other European long-term residents who were not on the government payroll appear to have had arrangements similar to those of their official representatives. Only lesser government staff, who stayed just for brief periods in Cambodia, were less likely to engage in concubinage relationships, since navy housing in makeshift barracks or on gunboats moored along Phnom Penh’s riverbank gave little privacy.²⁰

Many of the relationships between local women and European men appear to have endured for long periods. As mentioned earlier, Caraman’s companion continued to reside in his house nearly a decade after she had given birth to Victor.²¹ Faraut, King Norodom’s French secretary and architect, enjoyed a relationship lasting several decades, while Boniface Ferrer, after living for ten years with his fiancée Maria, held a church marriage at the end of the 1870s.²² That they engaged in more than just temporary unions of convenience is also suggested by those colonists who, in their wills, bequeathed all or part of their estate to their Cambodian companions and their children.²³ Finally, a comparison of birth rates and the estimated growth of the European presence in Cambodia suggests that *métis* children were far more likely to be recognized by fathers who formed part of the first generation of colonists than thereafter.²⁴ Racist as they were, early colonists nonetheless appear to have been somewhat more tolerant and less hypocritical than subsequent generations of colonials, who claimed that cross-racial relationships as such were disgraceful and to be avoided by any Frenchman who valued his honor.

If associated with an indigenous woman in a long-term relationship, a Cambodia colonist of the first generation could count on a milieu of peers who endorsed such unions and were likely to maintain similar ties to indigenous women.²⁵ Although their unions were sanctioned neither by the church nor by the state (Boniface Ferrer and Maria Trong being the exception), they featured some characteristics of marriages in Europe in that period, including the father’s claim of full rights over his children and his responsibility to provide for the family after death.²⁶ Perhaps the longevity of these relationships suggests that, at least to some degree, they could meet the expectations of both parties involved.

From the vantage point of the European, these expectations included sex, emotional comfort, and cheap domestic labor. Sex usually came first. Although many travelers to Indochina initially stressed how “hideous” the natives were to

their eyes, after a few months of residence initial disgust regularly shifted to a more positive appreciation of indigenous beauty.²⁷ A Dr Morice noted in 1873 that “after a sojourn of several months, one ends up discerning some sense on many faces and learns to discriminate among all this ugliness. One distinguishes straight eyes, noses that are almost Caucasian, and the repulsion gradually disappears.”²⁸ As the overwhelming strangeness and uniformity of Asian faces made way in the European mind for more selective judgments, some noted with surprise that “the Cambodian women are not as unsightly as one has said.”²⁹ As well as negative comments, one thus finds much praise for their beauty, with particular attention paid to the shape of breasts, waists, and hips.³⁰ To have such a body at one’s personal disposal was thus a tempting outlook for any European determined to live in Phnom Penh on a more permanent basis. In France, some may have been prevented from marrying the woman of their choice, for want of status, wealth or good looks. Such constraints did not apply in Cambodia, which offered romance and sexual gratification for anyone, without the burdens of European marriage.

In addition, the *congai* played a mediating role between the colonist and the indigenous environment, and buttressed his sense of virility and self-worth in an environment that put the latter to a hard test. The average Phnom Penh trader had traveled the seven seas confident to find at the end of his journey the lazy, ignorant and generally hapless natives of colonial propaganda. Once on site, he had to learn that the same allegedly inferior natives were a fierce competition in business. Persistent lack of commercial success came to taint the well-developed self-regard that had accompanied many Europeans to the colonies.

Where the outside world declined to grant success, the domestic world became a refuge for colonial dreams of mastery. The *congai* and the *boy* (servant) provided in miniature the satisfaction of conquest and control that Cambodia stubbornly withheld from early colonials.³¹ Both also served as go-betweens and translators to the colonist, providing him with goods and information across the cultural divide.³² In a sense, they made a colonial existence viable; for without them, the colonist would have been even more isolated and unable to achieve his aims than he was to begin with. As his “skin dictionary,” the *congai* gave him a sense of understanding and belonging. As his associate in business, she helped him survive in a world that remained unintelligible and largely indifferent to his quest for acknowledgment and profit.³³ And for those colonists unable to afford the complete set of servants required for a colonial lifestyle, the *congai* further assumed the roles of cook and cleaner. In neighboring Saigon, some colonists were able to comply with the minimal requirements for a colonial home, as recommended by publications of their day: a cook, a *boy*, a gardener, a coachman, and a stable help, with the *congai* serving as the person in charge of domestic staff.³⁴ In Phnom Penh, colonial households were generally less opulent and usually run by the *congai* alone, at best aided by a *boy*.³⁵

While there can be little doubt that concubinage relationships were fundamentally exploitative, there may have been some minor benefits for the woman as well. If we believe the experience of Adhémard Leclère, the main draw of concubinage for the *congai* and her family was the promise of economic security. Leclère authored a manuscript that would have become the only



Figure 5.2 The object of desire: Portrait of a 'Cambodian woman' by Emile Gsell, around 1870 (Archives Diplomatiques, Paris).

nineteenth-century novel on Cambodian colonial romance, had he ever found a publisher. In his manuscript, Leclère describes in detail the negotiations preceding a concubinage relationship.³⁶

A French official called Verrier, smitten with the beauty of Thi Sao, an eighteen-year-old girl from Sadec, one day asked his *boy* to invite her to his

house. In the privacy of his bedroom, he asked her to undress so that he could more closely inspect her bodily features. Apparently satisfied with what he saw, he asked her to return the next day in the company of her mother. The following day, the three met in the living room of his residence. After some haggling, the mother and Verrier agreed on a down payment of one hundred, and a monthly allowance for Thi Sao of thirty piasters. In addition, Thi Sao's family would in the future be able to profit from Verrier's position in the colonial hierarchy, acting as brokers between fellow Cambodians and Verrier.

As suggested in Leclère's novel, *congai* of early colonial officials did indeed often attract criticism for meddling in political and administrative matters and exploiting the influence they held over their male partners, most notably Neang Teat and Neang Ruong, the companions of Representative Moura and Resident Superior de Vernéville, respectively.³⁷ Many local people who had business with Protectorate officials would have found it easier to approach their indigenous female partners and their kin rather than the Frenchmen themselves, thus propelling local families associated with colonial administrators into new roles as powerful middlemen. The same was true for *congai* of Western merchants, even though such relationships would probably yield less for the concerned women and their families, given that most of the European merchants were comparably poor. Be it merchants or government officials, however, the hope for economic security and financial advantages was always likely to figure among the central arguments to convince local parents that one of their daughters should be allowed to enter into a concubinage relationship with a European man. Money was key, even though, perhaps in some cases, a degree of mutual affection and loyalty could eventually complement such arrangements.

The colonial government initially appears to have accepted concubinage among members of the administration, for there were a number of advantages that the government was well aware of. *Congai* kept government staff marginally content, and thus led to lower staff turnover. Local experience and language skills were in short supply, with *congai* contributing to both in multiple ways and thus enhancing their French partners' professional performance. Furthermore, a steady relationship with a *congai* diminished the risk of lengthy incapacitation as a result of venereal diseases. It also reduced costs for the colonial bureaucracy. A European wife required additional expenses for travel, lodging, food, and clothing. The indigenous lovers of single male Protectorate officials "were less expensive than white women," and salaries could thus be kept low.³⁸

Concubinage may not have been formally condoned, but it was certainly seen as the lesser evil compared to the alternatives. In those early days, there were few single white women in the colonies, and the colonial government was not in favor of more of them making the journey across the seas from Europe. Some French administrators were haunted by the unseemly spectacle of destitute Europeans accumulating in Cochinchina and Cambodia and preferred that no more of their kind should follow in their footsteps.³⁹ People of low class and few skills, the "dried fruits of the *métropole*," the argument ran, would only add to the budding lumpenproletariat in places like Phnom Penh, while women immigrants were seen as the ultimate *petits blancs*, prone to poverty, or worse, prostitution.⁴⁰

In the absence of white women, male employees of the colonial administration thus had to find other means to satisfy their sexual and emotional needs. The alternatives to unions with indigenous women – homosexual relationships and masturbation – were both considered contrary to the laws of nature and detrimental to the fighting power of the troops, and latent fear of both further contributed to a government attitude that was initially fairly pragmatic.

In later years, some old Indochina hands liked to recall those early days as the “good old times” when the colonial community had not yet been “adorned with the fair sex” and colonists could still engage in “patriarchal hospitality,” eating, drinking, smoking, and conversing among men, unrestrained by white women and the demands of a bourgeois household.⁴¹ However, the archival record reveals that quite a few members of the fair sex had already found their way to Phnom Penh. Merchant Paul Roustan and mechanic Andrieu, for example, both lived in the 1870s with their French fiancées, while Marie Josephine Muller joined her shoemaker husband in 1877, as did Marie Laty, spouse of the local hairdresser Guérin.⁴² We know that Caraman contemplated traveling to France to marry as early as 1874, at a moment at which he considered his colonial career far from over.⁴³ And throughout the 1870s, Phnom Penh’s foremost European merchant was Madame Marrot, a woman who enjoyed the respect, if not the affection, of most of her male fellow traders. Still, the small group of white women was far outnumbered by single European males, most of whom entertained concubinage relationships with local women. As time wore on, these relationships produced a growing number of children of mixed race, Victor being one of them.

In the 1880s, Victor and other *métis* children like him reached school age. Even though early colonists such as Caraman, who had come to Cambodia prior to the war of 1885–86, registered their children more readily and in greater proportion than later generations of colonists, it appears that unregistered were still more numerous than registered *métis* children even in those early years. Naturalization requests by *métis* born prior to 1885 and personnel files of colonial employees of mixed descent with birth dates before 1885 leave little doubt that many more children were born to European fathers during the early Protectorate, even though few traces of their lives remain in the archival record.⁴⁴ In 1903, in the first colonial census, the Cambodian capital counted forty-eight registered *métis* residents, while 315 more residents were “known European *métis*, but assimilated to Asians, because of the lack of an *état civil* (proper registration).”⁴⁵

A man called Dam might serve as an example for those 315 unnamed men and women. Unregistered at birth, Dam’s name is nowhere to be found in the colonial chronicles; he goes unmentioned in tens of thousands of pages of reports, registers, and correspondence produced by the Protectorate during his youth. In 1913, as a grown man and by now working for the Protectorate administration, Dam was required to produce a so-called “*acte de notoriété*” – a statement about his family origins signed by three witnesses – in order to get a promotion. The document states that Dam was born in 1874, son of a Neang Teat and Jean Moura, at the time serving as Representative of France in Cambodia. Dam was therefore the son of the principal author of a large part of

the same colonial records that pass in silence over his existence.⁴⁶ Based on stories like Dam's, the 1903 census, and the fifteen *métis* born before 1885 who had been duly registered with the Protectorate, a number of fifty children of mixed descent living in Phnom Penh by the mid-1880s thus appears a realistic, if somewhat conservative, estimate.

As they grew older and more numerous, Phnom Penh's *métis* became of increasing concern to the colonial government. The growth of a hybrid population that defied racial classification and segregation stimulated latent fears that the current power structure might one day be open to challenge.⁴⁷ These fears were further exacerbated by political rhetoric in France suggesting that the French Nation was dogged by gradual degeneration. The debate on this alleged decline was animated by influential authors like Benedict Augustin Morel, who advised that there was hope for national regeneration, but only if great care were taken with the mixing of races and classes.⁴⁸

In the view of a new generation of colonists arriving in Phnom Penh from the mid-1880s, the general notion that things were somehow on the decline found a vivid exemplification in the moral laxness of their colonial compatriots already present. The *congai* and her children were the first to suffer from a reinvigorated bourgeois morality that disapproved of any kind of disorder and impurity. Within only a few years, what was initially a vague unease had consolidated into sound bigotry. Consider this statement from an 1896 circular of the Société de protection des jeunes métis, a colonial welfare organization that focused on the fate of children of mixed couples. An extreme example of the newly dominant negative view of concubinage, it claims that "in most cases"

the indigenous woman who agrees to live with a European is in fact a genuine prostitute who will never better herself. When, after several years of free union with Frenchmen, the latter disappear or abandon her, she inevitably relapses to the vice out of which she came. She virtually always is to her children a model of debauchery, laziness and immorality.⁴⁹

The concubines' children were similarly stigmatized. Many believed that *métis* girls were fated to prostitution, and boys to become dissatisfied and resentful outcasts.⁵⁰ The *métis* and *congai* came to personify everything that the bourgeois dreaded: immodesty, indolence, disobedience, and lust.⁵¹ In many ways, *congai* and *métis* came to mirror repressed desires, with their role as outsiders helping to reinforce boundaries of race relations and acceptable behavior. Respectable society rejected, but also pitied them with a kind of benevolent contemptuousness that also included colonial veterans who had, in the view of the majority, "given into their biological drives at the cost of empire," as Ann Stoler put it.⁵² While the parents were often seen as beyond redemption, orphanages and strict separation from the indigenous world were considered a way to reclaim *métis* children for a respectable, white existence.

The children of Ngien Tiep and Alexis Blanc were among the first of their generation in Phnom Penh to find out what the new order had in store for young *métis*. Blanc, a mechanic in the service of the Messageries fluviales and part-time merchant, had been a Phnom Penh resident since the early 1870s and was a good

friend of Caraman's. His wife, Ngien Tiep, was the daughter of a Chinese man and a Khmer woman, and had been in the service of King Norodom prior to becoming Blanc's companion.⁵³ Blanc spoke excellent Khmer, and the couple counted among their friends Chinese, Vietnamese and Khmer, as well as European residents of Phnom Penh.⁵⁴

Throughout his life in Cambodia, Blanc lived with Ngien Tiep in a house on the Grande Rue where, over the years, she gave birth to four boys and girls, one of whom died in childhood.⁵⁵ Although apparently not always a faithful husband, Blanc's close relationship to his wife held for almost two decades until his death in 1889. Two years before his passing, Blanc had written a will, which explicitly included Tiep and bestowed three quarters of his estate upon his Phnom Penh family, while only one quarter went toward relatives in France.⁵⁶ It seems thus safe to say that the relationship of Blanc and Tiep had many of the markers of European marriage, save the blessing of the Church and state.

Blanc had been in ill health for some time and left Phnom Penh shortly before his death in hope of recuperation in France. After his death, Blanc's friend Dussol was named tutor of his children, since, apparently, Tiep was considered unfit to take care of her own children.⁵⁷ Emelie Blanc, fifteen years old, was placed in the orphanage of the Sainte Enfance in Saigon, and the nine-year-old Auguste, who followed her to Saigon, was placed in an institution for boys.⁵⁸ Only the four-year-old Pierre was allowed to stay with his mother. The way the authorities dealt with Tiep's family corresponded with the view that *métis* children should be separated from the "model of debauchery, laziness and immorality" of their mothers no later than the age of seven.⁵⁹ *Métis* children of



Figure 5.3 The orphanage of the Soeurs de la Providence de Portieux in Phnom Penh in 1884 (Musée des Beaux Arts et de la Dentelle, Alençon).

deceased fathers were being referred to as “orphans” in official documents, thus blotting out the existence of mothers.⁶⁰

The official policy of orphanage and separation was based on an array of racist bourgeois fears. At times, however, more concrete motives also spoke in favor of public charity. In 1894, for instance, the mother of a former opium agent, the late Auguste Patou, who had had business interests in Cambodia since the early 1880s, inquired into the whereabouts of her grandchildren.⁶¹ Her son had taken up a relationship with the Cambodian Nou while working in Kampot in the 1880s. Over time, Nou gave birth to three children. Although Patou had awarded his entire estate and rights to Nou in his will, their children were declared orphans after his death and taken in by the Sainte Enfance.⁶² One of them was adopted and renamed by a Saigon school director.⁶³ Informed of this state of affairs, Patou’s mother wondered if it was not advisable to permanently “remove [the children] from the vice and the bad example of their mother” by transferring custody and property rights to her.⁶⁴ Her letter clearly indicates that she believed her son had owned a large plantation in Kampot, revealing material interests behind charitable claims.

Madame Patou’s motives remain unconfirmed. Interestingly, however, her quest for custody ended abruptly after the authorities refused to transfer the land rights to her, on the grounds that they had been legally given to Nou. Property that mixed couples had acquired during their lives together, it appears, could be granted to widowed concubines such as Nou; any children they had in common, however, were an entirely different matter.

By the late 1880s, the practice of separating *métis* children from their mothers following the European father’s death had become common practice. Of Phnom Penh’s registered *métis* whose lives can be traced in the archives, only those who left the colony in time or whose fathers lived to old age avoided the fate of the Sainte Enfance. Caraman’s son Victor, for instance, left Cambodia for Europe in the early 1880s in the company of Miss Marrot, while Faraut’s children were spared because their father remained alive until 1911.⁶⁵ By then, his sons Léon and Emile were in their late twenties and early thirties, too old to be ‘redeemed’ in an orphanage from the influence of their Laotian mother.

Although they had not followed the standard route of Phnom Penh’s first generation of *métis*, it appears that Faraut’s sons embraced the new values and views. At the time of his father’s death, Emile served as the “principal collaborator” and “very devoted treasurer” of the Société de protection de l’enfance au Cambodge, an organization in charge of collecting the ‘abandoned’ children of cross-racial relationships.⁶⁶ Emile’s close collaboration with an organism that championed the breaking up of families like his own gives an idea of the force of the new views on miscegenation. Within a few years, they had become so dominant that victims like him ended up accepting the stereotype of themselves, acknowledging the ‘problem’ of their own existence and doing everything to help ‘solve’ it with racist charity directed at other *métis*.⁶⁷

Explicit government regulations outlawing concubinage for colonial staff did not come into force until the end of the century, but the zeitgeist in Phnom Penh had shifted more than a decade earlier. The young Marrot, for instance, knew that he struck a chord with his audience when he derided a local state attorney in

an 1891 letter for “liv[ing] publicly in the palace of justice with an Annamite woman and many more persons devoid of morality,” adding that “according to all, this is a scandal.”⁶⁸ In the name of dignity and honor, the subsequent generation of colonists was advised against concubinage. Consider this confidential 1897 memo from the head of the judicial service for Cochinchina and Cambodia, addressed to all members of the judiciary in Phnom Penh and the interior:

I regret to find recently that a magistrate posted in the interior lived publicly in concubinage with an indigenous woman. I was forced to take rigorous measures against him, for I cannot admit such a lack of proper attitude on the part of a functionary who has the task of dispensing justice. You do not ignore the fatal consequences of these irregular cohabitations, degrading the magistrate, compromising his authority and his prestige and sometimes – which is even worse – his honor.⁶⁹

The author went on to emphasize that the “dignity of the magistrate’s private life” had to be preserved at all cost and noted with satisfaction that “the behavior of the large majority of the staff was irreproachable.” He demanded that any remaining renegades “break off *immediately*” with their companions.⁷⁰ Governor Doumer eventually banned concubinage for government staff at the turn of the century.⁷¹ With the standard domestic arrangement for European men no longer available, all-white marriages and prostitution replaced the former mode of behavior.

From concubinage to prostitution

One of the earliest remarks concerning prostitution and the trafficking of women from Cochinchina to Phnom Penh is found in a Moura letter, dated 11 February 1875:

Old women come to our large towns, collect the abandoned prostitutes (*filles publiques*) and bring them here, conjuring up in their mind a better future than in Cochinchina. Upon arrival in Phnom Penh, they are forced to make expenditures for which they cannot pay and are kept in slavery until reimbursement [of the debt], the day of which never comes. Meanwhile, they are put at the disposal of the public; sometimes it is even the parents themselves who leave their children as collateral, that is to say as slaves, for money they borrowed. I have drawn attention to these facts at the time, and I do not go soft on the culprits. I send all the slaves who come toward me back to Cochinchina if they originate from there. Furthermore, I make sure that sellers and buyers are severely punished. No one in Cambodia ignores that we do not allow this kind of trade. For five years now, I have posted to my door, in every language, that French subjects of whatever race can neither sell themselves, nor be sold.⁷²

Moura’s efforts to ban such traffic came too late. By the 1870s, the presence of large numbers of French troops and single male Chinese immigrants had already

turned the towns of the French colony into lucrative destinations for the sex trade. Saigon had been integrated into a flourishing international network, through which women were shipped from rural China and Japan via Hong Kong or Nagasaki to Singapore. Women who did not enter Singapore's brothels on Malay or Smith Street were subsequently transferred to the Dutch Indies, Burma, India, Siam and Saigon, where they likewise joined the sex trade.⁷³ By 1880, Saigon's Chinese sister town Cholon had eleven brothels staffed with Cantonese girls, acquired in Hong Kong at a price of 100 to 200 piasters each, serving a population of roughly 30,000 city dwellers, who were mainly Chinese bachelors.⁷⁴ While these brothels remained largely closed to men of non-Chinese origin, the Japanese *karayuki-san* received indiscriminately.⁷⁵ Their number was nevertheless insufficient to satisfy the increasing demand in Saigon as it developed into the main hub of the French navy in Asia. Over time, more and more Vietnamese women began to provide sexual services to Saigon's mass of single males.⁷⁶

With rents and living costs in Saigon high, most Chinese traders had to put in several years of work and saving before they could spare the cash to marry and set up a household. Mariners and soldiers, on the other hand, stemming as they did from the lower classes of home society, were considered by their superiors to be incapable of the self-discipline and moral character necessary for abstinence.⁷⁷ For the navy, the question was thus never *if*, but merely *how* their sexual needs should be met. In the face of frequent rapes perpetrated by bands of soldiers and sailors in and around Saigon, and latent fear of homosexuality, prostitution was by far the more preferable alternative.⁷⁸

A steady stream of young Vietnamese women traveled up the Mekong to work temporarily in the Cambodian capital as well, serving a similar yet smaller group of foreign men. In addition to French troops and their Vietnamese auxiliaries, whose numbers varied greatly depending on the military situation, an itinerant population of Vietnamese men further ensured a constant demand. In contrast, Chinese men in Phnom Penh appear to have been better integrated into local society than their compatriots in Saigon, and many had married local women. Effective social control among the Khmer and Cham communities made it also less likely that their married men would use the services of the Vietnamese prostitutes, more so even since they generally held the Vietnamese in low esteem. There is also some evidence for Khmer women exchanging sex for money or other favors. However, such services were usually embedded into more complex contractual arrangements. Their situation differed markedly from those Vietnamese women who had been trafficked to Phnom Penh for the sole purpose of prostitution and were cut off from their homes and family relations.⁷⁹

Numbers are difficult to come by. A report from 1870 by the Governor of Cochinchina does not indicate the size of the sex trade in Saigon, instead enumerating the efforts that the colonial administration had undertaken to limit the spread of venereal disease in its wake. A dispensary established in 1863 had on average about 200 prostitutes under treatment at any particular time. Patients came from all over the colony, including Saigon, Cholon, Mytho and other rural centers. In addition, an average of 150 male Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian

patients suffering from sexually transmitted diseases were treated at any one time at the clinic.⁸⁰ Thus it seems reasonable to assume the presence of a couple of hundred prostitutes, all nationalities combined, working the streets and brothels of Saigon and Cholon during the early colonial period, with some more working in Mytho and other smaller towns. Such a number was still quite small compared to Hong Kong or Singapore. In Singapore, government-licensed brothels alone, not counting street prostitution and clandestine establishments, numbered at the time 212, with numbers of female employees reaching four-digit figures.⁸¹

Comparably modest as it was, the Saigon sex trade still garnered special mention in contemporary tourist guidebooks, while Phnom Penh's red light district remained largely unnoted.⁸² In Phnom Penh, there were neither streets nor neighborhoods dedicated to brothels such as one found in Cochinchina. Soliciting did not occur in public. Rather, local residents served as intermediaries, bringing clients and women together in private homes. For those interested in Khmer women, in particular, a group of European merchants, Cambodian dignitaries, lesser princes, and palace employees served as go-betweens and occasional pimps.⁸³ Caraman served at least in one instance as intermediary between a European visitor from Saigon and a "*petite cambodgienne*," whom the visitor still remembered fondly in his later correspondence.⁸⁴

However, French troops on shore leave in Phnom Penh found it difficult to adapt to this system. Accustomed to the more straightforward practices of Saigon, their behavior gave often rise to scandal. In 1881, for instance, French administrators faced daily complaints against soldiers who were "chasing women at nightime."⁸⁵ Hoards of rowdy soldiers regularly accosted women in the streets, trying to grab and kiss them. The colonial authorities admitted to the lack of discipline of some navy personnel and sent them back to Cochinchina if they proved unable to adjust to local convention. Those who remained and behaved more discreetly came to sustain the small but growing local sex industry. This industry still recruited its personnel mainly among women of Vietnamese origin, many of whom had been brought to Phnom Penh from Saigon and then forced into debt by tactics such as those described in Moura's letter. Women of Khmer or Sino-Khmer descent, on the other hand, were recruited from the periphery of the palace world among lower ranking families, who often found it hard to make ends meet.⁸⁶ But by and large, Cambodia's sex trade remained at that time limited to an anarchic and personalized system involving only a handful of individuals.

When elaborating on the reasons why women entered the sex trade, French sources never divert from conventional prejudice. Lefebvre represents the general European consensus in stating that "different causes make these girls fall down to the sullied path of prostitution: luxury attracts some, laziness seduces others, but poverty plays the most important part in recruiting this army of vice."⁸⁷ Commentaries like Lefebvre's construct the prostitute as representing all that the commentators hoped not to be.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, it is true that poverty was indeed an important factor.

The conquest of Saigon had led to the displacement of large sections of the indigenous population. In the 1860s, many of Saigon's Vietnamese inhabitants were Catholics who had followed the French troops from the initial debacle in

Tourane to their new stronghold further south.⁸⁹ Restarting their lives in a colonial economy that was slow to pick up speed, many families faced cruel choices. In the rural areas, insurgency slowed agricultural productivity. Newly drawn colonial borders altered established trade patterns, separating unoccupied provinces of the delta from the now French-controlled markets of Saigon and Mytho. For those hardest hit by the economic constraints – displaced families, the rural poor, single women, widowed mothers – the exchange of a child for money was a way to temporarily alleviate hardship. The patriarchal nature of Vietnamese society made girls the most vulnerable. But poverty, trafficking, and debt bondage do not account for all the factors leading to prostitution. For some women, working in the sex trade was a choice they made after evaluating the available options, even though this choice would always have been conditioned by their life circumstances and their economic situation, and thus would rarely be quite ‘free.’⁹⁰

In Cambodia, meanwhile, the colonial authorities, “duly concerned about the health of [their] troops,” were regularly “obliged to take recourse to the hospital of Saigon in order to purge Phnom Penh of contaminated women.”⁹¹ A crackdown in 1879 found more than twenty Vietnamese women afflicted with venereal disease, all of whom were subsequently deported to Cochinchina.⁹² In the opposite direction, the traffic of women from Saigon to Phnom Penh likewise continued at levels similar to those of previous years. Official policies wavered between regulation and *laissez faire*.

In the early 1880s, the first civilian Saigon Governor, Le Myre de Vilers, relaxed previous naval regulations for dealing with prostitutes throughout the colony. Le Myre de Vilers argued that soldiers carried responsibility for their own health and that the persecution of prostitutes on medical grounds should stop. His stance also led to a more lax attitude in neighboring Cambodia.⁹³ By 1884, however, the prevalence of venereal disease among Phnom Penh’s colonial agents convinced Representative Fourès that a return to the old system, in which the navy doctor could single out ailing women and gather them for deportation, was required.⁹⁴ In view of the war of 1885–86 and the appearance in Phnom Penh of massive contingents of colonial troops, the Cambodian capital was thus all set for Doctor Maurel and his regulationist remedies.

Arriving in Phnom Penh in early 1885, Doctor Maurel faced a daunting task. Since January, war had swept through the country and most provinces were in revolt. The radical reforms imposed by Governor Thomson the previous year on King Norodom had created discontent, and a mixed group of royals, mandarins and provincial dignitaries directed a powerful uprising against the French presence in the country. The French transported several hundred troops to Phnom Penh to tackle the rebellion, from where they fanned out into the Cambodian countryside.⁹⁵ In the face of stiff resistance in the provinces, casualties among French soldiers, Vietnamese *tirailleurs* and the rapidly formed Cambodian militia were heavy. With each returning battalion, more soldiers swelled the ranks of the wounded and diseased. Phnom Penh’s medical facilities, consisting basically of five separate beds and a pharmacy in the military barracks, plus a string of druggists selling Chinese medicine along the main road, were insufficient to deal with such numbers.⁹⁶

It quickly became apparent that the construction of a new hospital was needed and Doctor Maurel was put in charge of the project. After locating a suitable site next to the newly constructed tribunal, Cambodian and Vietnamese families living on the premises were evicted and the grounds flattened. From July 1885, Maurel oversaw the construction of a vast complex of dormitories, quarantine compartments, a refectory, a kitchen, toilets, staff quarters, a surgery room, a room for postmortems, and a morgue.⁹⁷

During the first months of operation, the Phnom Penh hospital was expanded to meet the climbing numbers of patients. The initial thirty-two beds were increased to one hundred and still proved insufficient when troops returned from embattled provinces.⁹⁸ Of a company sent to Pursat to take a rebel stronghold, for example, 75 out of 120 soldiers ended up in the Phnom Penh hospital.⁹⁹ In addition to war injuries, malaria and dysentery were the most common reasons for hospitalization.¹⁰⁰ As the war drew on, however, venereal disease added variety to the clinical symptoms observed by Maurel. Within a few months, a third of the troop exemptions from active duty were the result of sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁰¹ By late 1885 therefore, and in spite of his many other obligations, Maurel believed it was high time to crack down on Phnom Penh's sprawling sex trade and to organize the "*service des filles*."

Maurel had been a navy doctor for more than twenty years and drew on a wide experience of supplying expeditionary forces with healthy women who were regularly checked for potential illness. Yet Maurel did not simply implement standard navy policies; the regime he imposed on Phnom Penh's prostitutes in late 1885 mirrored policies en vogue in Europe and neighboring colonies. In France, regulationist policies prescribed that prostitutes remain within an enclosed system, which protected the bourgeois world from contamination. Within this system, women were shuttled between four distinct institutions: the *maison de tolérance* or brothel, the lock hospital, the prison, and, if required, the convent or another establishment where the 'fallen' woman could 'repent' and find 'forgiveness.'¹⁰² The prostitute was to be kept from transgressing the boundaries of these institutions in order to protect society from her alleged avatars: desire, disorder, immorality, and lack of self-control. Bourgeois fears of contamination, manifest since the end of the second Empire, now received renewed support from the medical profession. Scientific progress made it possible to identify three successive stages of syphilis. Once syphilis, in its tertiary stage, was known to affect the heart and the arteries, fatal disease was added to disorder in arousing bourgeois fears.¹⁰³ The prostitute was the one on whom all the blame was placed.

The syphilis panic of the second half of the nineteenth century was similarly a driving force behind a set of new laws aiming at tightening control over the sex trade in neighboring British colonies. In Singapore, the so-called Contagious Disease Ordinances came to govern brothels from 1870 onwards. The ordinances required the registration of all brothels and their prostitutes in the port town. Unannounced visits to their workplace, censuses, medical checks, and mandatory recovery in lock-hospitals for diseased women were components of this system. The authorities defended these ordinances as a means to ensure public health, curb illegal trafficking, and decrease ill-treatment of prostitutes

by their employers.¹⁰⁴ Yet, the women the ordinances claimed to protect disliked the measures, particularly the weekly medical inspections, which they found humiliating. The brothel owners, for their part, were opposed to them because sick women were kept from serving customers, thus reducing profits. Many tried to circumvent state control through the use of false identities or by avoiding registration. Further opposition to the ordinances came from the motherland where a colorful coalition of moral reformers, feminists, missionaries, and civil libertarians fought for their repeal on ethical grounds.¹⁰⁵

As in Singapore, the old fear of disease and the prostitute came to carry increasing salience in Saigon.¹⁰⁶ An *arrêté* from January 1878 provided police authorities with the right to levy fines or jail prostitutes who were unable to produce their registration cards on demand. Some received prison sentences of up to two months, as did prostitutes who refused to show up for regular health exams. The tightening of government control backfired, however. A decade later, the authorities noted that

it was doubtless in these procedures that we must seek the cause of the almost insignificant number of prostitutes (*filles*) who accept to have themselves registered; there are in fact only 114 in the whole of Saigon, half of whom are currently in prison. This figure is far too low for the size of the population and is proof for the considerable importance that clandestine prostitution has acquired.¹⁰⁷

In the eyes of the French, the prostitute was thus further stigmatized, becoming a criminal who engaged in clandestine, that is illegal, activities. The causal chain of prostitution, disease, and illegality henceforth was unquestioned. When Doctor Maurel decided to take on syphilis and gonorrhea in Phnom Penh, he already knew what subsequent authors would repeat: “Clandestine prostitution in Cambodia . . . [was] at the source of the commonness of venereal diseases in this country.”¹⁰⁸

Prior to Maurel’s arrival in Phnom Penh, “when it was publicly known that a woman lived off prostitution or was sick, she was arrested by the police, taken to the doctor, and, if found infected, immediately transferred to the Saigon dispensary.”¹⁰⁹ According to Maurel, these measures had not been applied consistently, and thus failed to produce the desired results. On Maurel’s insistence, women “caught in the illegal act of prostitution” were forthwith given a number, entered into a register, and forced to appear at the dispensary each Thursday for a vaginal exam. Diseased women of Vietnamese origin were deported to Saigon by the boatload. After a transport of thirty women, Maurel noted that it was most fortunate that they had been removed from Phnom Penh, for “this figure gives an idea of the number of *victims* that they could have produced, above all if one considers that each of them would have spread the ill.”¹¹⁰

The turnout on inspection days remained discouraging, however, for Maurel encountered difficulties in locating and cataloguing Phnom Penh’s prostitutes. He mostly relied on French and Vietnamese soldiers who, when showing symptoms of venereal disease, were asked to denounce the women with whom they had consorted.¹¹¹ But not all the men were cooperative. On one occasion,

for instance, a French official came to the defense of a woman who Maurel knew “worked the street every evening.” Maurel was overtaken by disgust for this official, and concluded that “surely, before his prolonged stay in the tropics, [the official] would not have dared to bear such shame.”¹¹² For the physician in Maurel, Frenchmen who availed themselves of prostitutes for the purpose of sexual relief were a medical problem that required his full attention. Yet, as soon as these clients showed a degree of solidarity with their sex partners, it was the bourgeois in Maurel that felt challenged. A man’s respectability was not endangered by frequenting an indigenous woman at night as long as he did not fail to disavow her during the day. If he failed to do so, he gave rise to concerns far beyond genital lesions and bloody urine.

The older generation of colonials, influenced by a “prolonged stay in the tropics,” showed particularly little enthusiasm for cooperation with Maurel. Still accustomed to previous orders, in which Europeans and indigenous women were often linked in long-term relationships, these old-timers now faced the arrival of a new generation of colonists who dreamed of a racially pure colonial bourgeoisie. In this new version of things, Frenchmen in white uniforms would lead leisurely lifestyles of office work, promenades, and long evenings on the verandah of one of the boulevard cafés. They aspired to live in a world where natives fanned the air with the *panka* and served drinks, but otherwise remained at arm’s length.¹¹³ The concubines of older long-standing relationships threatened this enclave because they intruded upon its racial boundaries. Similarly, the prostitute endangered racial integrity as soon as she entertained more than a purely monetary relation with her white customer. In the perception of the new generation of colonials, the concubine was reinterpreted as a prostitute who, for a given period, served a single client. Negative qualities traditionally attributed to prostitutes were extended to all indigenous women who entered into contact with a white man.

To the nexus of prostitution, illegality and disease was therefore added the notion of miscegenation. Any sexual contact between an indigenous woman and a Frenchman became tinged with the stigma of prostitution, while any indigenous woman suffering from venereal disease was assumed to be a prostitute. As a consequence of these attitudes, Maurel’s quest to control prostitution inevitably ran into preexisting patterns of marriage, concubinage, patronage and servitude. He noted with surprise that “the difficulties [in organizing the *service des filles*] were not only caused by the women, but also by [male] lovers and even husbands. Conjugal jealousy has a temper in these lands of easy mores, and the husbands have a different understanding of their duty and self-respect.”¹¹⁴ Worse still, “all the apprehended women declared they belonged to some mandarin, and [these mandarins] in turn, far from disavowing them, came to take them back.”¹¹⁵ Resistance against what Maurel regarded as highly sensible measures was interpreted as further indication of the moral degeneration of the local society, a judgment in which he included the colonial veterans.

Despite these difficulties, Maurel continued his new regime and constructed a separate building for the weekly health check of the ‘prostitutes.’ At the same time, “in order to attenuate somewhat those aspects of an inspection of prostitutes that oppose the mores of this people,” Maurel decided to introduce free



Figure 5.4 The Phnom Penh dispensary during a public consultation, undated (Musée des Beaux Arts et de la Dentelle, Alençon).

consultations for the general public on Mondays and Thursdays in the same building used for the inspection of women said to work as prostitutes. In addition, he instituted weekly inspections of the troops in Phnom Penh and in the French provincial military posts, which grew in number the longer the war lasted. In October 1885, fourteen forts dotted the Cambodian landscape; by July 1886 this figure had risen to forty, even though only Takeo, Pursat, Kompong Thom, Samboc, and Kampot were large enough to warrant the dispatch of a resident physician. According to Maurel, the combined efforts of the army doctors in the field and in Phnom Penh bore fruit. If we believe his somewhat self-congratulatory reports, the prevalence of venereal disease among troops declined a few months after inspections began.¹¹⁶

Whereas troop inspections were thus extended throughout the country, the inspection of prostitutes remained limited to Phnom Penh. The obvious reason for this was that there were rarely any prostitutes among the small rural communities where the French established their military posts. Soldiers fighting in the provinces instead found other outlets for their sexual exploits. Adhémar Leclère, for example, noted in his diary shortly after his arrival in Kampot during the second year of the war how he learnt of numerous sexual assaults perpetrated by the local expeditionary corps against local women.¹¹⁷ Among the incidents he mentions is the story of a young Chinese woman who was gang-raped by four soldiers who were later identified, but never court-martialed for

their crimes. Further evidence suggests that rape was a widespread phenomenon, particularly in those provinces where fierce fighting led to a gradual brutalization of French soldiers and officers.¹¹⁸

The year 1887 brought an end to the war and a substantial decrease in the French military presence in Cambodia. With a large portion of the clientele for Phnom Penh's sex trade back in the barracks in Saigon, Doctor Maurel embarked on a scientific career as an anthropologist, publishing articles on Cambodian ethnography, and speaking on the French lecture circuit.¹¹⁹ In Phnom Penh, the changes he had introduced and the legacy of the war outlived the two years of fighting. The war had transformed sexual relations between indigenous women and European men, with a few comparably long-term unions now complemented and gradually replaced by countless fleeting one-off encounters. The sexual act came to be repositioned from being part of a broader relationship to a ready-made commodity stripped of any social exchange beyond payment.

The new generation of colonials that streamed into the Cambodian capital in the wake of the Thomson Reforms further modified the local sexual economy, bringing with them the fear of miscegenation and unclear boundaries with regard to any kind of fraternization across the racial divide. Because the concubine and the prostitute threatened common eugenic rules, the distinction between prostitution and concubinage became increasingly muddled. Women who had lived with Frenchmen for years were reclassified as prostitutes because "the indigenous woman who agrees to live with a European is in fact a genuine prostitute who will never better herself," and thus became subject to the disdain that bourgeois morality traditionally reserved for the prostitute. At the same time, she was rendered harmless: in turning her from an intruder into an illicit outcast, her disgrace confirmed the values of those who abided by the rules. From this time forth, she was a pariah to be despised and used on occasion. As such, rather than threatening, she was beneficial to the coherence of the white enclave, as long as she stayed in her place.

The arrival of more Frenchmen in the mid-1880s, the regulation of prostitution, the denigration of the concubine, and the marginalization of the first generation of colonists were thus closely interrelated developments. As we will see further below, these changes were secured via the ideal of the white colonial couple, defending metropolitan standards of morality and decency against the constant threat of an overly sensual, permissive, and promiscuous local society. At the time, few newcomers to Cambodia would have doubted this distorted view of local society, and those who did would have been asked by their peers to look no farther than the royal palace for proof that such fantasies of indigenous sexual intemperance were indeed true.

Harem, sex, and authority

The standard narrative of a visit to Phnom Penh, repeated many times in the literature on Cambodia, began with a description of the town as seen from the Mekong, with the pagoda-crowned *phnom* standing out to the north. An enumeration of the brick buildings of the Protectorate would usually follow,

varying in length depending on the time of writing, along with the observation that the capital consisted of a single road, lined on both sides with wooden merchant houses. In addition, there would be a brief description of street life, noting the picturesque scenery of markets and inhabitants or, alternatively, the stink and rot of Phnom Penh's unpaved alleys, depending on the author's sensibilities. From there, accounts regularly moved straight to the endpoint of the journey, the royal palace, which for most authors seems to have been the only sight worth describing in any detail.¹²⁰

Within the palace, King Norodom's female entourage provoked extensive commentary from Western guests. Ever since the first missionaries and their critique of palace polygamy, every European visitor to Phnom Penh felt at some point obligated to add his personal opinion on the subject.¹²¹ The number of women kept by King Norodom remained disputed, with colonial authors claiming that 45, 100, 200, 300, 400, or any number of royal concubines were hiding beyond doors marked as the private chambers of the king.¹²² Caraman held to a personal count of a hundred, but believed that the "King can take as many women as he desires."¹²³ Furthermore, Caraman "found all [of Norodom's] women very beautiful, perfectly proportioned, leaving nothing to be desired on that level."¹²⁴ A world where, sexually speaking, nothing was left to be desired and a man could do as he wished with hundreds of beautiful women: this was the stuff of colonial fantasies.

Most French accounts assumed that all these women had been sold into sexual slavery and were kept in the palace, mostly against their will, to fulfil the sexual fancies of their sovereign. In these constructions, the harem was presented as the sensual underside to cruel Oriental despotism. From the 1880s onwards, the picture of Cambodia's monarch as despotic and decadent became ubiquitous, and the king was portrayed as indulging in extravagant promiscuity, squandering public funds, and jealously watching over his seraglio at the expense of more important matters:

This court of Norodom surpasses in comic effect all of Offenbach's buffooneries . . . Unfortunately, behind these jokes, there is the suffering and the ruin of an entire people. For Norodom, to be King means squeezing his subjects to the last drop, having lots of women, adorning and beating them, [and] chopping off heads according to his whims. . . . All his physical and intellectual faculties are focused on his corps de ballet. As Norodom has never thought of creating anything useful, of undertaking public works of any kind, as he lets everything crumble and wither away, including his own palace, his budget is virtually in its entirety spent on the maintenance of his harem. . . . Norodom is unforgivingly jealous. Whoever is unfaithful is unfailingly beheaded.¹²⁵

In actual fact, Norodom had only three principal wives. In addition, eight more women, grouped on two hierarchically distinct levels, were married to the king.¹²⁶ All other women in the palace worked as dancers, singers, musicians, actors and servants, or belonged to the class of hereditary slaves. They were entitled to an annual allowance for their needs in proportion to their rank and

tasks. They also received a monthly allotment of rice, oil, and candles, as well as a small cash sum that allowed them to supplement these rations at the market.¹²⁷ The women of the palace themselves often had female servants, and candidates for these positions were apparently plentiful. For this second tier of servants, it seems that being associated with the palace actually was a step toward greater personal freedom, since those at lower levels of the palace hierarchy were subjected only to cursory control.¹²⁸

That King Norodom had only eleven wives did not mean that he was unable to entertain relationships among palace artists and servants.¹²⁹ However, these relationships had to be developed on an individual basis. Palace women might temporarily attract Norodom's attention, and later fall out of favor again. But the idea that hundreds of women were languishing in the royal bedroom, waiting to provide the king with sexual favors *à discretion*, was an image that bore little resemblance to reality. The same can be said of the underlying claim that these women were held in prison-like conditions, haunted by fears that any misstep would lead to their death.

This having been said, it is nevertheless true that capital punishment was at times applied, and credible French eyewitness accounts record at least eleven death sentences inflicted on palace women and their male lovers, apparently because the women in question had at the same time enjoyed King Norodom's favor.¹³⁰ While the image of the bloodthirsty despot continually decapitating subjects was embellished for European consumption, the fact remains that, to King Norodom, adultery in the royal household was a serious affront.¹³¹ It challenged regal authority at the center of his universe, under the eyes of the mandarin. To let it go unpunished would be the equivalent of exposing the monarch to ridicule before the public, thereby undermining the traditional order of the palace world. It is in this context that a fistfight in August 1878 on Phnom Penh's Grande Rue takes on particular significance, shedding light on more fundamental problems of colonial desires and royal authority.

The opponents in the fight were Caraman and a Siamese mandarin who lived next door to him on the river embankment. Early one afternoon, while having lunch with the local hairdresser Guérin, Caraman felt disturbed by the noise coming from his neighbor's home, went to the fence separating the two houses, and in less than polite terms commanded the mandarin to put an end to it. The source of the noise was a conjugal disagreement between the mandarin and his wife. Caraman knew his neighbor's wife well, since she was the sister of Ngien Tiep, the *congai* of his friend Blanc, and also friendly with Caraman's own female companion. Tiep's sister had a history of tension with her Siamese husband, sometimes leaving her home to seek shelter at her sister's place. After a particularly violent quarrel two years previously, Blanc and Caraman had planned to smuggle her to Cochinchina disguised as Caraman's *boy*. The scheme was aborted when her identity as a woman was discovered as they boarded the steamboat to Saigon. After this incident, relations between Caraman and the Siamese mandarin had gone from bad to worse, and the fistfight that day, witnessed by an audience of about a hundred bystanders, was just one in many confrontations.¹³²

Ngien Tiep and her sister were the children of a Khmer mother and a Chinese father. After some years in Oudong, the family had moved to Phnom Penh

where the mother, Phuong, and her two daughters entered service at the palace. The two sisters became dancers in the royal ballet, but continued to live outside the palace walls. After a few years, they ended their dancing careers, and while Tiep moved in with Blanc, giving birth to their first daughter in 1874, King Norodom married her sister to a Siamese palace official. The marriage was soon riddled with discord, and Tiep's sister spent more and more time at Blanc's place or at her family home, warning her husband that one day she would not return. That day came in late 1882.¹³³

On 11 December, Representative Fourès cabled a dispatch to Saigon:

Yesterday, King made complaint about Blanc and Larrieu-Manan concerning affair woman that I have told you about during your visit here. King reclaims the mother and the daughter, who are two palace dancers belonging to him. Has sent to look for them, but mandarin insulted and driven away by Blanc, however no search made in Blanc's house. King says that Blanc made offensive remarks about him when throwing out mandarin. Currently, the daughter is with Larrieu-Manan who keeps her, the mother is at Blanc's. The daughter is pretty. King requests that according to treaty our compatriots not oppose resolution Cambodian affairs. Requests our intervention so that Blanc and Larrieu return the two women. Fears that Blanc sends them tomorrow to Cochinchina. King is in great excitement. Please give instructions.¹³⁴

The preceding night, King Norodom had complained bitterly to Fourès about Blanc, Caraman, and Larrieu, recounting events that had led up to the current situation. Initially, the Siamese mandarin had notified the king of marital discord. Presented with allegations of wifely disobedience – which was also disobedience vis-à-vis the king, since he had given the woman to the mandarin – Norodom believed it appropriate to reassert his authority. He sent a palace employee to the house of Phuong, the mother of the accused, to demand that mother and daughter respect his orders, but neither of the women was to be found. The father, who answered the door, promised he would look for the female members of his household. Minutes later, Blanc appeared instead and kicked the mandarin out of the house with a hail of foul language. According to Fourès' minutes, at one point during the meeting, the king sighed and said: "You know Blanc, he always had affairs with women" – a view that the representative seconded in his dispatch, calling Blanc and Larrieu "men devoid of scruples."¹³⁵ Fourès suggested that Tiep's sister and her mother be returned to King Norodom on condition that they suffer neither corporal punishment nor imprisonment. The archival record shows that this was carried out, and the affair was thus brought to a close.¹³⁶

The story of Phuong and her daughters is instructive because it points to a broader phenomenon. Many *congai* of local European residents were ethnic Vietnamese. Those who were not, however, were mostly women who had previously worked in the palace. In some instances, the choice to leave the king's quarters to live with a European was taken with Norodom's explicit consent, as for example in the case of Rosenthal and Le Faucheur, both of whom married

palace women, who, in the words of their husbands, had previously “belonged to the king.”¹³⁷ Those not on intimate terms with King Norodom, however, risked creating diplomatic incidents each time they claimed that their relationships overrode any previous engagements that their female partners may have had with the palace. Radisson, head of the French guard left at the palace during the war years of 1885–86, is such an example.

During his time in Phnom Penh, Radisson had set eyes on the sixteen-year-old girl Me-Svai, who at the time lived and worked in the palace in the service of King Norodom’s oldest son, Prince Yukanthor, apparently as a result of gambling debts that her father had incurred. After paying one hundred piasters to the former creditor to settle her father’s debt and thus “obtain the favors of this young beauty,” Radisson believed himself entitled to take Me-Svai to his home. As is easy to imagine, Prince Yukanthor was not amused, and the Protectorate, called in to mediate between the two sides, was left to deal with the diplomatic fallout of the affair.¹³⁸

The scandals surrounding relationships between Europeans and palace women thus represent more than a clash of conflicting concepts of ‘love’ or of differing purchasing power on the local market for women. They over time became a symbol of the king’s incapacity to assert his authority in his own household in the face of ever more frequent challenges.¹³⁹ Whereas King Norodom meted out capital punishment to his own subjects when they were found with a royal concubine, Europeans remained untouchable. The king had to plead with the Protectorate, often accepting their conditions so that they would be returned to him, while the intruders went unpunished. In the eyes of the public, this state of affairs could only be interpreted as a loss of face and authority. From this, the conclusion could only be that the French could get away with anything, even the humiliation of the king and his sons. In Cambodia, the loyalty of palace staff to their king had always been a political issue, and cases of perceived infidelity of palace women were more than mere domestic mishaps, and particularly so if they involved European men.

By the late 1880s, however, the number of such incidents began to slowly decrease. Among the second generation of colonists coming to the Cambodian capital, fewer appear to have chosen partners among female palace staff. At the same time, the first group of single white women had arrived in Phnom Penh.

White man, white woman

On a Friday afternoon in August 1884, two young French ladies were gallantly led up the stairs to the Protectorate’s office. The sisters Marie and Marie-Louise Blay had only recently arrived in Phnom Penh from Trévoux, a small town in southeastern France known chiefly for the manufacture of silver, gold and diamond jewelry. Two well-placed colonial bureaucrats, Claude Coqui and Guy Lelay escorted the ladies, accompanied by a navy doctor, the representative’s two assistants, and an accountant with the newly founded French customs service in Cambodia. In the office of the representative, the two sisters and the two men confirmed that they wanted to form a permanent union, signed a register, probably exchanged a kiss, and were thus formally married. The twin-

weddings were Phnom Penh's first all-white marriages. This in itself was ample cause for celebration.¹⁴⁰

As the couples left the Protectorate offices, they climbed into royal carriages as King Norodom's royal orchestra played, dispatched from the palace for the occasion. The party proceeded to meet with the king's half-brothers Nupparot and Sisowath, and three sons of Norodom. The war minister, who had promised that his ballet corps would make a performance in honor of the newly weds, was also on hand to represent the Cambodian government. No French civilian or military authorities missed the opportunity to extend their best wishes to the couples. Many had traveled all the way from Saigon to attend the wedding, since Coqui and Lelay had moved to Phnom Penh only recently to assist with Governor Thomson's reforms. According to a newspaper correspondent, "an excellent dinner was served" later that evening,

during the course of which the band never ceased to play. . . . Several toasts were made: to France, to the President of the Republic, to the Governor of Cochinchina, to the King of Cambodia, to the Representative of the Protectorate, and to the newly-wed couples.

