

VOYAGE À ANGKOR (1912): GEORGE CŒDÈS'S FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH CAMBODIA

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ABSTRACT—This note presents an annotated translation and commentary on *Voyage à Angkor*, a travel journal George Cœdès wrote during his first journey to Angkor in April–May 1912 for his family in Paris. The diary recounts his expedition from Phnom Penh to Angkor and back. Although it offers only limited observations of the archeological sites themselves, the account provides a vivid portrayal of the travel conditions, daily life, and working environment of archeologists in Cambodia in the early 20th century.

KEYWORDS: Angkor; Archeology; Cambodia; George Cœdès; Travel Writing

Introduction

After the 15th century, Cambodia's capital successively shifted southeastward to Chaktomuk (or Phnom Penh), Lovek, Srei Sonthor, Oudong and ultimately Phnom Penh. Yet Angkor—formerly known as Śrī Yaśodharapura—retained its role as a sacred city. Cambodian, Siamese, and Japanese pilgrims continued to visit for rituals and acts of devotion (Ishizawa 2015: 47–61; Santi & Navarat 2561: 358–364). For others, however, the city remained largely unknown. A few Portuguese and Spanish adventurers visited between the late 16th and early 17th centuries, followed much later by Father Charles-Émile Bouillevaux (1823–1913) in the mid-19th century (Bouillevaux 1877; Groslier 1958).

Not until the 1859–1860 Indochinese travels of Henri Mouhot (1826–1861), a French naturalist and explorer and their

subsequent publication (1868: 186–221), did Angkor capture widespread Western attention. This account spurred a wave of travel to the ruins. Mouhot was later regarded by Western audiences during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the “discoverer” of Angkor. Among the first to follow Mouhot was Louis Delaporte (1842–1925), who accompanied Ernest Doudart de Lagrée's (1823–1868) 1866 Mekong expedition. Delaporte returned on his own research missions in 1873–1874 and 1881–1882, producing two major volumes: *Voyage d'exploration en Indo-Chine* (1873) and *Voyage au Cambodge* (1880). He also introduced Khmer art to French audiences through exhibitions at the 1878 and 1889 Universal Exhibitions, which astonished the public and sparked lasting interest in Khmer art and architecture (Flour 2014: 63–82).

A turning point came in 1898 with the establishment of a permanent archeological mission in Indochina,

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later formalized as the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO). After the Franco-Siamese treaty of 1907 placed the ruins under French jurisdiction, the Conservation des Monuments d'Angkor was created. From that point, systematic study and restoration of Angkor were undertaken by scholars and specialists, notably young George Cœdès (1886–1969), who would later become the “Father of Khmer epigraphy” [FIGURE 1].²

First Encounter with Angkor in 1912

George Cœdès made significant contributions to Angkorian studies. His serious engagement with this field can be traced back to his formative years at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris (Cros 2017: 4–5). Although he had not yet traveled outside Europe, between 1904 and 1911 he had already produced an impressive corpus of academic work on the ancient capital of Cambodia, notably *Les bas-reliefs d'Angkor Vat* (Filliozat 1970: 10–11). Cœdès's research on Angkor reached a turning point on 2 December 1911, when he first departed for French Indochina. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed a corresponding member of the EFEO.

The future distinguished epigraphist arrived in Hanoi on 3 January 1912, before devoting himself to the study of archival documents kept at the EFEO library in that city and at various temples. He also conducted fieldwork at archeological sites associated with the former polities of Champa. Ancient Cambodia, however, was his ultimate

scholarly goal and, in March of that year, he set out on a research mission to the kingdom. In Phnom Penh, he was cordially welcomed by several high-ranking French officials and members of the Cambodian aristocracy (Cros 2021: 96–103).