Spirits were high. To the swinging sounds of the band, the guests danced through the night and into the early morning hours.¹⁴¹

Marie and Marie-Louise were among the first of a wave of brides and wives who relocated to Phnom Penh after 1884. Three years earlier, Representative Fourès wrote to Aymonier, who was on leave in France, that "the Protectorate is over: you would make a mistake to come back unmarried."¹⁴² Whereas Aymonier returned to the colony single, others heeded Fourès' advice. Within a few years, Phnom Penh gained a large enough community of white women to allow for some choice of dancing partners at receptions and balls, and higher colonial bureaucrats disembarked in Phnom Penh with their entire families. Fourès' three successors Badens, Piquet and Champeaux, the Protectorate's secretary general Orsini, the head of customs de Giafferi, and provincial administrators like Leclère, all brought their wives and children in tow. Colonel Badens went as far as to introduce the first white house servant to Phnom Penh, one Marguerite Valade; regrettably, her unbecoming behavior soon necessitated her repatriation to France.¹⁴³

The significance of Marie and Marie-Louise's wedding becomes clearer if we set it alongside a very similar ceremony only three months later. Again, King Norodom's carriages waited in front of the Protectorate for the illustrious guests. This time, only men walked down the steps. Sisowath and the Saigon Governor led a numerous party of French officers and bureaucrats to a nearby building where they were greeted by Mayor Morin and ushered into a splendidly decorated hall. A little later, before an audience of French and Cambodian notables and under the double banner of the Tricolor and the Cambodian flag, Morin rose from his chair. In the name of the governor, he proclaimed the inauguration of the Municipality of Phnom Penh.¹⁴⁴

Within twenty-four hours, two decrees completely reorganized the city, dividing it into separate constituencies. Taxes, public works, and law and order

in the broadest sense were placed in the hands of the mayor who was to govern the town through a network of neighborhood chiefs. Inhabitants were henceforth required to clean the sidewalks in front of their houses each morning and to remove any weeds; garbage and weeds were to be deposited only along the roadside at a distance of precisely fifty centimeters from the walkway. Pigs, geese, chicken, goats, and sheep were no longer tolerated in the town center unless properly penned in. Galloping cows and horses, storage of material on public thoroughfares, billposting, or stands outside market areas were all prohibited. Street theater and parties of any kind required in the future proper authorization from the mayor. After putting up with Phnom Penh's amiable chaos for two decades, the French authorities seemed finally determined to introduce some order into the local landscape.¹⁴⁵

Parallels between the weddings of August and the municipal decrees of November were not limited to the use of royal carriages and copious toasts to the glory of France. Behind the two events stood a common spirit and a single political agenda. Just as decrees aimed to clean up the mess on the town's sidewalks, so the marriages of the Blay sisters to local colonial bureaucrats signified an official desire to tidy up the mess of interracial relationships. Just as administrative disorder was replaced by neighborhoods separated by distinct boundaries, so all-white marriages would replace relationships of concubinage and resulting *métissage*, installing clear borders between white and indigenous communities. And while mayor Morin planned to curb festivities and theatrical productions not previously approved by colonial authorities, so, too, unofficial relationships were ended in favor of those deserving official approval.¹⁴⁶ As can be seen from the guest list and the elaborate ceremony of their wedding, such official approval for the double-match of Coqui, Lelay and the Blay sisters was not in short supply.

Phnom Penh thus witnessed how mixed couples as well as their *métis* children were becoming increasingly marginalized and how their families were broken up following the death of the European father. Prostitution became regulated and policed, while more complex cross-racial relationships were declared variations of the former, sharing its connotations of criminality and disease. Guarding this new order of racial purity, there now comes the all-white bourgeois couple transposed into a colonial setting, separated from the generation of the early colonists by racial homogeneity, class, and proper morality. Marie, Marie-Louise and their spouses chose their partners among their peers, while natives played music and provided an exotic backdrop for the wedding picture. The change to an all-white cast, however, called for a different stage set. Hence mayor Morin's decrees, which hoped to turn Phnom Penh into something closer to resembling a small town in provincial France.

As a final example of these changes, consider the following turn-of-the-century police report. It provides us with the government's view on François Aubriot, a French merchant who arrived in the colony in the early 1870s, and his concubine Neang Sut. In response to a job application Aubriot handed in to the Phnom Penh authorities in 1899, police officer Dresen summed up in a few lines what there was worth knowing of the couple. We imagine Dresen sitting at his desk, as the words and phrases to describe the couple flow effortlessly from his

pen, one term leading to the next in the official vernacular of charitable contempt. In condensed form, the letter reveals how, in the now prevailing view, the themes of concubinage, *métissage*, prostitution, filth, poverty, disgrace, disease, and death relate to one another:

I have the honor to return to you the two requests enclosed herein of Monsieur Aubriot and to address to you below the confidential information that you requested on this individual. For the whole time that Monsieur Aubriot lived in Cambodia, he always lived off odd jobs. . . . Aubriot lives in a *sordid shack* near the pound. It is in this *hole* that he has been *vegetating* for several years, living off the *prostitution* of his *mistress*, a Cambodian *métisse* named Néang-Sut. This woman died eight days ago, and it is for this reason that Monsieur Aubriot is now *without resources* and appeals to the administration. The vice squad officer has frequently notified me of this woman who invited palace servants to Aubriot's [house] in order to hook them up with soldiers, and often *even with Asians*. In the meantime, Aubriot left the house and on returning home, his *mistress* handed him the evening's proceeds. Because we were dealing with a Frenchman, a *crippled* old man, completely *degraded* and rendered *dumb* by opium [use], I have always been *tolerant* and let him live off his *vile* trade. If Monsieur Aubriot does not deserve our interest, he is certainly deserving of *pity*. With his *mistress dead*, he is completely *without resources*, and if the administration does not provide him with relief, we will probably find him *dead* one day in his *hole* in Ohier Street due to starvation.¹⁴⁷

Les divettes et les indigènes

Not all the European women arriving in Phnom Penh fit neatly into the mould of the new order. A decade later, one author declaimed that, in the colonies, there were only two categories of white women: “the spouses of officials, devoted and admirable wives . . . , and the *divettes de café-concert*, who, after failing first in Paris and later in the provinces, have with far too much success exported their repertoire.”¹⁴⁸ Indeed, the arrival of respectable wives and brides was complemented by an influx of women who were, in the official view, of regrettably low class and dubious morality. A visit to their workplaces, Phnom Penh's bars serving a white male clientele, provides insight into how shifts in the local sexual economy and the concern for racial purity were related to questions of class.

The first French merchants in Phnom Penh to open a bar for their peers were the barber and petty trader Jean Guérin and his wife Marie Laty.¹⁴⁹ In April 1880, the two made an important business decision. With the number of Europeans in town approaching fifty, not including the navy contingents, they saw a viable market for a downtown bar in French style. They placed two tables and six chairs on the ground floor of their space, ordered absinth, wine, beer, cognac, coffee and sugar from their German neighbor Molt, and opened the doors to the public.¹⁵⁰ Their simple menu of alcohol, coffee, ham and smoked meat was apparently to the taste of the local French clientele, and business was reasonably good. The following year, Guérin and his wife were able to add two

rooms to the restaurant to lodge short-stay visitors, henceforth calling their establishment “Hôtel Guérin” and later, more grandly, “Hôtel Phnom Penh.”¹⁵¹

In 1883, they sold their business to another merchant who renamed the place after himself “Hôtel Mermier.”¹⁵² By then, the tavern had regular customers, white men who came to drink, play cards or kill time over a game of billiards, but soon after, the war thoroughly transformed the local market. With hundreds of soldiers pouring into the capital, other merchants seized the opportunity. A Miss Clerc rented a space down the road from Mermier and opened a far more glamorous place featuring three dining halls on the ground floor and a magnificent bar of white marble.¹⁵³ Nearby, the notorious Larrieu-Manan turned a couple of former merchant houses into a bistro.¹⁵⁴ Everybody wanted a share of the money that flowed freely from French soldiers returning from the battlefield. As one of their customers later recalled, combatants had accumulated

veritable small fortunes to spend. So little is needed to satisfy the soldier who, when he comes back from the field with a few *louis* in his pocket, takes himself for a small Rothschild. You should have seen our joy. Everybody went about his own ways, entire squadrons besieged the small restaurants that were there, and all of us sought, as it was our right, to forget among comrades for a moment past hardship and privations.¹⁵⁵

The growing number of colonial administrators added to the clientele and, as unpaid bills from the period indicate, Caraman, too, was a regular at the Café Larrieu.¹⁵⁶ But the boom years for these establishments were short lived. By the end of 1886, the war was over and clientele became sparse. Where previously three restaurants could easily prosper, owners now needed more original ideas than absinth and Bordeaux wine to lure customers. Mermier was the first to understand this situation and to act upon it.

Toward the end of that year, one Félicite Viel and her friend from the French southern town of Toulouse arrived in Phnom Penh, and soon after, in January 1887, together took over the management of Mermier’s restaurant.¹⁵⁷ During their first months at the head of the restaurant, Félicite Viel and her associate were so successful that their competitor Larrieu soon had little choice but to give them his bar to run as well, fearing that otherwise he would be forced out of business.¹⁵⁸ Félicite and her friend became the targets of both the scorn and the sexual desires of their male European customers. Leclère, himself a staunch socialist, wrote in his diary in July 1887:

I learned and saw a good deal of curious things in Phnom Penh. . . . Firstly, that Monsieur Larrieu [sic] sold his café to the two whores that ran the one of Monsieur Marmier [sic], or more precisely to one of them, Mlle Félicite. . . . [Félicite] has a history. She came from France as a house servant with someone whose name I cannot recall, but on board [the steamer] she acquaints herself with a doctor. Once on firm ground, she dropped master and lover to be everyone’s mistress. On that account, she earned more smallpox than money. . . . Sick, she nursed herself, recovered, had to cure herself again, and eventually met Monsieur Marmier, municipal counsel of

Phnom Penh, who in order to give a boost to his café and overcome Larieu's competition, employed her as a barmaid together with her companion, a horrible Toulousaine who talks gibberish and whom Thomin designates with this paraphrase not devoid of a picturesque quality: "The one that was shot in the face by a gun loaded with shit." The poor girl is pockmarked like a skimmer. No one dares fondle her above her impressive bosom. They say that she pockets all of Phnom Penh's scum. That's easy to believe because the Café Larieu has become a first class establishment; it is now practically a love hotel (*maison de passes*). They say Félicite had Thomin, later Garnier, Laroche, then the head of the *bureau de l'intérieur*, then this, that and the other one, etcetera, etcetera. She is on intimate terms with everyone, and everyone reciprocates by squeezing her thighs [and] breasts. She kisses freely and beds a new man every week.¹⁵⁹

Two months later, Leclère noted in the same diary – good socialist that he was – that he harbored "more esteem for the working class than for the other classes."¹⁶⁰ Given his political beliefs and earlier writings on women in France, one may assume that his comments represent the more sympathetic end of local judgments on Félicite and her peers, which gives an idea of the kind of contempt they faced from the more conservative new white elite.¹⁶¹ Félicite had the right skin color and bedded white men, but that helped little, given her class background. In the new order of things, Félicite's place was at the margins of colonial society where she joined the old merchants and their concubines with their half-blooded children. The likes of Félicite may have been good enough for a casual rendezvous, or as the protagonists in delightfully scandalous stories, but as members of the new colonial society they did not qualify.

The class divisions in Phnom Penh's growing European community did not go unnoticed among indigenous observers. In the early days of the war, Governor Thomson received an anonymous letter, addressed to him by a Khmer inhabitant of Phnom Penh. Based on allegations contained in this letter, Thomson invited Representative Fourès to investigate the letter's authorship and the veracity of the claims.¹⁶² The letter is one of the rare testimonies to how the Europeans were regarded by the town's indigenous inhabitants. In its curious mix of assessments that seem partly genuine, partly tactical in nature, the letter reveals that the author was well aware of official concerns. In garbled French, the letter lists Phnom Penh's European inhabitants, each entry followed by an individual description. The list leaves little doubt that indigenous views on the European community were not particularly flattering:

3. Funel, state attorney, being a judge, should not party that often at Larrieu Manan's, businessman, he and Berto, head of the cadastre service, do not leave this establishment, keep the neighbors from sleeping, as high officials who give orders to the small people (*aux petits*) they are not supposed to go to an unruly person like Larrieu 4. Corraudy, employee of the Franco-Khmer tribunal, is an intimate friend of Larrieu's, but every evening he plays baquan in the streets. 5. Bigouilla beats up Vietnamese and plays baquan with indigenous inhabitants, for a Frenchman that is equivalent to

robbing France of its prestige. 6. The court clerk shoots his pistol, and he is a baquan player and a regular of the Café Larrieu, this is disgraceful for a magistrate, he has fired his revolver on a police agent. . . . 8. Cadet, brigadier of the police, is constantly having litigations; he plays the role of businessman and police officer. It is not in this manner that one can obtain the respect of the Cambodians. . . . Rosenthal, always drunk, keeps yelling the whole night with his harem of women. Teacher Pelletier has similarly [the habit] of getting drunk, he [never] sees the light of day.¹⁶³

Given the declining reputation of its citizens in Phnom Penh, France had to act if it was to preserve its prestige and keep its claims to rule in Cambodia from being ridiculed by the local public.

6 Honorable affairs, 1880–83

Master of the lands

William Hale held nothing against black people as long as they stayed in their place. In the course of his career he had learned to appreciate their work. For close to twenty years he relied on black slave labor to sustain his cotton-spinning mill in New Orleans. In antebellum Louisiana, where people were still bought and sold as private property, William Hale thrived. Once the Civil War had formally ended slavery in the southern states, and with many former slaves gone north, Hale decided to move to a place where labor remained cheap and abundant, and where his white skin counted for something. Perhaps this was the prime reason that he wound up in Saigon soon after the French conquest of the Mekong Delta.¹

William Hale was the local representative of Jardine & Matheson, the largest Hong Kong merchant house in the Far East, and he also dealt in insurance, shipping, and commodity trade.² In 1874 the British Consulate listed him as representing “the leading British interests in the colony,” including the legendary Lloyd’s of London.³ Hale was a busy man and needed no further responsibilities, but he kept a watchful eye on developments on the local cotton market and hoped that circumstances would one day permit him to return to his former trade. With American plantations struggling in the 1870s and the demand for quality cotton high on the world market, Saigon’s traders were certain that cotton was Cochinchina’s future. Unsuccessful forays into that area in previous years had not diminished the general optimism regarding the potential of local cotton.⁴ When one day, in May 1878, Caraman walked into Hale’s office to tell him how he planned to revolutionize the Khmer cotton industry, Hale was therefore ready to listen.

Caraman had just returned from France where he had been seeking allies among metropolitan politicians in his disagreement with King Norodom over the payment for the notorious gilded screen. His struggle to stay afloat in the face of mounting debts consumed most of his time, but when he was not busy fighting off creditors, his obsession with how to best exploit what he imagined to be Cambodia’s unlimited riches time and again got the better of him. From France he wrote, “I have occupied myself with the question of the Cambodian cotton, [which is] so important. I had the large factories in Rouen make tests, and the results were very satisfactory.”⁵ Cotton manufactures of Le Havre and Rouen agreed to receive Khmer cotton, and various merchants and corporations from

Europe to Egypt offered Caraman enthusiastic encouragement. Inspired by this support, he decided to address an issue that still troubled him. On his way back from France, somewhere between Alexandria and Suez, he ordered several shipments of Egyptian cottonseed. Caraman was convinced that the quality of Khmer cotton must be improved before it could be introduced on world markets. If this could be accomplished, Cambodia's cotton industry would prosper, and merchants investing their money in cotton would inevitably make a fortune. This, more or less, must have been what Caraman told William Hale on that spring day in 1878.⁶

Hale was so impressed by Caraman's pitch that he loaned him several thousand piasters, and other local merchant houses joined in financing the venture.⁷ Representative Moura remained more cautious. At the time, the dispute over the gilded screen had not yet been settled, and the site where Caraman had attempted to set up another brick factory was deserted, with vines overgrowing the machinery, and the workers and foreman Fourcros long gone. Given the state of Caraman's affairs, Moura discouraged investors from getting involved in another of his projects. He wrote that Caraman was "a French subject that, by himself alone, takes up more than half of the time of the Representative of the Protectorate," and believed that this new cotton venture was unlikely to improve his record of commercial ineptitude.⁸

At first glance, however, Caraman's new venture seemed deceptively simple and convincing. He proposed to distribute his superior Egyptian seed at no cost to participating farmers all across Cambodia's plains. In return, these farmers would give two tenths of their cotton harvest to Caraman's company, while selling the other 80 percent to the company at a fixed price. To Caraman's mind, this scheme would not only ensure the improvement of crops and increase the farmers' income, but would also put him back in business. What seemed like a brilliant idea to Caraman left Moura unswayed, however; the representative cited lack of proof that metropolitan corporations backed the venture, as well as concerns that Caraman's company would in essence establish a cotton monopoly in Cambodia, thus infringing farmers' freedom of action.⁹

Moura's suspicions were no secret to Caraman, and he believed the representative to be the main reason why the colonial government appeared at first unreceptive to his scheme. In one of his frequent outbursts of anger, Caraman told Moura that

the Governor is not to blame, he only does what you tell him to do, and it is you who provokes all the obstacles to those peddlers of wigs, socks and English overcoats, as you label us with your sublime kindness. I can only regret that you act this way. But the hour of revenge is near. . . . I do not fear the fight, and if you impose it upon me, as you seem determined to do, be sure that I will bring to bear everything that an honest man, angry and deceived, can employ in terms of energy and activity.¹⁰

The Saigon Governor similarly received "precise, frank, and categorical explanations" from Caraman on the conduct of his representative in the Cambodian capital:

For presently sixteen years we've protected an agricultural country where great things could have been accomplished, [but] where nothing has been done. Who is to blame for this? This someone (*cet homme quelconque*) who represents our Protectorate, . . . who does nothing but strive, by any possible means, to maintain himself in a position for which he wasn't made.¹¹

Caraman lamented that his life was hard enough already, without adding to it “the opposition, secretly at least, of the authority that is meant to provide help and assistance.”¹² In the face of Moura's opposition, Caraman pledged to “bring down this occult enemy, who disloyally and obstinately has kept attacking me since 1871,” and embark on his new career as a cotton magnate regardless.¹³

To do so, Caraman needed local allies. Among Phnom Penh's European traders he enlisted his old friends Miss Marrot, her son Raoul, and her partner Julien Bras. The local barber Guérin, broke and still two years away from owning his own tavern, agreed to help out in packing upcoming seed deliveries, while Blanc was enrolled as a Khmer interpreter. William Hunter, a Bangkok-born Scotsman and big-game hunter, who had come to modest fame as the author of several carnages among Cambodia's elephant population, also joined Caraman's team. Later on, Ducret, a new arrival in Phnom Penh, completed the crew.¹⁴ Beyond the European community, Caraman repeatedly approached King Norodom for support, loans, and the use of the royal cruise ship *Mékong* to distribute his seed along the river.¹⁵ Caraman also apparently considered himself allied with some “36,000 farmers who will owe the increase of their agricultural prosperity to a Frenchman.”¹⁶ Together, this made for an impressive army of supporters, which Caraman planned to field against Cambodia's French representative.

For October of that year, two deliveries of cottonseed from Egypt had been announced. In Caraman's view, his success would be certain now if it were not for the “insurmountable obstacles” that Moura kept on piling in his path by his “excessive excess of mistrust [sic].”¹⁷ Delays in arrangements with the crown for obtaining the land and trade privileges were attributed to Moura's “fatal influence” on King Norodom.¹⁸ Eventually, gentle pressure from Saigon Governor Lafont made Moura somewhat temper his resistance. Still, Moura kept warning that Caraman's cotton plan could lead to “disorder,” “protests,” even “a general uprising” of farming populations along the Mekong River.¹⁹ Governor Lafont, on the other hand, determined to advance French capitalist interests in Cambodia, agreed with Caraman that France had occupied these lands “in order to *faire acte de civilisation*, to affirm progress, . . . [and] to encourage in this agricultural colony . . . industry, trade, development, [and] work, so as to fortify the concord of mankind.”²⁰ In the governor's view, one should not stand in the way of a Frenchman who volunteered to take the lead in this noble quest. Thanks to Lafont's distant support, Caraman could eventually announce that “the time of bitterness, of anger and resentment has vanished. The time of work has come.” At stake was now the “patriotic success of my enterprise,” whose number of employees had apparently tripled in the meantime and now included “more than one hundred thousand of this country's cultivators.”²¹

In early September, Caraman and Bras set out on the Mekong to Kratie, and further upriver to the rapids in the border region, to Laos, in order to meet some of those one hundred thousand farmers. Dogged by rainstorms and engine failures, the two eventually reached Samboc, from where Caraman intended to trudge downriver to Phnom Penh, “going from one village to the next.”²² Caraman did not yet have Egyptian seed to distribute; instead, he held meetings with village elders, explaining the advantages of his Egyptian seed while taking orders from interested farmers. From the Laotian border, he reported happily that his ideas had been met with “general enthusiasm. . . . If the crop becomes a success, France will have conquered this rich valley for her premier industry.”²³

Equally encouraging news came from Paris. Caraman’s brother Charles, still employed as a physician at the spa of Forges-les-Eaux in Normandy, was about to put together an alliance of French cotton manufacturers and Parisian investors to support Caraman’s cotton plan. Charles had also written to Moura, suggesting that he would use his contacts with the Ministry of the Marine and Colonies to secure a promotion for Moura if the representative gave his wholehearted support to Caraman’s venture.²⁴ But Moura remained skeptical; as far as he could see, the Caraman brothers’ elusive *Société générale cotonnière du Cambodge*, allegedly providing three million francs of capital for the scheme, had yet to prove its existence beyond the brothers’ inexhaustible imagination.

Real or not, the company proceeded to order cotton-processing machines in England and France. In March 1879, machinery worth 86,000 francs was loaded on a ship in Marseilles to tackle an anticipated bumper crop of Egyptian cotton being grown in a faraway Asian kingdom.²⁵ By this time, Caraman’s cotton venture had become more concrete. During his initial trip in September 1878, he visited 196 villages on horseback and foot, arriving in Phnom Penh completely exhausted with a large sore on his right leg.²⁶ After some delays, the seed was actually delivered in November to an unknown number of addressees. Upon Governor Lafont’s orders, the administration provided a gunboat to tow three rafts of seed to select destinations along the Mekong River.²⁷ By January, Caraman reported that all along the Great River “the cotton plants sprout very well and are very beautiful”; some trespassing buffaloes were the only real danger for an enterprise “whose success is now certain.”²⁸

Shortly thereafter, Caraman set out for Saigon where he intended to inform the authorities of the success of his cotton venture and ask for further support. Before he departed Phnom Penh, Caraman wanted the representative to certify his accomplishments, based on

the information that the planters of Koh Sutin have given to the Protectorate in my presence regarding the success of the sowing of Egyptian and American seed as well as the trust that they have in them in view of the future and the renaissance of this region’s cotton crops.²⁹

Once again, Representative Moura refused, remembering that “the above-mentioned planters are limited to one single Chinese, whom you brought here and whose testimony was insignificant.”³⁰ Caraman was undeterred and wrote to cotton traders in Rouen and Le Havre that, by April of 1879, twelve thousand

tons of cotton would be ready for export.³¹ Reveling in his anticipated wealth as Cambodia's cotton magnate, Caraman grandly offered the Saigon government excess seed, so that cotton production in Tonkin could similarly be revitalized.³² This seed had since November been stored in the basement of the Phnom Penh lighthouse, with the permission of King Norodom. Strange sounds from the balcony of this lighthouse had bewildered the population of Phnom Penh ever since; a music lover among Caraman's European employees had apparently interpreted the royal gesture as an invitation to use the lighthouse balcony for solo horn performances. Local inhabitants on the Chruy Changvar peninsula opposite Phnom Penh concluded that the daily serenades were Caraman's way of fending off bad spirits.³³

We will never know whether it was due to the presence of bad spirits or merely bad luck, but on April 12, 1879, disaster struck. That day, Caraman sent a brief note to Representative Aymonier explaining:

Monsieur le Représentant, yesterday I received an extremely important notice from the planters of the Great River. Here it is: The Khmer cotton harvest is going to be absolutely nil this year. The [harvest] of my cotton was very promising, but one must be afraid that it will be entirely compromised by the rains of these last six days.³⁴

The cotton had apparently been in full bloom when the monsoon hit, and the plants were so heavy with flowers that they quickly broke under the pounding rains. Pushed into the mud, the plants rotted within days. Still, Caraman remained almost insanely upbeat, claiming that no one could deny his "striking and irrefutable" success, even though his entire harvest had been destroyed and any alleged success remained therefore, as he reluctantly admitted, somewhat "incomplete."³⁵

Even before this latest debacle, Caraman had undergone another of his characteristic mutations. After being an aspiring navy officer (1860–62), a scientific explorer (1863–65), a Colbert of sorts heading the Société Générale du Cambodge (1865–67), a brick manufacturer (1868–69), teacher (1869–70), royal commissioner (1873–76), and again brick manufacturer (1876–78), Caraman now signed his letters "Fréd. Thomas Caraman, planter." At around the time of this shift, the names of two Mekong islands, Oknya Tey and Khsach Kandal, appear for the first time in his correspondence, becoming over the summer of 1879 more and more of a fixation for Caraman. Exhausted by "cruel waiting, terrible anguish, penury and harsh trials," the two islands near Phnom Penh developed in his writings into a kind of Promised Land that would magically change his bad fortune, restore his dignity, and bring to fruition his success as a *colon*.³⁶ If only the king would grant him the lease of these islands, he wrote, then "the success of my enterprise can only be a question of time."³⁷

The two islands covered a considerable area and were densely populated; the larger of the two, Khsach Kandal, was sufficiently important to be counted as one of the kingdom's fifty-one provinces.³⁸ The prospect of tying the destiny of one of the kingdom's provinces to Caraman's pleased neither King Norodom nor the Cambodian Council of Ministers, and Caraman's request was rejected.

In response, since he felt that “we French citizens [cannot] be abandoned to such whim and allow that intelligence be subjected to ignorance,” Caraman once again turned to the Saigon Governor to set things straight.³⁹

Le Myre de Vilers had just taken office in Saigon, becoming the first civilian governor to follow a series of naval commanders. A fervent supporter of private entrepreneurship, he studied Caraman’s proposal to take over the Mekong islands for his plantation projects and found the idea, “at first sight,” good.⁴⁰ Caraman was simultaneously lobbying local groups, including Saigon’s *Comité agricole* and the Chamber of Commerce, in order to ensure that the governor’s support would not fade away. “The day when we, we Frenchmen, will have succeeded” would come, he assured these backers, and thanks to his cotton venture, this day was now finally within reach.⁴¹

Under pressure from the Saigon Governor and his representative in Phnom Penh, who had been instructed to “officially” support Caraman’s request, King Norodom and his government yielded toward the end of the year.⁴² In October 1879, Caraman moved his things from his house on the Grande Rue to a temporary shack on Oknya Tey where Raoul Marrot, Ducret, and a Franco-Indian from Pondicherry called Francine joined him shortly thereafter.⁴³ The group took out loans to buy buffaloes and basic farming tools, and began putting the fields under the plow.⁴⁴ From Saigon, Caraman ordered seed for crops as diverse as corn, hemp, vanilla, cacao, coffee, sugar cane, and of course cotton, while island farmers were offered jobs as laborers or sharecroppers. To Caraman’s surprise, however, the local inhabitants showed no interest in either working for him or using the seed he offered them. Puzzled, Caraman attributed such local resistance to “the ill will of my island’s Cambodians to give me a hand, even for top dollar,” and considered traveling to Tonkin instead to recruit Vietnamese laborers; only the strong objections of the colonial authorities kept him from instantly leaving for Haiphong.⁴⁵

Despite the labor shortage, a rudimentary plantation began taking shape on Oknya Tey over the following months. Once again, Caraman had high hopes that he would “succeed and obtain a definitive success, an irrefutable result.”⁴⁶ Once again, he somehow failed to anticipate the local rainy season. In April, at the time of the harvest and the coming of the monsoons, the new representative, Aymonier, went to Oknya Tey to visit Caraman’s farm:

I have recently visited Monsieur Caraman’s plantation. His harvest is a disaster, but a disaster that one could have predicted in a monsoon territory, where the harvest in April is uncertain. . . . Monsieur Caraman sowed so as to harvest in May. It would have required a more-than-extraordinary delay of the monsoon; since early April, the rains have effectively set in. This result is all the more unfortunate, since Monsieur Caraman has in fact worked seriously, contrary to my expectations I would almost add. I could also verify once more to what extent Monsieur Caraman embraces with ease the most blatant errors.⁴⁷

In letters to Saigon, Caraman continued to promote his farm, writing “the individual interest which has guided this enterprise is intimately linked to the

general interest of this country and of our Far Eastern colony,” a fact which, he believed, made him eligible for state subsidies.⁴⁸ Saigon’s Conseil Privé, made up mainly of merchants, agreed and bestowed upon Caraman a grant of 6,000 francs.⁴⁹ King Norodom, apparently still fond of Caraman in his own peculiar way, also loaned him money. With this infusion of cash, the Caraman farm on Oknya Tey continued to function through 1880, securing recognition on the occasion of a Saigon trade fair where a merchant-led jury concluded that Caraman’s two harvests (complete failures in actuality) deserved praise and a silver medal, and “*première classe*” at that.⁵⁰ Newly decorated and by now apparently an expert on all things agricultural, Caraman contended that it was “of utmost urgency that the Khmer agricultural tools be completely changed. All their practices are fundamentally faulty; it is important that a model farm school, or several if necessary, be set up wherever there is an opportunity.”⁵¹ In retrospect, it is simply baffling how Caraman’s repeated defeats appear to have intensified his sense of superiority over the indigenous farmers rather than instilling him with modesty.

While his real-world plantation was foundering, Caraman seemingly lived in a virtual world of colonial triumph. The cash he had recently received from the colonial state and King Norodom was gone, poured into an unfinished project to dig a canal from Oknya Tey’s riverbank to the central parts of the island. By the following fall, Caraman had spent his last money, and food was becoming scarce. Complaints from villagers in neighboring Khsach Kandal maintained that Caraman’s tattered employees occasionally appeared in their villages, requisitioning chickens and other food, which they were unwilling or unable to pay for.⁵² But even during these tough times, Caraman remained convinced that success would ultimately be his. He did not attribute his failures to inaccurate planning and lack of expertise, preferring instead to lay all blame on the shortcomings of the current Cambodian administration. Thus, his temporary lease on the islands gave him insufficient leverage over the local population; this resulted in the scarcity of labor that was at the root of all his problems. Mandarins and provincial governors, jealous of the white farmer who habitually called himself “the island’s head” and “master of the lands,” further used any opportunity to disrupt his farming operations and damage his reputation with the locals. To Caraman, this state of affairs required a fundamental reform of Cambodian landholding practices.

In a twelve-page *lettre-rapport* to the Governor of Cochinchina, Caraman outlined his intended reform, describing the kingdom’s current desolation and charting the decline in agricultural productivity since King Ang Duong’s reign: “Misery is at its peak,” and famine imminent.⁵³ A wretched rural population wandered aimlessly through the countryside, stealing, murdering, and setting fire to other people’s property. In Caraman’s tableau, political developments such as the recent incursions of Sivotha’s rebel bands were seamlessly tied to the feeling of gloom prevalent on his island farm. Only one way led from current darkness to a brighter future, he claimed: a new landholding regime, which would grant foreigners land for a duration of ninety-nine years, free of charge, replacing current ad hoc arrangements. Caraman sent a similar *lettre-rapport* from Oknya Tey to King Norodom, adding a draft for a royal ordinance, which

the king would only have to sign in order to set the new land regime into effect.⁵⁴ According to Caraman, swift action was needed; left to their own devices, without the tutelage of white farmers like himself, the kingdom's farmers had no future.

In the face of Caraman's repetitive plans, complaints and demands, the colonial government's patience with him was beginning to wear thin. The French representative in Phnom Penh had warned that, given Caraman's hunger for land, the proposed royal ordinance would, in theory, turn him into the "owner of all lands of the kingdom."⁵⁵ As an interim governor scribbled angrily upon receiving yet another missive from Caraman:

I think Monsieur Thomas alias Caraman is going insane, or else he thinks we are . . . I dare not write the word. How can he possibly think that I would allow the [French representative] to present such a project to the King. If ever anyone takes the totality of the lands of the Kingdom of Cambodia, it is going to be the Government of Cochinchina.⁵⁶

The governor's words turned out to be prophetic. The French seizure of Cambodia's land, and its transformation into French property, was a mere three years away. The governor and others may have claimed that Caraman's mind had spun out of control, that he was indeed slowly going "insane"; but in many of his views, Caraman only expressed the insanity of his time.

The mind game

In a sense, Caraman's mania took the colonial spirit of the time to its extreme, to a point where colonial claims threatened to become absurd, and grandiose pretensions turned into farce. Caraman's greed, arrogance, and racism, his demand for recognition, his overbearing sense of entitlement, his unwillingness to be surprised by a local environment that he believed himself to fully understand before even engaging with it: in their extremity, such views only highlighted core elements of the ruling ideology. Caraman went overboard, which made him appear odd, or "insane," to his contemporaries. But his French critics, just like him, could not conceive of themselves and their environment in terms other than those stipulated by the *esprit colon*, which Virginia Thompson once described as an "aggressive composite of smugness, laziness, fear, and racial prejudice."⁵⁷ According to this mindset, in the dormant lands of the Orient, among a native population of listless fools, the colonial pioneer's creativity, energy and resolve were all that was needed to garner success. The grandiose scale of Caraman's cotton venture made sense only within the framework of this spirit, and the ease with which he raised funds for the venture in Paris and Saigon, as well as the readiness of local merchants to follow him to Oknya Tey, show the extent to which this spirit had taken over the times and individual participants in them.

Many French projects in Cambodia, inspired by the expectations of one's peers and the teleology of social Darwinism, reflected the inner logic of this spirit, rendering a realistic evaluation of local factors and individual qualifications

impossible. In the view of the *colons*, the natives and their local environment could be seen and understood only through clichés as receptacles for foreign hopes and prejudices. The result, as Mannoni once pointed out, was for the colonist a kind of ‘splendid isolation’ from the immediate environment, in which he developed his views and perceptions “according to an internal anatomy” rather than through observation and adaptation.⁵⁸ The early colonist was thus reduced “to live in the midst of his own projections”; and in these projections, untimely monsoon rains and failed harvests were mere disturbances, blotting the beauty of Caraman’s fantasy whose inevitable success was not allowed to be qualified by any local particulars. If Caraman had taken into account local factors and environments, if he had been ready to acknowledge the real-world results of his actions, his way of seeing and thinking, which in turn explained and justified his colonial existence, would have been overturned. Only in a virtual Cambodia of colonial triumph could a cotton farm be a “striking and irrefutable success” without ever producing a single ounce of cotton, and only in this virtual world was there a legitimate place for Caraman and his ambitions.

For early pioneers like Caraman, colonizing Cambodia was, in essence, a mind game, with self-defined rules and a predetermined winner. The problem they faced was that reality, at least in Cambodia, refused to function along these lines. In Saigon, the local hub for the French navy, a handful of merchants managed to sustain themselves, even prosper, thanks to a heavily state-subsidized local ‘market’. In Cambodia, however, where the French military was largely absent before 1885, occasional deliveries of European merchandise to the palace, and King Norodom’s weak spot for European cronies, were almost the only real sources of income for European merchants, and far too meagre to support their growing number. To have a chance to succeed in other businesses, one would have needed capital, skills, labor, modesty and intellectual curiosity, all of which were at the time in short supply among Phnom Penh’s European community.

Where success was at the same time *de rigueur* and improbable, lies and self-deception became the early colonist’s indispensable allies for survival. Real-world failure, to the extent that it was acknowledged at all, was attributed to sabotage from outside. Personal setbacks did not cause the colonist to engage in self-criticism but instead to aggressively seek out the “hidden enemies” that, behind the scenes, undermined efforts that otherwise would have succeeded. The longer success failed to materialize and the deeper the colonists buried themselves in their misbegotten development projects, the more belligerent they thus became. The mood among Phnom Penh’s traders toward the colonial government grew increasingly negative in those years. It was common knowledge that if anyone were to blame for their reversals and mishaps, it was the government and its representatives in Phnom Penh and Saigon. Not all of the local traders had Caraman’s passion in expressing this view, but all of them held grudges against their compatriots in the colonial administration.

The colonial government, in turn, had to find its own answer to the colonists’ continual failures. Theoretically, three different solutions presented themselves. First, the government could continue to nurse the minuscule merchant community in Phnom Penh with subsidies and occasional contracts. Subsidies

were supposedly handed out, as a report in Ducret's case stated, not out of compassion but in order to encourage an applicant's "activity, zeal, and willingness."⁵⁹ Yet those awarding these grants were well aware that, without such subsidies, the grantees were heading for destitution. They were equally aware that a continuation of this practice would eventually equate itself to a barely veiled welfare system for poor whites, an impression supported by the fact that the trickle of state subsidies seemed to have no positive effect on their commercial prospects. With the number of Europeans in Cambodia expected to rise in the future and the colony's budget already overstretched, this was not an attractive option.

Second, the colonial government could implement an aggressive protectionist policy, reserving through legal or other means certain sections of the local market for Europeans. Such a policy would shield them from local competition and guarantee them a secure living separate from Chinese or Indian fellow merchants. Europeans could thus gather strength and scale in the local market, hopefully rendering these protectionist barriers obsolete. However, such a strategy would require legislative powers that the Protectorate did not achieve before 1885, despite its stealthy advance in the judicial realm. It was also unclear in which sectors, other than government, Europeans could learn to hold their own. Finally, such an approach would, if implemented openly, contradict official pledges for a liberal trade policy as well as Saigon's status as a free port.

A third solution was for the government to turn Cambodia into a state-run enterprise. Early Saigon Governors like de la Grandière believed that, in order to "prevail" in the kingdom, it was best to choose a path that appeared to privilege "disinterestedness as the means of action."⁶⁰ Initially, Cambodia served to contain Siamese and British influence and provide a buffer zone around the embryonic Cochinchinese colony; the role of the early Protectorate was thus defined as conservative and above all passive. In this view, the state focused on maintaining "influence," however vaguely defined, at the top of Cambodian government, while the crucial role of furthering the French cause through trade and the exploitation of the kingdom's resources was delegated to private enterprise.⁶¹ The colonial state could thereby emerge from being a "protector" and itself take on the initiative in exploiting Cambodia's riches. Such an approach made sense if one assumed that colonial authorities had at their disposal the means that the merchants were lacking to turn a potential development venture into a success. As mentioned earlier, three among these would have been expertise, capital, and labor-power.

Past experiences did not warrant much optimism in this respect. The only French government development project planned during the first two decades of the Protectorate was an experimental plantation in the Pursat Mountains for cardamom, quinquina, and coffee. Promoted in the early 1870s by the director of the Saigon Botanical Gardens, the project consisted of a memorandum of understanding between the Saigon Governor and the Cambodian government, and a couple of exploratory missions.⁶² Otherwise, the French authorities had never attempted to make money in Cambodia and thus lacked much-needed expertise to engage directly in production and trade. Also, with Cochinchina's budget already overextended, additional expenses for large-scale development

projects would cause further overruns which the Saigon government could ill afford. Metropolitan financiers, in turn, were unwilling to devote much capital to colonial territories until social and political conditions had been established that not only guaranteed the safety of their investments but also promised at least the same return available elsewhere on invested capital.⁶³ Finally, and most importantly, the colonial state lacked direct access to labor-power.

Since the early days of the French presence in Cambodia, the majority of Khmer working as rice farmers in subsistence agriculture were disinclined to work for the French. This lack of interest led some commentators to formulate the “lazy and indolent character of the Cambodian race.”⁶⁴ The average Khmer, they said, in contrast to Europeans, “lives without worrying about the future, and does not care about tomorrow as long as he has enough to eat for the present day.”⁶⁵ Refusal to engage in “any serious development of the resources of their country . . . breeds a profound discouragement in the spirit of the majority of Frenchmen who come to Cambodia,” a local newspaper observed as early as 1865.⁶⁶ Some concluded that for developing the kingdom, “unfortunately, but little reliance can be placed upon the indigenous population, which is lazy in a high degree; recourse must therefore be had to the Annamites, Malay, and, best of all, the Chinese.”⁶⁷

Indeed, the workforce that French entrepreneurs like Caraman drew on was overwhelmingly Vietnamese and Chinese. Precise figures regarding the number of ethnic Vietnamese working in Cambodia during those years are unavailable, although their numbers had certainly shrunk since the time of Vietnamese occupation in the 1830s.⁶⁸ In 1862, French travelers estimated that the Vietnamese in Cambodia were “few in number,” and for several decades more, the number of Vietnamese laborers did not increase sufficiently to provide answers to the concerns of colonial strategists.⁶⁹ French dreams of large-scale plantations and of gold, silver and iron mines thus turned to the Chinese population for potential coolies. The Chinese laborer, unlike the Khmer, was said to be sober, hard-working, and willing to toil for anyone, provided the pay was right. He was slightly more expensive than his Vietnamese colleague, but made up for this, according to the French, with his greater sobriety and diligence.⁷⁰ The problem was that the French government could only get access to this workforce via influential Chinese merchants and the network of *kongsi*.

Kongsi were socio-economic organizations in which Chinese pooled their resources in what Trocki and others have called an “economic brotherhood.”⁷¹ They were both commercial corporations and social welfare organizations, offering each member a share of profits in exchange for his contribution to the organization’s aims, while providing security and a sense of belonging far from home.⁷² Early on, the French had begun to regulate the Chinese in the colony, with the double aim of taxing them and using the poorer classes as a labor force.⁷³ Early administrations largely failed in this endeavor and thus remained dependent on the mediation of Chinese leaders. In neighboring Cambodia, the Chinese community remained even more resistant, and its organizational structure elusive. Because of frustration among European merchants with the Chinese dominance in business, and since there was also confusion about the relationship between the *kongsi* and the activities of Chinese triads with political

aims, French policies took an increasingly anti-Chinese tone. Under these conditions, it was hardly realistic to expect large state-run enterprises to be staffed with Chinese laborers.⁷⁴

Thus, the Saigon authorities found themselves caught in a dilemma. French private enterprise had proved incapable of exploiting Cambodia's natural resources and the colonial state had little experience and no access to the necessary capital and labor force. Withdrawal from the kingdom was not an option. Neither was the status quo, in which a sorry crew of impoverished Frenchmen represented all the French assets in Cambodia, as well as a disgrace to national pride and a strain on the colonial budget. In order to increase revenue, provide state and metropolitan capital access to the kingdom's resources, solve the problem of labor, and ensure that those representing France in Cambodia gain the social and economic position that colonial ideology prescribed, Cambodian society and economy needed to be radically restructured.

The frequency with which calls for such radical reforms were made was increasing, particularly in Saigon. When military rule was replaced by civilian rule, navy governors were exchanged for metropolitan politicians on a very different career track. As in Charles Thomson's case, their careers typically started out in provincial France and ideally ended in Paris. Their sojourn in the colonies was a step on the way to accumulating enough political capital to one day be able to gain a seat in the French Senate, or possibly even a cabinet post. Thomson, for instance, was prefect of the Loire County when he was nominated to his new post in the colonies. The sibling of an influential Parisian parliamentarian, he was then only in his late thirties, young enough to have reason to believe that he would manage to emulate or even surpass his brother in his own life.⁷⁵ With him came his trusted deputy Klobukowski, who, it can be assumed, saw his assignment in Asia similarly as a temporary digression in a career plan focused on the *métropole*. The importance of this change for the course of events in Saigon and Phnom Penh should not be underestimated. The French government and the metropolitan press, not their navy superiors, henceforth were the bodies that leaders of the colonial government had to please.

Even though governors were nominated to their posts by the metropolitan government, the leverage of 'public' opinion within the colonial community in Saigon had increasing effect on their tenure. No politician could afford to gain bad marks from his stay in the colonies if he had ambitions to continue his career back home in France. And unlike in the early days, career missteps in the 1880s were almost certain to be criticized by an independent and increasingly diverse local press, which knew how to make use of its newfound power.

In the early 1880s, Saigon witnessed the birth of several newspapers with different political allegiances. The town's long-standing bi-monthly papers, the *Courrier de Saigon* and the *Indépendant de Saigon*, were joined by the *Saigonais* and soon after by the *Unité Indo-Chinoise*. One would think that four different newspapers would saturate the small market provided by the local European community. But founding newspapers had suddenly become something of a fashion with local merchants, and a colorful array of periodicals, most of them exceedingly short-lived, competed with the larger titles for readers and advertisements.⁷⁶

Political affiliations were usually easy to determine. Most of these two- to four-page pamphlets, edited, published, and distributed by a staff of one, kept to the political opinions and ambitions of their *rédacteur-en-chef*. Of the four larger titles, two were explicitly pro-government, the *Courrier de Saïgon*, the colony's official journal, and Charles Jourdan's *Saïgonnais*. The *Indépendant* was moderately critical of the government and immoderately uncritical of one of its founders, the politician Blanscubé. The *Unité Indo-Chinoise*, finally, was vehemently hostile to the government, reflecting the political ambitions of its founder Ternisien, a financier and businessman who had come to Saïgon from Guyana.

Like the press, Saïgon's political institutions had also diversified and reflected a broader spectrum of interests. Several advisory assemblies had been created, which served as forums for local business interests to make their concerns known to the government, such as the Conseil privé and the Conseil colonial. These assemblies provided merchants such as Dussutour, Denis, or Roque and politicians such as Blanscubé and Jourdan with platforms from which to push their agendas and assert their egos. Seats on the Conseil colonial, as well as the post of Saïgon Mayor, had become subject to public ballot and were vigorously contested. Thus, a democratic touch was added to the colony, even though only the French community could participate in elections, and despite the fact that the local councils had initially been created to deflect growing political aspirations among the local European community rather than to democratize the administration.

In the early 1880s, debates over seats, honors, and policies grew increasingly heated and confrontational. Controversies and smear campaigns filled the pages of the local press, ensuring a continued readership for the papers even in periods when nothing newsworthy had happened. Led by ambitious trader-politicians, merchant concerns increasingly dominated the political agenda. Naturally enough, the actions of the government in the effort to open up new markets and support local business were always deemed inadequate, and local politicians soon were trying to outdo each other in championing private interest. By 1880, with the local balance of power altered by the advent of civilian rule, the government had to accommodate its critics. As a Phnom Penh postal clerk explained: "The civilian Governor that the Republic has sent to Cochinchina to replace the military Governor is a man of progress; under his impulse the colony will enjoy an enormous development."⁷⁷ Woe to the career of a governor who did not live up to such expectations in this new environment.

Progress, merchant-style, stood for more government spending, a protectionist trade policy favoring Europeans, and an expansionist strategy toward the colony's neighbors Annam and Cambodia. The pursuit of these policies promised relief from the history of failure that dogged local European merchants. For their part, Governors Le Myre de Vilers and then Thomson not only needed good press, but also required new revenues in order to balance their budgets and respond to new demands. An increasingly desperate local electorate of luckless merchants, a precarious budget, and the obligation to please local as well as metropolitan audiences left them with little room to maneuver. To please the European public, they pursued an openly anti-Chinese domestic agenda and

pushed for greater interference in neighboring states to gain access to natural resources. To augment state revenue, the tax burden on the indigenous population would have to be increased, with opium seemingly the most promising among available options.

The opium barons

Cambodia's opium trade had for many years been in the hands of Chinese syndicates, who during the reign of King Ang Duong imported raw opium from Singapore and Bangkok to Kampot and Phnom Penh, where it was processed and sold to users, most of whom were Chinese.⁷⁸ In return, these syndicates paid the king an annual fee, which was determined at the end of each concession contract through competitive bidding. In the capital Oudong and most provinces, opium smoking was uncommon. King Ang Duong was no friend of the drug and made sure that the habit did not spread among mandarins, while most inhabitants of rural areas were too poor to be able to spare much money for drugs.⁷⁹ In Phnom Penh and Kampot, however, sizeable trader communities kept the business going. Wealthy customers purchased a stock of the drug to smoke in the privacy of their homes, while opium dens selling single rations catered to poorer members of society. The two towns became the main markets for the opium trade in Cambodia, a fact that led French missionaries to describe them as “haunt[s] of brigands, gamblers and opium smokers.”⁸⁰

Under King Norodom, the use of opium was more readily tolerated, inside and outside the palace. A traveler in 1862 reported that at that time opium was available in “every village of some importance” along the Mekong and Tonle Sap, with the Chinese tycoons Wang Tai, Banhap, Watseng and Afoune successively in control of trade and distribution.⁸¹ Regular opium shipments from Saigon ensured a reliable supply, protected from pirates by heavily armed French gunboats.⁸²

In April 1880, the concession holder Afoune died; he was survived by four daughters and a son. Without delay, Governor Le Myre de Vilers instructed his envoy in Phnom Penh to keep “certain industrialists” under close surveillance to prevent them from taking advantage of the situation while Afoune's son attempted to salvage the family business.⁸³ In addition to assessing potential buyers, Le Myre wanted the representative to begin negotiations with King Norodom in view of a planned merger of the opium concessions for Cambodia and Cochinchina under French supervision. In neighboring Saigon, after three decades of subcontracting the processing and sale of opium to local Chinese firms, the colonial government had recently discarded previous moral scruples and decided to run the opium business on its own. Earlier, the government had claimed that it could not “turn itself into an opium trader,” and thus “give the odious appearance of poisoning the people.”⁸⁴ The financial needs of the colony had since grown. Personal taxes, such as property and poll tax, could not be increased endlessly without risking political unrest, but indirect taxes on consumption and exports proved more flexible. Merchants and colonial administrators alike believed that by eliminating Chinese middlemen, revenues from the trade would increase manifold, and this in turn had given birth to the



Figure 6.1 Chinese workers at the Saigon *bouillerie* processing opium into the smokable *chandoo*, 1890s (CAOM, Aix-en-Provence).

first state-run *régie d'opium*. Ever since, there had been concern that Chinese syndicates with the right to import and handle opium in Cambodia would engage in contraband, thus bringing the government operation to ruin.

Following Afoune's death, things seemed initially to go the governor's way, but soon the number of contenders for Cambodia's opium concession multiplied. In addition to Chinese competitors, an unexpected number of unsolicited Europeans also bid for the concession. In the end, King Norodom was besieged with applicants, a situation that profited middlemen such as Col de Monteiro, Boniface Ferrer and Félix-Gaspard Faraut, who facilitated such contacts. Faraut, above all, seemed anxious to influence the process to favor his protégé and friend Octave Vandelet, and Representative Aymonier viewed Faraut's "mysterious conferences" with King Norodom with a degree of apprehension.⁸⁵ Before long, it became clear that Vandelet, in partnership with the Saigon-based merchant Dussutour, had offered King Norodom an annual sum of 11,000 silver bars for the opium concession. The proposal represented an enormous increase from the price paid in previous years.⁸⁶ Although the contract had not yet been signed, the palace signaled that Vandelet was likely going to be the king's choice.

Dussutour and Vandelet were new to Phnom Penh. Dussutour had come to Saigon in 1863 with several family members, among them his sister Augustine. The Dussutours were respected citizens of Saigon, due primarily to Augustine's tireless work for charitable causes. She had founded the Saigon Girls' School,

which was later transformed into a municipal institution, and became one of the leading figures in the political struggle to solve the alleged ‘problem’ of *métis* children by way of orphanages and European education. Her brother was better known for his commercial and political ambitions. A restless entrepreneur, a vocal lobbyist for merchant interests, and a member of the Conseil colonial, he had no knowledge of the opium business however. With his bid for the Cambodian opium concession, he was venturing into uncharted waters.

Vandelet had come to the colony in 1873 after bad business deals had forced him to leave his home in France. He spent a few years as a grocer in Saigon and then moved to the Cambodian capital in 1878 as the representative of Morice Frères & Bailly, a company that dealt in shirts, linen, and *articles de Paris*.⁸⁷ Soon after he arrived, Vandelet secured for himself the right to exploit King Norodom’s real estate along the Grande Rue in exchange for an annual fee. By the terms of the contract, Vandelet was free to negotiate lease conditions with individual tenants. He immediately proceeded to raise all rents by two piasters.⁸⁸ In this way, he managed to alienate Phnom Penh’s entire Chinese, Indian, and European merchant community, only months after his arrival.⁸⁹ Soon thereafter, he launched a pawnshop in partnership with Wang Tai but soon clashed with his Chinese partner over the way the project should be implemented. In the aftermath of this affair, Vandelet accused the French representative of dishonesty and incompetence, thus adding local colonial authorities to his long list of perceived enemies.⁹⁰

In July 1881, after long months of negotiation, Vandelet, Faraut and Dussutour took control of the opium concession. As the new opium czars of Phnom Penh, they turned to the town’s European community to recruit their staff and hired a mixed group of Dussutour clan members and destitute local whites. Representative Fourès scoffed: “And now Cambodia has been enriched with ten farm employees: Got to see these faces! Hold on to your purse. Guérin is among them.”⁹¹ In addition to Guérin, Vandelet hired Caraman’s former employees Fourcros and Blanc as well as Alphonse Mercuriol, the Yokohama croupier and cattle trader, and Larrieu-Manan, formerly court clerk, police agent, felon, owner of an illegal bar, and legal representative for Vietnamese fishermen. There were also Montagu and Dehenne, two recent additions to Phnom Penh’s trader community, two of Dussutour’s in-laws, and finally Dewaal, a Dutch national, who stood out among his colleagues because of his literacy and was therefore entrusted with the farm’s accounts.⁹² To the colonial authorities’ great embarrassment, Vandelet further managed to win over Chhun, the Protectorate’s sole interpreter and longtime secretary, whose career has been traced in a previous chapter.