After the Cambodian New Year celebrations, he accompanied Jean Commaille (1868–1916), the first Conservator of Angkor, on an expedition to the ancient capital. This was Cœdès's first encounter with the ruins. During the journey, which lasted from 21 April to 27 May 1912, he recorded his observations in a document entitled *Voyage à Angkor* (1912), consisting of five sheets of airmail stationery in A4 format, written on both sides, which he sent to his family (ibid.: 104). This original manuscript is preserved in the Cœdès's family archives, while a copy is held at the EFEO archives in Paris [FIGURE 2]. This article relies chiefly on this manuscript reproduced in full in this journal as an **ONLINE APPENDIX**.

These pages were also published in transcription by his grandson Bernard Cros (2021: 103–112), but with limited explanation or analysis. In this modest note, I offer an English translation of the document with additional commentary. In the translated portion presented here, the original orthography of proper names has been updated to conform to modern usage, with explanatory remarks provided in the notes where appropriate.

Summary of the Expedition

According to *Voyage à Angkor*, the two French scholars, Commaille and Cœdès,

² See Baffie, this Special Edition, for more on his pioneering role in Southeast Asian studies—Editor's note.



FIGURE 1: George Cœdès in his Paris home study, 1904, at the desk where he conducted his early research on Angkor © Cœdès's Family Archives

accompanied by several local porters, departed Phnom Penh aboard the longboat *Alcyon* on 21 April 1912, travelling upstream along the Tonle Sap River before reaching Kampong Chhnang

later that evening. From there, between 21 and 23 April, the small party continued overland by oxcart toward Kampong Thom, where they stayed at the Residence of Mr Marie Auguste-

1

Voyage à Angkor
 - 21 Avril - 27 Mai 1912. 1

Dimanche 21 Avril
 DÉPART de Phnom-Penh à 8 $\frac{1}{2}$
 du matin par la chaloupe
 "Alcyon" des Messageries fluviales, au
 Compagnie de Commerce, pouss-
 euse des rives, de nos deux
 bœufs (le bœuf de Commerce absolu-
 ment bon à rien) et d'un
 nombre respectable de colis.
 Arrivé à 4^h du soir à Hompong
 Phnang après un voyage sans
 incident, mais pénible, car
 nous avons marché constam-
 ment le long des rives, à une
 vitesse égale à la sienne.
 Transbordement de nos rameaux
 et de nos bagages dans un
 sampan qui nous débarqua
 à la nuit tombante à
 Hompong Hao, sur la rive
 opposée où nous attendent
 six charrettes à bœufs

FIGURE 2: The first page of Voyage à Angkor (1912) © AEFEQ

Hippolyte Galtier (1869–?), the French Resident,³ until early on 25 April. Joined by Mr Galtier and the Cambodian Deputy Governor of Kampong Svay, a person familiar with the route, they travelled from there on elephant back, accompanied by servants transporting supplies by carts.

The expedition passed through forested areas under intense heat, moving through villages before arriving at Beng Mealea on 29 April. Cœdès remained there for four days to study the archeological site. On 4 May, the party continued to Jean Commaille's home in Siem Reap, arriving late the following morning. There, Cœdès met Jean de Mecquenem (1883–1939), an architect and corresponding member of the EFEO from 1910 to 1912; together they went to Angkor on 6 May, where they resided nearly two weeks, exploring and documenting the monuments, particularly Angkor Wat and the Angkor Thom complex.

The substance of Cœdès's stay at Angkor is barely documented. His account provides little of his personal impressions of the sites: he only explains he was preoccupied with exploring them. On 18 May, Cœdès returned to Phnom Penh, passing through Kampong Thom and Kampong Chhnang, arriving on 27 May. The diary kept during the return journey was not as detailed as that of the outward trip [MAP 1].