This motley lot went about launching the first European concession for opium in Cambodia with so much enthusiasm that, within days, the Protectorate was swamped with complaints. Chinese delegations from all over the country queued in front of the Protectorate’s offices to tell the representative of their grievances.⁹³ It appears that Vandelet’s staff used illegal means to increase sales and fight smugglers. Traditionally, the owner of the opium concession had the right to set up posts in provincial capitals, maintaining a private police force licensed to search suspicious ships and houses, apprehend smugglers, and turn



Figure 6.2 Félix-Gaspard Faraut, undated portrait (*Nice Historique*, 1911).

them over to the authorities. Vandelet's staff, prone to seeing themselves as the masters of the country by virtue of their white skin, apparently believed that this privilege gave them *carte blanche* to fight contraband as they saw fit.

From Kampot, and to a lesser extent from provinces closer to Phnom Penh, complaints poured in that Vietnamese militias under European command raided Chinese villages, searching entire neighborhoods, beating up suspects, and arresting commoners and clan chiefs at will. Some plaintiffs alleged that if sales remained below expectation, Vandelet's staff would break into houses of rich Chinese merchants to plant some opium in a cupboard and then compel the innocent victim to buy himself off, pillaging the house on the way out before continuing next door.⁹⁴ In Kampot, two Chinese were said to have succumbed to injuries suffered during such a raid.⁹⁵ While under the previous concessionaire, Afoune, things had been "tough but bearable," this was no longer so:

They [the French] have policemen, Manillamen and Annamites to look for opium and search the houses of those who have a quantity of a *chic* or a *hun*

of opium. For the other Chinese who do not smoke, the Manillamen and the Annamites have placed opium residue in their homes and take their belongings, . . . they beat them and order the rich . . . [to pay] 75 piasters, the well-to-do 50 to 60 piasters and the poor . . . without children 10 to 20 piasters.⁹⁶

Vandelet's representative in Kampot, Larrieu-Manan, rebuffed such accusations as "heinous," but was eventually asked to find employment elsewhere. He and others involved blamed the complaints on a conspiracy against the French by Chinese syndicates.⁹⁷ There may have been a grain of truth in this. A Gi, an influential member of the Hainanese community and King Norodom's chief servant, seemed to be behind some of the complaints. A Gi had excellent contacts in Kampot where Hainanese dominated both trade and the pepper industry, and some of the complaints seemed indeed false. There can be no doubt, however, that Vandelet's staff deeply troubled the peace among the kingdom's Chinese inhabitants and were responsible for a number of crimes, as an investigation by the representative confirmed.⁹⁸ Phnom Penh's poor whites, once given the power to rule over others, proved to be a vicious lot.

Faced with incessant protest, King Norodom revoked his decision to grant the opium concession to Vandelet. Vandelet's contact at the palace, Faraut, was dismissed from his post as King Norodom's European adviser when it became known that he had stakes in Vandelet's company. Those Europeans who had felt left out earlier believed that now their hour had come. The Marrots swung into action, working tirelessly to further discredit Faraut and Vandelet in the eyes of the king. It was said that Madame Marrot "would like [her son] to replace Faraut one day in the service of the King," an ambition that the colonial authorities secretly supported because they believed the young Marrot to be "too insignificant to succeed like Faraut in dominating the King."⁹⁹ Caraman, too, had hopes of replacing Faraut as King Norodom's adviser and began to appear more often at the palace.¹⁰⁰ As the dispute between the Chinese community and Vandelet deteriorated, Caraman suggested that the king appeal to the Saigon Governor for help, while Vandelet similarly turned to the French government to settle the dispute.¹⁰¹ Thus informed of the state of affairs in Cambodia, the Saigon Governor felt that the affair was no longer the private matter of the king. French business interests were apparently at stake against Chinese syndicates, making the matter a political issue.

Instructions sent from Saigon to Representative Fourès revealed a strong anti-Chinese sentiment. Vandelet was to keep the concession, and Fourès was to support him, come what may:

At a time when we do no longer want to deal with the Chinese, it is . . . not admissible that our ally [Norodom] should, for the sake of profit, support those that we want to get rid of and who alone have been in a position to disturb Cambodia's usual tranquility, hoping to see their projects succeed.¹⁰²

In other instructions, the governor suggested that a French government commissioner should henceforth oversee operations of the Cambodian opium concession to ensure that Vandelet would not sell opium below prices set in

Cochinchina, thus limiting contraband across borders and protecting Cochinchina's state-run opium business. Finally, French authorities inserted a clause into the contract between Vandelet and King Norodom noting that, at some point, the colony might take control of the Cambodian concession. These dispositions revealed the French government's growing desire to merge their *régie d'opium* with the opium concession in Cambodia to form one large operation generating revenue for the colonial state.

Unlike the British in the Straits and the Dutch in Java, the French did not try to connect the Chinese merchant class to their rule by using opium as a tool.¹⁰³ If anything French policies on opium in Cambodia intentionally – but perhaps unwisely – alienated the Chinese, on whose financial clout Cambodia's economy has always depended. The French believed themselves to have good reasons to support Vandelet against the Chinese. A French-run opium concession in Cambodia would be more transparent and easier to control than one run by Chinese syndicates. With the concession in French hands, Western accounting and budgeting procedures would replace obscure Chinese methods of book-keeping, thus revealing whether or not the concession was truly profitable. If it proved profitable, it could be taken over by the colonial state with more ease if it was a French-run rather than a Chinese-led enterprise. Furthermore, contraband would become a case to be dealt with by French courts, since at least one of the litigants would be of European origin. Finally, Vandelet's enterprise also seemed to answer the question of what to do with Phnom Penh's poor whites: many had found employment under the concession, newly earning handsome salaries that enabled them to afford the kind of clothes, houses and lifestyles deemed suitable for French colonists in Asia.¹⁰⁴

Leavened with xenophobia, these arguments may have contributed to a pro-Vandelet attitude in Saigon. The representative in Phnom Penh, Fourès, far less excited about Vandelet and his European associates and accused of harboring sympathies for the Chinese, eventually resigned himself to the inevitable: "Hooray to Vandelet!" was the guideline for the months to come.¹⁰⁵

Initially, Fourès' reservations over the new regime of Vandelet, Dussoutour and Faraut proved correct. The numerous European staff involved in the concession not only caused further controversy but also consumed profits. By October 1881, Vandelet's business was in arrears, unable to pay King Norodom the next payment for the concession, while complaints from the Chinese continued.¹⁰⁶ As Fourès noted to Aymonier:

No, never have you been as harassed as I have been for the last six months. To hell with Vandelet, his firm, and all this organized theft. May God forgive me; there are moments when I blush, [ashamed] to be of the same nationality like Vandelet. . . . I'm very much looking forward to your return: glad to relax a bit and hand Vandelet over to you.¹⁰⁷

At the moment that tension in Phnom Penh reached its peak, however, Vandelet radically changed his business strategy. He made peace with his Chinese competitors and dismissed all of his European staff except for four men.¹⁰⁸ Vandelet then confined himself to the wholesale import of raw opium,

leaving retail sale to Chinese merchants. The farm still maintained a *bouillerie* for the processing of opium in Phnom Penh, and a sales office as well as eight *fumeries* in different neighborhoods of the capital, but day-to-day operations were left to Chinese subcontractors.¹⁰⁹ These subcontractors had to purchase opium from the central warehouse, and the more opium they sold, the less Vandelet charged them. Through this system, Vandelet's farm generated "superb benefits, which, through the progressive development of the business, increased from one year to the next."¹¹⁰ Since the arrangement proved profitable for both sides, Vandelet and his Chinese contractors were suddenly again on cordial terms. The Saigon Governor, on the other hand, learning of the new entente in Phnom Penh, was beside himself that the French holder of the concession now "posed as the protector of the Chinese," rather than following him on his crusade against Chinese economic supremacy.¹¹¹

When Governor Thomson assumed office in early 1883, the anti-Chinese bias of the Saigon government intensified. Mediocre performance by the *régie d'opium* of Cochinchina, and declining sales in the border region near Cambodia, had given rise to suspicion that Vandelet's Chinese subcontractors were engaged in smuggling. The longer this situation prevailed, the more it was assumed that the true reason why the state-run opium business in Cochinchina proved unable to generate enough profits lay, in fact, in Cambodia.¹¹² Vandelet's standing with the government in Saigon declined sharply, and by mid-1883, he and his companions had, in Thomson's words, "lost every right to the benevolence of [his] administration."¹¹³ Six months later, Thomson would write to Paris that Vandelet, Dussutour and Faraut "have always had in Cambodia the attitude of bad Frenchmen" and were determined to "obstruct our influence and our action in Cambodia."¹¹⁴ It was a remarkable fall from grace for a group of men who, only three years earlier, had been momentarily considered the champions of the French cause.

In September 1883, the Saigon government seized the Cambodian opium concession. A convention was forced upon King Norodom, transferring the responsibility for the import and distribution of opium in the kingdom to the colonial government's *régie d'opium*. Despite vehement protests, Vandelet and his associates were removed.¹¹⁵ Before long, five French employees of Saigon's state-run opium operation, and a number of indigenous coworkers, disembarked in Phnom Penh to prepare for the first batch of *régie* staff, consisting of thirty-three European and one hundred and twenty-eight indigenous government agents.¹¹⁶ Their arrival represented a huge increase in colonial administrative personnel in Cambodia. The delegation was headed by Claude Coqui who, as mentioned earlier, would soon marry Marie Blay in Phnom Penh's first all-white wedding.

Coqui moved into Phnom Penh's most prestigious building, from where he looked down on the more modest homes of the colonial pioneers scattered along the Grande Rue.¹¹⁷ His European subordinates requisitioned some of these houses, among them Caraman's, dislodging his longtime companion, the mother of his son Victor.¹¹⁸ Vandelet and Dussutour, in turn, packed their bags and left Phnom Penh; their property in Phnom Penh and Saigon was sold in public auctions.¹¹⁹ In April of the following year, Vandelet, Dussutour, and Faraut left

the colony on the ocean liner *Sindhy* for France. Governor Thomson forewarned authorities in the *métropole* that “these gentlemen . . . have always had an attitude that was not only hostile toward the Administration, but moreover toward the French influence.”¹²⁰

In letters to his superiors, the governor explained the advantages of his action. Beyond additional revenue for the colonial budget, the opium concession would also allow the French government to set up police and surveillance posts across the kingdom “and, in so doing, extend little by little the fecund effect of the French influence, legally, without any difficulty of any sort, [and] with the support of the Cambodian population itself, which is so miserable and so interesting.”¹²¹ In March 1884, Thomson placed all cases of contraband under a special mixed Franco-Cambodian court staffed by two Cambodian mandarins and two Frenchmen, specifying that in case of disagreement, the French overrode the opinion of the mandarins. It was another blow to the increasingly fragile authority of the Cambodian courts, passed into law despite King Norodom’s passionate resistance.¹²² The following year, French provincial administrators established offices in and around the existing opium warehouses;¹²³ a year later, with the advent of war, a military camp was added to each opium depot.¹²⁴ Thus, in addition to providing revenue, the opium operation served to prepare the kingdom for the bureaucratic and military takeover by the French.

In Cambodia, critics of the new concession were numerous. The merchant community condemned it, claiming that they were henceforth excluded from Cambodia’s most promising business sector. Missionaries opposed the state’s role in the sale of opium on moral grounds. The administration argued in response that opium played a crucial role in the advance of the French colonial project. A farm employee in the Cambodian port town of Kampot expressed this view in an unorthodox, revealing way:

After all, it is [the opium business] that allows us all to live, from the lowest to those at the top . . . If people didn’t smoke opium, I would not take home my ninety-two piasters per month; there wouldn’t be all the dough to pay sumptuously this swarm of bureaucrats swooping down on Cochinchina like a band of starving crows . . . And the *colons* wouldn’t be able to share among themselves, in the shape of subsidies, the better part of the budget . . . No opium smokers, no budget; everyone here knows that perfectly well . . . And if one stopped smoking opium, we all, big and small, would be left with no other option than to clear off . . . Me, I wouldn’t have any savings to send back home to my old lady, and the top dogs could not drive around in their horse carriages.¹²⁵

To the colonial government’s great disappointment, however, Cambodia’s opium operation netted far less than expected. The numerous French, Vietnamese and Cambodian personnel necessary to assure the distribution of opium and the seizure of contraband proved costly. Only three years after the official takeover of the concession, the initial optimism had vanished. From 1887 onwards, local colonial authorities began to advocate a return to the former system in which the concession was auctioned off to the highest bidder, but

because of resistance from Saigon it took another three years for it to be reestablished.¹²⁶ When the concession was finally auctioned again, it went not to one of the Chinese syndicates but rather to the fastest-rising star among the new Francophile Khmer elite, Alexis Chhun.

Indigo blue

In the history of the colonization of the Far East, opium usually provided reliable revenue for the colonial state and income for its agents. Every so often, a war became necessary to open up new markets and overcome the resistance of hostile local governments, but once this was achieved the opium trade was most of the time hugely profitable. The British colonial empire owed its development in the East in large parts to the drug, and it seemed only reasonable to assume that the same would be true for French Indochina. That this ended up not being so in the case of Cambodia was therefore a considerable disappointment for the French. The Cambodian opium trade turned out to be a valuable tool by which to expand French control further into the country's administration and society, but only a mediocre source for state revenue. Yet the French had in stock colonial products other than opium, which they hoped to sell to local populations with a profit. One of them was land, or more precisely, property.

In Cambodia, land was still plentiful. The country was sparsely populated compared to neighboring Cochinchina, and considerable land reserves remained uncultivated. Large forests covered many provinces, and farmers could usually choose where to settle and how much land they would cultivate. There were different categories of land depending on location, soil quality, and exposure to the annual floods. *Chamcar* along the Mekong River or pepper plantations in Kampot, for example, were finite in area. Land of lesser value, however, was abundant, limited only by the farmer's capacity to clear it of undergrowth and prepare it for cultivation. Once land had been cleared and tilled, custom stated that it 'belonged' to the concerned family unless it was abandoned for more than three years.¹²⁷ An annual tax of 10 percent of what the family produced on the cultivated land would then have to be paid to the royal treasury.

Thus, a farmer's land was 'his' inasmuch as he had claimed and kept using it. The same land, however, also belonged to the king, for the king was not only master over all beings in his realm, but also owned all the land. For the Khmer, land devoid of such royal protection would turn out to be fallow and cursed.¹²⁸ While in theory then, farmers never really 'owned' their land completely, in practice their rights to land cultivated in previous years were rarely contested. For a Khmer rice farmer, land that he had tilled previously was 'his' inasmuch as he 'knew' it. After some years of residence, he would become intimately familiar with its specific features; the years he lived on it would add an emotional attachment to his dependency on a particular segment of soil, and together this set 'his' land apart from all other places. Still, it was not 'property' in a Western sense. The idea of owning land on an exclusive and perpetual basis was a foreign concept. The local concepts of landholding, by contrast, left the rural population comparably mobile, particularly in times of war or famine, or when facing

rapacious local authorities, a fact that always surprised and at times confounded the colonial authorities.¹²⁹

From the king's perspective, land was not a resource, since crops were what produced revenue. Revenue on crops, however, was only paid because all the land on which they grew was considered to be the king's, whose might and protection extended to every corner of the kingdom. The king could thus own land that none of the individual monarchs succeeding each other in the capital had ever visited and physically claimed. For its part, because of the different nature of its rule, the colonial state could not simply claim ownership of all land in a given region in such an all-embracing manner. The space once occupied by the transcendental presence of the king was to be replaced with the cadastre service.

The cadastre system upheld ownership by the state of a specific plot of land within state boundaries, or alternatively, by an individual once the state had sold the land to him. Land titles provided the physical proof of ownership after land had been acquired through the proper channels. Additionally, land titles allowed for the sale and rental of land, and for its use as collateral on loans and as part of an inheritance bequeathed to the next generation. On a land title, a form detailing measurements, location and surface, all lands and places look alike; land titles can be filled out, taxed, and filed. This was the state's way of 'knowing' a particular plot of land, and he could thus claim it and subsequently sell it to those who live on it. In order to transform customary land rights into proprietary rights, local farmers had to be convinced that land could no longer be theirs through knowing and plowing it, but rather through the acquisition of a certificate stamped by colonial authorities. This was the indispensable condition for land to be turned into colonial revenue.¹³⁰

That land in Cambodia needed to become a marketable commodity was considered uncontestable by the French. Merchants had complained since the early years of the Protectorate that current understandings of land ownership gave them insufficient security for capital they planned to invest in future plantations and cattle-breeding operations. The colonial government, for its part, needed funds, which the sale of land throughout the kingdom was meant to generate. Furthermore, if cities like Phnom Penh were to develop, urban planning could no longer depend on a king who, as owner of all land, could grant or withdraw his approval of construction projects according to his whims. All these were good arguments, but another reasoning lurked behind them. When Caraman had to justify why his cotton plantation had ended in disaster, he was quick to state that the absence of a real notion of land ownership had resulted in him having insufficient leverage over indigenous inhabitants to make them work. Similarly, referring to the shortage of indigenous labor, another Cambodia *colon* noted:

There is the great difficulty, above all at the present time, with no existing French operation that could be shown as an example to the workers who, quite naturally, meet the promises of the foreigners with great suspicion, combined with an instinctive fear of the unknown and the new. *Property does not exist, the peasant can establish himself wherever he pleases, and the colon has not even the option to offer land to those who do not have any.*¹³¹

In other words, only where there was property could there be landlessness, and only where there was landlessness would there be cheap labor. Teachers at the Phnom Penh School had expressed this line of thinking when they proposed to “transform the native, . . . accustom him to [the idea of] productive energy,” and overcome his natural “indolence” and “laziness.”¹³² In order to turn rice farmers into an “inexpensive support to the colonization,” they needed to be effectively persuaded.¹³³ The means of persuasion was to be land, or rather the lack of it.¹³⁴

It was thus no coincidence that the 1884 decree establishing the right to property in the kingdom was proclaimed on the same day as another decree abolishing slavery.¹³⁵ Humanitarian acts of progress in the eyes of most French contemporaries, both decrees prepared Cambodia for an economy of colonial extraction. Both measures shattered traditional structures of dependency and indebtedness that held the fabric of Cambodian society together. David Chandler has stressed that it was particularly these reforms “that struck at the heart of traditional Cambodian politics, which were built up out of entourages, exploitation of labor, and the taxation of harvests (rather than land) for the benefit of the elite.”¹³⁶ A native entangled, constrained, but also sustained by his many obligations and dues was to be replaced by one unburdened by commitments but also unassisted in times of distress. Only among such natives was there a chance to find the coolies necessary to staff the plantations and mines of French merchant dreams.

There were many who harbored such dreams. Since the early days of the Protectorate, Phnom Penh’s Europeans believed that the Cambodian mountains contained large reservoirs of iron ore, gold, and silver. Iron found in Kompong Svai, in particular, fuelled the imagination of successive generations of entrepreneurs. The ethnic minority of the Kuy based their livelihood on the small-scale exploitation of these deposits. Since 1872, various merchants had approached King Norodom to obtain his permission to extract them more efficiently. Le Faucheur, Garcerie, and Ternisien were among those who at different times held rights to the mines, although none of them ever pursued these claims.¹³⁷

An even greater hysteria surrounded the alleged discovery of gold in the beds of the Mekong River and its tributaries. Numerous merchants jockeyed to secure concessions, some of them with grand claims; Guérin, for example, Phnom Penh’s barber and innkeeper, at one point scrawled a note to the colonial authorities, asking to be given the Mekong River as a whole from the village of Samboc all the way to the border with Siam.¹³⁸ Government-led exploratory missions revealed that the local gold rush was based on little evidence; the desires of Phnom Penh’s merchants proved stronger, however, and the rumors continued.¹³⁹ Early colonists also applied for, and often obtained, huge land grants, some in excess of a thousand hectares, in order to raise cattle.¹⁴⁰ Other colonial hopefuls solicited plots of similar dimensions on which to plant cash crops such as coffee or tobacco.

During these early days, the king apparently granted concessions “with rather great liberality.”¹⁴¹ Actual contracts with the king were formulated in a way that preserved the traditional rights of the crown as well as those of the local population. In principle, they simply put in writing the basic right to exploit any

of the country's resources in exchange for a 10 percent tax to the royal treasury. The concessions were thus in no way equivalent to land titles in a European sense. For the first twenty years of the Protectorate, these concessions epitomized the hopes of failed merchants to finally make the fortunes they had come to find in the colonies. The contracts (and not the business enterprises for which they claimed to be the basis) became a tradable good, changing hands every few years for varying fees.¹⁴² The proposed enterprises, for which the contracts were meant to lay the groundwork, hardly ever advanced beyond imaginary plans. The right to property and the abolition of slavery were meant to make available the land and cheap labor-power for such imaginary plans to be realized and to help create an export-g geared agromineral economy envisioned by metropolitan and local empire-builders alike.

Once again, Caraman was at the forefront of these developments. In 1881, three years before Thomson's decrees on the establishment of property and the abolition of slavery, Caraman had solicited a land concession of 15,000 hectares to create a large-scale plantation.¹⁴³ Presented with this new demand, the local French representative noted briefly, somewhat resigned perhaps, "Caraman does indigo now, cotton's over."¹⁴⁴ And indeed, indigo had replaced cotton as Caraman's new obsession. On the island of Oknya Tey, working with four indigenous collaborators, Caraman was at the time pounding, stirring and compressing indigo plants to make a deep-blue paste. After two weeks of experiments, Caraman announced in September 1881 to the king and colonial authorities that trial runs were "conclusive" both in terms of the quantity of indigo plants that he planned to grow and the quality of dye to be produced from them.¹⁴⁵ Oknya Tey, according to Caraman, could easily be turned into the third-largest producer of indigo in the world after Bengal and Java; on his occasional visits to Phnom Penh, Caraman enthusiastically told local Europeans that "Okhna Tey and Sach Kandal can alone cover the needs of France."¹⁴⁶

Since all of his expatriate staff from his cotton venture had left by then, and the local population still hesitated to participate in his projects, Caraman lacked the labor force to set production on his island in motion. In Phnom Penh, there were few people left who were keen to be recruited by Caraman. Eventually, he managed to persuade three newcomers to the town to follow him to Oknya Tey: they were Ozoux, a former worker with the Saigon shippers Roque; Louis Cazeau, also from Saigon, who had previously toiled for a government farm; and Citti, a soldier-of-fortune and drifter who had lived in Egypt, Bengal and Burma before coming to Cambodia. Caraman's long-time friend Raoul Marrot also joined the group, perhaps sent by his mother to keep an eye on Caraman, about whom, as the godmother of his child, she may have grown increasingly worried.¹⁴⁷ A German merchant called August Bauermeister contributed funds, and a band of eight Vietnamese were hired as workers.¹⁴⁸ Caraman's brother Charles was encouraged by mail to find additional investors in France.¹⁴⁹ Most importantly, Caraman ordered stationery with the letterhead "Indigoterie d'Oknhatey Thomas-Caraman et Cie." Armed with the appropriate writing paper and the support of five Europeans and eight Vietnamese, he felt that he was once again in business.

Little by little, a small village sprang up on Oknya Tey. From the verandah of his house, Caraman overlooked a group of huts inhabited by his European and Vietnamese employees; the inhabitants also included a Khmer family that he had “bought” from one of the island’s dignitaries the previous year.¹⁵⁰ On the fringes of this impromptu village, a wild array of wells, tubs, boilers, distilleries, pressing machines and drying apparatuses added an industrial touch.¹⁵¹ A short distance away, Ozoux, Nam and his Vietnamese colleagues began to plant indigo, while Caraman wrote another eighteen-page report to the French authorities on “the Bengalese Indigo on Oknhatey.”¹⁵² He spoke of dikes and dams that he planned to build on the island, of the introduction of steam tractors to plow the fields, and of a regular shipping line down the Mekong River, exporting upcoming indigo harvests to Saigon, Singapore, Bangkok and beyond.¹⁵³ He also kept Saigon Governor Le Myre de Vilers abreast of events on his island, where “the grand enterprise” that he had launched was “on its way to total success.”¹⁵⁴

As with his failed cotton venture, Caraman could initially count on the governor’s uncritical acceptance in the name of French business interests. The Conseil Privé in Saigon ensured a constant trickle of government subsidies and interest-free loans, which in the beginning paid the bills for Caraman’s new indigo factory, just as had been the case for his cotton venture.¹⁵⁵ One aspect, however, made this attempt differ from all his previous projects: the question of land and labor-power. It is this point, crucial to both Caraman’s indigo factory and the French colonial project as a whole, that merits closer attention.

With his eyes set upon his indigo islands, Caraman approached King Norodom in early 1882, requesting that Oknya Tey and Khsach Kandal be ceded to him for good or for a period of thirty years. Caraman still held a renewable lease for the islands from the time of his cotton enterprise, which fixed an annual rent payable to the treasury. The short-term nature of the original contract was unsuitable for indigo, Caraman argued, and a longer-term solution acceptable to metropolitan capitalists the only way to ensure that his enterprise was grounded firmly. Since Governor Le Myre de Vilers had “always viewed with lively satisfaction the foundation of durable establishments in Cambodia by compatriots,” he agreed to Caraman’s request.¹⁵⁶ Representative Fourès was thus instructed to somehow compel King Norodom to accept Caraman’s proposals.

During an audience, Fourès was told that the king feared Caraman’s request would set a precedent, encouraging other Frenchmen to make similar demands in the future, and Fourès left with the impression that “it was this that [the king] wants to avoid.”¹⁵⁷ In letters to Saigon, Fourès added his own concern that Caraman would eventually resort to forced labor, “*culture forcée*,” to make his plantation viable if the islands were handed over to him.¹⁵⁸ Since land for cultivation was limited on an island, Fourès feared that Caraman would leave inhabitants with the choice of either working for him or forfeiting their customary rights to the land on which they had their house and gardens. But rather than interpreting Fourès’ letters as a warning, the Saigon Governor read them as encouragement for more forceful support of Caraman, since he viewed Caraman’s quest not as an isolated case but as one step in a revision of Cambodia’s antiquated land regime.¹⁵⁹ Pressure from Saigon tilted the balance in Caraman’s favor. In early July 1882, the Caraman contract was signed.¹⁶⁰

Caraman was triumphant. This document made him Cambodia's first white mandarin ruling over a Cambodian province and the *maître des terres* he had always aspired to be. With renewed enthusiasm, Caraman applied himself to establishing the large-scale indigo plantations that he needed for his factory. He was still motivated by the idea that Khmer agriculture had to be fundamentally transformed, since evidently everything about it was "faulty."¹⁶¹ "This transformation – it has to be a radical one," he wrote in an account entitled *L'indigo au Cambodge*, in which he outlined that it was obvious that French superiority was a result of their "superior industrial organization," a point that he was determined to prove on his islands.¹⁶²

In practice, this superior industrial organization signified a division of labor that Caraman summed up as follows: "To the Frenchmen, the industrial management; to the Khmer, the tilling."¹⁶³ Caraman presented island families with printed forms for entering their names and the location and area of the land they were accustomed to cultivating. Initial drafts of the form spoke of annual rent payments based on these declarations, with tax reductions for certain crops such as indigo. Later versions plainly stated that each tenant was obliged to grow indigo. One tenth of the harvest was to be handed over to Caraman at the end of the season as a compensation for the right to live on the land; the other nine tenths would be bought by Caraman at a price that he deemed fair.¹⁶⁴ Thus farmers were permanently tied to Caraman's factory. They could produce crops that Caraman approved of as well as surplus crops that could be sold; alternatively, they could work for wages on Caraman's farm at a salary that he thought adequate. In a move similar to the one which the colonial government would enact a few years later, the villagers were thus coerced into leaving subsistence agriculture for a money economy.¹⁶⁵

Later on, Caraman proposed to divide the island into 60,000 plots, which he offered to individual tenants at a price of twenty-five piasters each.¹⁶⁶ The contracts represented this sum as the equivalent of thirty years' worth of annual taxes. In practical terms, however, the contracts were the closest thing to an agricultural land sales contract that had ever been floated in the Khmer Kingdom. Caraman calculated that the scheme would net him 150,000 piasters. Even after deducting payments due to the royal treasury, he would be left with a hefty profit. By that time, however, only two years before Thomson's land grab of 1884, it became apparent that the colonial government had similar aspirations.

One year later, in 1883, Caraman's indigo factory had foundered, like all of his previous undertakings. One of his employees, Cazeau, was forced to petition the colonial government for help for himself and his family, "which at this point lives thanks to the charity of a friend."¹⁶⁷ He was about to leave Oknya Tey and hoped to receive "honorable employment in Cambodia," which he felt the government owed him.¹⁶⁸ Some months earlier, Ozoux had petitioned the colonial authorities for support as well, adding that it was "in the last extremity that I address myself to [the] Government."¹⁶⁹ Citti, too, expected relief from the government: a month before Ozoux wrote his letter, he had offered his services as a mercenary to the French for their military expedition in Tonkin.¹⁷⁰

While, given Caraman's track record, the exodus from his farm after a year of operation will astound no one, the turn to government jobs by previously

independent colonists is noteworthy. Cazeau's plea for "honorable employment" came at a time when colonial authorities were hiring a great many of Phnom Penh's poor whites, integrating them into their rapidly expanding bureaucracy. Among Cazeau's new colleagues in the government service were old acquaintances such as Alfred Rosenthal, the Irish drifter whom colonial authorities ten years earlier regarded as "not worth a great deal," and in any case completely unemployable.¹⁷¹ Cadet, Blanc's former associate and long-time Phnom Penh resident, had entered the newly established colonial police force.¹⁷² Among his fellow policemen was Montagu, the former Vandelet opium agent, whom an indigenous inhabitant of Phnom Penh once described as

almost illiterate. . . . He smokes opium and eats with the locals. And on top of this he is a man who has been in prison for 18 months. I ask myself why the French administration has accepted [such] a disorderly person into the police.¹⁷³

A few years later, even Yokohama-returnee and former opium agent Mercuriol joined the government. Having temporarily left Cambodia for Vietnam, he had risen to the position of finance minister in a short-lived kingdom established in the Vietnamese highlands, at the side of another colorful adventurer, David de Mayréna, who himself was crowned king.¹⁷⁴ Upon his return to Phnom Penh, Mercuriol was offered a job with the Public Works department.¹⁷⁵ His previous record apparently did not dissuade the government from hiring him for this new task.

The list of former members of Phnom Penh's impoverished European merchant class who obtained government posts in the 1880s and early 1890s is extensive. Indeed, we can understand the anonymous indigenous observer who, in 1885, wondered why the French government would employ such people. Why burden the administration's ranks with those that one contemporary author has called "the scum of the *métropole* and of Europe?"¹⁷⁶ It is not far-fetched to suggest that there might have been a link between the liberal hiring policy and the fact that the mere presence of white "scum" in the colony challenged the ideology of white supremacy. The provision of jobs to Phnom Penh's poor whites, regardless of their qualification and nationality, was implemented in reaction to two decades of settler failure, once it became clear that Caraman and his peers would never attain any position in local society by other means. This policy complemented the radical changes that the French imposed on the Khmer Kingdom in the 1880s.

Motivated by insecurity and greed, the changes of the 1880s were to be effected by driving three wedges into the local society and economy: increased taxation, the establishment of proprietary rights to land, and the creation of a 'free' peasantry who, through taxation and the new land regime, would be coerced into producing surplus crops for the market or toiling as wage-paid laborers. The introduction of property transformed land into a marketable commodity, while creating the conditions for social differentiation in rural areas. Landless peasants at the bottom of the emerging order were meant to provide the coolies that were required for a French-led agromineral export economy. The abolition of slavery

would help establish a labor market receptive to supply and demand, ensuring that daily wages could be negotiated directly with the laborer himself, whose bargaining power was the weakest. The new regime was later complemented with the large-scale use of so-called *corvée* labor; that is, the forced participation of peasants in Public Works projects in lieu of cash tax payments or, in other words, labor that was not only cheap but free.¹⁷⁷

The seeds of change sown in the 1880s were only reaped decades later. The 1885 rebellion, the enduring vitality of traditional modes of production, and a continued shortage of metropolitan capital prolonged the falterings and failures of the conquest era for some years more. Only in the 1920s did the large-scale plantations that Thomson and Caraman had dreamt of appear, with rubber as their mainstay. By 1942, Cambodia's rubber plantations covered 28,600 hectares of prime agricultural land, and were owned by a handful of agroindustrial companies.¹⁷⁸ The voluminous colonial archives on labor management, "coolie deserters," and manhunts to chase down workers and reintegrate them into the plantation economy are all phenomena of the 1920s and 1930s, but inextricably linked to the reforms introduced four decades earlier.¹⁷⁹

The establishment of property further resulted in the emergence of a propertied class of indigenous landholders who owed allegiance to the French colonial regime rather than to the Cambodian government and the king, with Alexis Chhun, who by 1920 owned land worth millions of francs, being just one example. It is far from a coincidence that Chhun also became Phnom Penh's first Khmer opium baron in 1890; opium and land were part and parcel of the same package of measures used to transform the Khmer Kingdom into the mature Protectorate. While the colonial government thus fostered a Francophile and 'progressive' group of Khmer à la Chhun, Phnom Penh's most destitute French merchants were co-opted through offers of employment. The few remaining independent colonists, such as Faraut, Blanc, the Marrots, and Caraman, by contrast associated themselves from the 1880s increasingly with traditionalist factions among the indigenous elite and the palace. The resulting tension within Phnom Penh's French community would soon deteriorate into open hostilities, capping a process that the pioneers had helped to further but that culminated with their demise.

7 Under siege, 1884–87

While respecting their mores and customs

On Saturday, June 14, 1884, some 300 troops disembarked onto Phnom Penh's pier. From the gunnels of the gunboats *Alouette*, *Sagaie* and *Escopette*, soldiers called up from the Mytho and Vinh-long garrisons emerged; more than 120 French marines and 150 Vietnamese *tirailleurs* carried their bags and guns to a couple of warehouses, situated at a hundred yards from the Protectorate offices. Joined by resident French and Vietnamese soldiers, they set up a temporary camp inside. It is unlikely that they knew the reasons for their deployment, nor when or whom they would be asked to fight. Cambodia was at peace, and Phnom Penh was as quiet as on any normal day. Two days passed, and nothing happened. The soldiers played cards, smoked, talked, cleaned their guns, and awaited orders, which finally came at midnight on the third day.¹

Before sunrise the next morning, the troops assembled their gear and separated into squadrons. The first eighty soldiers left the barracks, marching down Rue Ohier toward the northern wall of the palace enclosure. From there, sentries were dispatched to the southern wall. Commanding this unit was Captain Joseph Jarnowski, a veteran of Cochinchina, who had fought across the colony off and on since 1868.² A second, larger, group left the barracks and took the path along the river embankment, emerging moments later in front of the main entrance of the royal palace. At the same time, merchants along the Grande Rue heard the sound of stomping feet as a third column of ninety soldiers marched down the road, coming to a halt just north of the grand square near the palace grounds. At ten past five, commanding officer Miramond informed Governor Thomson that the palace had been surrounded, and all its exits were blocked by French troops. Moments later, the governor appeared at the main entrance of the palace accompanied by his chiefs of staff. Escorted by officers and elite soldiers, he entered the palace and demanded that the king be awakened.³

There are several accounts of what ensued inside the palace during the next three hours.⁴ Despite differences in details, all accounts agree on the essence of the encounter between Thomson's company and King Norodom: "Submission or abdication."⁵ King Norodom was forced to sign a treaty that reduced his role to that of a constitutional monarch, transferring governmental powers to the French. As the first clause of the treaty put it: "His Majesty, the King of Cambodia, accepts all the administrative, judicial, financial and commercial reforms, which, in the future, the Government of the French Republic will find useful to implement, in order to facilitate the accomplishment of its Protectorate."⁶

The treaty was a radical departure from previous strategies. This time, no attempt was made to disguise the fact that the French were directly and forcefully imposing their will on the Cambodian king. If required, they seemed prepared to depose Norodom, replacing him with his more malleable half-brother Sisowath. Under such threat, King Norodom agreed to sign the document, although the king was described as “very upset.”⁷ Thomson, for his part, reveled in what he perceived to be his greatest achievement as governor to date. Glowing with contentment, he boarded the *Alouette* a few days later, returning to Saigon where an enthusiastic merchant community was waiting for news of this “decisive step forward” in the history of the Protectorate.⁸

Saigon’s Philharmonic Society played the Marseillaise when the governor’s yacht pulled into the harbor, and the Rue Catinat was stirring with bunting and Tricolors.⁹ Crowds cheered in the streets, while the local press ran editorials deliriously praising Thomson’s feat. The Conseil colonial, the Chamber of Commerce and other merchant bodies addressed their “most lively congratulations” to this “patriotic revolution that will be to Monsieur Thomson’s eternal honor.”¹⁰ Saigon’s colonists were confident that, finally, this convention would make them “forget the twenty years of stagnation” that they had witnessed, allowing them “to make up for lost time.”¹¹ For once, bureaucrats, merchants, and army personnel were all united in celebration.

The ambiance in Phnom Penh was less upbeat. Vietnamese immigrants from Cochinchina were probably the most supportive, among local communities, of Thomson’s coup. Although not opposed in principal to a further increase in French power, the Chinese were nevertheless apprehensive of how such changes might affect their business interests. Obviously, the majority of the Khmer palace community disapproved not only of the treaty’s substance, but also of the appalling rudeness with which the king had been forced to sign it. Under the new regime, all of the kingdom’s revenue – customs, taxes, revenue concessions – went to the French, leaving the king with an annual Civil List of 300,000 piasters for the expenses of his household and the palace. How would the thousands of subjects who were in one way or another economically dependent on the royal treasury make a living under this new regime? Phnom Penh’s European community, by contrast, was divided over the initiative. Tired of untying the Gordian knot of Cambodia’s administration, government officials were generally glad that it had been cut in two. The most prominent merchants, however, unanimously opposed the changes.

Immediately following the signature of the treaty, French authorities observed that Caraman, Raoul Marrot, and Dewaal, the former accountant of the opium farm, were called to the palace with increasing frequency.¹² The governor and his staff were already finalizing details for the kingdom’s new organizational structure when a report from a Filipino member of King Norodom’s staff interrupted their deliberations to caution them over these European visitors. The Filipino confirmed that the king had asked Marrot, Caraman and Dewaal for help in countering the French coup d’état.¹³ He had learnt from the head of the Tagal guard, Pascual de la Cruz, that the king was determined to seek “every possible means to break the iron collar that the French have placed upon him.”¹⁴ The king had apparently asked Caraman and Col de Monteiro to write a letter to the

President of the French Republic, complaining over the manner in which he was being treated.¹⁵ Marrot was entrusted with taking this letter to France and bringing it to the attention of the French government and the general public.

As a businessman, Marrot had been concerned for some time about “the dangers that an overly drastic and persistent political strategy would have for French trade in Cambodia”; he had advised the local representative against rash decisions.¹⁶ Now that his fears had come true, Marrot was ready to assist King Norodom, in order to ensure that the kingdom did not simply become a fully submissive colony of France. Three days before Thomson returned to Saigon, Marrot boarded the postal ship downriver, carrying with him Col and Caraman’s letter to the President of France as well as letters for the Spanish consul in Saigon denouncing Thomson’s actions.

Marrot booked passage to France on a steamer leaving town at the end of June, and then went to visit the Catholic Bishop of Saigon and the Spanish consul, Contreras. In the wake of these visits, Contreras sent a confidential letter to the Spanish ambassador in Paris. Once again, the French intelligence service proved effective, and Thomson soon had a copy of this letter on his desk, forwarded to him by an informant inside the consulate. The letter provided evidence that his detractors in Phnom Penh were not only “adventurer[s] and shameless wire-puller[s]”¹⁷ of the kind he saw in Caraman. In fact, the affair was far more dangerous than this. According to Contreras, it was desirable for Germany and Spain to come to a secret agreement in case of another Franco-German war, by which Cochinchina would become part of a nascent German Empire, while Cambodia would be converted into a Spanish Protectorate. As the Spanish consul in Saigon explained:

I have forgotten to tell Your Excellency that Monsieur Marrot is a bit shy and I even believe that the King has made a bad choice in that respect; but Monsieur Faraud [*sic*], our most devoted, is also in Paris, he will make use of him; he will make up for whatever Monsieur Marrot should not do. To this purpose, he is the bearer of a letter of His Majesty Norodom in which the King further asks Monsieur Faraud to directly or indirectly contact the Representative of Cochinchina in the Chamber of Deputies, in order to establish if this gentleman would be willing to bring the defense of [Norodom’s] cause to [the attention of] the President of the Republic or even the Chambers [of Parliament]. For this purpose, Monsieur Faraud is authorized to offer to Monsieur Blanscubé, in the King’s name, whatever amount of money, and if he thought it appropriate he could ask Monsieur Dussutour to help him . . . , and if successful, His Majesty will pay to Monsieur Dussutour upon his return to Cambodia all the money that the Government of Cochinchina has refused to give him.¹⁸

Upon reading this secret letter, Governor Thomson believed that he had uncovered a conspiracy uniting King Norodom, Col de Monteiro and all the conservatives in the king’s palace with Caraman, the Marrots, Dewaal, Faraut, Vandelet, and Dussutour. These old enemies of Thomson’s appeared to be backed by Cochinchina’s MP in Paris and to have garnered clandestine support

in German and Spanish diplomatic circles as well.¹⁹ Marrot's visit to the Bishop's residence in Saigon and the anti-government feelings that Thomson assumed to be endemic among Phnom Penh's missionaries convinced him that the conspiracy reached even further.²⁰ Could there be a more fearsome coalition than France's rivals Germany and Spain, plotting with a mutinous monarch, the Catholic Church, influential metropolitan politicians, and Phnom Penh's white proletariat?

Thomson hurriedly dispatched reports to France picturing this conspiracy in dire terms. On top of things, Marrot's trip was not the first secret diplomatic mission sent to France by King Norodom. Raoul Marrot's mother had left Cambodia earlier in the year with Caraman's son, Victor, allegedly retiring from her business dealings to look after the education of her foster child. Rumors circulated, however, that she had been carrying another letter from King Norodom protesting about Governor Thomson's interference. For Thomson, this was another example of the way in which the motley lot of Europeans in Phnom Penh were "mixed up in every venomous affair in Cambodia."²¹ To preempt their plots, Thomson leaked news to the local press that ill-intentioned "consultants, who unfortunately are not Cambodians" were behind King Norodom's resistance.²²

Public opinion in Saigon turned quite quickly against King Norodom and his European allies. From Oknya Tey, Caraman tried to exonerate his name, emphasizing his patriotic sentiment as a "Frenchman [and] loyal citizen of the Republic." Although he expressed a "friendly affection for the King," he insisted that he would never betray his motherland, whatever the incentive he was offered. How could anyone suggest that he would be capable of treason, given his tireless efforts for the cause of the Nation over so many years, he argued. "My twenty years passed in these regions where I have sacrificed my youth, consumed my future, and almost wasted my time, my three years of struggle with the King, my writings, my efforts etc. . . . ; does all this not plead in my favour?" Raoul Marrot, for his part, similarly denied any involvement in secret machinations; he was eventually allowed to embark on his steamer for France as planned.²⁴

With Marrot gone and Caraman on his Mekong islands, "devoured by mosquitoes" and drowned by "a deluge of rain," controversy over the Thomson Convention temporarily subsided, and the restructuring of Cambodia's administration went ahead according to plan. French administrators were dispatched to Kompong Chhnang, Banam, Kompong Cham, Kratie, Pursat, and Kampot to prepare for provincial headquarters, later to become the *résidences*. Military recruiters traveled through Vietnamese villages in neighboring Cochinchina, requesting volunteers for a new colonial militia given "the honor to extend France's power in this new country" by being stationed at the *résidences*.²⁵ Telegraph lines were laid along waterways and across dense forests all the way up to the northernmost military post of Sambor near the Lao border.²⁶ By the end of August 1884, postal offices in Kompong Luong, Kompong Chhnang, and Kompong Thom had opened their doors, and others followed in short order.²⁷

French engineers from the Public Works department took control of the streets of Phnom Penh, drawing plans and finalizing building projects that would

remake the capital according to French tastes.²⁸ Local traders wrote home that “the moment has come to lay out your capital to advantage” in “this small kingdom that has just been handed over to us by its own sovereign ‘Norodon’ by virtue of the treaty concluded on past 17 June.”²⁹ Thomson’s coup had unleashed a renewed sense of confidence, and previous discouragement gave way to optimism, reawakening the Cambodia of bygone merchant dreams.

Thomson returned to Cambodia in November 1884 for a grand provincial tour to inspect progress. The journey reinforced his conviction that the French takeover had been long overdue. “From all sides,” he concluded upon returning to Saigon, “I have been given testimonies of trust, and everywhere I have seen how the longing has become more pronounced . . . for a new state of things and a coming revival.”³⁰ Wherever he went, he “found the same heartfelt welcome, the expression of the same sentiment of gratitude and sympathy” for French resolve to transform Cambodia and Cambodians, “while respecting their mores, customs, [and] religious and national beliefs.”³¹ With a view to the “creation of our great French Indochina” the Saigon press concluded:

The organization of this beautiful country [Cambodia] . . . has advanced rapidly. Not a single drop of blood has been shed; law and order have not been troubled for a single moment; the difficulties appear to lessen as Monsieur Thomson forges ahead and completes his job: we can [only] smile about the untoward predictions and the threats by the selfish detractors of the early stages, and have complete faith.³²

Two months before the *Saigonais* published this reassuring article, Caraman had contacted Henri Ternisien, owner of the Saigon newspaper *Unité Indo-Chinoise*. Caraman knew Ternisien well, since they had been business associates in a range of fictitious mining and railway projects since 1882. Caraman had introduced Ternisien at King Norodom’s court, directing his attention increasingly toward Cambodian politics. From 1883 onwards, Ternisien had agreed to help “repair the wrongs that we have done to the King of Cambodia.”³³ To this end, whenever King Norodom wanted to bypass the Saigon Governor and take his grievances directly to the Ministries of the Marine and Colonies and Foreign Affairs in Paris, Ternisien offered his services as a private emissary. Following Thomson’s coup, Ternisien reasserted his willingness to “defend [the king] in France with the help of his political friends Wilson, Andrieux, Clémenceau, etc. by way of the press and by way of rumors.”³⁴ The price for his services was fixed at 300,000 piasters, with 50,000 piasters for expenses. Caraman, whose loyalty to the motherland allegedly had no price, agreed to work for the king for half of this amount.

By the time that Ternisien and Caraman were negotiating with King Norodom over the conditions for their political support, Marrot had arrived in France. Shortly after his arrival, Marrot contacted Cochinchina’s representative in Parliament, Blanscubé, forwarding a copy of King Norodom’s letter of protest to him and promising that the MP would be generously compensated for any efforts he would make on behalf of the Cambodian king. Charmed by an advance payment of several thousand francs and a “magnificent bracelet” for his

female companion, Blanscubé agreed to throw his weight behind Norodom's cause. The French Parliament had a crucial role to play in the reforms since Thomson's convention had to be ratified in Paris. Together with Blanscubé, Marrot and his mother set out to orchestrate and finance a press campaign, in which major newspapers, such as *Le Télégraphe* and *La France*, published articles denouncing Thomson's actions in Cambodia.

A booklet entitled "Au Cambodge, la convention du 17 juin 1884," published under a pseudonym, appeared on the shelves of Paris bookstores, circulating widely throughout the capital and causing a stir in political circles.³⁵ Caseloads of the booklet were also sent to Saigon, where it was distributed free of charge to the local public. It offered a biting and witty critique of Thomson who, "burning to play the role of the Harmands, of the de Champeaux and other French plenipotentiaries in Tonkin and Hue, yearned to draw attention to himself through some sort of brilliant feat. . . . Civil bureaucrat that he was, he wanted to garner laurels like the generals do."³⁶ The booklet was immediately condemned by officials as a "fabric of incorrect maunderings, of shabby rancor, [and] anti-patriotic thoughts," but the damage had been done.³⁷

With the presumed authors of this campaign beyond Thomson's reach, Caraman came to bear the brunt of the governor's anger, which had been fueled by further reports of conspiratorial visits to the palace:

Monsieur Caraman resumes or continues his intrigues with [the] King. He has just proposed to him a draft treaty to be submitted to the French Government . . . that would annul the 17 June convention. All this is done with Bras [Madame Marrot's partner] and Col [de Monteiro]. I believe it necessary that you take [a] decision to prohibit Monsieur Caraman from the territory [of] Cambodia, at least temporarily.³⁸

Thomson's answer arrived the same day:

Please let Monsieur Caraman know that I'm aware of his past intrigues, which had the goal to prevent [the] ratification [of the] convention of 17 June, and of his current intrigues with the King. I ask you to invite him in my name to betake himself to Saigon by the next boat. In case of his refusal and after advising him of my intentions, you will inform me telegraphically. I will then notify you by telegraph [of the] deportation order, the immediate execution of which you will ensure under conditions that I will indicate to you.³⁹

Fourès replied that Caraman would leave Phnom Penh by the next boat, although he made "protestations of his pure intentions and of his love [for the] Republic and [the] progress [of] civilization."⁴⁰ Thus began the long months of what Caraman later called his "political detention" by the Saigon authorities.

In early December 1884, a few weeks before Caraman's deportation, a Frenchman disembarked from the postal ship *Mouhot* at Kompong Luong en route to Oudong. His disheveled and unkempt appearance was matched by the fact that his only baggage appeared to be a Remington shotgun, carried over his

shoulder, together with a revolver belt, a red cape, and a case containing several bottles of spirits. At the port he ran into the local agent of the government opium concession and presented himself as “Monsieur Coste, businessman, coming to Oudong on the behest of the Queen-Mother.” In the ensuing conversation, Coste apparently expressed his “absolute reprobation of the measures taken by [the Saigon Governor],” noting an “imminent uprising of Cambodia instigated by mandarins [that were] as brave as they were intelligent.” Coste was known for such rambling sermons, mixing dark prophecies with “long-winded adulatory praise of the courage of the Cambodians”; his conversation with the opium agent warned of imminent war and devastation.⁴¹

Although the overall atmosphere in the European community in Phnom Penh remained calm, an increasing number of locals worried like Coste over the naïveté of the French authorities. The affront to King Norodom in June, followed by the frantic pace with which reforms were being implemented, might well draw a response both from the palace and from the population as a whole. There were perhaps local Europeans who knew of the coming revolts, as the authorities would later claim. The most comprehensive government report on the causes of the 1885–86 rebellion concluded even that “the principal authors of the plot hatched against the French influence and . . . true culprits are Miss Widow Marrot, the young Marrot, Ternisien, Caraman, Blanscubé, Chabrier, Col de Monteiro, [and] the princes Nupparat and Duong Char.”⁴² Retrospectively, it seems that the Thomson administration overemphasized the role of Frenchmen in the revolts. Caraman and his peers were unlikely to have known the details of what was being planned in the palace. But they sensed that there was trouble ahead.

The trouble began on 8 January 1885, in Sambor, the northernmost French outpost on the Mekong River. The evening before, at least 160 Chinese and Khmer men assembled near the post, waiting until daybreak before approaching further. They wore no uniforms, but carried forty-odd old-fashioned guns and assorted weapons. Just before sunrise, a Vietnamese guard at the post spotted a suspicious movement near the palisade and opened fire. Dozens of *tirailleurs* and French marines, rising from their beds in confusion, began firing randomly into the dark. The commander of the post, Lieutenant Bellanger, acted swiftly. Grabbing another French petty officer, a Vietnamese corporal, five *tirailleurs*, and a clarion for backup, he stormed out of the post in the direction of the supposed enemy, gun in hand. Instantly, the sparkles and thudding sounds of discharges filled the night. Six of his men fell at once, a short distance from the entrance, while Lieutenant Bellanger continued charging toward the enemy. Members of his group retreated into the palisade, carrying the wounded with them, and defenders inside watched as Bellanger stormed alone toward the attackers, gesticulating wildly with his gun. When he finally reached them, one of them cut him in half with a single blow of a sword on a bamboo stick.⁴³

The telegraph station further south in Krauchmar soon received the message: “Rebellion. Cambodians have shot canons everywhere around the house and the fort.”⁴⁴ Perplexed by the message, the telegraph operator cabled back to Sambor to ask for confirmation. “I leave, they’re coming,” was the only reply received before the line was cut.⁴⁵ The post at Sambor was hastily evacuated by



Figure 7.1 A unit of *tirailleurs* and a French officer posing in front of the military post of Sambor in 1884, only weeks before the attack (Société de Géographie de Paris).

boat, and rebels burned the buildings to cinders that afternoon. When this news was received in Phnom Penh and Saigon, it was met with disbelief.⁴⁶ The head of the post in Krauchmar decided to check with local inhabitants to see if they had heard anything of a rebellion further north. He reported that

for about three months there have been parleys by way of emissaries between Sivotha's bands and the inhabitants in the whole region of the Upper [Mekong] . . . ; a general uprising was in the making. There were supposed to be simultaneous attacks on our outermost post Sambor, the practically defenseless Krauchmar and Kompong Cham where we also had only seventeen indigenous soldiers and not even a telegraph station.

According to these informers, "the whole country supposedly knew about it," except, it appears, the French.⁴⁷

Upon receiving this news, the garrison in Phnom Penh dispatched a fleet of gunboats to Kompong Cham and Krauchmar to protect the forts. Another ship was sent to Sambor, where it arrived on 15 January 1885. The rebels had left the day before. When the two hundred men of the expeditionary force came on the shore, they were greeted by a friendly Chinese from the local village who was shot by the commanding officer, no questions asked. Standing on the ashes of the former fort, the French hoisted the Tricolor, shouting "Vive la France."⁴⁸

In the Cambodian capital, news of the attack and the casualties left the European public dumbfounded:

Initially, the emotions ran high in Phnom Penh where nothing, up to this day, had presaged such a grave event; rumors of the most contradictory kind circulated everywhere: “It’s an insurrection that will quickly expand,” said the pessimists; “Sivotha’s partisans who usually reside near the frontier with the Siamese Lao [region] and the province of Kompong Svai, have been reinforced by numerous Chinese; . . . the Cambodians . . . will follow this impulse.” . . . “An insurrection! You must be joking, replied those for whom the horizon is always bluer than blue; thank God, we know Cambodia because we have traveled and surveyed it far and wide, and we have always admired the imperturbable serenity of its inhabitants [who are] so simple, so gentle, so hospitable. Plainly, we are confronted with [nothing but] a band of pirates.”⁴⁹

The view held by most French government personnel was that there might be occasional incidents in the wake of the Sambor attack, “but that [there] would be nothing of a seriously alarming [nature].” Sambor was reoccupied, and the rebels would be apprehended any day: “A few executions, some fifty arrests, and everything will be back to normal,” those residents reassured each other over a Pastis on the verandah of the Café Mermier.⁵⁰ They could not have been more mistaken.

Bad Frenchmen

The Sambor attack marked the beginning of a rebellion that would become both the bloodiest and the most difficult to subdue in the history of the Protectorate. From Sambor, the fighting spread first southward along the Mekong River, then eastward into the marshy plains of Baphnom, and westward to Pursat, eventually consuming the southern towns of Takeo and Kampot as well. By May 1885, the uprising had reached Phnom Penh. French positions in the country were at their most precarious on 3 May, when rebel troops attacked the capital from three different sides and fought their way into its center. Attacks in Pursat, Sambor, Takeo, Kampot and the capital were launched almost simultaneously, stretching French military capabilities to their limits.

Fear and disbelief pervaded Phnom Penh’s European community as the rebellion spread from the kingdom’s periphery toward its core. Local rumor mills went into overdrive, and panic spread. Phnom Penh was clogged with colonial troops and military equipment and more kept pouring in, but the quick victory over the rebels that the French had been promised remained elusive. Five months after Sambor, mobile brigades of French marines and Vietnamese *tirailleurs* scoured the provinces, while French gunboats controlled the Mekong and the villages hugging the riverbanks. Given their modern weaponry, direct engagement and exchange of fire benefited the French forces, which regularly prevailed in battle. Despite these small victories, routinely celebrated in the Saigon press as the beginning of the end of the revolt, the rebels’ resolve to fight



Figure 7.2 Members of the Khmer militia, created in 1885 as part of the French war effort, undated (Musée des Beaux Arts et de la Dentelle, Alençon).

did not seem to wane.⁵¹ Defeats in open battle only made them reconsider their strategy; the longer the revolt wore on, the more the rebels turned to guerilla tactics. Henceforth, each rebel surprise attack was followed by an immediate retreat. This tactic proved highly effective, and by the end of 1885 the French had lost control of most of the kingdom's territory except for the capital, the immediate surroundings of the provincial headquarters, and the small forts hastily set up by platoon commanders at strategic locations.

The sounds of guns and canons reverberated throughout the Cambodian countryside during early 1885, while the Saigon public gathered nightly at the *Théâtre de Saigon* to listen to song performances by the popular soprano Madame Lecerf, accompanied by Emmanuel Pontet on the piano. Local residents enjoyed the last gala evenings before the theater would go into the summer break and Pontet's company head back to Paris. Saigon had enjoyed a particularly successful concert season that year, with Governor Thomson a regular visitor at the theater where he would unwind after a long workday at his office, from which he directed the French war effort in Cambodia. The governor was a music enthusiast and had often requested Pontet's services for government balls and receptions. Thus, when boarding the steamer *Iraouaddy* at the end of April, Pontet did not have to leave Saigon empty-handed; he carried a small box in his breast pocket, with a star-shaped piece of medal on a colorful banderole inside. It was made of brass and thus worth little money. Its symbolic value, however, was considerable. In appreciation of Pontet's efforts to keep Saigon's European

community entertained, Governor Thomson had elevated him to the rank of Chevalier of the Royal Order of Cambodia.⁵²

At first glance, Pontet's cherished souvenir and the war in Cambodia seem to have little in common. On another level, however, the two were closely related and also entwined with the fate of Caraman, Marrot and the other Phnom Penh residents who opposed the June 1884 convention. Honor and its counterpart, shame, were central concepts within the European community in the political struggle over the future of the French Protectorate, and were used as a weapon by the Saigon government in its fight against political opposition. Through the allocation of honor to selected recipients while 'shaming' opponents, the colonial state disciplined its citizens, fostering allies and marginalizing rivals. Honor and shame delineated the boundaries between those who supported the common cause and those who undermined it and needed to be excluded and expelled. The precariousness of the local colonial society exaggerated the meanings of honor and shame, and in the local context, 'losing' one's honor was equivalent to social excommunication. If the state managed to secure the capacity for dispensing and withdrawing honor, it thus acquired a powerful tool to align potential critics.

As a compliment to Thomson's bureaucratic and military conquest of the Khmer Kingdom, the European community was combed for elements of dubious loyalty. These suspect elements were given the choice of either conforming to the government view, or being labeled as traitors against the national cause. It is no coincidence that Thomson's aggressive stance, the bureaucratization of the Protectorate, and the war were contemporaneous with the appearance in common usage of the term "bad Frenchmen," by which people like Caraman and Marrot were expunged from colonial society. The concept of honor is central to this process. Its emblems were those small pieces of brass which, once fixed to a shirt, signified to the outside that the man inside the shirt was an officially authorized carrier of honor. By awarding Pontet the Royal Order of Cambodia, Governor Thomson had thus given the pianist a small but meaningful farewell gift.

As Chevalier of Cambodia's royal order, Pontet joined an illustrious group of contemporaries. Other local residents recently elevated to the order included Charles Jourdan, Thomson's untiring defender at the head of the *Saigonais*; Claude Coqui, head of Cambodia's newly formed *régie d'opium* and the first Frenchman ever to be married to a Frenchwoman in Cambodia; Captain Jarnowski, commander of a military squadron during the June 1884 crisis; and Doctor Maurel, the naval physician in charge of the military hospital and the health checks imposed on Phnom Penh's alleged prostitutes. If no immediate correlation between Pontet's musical, Jourdan's journalistic, Jarnowski's soldierly, and Maurel's medical accomplishments seems apparent, one does not fail to notice a preference for those who had rendered Governor Thomson service in the past.⁵³

This had not always been the case. Initially, the Royal Order of Cambodia had been a creation of King Norodom in the early 1860s, inspired by the French Légion d'honneur. Doudart de Lagrée, Admiral de la Grandière and Emperor Napoleon III, in reverse order, were the first three beneficiaries of royal orders

from King Norodom's hands.⁵⁴ During the following years, the king continued to elevate a wide array of Frenchmen to this honor. In the early 1870s, for instance, he rewarded Caraman's fellow pioneer and long-time troublemaker Paul Le Faucheur with a nomination to the rank of Chevalier for his lifelong service to the crown, and some years later Félix-Gaspard Faraut, at the time still secretary and confidant of the king.⁵⁵

From 1875 onwards, letters in the archives note growing official French desires to leave the likes of Le Faucheur and Faraut undecorated.⁵⁶ The colonial government began proposing candidates of its own choosing to King Norodom, but the king still had control over the ultimate decision on such honors. While King Norodom thus continued to honor his friends and allies, he remained willing to accommodate French wishes: in this way, Representative Aymonier became Chevalier of the royal order, despite the fact that he and the king had never been on friendly terms.⁵⁷

What began as occasional proposals to be accepted or refused were transformed later into mechanical gestures as part of a French-controlled honor-producing machine, with numbers of nominations increasing annually. The colonial government had gained greater control over nominations, while certificates and medals were shipped in from France by the hundreds. In early 1884, Governor Thomson wrote to the Ministry in Paris stating:

I have the honor to acknowledge reception of a case marked C, I, N, S.L. No.5419, containing 235 certificates of the Royal Order of Cambodia. 20 certificates of the *grand-croix*, 20 for *grand-officier*, 35 for *commandeur*, 110 for *officier*, 50 for *chevalier*. May I be permitted to solicit Monsieur le Ministre to give the necessary orders so that an equivalent number of certificates will be shipped to me in view of coming needs.⁵⁸

These "coming needs" required, only four months later, and apparently "*d'urgence*," an additional ten certificates for the *grand-croix*, fifteen for *grand-officier*, fifty for *commandeur*, two hundred for Officer and three hundred for Chevalier!⁵⁹ By the end of 1885, the promotion of government staff to honorary titles had become so common that the representative at the time believed that it was "customary that officers and employees were to be decorated after a six-month presence in Cambodia."⁶⁰ Handed out in ever greater numbers, royal honors inevitably lost some of their appeal, so that some local residents came to call it the "Banana Order" (*l'ordre de la Banane*).⁶¹ Notwithstanding this, local Frenchmen were keen to acquire the distinction, as is revealed by frequent references to order-related questions and requests in the archival record.

King Norodom still managed to occasionally slip in one of his own candidates among the stream of government awardees. In this manner, Raoul Marrot was rewarded on several occasions for his loyalty to the king in his disputes with the Saigon Governor, as Chevalier (1883), then as Officer of the Royal Order (1885), and finally as recipient of the *Médaille d'Or* (1889).⁶² Since in France foreign honorary distinctions were generally subject to state control and prior authorization, Marrot requested permission from the Chancellery of France's Légion d'honneur, while in Paris in 1884–85, to wear the medals in public.⁶³ The

authorization was not granted, due apparently to a technicality (the reason given was that the certificate lacked Marrot's first name). Only later did it become clear that at the time there had been a lively exchange of information between Saigon and Paris about Marrot's medals, and that there were plenty of other reasons apart from lacking names to warrant a refusal. Saigon apparently felt that Marrot should not be allowed to wear his orders in the presence of others, given his actions to the detriment of the French cause during 1884 and 1885.⁶⁴ In the perception of the colonial authorities, Marrot had forfeited his honor and was no longer entitled to lay claims to it by the public display of medals.

What kind of honor was it, precisely, that Marrot had lost? To answer this question, it is necessary to briefly sketch the evolution of the concept of honor in France during the nineteenth century, before exploring how it was applied in the particular context of Saigon and Phnom Penh.

Originally, honor was a concept that referred to the goods, land, and inheritance of the aristocracy.⁶⁵ Over time, the term became primarily associated with noble military service and the specific virtues that a good knight needed in the age of chivalry. "*Prouesse, loyauté, largesse, courtoisie, and franchise*" were qualities that helped him survive and thrive in an atmosphere of danger, in the company of a hierarchy of fellow warriors.⁶⁶ With the evolution of society and the demise of the feudal world, honor became associated with a set of rules that, in a more general sense, regulated relations between men, defining prevailing



Figure 7.3 Raoul Marrot's Cambodian Royal Orders: *Médaille d'Or, Chevalier, Officier* (Archives personnelles Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman).

ideas of manliness and marking boundaries for masculine comportment. Women had no place in this system of honor, except as appendages to the honor of men. Female honor consisted primarily of virginity and marital fidelity, in both instances qualities requiring the oversight of men.⁶⁷ As such, women could only lose their honor, while men, through proper deeds and behavior, could accrue ever more honor in the eyes of others.

As a new industrial order dominated by the bourgeoisie emerged in Europe, middle-class men adopted the qualities of manliness exemplified in the noble gentleman with, however, some revisions. Honor became less linked to blood lineages and more linked to wealth and social achievement, and the concept of honor came to incorporate the bourgeois preoccupations with moral discipline, work ethics, inner values, and the control of reproduction and sex, in order to first generate wealth and then retain it in the family.⁶⁸ The new political order opened up possibilities of power, wealth and honor to a greater part of society, but the appeal of the old aristocracy, or at least of its symbols and rites, did not lessen in post-revolutionary France. As part of these symbols and rites, the securing of honor remained a central requirement for the new elite, just as it had been under the former order. Napoleon I played on these aspirations by “ennobling” ever-greater numbers of commoners, thus fostering a loyal meritocracy of his own design.⁶⁹

The desire of commoners to transform themselves into gentlemen led to the emergence of a great many pseudo nobles, of whom Caraman and his father were typical examples. As contenders for honor increased, so did the risk of losing one’s honor together with the wealth and social position that had helped one acquire it in the first place. Bourgeois honor was more democratic but also more fragile than its noble predecessor, creating a more acutely felt sentiment of vulnerability in those attempting to defend it in the face of ever more frequent challenges.

In the France of the Third Republic, the republican credo put honor, in principle, within the reach of most men. As Robert Nye remarks, honor was no longer “a fetish of a tiny elite, but a quality of any Frenchman who was conscious of his civil dignity, jealous of his personal rights, who loved his fatherland and dreamed of revenge against its enemies.”⁷⁰ During the same period, the concept of honor became increasingly nationalized, particularly after the humiliating defeat of the French army by the Prussians during the war of 1870 and the ensuing loss of Alsace and Lorraine.

As the powerful new religion of nationalism and the fatherland emerged, it incorporated some of the symbolic materials that had played a role in the old system of honor. Aristocratic concepts of loyalty were reconstituted as faithfulness to the nation. Family honor became inseparable from love for the French motherland. While a man’s honor henceforth required that he display patriotism on the slightest occasion, private conflicts between commoners became similarly embedded within a discourse of honor, epitomized by the frequency of duels in late-nineteenth-century France.⁷¹ Similarly, the pages of Saigon newspapers from the 1880s contain frequent reports of duels, mostly resulting from disputes of the most trivial kind imaginable.⁷² Those most likely to lose their honor in the official interpretation of things – for instance former Cambodian opium czar

Dussutour or Caraman's co-conspirator Ternisien – figure prominently among Saigon's duelists.⁷³ In view of the astounding number of duels in Saigon even in the twentieth century, de Gantès notes that the colonial society appears to have been subject to a kind of “*survivilisation*.”⁷⁴

A resident of Saigon in the early 1880s retrospectively stated that he “had never seen a population so awkwardly overexcited than the one of Saigon”:

Above all, one has to be careful that in Saigon, the European population, a few exceptions notwithstanding, is composed of people of all nations and categories who have a fortune to rebuild, a blemish to make forgotten, a reputation to blot out: the movement, the activity, the gossip, and the eagerness become thus understandable that they put to work, so as to give themselves a new value and a new importance vis-à-vis their families or their creditors, their faraway motherland or the society close at hand.⁷⁵

Many decades later, Virginia Thompson remarked upon her visit to the French colonies that this particular quality of the colonial society had budged little since the 1880s. Just like the commentator above, she noticed that within the local society, colonists were primarily judged by the display they made, since all of them had come to the colony as entities unknown to each other.⁷⁶ Within this environment, a man with social aspirations could not escape others' judgments about his worthiness as a man of honor since the colonist's honor was often his only capital.⁷⁷

The locales where opinions about the honorability of others were formed and exchanged were places of male sociability: bars and restaurants, the balls and receptions given by the governor, the *cercles* and Masonic lodges, and the countless *amicales* of Corsicans, Bretons and other *originaires* of particular regions of the motherland, all of which flourished with particular abundance in colonial Saigon.⁷⁸ The indispensable criterion to accede to most of these was to be deemed an “*homme honorable*” by one's peers. Once accepted, the colonist could then mingle with other honorable men who would not only provide him with a sense of belonging but also with the necessary contacts and favors to ensure his economic survival. Without access to these places, any newcomer to the colony would have had a hard time getting anywhere, since in that respect, the Saigon of the 1880s was little different from the Saigon that Caraman had first visited in 1865. It was still a world of few real opportunities for Europeans, who remained for the most part dependent on the government and a minute group of merchant princes with means and power. Not to be judged an “*homme honorable*” in these circumstances was to be condemned to social isolation and economic ruin.

Whoever had the power to decide who was “honorable” and who was not had thus considerable power, and the precise prerequisites to qualify for honor were of great political salience. It is this fact that motivated the colonial government in trying to monopolize the capacity to define and allocate honor and honorability in Cambodia. As early as the late 1860s, Representative Moura prohibited his staff from associating with Le Faucheur and his peers, and henceforth briefed European newcomers to the Cambodian capital upon arrival that the local

community of European traders consisted only of vagrants and tramps, who were best avoided altogether.⁷⁹ Later on, the colonial state developed a more methodical approach to differentiate among worthy and unworthy colonists. In 1884, for example, two traders from Alexandria, Praire and Bléton, arrived in Phnom Penh with the following letter of recommendation in hand, addressed to the French representative by the Saigon Governor:

I believe that these gentlemen deserve not to be confused with the businessmen of every sort that are brought to us by the steamer transports at every moment. In this connection, my dear Fourès, make it your rule to beware of all those who come to you without a letter of recommendation of the government. In any case, I will take care to guide you, through a special mention about the value of each traveler.⁸⁰

While the allocation of government support according to the “value” of each colonist was nothing new, the French authorities had in the past only rarely attempted to actively demolish the reputation of residents. Luckless independent colonists such as Caraman were considered an embarrassment and a liability for French prestige; nevertheless they deserved support, at times perhaps censure, and occasionally pity. But however negative the views that the government held about particular citizens, it generally kept them to itself. Only under Governor Thomson did the idea take hold in government circles that

our worst enemies in these regions are less the armed bands combating our troops in Tonkin than the few *bad Frenchmen* who . . . gather keenly the exaggerations of language, the calumnious appreciations of the papers that are hostile to the government strategy and, in Cochinchina as well as in Cambodia, do not hesitate to serve clandestinely and even vis-à-vis our adversaries, as colporteurs of the most alarming news.⁸¹

To combat these enemies of the French cause, official reserve was no longer indicated. In March 1885, coincidentally one month before its *rédacteur-en-chef* Jourdan would be promoted Chevalier of the Royal Order of Cambodia, the *Saigonais* published a commentary that laid the responsibility for the Cambodian uprising squarely at the door of Phnom Penh’s *mauvais français*. The day would come, it argued, when the public would judge those

disappointed slanderers who, now that they can no longer approach King Norodom’s coffers and speculate on his vices and his degradation, revenge themselves upon those who they hold responsible for the failure of their anti-French strategy. Against and despite their [opposition], the convention of 17th June will be ratified; against and despite their opposition, [this affair] will be cleared up, and the only thing that will remain of this whole fabric of lies and infamies . . . will be the sickening memory linked to every bad deed once justice had been made.⁸²

With pressure on Thomson’s opponents mounting by the day, cracks appeared in their unified façade. Confronted with the increasing likelihood of a

government-sponsored public disgrace, Caraman was the first to abscond and make off with what remained of his reputation. In May 1885, Caraman published a letter in the *Saigonais*, absolving himself of any wrongdoing and blaming Ternisien for the conspiracy. Ternisien, in turn, publicly blamed Blancscubé, who in turn blamed Marrot. Still in France, Marrot forwarded select letters to the Saigon press confirming that Blancscubé was deeply implicated in the plot.⁸³ The details of the affair and allegations that the colony's most influential politician was involved in undermining the government left the Saigon public in shock. There was no social gathering anymore, no dinner, no casual encounter at the *cercle* or in one of the bars on the Rue Catinat, where the mention of those *mauvais français* could not be heard, accompanied by disapproving frowns.⁸⁴

In France, major newspapers picked up on the stories of the *mauvais français* and their dealings at the Cambodian court. Papers like the *République française* and the *National* concluded that Caraman and Ternisien's actions were simply "disgraceful," while the *Avenir des colonies* ran an article entitled "Les courtiers de Norodom," which ended on the following line:

What is clear is that he [Norodom] has found himself two Frenchmen, . . . in order to conspire against France, and that by way of their unspeakable intrigues they have given a pretext to the start of an insurrection which has already cost the blood of our soldiers. It is necessary that justice be made with these two adventurers. If there is no law that could punish them, at least they must not escape the contempt of the public.⁸⁵

There was indeed no legislation against dissent or public campaigns for a political position, even if it was an anti-government one. In the official reading of the Cambodian revolt, however, the critics of Thomson's coup d'état became responsible for the bloodshed in Cambodia, not the actual forced reforms themselves. The public did as it was told and drew a line between citizens and traitors. In the ensuing weeks, Caraman, Bras and the Marrots were blacklisted, while Blancscubé and Ternisien with some difficulty managed to partially reconstruct their shattered reputations, converting to a stance fervently in favor of the June Convention and skillfully using the press to bury their past blunders. Caraman, Bras and the Marrots' repute, on the other hand, was beyond redemption.

The Marrot family and Bras packed up their belongings and left Phnom Penh for France. Caraman decided to stay put but was now lonelier than ever. From the island Oknya Tey, where the government let him move again toward the end of 1885, he wrote occasional letters in which he fumed against the "infamous anti-French act" of the June Convention, following Thomson on the discursive terrain of patriotic honor/shame binaries.⁸⁶ The colonial authorities were to blame for the war: "those among our rulers who have never ceased to lie to the Nation in order to persuade it of ratification. They have dishonored France which has followed the maxim of Germany: Might is right (*la force prime le droit*)!"⁸⁷ The government, in turn, remained convinced that those "who had hoped, at the time of the conquest, that Cambodia would be given to them as



Figure 7.4 Raoul Marrot in his late years (Archives personnelles Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman).

their pasture” had not only become “a disgrace for France” but traitors to the colonial cause, and thus needed to be disposed of.⁸⁸

Upon their return to France, the Marrots bought a stately mansion near Toulouse, surrounded by fields, forests and meadows. Through adroit investment of their Cambodian savings, they managed to live as *rentiers* for the remainder of their lives. After years of changing fortunes, they had attained the dream of any French bourgeois, namely to be able to live off interest on capital accumulated in the course of a working life. The wife and son of a baker from the unremarkable village of Foix had become reasonably wealthy landowners. For them, the colonial promise had at least partially come true. They had achieved economic independence; however, the *honorabilité* that usually came with wealth remained beyond their reach.

Decades later and years after his mother’s death, the events of the 1880s still cast a long shadow over Raoul Marrot’s bourgeois existence. To be recognized as a full member of the honorable society of the rich and respected remained an obsession for him until his own death in 1920. Only months before his passing, he donated his entire estate to the state for the establishment of an agricultural college.⁸⁹ In appreciation of his generosity, he was promoted to the rank of

Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur and thus finally redeemed before the authorities and the public. A few weeks later, he took his last breath. Caraman family lore has it that Marrot died out of happiness because he had been declared an honorable man. Later generations of the family were told that their forefather Raoul, quite simply, “*est mort de bonheur*.”⁹⁰

Jarnowski's heart of darkness

Joseph Jarnowski no longer needed to aspire to honors and orders, since he had already amassed medals, pins and diplomas in good measure, starting at a young age. Almost two decades ago, he had won his first golden pin for best marksmanship in his unit, going on to win further distinctions during the colonial wars in Mexico and Senegal. He had steadily risen through the ranks, from corporal to sergeant to lieutenant. By the time he came to Saigon in late August 1883, to take command of a brigade of the Fourth Naval Infantry Regiment stationed in the colonial capital, he was a captain. There was a good chance that sooner or later he would be sent north to conquer Tonkin, a task that was almost certain to provide him with further medals and chances for promotion.⁹¹

Joseph Jarnowski was middle-aged by then, and an old hand when it came to colonial wars. A native of the southern French town of Toulouse, he came from a Polish family and perhaps still spoke French with a slight foreign accent. Documents in his personnel file suggest that he had been raised in Toulouse within a close-knit community of Polish-speaking refugees and that his family tended to keep somewhat separate from local French society. His foreign origins, in turn, perhaps played a part in his decision to join the army and thus secure a position in the host society through a military career. On the day of recruitment, the responsible officer apparently considered him an outwardly unremarkable adolescent. A ledger kept today at the army archives at Vincennes notes that a young Polish student called Jarnowski had signed up that day, a boy of medium height and without distinctive physical features apart from his pale gray eyes and a mouth that somehow seemed too small for his face.⁹²

Contrary to expectations, Jarnowski was sent to Cambodia instead of Tonkin, called upon to command the two units that marched through the streets of Phnom Penh in June 1884 to besiege King Norodom's palace. For his role in supporting Thomson's coup, Jarnowski was promoted to Officer of the Royal Order of Cambodia, skipping the intermediary stage of Chevalier. After the treaty had been signed, Jarnowski remained in Cambodia in charge of the regiment stationed in Phnom Penh. Responsible for the capital's defense, he mistrusted the apparent peace of late 1884. He was wary of Phnom Penh's Chinese community, and generally remained on alert regarding suspicious activities among the *indigènes*. He had had significant dealings with native peoples in Mexico, Africa, and in Asia. And whatever their look, tongue, or culture, as far as he was concerned, they were not to be trusted.⁹³

When the revolts began in January 1885, Jarnowski was not surprised. He called for swift action to stem the rebellion before it spread any further. Put at the head of one of the mobile columns fanning out from Phnom Penh into the countryside, he did his best to seek out and destroy the enemy wherever it could

be found. Until February 1885, he fought in the environs of Phnom Penh and Oudong, commanding units of up to one hundred marines and Vietnamese *tirailleurs*.⁹⁴ He then moved north with other mobile units, covering a wide area on both sides of the Mekong River between Kompong Cham and Kratie.⁹⁵

Jarnowski found it hard to engage the rebels during these months, and it was not until April that he first attracted the attention of his superiors by ritually decapitating a prisoner, a dignitary named Saur, who was said to be conspiring with the enemy. In doing so, Jarnowski imitated a practice used by rebels on a missionary earlier in the uprising.⁹⁶ Jarnowski was not officially reprimanded for his action but nevertheless warned of “serious inconveniences” if he should continue to “alienate through acts of violence the part of the Cambodian population whose participation in the troubles in the kingdom was not conclusively established.”⁹⁷ Governor Thomson subsequently issued orders “to soften to a certain extent the instructions given to the commanders of the columns, and to invite them to proceed, outside purely military operations, with less rigor and precipitation.”⁹⁸

However, events north of Cochinchina fundamentally changed the context of the revolt and its repression. The French lost an important battle against Chinese imperial troops near Langson in northern Tonkin. When news of the defeat arrived in Paris, the wave of public consternation led to the downfall of Jules Ferry’s government. For years, Ferry, together with Gambetta, had been the embodiment of the Third Republic. He was responsible for many of its great accomplishments in fashioning a French democracy and a state that had been separated from the church. Ferry and his political friends also, however, stood for the Republic’s increasingly aggressive stance in colonial matters, as a means to rehabilitate a France humiliated by the defeat against the Prussians in 1870.

Ferry had faced repeated criticism for his imperial adventures, from both radicals on the left and conservatives on the right. In the eyes of his many critics, the extension of the French Empire was achieved at the expense of a local political agenda, which should instead focus on the fate of Alsace and Lorraine.⁹⁹ The defeat at Langson, later rewritten as a tactical retreat, caused Ferry and his Ministers to be accused of high treason in Parliament.¹⁰⁰ While the true reasons for Ferry’s downfall went deeper than a lost battle on the Chinese border, the new government nevertheless went about its work with a refreshed sensitivity to the political repercussions of colonial wars. Governor Thomson was recalled to Paris “for consultations” and replaced in Saigon by General Bégin, who became the sole authority in the colony. Bégin soon demoted Representative Fourès to secretary general of the Protectorate, replacing him with the commander of the troops in Cambodia, Badens, as *résident général par interim*. Thus, Fourès observed powerlessly how the military put in place what one commentator would later call “the regime of the sword.”¹⁰¹

After a small detour to Pondicherry, Bégin arrived in Saigon in early June 1885.¹⁰² It is likely that in his briefings of Bégin the outgoing Governor Thomson dwelt at length on the recent successes of the expeditionary corps in Cambodia. Indeed, the fortress of Angko near Takeo in the kingdom’s south had been retaken only four days prior to the general’s arrival. In a bloody battle whose last

stage was fought with bayonets, the French had chased the rebels out of the fort, leaving behind a battlefield littered with dead and wounded combatants.¹⁰³ The press in Saigon cheered gleefully that “it was likely that this brilliant success . . . will put an end to the insurrection in Cambodia.”¹⁰⁴ If this were to happen, all the credit would go to the commander of the victorious battalion that had captured Angko: Joseph Jarnowski.

Together with two other mobile units under the respective commands of Commandant Klipfel and Captain Laray, Jarnowski had been working to pacify the area south of the Mekong River between the canal linking Hatien with Chaudoc to the east, the Elephant Mountains to the southwest, and the coastal line to the south. In between these natural barriers, flatlands of

brushwood next to vast expanses of land covered by tall grass alternated with large spaces, bare and uncultivated, and impenetrable thickets of trees, surrounded by water pools and marshes. Not one mountain to brighten up this landscape, really, nothing [could be] more monotonous, nothing sadder.¹⁰⁵

For the past months, the rebels had ruled this area uncontested; as a Saigon newspaper conceded in May 1885, “in this immense triangle formed by the three towns of Pnom-penh, Hatien and Chaudoc, the rebels are masters of the country.”¹⁰⁶

With the capture of the fortress of Angko, Jarnowski set up headquarters in Takeo.¹⁰⁷ His men were the sole inhabitants of the former town, since “there remained nothing else than a few huts” as a result of a blaze a few months earlier. “The population, made up mainly of Vietnamese, Malay and Chinese, has deserted,” noted a visitor that summer.¹⁰⁸ Jarnowski and his company set up a provisional camp in the former opium depot, a ramshackle structure of wooden planks, enclosed by a bamboo fence. They ventured out into the neighboring countryside to raid villages and hunt down alleged rebels. The enemy remained mostly invisible, but could attack at any moment. Whenever Jarnowski’s units believed themselves to have chased the rebels away, they suddenly reappeared in small groups of three or four behind their backs, attacking them from the rear, only to disperse and disappear in the next instant.¹⁰⁹ Jarnowski and his men received little or no support from local inhabitants and even less information concerning rebel whereabouts. At the same time, death revisited the camp with increasing frequency. Casualties among the French marines were not high but constant, with some succumbing to disease, while others died of injuries suffered in surprise attacks by rebels.¹¹⁰

In June, the rains set in. By early July, Jarnowski’s company was bogged down at its camp, huddled together under the thatched roofs of their sheds, waiting for the rain to stop. Expeditions far afield had to be abandoned, since the heavily armed French soldiers easily became stuck in waist-deep mud. Further south, Laray’s unit was similarly stuck in its post in Kampot, continually besieged by rebel forces.¹¹¹ The unit led by Klipfel had become hopelessly mired in a plain of swamps while marching to Kampot, and had to be evacuated to Chaudoc.¹¹² News and provisions became scarce. Located at a roughly equal distance from

the Mekong River, Phnom Penh and the coast, Takeo was theoretically linked to the capital and Saigon by telegraph, but rebels frequently cut the line. Supplies and news came from Chaudoc by boat, if at all, usually with several days' delay.¹¹³ Engulfed by "an immense sea covered by trees and sprinkled with islands," Jarnowski and his soldiers remained in camp, "isolated for four months, lost, immobilized, powerless."¹¹⁴

There was somewhat more activity on the rebel side. In a letter to *obbareach* Sisowath, who was at the time touring the country at the behest of the French, a rebel leader from the province of Treang demanded that "the French troops in Takeo return to Phnom Penh." Afterwards, he said, "we will obey you compliantly, and we will surrender our existence to you."¹¹⁵ As long as the French outpost stayed in Takeo, the rebels threatened to continue telling local populations that

the King and the second King are with the French, that one should not listen to the mandarins of these two Majesties, that today there remained only one leader in which the inhabitants could have trust, namely Sivotha, that one should listen also to the [rebel] leader of Treang. That the French have given orders to make a census of the cows and buffaloes in all villages, so that they can levy taxes for each farm animal, [and] that one should not bring wood to Takeo because the French want to construct a fortress there.¹¹⁶

Rather than giving in to the rebels' demands, Colonel Badens made Jarnowski *sous-résident* of Takeo, thus granting him the dual responsibilities of military commander and civil governor.¹¹⁷ Tasked with "preparing the definitive organization of our administration," Jarnowski began not only to wage war, but also to render justice and collect taxes.¹¹⁸ When the rains finally stopped, Jarnowski proved remarkably effective at these tasks. Agents of the newly established Service des contributions indirectes, the successor to the government opium concession, joined the soldiers in harassing local inhabitants, forcing them to pay their dues to the colonial budget, which in turn was used to pacify their homeland. A report by Chaudié, deputy inspector of the administrative and financial service of the navy, suggested that for the period from January to September 1885, the Protectorate's revenue actually exceeded expectations, regardless of the widespread unrest disrupting harvests and trade.¹¹⁹

While Jarnowski repeatedly emphasized that the presence of French troops was essential "to ensure . . . the collection of the taxes that are still due to the state," there was increasing evidence that he and his fellow officers were carrying their duties too far.¹²⁰ In Kampot, for instance, the new civil administrator Leclère found in 1886 that "certain farmers had to pay an amount that was in excess of the value of their entire harvest."¹²¹ Assisted by agents of the Service des contributions indirectes, who Leclère found to be "brutal and bland people, quite unscrupulous, very arrogant, pretentious and ambitious," the military commanders went to great lengths to meet the budget quota. Their job, in Leclère's eyes, increasingly resembled the "profession of pirate."¹²² At one point, Governor Bégin himself felt compelled to remind his overeager agents in Kampot that "in the wake of the disorders that have devastated this province, we

should not primarily preoccupy ourselves with safeguarding the interests of the treasury. It is important to gather together the population that the rebellion has scattered, to reconstitute the villages and to show clearly to the inhabitants that the creation of a *résidence* has as its primary objectives the protection of their rights and the concern for public prosperity.”¹²³

A report from 1886 notes, however, that forced tax collection continued, while state taxes were progressively supplemented by additional charges of a more private nature: “In Kampot, where the military authority has not conquered an inch of territory against the rebels and the pirates in more than a year, have we not seen, at the return of each expedition, how a veritable fair of stolen objects, jewelry, clothing, furniture, etc. was set up under the eyes of the superiors?”¹²⁴ Some officers were known to send home large amounts of money, far exceeding their pay, together with crates full of stolen bounty. Another officer, returning to Phnom Penh from Pursat in early 1885, was observed with “immense crates of Buddhas and precious objects taken from the pagodas and in the villages. He did not even bother to hide this, and showed them to whoever liked to see them.”¹²⁵

In addition to mounting evidence of looting and stealing, the occupying French army appears to have become more brutal the longer the rebellion lasted. French commanders took no prisoners, and suspected rebels were shot, while villages said to have given them shelter were burnt to the ground. In the summer of 1885, Thomson’s head of staff, Klobukowski, visited Cambodia to investigate the causes of the rebellion. After visiting an area of intense fighting in the kingdom’s east, he wrote back to his mentor in Saigon:

Based on which orders coming from Pnom-Penh do our columns operate? I don’t know, but the truth is that we pillage and set fire to the villages and pagodas, as such plunging women and children into misery, ruining almost completely a country we must administer, and alienating the monks who, throughout Cambodia, have observed an exceedingly correct neutrality . . . Since then, the entire population has turned against us, and one can rightfully say . . . that we had to combat a national insurrection.¹²⁶

As the war entered its second year, local resistance of the insurgents did not weaken, and a French soldier noted that “in reality, the general situation is bad. We lay claim to the domination of the country, but are blocked everywhere, and certainly the Khmer, Chinese and Malay are gloating over our impotence.”¹²⁷ At the same time, the *résident* of Kompong Cham informed Colonel Badens that “we cannot deceive ourselves; with the exception of a few points on the river where our partisans barely manage to hold out, the insurrection is master of the entire region.”¹²⁸ Since the onset of the hostilities, the number of French troops and indigenous auxiliaries had risen steadily to a total of roughly four thousand.¹²⁹ These well-equipped troops, however, had no answer to the challenge of guerilla warfare. Trained to confront an enemy in open battle at a determined place and time, the French were at a loss how to effectively quell this type of rebellion.¹³⁰ Those behind the insurgency remained obscure and fighters seemed to be at once everywhere and nowhere.

Despite months of bloody confrontation, the spirit of resistance seemed largely unbroken, while the inner organization and command structure of the insurgency remained a mystery to the French. In Takeo, Captain Jarnowski went so far as to imagine that all the traditional leaders of the province, as well as the Khmer soldiers of his own militia, were rebels at heart.¹³¹ This might explain in part the increasingly indiscriminate pacification campaign that he undertook in his sector. The villagers around Takeo suffered the brunt of his fury, and many fled to the forests. Those who stayed became witnesses to Jarnowski's growing appreciation of the esthetic quality of killing.

Since decapitating a prisoner near Kompong Cham some months earlier, Jarnowski had apparently grown to accept what he might have assumed to be established local practices of punishment. As a private of the colonial army who had participated in the repression of the revolt put it:

I have to say that this execution [beheading] is the rule: every Cambodian apprehended with a weapon in hand has his head cut off; this is a procedure that is [commonly] employed in this country, which we use only with regret, but of which we must make use; and as our nature feels repugnance about this job, we let it be carried out by the natives on our payroll.¹³²

Beheadings in regions under Jarnowski's control were far more frequent than in other regions of Cambodia where this type of death was reserved for leaders of the revolt.¹³³ In Takeo, the chopping off of heads followed Jarnowski's own erratic judgment:

Around Takeo, the severed heads pegged on pickets, and unfortunately renewed, showed from afar the effects of the terrible justice of the *sous-résident* [Jarnowski]. Nearly everywhere, people arrested without arms, by virtue of the denunciation of some native, of their embarrassed answers, of their bad appearance, sometimes because of phrases wrongly translated by an interpreter, were sent to their death after an interrogation of five minutes.¹³⁴

Jarnowski also acquired a reputation for abducting and raping women, and it appears that at least two reports on his crimes were sent to his superiors in Phnom Penh, one of which was mysteriously lost.¹³⁵ Whatever happened to these reports at headquarters, they seem to have remained without immediate consequence. No charges were ever brought against Jarnowski, who was replaced in Takeo two months later not because of his past misdeeds but in order to allow him to enjoy a well-deserved vacation in France.¹³⁶ The fifteen months spent in Takeo, during which Jarnowski and his men had burnt Cambodian villages, massacred local farmers, raped their women, and decorated the local landscape with severed heads on bamboo poles, were recorded in Jarnowski's personnel file with a laudatory entry about his "determination and initiative" and his "fine comportment."¹³⁷ A few months later, Jarnowski was nominated to France's most prestigious honorary order, the Légion d'honneur.¹³⁸

By the time Jarnowski left Takeo, it was becoming clear that the French

intervention in Cambodia was at an impasse. With pressure from Paris mounting to find an end to the conflict, it was necessary to admit that an end could only come through the active cooperation of King Norodom and the traditionalist palace faction, who had always been suspected by the French as principal instigators of the revolt. The new civilian Governor Filippini, who took up office in June 1886, thought it preferable to appease these forces rather than be caught up with an endless war whose outcome remained uncertain.¹³⁹ Through negotiations with the king, a proclamation to the Cambodian people was drafted and then repeatedly amended by Filippini, apparently

because it seemed ill-advised to me, in a document that was to receive a large publicity, to indicate too plainly the whole extent of the concessions that we have the intention to make. Such an admission would certainly be taken as a show of weakness and discouragement and could do great harm to our prestige.¹⁴⁰

The main points of the agreement included a reduction in the number of *résidences* to be established in the provinces, a promise that the French would stop substituting themselves for the Cambodian administration, and the continuation of a regime where the king nominated provincial governors and the latter collected taxes for the royal treasury, as well as an amnesty for former rebels.¹⁴¹

The staff of the Protectorate and military commanders in the field were soon informed of the agreement through a *circulaire*. Instructions sent along with it leave little doubt that the French faced, if not a defeat, then something very near to it. The *circulaire* reminded French officials that

this political evolution . . . is, on our part, not a step backward. We resume our role of protector, from which we should never have strayed away and which is incontestably the surest course to the goal that we aspire to here: to develop the commercial interests of our nationals and, at the same time, the kingdom's prosperity.¹⁴²

Those in direct contact with the indigenous population should take great care, the *circulaire* continued,

to explain clearly to the Cambodians who may question you, and only to those, that France does not shrink back in the face of difficulties, that it remains absolutely faithful to its civilizing mission in Cambodia, but that it insists on remaining in its role of protector and never had the thought to take possession of the country.¹⁴³

During the two-year war, the inhabitants of the Khmer Kingdom had gained new perspectives on the precise meaning of the “civilizing mission” to which the French had vowed to remain “absolutely faithful.” Leclère, arriving in Cambodia during the second year of the rebellion, put the number of war-related deaths among the population at 10,000, but the true figure may well have been higher.¹⁴⁴ In many regions, the fighting upset the seasonal rhythm of rice planting and led

to failed harvests and famine.¹⁴⁵ In Pursat alone, where the French suffered a series of military setbacks at an early stage of the rebellion, there is evidence that some forty thousand inhabitants were displaced by the hostilities, abandoning their homes and fleeing to Battambang province, which was at the time under Siamese suzerainty.¹⁴⁶ France's *mission civilisatrice* had been imploded by the conflict. While early administrators, such as Moura and Aymonier, had still believed with great sincerity and commitment in the mission's humanitarian promise, two years of bloodshed had exposed its rigid core of fear, violence, and greed.

The individual motivations behind the uprising are hard to decipher from remaining evidence. King Norodom and his half-brothers Sisowath and Sivotha were probably fighting their last battle over the Cambodian throne. Sisowath opted for the French, while Sivotha marched with the rebels; King Norodom attempted to play both sides of the revolt. Further down the hierarchy of local leaders, reasons for their involvement varied. In Takeo, for instance, Jarnowski's successor concluded that the French seizure of the kingdom's revenues was the principal force motivating local leaders to rebel.¹⁴⁷ It seems certain that provincial dignitaries, like many of their fellow mandarins in the capital, feared that the proposed reforms would end their traditional sources of income. Such fears were multiplied by general concerns over the reforms undermining the monarchy, and with it, the balance and harmony that had previously guided the administration of the country.¹⁴⁸

We can only speculate as to the thoughts of the peasants at the lowest social levels who joined the rebel ranks. Some may have done so because of the leadership of Sivotha, who still had supporters in wide parts of the country; others might have been forced to join; still others, perhaps, acted out of hope for bounty or a better life. Mostly, however, the peasants may have sensed what was in store for them if French rule extended further into rural areas. In the past, the advent of new rulers often meant increased taxes, which threatened the survival of rural communities. Such a suspicion would have been a convincing reason for resistance, and was indeed borne out by the later development of the French Protectorate.

The year 1887 began with renewed hopes for peace, but not everyone greeted this possibility with equal enthusiasm. For the French military, the war was a welcome opportunity for plunder, promotions, and improved prospects for retirement.¹⁴⁹ To more lucid local observers, it was "obvious, transpiring at every moment from every conversation . . . with a certain crowd of people, that the soldiers are furious to see that they are no longer needed, that the field of honor, where the rachitic laurels and the cheap crosses grow, is closed in Cambodia."¹⁵⁰ Others were displeased with the government's new leniency for commercial reasons. As the new *résident général* Piquet put it during a casual conversation on the verandah of the Protectorate building in the summer of 1887:

You see, there are people that are unhappy with the current order of things. [There are] the traders of Cochinchina and the officials that thought that Cambodia would be the cow that one could milk forever; then there are the Chinese traders in Phnom Penh who sold more when there were an additional fifty civil servants here, as well as a small army; the French

cafetiers who sold more absinth. And all these people resist; all these people are dissatisfied.¹⁵¹

By the end of 1886, hostilities were drawing to a close. By the time of New Year, there was calm throughout the kingdom. The French celebrated the beginning of a new era with a solemn New Year's Eve ceremony, during which both Piquet and King Norodom gave a speech. Later that evening, the French authorities invited the European residents and selected Khmer and Chinese dignitaries to the Protectorate offices for a festive reception and a ball. As the honorary guest, King Norodom sat overlooking a cheerful crowd of Europeans, dancing, smoking, and raising glasses to toast the prospect of peace and prosperity. The army officers, except for their commander, Colonel Chevallier, had declined the invitation. Around midnight, the officers appeared in front of the Protectorate building, yelling and shouting their dissent with what was being celebrated inside.¹⁵²

A few hours later, on New Year's Day 1887, Caraman died in a Saigon hospital. His time had run out, both physically and metaphorically. With the war of 1885–86, the pioneering period of the French colonial presence, with its illusions of humanism, its erratic politics, and its motley crew of gunslingers and carpetbaggers, had come to an end; after an intermediary period, a more bureaucratic, efficiency-oriented strain of colonialism would eventually replace it. Caraman had no place in this new colonial Cambodia, and perhaps he knew it. It may have been for this reason that he decided to stop breathing precisely on this historic day, as if he wanted to register his final disapproval.

Last dance

Caraman died less than two years after his deportation to Saigon. He had pleaded with the authorities for months to be released from “political detention” and allowed to leave Saigon.¹⁵³ By July 1885, Governor Thomson had been called back to France, Caraman's reputation as a *mauvais français* was firmly established, and the colonial authorities thus felt that there was scope for a final act of compassion. Caraman was allowed to return to the island Oknya Tey as long as he abstained from meddling in politics. He came home to an island that had been badly affected by the fighting. His indigo factory on Oknya Tey had ceased to exist. In early May 1885, rebel forces had landed on the southern tip of the island, setting fire to Caraman's house and the huts of his former associates Nam and Ozoux. The fire had raged for a day and a night and consumed the whole village, leaving nothing but a few blackened beams and bits and pieces of machinery, which the intense heat of the blaze had turned into “grotesque lumps of iron and copper.”¹⁵⁴

The month before, Thomson had allowed Caraman to pay a short visit to Cambodia for a few days to allow him to persuade “his” farmers that they should begin to grow maize and grapes instead of indigo. Caraman believed that the war in Tonkin would soon create a demand for maize to feed the horses of the French cavalry.¹⁵⁵ During his forced sojourn in Saigon, Caraman had also realized that his compatriots from Bordeaux and the Côte d'Azur missed the

good wines of their homeland. Because Caraman grasped that “the grape question is of great importance to the well-being of the French community,” he decided to become a winegrower in addition to planting maize.¹⁵⁶ With his base on Oknya Tey reduced to smoldering ruins, however, his plans were once again in jeopardy.

Caraman had no explanation for the arson of his factory. At the beginning of the revolt against the French presence in Cambodia, he felt that he of all Frenchmen had nothing to fear:

I’m afraid of nothing; I always knew how to win the Khmer people’s love; I have given it proof, for eight years, that I did everything to provide it with *cultures riches*. And, perhaps, I may say that this year: *teneo lupum auribus*. Whatever happens, . . . I will always be well received.¹⁵⁷

Despite warnings from the government that civilians should refrain from venturing into the rural areas, Caraman felt that “with disorder and latent rebellion overwhelming us, we must take the workers’ lead and show them that we don’t forget them.”¹⁵⁸ Never would he have thought that the natives, who in his view owed so much to him, would turn against him. Now that the unthinkable had come true, Caraman was filled with anger and bitterness over their ingratitude: “I have given Cambodia the best twenty years of my life, dreaming for it and its sovereign: the loftiest intentions under French influence, and look how I’m being treated!”¹⁵⁹



Figure 7.5 The former Grande Rue at the turn of the century. To the right, a pile of rubble indicates the place where Caraman’s house once stood (CAOM, Aix-en-Provence).

With no place to go back to on Oknya Tey, Caraman returned to Phnom Penh where he hoped to recover his former house on the Grande Rue. In the course of the last few years, however, the house had deteriorated rapidly as a result of the tropical climate and a termite infestation. Its decay had reached a point where one commentator noted: “Truly, one has to lack everything to dare live in such a hole.”¹⁶⁰ The *régie*, which had sequestered it for its own use, planned to raze the decrepit structure, replacing it with a decorative garden. There was thus no way that it would be returned to its former owner.

With Caraman wandering aimlessly through Phnom Penh’s streets, homeless and increasingly desperate, Pascual de la Cruz, the head of the king’s Filipino guard, at first offered to take him in.¹⁶¹ Later, Caraman moved to a room on the first floor of Larrieu-Manan’s bar from where he made occasional excursions to his islands.¹⁶² In numerous petitions, written from the islands as well as from his Phnom Penh hotel room, Caraman demanded that the authorities reimburse him for damages incurred by the burning of his factory.

The language in those letters became increasingly incoherent. In more lucid passages, Caraman raged against the injustice he had suffered, blaming Khmer mandarins who were jealous of his success, as well as the French administration for its refusal to compensate him. In other letters, rambling cascades of disconnected fragments were scrawled across the pages referring to “promises I was made,” “losses incurred,” “the future organization of Cambodia,” and “successful solutions.”¹⁶³ An internal government note from the period concluded sarcastically that “Monsieur Caraman is one of the oldest *colons* of Indochina; his moral senses have become completely obliterated; he has tried everything and has never succeeded; he strives to live” and in his extreme despair “is capable of everything, even a good deed.”¹⁶⁴

Caraman by this point was, at best, a case for charity, but no longer eligible for government grants or compensations. To keep on offering government funding to Caraman “who, during more than twenty years in Cambodia, has never produced anything useful, despite the numerous subsidies that he has been given,” would be equivalent to throwing good money after bad.¹⁶⁵ Toward the end of 1885, Caraman received his last grant from the colonial state, 300 piasters given “à titre gracieux,” as the government took care to stress.

In 1886 came the final blow. Unable to pay an installment on his island rent to King Norodom, and equally unable to repay his loans to the colonial treasury, Caraman was dispossessed of his property.¹⁶⁶ Island farmers were told to stop treating Caraman as the “*mekoh*,” or master of the islands, and were instructed to henceforth pay any monies due to Caraman instead to the Protectorate, which would deduct them from the amount that Caraman owed to the colony. With this final blow, Caraman’s latest experiments with new crops, such as tomatoes, radish, cabbage and plums, came to an end.