Voyage à Angkor (1912): Annotated Translation

Sunday, 21 April: Departure from Phnom Penh at 8.30 am, on the longboat *Alcyon*, which undertook the delivery of the postal parcels up and down the river⁴ accompanied by Mr Commaille, the Conservator of the ruins [FIGURE 3], our two boys⁵ (Mr Commaille's one is absolutely useless), and several coolies.⁶ Arrival at Kampong Chhnang⁷ at 4.00 pm, after an uneventful journey, but broiled because we were always travelling in the same direction as the wind and at the same speed. [We] transferred ourselves and our belongings into a *sampan*⁸ which delivered us at nightfall to Kampong Hao⁹ on the opposite bank, where six ox carts awaited us (alas! actually pulled by buffaloes), having come from Kampong Thom¹⁰ to collect

⁴ Due to the interruption of the river transport between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap during the dry season, boat operators provided service only up to Kampong Chhnang. There were two operators: the first was the Cochinchina Riverboat Company and the second consisted of numerous Chinese *sampans* that plied the route daily (Indochine française 1912: 557).

⁵ In the original text, Cœdès used the word *boy* to refer to his male servants or local attendant, regardless of age. These men were actually Vietnamese, from Annam.

⁶ Cœdès spelled this word here as *colis* (porters).

⁷ In 1912, the province of Kampong Chhnang was administratively divided into seven districts: Rolea-Phaear, Longvek, Baribour, Kampong Leaeng, Anlong-Reach, Pursat, and Krakor.

⁸ A *sampan* is a wooden boat with a relatively flat bottom, commonly found in East, Southeast, and South Asia. This type of boat is generally used for transportation in the coastal areas or on rivers, especially for traditional fishing (Manguin 2012).

⁹ The village is presumed to be Chnok Tru, a commune in Kampong Chhnang province.

¹⁰ In 1912, the province of Kampong Thom was administratively divided into six districts: Baray, Chi

³ During the French Protectorate in Cambodia (1863–1954), each province (*résidence*) was administered by a Resident (*résident*), a French official overseeing local governance and representing the Protectorate authorities—Editor's note.



MAP 1: The 1912 journey between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap; red indicates the outbound route, yellow, the return © Wipada Onwimol & Thissana Weerakietsoontorn

us.¹¹ Dinner on the riverbank in the dim glow of a glass lamp. Departure at 9.30 [pm] and traveled all night (the ox cart is a well-developed instrument of torture: the wheel is barely circular, while most Cambodian roads consist of two parallel ruts spaced equally apart, but never level with each other).

Kreang, Kampong Svay, Promtep, Santuk, and Stung. In the present case, Kampong Thom does not denote the province itself, but rather Stung Sen, its capital.

¹¹ In the rainy season, river transportation reached Phnom Penh from Kampong Thom. However, in the dry season, the travelers had to continue their journey overland from Kampong Chhnang for another 63 kilometers to reach Kampong Thom (Indochine française 1912: 560).

Monday, 22 April: At 7.30 am, arrival at the village of Chenok,¹² where we halted as it was unthinkable to traverse the desolate stretch separating this point from Kampong Thom in the daylight hours. We sheltered from the sun inside the *sala* for the entire day.¹³ We were very thirsty and drank a lot of water (mineral!), for it was essential to avoid dehydration. Departure at 10.00 pm.

¹² The village is presumably located in Kampong Chhnang province.

¹³ The *sala*, or “pavilion”, plays an important part in the social life of the Cambodian village and often serves as a place to welcome distinguished guests—Editor’s note.



**FIGURE 3: Jean Commaille, circa 1910,
photo CAM20004 © EFEO**

Tuesday, 23 April: Arrived at the miserable village of Sdau¹⁴ at 9.00 am. We were already close to Kampong Thom, but since Cambodians usually take their meal at that hour, it was

pointless to try to press on with a cart driver intent on eating. We installed ourselves in a wretched thatched hut that served as a *sala* and could not even remove our hats to take a siesta because the roof had completely collapsed. Departure at 4.30 [pm] and arrival an hour and a half later in Kampong

¹⁴ The village is presumably located in Kampong Thom province.

Thom. We were invited to the Residence¹⁵ where we found comfortable beds, a bathroom, and iced drinks.