Still, Caraman publicized his experiments to “the *colons* of French Indochina” on handwritten leaflets, declaring that they “let [us] expect a serious success”; he promised to soon be able to deliver “all the garden vegetables from France, the Midi and Italy,” starting next season.¹⁶⁷ To fulfill this promise, Caraman planned to recruit 500 families in Vietnam to settle the island of Khsach Kandal, where he wanted to offer them land that was as yet “insufficiently

cultivated by the Khmer.”¹⁶⁸ For the last time, Caraman was able to presage what would later become an undeclared colonial policy. His plans proved worthless, however, for the government instructed inhabitants of the Mekong islands to disregard him: “Just see the effect on the peasantry (*les masses agricoles*), you’ve done me greatest harm,” Caraman wrote to Phnom Penh authorities. It was simply unfair, he continued, “to thrash in this way an unfortunate struggler.”¹⁶⁹

The last archival record from Caraman takes the form of two announcements offering for sale wood and kidney beans from Khsach Kandal, dated September and October 1886 respectively.¹⁷⁰ On 2 January 1887, two nurses, one French and one Vietnamese, entered the office of Saigon Mayor Carabelli to inform him that the previous night, a man named Frédéric Thomas-Caraman, planter, forty-five years old, had died in his hospital bed.¹⁷¹

Caraman was buried in Saigon’s municipal cemetery. His faithful friends, Raoul Marrot and Alexis Blanc, agreed to serve as the guardians of his son, Victor. Two days after Caraman’s death, Victor celebrated his tenth birthday in the Marrots’ house in France, unaware that his father had died. Victor would receive neither memorabilia nor money to remind him of his natural parents. Caraman’s possessions were quickly disposed of by a local *courtier* for a total sale of 14 francs and 3 cents. The personal belongings found in his Phnom Penh hotel room earned an additional 25 francs and 67 cents, hardly enough to pay for the *courtier*’s services.¹⁷² The only item of value in his inheritance was a diamond bracelet, which turned out to be fake.¹⁷³ A first overview of his debts showed that he owed more than 100,000 francs, but the precise amount of his obligations could never be established.¹⁷⁴

In the end, all that remained of Victor’s father was a photograph, showing him with a friend sitting in front of a blackboard, holding a monkey on his knees and a piece of chalk between his fingers. On the blackboard behind them, there was a sketch of a map of Central Asia and how it should be carved up between European colonial powers. The flourish of the letters betrays Caraman’s handwriting.

In 1894, Victor enrolled at the Ecole coloniale in Paris, the former Ecole cambodgienne, which the French had founded in the 1880s for the sons of Cambodia’s new Francophile elite, and which had in the meantime been transformed into a school for colonial administrators. He graduated honorably, hoping to be given a position in French Indochina’s fast-growing bureaucracy. He was said to be “anxious to be fixed up” with a well-paying job in the colonies, but waited in vain for more than two years without an opportunity presenting itself.¹⁷⁵ Eventually, well-placed friends had to intervene on his behalf, reminding the Ministry that Victor was “the son of a Cambodia colonist who had died *à la peine* after having worked a lot and made countless agricultural essays,” and recommending Victor to the government’s particular attention.¹⁷⁶ In the end, Victor was given a position with the colonial customs service and left France for Cochinchina in September 1899 to take up his new post in Mytho near Saigon.

In 1905, Victor was reposted in Phnom Penh. He now lived once again in the town of his birth and near where his mother lived, but it seems that he never made any attempt to meet her. Official archives and Caraman family lore remain silent about her fate. A couple of years later, his godfather, Raoul



Figure 7.6 Victor Thomas-Caraman (on the left) at home in Toulouse, with a relative, his wife Gabrielle, his mother-in-law Olympie and Raoul Marrot (Archives personnelles Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman).

Marrot, wrote that Victor's natural father had died many years ago and that today "there remained no one else of his family but me and my mother."¹⁷⁷ This phrasing reveals little; it could mean that Victor's real mother had died in the meantime or that, in the view of Victor's foster parents, she might as well be dead. The record instead shows that Victor decided to found his own family, marrying the daughter of a postman, twenty-one-year old Gabrielle Ribet, during a home leave in France. Following her new husband to Phnom Penh, Gabrielle soon gave birth to a son, whom the parents named Raoul, after Victor's foster father Raoul Marrot.

Victor's colonial career never took off, and little more than a decade later, in 1913, he decided to quit, apparently disillusioned and frustrated because he had repeatedly been sidelined when applying for promotions and new postings. He was granted early retirement, thanks in part to medical certificates by

one Doctor Maurel, the same Doctor Maurel who three decades earlier had organized Phnom Penh's *service des filles*, and whom Victor had apparently befriended in Toulouse.¹⁷⁸ Still only in his mid-thirties, Victor began working at the side of his foster father on a number of small commercial ventures, but for the most part joined him in being a *rentier*, living off savings that the Marrots had brought home from Cambodia. On their small but well-kept estate just outside Toulouse, Marrot, Victor and his wife Gabrielle together raised young Raoul, who was by now approaching adulthood.

In 1929, it was Raoul's turn to choose a professional career and he once again opted for the colonial service. Recruited as a clerk for the colonial postal service, he was sent first to Dahomey and then to Senegal, together with his young wife Irène Croizet, whom Raoul had married in Toulouse between two stints in France's African possessions. Back in Dahomey, Raoul found the tropical climate along Africa's West Coast uncongenial both to himself and to his wife and asked to be given a position in France. He was soon sent instead to French Sudan (today's Mali), alone this time, with his wife staying behind in France. By then, she was pregnant with a daughter, Marie-Thérèse, born in Toulouse in 1938.¹⁷⁹



Figure 7.7 The young Raoul Thomas-Caraman in uniform around 1930, flanked by two women friends (Archives personnelles Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman).

As had been the case for his father and grandfather, Raoul's colonial career did not work out according to plan. He never advanced beyond the level of a clerk tasked with receiving and dispatching parcels and letters and was posted in increasingly remote colonial outposts, the last being Kidal, a provincial town in Mali. Only rarely did he have compassionate superiors who noted that his lackluster job performance might have been a lack of self-esteem and confidence, and that with some encouragement, Raoul could have been more than just the "mediocre counter clerk" that less well-meaning bosses saw in him.¹⁸⁰ In addition, Raoul's marriage gradually disintegrated, in part because of his violent temperament, which led him to physically abuse his wife and his small child. By 1940, his wife Irène had decided to raise their daughter alone. She moved back to Toulouse and filed for a divorce, while Raoul continued to work in Mali. Home leaves became infrequent, and news from Raoul increasingly rare. In 1946, just before New Year, a telegram arrived from Africa: "Regret to inform death Thomas Caraman Raoul, postal clerk at Kidal . . . stop . . . born 25 September 1905, Pnompenh, Cambodia . . . stop . . . died 17 December 1946, Kidal, French Sudan . . . stop . . . cause unknown."¹⁸¹

"I would not be surprised if my father had wanted to die, *qu'il s'est laissé mourir*," Marie-Thérèse, my host, said pensively. "Perhaps he had lost his will to live. You see, despite his violence, I could always see his anguish, his suffering. But I found it hard to forgive him and had edited him out of my life at an early age. I remember a time in 1942, during the War, when he came for a visit to France: I was standing at the top of a flight of stairs, and he stood at the bottom. He looked up and said, 'I'm coming to see you,' and I replied that I had no desire to see him. He said, 'In that case, I'll go outside and throw myself into the canal,' and I replied he should go and do that. I was only four by then, but I knew what I was saying. At the end of the War, just when he was about to leave again for French Sudan, he once looked at me and said that he felt he was seeing me for the last time. A year later, he died in this godforsaken place somewhere in the African desert. We still don't know what it was that killed him in the end."¹⁸²

There was a pause. Marie-Thérèse looked at the documents piled up on the table, then at her mother sitting in the corner of the room, then at me: "Would you like to see some pictures? We have some old ones of the family that you may want to see."

She picked up a folder with black-and-white photographs of different formats and laid them out on the table. There were postcards from Cambodia from the early twentieth century, pictures of Victor on the Saigon pier and with the Marrots in front of their manor near Toulouse, and a studio photograph of a brash young Raoul, showing him in uniform, together with two good-looking young Frenchwomen.

"You see, I've always been interested in all this. Three generations of my forebears have lived in Cambodia, and then there is the mystery of my great-grandmother, the fact that I have some of this country's blood running in my veins. My mother and I are the first in four generations not to have gone to Asia. But you know, *toutes ces histoires, ça me fait rêver*, and sometimes I let my thoughts wander and imagine myself over there."¹⁸³

Epilogue

In 1983, somewhere in Vietnam's sprawling communist bureaucracy a decision was made regarding a vacant expanse of land located in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City, as Saigon has been named since 1975. An empty space in an inner-city neighborhood was to be reclaimed and developed. Construction workers were already starting to level the area with trucks and heavy equipment when the French consul intervened, reminding authorities that this plot of land happened to be the former French cemetery and asking for the decision to be reconsidered.¹ The consul's request was rejected, but the French were given a grace period during which they were allowed to retrieve whatever they felt worth retrieving from the gravesite. The remains of Francis Garnier and Doudart de Lagrée were among those selected for reburial by the consul, while the French government dispatched a warship and a helicopter-carrier to Saigon. A few days later, the urns of the two heroes were brought onboard these ships and a small ceremony held on the deck of the larger of the two, the *Jeanne d'Arc*. The commanding officer made a laudatory speech about the lives and deeds of the two dead men, while four other officers, swords in hand, formed an honor guard. After prayers and a rendering of "de profundis" by a naval choir had concluded the service, the urns, each covered with the Tricolor, were sent on their journey back to France.²

While Doudart de Lagrée and Garnier, together with the remains of a few early missionaries, traveled back to France, Caraman and other merchants from the early days of the French colonial presence were left behind. The consul's choice seemed perfectly reasonable and was never questioned. After all, Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier are icons of the French imperial endeavor, heroes who gave their lives for the good of the nation, names familiar to every French tenth-grader from history lessons on the colonial period. Caraman, on the other hand, was a perennial loser, a failure *par excellence*, and never had a place in the public historical consciousness. Apart from some passing references, he does not even figure in the corpus of scholarly work on the history of French colonialism. Why would one exhume him from the grounds of the Saigon cemetery; why dig him up from those dark corners of official memory where France puts away its historical figures of lesser value?

Caraman had envisioned himself at the center of the French colonial enterprise but instead ended up at its margins. He had started out as standard-bearer of the French cause and ended up a failure, an embarrassment, a traitor, a

“bad Frenchman,” unable to conform to the demands of ruling ideology. In the understanding of contemporary historians, his life would have been, above all, utterly forgettable. As we do today, these historians organized their accounts of French colonialism around certain frames of inclusion and exclusion and ordered them according to conventions of arrangement, interpretation, and presentation. Once this was done, Caraman’s experiences had fallen through the cracks.

However, tales that are conspicuously absent in historical accounts of a period would often have been the most revealing, since every historical account encloses the rules not only of historical remembering and forgetting of the reconstructed past but of the writer’s present as well. Inasmuch as historical remembering and forgetting is never a politically innocent act, such tales have the potential to be particularly illuminating with regard to the power structures that declared them too insignificant to be worth recording in the first place. This is why I consider Caraman, most forgettable of colonists in the official interpretation of things, an excellent vantage point from which to explore the first three decades of the French presence in Cambodia and the ideologies underpinning it. In the course of this book, I have tried to accomplish this in five different fields, five areas of the colonial encounter that at the same time formed part of his biography and were crucial to the establishment of French rule: education, justice, sexuality, *la mise en valeur*, and finally war and honor. In conclusion, I would like to offer some suggestions of a more general nature, which follow themes of the previous chapters but cut across them.

Life in a bubble

Caraman’s life and the lives of other colonial pioneers in Cambodia demonstrate that their physical proximity, even intimacy, with sections of the host society correlated with an almost complete detachment from this society’s world of meaning. The French largely lacked the capacity, and sometimes also the will, to understand their environment and to communicate successfully with their indigenous counterparts. French thinking and reasoning about the Khmer, the future of the kingdom, and their intended role as colonists remained for the most part confined to a closed system. Perceptions and policies were measured against expectations, hopes and commonly held truths rather than experience. Day-to-day experience constantly disproved the validity of their imagined Cambodia, but whenever the French set about to act, the Cambodia of their dreams proved stronger. French officials convinced themselves that they were liberators of an oppressed population, but never bothered to ask if the latter at all cared to be liberated. To develop the country’s resources, French traders launched project after project, which invariably collided at an early stage with realities that they refused to acknowledge. The style was pompous, but the results often futile. As a result, a distinct air of absurdity permeated the French presence in Cambodia, absurdity that stemmed, as Urs Bitterli has argued, from “the discrepancy between the laboriously maintained appearance of a claim to dominance and the indifference of the situation that one is supposed to dominate.”³

On the other hand, the colonists’ failure to come to terms with a Cambodia

that remained intangible and unmanageable turned eventually into a major cause for change. The longer their environment kept refusing to respond according to plan, the more the French exhausted their patience and resorted to more drastic methods and actions. The Thomson Convention of 1884 and the ensuing war marked only a first high point in this process. Perhaps the war came, for some Frenchmen, almost as a relief: fighting Khmer with guns rather than arguing with them with words, the French felt at least again familiar with the relevant parameters of communication.⁴

The centrality of local factors

While the French intervention in Cambodia can be understood as the result of a constant preoccupation with prestige and national pride (“the taproot of French imperialism in the Far East,” as John Cady once put it), most concrete steps toward an increase in French influence appear to have been brought about by the logic of the colonial encounter itself.⁵ Casually held together by shared convictions about French racial, cultural, and intellectual superiority and its humanitarian twin, the *mission civilisatrice*, local actors whose motivations were often similarly rooted in local contexts drove the colonial endeavor forward. The most effective strategies to advance French rule were authored by local representatives acting without precise directives from Saigon, let alone Paris – the best example being the undermining of the Cambodian judiciary, beginning in the 1870s. These strategies were perhaps based on a misreading of the local situation, but this did not keep them from becoming effective tools in furthering French dominance. Other, more visible feats of French interference – like the Thomson Convention of 1884 and, as a result, the war – had as one of their prime sources the local merchant milieu of Saigon and its powerful political pressure groups.

Behind the demands of the latter and, more generally, behind growing French interference in Cambodia lurked a feeling of unease and uncertainty, which affected local representatives of the colonial project far more than empire-builders in the *métropole*. There always remained a lingering doubt as to whether the French really had any legitimate business in this place, routinely silenced by ostentatious avowals to the contrary. Nowhere did this fear and the frantic activity to keep it at bay manifest itself more plainly than in the life of Caraman. His fear was of the same nature as the one haunting French officials in Saigon and Phnom Penh: that their colonial experiment might fail, something that the racist and supremacist ideology of the time could have acknowledged only at the price of its own demise.

This is not to say that metropolitan developments were without influence on the situation in the colony. The redefinition and reassertion of bourgeois standards of decency in early 1880s Phnom Penh, to cite but one example, cannot be understood separately from what happened in Europe. However, the social and intellectual dynamics created by a closed society ensured that metropolitan impulses were greatly modified in the process of reception and applied in ways that, in turn, make sense only if one takes into account the specific conditions prevalent at the time in the colonial milieu.

The chronology

The year 1884 does not constitute, as is sometimes argued, a break, abruptly ending a previous period of French passivity by virtue of a sudden bout of determination. Rather, it marks the culmination of a variety of evolutionary processes, some of which were by then already decades old. Since their onset, these processes had caused constant friction within the colonial society and between the colonists and their indigenous counterparts. Over time, enough heat had been created to ignite the formerly sluggish process of French intrusion, bringing about the radical changes of June 1884. Veiled by an apparent lack of interest and resolve in expanding French influence in the Khmer Kingdom, interference by local representatives was responsible for a gradual decrease in legitimacy of political institutions such as the judiciary. Their actions provided the colonial power with a better grip on patronage resources that could be used in bargains with the local elite. By the early 1880s, when opium and customs, two more sources of patronage and revenue, were about to pass into French hands, this process began to endanger former political alliances, in the palace as well as in business. Around the same time, the first successes of the Protectorate School can be observed in recruiting and training students for the colonial service.

The same period also saw the French government tightening its grip on the local community of Europeans, reasserting desired patterns of behavior and obedience. The push in the early 1880s to rein in the rowdy pioneer community and replace it with one made up of slick colonial bureaucrats was similarly part of a longer process that had begun in the 1860s as a government effort to gain greater legal power and disciplinary control over French citizens in the kingdom.

To some extent, the same can even be said about the reforms of 1884, including those affecting the traditional land regime and the social institution of debt slavery. They might appear as a radical rupture with the past, but they do have their less visible antecedents in ill-fated commercial and industrial initiatives such as those attempted by Caraman on his island Oknya Tey. Thomson's reforms were, on the one hand, the long-awaited response to two decades of colonial commercial failure and, on the other, the seamless continuation of two decades of political subversion. As such, they only brought to the surface what had long matured underground. It is thus misleading to take the year 1884, or as some authors do, 1897, as the 'actual' starting point of the colonial period in Cambodia, separating it from previous "years of colonial powerlessness."⁶ Some of the most important steps in establishing French rule had occurred well before these dates.

The plethora of actors and motives

The colonial encounter in Cambodia was no two-sided confrontation between a conqueror and indigenous populations united behind their king, but rather a busy marketplace where temporary coalitions were made, abandoned, and remade between a large number of relatively independent participants. In the struggle for power in the kingdom, the Chinese business elite, the Khmer-Portuguese, the Cham, missionaries, Vietnamese migrants from Cochinchina,

the palace community, provincial mandarins, the representatives of the colonial state, and finally the local community of European traders all had their own interests at stake; and these could lie on either side of the colonial divide at different times. Consequently, the emerging map of alliances turns out to be a rather untidy affair. Leading members of the local elite, such as Alexis Chhun and Col de Monteiro, collaborated with the French, while Phnom Penh's European *déclassés* became over the years valued partners for King Norodom and the traditionalist palace faction in opposing the advance of French rule. Variably facilitators, profiteers, and saboteurs, Phnom Penh's European traders played a central part in this drama. The fault line between the camps for and against a further increase in French control crisscrossed the European and the indigenous communities. As is well known from Osborne's work, the same rift also divided the royal family, Sisowath promoting himself from early on as a compliant and pro-colonial alternative to his independent-minded half-brother Norodom.

Governing the Khmer Kingdom was a fragile and precarious process. The capacity to rule depended on the number and nature of followers recruited among its diverse populations, who in turn had to be provided with resources in exchange for loyalty. King Norodom was aware that power could not simply be imposed but had to be negotiated in a continuous process of give and take, which explains his obstinate resistance to yielding control over those state resources traditionally used for patronage. The French were less adroit at this game, even though representatives like Moura and Aymonier showed a certain capacity to use the rules of the system to their advantage.⁷

Any meaningful analysis of the Protectorate period thus needs to take into account the micro-politics of the local setting as well as the manifold and often contradictory linkages with the colonial theaters in Saigon and the *métropole*. Among the colonizers as well as among the colonized, neither a common outlook, nor a coherent strategy – not even a degree of solidarity in fact – can be taken for granted. Unifying discourses presenting the colonial process in Cambodia as an encounter between 'the' colonial power and 'the' indigenous society would be likely to obscure more than they reveal.

Colonizing the others, colonizing one's own

Lastly, the tales of Caraman and his fellow merchants illustrate that colonizing indigenous communities was intricately linked to the inner restructuring of colonial society itself. The colonial project stood not only for French supremacy over Khmer, Chinese and Vietnamese, but also for a particular form of society. In this new society, not only Asians needed to be circumscribed, disciplined, and repressed, but Europeans, too. Officially, it was claimed that

it does not matter much, if we have come to these faraway lands in search of wealth or under the flag: industrialists and merchants, *colons* and missionaries, mariners and soldiers, we all are, in different ways, responsible in solidarity for the results of the new colonial experiment endeavored by France.⁸

And yet, it was precisely these differences that mattered. Not everyone was welcome to join the game. Behind the front of solidarity and common goals, the colonial government went to great lengths to police poor white women and men who kept undermining French prestige, and to make sure that the colonial venture remained overall a “middle-class phenomenon.”⁹

The healthy and vigorous bourgeois society that French empire-builders had in mind for the colonies was designed in contrast to other races, but also to the lower classes of the settler society. Danger loomed on two opposite fronts. Those aspiring “advanced natives” (*indigènes évolués*) who, like Truong-vinh-Ky and Alexis Chhun, took the French and their promise of future *assimilation* at their word would over time become accepted as full citizens, and thus would turn themselves into Frenchmen. On the opposite side stood poor colonial Frenchmen, incapable of leading a proper white existence of privilege and standing, who embodied an even greater threat: that over the long term, the French *colon* “would not remake a colonized space but be remade himself as a native.”¹⁰ At the center of this concern stood cross-racial relationships and the growing number of *métis* in Phnom Penh and Saigon.

From the 1880s, the colonial state began to do away with all instances of *promiscuité* between races and classes in Phnom Penh’s minute colonial society. Boundaries and hierarchies were reasserted, certain compartments encouraged and others outlawed, while unredeemable subjects became further marginalized. When those latter subjects resisted the political changes imposed by Thomson, the state felt confirmed in its opinion that these elements were indeed “bad Frenchmen.” They lacked “honor,” the central prerequisite for being counted among the accepted members of colonial society. As such, they fulfilled henceforth the role of the outcast already beyond the pale, the anti-type that every closed society needs in order to reassert its values and rules, a warning to all those who might be tempted to stray from the path.

Appendix

European traders in Cambodia during the early Protectorate period

<i>Name</i>	<i>Arrival in Cambodia*</i>	<i>Year of death</i>
Piram	?	1874
Thomas, Alex.	?	1879
Treffé	?	1878
Aspési	?	1874
Aubriot	?	1896
Gelley	1861	
Imbert	1864	1872
Le Faucheur	1864	1874
Thomas-Caraman	1865	1887
Rosenthal	1869	1888
Ferrer	1871	
Edward	1872	
Lallemand	1872	
Mercuriol	1872	1896
Garcerie	1872	1890
Blanc	1873	1890
Cadet	1873	1887
Roustan	1873	
Bailly	1874	
Brou	1874	
Faraut	1874	1911
Guéno	1875	
Marrot, Marie Antoinette	1875	1905
Marrot, Bernard (Raoul)	1875	1920
Coste	1876	1886
Fourcros	1876	1882
Hunter	1876	
Russel	1876	1911
Vaillant	1876	1876
Bras	1877	
Guérin M. & Mme	1877	1888/92
Molt	1877	1883
Muller M. & Mme	1877	1882
Rueff	1877	

European traders in Cambodia *continued*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Arrival in Cambodia*</i>	<i>Year of death</i>
Vandelet	1878	1912
Marchand	1878	
Berthier	1879	
Andrieu	1880	
Dumas	1880	
Kirchhoff	1880	
Brunet	1881	1884
Cazeau	1881	
Fontaine	1881	
Larrieu-Manan	1881	1888
Montagu	1881	1885
Ozou	1881	
Rogge	1881	
Chaalons, Jules	1881	1883
Chaalons, Victor	1881	
Citti	1882	
Devaal	1882	
Dehenne	1882	1884
Patou	1882	1894
Pelletier	1882	
Bruel	1883	1884
Dussol	1883	
Génévoix	1883	
Grégoire	1883	1888
Mermier	1883	
Chabannes	1884	
Praire	1884	
Charpentier	1885	
Clerc Mme	1885	
Hartmann	1885	
Klinger	1885	
Meyer	1886	1888
Viel Mme (Félicite)	1886	
Bellon	1887	
Binot	1887	
Féraud	1887	
Rosset	1887	
Leriche	1888	
Mougeot	1888	
Crochet	1889	
Evrard M. & Mme	1889	
Lasserre M. & Mme	1889	1889/?
Laval M. & Mme	1890	

* Approximate year of arrival where known/year of first appearance in the archival record.

Representatives of the Protectorate and Governors of Cochinchina 1859–87

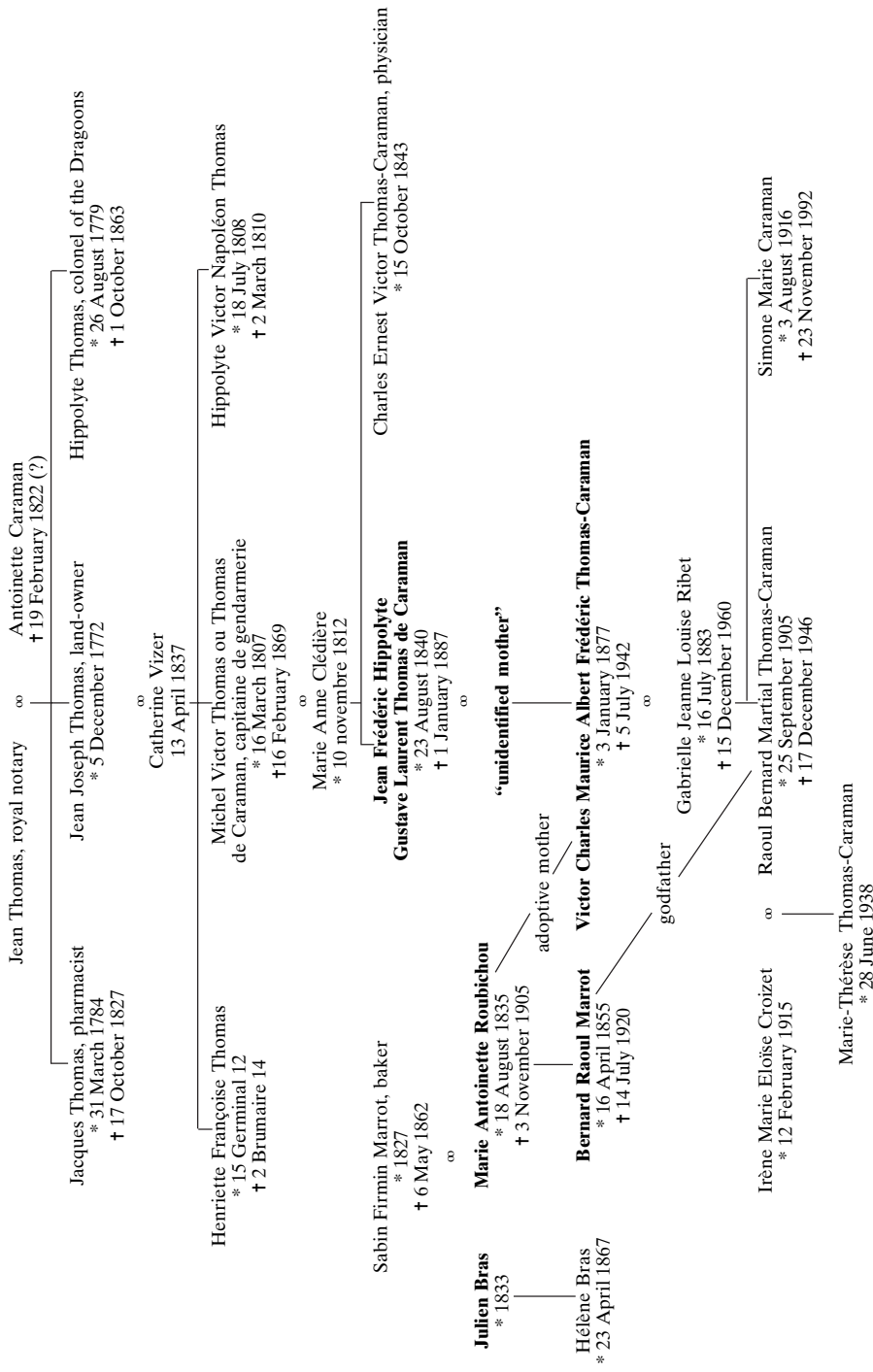
Representatives of the Protectorate

1863–66	Doudart de Lagrée
1866–68	Pottier
1868–79	Moura
1879–81	Aymonier
1881–85	Fourès
1885–86	Badens
1886–87	Piquet

Governors of Cochinchina

1859	Rigault de Genouilly
1859–60	Page
1860–61	Ariès
1861	Charner
1861–63	Bonard
1863–65	de la Grandière
1865	Roze
1865–68	de la Grandière
1868–69	Ohier
1870	Faron and Cornulier-Lucinière
1871–74	Dupré
1874–75	Krantz
1875–77	Duperré
1877–79	Lafont
1879–81	Le Myre de Vilers
1881	Trentinian
1881–83	Le Myre de Vilers
1883–85	Thomson
1885–86	Bégin
1886–87	Filippini
1887–88	Piquet

Genealogical table of the Thomas-Caraman, Marrot, and Bras families



Notes

Introduction

- 1 Conversation with Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman and Irène Croizet, Toulouse, July 2001.
- 2 Milton Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and response 1859–1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969).
- 3 Since the fall of Pol Pot, only a handful of books touching on the colonial period have been published or are forthcoming, notably those by David Chandler, Ben Kiernan, Alain Forest, Marie-Alexandrine Martin, Charles Meyer, Ingrid Muan and Penny Edwards. With the exception of two forthcoming volumes by Muan and Edwards, they are essentially based on research from before the Khmers Rouges Regime or else contain no sources from the National Archives of Cambodia. See David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), and *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, war, and revolution since 1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot came to Power: A history of communism in Kampuchea, 1930–1975* (London: Verso, 1985), and *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea 1942–1981* (London: Zed Press, 1982); Alain Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française: Histoire d'une colonisation sans heurts (1897–1920)* (Paris: Harmattan, 1980); Marie-Alexandrine Martin, *Le mal cambodgien: Histoire d'une société traditionnelle face à ses leaders politiques 1946 – 1987* (Paris: Hachette, 1989); Charles Meyer, *La vie quotidienne des Français en Indochine 1860–1910* (Paris: Hachette, 1985). Muan and Edward's forthcoming volumes are based on their PhD theses: Ingrid Muan, "Citing Angkor: The 'Cambodian Arts' in the age of restoration 1918–2000" (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2001); and Penny Edwards, "Cambodge: The cultivation of a nation 1860–1945" (PhD thesis, Monash University, 1999). See also John Tully, *Cambodia under the Tricolour: King Sisowath and the mission civilisatrice (1904–1927)* (Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, 1997), and *France on the Mekong: A history of the French Protectorate in Cambodia* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 2003).
- 4 On the history of the National Archives of Cambodia, see Peter Arfanis and Helen Jarvis, "Archives in Cambodia: Neglected institutions," *Archives and Manuscript* (Australia) 21, no. 2 (1993); Peter Arfanis, "Archives at risk in Cambodia" (paper, Australian Society of Archivists Annual Conference, Brisbane, July 1999). For information on collections, see the National Archives of Cambodia's web site at www.camnet.com.kh/archives.cambodia.
- 5 Nicholas Thomas and Richard Eves, *Bad Colonists: The South Sea letters of Vernon Lee Walker & Louis Becke* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
- 6 Frances Gouda and Julia Clancy-Smith, "Introduction," in Gouda and Clancy-Smith, eds, *Domesticating the Empire: Race, gender, and family life in French and Dutch colonialism* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 3.
- 7 For bibliographic essays tracing the evolution of these new approaches to colonial

- histories, see for instance Thongchai Winichakul, "Writing at the interstices: Southeast Asian historians and postnational histories in Southeast Asia," in Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee, eds, *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), 3–29; Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the intimate in colonial rule* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 1–21; Gyan Prakash's introduction to his edited volume *After Colonialism: Imperial histories and postcolonial displacements* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–20; Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, "Between metropole and colony: Toward a new research agenda," in Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial cultures in a bourgeois world* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 1–56; Catherine Hall, ed., *Cultures of Empire: A reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1–33.
- 8 For a recent example, see Brian Keith Axel, ed., *From the Margins: Historical anthropology and its futures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).
- 9 Winichakul, "Writing at the interstices," 11.
- 10 Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking colonial categories: European communities and the boundaries of rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989): 135–6.
- 11 Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, travel and government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 159.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 13 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Ohier, 25 August 1869. The term "filthy affairs" is an annotation by Ohier.
- 14 Governor of Cochinchina Filippini as quoted by Leclère, in Leclère's Diary, entry of 18 July 1886.
- 15 "The White Man's Burden," poem by Rudyard Kipling, first published in *McClure's Magazine* (1899).

1 Ideas and origins, 1840–67

- 1 *Courrier de Saigon*, 5 January and 20 January 1865.
- 2 Archives de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille (Dépôt des archives des Messageries Impériales/Messageries Maritimes): Lr Captain Massenet to Director of Messageries Impériales, 5 December, 18 December 1864, and 25 February 1865.
- 3 Caraman's physical appearance as a young man is recorded in Archives de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes, registre de matricule 34YC 2464, entry no. 9941: Thomas Jean, Hypolite [*sic*], Frédéric, Gustave.
- 4 CARAN, F17: 2950: Lr Chevreul to Caraman 5 December 1863; Lr Truong-vinh-Ky to Caraman, 7 November and 8 November 1863.
- 5 *Courrier de Saigon*, 1 January 1864, 5 July 1865, advertisements section.
- 6 Information on shops taken from commercial advertisements in *Courrier de Saigon*, various issues 1864 and 1865.
- 7 Lr Savin de Larclause to his sister Clara, 26 February 1859, in André Baudrit, "Correspondance de Savin de Larclause, officier d'infanterie de Marine, concernant les campagnes de Chine et de Cochinchine et les premières années de la Cochinchine française," *Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises*, nouvelle série, XIV, no. 3/4 (Saigon 1939): 70–1.
- 8 *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 January 1865. For descriptions of Saigon during this period, see Charles Lemire, *Cochinchine française et Royaume de Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel, 1877, 1st edition 1869), 155–76; Eduard du Hailly, "Souvenirs d'une campagne dans l'Extrême Orient," *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 October 1866: 893–924; Adolf Bastian, *Die Voelker des oestlichen Asien: Studien und Reisen von Dr. Adolf Bastian. Vol. IV: Reise durch Kambodja nach Cochinchina* (Jena: Costenoble, 1868), 429–30; P. Cultru, *Histoire de la Cochinchine française, des origines à 1883* (Paris: Challamel, 1910), 182–3.

- 9 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 7 January 1865.
- 10 Archives de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes: Dossier de pension 4Yf 29349: Hyppolite [sic] Thomas.
- 11 Ernest Lavisse, *Histoire de la France contemporaine depuis la révolution jusqu'à la paix de 1919*, vol. 6 (Paris: Hachette, 1921), 385.
- 12 Archives de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes: Dossier de pension 4Yf 57647: Michel Victor Thomas.
- 13 Christophe Charle, *Histoire sociale de la France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 208–10; Lavisse, *Histoire de la France contemporaine*, vol. 6, 385.
- 14 David Higgs, *Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France: The practice of inequality* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 124.
- 15 Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848–1945*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 16.
- 16 *Gazette des tribunaux*, 17 May 1868: Trial of Michel Victor Thomas for taking up a false name and title. The professions of Caraman's ancestors were taken from entries concerning his family in Bibliothèque municipale de Laval: Registre des baptêmes de l'Eglise de St. Alain, Laval; and Registre de l'état civil de Laval, naissances et mariages. On the family Riquety de Caraman, see *Notice sur la maison Riquet de Caraman* (Paris: Ernest Bourges, 1877).
- 17 *Dictionnaire historique et géographique du département de la Creuse, contenant la description générale du département* (Aubusson: J. Bregère, 1882), VI.
- 18 See Alain Corbin, *Archaïsme et modernité en Limousin au XIXe siècle 1845–1880* (Limoges: Presses universitaires de Limoges, 1998), a superb study of nineteenth-century central France. On agriculture, see pp. 21–31, 429–56. On seasonal migration, see pp. 177–204.
- 19 *Dictionnaire historique et géographique du département de la Creuse*, VII.
- 20 On the slow development of the road and railway network in the Limousin and the subsequent “psychose de l'isolement,” see Corbin, *Archaïsme et modernité en Limousin*, 119–51.
- 21 Corbin, *Archaïsme et modernité en Limousin*, 321–53.
- 22 Corbin, *Archaïsme et modernité en Limousin*, 91–100.
- 23 Bibliothèque municipale de Laval: Registre de l'Etat civil de Laval: Décès de Henriette Françoise Thomas le 2 brumaire 14; Décès de Hypolite [sic] Victor Napoléon Thomas le 2 Mars 1810.
- 24 Georges Dauger and Daniel Dayen, *Histoire du Limousin contemporain: Corrèze, Creuse, Haute-Vienne de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris: Lucien Souny, 1997), 66–82.
- 25 Caroline Girard, “Les sociétés d'originaires et la réponse à l'image noire du Limousin à travers ‘Le Limousin de Paris’, journal de la colonie limousine de Paris,” in Gilles Le Béguec and Philippe Vigier, eds, *Limousins de Paris: Les sociétés d'originaires du Limousin sous la IIIème République* (Limoges: Presses de l'Université de Limoges et du Limousin, 1990), 53–5. The literal translation of “oies” is “geese.”
- 26 Anonymous, *Schilderung der Provinz Limousin und deren Bewohner: Aus dem Tagebuch eines Preussischen Offiziers in französischer Kriegsgefangenschaft* (Berlin: Maurer, 1817). The language spoken in the Limousin at the time was the local *patois*. French had to be learnt as a second language. Monsieur de Pourceaugnac is a character from a comedy by Molière, a *Limousin* who comes to Paris where his personality clashes with his new urban environment.
- 27 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fleurier to Governor Ohier, 15 November 1868. Fleurier was a former boat mechanic who met Caraman in Phnom Penh and later returned to Paris to work with him. He subsequently spent several months with the Caraman family.
- 28 Bibliothèque centrale du Lycée Louis-le-Grand: Registre des entrées 1861/62.
- 29 Archives de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes: 34YC 2464: Registre de matricule du 54

- régiment, no. 9941: Thomas Jean Hypolite [sic] Frédéric Gustave; 31YC7 5764: Registre de matricule du 1er régiment des grenadiers de la Garde Impériale, no. 5764: Thomas, Jean Hypolite [sic] Frédéric Gustave.
- 30 CARAN: F17: 2950: Certificate signed by Garcin de Tassy, professor at the Ecole Impériale et spéciale des langues orientales vivantes, 8 December 1863.
- 31 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Governor of Saigon, 24 March 1870. Communication to the author by the Ecole Polytechnique, April 2000.
- 32 Milton Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and response 1859–1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 27–9, 61–2; Etienne Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine sous la Restauration et le Second Empire* (Bordeaux: Delmas, 1965), 167–8.
- 33 *Le Moniteur universel: Journal officiel de l'Empire français*, 14 September 1863.
- 34 *Le Moniteur universel*, 4 October 1863 and 8 October 1863.
- 35 *Le Moniteur universel*, 14 September 1863.
- 36 *Le Moniteur universel*, 5 October 1863.
- 37 Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1st edition 1859/1860).
- 38 Henri Mouhot, “Voyages dans les royaumes de Siam, de Cambodge, de Laos et autres parties générales de l’Indo-Chine,” *Le Tour du Monde*, no. 2 (1863): 219–352; published in English the following year as *Travels in the Central parts of Indochina (Siam), Cambodia and Laos in 1856, 1859 and 1860* (London: John Murray, 1864). For a compelling analysis of the cooperation and conflation of science, travel/exploration literature, conquest and colonialism, see Mary Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), particularly pp. 15–37, 201–13.
- 39 Arthur Gobineau, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, 3 vols (Paris 1853–55).
- 40 Jean Meyer and Jean Tarrade, *Histoire de la France coloniale, tome I: Des origines à 1914* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991), 480–4.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 488–94.
- 42 AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 1: Lr Eymond & Delphin Henry to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 21 August 1863. On the role of the French trader lobbies in furthering French imperialism, see Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, *Indochine: La colonisation ambiguë (1858–1954)* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995), 30–3.
- 43 Napoleon’s speech was reprinted in *Le Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 6 November 1863. See also John Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1954), 274–5, 279–80.
- 44 Charles de Paravey, *Du Royaume fort riche de Tchîn-La ou du Cambodge près Saïgon et de l’importance de son occupation* (Paris: Donnaud, 1864), 3–7.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 6
- 46 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 48 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 1 December 1865. See also Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A history of French overseas expansion* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 103–4.
- 49 For the importance of disseminating (*vulgariser*) positive news on the colonies among the metropolitan public, see for instance Théophile Bilbaut, *Le canal de Suez et les intérêts internationaux: La Cochinchine française et le Royaume de Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel, 1870), 22.
- 50 Dominique Lejeune, *Les sociétés de géographie en France et l’expansion coloniale au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993), 73, 81.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 “Extraits des procès-verbaux des séances: Séance du 16 octobre 1863,” and “Séance du 6 novembre 1863,” *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, 5e série, 6 (July–

- December 1863): 347–55. Ky’s “Notice sur le royaume kmer ou Kambodge” was also published in vol. 6 (1863) of the SGP’s bulletin.
- 53 For more on the relationship between Catholic missionaries and French conquest, see for instance Patrick Tuck, *French Catholic Missionaries and the Politics of Imperialism in Vietnam 1857–1914: A documentary survey* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1987); Jean Guennou, *Missions Etrangères de Paris* (Paris: Sarmant-Fayard, 1986); and the magisterial, if somewhat biased, work by the missionary Adrien Launay, *Histoire générale de la Société des Missions Etrangères*, 3 vols (Paris: Téqui, 1894).
- 54 *Courrier de Saigon*, 10 January 1864.
- 55 See numerous letters in the MEP on the issue of government subsidies in vol. 755 for the year 1865.
- 56 Du Hailly, “Souvenirs d’une campagne,” 910.
- 57 Lemire, *Cochinchine française* (1869), 270–1.
- 58 Anne Madelin, “Pétrus J.-B. Truong-vinh-Ky (1837–1898): Un lettré cochinchinois entre deux cultures” (MA thesis, Université Paris VII, 1995), 8.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 60 *Courrier de Saigon*, 5 April 1865.
- 61 Madelin, “Pétrus J.-B. Truong-vinh-Ky,” 59.
- 62 A complete bibliography of Ky’s oeuvre is to be found in Madelin’s thesis.
- 63 For more on Truong-vinh-Ky see Madelin, “Pétrus J.-B. Truong-vinh-Ky,” and Milton Osborne, “Truong Vinh Ky and Phan Thanh Gian: The problem of a nationalist interpretation of nineteenth century Vietnamese history,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 30, no. 1 (November 1970): 81–93.
- 64 AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 1: Lr Caraman to Emperor Napoleon III, 4 November 1863.
- 65 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Pétrus Truong-vinh-Ky to Caraman, 7 and 8 November 1863.
- 66 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Pétrus Truong-vinh-Ky to Caraman, 7 November 1863.
- 67 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Pétrus Truong-vinh-Ky to Caraman, 8 November 1863.
- 68 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 11 November 1863.
- 69 For the wide-ranging correspondence on the preparation of Caraman’s travels during the year 1864, see the collection of letters in CARAN: F17: 2950, for instance: Lr Minister of the Marine and Colonies to Minister of Education and Culture, 3 January 1864; Lr Administration des Services Maritimes des Messageries Impériales to Minister of Education and Culture, 11 October 1864; Lr Minister of Education and Culture to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 8 November 1864.
- 70 All details in this paragraph taken from Archives de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille (Dépôt des archives des Messageries Impériales/Messageries Maritimes): Lr Captain Massenot to Director of Messageries Impériales, 5 December 1864 and 25 February 1865.
- 71 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 7 January 1865.
- 72 *Ibid.*
- 73 *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 December 1864.
- 74 *Ibid.*
- 75 *Courrier de Saigon*, 1 January 1864.
- 76 *Ibid.*
- 77 The merchant house of Ségassie first appeared on the local scene in 1860 as a cattle-trading establishment. The following year, Ségassie bid on Cochinchina’s opium concession and won out against competition from the Chinese merchants Wang Tai and Banhap. Ségassie thus became the first opium baron of occupied Saigon with the right both to run the *bouilleries* where raw opium was prepared for consumption and to oversee a network of retailers catering to individual consumers. Profit margins

- were high and the demand assured. Many observers believed that rewards would be quick and abundant. According to accounts that Ségassie presented to the naval administration during the first year of operations, however, his company had run up considerable deficits. After an official inquiry found evidence of fraud, Ségassie and his colleagues were tried in front of a military court. Ségassie was sentenced in absentia to five years of forced labor. Apprehended in France on the basis of an arrest warrant, he was shipped back to Cochinchina on a government craft, in spite of his rapidly failing health. Upon arrival in Saigon, his state of health had become so alarming that he was transferred to a local hospital where he expired three days later, on 19 August 1864, at the age of 39. The naval government was at pains to hide its embarrassment, while Saigon's European trader community, outraged by the allegedly political nature of the trial, reveled in the veneration of its first martyr. For more detail, see Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine*, 181–2; Chantal Descours-Gatin, *Quand l'opium finançait la colonisation en Indochine: L'élaboration de la régie générale de l'opium (1860–1914)* (Paris: Harmattan, 1992), 43; *Courrier de Saigon*, 10 March 1864; MEP: vol. 765: 72: Lr Hestrest to Albrand, 22 September 1860.
- 78 Lemire, *Cochinchine française* (1869), 223.
- 79 Lemire, *Cochinchine française* (1877), 193–5; Lemire, *Cochinchine française* (1869), 221–3.
- 80 *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 July 1865.
- 81 *Courrier de Saigon*, 25 July 1864.
- 82 Denis' *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine sous la Restauration et le Second Empire*, an informative book that has been little acknowledged, gives a comprehensive account of the involvement of these Bordeaux-based networks in the colonization of Cochinchina.
- 83 MEP: vol. 755: 457: Lr Galy to Libois, 26 April 1865.
- 84 *Annuaire de la Cochinchine française pour l'année 1867* (Saigon: Imprimerie Impériale, 1867), 142–54.
- 85 P. Duchesne de Bellecourt, "La colonie de Saïgon: Les agrandissements de la France dans le bassin du Mékong," *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 March 1867: 435–6, 454.
- 86 After an interlude in France, the Roques eventually returned to Cochinchina to relaunch their business and later extend it to the newly occupied territories in Tonkin.
- 87 CAOM: GGI 12705: "Rapport sur le Cambodge. Voyage de Sai-gon à Battambang par A. Spooner." Spooner's report was later published as "Voyage au Cambodge: Renseignements topographiques, statistiques et commerciaux," *Annales du Commerce extérieur, Chine et Cochinchine*, livraison 36 (mai 1865).
- 88 *Ibid.*
- 89 *Ibid.*
- 90 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to his sister-in-law, 12 November 1863, in A. Bonamy de Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions de Doudart de Lagrée: Extraits de ses manuscrits* (Paris: Veuve Bouchard-Huzard, 1883), 400–1. For the travelogues mentioned, see Charles-Emile Bouillevaux, *Voyage dans l'Indochine 1848–1856* (Paris: Palmé, 1858); Henri Mouhot, "Voyages dans les royaumes de Siam, de Cambodge, de Laos et autres parties générales de l'Indo-Chine," *Le Tour du Monde*, no. 2 (1863): 219–352; Bastian, *Die Voelker des oestlichen Asien*, as well as an earlier version of his travelogue, published in *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 1865: 74–87; King and Forrest's travelogue was published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 1860: 177–82.
- 91 *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 July 1865.
- 92 See for instance Paul Merruau, "La politique française en Cochinchine," *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 October 1877, 630–5.
- 93 As expressed in Garnier's propaganda pamphlet *La Cochinchine française en 1864* (Paris: Dentu, 1864), published under the pseudonym G. Francis.

- 94 Milton Osborne, *River Road to China: The Mekong River Expedition 1866–1873* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), 27–9.
- 95 *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 November 1864 and 5 January 1865.
- 96 The lure of Cambodia was in Caraman's mind complemented with disappointment about the local market, as it was for other merchants. Prior to visiting Cambodia, Caraman had gone on several trips to outlying areas in Cochinchina, among them the unoccupied province of Vinh-long where he met his Parisian acquaintance Phan-thanh-Giang. He was soon forced to realize that, because of prevailing political and economic constraints, the wide-ranging development plans he had discussed in Paris with Giang and Ky had little chance of succeeding. See CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Governor of Saigon, 17 October 1880; CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Truong-vinh-Ky to Caraman, 7 November 1863.
- 97 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 7 January 1865.
- 98 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 3 March 1865.
- 99 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Admiral Roze to Doudart de Lagrée, 6 May 1865.
- 100 *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 May 1865.
- 101 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Doudart de Lagrée to Governor de la Grandière, undated (February 1866).
- 102 For contemporary descriptions of the voyage from Saigon to Phnom Penh and impressions of the Cambodian capital, see for instance Frank Vincent, *The Land of the White Elephant: Sights and scenes in South-Eastern Asia* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low & Searle, 1873), 269–70, 289–92; M.J. Agostini, "Pnom-Penh: Voyage au Cambodge," *Le Tour du Monde*, 1898: 290–3; Edgar Boulangier, *Un hiver au Cambodge: Chasses au tigre, à l'éléphant et au buffle sauvage: Souvenirs d'une mission officielle remplie en 1880–1881* (Tours: Alfred Mame, 1887), 35–6; Paul Branda, *Cà et là: Cochinchine et Cambodge: L'âme khmère: Ang-kor* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1892), 43–4, 48–54.
- 103 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 9 July 1866; Lr Caraman to Baron Duperré, 16 December 1865. For a contemporary description of the trip from Phnom Penh to Oudong, see Lemire, *Cochinchine française* (1869), 404.
- 104 Lemire, *Cochinchine française* (1869), 410–11.
- 105 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to Mme P . . . , 10 February 1865, in de Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, 424–6; Lr to his sister-in-law, 9 April 1865, *ibid.*, 428–9; 8 July 1865, *ibid.*, 430–1; and 28 May 1864, *ibid.*, 415–16.
- 106 The full text of the treaty can be found in *Annuaire du Cambodge 1888–1889* (Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Protectorat, 1889), 47–52, and in Georges Taboulet, *La geste française en Indochine: Histoire par les textes de la France en Indochine, des origines à 1914*, 2 vols (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1954), 624–7.
- 107 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to his sister-in-law, 16 June 1863, in Félix Julien, *Lettre d'un précurseur: Doudart de Lagrée au Cambodge et son voyage en Indochine* (Paris: Challamel Aîné, 1885), 30–1.
- 108 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to his sister-in-law, 10 December 1864, 22 January 1865, 19 February 1865 and 17 June 1865, in de Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, 420–3, 427, 429–30.
- 109 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Doudart de Lagrée to de la Grandière, 9 June 1865.
- 110 *Ibid.*
- 111 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fleurier to Ohier, 15 November 1868.
- 112 CARAN: F17: 2950: "Rapport sur mon voyage au Cambodge," Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 10 November 1865.
- 113 Lemire, *Cochinchine française* (1869), 420–1.
- 114 ANV2: SL 1693: Contract between Norodom and Caraman, 3 June 1865.

- 115 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Norodom to Doudart de Lagrée, undated (February 1866).
- 116 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Doudart de Lagrée to de la Grandière, undated (February 1866).
- 117 ANV2: SL 1693: Contract between Norodom and Caraman, 3 June 1865.
- 118 CARAN: F17: 2950: “Rapport sur mon voyage au Cambodge,” Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 10 November 1865. On Col de Monteiro, see Chapter 3.
- 119 ANC: RSC 3060: Contract between Norodom and Caraman, 3 July 1865.
- 120 Ibid.
- 121 CARAN: F17: 2950: “Rapport sur mon voyage au Cambodge,” Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 10 November 1865.
- 122 Ibid.
- 123 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Norodom to Doudart de Lagrée, undated (February 1866); Lr Doudart de Lagrée to de la Grandière, undated (February 1866); Lr Caraman to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 9 July 1866.
- 124 CARAN: F17: 2950: “Rapport sur mon voyage au Cambodge,” Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 10 November 1865.
- 125 Caran: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 10 and 12 November 1865.
- 126 AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 1: Lr Caraman to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 17 November 1865. CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Minister of Education and Culture to Caraman, 18 November 1865.
- 127 Other than the two letters mentioned in the previous reference, seven more were sent out, to be found in AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 1: Lr Caraman to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 18 November 1865; ANV2: SL 1693: Board of Directors Compagnie Générale du Cambodge to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 1 December 1865; CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 24 November 1865; *ibid.*, 29 November 1865; *ibid.*, 1 December 1865; Lr Caraman to Bellaguet, Chef du Cabinet, 3 December 1865 and 10 December 1865.
- 128 AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 1: Lr Baron de Rothschild to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 7 December 1865; Lr Emile Ollivier to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 10 December 1865; Lr Minister of the Marine and Colonies to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 7 December 1865; CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Minister of Education and Culture to President of Ecole Impériale des langues orientales vivantes, 9 December 1865; Lr Minister of Education and Culture to Minister of Agriculture, Commerce and Public Works, 16 December 1865; Lr Minister of Agriculture, Commerce and Public Works to Minister of Education and Culture, 27 December 1865.
- 129 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Norodom, 17 November 1865.
- 130 AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 1: Lr Baron de Rothschild to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 7 December 1865; Lr Emile Ollivier to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 10 December 1865.
- 131 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Minister of Foreign Affairs to Board of Directors of Compagnie Générale du Cambodge, 11 December 1865.
- 132 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Baron Duperré at the Ministry of the Marine and Colonies, 16 December 1865.
- 133 Ibid.
- 134 Ibid.
- 135 Theodore Zeldin has provided us with a biography of Emile Ollivier, Napoleon’s chief minister in 1870 during the last days of his reign: *Emile Ollivier and the Liberal Empire of Napoleon III* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963). Needless to say, Caraman does not figure among the names of celebrities in Zeldin’s index of persons associated with Ollivier during his lifetime.
- 136 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 1 March

1866. Caraman's study entitled "Mémoire sur les Moi, tribus sauvages comprises entre l'Empire d'Annam et le Royaume du Cambodge visitées en 1865 par le sous-signé Cte Comnène de Caraman" describes on 24 pages his observations during a visit to the village of Bachoan (Baria) in April 1865, possibly enriched by tales overheard before and after in Saigon, Oudong and Ponhea Lu.
- 137 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 9 July 1866.
- 138 AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 1: Lr Caraman to Emperor Napoleon III, 5 May 1866.
- 139 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Minister of Foreign Affairs to Minister of Education, 12 October 1866.
- 140 AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 1: Lr Caraman to Emperor Napoleon III, 5 May 1866, and "Note sur les résultats à attendre de la constitution de la Société générale du Cambodge," undated (~February 1866); CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Minister of the Marine and Colonies to Minister of Education and Culture, 12 October 1866; Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 1 December 1865.
- 141 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education and Culture, 15 August 1866.
- 142 CAOM: GGI 11829: Contract between Michel Victor Thomas Comnène de Caraman, Comte de la Rochfoucauld Liancourt, Dominique Auguste Baron de Cassan, and Achille Bize, 18 September 1866; ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Baron de Cassan to Norodom, 18 April 1867.
- 143 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to de la Grandière, 15 September 1866.
- 144 Ibid.