Wednesday, 24 April: A rest day. We asked Mr Galtier, the Resident, to accompany us for a part of our journey and we all agreed to depart the next morning. We sent out a convoy of eight carts carrying our boys and our luggage in advance at 5.00 pm. The caravan had to make its way directly to the first resting point where we would join them the following morning by traveling on elephant back. “Man proposes [...]”.¹⁶

Thursday, 25 [April]: Departure at 6.00 am with four elephants, one for the Resident, one for Commaille, one for me, and the last for the interpreter and the *balat*¹⁷ or Vice-Governor of Kampong Svay province (the howdah on an elephant is another instrument of torture, equally well-developed) [FIGURE 4]. Although we were fairly high above the earth, we were not safe from wild creatures and the worst that could happen, by passing too close to mango trees, was to import into the howdah a nest of red ants called *angkrang*.¹⁸ We passed through an area of very dry open forest, where we looked in vain for any

game to hunt. Meanwhile, we imprudently lost contact with the Vice-Governor, the only person who knew the route. As a result, by noon, the Resident, Commaille, myself, and our three mahouts found ourselves on a rough trail that appeared to lead nowhere. Worst of all, the midday sun was almost at its zenith, making it impossible to orient ourselves. By chance, we took another path where we luckily came upon some woodcutters who pointed out the way. We were too far west and the detour had cost us over three full hours.

In the first hamlet we came across, we profusely drank fresh coconut water before arriving at Phum Thom (big village),¹⁹ our first stopover, at 2.30 [pm]. At least, my two travel companions made it there. As for myself, I did not arrive until an hour later. My elephant, exhausted and deprived of water, expressed his desire to rest in the shade of a tree. We were expecting to find our carts sent out the evening before. Disappointment! They arrived after us. They had not lost their way, but the [water] buffalo is an amphibious creature, and the lack of water greatly affects him, depriving him of all energy. He will not move, with his muzzle on the earth and his eyes half-closed. We could not think of leaving in the evening, as planned. We decided to eat and sleep at Phum Thom.

Friday, 26 [April]: Departure at 5.00 am. The terrain became ever drier and more desolate. Not a single drop of water, which meant no wild animals, not even mosquitoes! We arrived at

¹⁵ The French Resident in place was Mr Galtier. We have no additional information about this individual except that he also served as the Resident in Kratie (Indochine française 1912: 565).

¹⁶ This is an allusion to a French proverb meaning “Man proposed, God disposes”.

¹⁷ The name and title of this noble figure could not be clearly established. The term is derived from *plas* (ពាយច្ប័ែង or ពាយឆ្ប័ែង) a Pre-Angkorian Khmer word meaning “to transfer”, “to exchange” or “to replace” (Jenner 2009: s.v.). It later came to be used with the meaning of “deputy” and “administrative assistant” in both Khmer and Thai (ປត័ម្ធ). See Committee 2521: s.v., and Lingat 2529: 204.

¹⁸ អង្គរ. See Committee 2521: s.v.

¹⁹ Nowadays, Phumi Thum is a village of Prasat Balangk district, Kampong Thom province.

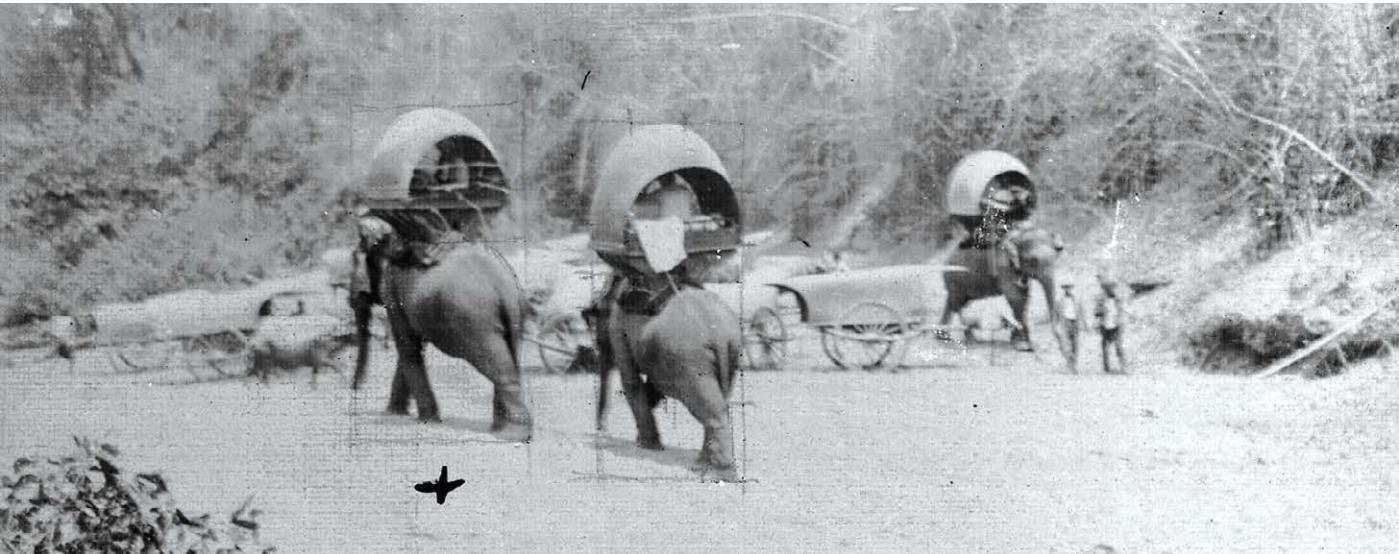


FIGURE 4: The expedition party in Cambodia, with George Coedès seated on the elephant to the left, April 1912 © Coedès's Family Archives

Sakream,²⁰ our second rest stop, only at 1.20 pm. For the same reason as the previous day, the carts carrying our food provisions arrived later. Thus, we had to depend for lunch on the supplies in the village: one boiled egg each, a bowl of rice, and our fill of coconut water. We spent the afternoon and evening at the Sakream *sala* before departing again at half past midnight.

Saturday, 27 [April]: At 8.30 am, arrival at the Ampu ford on the Stung River.²¹ Our animals found some waterholes to drink and bathe and we installed ourselves for lunch in the dry riverbed. At 11.30 [am], departure for Preah Khan (ruins),²² where Commaille

and the Governor arrived at 4.00 [pm], while I arrived at 5.00 [pm] (my elephant remained as sluggish as ever) and the carts arrived at 6.00 [pm]. I do not know why we did not fall ill that night as we slept in the forest under an improvised shelter hastily erected within the enclosure of the monument only a few centimeters above soil drenched by a little shower, enveloped in a damp and malodorous fog.

Sunday, 28 April: In the morning, a visit to the ruins of Preah Khan [of Kampong Svay], truly ruined and overgrown with vegetation, but remarkable. Departure at midday for Khvao,²³ the next rest stop, which was situated 40 kilometers away. The forest [is] dense and beautiful, but without a drop of water. Towards the end of the journey, the caravan became scattered. The elephants of Commaille and the Resident continued to lead the way with the carts

²⁰ Currently, Sakream is a village of Prasat Balangk district, Kampong Thom province.

²¹ The Stung River is one of the principal tributaries of the Tonle Sap.

²² Preah Khan refers here to the archeological complex of Kampong Svay which was surveyed by the explorers and archeologists as early as the second half of the 19th century (Lunet de La Jonquièrre 1902: 242-246).

²³ Khvao is situated at the southern border of Siem Reap province.

following quite far behind. My elephant and the one carrying the *balat* and the interpreter lagged behind and halted at 7.30 [pm] from thirst and fatigue. We quickly consulted together. Waiting until the elephants could get moving again was impossible because we had not yet had dinner. Sending one of the coolies who accompanied us ahead on foot was too risky, as he might not return for several hours or, worse, not return at all. Only one choice remained: abandon the elephants (leaving them with the mahouts, who could manage on their own) and rejoin the main group by walking as quickly as possible. Besides, the *balat* assured me that Khvao was not far. So at 7.45 [pm], we set off, guided by the light of a torch. A picturesque walk, but [it] would have been more pleasantly done without an empty stomach and a parched throat.