2 In Phnom Penh, 1868–69

- 1 CAOM: B.220 (4), no. 117: Lr de la Grandière to Pottier, 20 May 1867; CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Pottier to de la Grandière, 31 May 1867.
- 2 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr de la Grandière to Pottier, 25 November 1867.
- 3 NV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to King Norodom, 16 July 1867.
- 4 *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 November 1867.
- 5 Khin Sok, *Chroniques royales du Cambodge: De Bana Yat à la prise de Lanvaek (de 1417 à 1595)*, collection de textes et documents sur l'Indochine XIII (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988), 465; Georges Coedès, "La fondation de Phnom-Penh au XV^e siècle, d'après la chronique cambodgienne," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient XIII*, no. 6 (1913): 6.
- 6 Bernard Philippe Groslier, "Pour une géographie historique du Cambodge," *Les Cahiers d'Outre-mer*, no. 104 (1973): 362–3; William Willmott, *Chinese Society in Cambodia with Special Reference to the System of congregations in Phnom Penh* (London: 1964), 27–30; Tcheou-Ta-Kouan, "Mémoires sur les coutumes de Cambodge," translated and annotated by Paul Pelliot, *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient II*, no. 9 (1902): 123–35, and published again as a separate opus in 1951 as *Oeuvres posthumes de Paul Pelliot no. 3* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1951).
- 7 William Willmott, "History and sociology of the Chinese in Cambodia prior to the French Protectorate," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 7, no. 1 (1966): 25–6; Willmott, *Chinese Society in Cambodia*, 37–8; Bernard Philippe Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVI^e siècle d'après les sources portugaises et espagnoles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 39–43, 54; ANC: RSC 5181: "Histoire de Kampot et de la rébellion de cette province en 1885–87," by Adhémar Leclère.
- 8 Willmott, "History and sociology of the Chinese," 25.
- 9 Willmott, "History and sociology of the Chinese," 27; Willmott, *Chinese Society in Cambodia*, 41–2. A narrative account of this period of Vietnamese settlement in Cochinchina and the influx of Chinese can be found in Paul Boudet's "La conquête de la Cochinchine par les Nguyen et le rôle des émigrés chinois," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient XIII* (1942), 115–32.

- 10 The Teochiu, who later became the majority speech group among Cambodia's Chinese, as well as the Hakka, appear to have migrated to the kingdom more recently than the other groups; see William Wilmott, *The Chinese in Cambodia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1967), 17–18, 23–4. Before the mid-twentieth century, the Cantonese formed a majority. In 1892, when the French formalized system of the *congrégations* was extended to Cambodia, six *congrégations* were established; see Adhémar Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique des Cambodgiens* (Paris: Challamel, 1894), 261.
- 11 Wilmott, *Chinese Society in Cambodia*, 17.
- 12 Carl Trocki, "Boundaries and transgressions: Chinese enterprise in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Southeast Asia," in Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini, eds, *Ungrounded Empires: The cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 62.
- 13 For documents on Wang Tai's business ventures in Cambodia, see for instance: ANC: RSC 3791, 4740, and 4424. The source for the number of Phnom Penh's leading Chinese families is Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 320. The *congrégations* were colonial categories dividing Chinese in Saigon and Cholon into subgroups according to their origin and speech group. Each group had a head acting as the representative vis-à-vis the colonial authorities. More detail and references are given in Chapter 6.
- 14 Chantal Descours-Gatin, *Quand l'opium finançait la colonisation en Indochine: L'élaboration de la régie générale de l'opium (1860–1914)*, (Paris: Harmattan, 1992), 52–5.
- 15 For documents on Luu Chap (also named A-Chap), Afoun and Watseng, see for instance ANC: RSC 3791 and 4424; CAOM: GGI 12032, GGI 10161, and GGI 10215; *Courrier de Saigon*, 5 April 1870; *Annuaire du Cambodge*, issues for 1889 to 1897 (Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Protectorat); Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 320–4.
- 16 For documents on Foc Yao, see for instance ANC: RSC 3791, 4424, 4415, 17666, and 17620; for Choi Fat, see CAOM: Notariat Cambodge Phnom Penh 1883–87, no. 18, entries of 27 August 1883, 10 November 1886 and 14 December 1887. Choi Fat was also one of the leaders of Phnom Penh's Cantonese community. However, compared to Saigon's system of *congrégations*, the Chinese speech groups in Cambodia appear to have been more loosely structured.
- 17 See for instance James Rush, *Opium to Java: Revenue farming and Chinese enterprise in colonial Indonesia 1860–1910* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- 18 See for instance for Kuching Craig Lockard, *From Kampung to City: A social history of Kuching, Malaysia, 1820–1970* (Athens, OH: Center for International Studies Monographs in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series, no. 75, 1987), 43–7, 65–74, 111–30, and James Warren, *Rickshaw Coolie: A people's history of Singapore 1880–1940* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986).
- 19 Adolf Bastian, *Die Voelker des oestlichen Asien: Studien und Reisen von Dr. Adolf Bastian. Vol. IV: Reise durch Kambodja nach Cochinchina* (Jena, Germany: Hermann Costenoble, 1868), 355–7. Jean Moura, "De Phnom-Penh à Pursat, en compagnie du Roi du Cambodge et de sa cour," *Revue de l'Extrême-Orient*, April-June 1882: 304–5.
- 20 Precious little is known about Cambodia's Indian community and their origins. An indication of how bleak the research situation currently is presents itself in the amount of space granted to the topic in a standard work on Indian communities in Southeast Asia, S. Kernial Sandhu and A. Mani, eds, *Indian Communities of South East Asia* (Singapore: Times Academic Press (ISEAS), 1993). Out of Sandhu's 983 pages, Cambodia gets 2½, with not a line written on the pre-twentieth century situation.
- 21 Leclère's Diary, entry of 2 August 1886.
- 22 Sandhu and Mani, *Indian Communities*, 32, 41; J. B. P. More, *Indians in French Indochina* (paper, international seminar on Indo-French relations and Indian

- independence, Pondicherry University, September 1997), 2–5; Charles Lemire, *Cochinchine française et Royaume de Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel 1869), 221; CAOM: GGI 12042: Questionnaire on the administration of justice in Cambodia, dated 2 September 1879; *L'Indépendant de Saigon*, 5 and 12 August 1879; Nasir Abdoul-Carime, personal communication to the author, March 2001.
- 23 CAOM: GGI 12042: Lr Aymonier to Lafont, 29 July 1879; CAOM: GGI 13431: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 6 June 1881; CAOM: GGI 13427: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 30 May 1881. Suleiman is usually spelled Solemanjee in French sources.
- 24 ANC: RSC 4415: Lr Ternisien to de Lanessan, 11 January 1893, and note by Fourès entitled “Affaire de Waal,” dated 1 March 1893; *Annuaire du Cambodge* (1889), 139, and entries for Solemanjee (Suleiman) in subsequent years; CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 18 June 1882; CAOM: RSC 258: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 3 March 1885.
- 25 CAOM: Notariat Cambodge Phnom Penh 1883–87, no. 18: Declaration of Hussein Momein and Hua Bua Sind regarding a blaze in Phnom Penh on 28 May 1884; CAOM: Notariat Cambodge Phnom Penh 1891, no. 20: Declaration of power of attorney by Abdul Hussein for Abdul Ali. See also CAOM: GGI 12044.
- 26 ANC: RSC 5811: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Fourès, 2 January 1882; Aymonier Papers: 3/46, commercial advertisement.
- 27 In his diary (entry of 2 August 1886), Leclère summarized the business activities of Phnom Penh’s Indian community as “selling cottons, silk, monies, and women.”
- 28 Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge*, 142–6.
- 29 Mak Phoeun, *Histoire du Cambodge de la fin du XVIe siècle au début du XVIIIe* (Paris: Presses de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1995), 268–71, 316.
- 30 Mak Phoeun, *Histoire du Cambodge*, 282, 327–8.
- 31 Among the first cattle traders were the Frenchman Ségassie and his Italian employee Telesio who went on to organize a few cattle shipments from the Cambodian port of Kampot. See MEP: vol. 765: 72: Lr Hestrest to Albrand, 22 September 1860; Etienne Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine sous la Restauration et le Second Empire* (Bordeaux: Imprimerie Delmas, 1965), 181.
- 32 MEP: vol. 765: 95: Lr Miche to Libois, 6 May 1862.
- 33 MEP: vol. 765: 96: Lr Hestrest to Libois, 15 May 1862; vol. 765: 98: Lr Hestrest to Libois, 3 July 1862; vol. 765: 104: Lr Janin to illegible, 28 January 1863; ANC: RSC 5181: “Histoire de Kampot et de la rébellion de cette province en 1885–87,” by Adhémard Leclère; M. Gelly, *Question de Cochinchine: Aperçu sur le Cambodge et sur le Laos* (Paris: Vert Frères, 1865), 19–24; Adhémard Leclère, *Histoire du Cambodge* (Paris: Geuthner, 1914), 448–53.
- 34 CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Le Faucheur to Doudart de Lagrée, 2 July 1864; Minutes of interrogation of witnesses, December 1864; Lr Governor de la Grandière to Doudart de Lagrée, 6 January 1865. Le Faucheur’s version of events is to be found in Paul Le Faucheur, *Lettre sur le Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel, 1872), 10–12.
- 35 Pierre-Lucien Lamant, “La création d’une capitale par le pouvoir colonial,” *Péninsule indochinoise: Etudes urbaines* (Paris: Harmattan, 1991), 67; CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Le Faucheur to de la Grandière, 15 June 1866.
- 36 For the most extensive account of Le Faucheur’s life in Cambodia, see Bruno Revertégat, “Un coureur d’arroyos: Le Faucheur, colon de la première heure en Cochinchine et au Cambodge (1858–74),” *Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises*, 3 (1941): 21–47; on the pepper deal, see p. 41. See also Charles Meyer, *La vie quotidienne des Français en Indochine 1860–1910* (Paris: Hachette, 1985), 125–7; and Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine*, 149–50.
- 37 Avis au public, in *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 November 1864. On Imbert, see Descours-Gatin, *Quand l’opium finançait la colonisation*, 43.
- 38 CAOM: GGI 13277: Lr Pottier to Governor of Cochinchina, 14 March 1870; Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine*, 274. Ferrer’s date of arrival in Cambodia probably dates

- back to the mid-1860s. According to Caraman (*Rapport sur le Cambodge présenté le 24 janvier 1874 au Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies* (Paris, 1874), 24), Ferrer settled in the kingdom in 1862, but Caraman proves a consistently poor witness for chronologies.
- 39 Félix-Gaspard Faraut, *Etude sur la vérification des dates des inscriptions des monuments Khmer* (Saigon: Schneider, 1909), 60.
 - 40 Elements of Faraut's biography can be found in A. Baréty, "Félix-Gaspard Faraut," *Nice Historique*, 1911: 420–2; Jean Ajalbert, "La mort du colon," in *Les nuages sur l'Indochine* (Paris: Louis Michaud, n.d.), 217–34; Claude Maitre, "Nécrologie: F.G. Faraut," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* XI (1911): 254–5.
 - 41 Leclère's Diary, entry of 25 July 1886.
 - 42 The service was launched in July 1872 by Marcellin Larrieu and the Roque brothers, the same brothers whose departure from Cochinchina a Saigon missionary deplored in the previous chapter. In 1870, after some years in France, one of the brothers returned to the colony and re-launched their business activities; see Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine*, 284–6.
 - 43 ANC: RSC 3060: Contract between Blanc, Cadet and Caraman, 11 January 1873; CAOM: GGI 12279: Contract between Norodom and Larrieu, 16 March 1872.
 - 44 CAOM: GGI 10214: Contract between Blanc, Cadet and Norodom, 8 August 1875; CAOM: GGI 13334: Lr Moura to Governor of Cochinchina, 23 August 1875.
 - 45 See *Le Saigonnais*, 26 March 1885.
 - 46 Advertisement in *Courrier de Saigon*, 5 July 1865; Bernard Marrot, *Exposition de Lyon 1894, section cambodgienne: Notes et souvenirs sur le Cambodge avec de nombreuses gravures dans le texte* (Roanne: Grande imprimerie Forézienne P. Roustan, 1894), 27.
 - 47 For more on Mercuriol's biography, see Chapter 4.
 - 48 Joseph Pouvatthy, "Les Vietnamiens au Cambodge: Etude d'une minorité étrangère" (PhD thesis, Université de Paris, 1975), 26–47. Giadinh (Prei Nokor), Baria (Preah Suorkea), Bienhoa (Changvar Trapeang), Mytho (Me Sar), Vinh Long (Lon Ho), Sadec (Phsar Dek), Chaudoc (Moat Chrouk) and Travinh (Preah Trapeang) were all annexed by Annam during the eighteenth century. However, these annexations were never fully accepted by the Khmer kings, and the borders were never delineated before the French undertook this task, pushing them further into formerly Khmer territory. See Sarin Chhak, *Les frontières du Cambodge*, vol. I (Paris: Librairie Dalloz, 1966); Khin Sok, *Le Cambodge entre le Siam et le Vietnam (de 1775 à 1860)*, collection de textes et documents sur l'Indochine XVIII (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1991), 27–58; Mak Phoeun, *Histoire du Cambodge*, 404–12.
 - 49 Maurice Comte, "Economie, idéologie et pouvoir: La société cambodgienne (1863–1886)" (PhD thesis, Université de Lyon II, 1980), 142–6. Estimated population numbers and ethno-geographical division according to Doudart de Lagrée are given by Georges Taboulet, *La geste française en Indochine: Histoire par les textes de la France en Indochine des origines à 1914* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1954), 637–9.
 - 50 Christian Goulin, *Phnom-Penh: Etude de géographie urbaine* (Phnom Penh, 1966), 64–6, 79–80. Alain Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française: Histoire d'une colonisation sans heurts (1897–1920)* (Paris: Harmattan, 1980), 445–7. Estimates of Phnom Penh's population and the number of Vietnamese vary greatly depending on the author and the time of writing. For the 1870s, the general consensus oscillated around 30,000 inhabitants, of which, not counting the Catholic village, at least 2,000 were Vietnamese.
 - 51 See for instance CAOM: RSC 258: *Protectorat du Cambodge: Rapport sur la situation du Cambodge (août 1903-juillet 1904)* (Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Protectorat, 1904).
 - 52 MEP: vol. 765: 1: Lr Miche to his Superiors, 18 January 1853, and vol. 765: 114: Lr Janin to his Superior, 7 October 1863.
 - 53 MEP: vol. 765: 46: Lr Barreau to Rousseille, 10 January 1859.

- 54 Political and internal developments could similarly lead to the closing of stations. Such was the case in Ponhea Lu, evacuated after the move of the capital to Phnom Penh in 1866, and in Kampot, given up in 1867, when the misconduct of the missionary overseeing the community became public.
- 55 MEP: vol. 765: 121: Lr Janin to his Superior, 29 April 1864; MEP: vol. 755: 527: Annual report for 1865, Miche to Board of Directors, 14 January 1866.
- 56 Lamant, "La création d'une capitale," 67–8.
- 57 MEP: vol. 755: 527: Annual report for 1865, Miche to Board of Directors, 14 January 1866, original emphasis.
- 58 Bastian, *Die Voelker des oestlichen Asien*, 362.
- 59 Moura, "De Phnom-Penh à Pursat," 202–4.
- 60 Forest (*Le Cambodge et la colonisation française*, 17–18, 346) estimates the number of palace employees and slaves in 1894 to be 7,500, basing himself on Leclère (Adhémard Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique des Cambodgiens* (Paris: Challamel, 1894), 275). Most of them were of Khmer origin. Moura, in a tentative 1873 census, states that there were far more than a thousand servants in the palace, in addition to the members of the extended royal family and the mandarins with their dependents (CAOM: GGI 11917). In 1901, the French classified about half of Phnom Penh's total population of 31,270 as being ethnically Khmer (Goulin, *Phnom-Penh*, 80). The total population in the 1870s was not much different from that figure, but it may well be that the ethnic distribution changed over the years. From there, the capital's population began to grow steadily. The first countrywide census was taken in 1904 and gave a figure of 50,000 for the capital (CAOM: RSC 258). For conflicting estimates for the previous period by otherwise well-informed authors, see for instance Jean Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 1 (Paris: Leroux, 1883), 248; Auguste Pavie, *Mission Pavie: Indochine 1879–1895: Géographie et voyages I: Exposé des travaux de la mission: Introduction, première et deuxième période 1879 à 1889* (Paris: Leroux, 1901), 56; Marrot, *Exposition de Lyon 1894*, 26; Frank Vincent, *The Land of the White Elephant: Sights and scenes in South-Eastern Asia* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low & Searle, 1873), 272–3.
- 61 May Ebihara, "Societal Organization in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Cambodia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* XV, no. 2 (1984): 294.
- 62 A good overview on how Khmer society was structured in the nineteenth century is given by Khin Sok, *Le Cambodge entre le Siam et le Vietnam*, 223–36. The most instructive essays on the topic by contemporary authors are Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 1, 325–34 and the works by Adhémard Leclère, in particular *Les codes cambodgiens* (Paris: Leroux, 1898); *Recherches sur le droit public des Cambodgiens* (Paris: Challamel, 1894); *Cambodge: Le roi, la famille royale et les femmes du palais* (Saigon: Imprimerie-Librairie Claude & Cie, 1905); and *Recherches sur la législation cambodgienne (droit privé)* (Paris: Challamel, 1890).
- 63 Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 1, 325; Adhémard, Leclère, *Recherches sur la législation cambodgienne (droit privé)*, (Paris: Challamel, 1890), 6.
- 64 Comte, "Economie, idéologie et pouvoir," 86–8.
- 65 ANC: RSC 24187: Documents relating to the seventh meeting of the Council of Ministers of 28 October 1897: Report on the Pol and Komlah; *Le Cambodge entre le Siam et le Vietnam*, 229–30.
- 66 Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française*, 346–7.
- 67 Some Khmer folk tales from the period suggest that to enter into the service of a rich and influential person because of incurred debts was at times seen as a viable career choice rather than a disastrous fate; see for instance the tale of Thmenh Chey in Etienne Aymonier, ed., *Textes Khmers* (Saigon: Collège des administrateurs stagiaires, 1878), 67–115.
- 68 John Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A study of plural economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944), 446.

- 69 Furnivall, *Netherlands India*, 449–50.
- 70 Typical for plural societies; see van den Berghe, “Pluralism and the polity: A theoretical exploration,” in L. Kuper and M.G. Smith, eds, *Pluralism in Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), 67–8.
- 71 At different points in their colonial careers, Mercurol worked for Afoun, Imbert for Banhap, and Spooner for Watseng.
- 72 See Chapter 4.
- 73 William Wilmott, *Chinese Society in Cambodia*, 42–3, 68; Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française*, 482–3. An example of a Siamese mandarin given a Khmer-Chinese wife by King Norodom is related in Chapter 5.
- 74 On such “secondary colonists,” see John Rex, *Race Relations in Sociological Theory* (London, 1970), 75–6.
- 75 Leclère, *Recherches sur la législation cambodgienne*, 38.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 48.
- 77 As the Chinese were subject to higher taxes than were the Khmer, Sino-Khmer who wore their hair according to the Khmer fashion and spoke the language often preferred to be inscribed on the list of Khmer inhabitants for taxation purposes; see Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 263. The French curbed this ‘ethnic mobility’ in 1892, based on a racialist rationale and budgetary concerns. The French-sponsored shift from cultural definitions of ethnicity to ‘race’-based concepts is explored in more detail in Chapter 4.
- 78 Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 211, footnote. However, just like the French ‘racial’ categories, categorizations of local populations according to cultural practice are not cut and dried. See for example the evolution of ‘Chinese’ and ‘Khmer’ clothing styles in Ly Daravuth and Ingrid Muan, eds, *Seams of Change: Clothing and the care of the self in late 19th and 20th century Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Reyum Publishing, 2003), 46–9, 74–5.
- 79 Aymonier Papers, 9: Complaint by Nguyen van Thanh and Vo van Dong, dated 18 February 1872. The *langouti* (*sampot*) is the traditional garment of the Khmer. Under the reign of Ang Duong, the province of Kampot was governed by a Chinese who had been nominated to this position for services rendered to the crown. He had to abandon Chinese hair and clothing style and assimilate to Khmer looks and habits; see Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 211. Second-generation inhabitants of Cambodia of Thai and Lao descent, regardless of whether they stemmed from mixed marriages, would usually be considered Khmer, as they tended to assimilate more easily than any other group, see Leclère, *Recherches sur la législation cambodgienne*, 41–2.
- 80 Craig Lockard found the same to be true for a wide range of large and mid-sized Southeast Asian towns, as diverse as Sukabumi (West Java), Semarang, Bangkok, Vientiane, Bandung and Manila. See his useful comparative chapter in Lockard, *From Kampung to City*, 207–34, particularly 213–17.
- 81 Vincent, *Land of the White Elephant*, 269.
- 82 Vincent, *Land of the White Elephant*, 269, 272–3, original emphasis. “Klings” was a derogatory term for Indians.
- 83 *Le Saigonnais*, 21 August 1884.
- 84 It was later briefly inhabited by his employee Edward, a native of the Isle of Jersey, who had formerly been in the Hong Kong and Calcutta trade; see Vincent, *Land of the White Elephant*, 271–2.
- 85 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fourès to Bégin, 10 August 1885; ANC: RSC 3060: Agreement between Norodom and Caraman, dated 1 July 1881.
- 86 Aymonier Papers, folder 1bis/2: Lr Royal Cabinet to King Norodom, dated the 7th day of the 3rd month of the year of the rabbit; CAOM: RSC 479: Lr Russel to Aymonier, 1 December 1879, and Lr Russel to Aymonier, 15 November 1880.
- 87 ANC: RSC 3974: Contract between Speidel and Norodom, 31 May 1884.

- 88 CAOM: GGI 23343: Minutes of meeting of the “Commission des terrains,” dated 10 October 1892, regarding the sale of the *compartiments* of Bras and the Marrots to the state.
- 89 CAOM: GGI 13412: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 17 May 1880.
- 90 Leclère’s Diary, entry of 26 July 1886.
- 91 CAOM: CP 1PL1974: Map of Phnom Penh dated 1864, “levée sur les ordres de de la Grandière par Héraud.”
- 92 M. E. Delaire, *Petit fonctionnaire de Pnom-Penh (Cambodge), salarié du trésor public . . . et précis de monographie d’un manoeuvre-coolie de Pnom-Penh (Cambodge), journalier . . . d’après les renseignements recueillis sur les lieux pendant l’année 1897* (Paris: F. Didot: Les ouvriers des deux mondes, 1899), 484. On pages 487–8, Delaire mentions the example of a Phnom Penh coolie whose monthly salary amounted to about 8 piasters. He lived with his wife in a one-room hut for which he paid his Chinese landlord a monthly rent of 1.2 piasters. To build a house for themselves and thus no longer be forced to spend money on rent, the couple would have had to come up with a minimal capital of 25 to 30 piasters; Paul Branda, *Cà et là: Cochinchine et Cambodge: L’âme khmère: Ang-kor* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1892), 48–9.
- 93 Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 1, 246.
- 94 Le Faucheur, *Lettre sur le Cambodge*, 33–4; Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.: Rare and manuscript department: Harmand Papers, no. 3481, Box 1, File 19, p. 3. The term “*haussmanniser*” refers to the famous town planner Haussmann, responsible for many of Paris’s grand boulevards.
- 95 In 1878, the newly arrived French merchant Octave Vandelet acquired the farm to collect the rent for shophouses. He paid 1,900 piasters per month to King Norodom for this privilege. Vandelet then decided to raise the average monthly rent of roughly 10 piasters per *compartiment* by two piasters, which went down rather badly with the Chinese and European merchants. See CAOM: GGI 12696: Lr Moura to Lafont, 31 October 1878; Lr Vandelet to Lafont, 16 January 1879; CAOM: GGI 12278: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 28 November 1881.
- 96 Penny Edwards, “Cambodge: The cultivation of a nation 1860–1945” (PhD thesis, Monash University, 1999), Chapter 2 (forthcoming as a book with Hawaii University Press).
- 97 Gobineau had published his *Essay on the inequality of human races* in the 1850s. In the era of the French settlement in Cambodia, these ideas were common currency. See Chapter 4 for more detail on French legislation to categorize the population into different ‘races’.
- 98 *Assainissement* has a range of inflections in French: technically speaking it stands for drainage, but also encompasses wider-reaching concepts of sanitation and purification.
- 99 ANC: RSC 9738: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 30 April 1884.
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 CAOM: GGI 12252: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 6 May 1884.
- 102 See CAOM: GGI 13469: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 31 May 1884; *Le Saigonnais*, 5 June 1884, mentions that 105 shophouses and some 40 *paillottes* were destroyed by the blaze, which thus would have annihilated half of the central market area.
- 103 ANC: RSC 5239: Lr by a group of Chinese merchants to Fourès, 31 May 1884.
- 104 CAOM: GGI 13469: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 31 May 1884.
- 105 According to Le Faucheur, *Lettre sur le Cambodge*, 33, rumor had it that the vendors of bamboo, mainly the Vietnamese of the Catholic Mission, looked at the regular fires with a sympathetic eye, if they did not actively encourage them.
- 106 *Le Saigonnais*, 5 June 1884.
- 107 See Chapters 6 and 7.
- 108 Decision by Governor Thomson of 28 October 1884, article 1, in *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, 20 (1884): 238.

- 109 *Ibid.*, 239.
- 110 See Chapter 7.
- 111 ANC: RSC 5239: Arrêté of the Phnom Penh mayor, dated 3 December 1884. See also Lamant, “La création d’une capitale,” 80.
- 112 Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 1, 245.
- 113 ANC: RSC 10338: Convention sur les aliénations domaniales au Cambodge, dated 27 June 1887.
- 114 “Le Cambodge en 1893,” *Revue Indochinoise*, September 1893, 173–81.
- 115 *Ibid.*, 187–8.
- 116 *Courrier de Saigon*, 5 January 1869.
- 117 CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Le Faucheur to Ohier, 5 March 1869.
- 118 AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 1: “Excerpt of the monthly report of December 1868 on the situation of the colony,” Ohier to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, dated 6 January 1869.
- 119 Following several short stints by Pottier and Philastre in Phnom Penh as representatives ad interim.
- 120 Archives de la Marine, Vincennes: Personnel file 2529 (Jean Moura): Lr Antoine to Bonard, 21 January 1863.
- 121 Archives de la Marine, Vincennes: Personnel file 2529 (Jean Moura): List of assessments of performance.
- 122 CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Le Faucheur to Ohier, 5 March 1869.
- 123 AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 1: “Excerpt of the monthly report of December 1868 on the situation of the colony,” Ohier to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, dated 6 January 1869.
- 124 Today’s Danang.
- 125 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Ohier, 5 June 1868; *ibid.*: Lr Caraman to Le Myre de Vilers, 17 October 1880.
- 126 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Ohier, 11 September 1868; Caraman’s address taken from *Annuaire de la Cochinchine française* (Saigon: Imprimerie impériale, 1869), 113.
- 127 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Ohier, 4 October 1868.
- 128 *Ibid.*: Lr Caraman to Ohier, 21 September 1868.
- 129 *Ibid.*: Lr Fleurier to Ohier, 15 November 1868.
- 130 *Gazette des tribunaux* (Paris), 17 May 1868.
- 131 CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Le Faucheur to Ohier, 25 October 1869.
- 132 CARAN: F17: 3009A: Sommatation sans frais par Béchu, trésorier payeur, dated 25 February 1869.
- 133 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Ohier, 26 February 1869.
- 134 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 29 March 1879.
- 135 ANC: RSC 3060: Contract between Caraman and Hap-Mo Poum-Tchao, dated 5 April 1869, and Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 29 March 1879.
- 136 CAOM: B.220 (6) no. 427, p. 11: Lr Ohier to Moura, 19 September 1869.
- 137 CAOM: GGI 10125: Lr Moura to Ohier, 29 June 1869.
- 138 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Ohier, 30 April 1869.
- 139 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Ohier, 25 August 1869.
- 140 *Ibid.*
- 141 CAOM: GGI 10125: Lr Moura to Ohier, 29 June 1869, and GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Ohier, 25 August 1869.
- 142 CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Le Faucheur to Ohier, 25 October 1869.
- 143 *Ibid.*
- 144 *Ibid.*
- 145 MEP: vol. 765: 76: Lr Miche to Fontaine, 15 December 1860; vol. 765: 72: Lr Hestrest to Albrand, 22 September 1860; vol. 765: 54: Lr Miche to Libois, 22 August 1859.

- 146 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Krantz, 14 May 1874.
- 147 Vincent, *Land of the White Elephant*, 277.
- 148 Edgar Boulangier, *Un hiver au Cambodge: Chasses au tigre, à l'éléphant et au buffle sauvage: Souvenirs d'une mission officielle remplie en 1880–1881* (Tours: Alfred Mame et fils, 1887), 72. See also Marrot, *Exposition de Lyon 1894*, 5–8.
- 149 Boulangier, *Un hiver au Cambodge*, 72.
- 150 For a highly complimentary description of King Norodom, see Le Faucheur, *Lettre sur le Cambodge*, 18–19; for a less sympathetic but more typical French portrait of his personality, see Paul Collard, *Cambodge et Cambodgiens: Métamorphose du Royaume Khmèr par une méthode française de protectorat*, Chapter 10 (Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1925).
- 151 Leclère, *Histoire du Cambodge*, 459.
- 152 Ibid.
- 153 See for instance the letter from King Mongkut to Sisowath (2 September 1861?), in David Wyatt, ed., *Documents concerning Thai-Cambodian relations 1860–1867* (n.p., 1969), 24, and other Thai documents of the period 1860–61 cited therein relating to the ongoing disputes between the three half-brothers.
- 154 The night before the attack, King Norodom and part of his following retreated to Oudong, leaving his allies Sisowath and the Christian General Pen in charge of the defense of the kingdom's foremost trading town. Passing through Ponhea Lu, he went to see the missionaries for supper, apparently quite unconcerned about his fate and the future of his young reign. One of the diners noted the following day: "Here we are in the midst of full-blown rebellion. With the old King of Cambodia dead, his children are fighting over the crown. Last night the oldest of them came by for dinner; he is abandoned by all of his partisans and left with nothing but his capital; but don't assume that His Majesty would be overly anxious; given his countenance, one would by no means suspect in what critical state He currently is! All his worries are reserved for his women." (MEP: vol. 765: 89: Lr Barreau to Faurie, 16 July 1861).
- 155 MEP: vol. 765: 91: Lr Janin to unknown addressee, 25 September 1861; vol. 765: 96: Lr Hestrest to Libois, 15 May 1862; Lr Doudart de Lagrée to Roze, in A. Bonamy de Villemereuil, ed., *Explorations et missions de Doudart de Lagrée: Extraits de ses manuscrits* (Paris: Veuve Bouchard-Huzard, 1883), 142–5; ANC: RSC 5181: "Histoire de Kampot et de la rébellion de cette province en 1885–87," by Adhémar Leclère.
- 156 MEP: vol. 765: 96: Lr Hestrest to Libois, 15 May 1862.
- 157 Ibid.
- 158 For more detail on this phase of King Norodom's reign, see MEP: vol. 765: 96: Lr Hestrest to Libois, 15 May 1862; vol. 765: 95: Lr Miche to Libois, 6 May 1862; vol. 765: 98: Lr Hestrest to Libois, 3 July 1862; ANC: RSC 5181: "Histoire de Kampot et de la rébellion de cette province en 1885–87," by Adhémar Leclère; Gellely, *Question de Cochinchine*, 19–24; Leclère, *Histoire du Cambodge*, 448–53; Wyatt, *Thai-Cambodian relations*, various letters.
- 159 Taboulet, *La geste française*, 644–6; Moura (1883), *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 2, 155; MEP: vol. 758: 36: Lr Miche to Pernot, 24 April 1864; Lr Doudart de Lagrée to Roze, 7 July 1865, in Taboulet, *La geste française*, 142–5, see also 137–8; ANC: RSC 5181: Adhémar Leclère, *Histoire de Kampot et de la rébellion de cette province en 1885–1887*.
- 160 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to Roze, 7 July 1865, in Taboulet, *La geste française*, 646–7.
- 161 Ebihara, "Societal Organization," 282.
- 162 David Chandler, "Cambodia before the French: Politics in a tributary kingdom 1794–1848" (PhD thesis, University of Michigan), 48.
- 163 Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 194.
- 164 King Norodom's cabinet of ministers was composed of the prime minister

- (*chauvea*), the Minister of Justice (*younreach*), the Minister of War and Land Transport (*chakrey*), the Minister of Water Transport and the Marine (*kralahom*), and the Minister of Palace and Finances (*veang*).
- 165 Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 71–6.
- 166 Although the latter is generally overestimated in French sources due to the angst of successive Saigon Governors that the English at the Bangkok court were working behind the scene toward extending their influence into Cambodia.
- 167 *Komlang*, a Khmer term, literally means “strength, force,” but is also used when referring to a person’s network of clients and connections, hence that person’s “strength” in a more figurative sense. Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 121–7; Leclère, *Recherches sur la législation cambodgienne*, 18–27; Chandler, “Cambodia before the French,” 49; Tauch Chhuong, *Battambang during the Time of the Lord Governor* (Phnom Penh: Cedoreck, 1994), 33.
- 168 Adhémar Leclère, *Cambodge: Le roi, la famille royale et les femmes du palais* (Saigon: Imprimerie-Librairie Claude & Cie, 1905), 6. The Sanskrit term *devata* stands for deities.
- 169 As a result of the former vassal position of Cambodia vis-à-vis Siam, see Taboulet, *La geste française*, 630–5; Leclère, *Histoire du Cambodge*, 453–5; Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 2, 148–51; Doudart de Lagrée, in a letter to his sister-in-law of 15 January 1864, captured Norodom’s anxiousness over this ceremony, using rather irreverent terms: “My kinglet of Cambodia wants at all cost to put a crown on his head; he makes a hell of a noise in order to obtain a superb ceremony,” in Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, 408.
- 170 Sachchidanand Sahai, *Les institutions politiques et l’organisation administrative du Cambodge ancien (VI-XIII siècle)* (Paris: Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1970), 21–2.
- 171 *Dharma*, a Sanskrit term, means righteousness, from *dhri* “to sustain, carry, hold.” Hence *dharma* is “that which contains or upholds the cosmos.” *Dharma*, the basis of the Hindu and Buddhist religious universe, is a complex and all-inclusive term with many meanings, including divine law, law of being, way of righteousness, religion, ethics, duty, responsibility, virtue, justice, goodness and truth. Essentially, *dharma* is the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature or destiny.
- 172 Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 44–5. The translation of titles follows Moura.
- 173 Comte, “Economie, idéologie et pouvoir,” 200; Sahai, *Les institutions politiques*, 34–5.
- 174 Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 6–16.
- 175 From “Les conquérants d’âme,” quoted in Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial family romance and métissage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 89.

3 Educators and collaborators, 1870–73

- 1 *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 March 1869.
- 2 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Minister of Education to Duc de Caraman, 4 February 1869.
- 3 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 29 March 1879.
- 4 Ibid. and CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Ohier, 25 August 1869.
- 5 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Ohier, 14 August 1869.
- 6 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Governor of Cochinchina, 1 September 1870.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Governor of Cochinchina, 21 June 1870.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 CARAN: F17: 3009A: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education, 3 October 1871.
- 11 For King Norodom’s stance on the matter, see CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to

- Governor of Cochinchina, 21 June 1870; and ANC: RSC 5816: “*Simple notes sur l’histoire de l’Enseignement au Cambodge de 1863 à 1890*” (henceforth “*Simple notes*”), dated 10 November 1911.
- 12 ANC: RSC 5816: “*Simple notes*,” dated 10 November 1911.
 - 13 CAOM: GGI 5870: “*Notice sur l’instruction publique au Cambodge*,” dated 21 March 1903.
 - 14 ANC: RSC 5262: Lr Dupré to Moura, 9 August 1871; Jean Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 2 (Paris: Leroux, 1883), 164; ANC: RSC 5816: “*Simple notes*.”
 - 15 CAOM: B.220 (4), no. 66: Lr de la Grandière to Pottier, 27 February 1867.
 - 16 According to the annual reports of the Cambodia Mission, the two schools accounted in 1866 for thirty pupils. In 1875, there were nine schools for boys with 180 students as well as two schools for girls with forty-two pupils. In 1883, the number of boys’ schools had increased to twenty and the number of male pupils to 832, while nine girls’ schools accounted for 425 pupils. However, the main objective of writing annual reports to the Sainte Enfance was to secure subsidies. Given the various setbacks of the Cambodia Mission in the course of the 1870s and 1880s, the alleged steady progress in the field of orphanages and education may have had its roots in budgetary considerations rather than the reality on the ground. See: MEP: vol. 765: 144: Lr Cordier to Girardin, Directeur de l’Oeuvre de la Sainte Enfance, 15 November 1866; MEP: vol. 765: 186: Annual Report, dated 15 September 1875; MEP: vol. 765: 249: Lr Cordier to Directeurs, 15 October 1883.
 - 17 ANC: RSC 5262: Lr de la Grandière to Moura, 23 March 1868. *Kampuchea kraom*, literally Lower Cambodia, is the Khmer term for the Mekong Delta region, formerly considered Khmer territory. The inhabitants of Cochinchina who are ethnically/culturally Khmer are called *Khmer kraom*.
 - 18 ANC: RSC 5262: Minister of the Marine and Colonies to Ohier, 1 February 1869.
 - 19 De la Grandière’s letters assert that all school-related costs would be covered by King Norodom, which, if true, would suggest that the project enjoyed at least some support from the king.
 - 20 ANC: RSC 5262: Minister of the Marine and Colonies to Ohier, 1 February 1869.
 - 21 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Governor of Cochinchina, 21 June 1870.
 - 22 *Ibid.*
 - 23 “*Avis au public*,” *Courrier de Saigon*, 5 March 1869.
 - 24 *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 November 1870.
 - 25 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Governor of Cochinchina, 24 March 1870, and Lr Mayor of Saigon to Directeur de l’Intérieur, 31 March 1870.
 - 26 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Governor of Cochinchina, 1 September 1870.
 - 27 *Courrier de Saigon*, 5 November 1870.
 - 28 Bibliothèque nationale de France: 4-LK10–122: “*Rapport sur le Cambodge, présenté le 24 janvier 1874 au Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies par Hte-Frédéric Thomas-Caraman*,” 3.
 - 29 CAOM: GGI 13304: Lr Moura to Dupré, 11 October 1873.
 - 30 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1bis: Lr Moura to Aymonier, 18 April 1878.
 - 31 CAOM: GGI 13365: Lr Moura to Duperré, 14 May 1877.
 - 32 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Lafont, 18 April 1878.
 - 33 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1bis: Lr Moura to Aymonier, 18 April 1878; Lr Moura to Aymonier, 20 January 1879.
 - 34 Report by Bergier to Norodom, undated, quoted in “*Simple notes*.”
 - 35 CAOM: GGI 5870: “*Notice sur l’instruction publique au Cambodge*,” dated 21 March 1903.
 - 36 *Ibid.*
 - 37 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1bis: “*Cahier des charges relatif à la fourniture des rations journalières aux élèves demi-boursiers de l’Ecole de Phnom Penh pendant l’année scolaire 1881–82*,” 20 June 1881.

- 38 On Roustan's sawmill, see ANC: RSC 3059: "Constitution de la Société de commission, de consignations et de transports," 6 February 1875; Contract between King Norodom and Société de commission, de consignations et de transports, 6 March 1875.
- 39 CAOM: GGI 13417: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 19 November 1880.
- 40 ANC: RSC 17636: List of end-of-year bonuses for Protectorate staff, dated 1 December 1882.
- 41 On André de Diaz, see CAOM: GGI 10173: "Rapport sur les faits qu'ont précédé et amené l'arrestation du père Roy," by Renard, dated 7 January 1872; ANV2: SL 1839: Lr Moura to Directeur de l'Intérieur, 21 October 1873; ANC: RSC 3059: Lr Roustan to Moura, 5 May 1877, and testimony by Morel on fight between Roustan and Guérin. On Pou, see Lr Doudart de Lagrée to Mme P . . . , 10 February 1865, in A. Bonamy de Villemerueil, ed., *Explorations et missions de Doudart de Lagrée: Extraits de ses manuscrits* (Paris: Veuve Bouchard-Huzard, 1883), 424–6; CAOM: GGI 12252: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 25 September 1882.
- 42 The division of traditional Khmer education into three branches of learning follows Jacques Népote, "Education et développement dans le Cambodge moderne," *Mondes en développement*, no. 28 (1979): 768–71.
- 43 Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 1, 376; Charles Lemire, *Cochinchine française et Royaume de Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel, 1869), 446–7.
- 44 Népote, "Education et développement," 770–1.
- 45 Tauch Chhuong, *Battambang during the Time of the Lord Governor* (Phnom Penh: Cedoreck, 1994), 100–1.
- 46 A collection of such *satras* told at the time in *vat* schools can be found in Etienne Aymonier, *Textes Khmers* (Saigon: Collège des administrateurs stagiaires, 1878), 171–266.
- 47 Pascale Besançon, "Un enseignement colonial: L'expérience française en Indochine (1860–1945)" (PhD thesis, Paris VII, 1997), 45.
- 48 However, this path remained restricted to those joining a pagoda around Phnom Penh or Oudong. If a student lived in a rural area he was far less likely to find a capable teacher, or even a library for that matter. By the time the French arrived in Cambodia, centuries of warfare with Vietnam and Siam and an exodus of knowledgeable elder monks to Siam had greatly decreased the level of erudition in the countryside.
- 49 Besançon, "Un enseignement colonial," 47. A Cambodian poem expresses the crucial importance of this relationship in the following words:

To 'know' by oneself / Is like being lost / In the middle of the forest / Or like a blind man / Left to himself, who sets out on his way / With no one to take his hand / And when he looks for the path / He never finds it / But wanders into the forest instead / Because he has learned things by himself / With no one to take his hand.

In David Chandler, "Normative poems (chbap) and pre-colonial Cambodian society," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* XV, no. 2 (1984): 275.

- 50 Népote, "Education et développement," 769.
- 51 David Chandler, "Cambodia before the French: Politics in a tributary kingdom 1794–1848" (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1974), 45–6.
- 52 François Ponchaud, *La cathédrale de la rizière: 450 ans d'histoire de l'Eglise au Cambodge* (Paris: Sarmet-Fayard, 1990), 35–49.
- 53 Népote, "Education et développement," 786.
- 54 When school director Bergier died in 1882, most of the Khmer left the school never to return (ANC: RSC 5816: "Rapport sur l'enseignement du Cambodge par Pelletier," dated 4 September 1883). Soon after, his assistant Fontaine was recalled to Saigon. With him, nine more Khmer left the school. When, in February the following year, Bergier's successor drew up his first report, he noted that upon arrival "one fact above

all has surprised me . . . : among the hundred-odd children of the school, no more than eight are [Khmer] and, consequently, the idea that inspired the creation of the *Ecole du Cambodge* has not been realized, because we don't have any [Khmer]" (ANC: RSC 5816: "Rapport au Représentant du Protectorat par Bonneau," dated 24 February 1883). The school still accounted for 110 students, but they were mainly ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese. Compared to the numbers of 1880 (250 students, of whom one hundred were Khmer, forty Chinese and ninety Vietnamese), it thus appears that almost the entire Khmer constituency had broken away, while only relatively few Vietnamese and Chinese left in the wake of the departure of the director.

How can this be explained? The French were quick to assert that the exodus of Khmer was set off by racial hatred. The new director Bonneau invoked the "profound antipathy that separates the Cambodian race from the Annamites and the Chinese" to explain his failure to find Khmer for his classroom. From there, it was only logical to conclude that "the only remedy . . . [was] the creation of distinct categories. Separating the [Khmer] is an absolute necessity if we want to attract them to the school" (*ibid.*). Consequently, Bonneau proposed the establishment of segregated classes along racial lines.

In later years, whenever the French faced dwindling numbers of Khmer students, the argument of racial animosity was cited as a serve-all explanation, leading eventually to the separation of the school in an "Ecole cambodgienne" for Khmer, and an "Ecole municipale" for all other ethnic groups. However, closer analysis suggests that the disparate fidelity of Khmer, Vietnamese, and Chinese students as compared to the Khmer was mainly caused by differing outlooks on the benefits of French patronage (see below).

55 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1bis: Lr Fontaine to Aymonier, 7 November 1881.

56 In this respect, the outlook of urban Khmer differed greatly from that of Khmer rice farmers in the provinces whose chief contact with the government was royal tax collectors.

57 Quoted in "Simple notes."

58 See Chapter 4.

59 See Chapter 6.

60 See Chapter 7.

61 CAOM: GGI 13466: Minutes of speech by Pelletier, dated 29 March 1884. The last paragraph reads: "There is no need to tell you, dear guests, that the expense will be considerable and the results at first not immediately obvious; but you understand that the effect of several centuries of slavery will only gradually disappear. The natives will for some time continue their ways, showing little interest in a civilization superior to the one they currently have; but given that they are no more completely without means, they will eventually emerge from the inferior state in which they vegetate, and, restored to their human dignity, become more strongly attached to us. Therefore, dear guests, let us not be discouraged by the difficulties involved; let us work with courage and perseverance toward the triumph of our grand humanitarian, pacific, and French idea: the civilization of the peoples of the Far East." Pelletier, it should be added, was known across Phnom Penh to be a notorious and rather uncultured drunkard, which adds further irony to his statement.

62 Instructions of Thomson to Resident Superior, undated (~April 1885), quoted in "Simple notes."

63 Report by Bégin to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, December 1885, quoted in "Simple notes."

64 CAOM: Ecole coloniale: Papiers Dislère: Carton 13/Reg. 43: "De l'enseignement au Cambodge," report by the director of the Ecole cambodgienne, July 1887.

65 *Ibid.*

66 ANC: RSC 5821: Report by Fontaine, Inspecteur des Ecoles en Cochinchine, to Resident Superior, 5 October 1897.

- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Théophile Bilbaut, *Le canal de Suez et les intérêts internationaux: La Cochinchine française et le Royaume de Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel, 1870), 67–8.
- 69 ANV2: SL 1654: Report by Philastre on construction of barracks, 6 October 1876; CAOM: GGI 13365: Lr Moura to Duperré, 14 May 1877; CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Lafont, 18 April 1878.
- 70 “Simple notes.”
- 71 ANC: RSC 3188: Monthly report by the department of Public Works, February 1886.
- 72 ANC: 5821: Report by Fontaine, Inspecteur des Ecoles en Cochinchine, to Resident Superior, 5 October 1897.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 The so-called Ecole cambodgienne in Paris was founded by Auguste Pavie for a group of initially thirteen young adults, taken from families of palace officials and provincial governors. The declared goal of the school was to turn these boys into “des Français de cœur” (Frenchmen by heart), who after their return to Phnom Penh would “not only be committed partisans and loyalists of the *influence française*, but moreover, voluntarily or without knowing, France’s missionaries” (*Paris-Cambodge: Journal composé par les élèves de l’école cambodgienne à Paris*, no. 1, March 1887). After Pavie’s departure, the school was renamed Ecole coloniale. Instructions prescribed that “the new pupils . . . have to be chosen among the principal families of the country [of Cambodia]” (ANC: RSC 9742: Lr Under-secretary of State of the Marine and Colonies to Governor of Indochina, 10 February 1888).
- 75 ANC: 5821: Report by Fontaine, Inspecteur des Ecoles en Cochinchine, to Resident Superior, 5 October 1897.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 ANC: RSC 24163: Verdict of the Cour d’Appel de Phnom Penh, 11 November 1909, and inventory of the estate of the late Col de Monteiro established by the *sala lukhun*, document 16bis, dated 9 December 1908.
- 79 ANC: RSC 24163: Joint petitions of Yim, Yem, Hem, Im, Oum, Saeni and Phon to Council of Ministers, 21 November 1908, and to Resident Superior, 24 November 1908; Verdict of the Cour d’Appel de Phnom Penh, 11 November 1909.
- 80 CAOM: RSC 495: Last will of Alexis Chhun, dated 30 October 1924.
- 81 CAOM: RSC 495: Memorandum of understanding between Alexis Chhun and Representative Fourès, dated 14 February 1882.
- 82 CAOM: RSC 495: Last will of Alexis Chhun, dated 30 October 1924.
- 83 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to Mme P . . . , 10 February 1865, in Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, 424–6.
- 84 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to his sister-in-law, 18 June 1864, in Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, 416–17, and Lr to Mme P . . . , 15 October 1865, 434–6. The parents of the two youths were Paul Yang and Cathérine Ep; see ANC: RSC 33885.
- 85 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to Mme P . . . , 15 October 1865, in Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, 434–6.
- 86 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to Mme P . . . , 10 February 1865, in Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, 424–6, Lr to Mme T . . . , 403–7, and Lr to his sister-in-law, 8 July 1865, 430–1.
- 87 Col de Monteiro, born seven years before Chhun in the same Catholic village of Ponhea Lu, was the son of oknya pichey darong Bernardos Ros de Monteiro and of Chhun Elisabeth (ANC: RSC 33885). It is possible that Alexis Chhun and Col de Monteiro were (distant) cousins.
- 88 ANC: RSC 25165: កំណត់រាយការណ៍របស់ពលរដ្ឋឡើយរដ្ឋមក កល់ដើមគំនេរវារ (Service record of the royal government for Col de Monteiro): “ដល់ឆ្នាំ . . . ១៨៦៣លោកកុម្មុំសដឹងដីឡាក្រែរសុំខ្ចីលួងទៅធ្វើជា គន្ធប្រកតនៅកាលយាយាឌីញបានខែរលួងស៊ុយកពីលោកុម្មុំសដឹងដីឡាក្រែរទៅនៅកាលបំរើញា។” (*Dol chhnam 1863 lok commandang de Lagrée som kchey luong toew twoe chea interpret noew kopal*

- yadinh ban 6 kae luong som yok pi lok commandang de Lagrée noew toew kal bomrae venh.*) “In the year 1863 commander de Lagrée asked the King if he could borrow [Col] to work as an interpreter on the ship *Giadinh*; six months later the King requested from commander de Lagrée that [Col] come back to continue work in his service.”
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 CAOM: GGI 13358: Lr Moura to Duperré, 2 February 1877.
- 91 CAOM: GGI 13371: Lr Moura to Duperré, 4 June 1877.
- 92 Jean Moura, *Vocabulaire français-cambodgien et cambodgien-français*, 4 vols (Paris: Challamel, 1879); ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Ducos, 21 August 1878.
- 93 CAOM: GGI 13360: Lr Moura to Duperré, 6 March 1877.
- 94 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Moura to Caraman, 1 August 1878, Lr Caraman to Moura, 28 July 1878, and Lr Caraman to Ducos, 8 August 1878. Caraman cited the case of his Malay neighbor, who had been forced to pay seven silver bars to Chhun in exchange for the promise to secure his release from prison.
- 95 CAOM: GGI 11818: Minutes of interrogation of Chau Yok regarding charges of corruption against interpreter Khiem, dated 27 February 1883; Lr Fourès to Thomson, 4 March 1883.
- 96 Adhémar Leclère, *De la démoralisation des conquis par les conquérants et des conquérants par les conquis: Mémoire lu au Congrès International d’Ethnographie tenu à Paris en 1900*, extrait du compte rendu (Paris: Leroux, 1902), 12.
- 97 CAOM: GGI 13388: Lr Aymonier to Lafont, 3 April 1879, original emphasis.
- 98 Ibid. and CAOM: GGI 13387: Lr Aymonier to Lafont, 27 March 1879.
- 99 CAOM: RSC 495: Memorandum of understanding between Alexis Chhun and Representative Fourès, dated 14 February 1882. According to this document, Chhun had acquired the terrain as early as 1874.
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 See Chapter 6 for more detail on Vandelet, Dussutour and Faraut’s opium concession.
- 102 ANC: RSC 17647: Lr de Giafferi to Resident Superior, 18 August 1887; *Annuaire du Cambodge* (Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, issues for 1889, 1891, 1892, 1894, 1895 and 1897).
- 103 ANC: RSC 3791: Lr Piquet to Secretary of State at the Ministry of Colonies, 28 November 1890.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 CAOM: GGI 23343: Lr Chhun to Fontaine, 1 December 1890.
- 106 *Annuaire du Cambodge 1897* (Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1897).
- 107 Ibid.
- 108 CAOM: GGI 46262: Lr Governor of Cochinchina to Directeur de l’Administration judiciaire de l’Indochine, 22 December 1922.
- 109 CAOM: GGI 46262: “Historique de la Concession Chhun,” Resident Superior to Governor of Cochinchina, 25 October 1922.
- 110 Ibid.
- 111 CAOM: GGI 46262: Lr Resident Superior to Governor of Cochinchina, 14 November 1922.
- 112 CAOM: GGI 46262: Lr Governor of Cochinchina to Directeur de l’Administration judiciaire de l’Indochine, 22 December 1922.
- 113 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Col de Monteiro to Caraman, 25 November 1872; CAOM: B.220 (8), no. 650: Telegram Dupré to Moura, 6 December 1872; CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Dupré, 15 December 1872.
- 114 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 28 May 1873, and list of merchandise handed over to Boniface Ferrer for safekeeping, dated 1 August 1873.
- 115 ANC: RSC 3060: Contracts between Caraman and Norodom on brick factory and on silk manufacture, dated 30 January 1873; contract between Caraman and Norodom

- on pepper trade, dated 30 January 1873; and Lr Caraman to Norodom, 24 January 1874.
- 116 CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: “Enquête sur les événements du Cambodge” (1885).
- 117 Col was ‘arrested’ in June 1884 during a meeting between the Saigon Governor Charles Thomson and King Norodom, the dramatic conclusion to Thomson’s attempt to take control of the Cambodian administration and reduce Norodom to a constitutional monarch. The story of the standoff between King Norodom, Col and the French party in the royal palace in June 1884 is one of the better-documented anecdotes of this period and will be narrated in more detail in Chapter 7.
- 118 CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: Lr Bégin to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 8 August 1885.
- 119 ANC: RSC 25165: កំណត់ការងារដែលបានធ្វើឡើងដោយ កល់ដឹមឆតេរារ (Service record of the royal government for Col de Monteiro).
- 120 Alain Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française: Histoire d’une colonisation sans heurts (1897–1920)* (Paris: Harmattan, 1980), 64.
- 121 ANC: RSC 25165: Candidature for the *croix de l’officier de l’ordre royal du Cambodge*, dated 15 October 1901.
- 122 Ronald Robinson, “Non-European imperialism: Sketch for a theory of collaboration,” in Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe, eds, *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), 121.
- 123 *Ibid.*, 133.
- 124 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Col de Monteiro, 24 October 1873.
- 125 *Ibid.* and Lr Caraman to Norodom, 23 October 1873.
- 126 ANC: RSC 3060: Register of letters by Denière to Caraman.
- 127 *Ibid.*: List of items, dated 26 July 1873.
- 128 ANV2: Goucoch divers 3489: Lr Procureur Général to Krantz, 17 June 1874.
- 129 Thanks to recent political changes in France, and the fortunate coincidence that the former Emperor’s name also began with an “N,” there was no shortage of this kind of furniture on the local market.
- 130 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Allard to Caraman, 21 December 1873, contract between Cullas and Caraman dated 15 December 1873, Lr Dumont to Moura, 2 September 1875, list of items dated 16 June 1874, Lr Clément to Caraman, 11 June 1874.
- 131 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 24 April 1874.
- 132 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Roulina to Caraman, 25 September 1874.
- 133 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 24 April 1874; Patrick Tailleux, *Histoire des thermes de Forges-les-Eaux des origines à nos jours: Quatre siècles de thermalisme haut-normand* (Luneray: Editions Bertout, 1991), 156, 182, and personal communication by Patrick Tailleux to the author, May 2000.
- 134 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 24 April 1874.
- 135 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Boniface Ferrer to Caraman, 1 January 1874.
- 136 ANC: RSC 3060: Telegram Caraman to Norodom, 11 December 1873.
- 137 The establishment of a French presence in Cambodia in 1863 had greatly angered the kingdom’s neighbor Siam, which saw its influence over the court in Phnom Penh diminishing apace with the strengthening of the Protectorate. Two years later, the French ambassador in Bangkok was instructed to negotiate a compromise with the Siamese government to ensure its assent to the new regional distribution of power. Over the course of two more years, these negotiations resulted in a treaty that allocated the northwestern provinces of Battambang and Angkor to Siam in exchange for their formal recognition of the French Protectorate over Cambodia. Battambang and Angkor had been occupied by Bangkok in the late eighteenth century, but were still perceived by Phnom Penh as forming part of the Khmer Kingdom. The French move was thus seen as an abuse of its role as protecting nation, giving the lie to pledges made in 1863. See Georges Taboulet, *La geste*

- française en Indochine: Histoire par les textes de la France en Indochine des origines à 1914* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1955), 654–5, for the full text of the treaty.
- 138 ANC: RSC 5809: Lr Dupré to Moura, 6 August 1871.
- 139 For detailed accounts of two of these affairs, see Pierre Lamant, *L'affaire Yukanthor: Autopsie d'un scandale colonial* (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'Outre-Mer, 1989), and Lamant, "L'affaire Duong Chakr," *Revue française d'histoire d'Outre-mer* LXVII, no. 246/247 (1980): 123–50.
- 140 Bibliothèque nationale de France: 4-LK10-122: "Rapport sur le Cambodge, présenté le 24 janvier 1874 au Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies par Hte-Frédéric Thomas-Caraman," 23–8.
- 141 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Norodom, 23 October 1873.
- 142 Bibliothèque nationale de France: 4-LK10-122: "Rapport sur le Cambodge, présenté le 24 janvier 1874 au Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies par Hte-Frédéric Thomas-Caraman," 1–22.
- 143 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 144 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 145 See Chapters 6 and 7.
- 146 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Roulina, 24 April 1874, verdict of the Tribunal de Commerce of Saigon, Lequès vs Caraman, dated 12 May 1874, Lr Caraman to Moura, undated (November 1874), Lr Caraman to Moura, 3 July 1874; CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Krantz, 22 May 1874.
- 147 ANC: RSC 3060: Certificate of nomination of Augier, dated 21 September 1874, and Lr Krantz to Moura, 22 September 1874.

4 The meaning of justice, 1874–76

- 1 ANC: RSC 3060: Minutes of the *tribunal arbitral*, session of 14 October 1874.
- 2 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to his sister-in-law, 10 December 1864, in A. Bonamy de Villemereuil, ed., *Explorations et missions de Doudart de Lagrée: Extraits de ses manuscrits* (Paris: Veuve Bouchard-Huzard, 1883), 420.
- 3 de Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, liv.
- 4 MEP: vol. 758: 42: Lr Miche to Gernot, 2 September 1864.
- 5 de Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, lxii. The French trader mentioned in the ruling is called "Thomas" but unrelated to Thomas-Caraman.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 The exact details of the incident were contested at the time between government representatives and Le Faucheur and remain unconfirmed. See report of Doudart de Lagrée to de la Grandière, 6 August 1866, in de Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, 488–96; CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Pottier to de la Grandière, 12 February 1867; Francis Garnier, "Voyage d'exploration en Indo-Chine," *Le Tour du Monde*, 2nd semester, 1870/71: 41. For Le Faucheur's version see CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Le Faucheur to Doudart de Lagrée, 2 July 1864, and Paul Le Faucheur, *Lettre sur le Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel, 1872), 10–12.
- 8 See conclusions of the official inquiry, in Lr Pottier to de la Grandière, 12 February 1867.
- 9 CAOM: GGI 12668: Minutes of trial, dated 12 December 1864.
- 10 Bruno Revertégat, "Un coureur d'arroyos: Le Faucheur, colon de la première heure en Cochinchine et au Cambodge (1858–74)," *Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises* 3 (1941): 40.
- 11 CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Pottier to de la Grandière, 30 October 1867.
- 12 For Le Faucheur's pepper ventures in collaboration with the Saigon merchant house Denis Frères, see CAOM: GGI 11828. For allegations that he buried his servant, see Etienne Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine sous la Restauration et le Second Empire* (Bordeaux: Imprimerie Delmas, 1965), 258.

- 13 CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr de la Grandière to Doudart de Lagrée, 6 January 1865; CAOM: B.220 (4), no. 20: Lr de la Grandière to Pottier, 23 January 1867.
- 14 CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Pottier to de la Grandière, 12 February 1867.
- 15 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr de la Grandière to Pottier, 18 September 1867.
- 16 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Ohier, 25 August 1869.
- 17 Moura's statement about the merchants spending their time "killing and stealing" was allegedly made following an incident in which an English and a French merchant shot dead two Chinese, as reported by Le Faucheur. CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Le Faucheur to Ohier, 25 October 1869, and GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Ohier, 25 August 1869.
- 18 CAOM: B.220 (6), no. 517, 63: Lr Ohier to Le Faucheur, 18 November 1869.
- 19 See articles 21–23 of the 1873 convention in *Annuaire du Cambodge 1888–1889* (Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Protectorat, 1889), 61–2.
- 20 *Ibid.*, see articles 1–9, 59–60.
- 21 *Ibid.*, see articles 11, 10, 21, 60–2.
- 22 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to his sister-in-law, 15 January 1864, in Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, 408. For a typical example of the fascination of French writers with the gory details of Cambodian executions, see for instance Paul Branda, *Cà et là: Cochinchine et Cambodge: L'âme khmère: Ang-kor* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1892), 255–6.
- 23 See *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 October 1864, for a report on the beheadings of Than, Ly and Muu, accused of murdering a French sailor.
- 24 The first French translations of Khmer law texts date from 1881 in the form of an article by the missionary Cordier in the local publication *Excursions et Reconnaissances*. Adhémar Leclère's work on Khmer law comprises the following monographs: *Recherches sur la législation cambodgienne (droit privé)* (Paris: Challamel, 1890); *Recherches sur le droit publique des Cambodgiens* (Paris: Challamel, 1894); *Recherches sur la législation criminelle et la procédure des Cambodgiens* (Paris: Challamel, 1894); *Les codes cambodgiens* (Paris: Leroux, 1898). His publications were based in part on a set of Khmer language booklets edited by the Protectorate and presenting traditional law texts for administrative usage. A set of these texts is today held by the National Archives of Cambodia, dated 1891.
- 25 The modern call for a good education as principal criterion for access to public office was not so far from the previous requirement of wealth, as only affluent families could afford to send their sons to Paris's elite schools. For a more elaborate discussion of the role of the French bureaucrat, see Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848–1945*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 113–30.
- 26 Sachchidanand Sahai, *Les institutions politiques et l'organisation administrative du Cambodge ancien (VI-XIII siècle)* (Paris: Publications de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1970), 54; David Chandler, "Cambodia before the French: Politics in a tributary kingdom 1794–1848" (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1974), 44; Alain Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française: Histoire d'une colonisation sans heurts (1897–1920)* (Paris: Harmattan, 1980), 24; Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 133–9.
- 27 Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française*, 22.
- 28 See for instance the letter given to a provincial governor on the occasion of his investiture in 1890, spelling out the office's duties and responsibilities, in Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 213–17.
- 29 ANC: RSC 11549: Lr Coulgeans to de Calan, 16 October 1885. The letter contains a description of the indigenous justice system as it still functioned near Krauchmar, a region largely untouched by French interference until the war of 1885–86. For a more detailed discussion of the Cambodian administration, see Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française*, 17–33; Chandler, "Cambodia before the French," 37–42; and May Ebihara, "Societal organization in sixteenth and seventeenth century

- Cambodia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* XV, no. 2 (1984), 280–95, particularly 285–7.
- 30 See the debate on assimilation vs association with regard to the colonized peoples, and the use of the heavily charged term of “*indigènes évolués*” for those members of the indigenous elite that appeared potentially eligible for assimilation, in Martin Lewis, “One hundred million Frenchmen: The Assimilation Theory in French colonial policy,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* IV, 2 (January 1962): 129–53.
 - 31 See article 26 of the treaty, in *Annuaire du Cambodge 1888–1889*, 63.
 - 32 On the subject of patronage and reciprocity and on the choice of one’s patron (*mekomlang*), see Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 121–7, and Leclère, *Recherches sur la législation cambodgienne*, 18–27.
 - 33 Jacques Népote, *Parenté et organisation sociale dans le Cambodge moderne et contemporain* (Genève: Editions Olizane, 1992), 107–9.
 - 34 For a more elaborate discussion of the function of gifts within the framework of kingship and patron–clientage, see Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 111–38.
 - 35 Jean Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 1 (Paris: Leroux, 1883), 371.
 - 36 Lr Doudart de Lagrée to Roze, 7 July 1865, in Georges Taboulet, *La geste française en Indochine: Histoire par les textes de la France en Indochine, des origines à 1914*, vol. 2 (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1954), 646–7.
 - 37 CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: “Enquête sur les événements du Cambodge” (1885).
 - 38 Preface by Charles Thomson to a complete edition of decrees proclaimed as part of the reorganization of the Cambodian administration, in *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, vol. 20 (1884), 205.
 - 39 CAOM: B.21 (45), no. 50: Lr Thomson to Under-secretary of State of the Marine and Colonies, 9 April 1884.
 - 40 Edgar Boulanger, *Un hiver au Cambodge: Chasses au tigre, à l’éléphant et au buffle sauvage: Souvenirs d’une mission officielle remplie en 1880–1881* (Tours: Alfred Mame et fils, 1887), 65.
 - 41 Aymonier Papers: 3/18: Correspondance avec Roi et mandarins cambodgiens: Minute of letter by Aymonier to King Norodom, 7 May 1880.
 - 42 Aymonier Papers: Folder 9: Complaint of Nguyen-van-Thanh and Vo-van-Dong, 18 February 1872. Aymonier was at the time preparing to take up his post in Phnom Penh as assistant to Representative Moura.
 - 43 *Ibid.*
 - 44 *Ibid.*
 - 45 *Ibid.*
 - 46 *Ibid.*
 - 47 *Ibid.*
 - 48 *Ibid.*
 - 49 On the request of the French government, the tax burden on Vietnamese (Cochin-chinese) fishermen working on Cambodia’s rivers and lakes was eased from 1868; see Gérard Groussin, *Le protectorat français sur le Cambodge de 1863 à 1884* (Phnom Penh: Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines de Phnom Penh, 1973), 17, 29–30.
 - 50 ANV2: SL 1839: Lr Aymonier to Directeur de l’Intérieur, 12 March 1874.
 - 51 *Ibid.*
 - 52 Royal ordinance of 1 May 1877 on the administration of justice in the kingdom, annex to the Convention of 15 January 1877, articles 1–6, in *Annuaire du Cambodge 1888–1889*, 73–4. The French did introduce identity cards for Chinese and Vietnamese in Cochinchina to verify the annual tax payments of the colony’s inhabitants (*capitation, carte de séjour*). The cards were less effective in monitoring population movements and left room for false declarations.
 - 53 CAOM: GGI 13334: Lr Philastre to Duperré, 19 October 1876.

- 54 Milton Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and response 1859–1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 196–9; Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 2, 177–8.
- 55 ANC RSC 17614: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Fourès, 24 November 1881.
- 56 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1, letters of 1881: Lr Fourès to Aymonier, 5 December 1881.
- 57 ANC RSC 17614: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Fourès, 24 November 1881.
- 58 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1, letters of 1881: Lr Fourès to Aymonier, 5 December 1881. “*Tirailleurs*” was the term commonly used for Vietnamese militia soldiers, auxiliary troops in the French colonial army.
- 59 *Arrêté* of 2 January 1882 on the inscription of Vietnamese at the Protectorate, in *Annuaire du Cambodge 1888–1889*, 81.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 CAOM: GGI 12279: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 29 February 1884. The *srok* Loeuk Dek is today situated in the border area of Kandal and Prey Veng province and before 1970 counted one of the highest concentrations of Vietnamese in Cambodia; see Joseph Pouvatshy, “Les Vietnamiens au Cambodge: Etude d’une minorité étrangère” (PhD thesis, Université de Paris, 1975), 86.
- 62 *Ibid.*
- 63 Biographic information taken from *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 March 1869; CAOM: GGI 12279: Excerpt of criminal record of Larrieu-Manan, dated 14 May 1884; CAOM: GGI 12007: Saigon police commissariat: Personal file of Henri Ternisien, dated 23 April 1884.
- 64 CAOM: GGI 12279: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 14 January 1883.
- 65 ANC: RSC 17683: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 19 January 1883.
- 66 CAOM: GGI 12030: Lr Procureur du Tribunal de première instance de Phnom Penh to Procureur Général in Saigon, 12 September 1886.
- 67 Charles Lemire, *Cochinchine française et Royaume de Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel, 1869), 225.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Pottier to de la Grandière, 31 May 1867.
- 70 *Courrier de Saigon*, 5 January 1865.
- 71 Paulin Vial, *Les premières années de la Cochinchine, colonie française* (Paris: Challamel, 1874), 356–7; *Courrier de Saigon*, 20 February 1865.
- 72 Jean-Pierre Gomane, *La mission Doudart de Lagrée-Francis Garnier 1866–1868* (Paris: Harmattan, 1994), 83–4; *Courrier de Saigon*, 5 March 1869.
- 73 King Norodom may have recruited some of the members of this brass band during an 1872 visit to Manila.
- 74 CAOM: Pavie Papers: 46APC, carton 1: Lettres à ses parents 1874–85: Lr Pavie to Adèle, 16 August 1880; Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 1, 106–7; Branda, *Cà et là*, 23–4; Paul Doumer, *L’Indochine française (Souvenirs)* (Paris: Vuibert et Nony, 1905), 223.
- 75 CAOM: RSC 258: Lr Jammes to Resident Superior, 3 January 1889.
- 76 See CAOM: Registre d’Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh 1873–89: Entries of childbirths, often for children born in previous years but not yet registered, particularly for the years from 1884 onwards.
- 77 Frank Vincent, *The Land of the White Elephant: Sights and scenes in South-Eastern Asia* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low & Searle, 1873), 274. By the 1880s, the archives reveal documents by Tagal authors in both Spanish and Khmer. For letters in Khmer, see for instance: Aymonier Papers: 3/2; 11/196; 11/331; 11/424; for Spanish correspondence authored by members of the Tagal community, see for instance CAOM: GGI 12278: “Note de police fournie par un agent secret,” 23 June 1884. See also CAOM: GGI 12042: Questionnaire on the administration of justice in Cambodia, dated 2 September 1879 (Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers).

- 78 CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh 1873–89: Entry of 30 April 1877, registering the marriage of Féliciano Pascual de la Cruz and Ton Suc.
- 79 CAOM: GGI 12042: Questionnaire on the administration of justice in Cambodia, dated 2 September 1879 (Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers).
- 80 See for instance an affair involving Pascual de la Cruz of the year 1879, subsequently hushed up by the palace (Aymonier Papers: 3/140).
- 81 Pascual de la Cruz's marriage in 1877 is the very first recorded in the register of Phnom Penh's colonial *Etat civil*. Subsequently, marriages, deaths and births were regularly reported by the Tagals, births starting in 1884 (CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh 1873–89).
- 82 CAOM: GGI 12278: Lr Marrot to Le Myre de Vilers, 28 August 1883.
- 83 PRO: FO 628/7/116: Lr Gould to Berthier, 21 March 1879.
- 84 *L'Indépendant de Saigon*, 5 August 1879.
- 85 CAOM: GGI 13412: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 17 May 1880.
- 86 CAOM: GGI 12042: Lr Aymonier to Lafont, 27 February 1879.
- 87 *L'Indépendant de Saigon*, 5 and 12 August 1879.
- 88 CAOM: GGI 12042: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 29 July 1879.
- 89 CAOM: GGI 12042: Lr Aymonier to Lafont, 27 February 1879.
- 90 See correspondence by the British consul Tremlett in Saigon, in CAOM: GGI 12042.
- 91 PRO: FO 628/7/116: Lr Knox to Tremlett, 3 May 1879.
- 92 CAOM: GGI 12042: Lr Aymonier to Lafont, 9 June 1879.
- 93 CAOM: GGI 12042: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 29 July 1879.
- 94 Ibid. See, however, PRO: FO 628/7/115: Lr Tremlett to Knox, 25 March 1879, which asserts that only Indians with proof of their British subject status would fall under French jurisdiction. Tremlett based this assertion in part on a copy of the *Courrier de Saigon* of 20 April 1873 outlining the content of the 1873 convention on jurisdiction over Europeans in Cambodia. By 1879, such information was not only “not easily to be got at this late date,” as Tremlett stated in a slightly self-congratulatory manner, but indeed dated. He had this information confirmed by a Saigon source, but at best this would represent the stand of the outgoing Governor Lafont. With Le Myre de Vilers' coming to office in July of the same year, Aymonier's view that all Indians should be accountable to French courts, as expressed in CAOM: GGI 12042: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 29 July 1879, had the necessary backing. See for instance CAOM: GGI 11834 for proof of Le Myre de Vilers' more interventionist attitude toward the issue.
- 95 Chinese were called *asiatiques étrangers* (foreign Asians) in official French terminology. For the legal status of Chinese in Cochinchina, see Nguyen Quoc Dinh, *Les congrégations chinoises en Indochine française* (Paris: Librairie du recueil Sirey, 1941), particularly 45–9, 141–7.
- 96 CAOM: B.21 (45), no. 39: Lr Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 20 March 1884.
- 97 CAOM: GGI 12042: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 29 July 1879.
- 98 Aymonier Papers: 3/18: Correspondence register.
- 99 The letters can be found in Aymonier Papers: Folders 1bis, 3, and 11. They are dated according to the lunar calendar, the large majority in the years of the rabbit, the dragon, and the snake, corresponding roughly to 1879–81.
- 100 Aymonier Papers: 11/258: Complaint by anonymous and his wife Tes to Aymonier, dated the fifth day of the waxing moon of the month of ches, the year of the dragon (1880): ខ្ញុំប្រធានសូមពឹងព្រះគេជគុណអោយលោកជួយដំណុកបំបុងកុំអោយកើតក្តៅក្រហាយប្រពន្ធកូនអោយបានលេចក្តីសុខដោយជាំព្រះគេជគុណ។ “Knyom brobat som peng preah dechkun aoy lok chuey tomnok bomrong kom aoy koeut kdao krohay bropun kon aoy ban sechkdey sok daoy chea preah dechkun.” Kbal Koh is likely the northernmost village on today's Koh Dach, an island in the Mekong River near Phnom Penh.

- 101 See for instance, Aymonier Papers: 11/210 and 11/196 (murder); 11/258 (fraud); 11/475 (case of convicted thief).
- 102 See for instance Aymonier Papers: 3/57 (render justice); 3/164 (accelerate procedures); 11/210 (reverse previous decision).
- 103 See for instance Aymonier Papers: Plea of Uk in favor of A-Chan (1880), in: 11/452; plea for release from prison by anonymous (1880), in: 11/475. The *srey nokorbal*, (ឧកញ៉ាស្រីនគរពាល) also called *ankorban*, was the head of the police for the whole kingdom, and also in charge of supervising the zeal of governors and other government agents in charge of judicial matters. He reported directly to the Minister of Justice (*younreach*); see Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique*, 90–3.
- 104 Aymonier Papers: Letters by Pascual de la Cruz, for instance 11/424 (1880); 11/331 (1880); 11/196 (1880).
- 105 As in the case of the woman In: Aymonier Papers: 11/301: Lr Aymonier to Court of Justice, dated 14th day of the tenth month of the year of the dragon (1880):
 ដ្បិតមេអឺនមិនសុភ័យចិត្តនឹងឧកញ៉ាព្រះស្នាចនកម្មធម៌មានក្នុងពាក្យសព្វក្រព្វអោយហៅក្រំយកខ្លួនមកជំងឺជំរះ
 តាមច្បាប់ក្តីអោយខាន។ [sic] “ . . . dbet me In men sokchet neng oknya preah sdach Nok
 doch mean knong piek sop krop aoy hao krom yok kluen mouk chumnum chumreah
 tam chbap kom aoy kan.” . . . Mme In is unhappy with *oknya preah sdach* Nok, as
 the complete case of their disagreement is enclosed herewith, and I call upon the
 court to bring those people once more to trial in accordance with the law, without
 exception.
- 106 It seems thus remarkable that the voluminous correspondence involved did not end up in the colonial archives, even more so as Aymonier had received them in his position as representative. Instead of being deposited with other documents of the period, they were taken home to France by Aymonier, together with his private papers, as a kind of souvenir. Such an archival policy is revealing in more than one way.
- 107 CAOM: GGI 11834: Lr Moura to Lafont, 2 January 1878.
- 108 See for instance Aymonier Papers: 3/67: Complaint of Banbit Chhun (1878); Aymonier Papers: 11/210: Plea by an anonymous mother in favor of her sons Net and Nut (1879); and Aymonier Papers: 3/63: Complaint of Ha (1880), also 11/536.
- 109 Aymonier Papers: 11/452 (1880); 11/475 (undated). In both cases the petitioners addressed the Representative of the Protectorate as the មេធាវីស្រុកខ្មែរ.
- 110 CAOM: GGI 12042: Lr Aymonier to Lafont, 9 June 1879.
- 111 Mercurol’s biography is fragmentary before 1880, as are those of most of his fellow traders. The summary presented in this paragraph is based on CAOM: GGI 14105: Lr Consul of France in Yokohama to Le Myre de Vilers, 25 October 1880; ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Procureur Général, 14 December 1872; CAOM: GGI 13415: Note, Direction de l’Intérieur, Commissariat Général de police, dated 9 September 1880. See also Gerald Hickey, *Kingdom in the Morning Mist: Mayréna in the highlands of Vietnam* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), for one of Mercurol’s escapades in neighboring Vietnam.
- 112 CAOM: GGI 13415: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 29 August 1880.
- 113 For the kind of lawsuits that Mercurol took under his patronage, see Aymonier Papers: 11/258 (1880).
- 114 See Aymonier’s register of correspondence with King Norodom and the mandarins, entry of 21 May 1880, Lr Aymonier to King Norodom, enclosed complaint of Neay Nay.
- 115 CAOM: GGI 11816: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 26 September 1884.
- 116 Groussin, *Le protectorat français*, 56–9. For a comprehensive record of the convention and the ensuing decrees, see *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, vol. 20 (1884), 207–52. More on this in later chapters.
- 117 CAOM: GGI 11543: Lr Procureur Général to Bégin, 13 September 1886; ANC: RSC 3585: Minutes of meeting with King Norodom, Sisowath and various ministers

- on accommodations regarding Thomson's treaties in exchange for a cessation of hostilities, undated (1886).
- 118 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Messageries Maritimes to Moura, 25 June 1874; ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Pouvet to Moura, 14 August 1874.
- 119 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 24 April 1874, Lr Caraman to Moura, 5 June 1874, Lr Pouvet to Moura, 14 August 1874, Lr Caraman to Moura, 31 January 1875, Lr Dumont to Moura, 2 September 1875, Lr Caraman to Moura, 26 August 1878, Lr Director of Bank of Indochina to Moura, 30 August 1878. ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Denière to Lafont, 31 March 1878.
- 120 CAOM: GGI 11829: Report of Augier and Moura on the failure of the *tribunal arbitral*, dated 10 December 1874; ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Moura to Caraman, 1 December 1877.
- 121 Maurice Comte, "Economie, idéologie et pouvoir: La société cambodgienne (1863–1886)" (PhD thesis, Université de Lyon II, 1980), 187–200; Adhémar Leclère, *Cambodge: Le roi, la famille royale et les femmes du palais* (Saigon: Imprimerie-Librairie Claude & Cie, 1905), 6; Leclère, *Le bouddhisme au Cambodge* (Paris: Leroux, 1899), 516–17.
- 122 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to the members of the *tribunal arbitral*, 28 October 1874.
- 123 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 1 January 1875, and Lr Caraman to Moura, 21 May 1876.
- 124 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Voisin-Lavernière and Espinasse (sénateurs du Tarn), Pourcet and Sacase (sénateurs de la Haute Garonne), Fayolle and Palotte (sénateurs de la Creuse) to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 2 March 1878. See for comparison Caraman's draft for this letter, altogether more baroque with regard to his achievements, but on the whole largely similar to the original, in: CARAN: F17: 3009A. Also CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fayolle and Voisins-Lavernière to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 19 February 1878.
- 125 Governor Lafont was in office from October 1877 until 7 July 1879; Le Myre de Vilers remained Governor, except for a short period in 1881, until January 1883.
- 126 Moura returned to France in January 1879; Aymonier left the position of representative in May 1881.
- 127 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Lafont, 18 April 1878, and 25 April 1878.
- 128 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Lafont, 22 July 1878; ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Moura to Caraman, 27 July 1878, and Lr Moura to Caraman, 30 July 1878.
- 129 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1bis: Lr (illegible) to Aymonier, 3 September 1880; CAOM: GGI 10166: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 6 September 1880, and Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Aymonier, 23 November 1880. Previously, the Saigon lawyer Vinson had traveled to Phnom Penh to settle the case but failed. Vinson shared an office with Viénot who had earlier so successfully lobbied the colonial authorities in the case of Ali Nullabay.
- 130 The final stages of the negotiations are chronicled by a voluminous correspondence between Le Myre de Vilers, Fourès, and Norodom in CAOM: GGI 10166.
- 131 CAOM: GGI 10166: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 19 February 1881.
- 132 CAOM: RSC 258: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Fourès, 23 December 1881.
- 133 Convention of 18 December 1881, in *Annuaire du Cambodge 1888–1889*, 77–9.

5 Rules of romance and reproduction, 1877–79

- 1 ANC: RSC 3060: Note by the Administrative Service of the Marine, dated 31 January 1877.
- 2 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Ferrer to Caraman, 12 June 1877.

- 3 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to (illegible), 13 February 1877, and court order, dated 5 June 1876.
- 4 ANC: RSC 3060: Financial statement (expenses and salaries of brick factory), January 1877.
- 5 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Fourcros to Caraman, 1 September 1876.
- 6 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Fourcros, 17 February 1877.
- 7 CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh, 1873–89: Entry of 25 September 1880 (birth of Victor Thomas on 3 January 1877).
- 8 ANC: RSC 3060: Contract between Caraman and Antoinette Marie Roubichou, Veuve Marrot, 31 December 1881.
- 9 CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh, 1873–89: Entry of 25 September 1880 (birth of Victor Thomas on 3 January 1877).
- 10 CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh, 1873–89: Entries of 19 January 1881 and 13 October 1884.
- 11 CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh, 1873–89: Entry of 26 March 1884.
- 12 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Badens, 26 July 1885.
- 13 CAOM: RSC 479: Lr Russel to Poumagnac, 13 March 1877 and 18 May 1877.
- 14 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 23 August 1878.
- 15 CAOM: GGI 22437: Lr Champeaux to Governor General, 21 January 1889.
- 16 The missionaries in question were Arsène Hestrest and Joseph Guesdon. In the case of Guesdon, his being expelled from the missionary society turned out to be beneficial on a different level. He became a brilliant Khmer linguist, authored a comprehensive Khmer–French dictionary and published a range of Khmer texts with the Parisian editor Plon. On Guesdon's troubles with celibacy, see MEP: vol. 765: 221: Lr Cordier to Superiors, 10 August 1881, and entry of 30 January 1887 in Leclère's Diary. On Hestrest's tribulations and their official interpretation, see "Notice nécrologique," *Comptes-rendus*, 1905, 387; MEP: vol. 765: 140: Lr Cordier to Miche, 18 February 1866; MEP: vol. 758: 78: Lr Miche to Pernot, 1 March 1866; MEP: vol. 758: 82: Lr Miche to Pernot, 27 May 1866. And "Quelques notes sur l'abbé Hestrest, ancien curé de Froidmont-Cohartille," *Semaine religieuse du Diocèse de Soissons*, 1908, 459–60, 471–3.
- 17 Archives personnelles Marie-Thérèse Thomas Caraman: Livret de naissance, Victor Thomas-Caraman.
- 18 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 28 July 1878; ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Lafont, 12 August 1878.
- 19 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1, letters of 1881: Lr Fourès to Aymonier, 29 May 1881.
- 20 The French did not move on land from the ship *Bienhoa* until 1873; see ANV2: SL 1839: Lr Moura to Dupré, 17 January 1873.
- 21 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Badens, 26 July 1885.
- 22 For Faraut, see A. Baréty, "Félix-Gaspard Faraut," *Nice Historique*, 1911: 420–2; Jean Ajalbert, "La mort du colon," in *Les nuages sur l'Indochine* (Paris: Louis Michaud, n.d.), 217–34; Claude Maitre, "Nécrologie: F.G. Faraut," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* XI (1911): 254–5. For Ferrer, see ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 4 October 1878; CAOM: GGI 12042: Questionnaire, dated 2 September 1879 (Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers).
- 23 See for instance CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh, 1883–87, no. 18: Entry of 14 December 1887 (Blanc); CAOM: GGI 23313: Lr Governor General to Mme Patou, 14 February 1895 (Patou).
- 24 The estimate is based on the following calculation: In the first census of Phnom Penh's population in 1903, there were 48 registered and 315 non-registered *métis*, a proportion of 1 to 6.6; 15 *métis* children had been registered up to 1885. If we apply the same proportion of registered–unregistered to this second figure from 1885, the result is that by this date more than 100 (registered and unregistered) *métis* children

- would have lived in Phnom Penh, all of them fathered by the first generation of Cambodia colonists. Given the small number of European residents prior to 1885, this seems highly unlikely. It thus appears that during this initial period the ratio registered–unregistered must have been fewer than 1 to 6.6, that is a higher proportion of *métis* children had been registered with the authorities. See CAOM: RSC 258: Census of 1903, and table of merchants in annex.
- 25 As suggested by the Phnom Penh birth register, where most European long-term residents at one time or other serve as witnesses for the registration of their peers' children. See CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh, 1873–89.
 - 26 Jenny Teichman, *Illegitimacy: An examination of bastardy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 40–52.
 - 27 Leclère's Diary, entry of 18 July 1886.
 - 28 Le docteur Morice, "Voyage en Cochinchine," *Le Tour du Monde*, vol. 2 (1875), 375.
 - 29 Leclère's Diary, entry of 1 August 1886.
 - 30 See for instance *L'Indépendant de Saigon*, 12 February 1884; Paul Lefebvre, *Faces jaunes: Moeurs et coutumes de l'Extrême-Orient* (Paris: Challamel, 1886), 7–9; Paul Branda, *Cà et là: Cochinchine et Cambodge: L'âme khmère: Ang-kor* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1892), 13; Raoul Postel, *Sur les bords du Mé-không* (Paris: Librairie générale de vulgarisation, 1884), 127–8.
 - 31 See Peter Frederic Baugher, "The Contradiction of Colonialism: The French experience in Indochina 1860–1940" (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1980), 165–9.
 - 32 Charles Meyer, *La vie quotidienne des Français en Indochine 1860–1910* (Paris: Hachette, 1985), 269–70.
 - 33 Penny Edwards, "Womanizing Indochina: Fiction, nation and cohabitation in colonial Cambodia, 1890–1930," in Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds, *Domesticating the Empire: Race, gender and family life in French and Dutch colonialism* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 117.
 - 34 Postel, *Sur les bords du Mé-không*, 190.
 - 35 Frank Vincent, *The Land of the White Elephant: Sights and scenes in South-Eastern Asia* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low & Searle, 1873), 271–2; ANC: RSC 11749: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 25 April 1884; Aymonier Papers: 3/57: Complaint of Rosenthal's servant A-Suos.
 - 36 Bibliothèque municipale d'Alençon: Collection Adhémar Leclère: Ancien fonds, manuscrits: Ms papiers XiXe, no. 701: "Le Résident Verrier," 35–43, 47–52.
 - 37 For Neang Teat, see ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 28 July 1878, and ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Lafont, 12 August 1878. For Neang Ruong, see Alain Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française: Histoire d'une colonisation sans heurts (1897–1920)* (Paris: Harmattan, 1980), 59–60.
 - 38 Bibliothèque municipale d'Alençon: Collection Adhémar Leclère: Ancien fonds, manuscrits: Ms papiers XiXe, no. 701: "Le Résident Verrier," 29.
 - 39 Metropolitan views were not in unison on this issue, however. Following the experience of the Commune, there was a strong counter-current in Paris that advocated the export to the colonies of those parts of society that were most at risk of harboring revolutionary ideas; see for example I.-H. Chessé, *Essai sur la colonisation en Cochinchine et au Cambodge* (Paris: Paul Dupont & Challamel Aîné, 1873), 2.
 - 40 Joseph Chailley-Bert, *L'émigration des femmes aux colonies* (discours de M.J. Chailley-Bert à la conférence donnée le 12 janvier 1897 par l'Union coloniale française) (Paris: Armand Colin, 1897), 17–19, and introduction by Comte d'Haussonville, 6.
 - 41 Postel, *Sur les bords du Mé-không*, 183.
 - 42 CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh, 1873–89: Entries of 16 May 1874 and 20 June 1877; CAOM: GGI 12278: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 2 December 1881; CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh, 1883–87, no. 18: Entry of 6 December 1883.

- 43 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Roulina, 16 June 1874.
- 44 See for example ANC: RSC 13271: “Naturalisation du métis Grégoire.” The petitioner, born in 1883, was the son of the Phnom Penh pharmacist-cum-ice-manufacturer Grégoire and Nguyen-thi-Tanh. His father died in 1888. He was an inmate of the Sainte Enfance in Phnom Penh, worked for some years as a teacher in villages along the Mekong River, and later became a rice farmer in Or Melou in northern Cambodia. In 1920, for reasons unknown, he requested French citizenship. For colonial employees of mixed descent, see the example of Dam below.
- 45 CAOM: RSC 258: Census of 1903.
- 46 ANC: RSC 7327: Personnel file of Moura Dam, “né à Phnom Penh au 5ème quartier le 15 décembre 1874, fils de Moura, lieutenant de vaisseau, représentant au Cambodge et de Téat (elsewhere Tat or Tan), décédée.” Dam worked as a clerk at the *résidence* of Kompong Chhnang, beginning in 1901. Together with his wife Him, he had at least five children, some of whom likewise entered the colonial service as teachers and clerks. They do not seem to have enjoyed any preferential treatment because of their famous grandfather, who is never mentioned again in later documents. See files ANC: RSC: 10789, 32667 and 18806 for more on the Dam family.
- 47 Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and colonial society in French West Africa 1895–1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 53, 77–80.
- 48 Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial family romance and métissage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 96–7; Benedict Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l’espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés malades* (Paris: Baillière, 1857).
- 49 CAOM: GGI 7701: Undated circular (1896).
- 50 *Ibid.* See also CAOM: GGI 16771: Lr Director of Finance to Governor General, 7 May 1912; Gilles de Gantès, “Coloniaux, gouverneurs et ministres: L’influence des français du Viet-Nam sur l’évolution du pays à l’époque coloniale 1902–1914” (PhD thesis, Université Paris VII), 51; Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 101.
- 51 CAOM: GGI 7701: Note by Crevost, “La question des métis,” manuscript sent to the Saigon Governor on 24 September 1898; also Teichman, *Illegitimacy*, 128–31; Alain Ruscio, *Le crédo de l’homme blanc: Regards coloniaux français XIX–XX siècles* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1995), 36–41.
- 52 Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the colonial order of things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 179.
- 53 CAOM: GGI 10214: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 11 December 1882.
- 54 CAOM: GGI 13360: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 17 February 1881, and Lr Moura to Duperré, 6 March 1877.
- 55 CAOM: Registre d’Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh, 1873–89: Court order of 19 October 1884 and entry of 19 December 1887; CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh, 1883–87, no. 18: Entry of 14 December 1887 (will of Alexis Blanc).
- 56 CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh, 1883–87, no. 18: Entry of 14 December 1887 (will of Alexis Blanc).
- 57 CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh, 1891, no. 20: Entry of 20 January 1891: Division of estate of the late Alexis Blanc.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 For the age limit of seven years, see CAOM: GGI 7701: Note by Crevost, “La question des métis,” manuscript sent to the Saigon Governor on 24 September 1898; quote from CAOM: GGI 7701: Undated circular (1896).
- 60 *Ibid.* The view that indigenous women should have no rights over their mixed offspring was not codified at the time in the colony. However, it was so in neighboring colonies with a longer legislative tradition, and it can be assumed that it seemed ‘natural’ to most local Europeans. See Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: Europeans and Eurasians in Dutch Asia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 148.

- 61 ANC: RSC 12383: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Fourès, 21 September 1882.
- 62 CAOM: GGI 23313: Lr Patou to Governor General, 23 July 1894, and Governor General to Patou, 14 February 1895.
- 63 CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, Cambodge, 1885–96, province de Kampot: Addendum for 1896 re: birth of Patou, Joseph in 1886.
- 64 CAOM: GGI 23313: Lr Patou to Governor General, 23 July 1894.
- 65 For Victor, see CAOM: GGI 12224: Lr Caraman to Thomson, 20 May 1885. For Faraut, see Antoine Brébion, *Dictionnaire de bio-bibliographie générale ancienne et moderne de l'Indochine française, publié après la mort de l'auteur par Antoine Cabaton* (Paris: Société d'édition géographique, maritime et coloniale, 1935), 153; Jean Ajalbert, "La mort du colon," in *Les nuages sur l'Indochine* (Paris: Louis Michaud, n.d.), 217–34.
- 66 CAOM: GGI 16769: Lr Graville to Governor General, 19 March 1910.
- 67 See George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and abnormal sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 151.
- 68 CAOM: GGI 22148: Lr Marrot to Fourès, 25 January 1891. Marrot himself missed the peak period of interracial relationships due to his young age, and later married a Frenchwoman.
- 69 CAOM: GGI 7770: Confidential circular by Assaud, Procureur Général, dated 18 September 1897.
- 70 *Ibid.*, original emphasis.
- 71 CAOM: GGI 7770: Instructions by Governor Doumer to Resident Superiors of Tonkin, Annam, Cambodia, and Laos, dated 29 September 1901.
- 72 ANV2: SL 1839: Lr Moura to Directeur de l'Intérieur, 11 February 1875.
- 73 James Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1880–1940* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993), 32, 67–70.
- 74 "Rapport au Gouverneur sur la prostitution à Cholon par M. Landes, administrateur," *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, no. 3 (1880): 55.
- 75 Lefebvre, *Faces jaunes*, 159.
- 76 Adhémar Leclère, *De la démoralisation des conquies par les conquérants et des conquérants par les conquies: Mémoire lu au Congrès International d'Ethnographie tenu à Paris en 1900*, extrait du compte-rendu (Paris: Leroux, 1902), 10–11.
- 77 Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 180.
- 78 For allegations of rape, see for instance MEP: vol. 755: 494: Lr Philippe to illegible, 11 September 1865; MEP: vol. 755: 151: Lr Baron to Albrand, 3 March 1860.
- 79 See for instance ANC: RSC 14354 or CAOM: GGI 12668.
- 80 CAOM: Indochine AF P 32 (1), carton 263: Lr Governor of Cochinchina to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 21 July 1870.
- 81 Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san*, 45.
- 82 Arthur Delteil, *Guide du voyageur à Saigon: Un an de séjour en Cochinchine* (Paris: Challamel, 1887), 113.
- 83 See for instance CAOM: GGI 22437: Lr Champeaux to Richaud, 21 January 1889, and CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: "Enquête sur les événements du Cambodge." The latter report contends that Prince Duong Chacr brokered sexual contacts between local women and Frenchmen. However, the report's author, Klobukowski, was heavily biased against what he perceived as "anti-French elements" in the palace (among them Duong Chacr), which makes the report a problematic source.
- 84 See two letters exchanged between Caraman and Ternisien in 1883 and reprinted *in extenso* as part of a political controversy in two Saigon newspapers two years later, in *Le Saïgonnais*, 11 June 1885, and *L'Unité indo-chinoise*, 12 June 1885.
- 85 CAOM: GGI 10161: Telegram Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 6 August 1881.
- 86 See for instance ANC: RSC 14354: Police report by Dresen on François Aubriot, dated 1 April 1899.
- 87 Lefebvre, *Faces jaunes*, 159.

- 88 Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and sexuality in France after 1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 19–20.
- 89 *Courrier de Saigon*, 10 January 1864; Charles Lemire, *Cochinchine française et Royaume de Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel, 1877, 1st edn 1869), 155; Prosper Cultru, *Histoire de la Cochinchine française, des origines à 1883* (Paris: Challamel, 1910), 183.
- 90 See Sumanta Banerjee, *Dangerous Outcast: The prostitute in nineteenth century Bengal* (Calcutta: Seagull, 1998), 105–25; Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san*, 52–9.
- 91 ANC: RSC 4416: Lr Vandelet to Le Myre de Vilers, 21 November 1879; CAOM: GGI 13465: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 22 January 1884.
- 92 ANC: RSC 4416: Lr Vandelet to Le Myre de Vilers, 21 November 1879.
- 93 CAOM: GGI 13465: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 22 January 1884.
- 94 *Ibid.*
- 95 See deployment tables of troops in Cambodia in: CAOM: GGI 13483. By September 1885, a total of 629 French troops were stationed in Cambodia, of which 383 remained temporarily in Phnom Penh. This represented roughly a 500 percent increase in the European presence in the capital. In addition, 420 Vietnamese *tirailleurs* (150 in Phnom Penh), 379 Vietnamese militia soldiers and 170 members of the newly formed Cambodian militia complemented the occupation force. The numbers increased in the course of the war and do not include the troops fighting in the eastern and southeastern part of Cambodia, which reported directly to Saigon.
- 96 ANC: RSC 9614: “Rapport sur le service de santé du Cambodge 1885 par Dr. Maurel,” 1.
- 97 ANC: RSC 9614: “Rapport sur le service de santé du Cambodge 1885 par Dr. Maurel,” 16–27; CAOM: GGI 12251: Telegram Fourès to Thomson, 1 July 1885; CAOM: GGI 12251: Lr Renaud to Bégin, 17 September 1885.
- 98 ANC: RSC 9614: “Rapport sur le service de santé du Cambodge 1885 par Dr. Maurel,” 6–13.
- 99 *Ibid.*, 6–7.
- 100 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 101 *Ibid.*, 80–1.
- 102 Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 10.
- 103 *Ibid.*, 246–57.
- 104 Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san*, 100.
- 105 For more detail, see Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The regulation of sexuality since 1800* (Longman, 1989), 84–93; Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san*, 100–21.
- 106 In Batavia, policies similar to Singapore date back to the early 1850s when regulation in the vein of the metropolitan *Reglement tot wering van de schadelijke gevolgen, welke uit de prostitutie voortvloeijen* [to counteract the harmful effects arising from prostitution] were introduced in the colony; see John Ingleson, “Prostitution in colonial Java,” in David Chandler and M.C. Ricklefs, eds, *Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Indonesia* (Melbourne: Monash University: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), 127–9, and Liesbeth Hesselink, “Prostitution: A Necessary Evil, Particularly in the Colonies: Views on prostitution in the Netherlands Indies,” in Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Anke Niehof, eds, *Indonesian Women in Focus: Past and present notions* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1987), 206–8. In the Spanish Philippines, the metropolitan trend to regulate prostitution reached the colony only with a considerable time lag. The first local *Reglamento de higiene pública en sus secciones de higiene de las nodrizas y de la prostitución* dates from 1897, but most likely had its less codified antecedents as early as 1887; see Andrew Abalain, “Prostitution Policy and the Project of Modernity: A comparative study of colonial Indonesia and the Philippines 1850–1940” (PhD thesis, Cornell University, 2003).
- 107 CAOM: GGI 9273: Lr de Lanessan to Fourès, 28 March 1893.