At 8.00, then 8.30, then 9.00 [pm], we still saw no sign of Khvao, not even the cart convoy. We were truly far behind, even though walking at a good pace. Finally, at 9.15 [pm], we heard the creaking of cart axles about 100 meters ahead of us. Crying out with joy, we raced up to the supply cart. But Khvao was still far off. We only reached there with the convoy at midnight and met up with Commaille and the Resident who had been there since 10.00 [pm], equally dying of hunger. A simple meal and well-earned rest.

Monday, 29 April: Departure from Khvao at 7.30 [am] and arrival at the ancient bridge known as Spean Ta Ong at 9.30 [am]. We installed ourselves beneath one of the arches; the boys turned the adjacent arch into a kitchen, allowing us to eat comfortably and in cool shade. Departure at 1.00 [pm]

(a hot time of the day, but there was no choice) for Beng Mealea²⁴ traveling the whole afternoon through a beautiful, dense forest. Our elephants arrived at the rest stop at 8.00 pm, accompanied by only three of the eight carts, unfortunately not those carrying the provisions (they did not arrive until 3.00 am). The three of us dined on two eggs and seven potatoes.

From 30 April to 4 May: Stay at Beng Mealea with only Commaille, as the Resident left us for Siem Reap to join the Resident-Superior on tour.²⁵ The Beng Mealea countryside was completely lacking in resources. We had to survive almost entirely on canned food, but our poor boys had to go without rice for more than two days, something tough for the Annamites!

4–5 May: Departure from Beng Mealea at 5.00 pm. Night travel without incident (moving in a southwest direction). Lunch the next day at Srett,²⁶ which was located near Roluos,²⁷ where we arrived at 5.00 pm. We stayed at the Governor's *sala*, which was quite comfortable (there was a *panka*²⁸ fan

²⁴ The four-day stay there served as the basis for one article (Cœdès 1913).

²⁵ Ernest Outray (1863–1941) served as the Resident-Superior of Cambodia from 1911 to 1914 (Forest 1980: 496).

²⁶ Unidentified village.

²⁷ Located 13 kilometers to the east of Siem Reap, Roluos is an important archeological site that served as the seat of Hariharālaya, the first capital of the Angkor kingdom.

²⁸ The term *panka* or *punkah*: “strictly a fan. In its original sense the *punkah* is a portable fan, made from the leaf of the palmyra; but the word has come to be used in a special sense by Anglo-Indians for a large swinging fan, fixed to the ceiling, and pulled by a coolie during the hot weather. The date of this invention is not known, but it was familiar to the

and an oil lamp). After dining there, we set off for Siem Reap at 10.00 pm (still travelling by ox carts).

6 May: At sunrise, arrival at Siem Reap, which is one of loveliest corners of Cambodia. The river is sadly low at this time of year, lined by huts hidden beneath palm trees. I spent the day at the Conservator's house where I was introduced to my colleague, de Mecquenem, who had just spent a year as Commaille's interim replacement. Leaving him to settle back into his home, I departed that evening with de Mecquenem to install myself in the bungalow at Angkor Wat,²⁹ where I remained until the 18th.

These two weeks were well spent. I made a detailed visit to Angkor Wat and the principal monuments in the Angkor Thom complex. (I already wrote to you briefly about this at the time, and I will not repeat myself. Please refer to those letters). X³⁰

[Angkor Wat, 7 May 1912: I arrived here yesterday after an extremely interesting but very arduous journey in this exceptionally dry and hot season. There is a whole world to see here—masses of things to study, and a series of new inscriptions to take rubbings of and to read. Suffice it to say, I barely have time to write. As soon as I return to Phnom Penh, I will send you a detailed day-by-day account of my journey.

Arabs as early as the 8th century [...]” (Chisholm 1911: 657).

²⁹ Commaille's house at the archeological site—*Editor's note*.

³⁰ This passage, marked in the diary by “X” and covering the earlier letters from Angkor Wat dated 7 and 15 May 1912, was added later and is inserted below in square brackets.

This morning I visited Angkor Wat, which was even more beautiful than I had imagined—and God knows how much I was expecting to see a marvel. Tomorrow I will spend the day at Angkor Thom in the company of my colleague de Mecquenem, an architect and resident fellow of the School,³¹ who left Siem Reap to join me at the bungalow in Angkor where we are staying very comfortably [FIGURE 5]. I plan to remain here for about ten days, which will certainly be very full days.

Angkor Wat, 15 May 1912: Just a few more days of patience and you will have the travel journal which I promised. I understand well that these hastily written letters without details will not satisfy you, but you must understand that, when I return in the evening after a day climbing staircases under the May sun, I think only of lying down rather than writing letters, even to those most dear to me.

Over this week, I have visited nearly all the monuments in the Angkor complex, which allowed me to discover many fascinating things. I arrived at the best time to see them. We were at the end of the dry season and the important removal of vegetation that had just been completed had not yet had the time to be spoiled by rain. I took a lot of notes and will organize them clearly in Phnom Penh as, though the bungalow was relatively very [sic] comfortable, I could scarcely work here with a relaxed mind, without fan, without ice, and especially without my books. But I will return here once the high water allows me to travel from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap in just two days. X]

³¹ The EFEO.



FIGURE 5: View of Angkor Wat from the west, with Commaille's bungalow on the left, circa 1911, photo CAM04214 © EFEO

[The day after tomorrow, I will return overland via Roluos, Chikeng,³² and Kampong Thom. I hope to be in Phnom Penh around the 23rd or 25th].³³ The return journey, less eventful, more pleasant, and more comfortable, does not provide as much material for description as the outward journey.

18 May: Preparation for departure, dinner at Commaille's place in Siem Reap and departure at 9.30 pm. Reached Roluos at 3.30 am, at the Governor's sala, where I quickly put up my camp bed to complete a night begun in the ox cart.

19 May: Spent the whole day with the Governor (a Cambodian naturally). Exchange of gifts: I received fresh eggs and mangoes and offered in return a

chicken slaughtered by my boy. Departure at 5.00 [pm] and arrival at Run³⁴ at 11.00 pm. I stayed in the sala, after having dislodged a monk from it.

20 May: Spent a torrid morning and afternoon in the sala. I lay flat out on my bed, half-naked, chatting idly with some villagers who came to greet me (the Cambodian is very sociable, loves coming to chat with the foreigners passing through, and the minor provincial officials make it a duty to come and pay their respects to distinguished travelers). Departure at 5.30 [pm], arrival at Chikeng at half past midnight, accompanied by a welcome brief rainfall.

21 May: Chikeng. In the absence of the Governor who was on tour, I was warmly welcomed by his subordinates,

³² Chi Kreang, a district of Kampong Thom province.

³³ This last passage, also in square brackets, is absent from the EFEO copy but appears in a letter preserved in the Coedès family archives. It was published in Cros 2021: 110.

³⁴ Unidentified village.

the *balat* and the *yokebal*,³⁵ who went to great lengths to provide me with eggs, chicken, and fruits as gifts. Departure at 5.00 pm.

Wednesday, 22 May: Arrival in Kampong Chen³⁶ at 8.00 am. The Governor of Stung province,³⁷ warned of my arrival, came to meet me at the *sala*, where he had a table and chairs installed for me. He is a jovial and chatty sort of Cambodian, for whom my visit was a blessing. He took me in a horse-drawn carriage to visit a nearby ruins³⁸ and went to great lengths to requisition three buffalo carts for me (I believe that without him, I would still be there). A powerful storm in the evening obliged me to postpone my departure and spend the night in Kampong Chen.