- 108 Le docteur Kermorgan, "Aperçu sur les maladies vénériennes dans les colonies françaises," *Annales d'hygiène et de médecine coloniale* VI (1903), quoted in Ngo Hou, "Les débuts de l'assistance médicale au Cambodge 1863–1908" (PhD thesis, University of Hanoi, Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacology in Saigon, 1953), 22.
- 109 ANC: RSC 9614: "Rapport sur le service de santé du Cambodge 1885 par Dr. Maurel," 81.
- 110 *Ibid.*, my emphasis.
- 111 *Ibid.*
- 112 *Ibid.*
- 113 A scene nicely described by a visitor to Phnom Penh in 1893, in M.J. Agostini, "Pnom-Penh: Voyage au Cambodge," *Le Tour du Monde*, 1898: 298–300.
- 114 ANC: RSC 9614: "Rapport sur le service de santé du Cambodge 1885 par Dr. Maurel," 81.
- 115 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 116 *Ibid.*, 70–7.
- 117 Leclère's Diary, entry of 1 October 1886.
- 118 CAOM: GGI 10181: Report by Fontaine on operations of the military authority, dated 28 July 1886; CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: "Enquête sur les événements du Cambodge," dated 23 July 1885.
- 119 Maurel became a member of the Société des Etudes Indochinoises, gave speeches before Paris's most prestigious geographical and ethnographical societies, and later embarked on an academic career at the University of Toulouse.
- 120 Examples of this staple narrative can be found in the works of authors as diverse as Harmand, Vincent, Agostini, Boulangier, Branda and Leclère; see Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Rare and manuscript department, no. 3481: Harmand Papers, Box 1, File 19, 3; Vincent, *Land of the White Elephant*, 269–70, 289–92; Agostini, "Pnom-Penh," 290, 293; Edgar Boulangier, *Un hiver au Cambodge: Chasses au tigre, à l'éléphant et au buffle sauvage: Souvenirs d'une mission officielle remplie en 1880–1881* (Tours: Alfred Mame, 1887), 35–6; Branda, *Cà et là*, 43–4, 48–54; Leclère's Diary, entries of 26 July and 2 August 1886.
- 121 MEP: vol. 765: 89: Lr Barreau to Faurie, 16 July 1861; MEP: vol. 765: 121: Lr Janin to his Superiors, 29 April 1864.
- 122 Estimates according to Lr Doudart de Lagrée to his sister-in-law, 15 January 1864, in A. Bonamy de Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions de Doudart de Lagrée: Extraits de ses manuscrits* (Paris: Veuve Bouchard-Huzard, 1883), 408; Raoul Postel, *Sur les bords du Mé-không* (Paris: Librairie générale de vulgarisation, 1884), 119; Branda, *Cà et là*, 289; Bernard Marrot, *Exposition de Lyon 1894, section cambodgienne: Notes et souvenirs sur le Cambodge* (Roanne: Grande imprimerie Forézienne P. Roustan, 1894), 8; Etienne Aymonier: *Le Cambodge*, vol. 1 (Paris: Leroux, 1900), 60.
- 123 CARAN: F17: 2950: Lr Caraman to Minister of Education, 10 July 1865.
- 124 *Ibid.*
- 125 Branda, *Cà et là*, 5, 288–9.
- 126 Adhémar Leclère, *Cambodge: Le roi, la famille royale et les femmes du palais* (Saigon: Imprimerie-Librairie Claude & Cie, 1905), 9–15.
- 127 Jean Moura, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, vol. 1 (Paris: Leroux, 1883), 231.
- 128 *Ibid.*
- 129 For an overview of King Norodom's many children and their respective mothers, see Justin Corfield, *The Royal Family of Cambodia* (Melbourne: The Khmer Language and Culture Center, 1990), 16–24.
- 130 See Lr Doudart de Lagrée to his sister-in-law, 15 January 1864, in Villemereuil, *Explorations et missions*, 408; Louis Delaporte, *Voyage au Cambodge: L'architecture khmer* (Paris: Delagrave, 1880), 33.
- 131 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, département des manuscrits orientaux:

- “Recueil des lois cambodgiennes, en vingt-et-un volumes manuscrits, autographiés à Oudong et portant tous la date du 9 mai 1891: Livret sur les lois contre les crimes de lèse-majesté, fautes commises au palais, erreurs d’étiquette commises en présence du roi (suite à séduction d’une concubine du Roi par un serviteur).”
- 132 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 23 August 1878.
- 133 CAOM: GGI 10214: Minutes of meeting between King Norodom and Fourès, Lr of Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 11 December 1882.
- 134 CAOM: GGI 10214: Telegram Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 11 December 1882.
- 135 CAOM: GGI 10214: Minutes of meeting between King Norodom and Fourès, Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 11 December 1882.
- 136 CAOM: GGI 10214: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 18 December 1882.
- 137 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1bis: Lr Rosenthal to Aymonier, 19 June 1879. For Le Faucheur, see Etienne Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine sous la Restauration et le Second Empire* (Bordeaux: Imprimerie Delmas, 1965), 258.
- 138 CAOM: GGI 13471: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 26 August 1884.
- 139 According to Caraman, even Representative Moura chose his *congai* among the palace women, and did so without the blessing of the king. Caraman’s accusations appear during a low point in the relationship between him and Moura, however, and have to be taken with a grain of salt: see ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Lafont, 12 August 1878.
- 140 *Le Saigonnais*, 21 August 1884; CAOM: Registre d’Etat civil, com. Phnom Penh, 1873–89: Entry of 15 August 1884; CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh, 1883–87, no. 18: Contract of marriage between Claude Coqui and Maria Blay, 11 June 1884.
- 141 *Le Saigonnais*, 21 August 1884.
- 142 Aymonier Papers. Folder 1bis: Lr Fourès to Aymonier, 3 October 1881.
- 143 CAOM: GGI 11101: Lr Badens to Aymonier, 26 April 1886.
- 144 ANC: RSC 5238: “Procès-verbal d’installation de la commission municipale de la ville de Phnom Penh,” dated 19 November 1884; *Le Saigonnais*, 23 November 1884; Branda, *Cà et là*, 67–70.
- 145 ANC: RSC 5238: Arrêté by the Governor of Cochinchina, dated 19 November 1884; ANC: RSC 5239: Arrêté by the Mayor of Phnom Penh, dated 20 November 1884.
- 146 The link between reorganizing Phnom Penh’s administration and reorganizing cross-racial sexual relations is further illustrated by generous orders of stationery by Phnom Penh’s mayor: fifty birth certificates, fifty marriage certificates and 250 passports. He was apparently hoping for a surge in properly registered marriages and a subsequent baby boom; see Penny Edwards, “Cambodge: The cultivation of a nation 1860–1945” (PhD thesis, Monash University, Melbourne, 1999), 112–13.
- 147 ANC: RSC 14354: Report by Dresen to Resident Superior, dated 1 April 1899, my italics.
- 148 Introduction to speech of Chailley-Bert by Comte d’Haussonville, in Joseph Chailley-Bert, *L’émigration des femmes aux colonies (discours de M. J. Chailley-Bert à la conférence donnée le 12 janvier 1897 par l’Union coloniale française)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1897), 6.
- 149 The Phnom Penh merchant Vaillant may have been Guérin’s precursor in opening a bar as early as 1876, but the evidence is inconclusive; see CAOM: RSC 479: Lr Russel to Moura, 10 April 1876. Vaillant died the same year; see CAOM: Registre d’Etat civil, com. Phnom Penh, 1873–89: Entry of 2 May 1876.
- 150 CAOM: RSC 480: Receipts of deliveries by Molt to Guérin, various dates from 30 April 1880, and Lr Molt to Aymonier, 17 September 1880.
- 151 CAOM: GGI 13435: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 16 July 1881.
- 152 CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh, 1883–88, no. 18: Sales contract and inventory of Hôtel Phnom Penh, Guérin, Laty and Mermier, dated 6 September 1883. Subsequently, the Hôtel Mermier was renamed several times after successive owners, first as Café Evrard and in the 1890s as Café Féraud.

- 153 CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh 1883–87, no. 18: Rental contract and inventory, Mme Clerc and Raoul Marrot, dated 31 December 1885.
- 154 CAOM: GGI 11909: Lr Anonymous to Thomson, 27 April 1885.
- 155 Paul Sainmont, *Algérie, Tonkin, Cambodge: Souvenirs et impressions d'un soldat du 2e zouave*, (Tours: Alfred Cattier, 1896), 218.
- 156 CAOM: GGI 11829: Report on the estate of the late Thomas-Caraman, dated 6 January 1887.
- 157 CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh, 1883–87, no. 18: Rental contract and inventory, Mermier and Félicite Viel, dated 1 January 1887 (entry of 15 February 1887).
- 158 CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh, 1883–87, no. 18: Rental contract and inventory, Larrieu-Manan and Andron, dated 14 February 1887.
- 159 Leclère's Diary, entry of 7 July 1887.
- 160 Leclère's Diary, entry of 3 September 1887.
- 161 See his publications on the 'betterment' of women in France prior to coming to Cambodia: Adhémar Leclère, *Etudes sociales: Les cancers: La femme déchuë, l'exploiteur, l'homme déchu* (Paris: Librairie universelle de Godet Jeune, 1876), and *La femme au dix-neuvième [sic] siècle* (Paris: Imprimerie Claverie, 1879).
- 162 The investigation revealed a suspect, but his responsibility for the letter could not be proven with certainty. Although the suspect's name is not revealed in the sources, it appears that he was indeed a Khmer inhabitant of Phnom Penh, as he claimed to be in his letter.
- 163 CAOM: GGI 11909: Lr Anonymous to Governor Thomson, dated 27 April 1885.

6 Honorable affairs, 1880–83

- 1 Etienne Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine sous la Restauration et le Second Empire* (Bordeaux: Imprimerie Delmas, 1965), 308.
- 2 Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine*, 323–4.
- 3 PRO: FO 27/2088: Lr Tremlett to Foreign Office, 2 November 1874.
- 4 Denis, *Bordeaux et la Cochinchine*, 151, 308–9.
- 5 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 8 February 1878.
- 6 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Lafont, 8 July 1878; ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 8 February 1878 and 3 June 1878.
- 7 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 17 April 1879.
- 8 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Moura to Lafont, 2 July 1878; ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 17 April 1879, and various letters by Caraman and Fourcros to Moura from 1877.
- 9 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Lafont, 22 July 1878.
- 10 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 19 July 1878.
- 11 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Lafont, 12 August 1878.
- 12 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Lafont, 21 July 1878.
- 13 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 23 July 1878.
- 14 For evidence for the participation of these individuals, see ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 23 August 1878, Lr Caraman to Moura, 4 September 1878, Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 28 October 1880; ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Le Myre de Vilers, 30 July 1880; CAOM: GGI 13425: Lr Aymonier to Trentinian, 21 March 1881.
- 15 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Lafont to Moura, 16 November 1878; CAOM: GGI 13396: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 12 August 1879.
- 16 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Lafont, 17 April 1879.
- 17 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 26 August 1878.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Lafont, 22 July 1878 and 25 April 1878.
- 20 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Lafont, 21 July 1878.

- 21 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 30 August 1878.
- 22 ANC: RSC 3060: Report by Caraman to Moura on his Mekong journey, dated 11 September 1878.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Charles Thomas-Caraman to Moura, 5 September 1878 and 17 September 1878.
- 25 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 17 October 1878 and 26 March 1879.
- 26 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 2 October 1878.
- 27 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Moura to Lafont, 21 November 1878.
- 28 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Moura, 9 January 1879, and Lr Caraman to Lafont, 23 January 1879.
- 29 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 3 February 1879.
- 30 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Aymonier to Caraman, 3 February 1879.
- 31 ANC: RSC 3060: Telegram Caraman to "Lucas St. Etienne du Rouvrey, près Rouen," 24 November 1878.
- 32 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Lafont, 1 December 1878.
- 33 Auguste Pavie, *Mission Pavie: Indochine 1879–95: Géographie et voyages I.: Exposé des travaux de la mission: Introduction, première et deuxième période 1879 à 1889* (Paris: Leroux, 1901), 51.
- 34 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 12 April 1879.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Lafont, 17 April 1879.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des manuscrits orientaux: Fonds mss indochinois 431 (Travaux divers de M. Hennecart), no. 137: "Noms des 51 provinces du Cambodge avec les noms des gouverneurs et leurs titres de dignité."
- 39 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 12 August 1879.
- 40 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Aymonier, 16 August 1879.
- 41 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Comité agricole à Saigon, 22 August 1879.
- 42 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Aymonier, 16 August 1879.
- 43 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 28 October 1879. On Ducret, see CAOM: GGI 13437: Lr Fourès to Trentinian, 10 September 1881. On Francine, see ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 28 October 1880.
- 44 ANC: RSC 3060: List of Caraman's debts vis-à-vis the royal treasury, undated, probably established shortly after Caraman's death in 1887.
- 45 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 11 May 1880, and Lr Caraman to Le Myre de Vilers, 28 May 1880; CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Le Myre de Vilers, 11 May 1880.
- 46 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Le Myre de Vilers, 28 May 1880.
- 47 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 17 May 1880.
- 48 CAOM: GGI 11829: Petition by Caraman to Aymonier, dated 30 June 1880.
- 49 ANV2: SL 1693: Lr Caraman to Le Myre de Vilers, 30 July 1880; CAOM: GGI 11829: Marginal note by Le Myre de Vilers on cover letter by Aymonier, dated 5 July 1880, accompanying Caraman's petition to Aymonier, dated 30 June 1880.
- 50 "Exposition de 1880: Rapport du jury," *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, no. 4 (Exploitations agricoles: Cambodge), (1880), 5–48.
- 51 CAOM: GGI 11829: "Compte-rendu des plantations d'Oknhatey," dated 3 April 1881.
- 52 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 28 October 1880.
- 53 CAOM: GGI 11829: "Lettre-rapport," dated 6 April 1880.
- 54 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Norodom, 14 May 1880, and draft of royal ordinance, dated 18 May 1880.
- 55 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fourès to Trentinian, 18 June 1881.
- 56 CAOM: GGI 11829: Note by Trentinian, dated 21 June 1881.

- 57 Virginia Thompson, *French Indochina* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968, 1st edn 1937), 438.
- 58 Octave Mannoni, *Prospero et Caliban: Psychologie de la colonisation* (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1984), 108.
- 59 CAOM: GGI 13425: Lr Aymonier to Trentinian, 21 March 1881.
- 60 ANV2: SL 1839: Lr Moura to Directeur de l'Intérieur, May 1874.
- 61 See the 1863 Protectorate Treaty where equal weight and space is granted to Saigon's diplomatic concerns and the protection of French trade in the kingdom, in *Annuaire du Cambodge 1888–89* (Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Protectorat, 1889), 47–52.
- 62 Georges Taboulet, *La geste française en Indochine: Histoire par les textes de la France en Indochine, des origines à 1914* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1954), 664–6.
- 63 Martin Murray, *The Development of Capitalism in Colonial Indochina 1870–1940* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 47, 109–19.
- 64 CAOM: GGI 12252: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 6 May 1884. See also Charles Lemire, *Cochinchine française et Royaume de Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel, 1969, 2nd edition 1877), 415.
- 65 Editorial in *L'Unité indo-chinoise*, 22 May 1885.
- 66 *Courrier de Saigon*, 5 March 1865.
- 67 Frank Vincent, *The Land of the White Elephant: Sights and scenes in South-Eastern Asia* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low & Searle, 1873), 355.
- 68 On the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century, see David Chandler, "Cambodia before the French: Politics in a tributary kingdom 1794–1848" (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1974).
- 69 CAOM: GGI 12705: "Rapport sur le Cambodge. Voyage de Sai-gon à Battambang par A. Spooner" (1862). By the 1880s, the encouragement of large-scale immigration of Vietnamese settlers to Cambodia had already entered the plans of French strategists, but only became a reality in the twentieth century. See P. Duchesne de Bellecourt, "La colonie de Saïgon: Les agrandissements de la France dans le bassin du Mékong," *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 March 1867: 447; Gérard Groussin, *Le protectorat français sur le Cambodge de 1863 à 1884* (Phnom Penh: Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines de Phnom Penh, 1973), 29–30.
- 70 Lemire, *Cochinchine française* (1877), 196.
- 71 Carl Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese society in colonial Singapore 1800–1910* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 15.
- 72 Mary Somers Heidhues, "Chinese organizations in West Borneo and Bangka: *Kongsi* and *hui*," in David Ownby and Mary Somers Heidhues, eds, "*Secret Societies*" *Reconsidered: Perspectives on the social history of modern South China and Southeast Asia* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 68–88.
- 73 Nguyen Quoc Dinh, *Les congrégations chinoises en Indochine française* (Paris: Librairie du recueil Sirey, 1941), 45–7.
- 74 However, efforts were made to this purpose from 1900. For one of these colonial attempts to import large numbers of mainland Chinese to Cambodia and settle them as agricultural laborers on government farms, see ANC: RSC 15444: "Société de colonisation indo-chinoise, Société civile d'études de l'immigration et de l'exploitation de la main d'oeuvre agricole chinoise" (1906).
- 75 Charles Thomson's brother was Gaston Thomson, *député* of Algeria in Paris, and one of the longest-serving parliamentarians in French history. His tenure lasted fifty-five years, from 1877 to 1932.
- 76 Other newspapers included the titles *L'Extrême-Orient* (also by Ternisien), *Le Courrier Saïgonnais*, *L'Indochinois*, and *La Trompette*.
- 77 CAOM: Archives privées: Fonds Pavie: 46APC, carton 1: Letters to his parents 1874–85, Lr 6 December 1880.
- 78 Adhémar Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit publique des Cambodgiens* (Paris: Challamel, 1894), 320–1.

- 79 Adhémard Leclère, *Histoire du Cambodge* (Paris: Geuthner, 1914), 440.
- 80 MEP: vol. 765: 1: Lr Miche to Directors, 18 January 1853.
- 81 CAOM: GGI 12705: “Rapport sur le Cambodge. Voyage de Sai-gon à Battambang par A. Spooner” (1862); Leclère, *Histoire du Cambodge*, 459.
- 82 Arrêté of 1 October 1870 by Contre-Amiral de Cornulier on the transport of opium by government craft.
- 83 ANC: RSC 3791: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Aymonier, 7 April 1880.
- 84 *Courrier de Saigon*, 10 March 1864.
- 85 CAOM: GGI 10166: Lr Aymonier to Le Myre de Vilers, 6 September 1880.
- 86 Equivalent to approximately 170,500 piasters or 877,500 francs. Previously, Afoune paid a total of 7,700 silver bars for a joint concession for opium, alcohol, gambling and the slaughterhouses; see *Mémoire introductif d’instance présenté au Conseil du Contentieux administratif de Cochinchine dans la cause entre MM. Vandelet et Dussutour (demandeurs) et M. le Gouverneur de Cochinchine (défendeur), par Henri Viénot* (Saigon: Guilland & Martinon, 1883).
- 87 Chantal Descours-Gatin, *Quand l’opium finançait la colonisation en Indochine: L’élaboration de la régie générale de l’opium (1860–1914)* (Paris: Harmattan, 1992), 74.
- 88 CAOM: GGI 12696: Lr Moura to Lafont, 31 October 1878.
- 89 CAOM: GGI 12696: Lr Vandelet to Lafont, 16 January 1879, and Lr Moura to Pelissier, Berthier, Blanc and Russel, 7 January 1879.
- 90 ANC: RSC 17658: Lr Vandelet to Aymonier, 5 May 1879, and Lr Aymonier to Vandelet, 9 May 1879.
- 91 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1bis: Lr Fourès to Aymonier, 3 October 1881.
- 92 There is no staff list of Vandelet’s farm. References to the participation of these men can be found in the following files: ANC: RSC 4414; ANC: RSC 3791; CAOM: GGI 12696; CAOM: GGI 10214; CAOM: GGI 13415; CAOM: Notariat Cambodge, Phnom Penh, 1883–87, no. 18: Sales contract between Guérin and Mermier, dated 6 September 1883 (list of witnesses).
- 93 A collection of complaints from 1881 by Chinese authors is included in ANC: RSC 4414.
- 94 Ibid. See also ANC: RSC 3791: Telegram (probably Directeur de l’Intérieur to Representative of Protectorate), dated 11 August 1881.
- 95 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1bis: Lr Fontaine to Aymonier, 7 November 1881; CAOM: GGI 12696: Lr Fourès to Trentinian, 27 July 1881.
- 96 ANC: RSC 4414: Lr Governor of Kampot to Cabinet of Ministers, 1 August 1881.
- 97 CAOM: GGI 10175: Telegram Dussutour to Trentinian, 7 September 1881.
- 98 ANC: RSC 3791: Telegram (probably Fourès to Trentinian), 26 September 1881.
- 99 CAOM: GGI 12696: Lr Fourès to Trentinian, 16 July 1881.
- 100 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fourès to Trentinian, 29 October 1881.
- 101 CAOM: GGI 12696: Lr Fourès to Trentinian, 16 July 1881.
- 102 ANC: RSC 3791: Lr Trentinian to Fourès, 23 August 1881.
- 103 See Trocki, *Opium and Empire*, for an account of the British model of dealing with the Chinese *kongsi* in Singapore, and James Rush, *Opium to Java: Revenue farming and Chinese enterprise in colonial Indonesia 1860–1910* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), with respect to the Dutch colonies.
- 104 ANC: RSC 3791: Description of the opium regime in Cambodia prior to the *régie* by Faraut (1887).
- 105 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1, Letters 1881: Lr Fourès to Aymonier, 5 December 1881.
- 106 ANC: RSC 3791: Telegram (probably Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers), dated 11 November 1881.
- 107 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1bis: Lr Fourès to Aymonier, 21 November 1881.
- 108 ANC: RSC 3791: Description of the opium regime in Cambodia prior to the *régie* by Faraut (1887).

- 109 See ANC: RSC 3791 for contracts between Vandelet & Dussutour and Chinese subcontractors (1882).
- 110 ANC: RSC 3791: Description of the opium regime in Cambodia prior to the *régie* by Faraut (1887).
- 111 ANC: RSC 4424: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Fourès, 16 March 1882.
- 112 ANC: RSC 3791: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 25 April 1883.
- 113 ANC: RSC 3791: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 17 July 1883.
- 114 ANC: RSC 3791: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 7 January 1884; CAOM: B.21 (45), no. 8: Lr Thomson to Ministry of the Marine and Colonies, 20 January 1884.
- 115 See the documents published in the annex of *Viénot's Mémoire introductif d'instance présenté à MM. les membres du Conseil du contentieux administratif de Cochinchine* (Saigon: Imprimerie Guillaud & Martinon 1883), 55–74.
- 116 Dominique Niollet, *L'épopée des douaniers en Indochine* (Paris: Kailash, 1998), 177.
- 117 Niollet, *L'épopée des douaniers*, 179.
- 118 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Fourès, 26 July 1885, and Lr Fourès to Bégin, 10 August 1885.
- 119 Notice in *L'Indépendant de Saigon*, 11 March 1884: “Vente volontaire, liquidation de la Société Vandelet et Dussutour, à Pnumpenh.”
- 120 CAOM: B.21 (45), no. 54: Lr Thomson to Under-secretary of State of the Marine and Colonies, 16 April 1884.
- 121 CAOM: B.21 (44), no. 256: Lr Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 23 September 1883.
- 122 CAOM: B.21 (45), no. 39: Lr Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 20 March 1884; ANC: RSC 3791: Instructions by Thomson to Fourès regarding King Norodom's resistance, dated 27 December 1883.
- 123 ANV2: SL 1839: “Rapport sur les opérations du premier trimestre du service des contributions indirectes,” dated 20 April 1885.
- 124 Ibid.
- 125 Quoted in Paul Branda, *Cà et là: Cochinchine et Cambodge: L'âme khmère: Ang-kor* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1892), 90. The words are those of a *préposé*, a lower-ranking employee of the *régie*, who was based in Kampot.
- 126 ANC: RSC 3791: Lr Filippini to Piquet, 30 August 1887.
- 127 Alain Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française: Histoire d'une colonisation sans heurts (1897–1920)* (Paris: Harmattan, 1980), 247.
- 128 Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française*, 246.
- 129 See Jean Delvert, *Le paysan cambodgien* (Paris: Mouton, 1961), for a comprehensive account of Cambodia's landholding practices and the agricultural economy based thereupon.
- 130 Angelo Torre, *Place in History: Sources, transcriptions, and the analytical problem of the local* (paper, Enaudi Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, presented on 24 October 2000).
- 131 ANC: RSC 10706: Lr Chabannes to de Vernéville, 6 May 1894, my emphasis.
- 132 CAOM: Ecole coloniale: Papiers Dislère: Carton 13/Reg. 43: “De l'enseignement au Cambodge,” report by the director of the Ecole cambodgienne, July 1887.
- 133 Théophile Bilbaut, *Le canal de Suez et les intérêts internationaux: La Cochinchine française et le Royaume de Cambodge* (Paris: Challamel, 1870), 67–8.
- 134 See for comparison Ann Laura Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt 1870–1979* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 22–5. Stoler argues that the creation of land shortages was an integral element of Dutch labor recruitment policy.
- 135 “Décision relative à l'abolition de l'esclavage au Cambodge” and “Décision relative à la constitution de la propriété au Cambodge,” dated 28 October 1884. The full text of both decrees can be found in “Organisation du Cambodge,” *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, no. 20 (1884): 233–47.

- 136 David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 144.
- 137 An initial contract regarding the iron mines of Kompong Svai was dressed up in 1872 for the benefit of an otherwise unidentified Baron Barbier. Garcerie, a Saigon trader with extensive Cambodia experience, held the concession from 1876. Ternisien recovered the contract with Caraman's help in 1883. There is no evidence that any work was ever undertaken by those parties to exploit the mines.
- 138 CAOM: GGI 10219: Lr Guérin to Fourès, 30 March 1883; ANC: RSC 635: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 3 April 1883.
- 139 ANC: RSC 635: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 3 April 1883; ANC: RSC 15: various letters.
- 140 See for instance the requests of former Phnom Penh teacher Pelletier (ANC: RSC 10753, and CARAN: F17: 2996B); Chabannes Curton La Palisse (ANC: RSC 5581 and 10706); and of the former Caraman mechanic Fourcros and his associate Patou (ANC: RSC 12383).
- 141 CAOM: GGI 13425: Lr Aymonier to Trentinian, 4 April 1881.
- 142 To give but one example, Guérin's 1883 claim of the Upper Mekong, even though never officially granted, was sold a few months later to a certain Bruel who served as the principal engineer of the *Société aurifère du Cambodge*, established in 1881 (ANC: RSC 17630). The Société never found any gold.
- 143 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Trentinian, 25 June 1881.
- 144 Aymonier Papers: Folder 1bis: Lr Fourès to Aymonier, 3 October 1881.
- 145 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Norodom, 12 September 1881.
- 146 ANC: RSC 3060: Note by Caraman to unknown addressee, 13 September 1881.
- 147 For evidence of the participation of these four individuals, see various letters in CAOM: GGI 11829 and GGI 13456 as well as CAOM: B.21 (45), no. 15: Lr Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 26 January 1884.
- 148 ANC: RSC 3845: Contract between Auguste Guillaume Bauermeister, Louis Cazeau and Caraman, dated 12 March 1882; ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Fourès, 4 July 1882.
- 149 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Le Myre de Vilers, 22 September 1882.
- 150 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Aymonier, 1 June 1880.
- 151 Objects listed in an inventory of Caraman's factory, established from memory to obtain compensation from the government after the factory had been burnt to the ground by insurgents (and therefore possibly exaggerated in scope), dated 20 June 1885.
- 152 CAOM: GGI 11829: "Rapport sur l'Indigo du Bengale à Oknhatey," dated 12 October 1881.
- 153 Ibid. and CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Le Myre de Vilers, 14 February 1882.
- 154 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Le Myre de Vilers, 26 February 1882.
- 155 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 14 January 1882, Lr Thomson to Fourès, 7 December 1883, Lr Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 26 January 1884, and Lr Directeur de l'Intérieur to Fourès, 3 May 1884. A total of at least 6,000 piasters in donations and loans was given to Caraman in little over a year.
- 156 ANC: RSC 12383: Quote from a letter by Le Myre de Vilers referring to a concession proposal by Fourcros and Patou, dated 21 September 1882.
- 157 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 12 May 1882.
- 158 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 18 June 1882.
- 159 See, for instance, CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Le Myre de Vilers to Fourès, 19 May 1882.
- 160 CAOM: GGI 11829: Telegram Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 6 July 1882.
- 161 CAOM: GGI 11829: "Compte-rendu des plantations d'Oknhatey," dated 3 April 1881.
- 162 CAOM: GGI 11829: "L'indigo au Cambodge. 1ère partie en 7 chapitres. Par Frédéric Thomas-Caraman, planteur, décembre 1882." An excerpt from this work was published under the title "Notes et essai sur la fabrication de l'indigo," *Bulletin de la Société indochinoise*, 1884: 58–106. The text was published under Ozoux's name.

The reason for this is unclear. Perhaps Caraman's name was already too discredited in Saigon to warrant a publication in the prestigious periodical of the Société indochinoise.

- 163 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Thomson, 3 January 1884.
- 164 ANC: RSC 3060: Undated form (1883).
- 165 Murray, *Capitalism in Colonial Indochina*, 68–9.
- 166 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Fourès to Le Myre de Vilers, 20 March 1883, referring to Caraman's recent visit to the Protectorate's offices to register model contracts for the farmers of Khsach Kandal.
- 167 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Cazeau to Thomson's chief of staff Klobukowski, 11 July 1884.
- 168 Ibid.
- 169 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Ozoux to Thomson, 2 September 1883.
- 170 CAOM: GGI 13456: Lr Fourès to Thomson, 2 June 1883.
- 171 CAOM: GGI 13333: Lr Moura to Krantz, 9 August 1875.
- 172 CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, com. Phnom Penh 1873–89: Death of Montagu, Bouzols, Antoine, Maurice on 17 November 1885, in his lifetime police agent, list of witnesses.
- 173 CAOM: GGI 11909: Anonymous complaint to Governor of Saigon, 27 April 1885.
- 174 See the highly readable account of this tale given by Gerald Hickey, *Kingdom in the Morning Mist: Mayréna in the highlands of Vietnam* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), which is based in large parts on an earlier article by Jean Marquet ("Un aventurier du XIXe siècle: Marie Ier Roi des Sédangs (1888–90)," *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hué* 14, nos 1 and 2 (1927): 1–133).
- 175 Antoine Brébion, *Dictionnaire de bio-bibliographie générale ancienne et moderne de l'Indochine française, publié après la mort de l'auteur par Antoine Cabaton* (Paris: Société d'édition géographique, maritime et coloniale, 1935), 259.
- 176 Raoul Postel, *Sur les bords du Mé-không* (Paris: Librairie générale de vulgarisation, 1884), 178. An excerpt from Postel's book, depicting the local colonists as "scum," was also published as an article in *Revue générale*, 1 May 1884.
- 177 On the use and role of *corvée* labor in Indochina's colonial economy, see Murray, *Capitalism in Colonial Indochina*, 81–90.
- 178 Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française*, 265–7, 298–316; Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, *Indochine: La colonisation ambiguë (1858–1954)* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995), 121–2.
- 179 A collection of such files can be found at the ANC under the classification M.11 (Main d'oeuvre indigène).

7 Under siege, 1884–87

- 1 CAOM: GGI 11666: Report by Commandant Miramond, dated 20 June 1884; *Le Saigonnais*, 26 June 1884.
- 2 Archives de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes: 7YF 19564: Dossier de pension de Jarnowski, Joseph Sigismond.
- 3 CAOM: GGI 11666: Report by Commandant Miramond, dated 20 June 1884; *Le Saigonnais*, 26 June 1884.
- 4 The story of the standoff between King Norodom, Col and the French party in the royal palace in June 1884 has been told and retold in many different versions. A Khmer-language account of the events existed at the Library of the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh (entitled "sastra lom veang") prior to 1968, after which date it has disappeared; see Khin Sok, "Les chroniques royales khmères," *Mon-Khmer Studies*, vol. 6: 198. For other accounts, see Paul Collard, *Cambodge et Cambodgiens: Métamorphose du Royaume Khmèr par une méthode française de protectorat* (Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1925), 109–12; Paul

- Branda, *Cà et là: Cochinchine et Cambodge: L'âme khmère: Ang-kor* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1892), 7–9, 283; Adhémar Leclère, *Histoire du Cambodge* (Paris: Geuthner, 1914), 463–5; R. Bernard, “Au Cambodge, la convention du 17 juin 1884,” in: CAOM: GGI 11739; Milton Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and response 1859–1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 209–11. For the archival record, see above all CAOM: B.21 (45), no. 88, and B.21 (45), no. 89, as well as file GGI 11666.
- 5 *Le Saigonnais*, 26 June 1884.
 - 6 The full text of the convention can be found in *Annuaire du Cambodge 1888–1889* (Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Protectorat, 1889), 103–4, and in Georges Taboulet, *La geste française en Indochine: Histoire par les textes de la France en Indochine des origines à 1914* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1955), 670–2.
 - 7 *Le Saigonnais*, 26 June 1884.
 - 8 Quoted from an article by Raphaël Garcerie in *Le Saigonnais*, 26 June 1884.
 - 9 *Le Saigonnais*, 29 June 1884.
 - 10 Editorials by Charles Jourdan in *Le Saigonnais*, 22 June and 26 June 1884.
 - 11 Charles Jourdan in *Le Saigonnais*, 21 September 1884.
 - 12 CAOM: GGI 11672: Report by Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, dated 29 June 1884.
 - 13 CAOM: GGI 12278: “Note de police fournie par un agent secret,” dated 1 July 1884.
 - 14 “. . . que el [Rey] buscara todos los medios posibles de romper el cuello de hierro que le han puesto los franceses,” in CAOM: GGI 12278: Lr Contreras to Ambassador of Alphonse XII in Paris, 29 June 1884, forwarded to the French on 23 July 1884.
 - 15 CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: “Enquête sur les événements du Cambodge” (1885).
 - 16 ANC: RSC 3578: Telegram Fourès to Thomson, 24 August 1883.
 - 17 CAOM: GGI 11672: Lr Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 29 June 1884.
 - 18 CAOM: GGI 12278: Lr Contreras to Ambassador of Alphonse XII in Paris, 29 June 1884, forwarded to the French on 23 July 1884.
 - 19 On the Spanish connection, see Gérard Groussin, *Le protectorat français sur le Cambodge de 1863 à 1884* (Phnom Penh: Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines de Phnom Penh, 1973), 33.
 - 20 CAOM: GGI 11672: Report by Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, dated 29 June 1884. The missionaries were indeed apprehensive about the convention’s ramifications, see MEP: vol. 765: 259: Cordier to Board of Directors, 13 October 1884. Therein, Cordier warns that the introduction of property rights for commoners would render missionary work more difficult. Land-owning Khmer, Vietnamese and Chinese would be to a lesser degree dependent on the charity of the mission in times of distress. Under these conditions, it was to be feared that the poorer sections of the local population would henceforth “offer more resistance to their conversion than currently.”
 - 21 CAOM: GGI 11672: Report by Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, dated 29 June 1884.
 - 22 *Le Saigonnais*, 26 June 1884.
 - 23 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Thomson, 4 July 1884.
 - 24 CAOM: GGI 11672: Lr Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 12 July 1884.
 - 25 ANV2: SL 1839: Circulaire by Directeur de l’Intérieur to heads of provincial administrations in Cochinchina, dated 17 October 1884.
 - 26 *Le Saigonnais*, 3 August and 30 November 1884.
 - 27 *Le Saigonnais*, 31 August 1884.
 - 28 ANC: RSC 11751: Contracts between Thomson and the company of Chang Tac, 20 August 1884; ANC: RSC 5823: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 12 August 1884; *Le Saigonnais*, 3 August 1884.

- 29 Archives de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille: MQ 54/05: Lr Charles Albert le François to Chambre de Commerce de Marseille, 16 December 1884.
- 30 ANC: RSC 5238: Speech by Governor Thomson during the inauguration of the Municipality of Phnom Penh, 19 November 1884.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 *Le Saigonnais*, 30 November 1884.
- 33 Lr Ternisien to Caraman, 16 March 1883, reprinted in *Le Saigonnais*, 11 June 1885.
- 34 Lr Caraman to Thomson, 28 April 1885, reprinted in *Le Saigonnais*, 30 April 1885.
- 35 AD: Mémoires et documents, Asie, vol. 71: “Note sur le Cambodge” by Thomson, dated 20 January 1886. The booklet was authored by an “R. Bernard,” a thin disguise for the young Marrot (Bernard Raoul). It can be found in CAOM: GGI 11739. For reactions, see AD: A.D.P. Indochine, vol. 2: Minutes of proceedings of the Chamber of Deputies, 1 December 1884.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Review of Bernard’s booklet in *Le Saigonnais*, 11 January 1885.
- 38 CAOM: GGI 11829: Telegram Fourès to Thomson, 13 February 1885.
- 39 CAOM: GGI 11829: Telegram Thomson to Fourès, 13 February 1885.
- 40 CAOM: GGI 11829: Telegram Fourès to Thomson, 15 February 1885.
- 41 All quotes in this paragraph from CAOM: GGI 10217: Report by *entreposeur* Martin to the head of the *Contributions indirectes*, dated 12 December 1884.
- 42 CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: “Enquête sur les événements du Cambodge” (1885). Chabrier was Blanscubé’s secretary and had accompanied him to France.
- 43 *Le Saigonnais*, 18 January 1885; Auguste Pavie, *Mission Pavie: Indochine 1879–1895, Géographie et voyages I.: Exposé des travaux de la mission: Introduction, première et deuxième période 1879 à 1889* (Paris: Leroux, 1901), 173.
- 44 ANC: RSC 11547: Report by the *résident* of Kompong Cham to Fourès, dated 11 January 1885.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Article by Raphaël Garcerie in *Le Saigonnais*, 27 November 1884.
- 47 ANC: RSC 11547: Report by the *résident* of Kompong Cham to Fourès, dated 11 January 1885.
- 48 *Le Saigonnais*, 18 January 1885.
- 49 Letter to the editor in *Le Saigonnais*, 15 January 1885.
- 50 Ibid. On the ambiance in Phnom Penh, see also *Unité indo-chinoise* 23 January 1885.
- 51 For the continual announcements that the rebellion was about to end, see for instance *Le Saigonnais*, 15 March 1885 and 4 June 1885.
- 52 *Unité indo-chinoise*, 21 April and 28 April 1885.
- 53 *Unité indo-chinoise*, 28 April 1885; CAOM: Registre d’Etat civil, commune de Phnom Penh, 1873–89: Entry of 15 August 1884; Archives de l’Armée de Terre, Vincennes: 7YF 19564: Dossier de pension de Jarnowski, Joseph Sigismond.
- 54 A. Bonamy de Villemereuil, ed., *Explorations et missions de Doudart de Lagrée: Extraits de ses manuscrits* (Paris: Veuve Bouchard-Huzard, 1883), lix.
- 55 ANC: RSC 5809: Lr Dupré to Moura, 18 August 1871.
- 56 CAOM: GGI 13326: Lr Moura to Krantz, 7 January 1875.
- 57 Société Asiatique: Archives Etienne Aymonier, 1bis: Direction des Colonies to Aymonier, 28 October 1875.
- 58 CAOM: B.21 (45), no. 9: Lr Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 22 January 1884.
- 59 CAOM: B.21 (45), no. 67: Lr Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 15 May 1884.
- 60 CAOM: GGI 13499: Lr Badens to Bégin, 30 December 1885.
- 61 Arthur Delteil, *Guide du voyageur à Saigon: Un an de séjour en Cochinchine* (Paris: Challamel, 1887), 118.

- 62 Archives personnelles Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman: Certificates of promotion of Raoul Marrot, négociant à Phnom Penh, dated 1883, 1885 and 1889.
- 63 CAOM: GGI 12278: Lr Secretary General of the Grand Chancellery of the Légion d'honneur to Marrot, 19 January 1885.
- 64 CAOM: GGI 12278: Lr Filippini to Piquet, 19 June 1887.
- 65 Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 18.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 10, 16.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 32.
- 69 David Higgs, *Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France: The practice of inegalitarianism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 124. See also Norman Hampson, "The French revolution and the nationalization of honor," in M.R.D. Foot, *War and Society* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973), 199–212.
- 70 Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes*, 172.
- 71 A practice that was particularly endemic in the officer corps; see Christophe Charle, *Histoire sociale de la France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 210.
- 72 See for example *Le Saigonnais* of 14 September 1884, 14 December 1884, 30 August 1885 and 4 November 1886, as well as Leclère's Diary, entry of 7 October 1889.
- 73 *Le Saigonnais*, 14 September 1884 (Dussutour vs Jourdan) and 14 December 1884 (Ternisien vs Delpino, Jourdan's brother-in-law).
- 74 Gilles de Gantès, "Coloniaux, gouverneurs et ministres: L'influence des français du Viet-Nam sur l'évolution du pays à l'époque coloniale 1902–1914" (PhD thesis, Paris VII, 1994), 96.
- 75 Raoul Postel, *Sur les bords du Mé-không* (Paris: Librairie générale de vulgarisation, 1884), 177–9.
- 76 Virginia Thompson, *French Indochina* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968, 1st edn 1937), 417.
- 77 Charles Meyer, *La vie quotidienne des Français en Indochine 1860–1910* (Paris: Hachette, 1985), 91–2.
- 78 De Gantès, "Coloniaux, gouverneurs et ministres," provides a good overview of the Masonic lodges, *amicales* and other social groupings active in colonial Saigon. See also Jean-Louis Pretini, "Saigon-Cyros," in Philippe Franchini, *Saigon 1925–1945: De la "Belle Colonie" à l'éclosion révolutionnaire ou la fin des dieux blancs* (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1992), 92–103.
- 79 CAOM: GGI 12668: Lr Le Faucheur to Ohier, 25 October 1869.
- 80 ANC: RSC 17606: Lr Klobukowski to Fourès, 9 December 1884.
- 81 CAOM: B.21 (45), no. 60: Lr Thomson to Ministry of the Marine and Colonies, 25 April 1884, my emphasis.
- 82 *Le Saigonnais*, 15 March 1885.
- 83 The to and fro of accusation, justification and counter-accusation meant that a good deal of private correspondence ended up being published in the Saigon press. From May 1885 and July 1885, respectively, exchanges of letters between Caraman and Ternisien and between Marrot and Blanscubé about their secret machinations against the Thomson Convention became public in this way. For the debate as well as the correspondence, see *Le Saigonnais*, 30 April, 17 May, 4 June and 11 June 1885; *Unité indo-chinoise*, 1 May, 8 May, 15 May, 19 May, 22 May, 2 June, 12 June, 30 June, 14 July, 17 July and 24 July 1885.
- 84 CAOM: GGI 12007: Lr Thomson to Minister of the Marine and Colonies, 2 May 1885.
- 85 Quoted in *Le Saigonnais*, 23 July 1885.
- 86 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Directeur de l'Intérieur, 4 November 1885
- 87 *Ibid.*

- 88 A statement made by Governor Filippini in 1886 during a private conversation with Adhémar Leclère, in Leclère's Diary, entry of 18 July 1886.
- 89 Marrot's estate, the Domaine de Monlong near Toulouse, indeed served for a while as an agricultural college and became the precursor of today's ENSAT (Ecole nationale des sciences agronomiques de Toulouse). Today, the former fields and forests have been turned into a vast expanse of concrete on the city's outskirts. The mansion itself, now sandwiched between social housing complexes and industrial plants, has recently been bought from the Municipality by a French entrepreneur returning from China. At a quiet spot near a grove of large trees, Raoul Marrot had built a small private cemetery where he and his mother are buried. Today, their graves sit forlornly next to the tall chimneys of the municipal garbage incineration plant.
- 90 Conversation with Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman and Irène Croizet, Toulouse July 2001.
- 91 Archives de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes: 7YF 19564: Dossier de pension de Jarnowski, Joseph Sigismond.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 CAOM: GGI 13479: Lr Fourès to Thomson. Therein, Fourès quotes a letter he received from Jarnowski, warning him of a hostile Chinese mob in Phnom Penh that was about to attack the Protectorate. A subsequent enquiry revealed that the Chinese in question were merely participating in a ceremony on the night of full moon.
- 94 *Le Saigonais*, 12 February 1885.
- 95 *Le Saigonais*, 12 February, 26 February, and 5 March 1885.
- 96 The missionary in question was killed in January 1885 at his station in Trabec, at the outset of the revolt. See MEP: vol. 765: 261: Lr Cordier to Board of Directors, 19 February 1885; vol. 765: 264: Acte de décès de Guyomard.
- 97 ANC: RSC 11209: Lr Thomson to Fourès, 21 April 1885.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Groussin, *Le protectorat français sur le Cambodge*, 45–7. This view had always been countered by the colonial lobby with the argument that it was precisely the colonies that were “the only means for us to rise from the ruins, to efface our disasters” (from “La Cochinchine en 1871,” *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 January 1872: 218).
- 100 For a detailed account of Ferry's downfall and the reasons that brought it about, see for instance Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Les débuts de la IIIe République 1871–1898* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 95–133.
- 101 CAOM: GGI 10181: Report by Fontaine to Bégin on operations of the military authority, dated 28 July 1886.
- 102 *Le Saigonais*, 11 June 1885.
- 103 *Unité indo-chinoise*, 12 June 1885.
- 104 *Le Saigonais*, 11 June 1885.
- 105 Capitaine Dufour, “Insurrection du Cambodge en 1885,” *Excursions et Reconnaissances XIII*, no. 29 (1889), 20.
- 106 *Unité indo-chinoise*, 19 May 1885.
- 107 CAOM: GGI 13483: Lr Badens to Bégin, 14 September 1885.
- 108 CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: “Enquête sur les événements du Cambodge” (1885).
- 109 Dufour, “Insurrection du Cambodge,” 21.
- 110 CAOM: Registre d'Etat civil, com. Phnom Penh, 1873–89: Entries of deaths, Takeo: 7 May: Haget; 31 May: Jouandanne; 5 June: Pelissier.
- 111 Dufour, “Insurrection du Cambodge,” 23.
- 112 *Unité indo-chinoise*, 14 July 1885; *Le Saigonais*, 5 July 1885.
- 113 Dufour, “Insurrection du Cambodge,” 25–6.

- 114 *Ibid.*, 12, 28.
- 115 CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: Lr Governor of Treang to Sisowath, 12 August 1885.
- 116 ANC: RSC 3594: Lr Jarnowski to Badens, 14 October 1885.
- 117 CAOM: GGI 12561: Decision by Bégin, dated 20 August 1885. By virtue of the same decision, Lieutenant Toquenne commanding the post of Sambor, Captain David commanding the post of Kompong Thom, and Lieutenant Laffargue commanding the post of Pursat were similarly made *sous-résidents* of their respective provinces.
- 118 *Ibid.*
- 119 ANC: RSC 11779: Report by Chaudié to Thomson, dated 1 October 1885.
- 120 ANC: RSC 11211: Lr Jarnowski to Badens, 30 June 1886.
- 121 Leclère's Diary, entry of 12 October 1886.
- 122 Leclère's Diary, entries of 11 March and 22 March 1887.
- 123 ANC: RSC 17659: Lr Bégin to Badens, 3 September 1885.
- 124 CAOM: GGI 10181: Report by Fontaine to Bégin on operations of the military authority, dated 28 July 1886.
- 125 *Ibid.*
- 126 CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: "Enquête sur les événements du Cambodge" by Klobukowski (1885). Klobukowski further asserted that in the case of Banam, widespread hostility vis-à-vis the French had been fostered by a long history of injustice and abuse suffered by local Khmer at the hands of the Vietnamese community of the Catholic village of Father Combes. The inhabitants of the missionary station were in turn allied with the Vietnamese guard at the French post. The local resident Sandret, inexperienced and relying in his judgment on the advice of the missionary and his Vietnamese auxiliaries, was unable to sort out the disputes brought before him, thereby further alienating local Khmer.
- 127 *La Gazette géographique et d'exploration*, nouvelle série, XXI, no. 3 (21 January 1886): 50.
- 128 ANC: RSC 11550: Lr Lalande-Calan to Badens, 31 January 1886.
- 129 This number is a rough estimate. CAOM: GGI 13483 contains detailed troop deployment tables for the months of September and October 1885. However, the total number of 1,500 given there does not include areas that were under the direct command of Saigon, including the whole eastern and southeastern part of the kingdom. Osborne estimates the occupation force at 4,000; see Osborne, *French Presence in Cochinchina*, 226.
- 130 Collard, *Cambodge et Cambodgiens*, 113–14.
- 131 ANC: RSC 3187: Lr Jarnowski to Badens, 1 October 1885. In this view, he was in complete agreement with his fellow commander Laray in Kampot; see ANC: RSC 11210: Letter of recommendation for interpreter Oung by Captain Laray, 18 September 1885.
- 132 Paul Sainmont: *Algérie, Tonkin, Cambodge: Souvenirs et impressions d'un soldat du 2e zouaves* (Tours: Alfred Cattier 1896), 212. See also Collard, *Cambodge et Cambodgiens*, 12.
- 133 *Le Saigonnais*, 8 March 1885. See the issue of 15 February 1885 for the summary execution of prisoners by firing squad rather than beheadings. See also ANC: RSC 17682 for minutes of the decapitation of two rebel leaders, Pen and Kong, put to death by the French in Phnom Penh in May 1886. Those executions followed a rigid protocol, however, in marked contrast to the impromptu decapitations that were Jarnowski's trademark.
- 134 CAOM: GGI 10181: Report by Fontaine to Bégin on operations of the military authority, dated 28 July 1886.
- 135 The missing report, allegedly filed in June 1886 to Piquet, is mentioned in CAOM: GGI 10181: Report by Fontaine to Bégin on operations of the military authority, dated 28 July 1886.

- 136 Similar charges were brought against Laray's company in Kampot; see Chapter 5. Evidence for the raping of local women by soldiers in Kampot is provided by Leclère's Diary, entry of 1 October 1886. See also CAOM: AF A 30 (74), carton 18: "Enquête sur les événements du Cambodge" (1885).
- 137 Archives de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes: 7YF 19564: Dossier de pension de Jarnowski, Joseph Sigismond.
- 138 Ibid.
- 139 Leclère's Diary, entry of 18 July 1886.
- 140 ANC: RSC 3593: Lr Filippini to Piquet, 29 July 1886.
- 141 ANC: RSC 3585.
- 142 ANC: RSC 3591: Circulaire by Piquet, addressed to *résidents, sous-résidents* and *commandants de poste*, dated 27 July 1886.
- 143 Ibid.
- 144 Leclère, *Histoire du Cambodge*, 466.
- 145 Collard, *Cambodge et Cambodgiens*, 115.
- 146 Osborne, *French Presence in Cochinchina*, 228.
- 147 ANC: RSC 3187: Lr Cornuel to Piquet, 31 August 1886.
- 148 Osborne consequently argues that the rebellion was essentially "traditionalist" in character, in Osborne, *French Presence in Cochinchina*, 223, 227. For an account that puts more emphasis on a desire for independence and an alleged "nationalist sentiment" as motives for the rebellion, see V.M. Reddi, *A History of the Cambodian Independence Movement 1863–1955* (Tirupati, India: Sri Venkateswara University: S.V.U. Press, n. d.), 43–8; and Charles Meyer, "Insurrections nationales du siècle dernier," *Etudes cambodgiennes*, nos 9, 10, 11, and 12 (1967).
- 149 In the French army retirement scheme, years spent at war counted double when calculating the pension due to a soldier at the end of his career.
- 150 Leclère's Diary, entry of 7 July 1887.
- 151 Ibid.
- 152 Leclère's Diary, entry of 1 January 1887.
- 153 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Bégin, 26 March 1886.
- 154 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Nguyen-van-Nam to Fourès, 23 June 1885; CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Bégin, 1 August 1885.
- 155 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Fourès, 5 February 1885; CAOM: GGI 11829: "A mes co-citoyens de la Colonie Française de l'Extrême-Orient, – de Cochinchine, – du Cambodge, – de l'Annam, – du Tonkin et de Chine; aux colons de Singapore et de Hongkong," dated 31 March 1885.
- 156 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Thomson, 20 January 1885.
- 157 ANV2: SL 1839: Lr Caraman to Directeur de l'Intérieur, 6 February 1885.
- 158 Ibid.
- 159 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Thomson, 24 May 1885.
- 160 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Fourès to Bégin, 10 August 1885.
- 161 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Fourès, 26 July 1885.
- 162 CAOM: GGI 11829: "Extrait du rapport de vérification de la curatelle: Succession Caraman," undated.
- 163 For example CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Fourès, 5 August 1885.
- 164 CAOM: GGI 11829: "Extrait d'un rapport," dated August 1885 (from "Enquête sur les événements du Cambodge").
- 165 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Bégin, 16 September 1885.
- 166 ANC: RSC 3845: Lr Badens to Bégin, 20 February 1886; ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Bégin to Badens, 23 February 1886.
- 167 ANC: RSC 3060: "Avis aux colons de l'Indochine Française," dated 14 July 1886; CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Badens, 7 November 1885.
- 168 CAOM: GGI 11829: Lr Caraman to Badens, 7 November 1885.
- 169 ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Caraman to Piquet, 10 September 1886.

- 170 ANC: RSC 3060: Draft of pamphlet, dated 24 September 1886; ANV2: SL 1839: Lr Piquet to Directeur de l'Intérieur, 23 October 1886, therein mention of an October letter by Caraman.
- 171 CAOM: Etat civil, Cochinchine, Saigon, no. 11, 1887/88: Acte de décès no. 1: Frédéric, Thomas-Caraman, âgé de quarante-cinq ans, planteur. Caraman was in fact 46 years old when he died.
- 172 CAOM: GGI 11829: "Extrait du rapport de vérification de la curatelle: Succession Caraman," undated.
- 173 Ibid.
- 174 Ibid. and ANC: RSC 3060: Lr Piquet to Directeur de l'Intérieur, 8 March 1887; CAOM: GGI 11829: "Situation de la succession" by Corteaud, dated 14 May 1888.
- 175 CAOM: EE/II/387/15: Lr Minister of Colonies to Senator Durnac, 21 December 1898.
- 176 CAOM: EE/II/387/15: Lr Marrot to Minister of Colonies, 26 March 1898, marginal note.
- 177 CAOM: EE/II/387/15: Lr Marrot to Minister of Colonies, 23 December 1902.
- 178 CAOM: EE/II/387/15: Various certificates by Doctor Maurel from 1911.
- 179 CAOM: EE/II/4022/B: Various letters.
- 180 CAOM: EE/II/4022/B: "Relevé des notes de Monsieur Thomas-Caraman, Raoul, Bernard, Martial," 1930-44.
- 181 CAOM: EE/II/4022/B: Telegram by Cortinchi, dated 28 December 1946.
- 182 Conversation with Marie-Thérèse Thomas-Caraman and Irène Croizet, Toulouse July 2001.
- 183 Ibid.

Epilogue

- 1 Bernadette Chovelon, *Doudart de Lagrée: Marin, diplomate, explorateur* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1997), 200.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Urs Bitterli, *Malraux, Conrad, Greene, Weiss: Schriftsteller und Kolonialismus* (Zurich: Benziger, 1973), 43.
- 4 See Octave Mannoni, *Prospéro et Caliban: Psychologie de la colonisation* (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1984), 115.
- 5 John Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1954), 294.
- 6 Alain Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française: Histoire d'une colonisation sans heurts (1897-1920)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1980); title of Chapter 1, which deals with the colonial period prior to 1897.
- 7 Perhaps at times unknowingly. This is suggested by the motives invoked by Aymonier to explain his interference in judicial matters, which, I believe, represented his sincere sentiments. He consistently argued that his actions were primarily motivated by compassion for the miserable lot of the "common people" rather than a desire to increase French "influence."
- 8 *Courier de Saigon*, 1 January 1864.
- 9 Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking colonial categories: European communities and the boundaries of rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31(1989), 150.
- 10 Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, travel and government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 167.

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- Archives diplomatiques du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris (AD)
- Archives du Lycée Louis-le-Grand, Paris
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- Archives municipales de Toulouse
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