23–24 May: Traveled from Kampong Chen to Kampong Thom. Stops for lunch at Wat Maha³⁹ and dinner in Senkor,⁴⁰ a miserable area where, to get two

³⁵ The Sanskrit term *yugapad* is attested in Old Khmer in the 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries where it means “to be under the yoke”, “to associate with”, “all together” (Pou 2004: 385–386). In the 17th century, this post appears to refer to a junior official assisting the provincial Governor before becoming the deputy to the district chief in the 19th–20th centuries (Mikaelian 2006, 2: 714–715). In Siam, the term *yokkrabat* (ຍក្របាទ) refers to a court official from Krom Wang (ក្រមវង់) or the Ministry of Palace serving as an inspector in the city to which he was assigned (Winai 2559: 98–99).

³⁶ Currently, Kampong Chen is a village of Kampong Chen Tboung commune.

³⁷ By the name of Oknha Sotip Montrey Mell (Indochine française 1912: 560). Stung actually being one of the districts in Kampong Thom province (see note 10).

³⁸ Presumably the temple of Samrong Preah Theat, on which see Lunet de La Jonquière 1902: 264.

³⁹ Wat Maha was surveyed by French explorers in the early 20th century (*ibid.*: 236–237).

⁴⁰ Also known as San Kor, a commune of Kampong Svay district, Kampong Thom province.

coconuts, I was obliged to summon the village chief and threaten him with the wrath of the French authorities if he refused to supply me with them. I spent the whole day of the 24th at the Residence of Kampong Thom with the Galtier family who I was happy to see again.

24–25 May: Travel from Kampong Thom to Kampong Hao, by the same route in the opposite direction. Nothing noteworthy, except that the cart drivers, by taking the wrong road and nearly getting us lost, chanced upon an interesting ruin,⁴¹ which is rarely visited. Let us not forget the story of the grilled chicken that my boy had roasted the day before in Kampong Thom and that he dropped at the moment of serving on seeing a huge centipede of the type called “hundred-legs” emerging from the chicken’s rear.

Sunday, 26 May: Spent the entire day in Kampong Chhnang with the Resident, Mr Pauher.⁴² Departure at 10.00 pm and arrival in Phnom Penh the following morning.

[End of Coedès’s travel diary
Voyage à Angkor (1912)]

⁴¹ Unidentified site.

⁴² Almost nothing is recorded about Maurice-Pierre Pauher (1865–?). Available information indicates that he joined the French Indochinese administration in 1889 and held various posts before serving as Governor of Kampong Chhnang (Indochine française 1900: 73–74). He also appears to have supported the work of EFEO archeologists in the region, such as Henri Parmentier (1913: 17).

Conclusion

Voyage à Angkor is a travel journal composed by George Coedès between 21 April and 27 May 1912, addressed to his family in Paris. It constitutes a valuable primary source for his first encounter with Angkor, a site in which he would later play a seminal role within the field of Khmer studies. Beyond its biographical interest, the journal illuminates the lived experience of early 20th-century travel in Southeast Asia, combining personal reflection, logistical details, and observations of the landscape and local communities.

A closer examination shows that the journal's main focus lies on the journey from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap (21 April–4 May), highlighting the hardships, adventures, and improvisations characteristic of travel in the region at the time. By contrast, the account offers only limited observations of the major archeological sites—Preah Khan of Kampong Svay, Beng Mealea, Angkor

Wat, and the Angkor Thom complex—visited primarily between 28 April and 18 May. Nevertheless, even these brief mentions provide insight into Coedès's emerging interest in Khmer architecture, iconography, and epigraphy.

The journal also offers a valuable context for understanding Coedès's working environment and scholarly formation. It foreshadows the remarkable productivity that would follow: between 1912 and 1913, he published at least eight articles directly related to this expedition, laying the groundwork for his later influential contributions to Southeast Asian archeology and history. *Voyage à Angkor* thus represents both a personal narrative and a foundational document in the intellectual trajectory of one of the field's most important figures. Many more journeys, observations, and publications would follow, building upon the foundations recorded in this early travel account.

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