

Representing Heritage without Territory— The Khmer Rouge at the UNESCO in Paris during the 1980s and their Political Strategy for Angkor

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Abstract In the modern history of Cambodia, the temples of Angkor were constantly (ab)used for identity constructions by the actual ruling powers. In this game, the years between 1979 and 1989 represent a unique case study: While the Cambodian territory itself was occupied by the Vietnamese Heng Samrin-regime, the resistance movements around the Khmer Rouge were driven out of the country but recognized by the United Nations as the legal Khmer government under the name of Democratic Kampuchea. As a clever political strategy and in coalition with the former King Norodom Sihanouk, its political leaders around Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary appropriated the Western discourse on national cultural heritage: with its Permanent UNESCO-Delegation in Paris, the “safeguarding of Angkor” was promoted as an inseparable part of the diplomatic struggle towards national independence. This paper tries to analyse the ways and means of the “Angkor-as-heritage discourse” of the Khmer Rouge/Democratic Kampuchea in the 1980s, including the reactions of UNESCO and the international community.

Perverved Missions to “Civilize” Angkor in the Last Breath of the Cold War: An Introduction

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, missions to civilize were often inseparably linked to violent claims on strictly defined territories in which mental components such as (re)discovered history were precisely conceptualized and localized as special landmarks of (re-)imagined communities. In other words, territory, cultural heritage, and collective identity formed a strong trinity of civilizing visions that could be formulated in the following ways: (1) by established

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225

elites or influential groups inside an existing state (-nation); (2) in relation to a society located outside the borders but within the classical situation of colonialism or land-reclamation; and (3) in relation to an international system of states.

The following case study focuses on the years 1979–1989 and will include all three types of—however strongly perverted—civilizing missions/visions as represented by one political regime or system. What makes this case study even more interesting is the fact that all three of the factions discussed here in the case of Cambodia—the Vietnamese-backed *People's Republic of Kampuchea* regime inside the country (type a); the Khmer Rouge, driven out of their former homeland in their efforts to reclaim their former territory (type b); and the supra-national community of the United Nations in their vision for regional and universal peace (type c)—used the so-called cultural heritage of Angkor to further their cultural-political action programme. In the following article I will attempt to demonstrate that even during this state of civil war the propaganda material, conference talks, and global declarations of the three factions formed different aspects of civilizing visions that were dominated by the “endgame in the ideological Cold War with players from all sides supporting and directing it” (Slocomb 2003, x). I will prove that the topos of “glorious Angkor” (and its cultural heritage) represented an important, and in some cases even decisive, element in both militaristic and diplomatic efforts.¹

The Territorial Situation in 1979–1989 and Political Alliances

The new government led by Heng Samrin, a former Khmer Rouge commander and deserter, overthrew the terror regime of the Khmer Rouge between December 1978 and January 1979. This new government called itself the *People's Republic of Kampuchea* (PRK) and was founded on January 10, 1979. Following the occupation of the capital Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979, the vast majority of the former Khmer territory, including Siem Reap and the temples of Angkor, came under its control. The regime was backed primarily by the neighbouring Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which was itself receiving heavy financial and military support from the USSR. In 1989, under the new prime minister Hun Sen and with the recent market-friendly reforms, the PRK turned itself into the *State of Cambodia* (SOC).

The Khmer Rouge, which was still officially called *Democratic Kampuchea* (DK) after their defeat in 1979, was almost completely driven out of the country but it succeeded in establishing resistance bases in the Cambodian northwest provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap, and Oddar Meanchey along and across the Thai border,

¹ Most of the sources cited in this analysis refer to the UNESCO Archive in Paris at Miollis/Bonvin-site. I am grateful to the archive staff for their patience and assistance while I conducted research. For the translation of Khmer and Vietnamese texts I would like to thank Vathdana Chavelith and Sokhalay Saur, both in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

and in recruiting guerrilla fighters in the numerous Khmer refugee camps on Thai territory. Even though the former leader Pol Pot was still the most powerful member of Democratic Kampuchea, Khieu Samphan served as both prime and foreign minister in public; and China, its powerful old ally, backed the regime. In waging their unpredictable guerrilla war, the former Khmer Rouge remained a constant threat to the Heng Samrin government in Phnom Penh and regularly attacked the city of Siem Reap and the temples of Angkor before completely losing credibility as an irascible and militaristic partner in the royal-republican-communist pact against the PRK.

The third important player on a global scale was the state community represented by the United Nations (UN). With the diplomatic support of the United States, China (against the will of the USSR), as well as the European Communities (EC), and the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN) states, including Thailand, Cambodia's neighbour to the west and important supplier to the Khmer Rouge guerrilla, the UN officially recognized the Khmer Rouge as the legal representatives of Cambodia. In 1992/93 the UN provided a *Transitional Authority in Cambodia* (UNTAC) to supervise general elections and to help establish a new state under the legal definitions outlined by the global state community.

The flags of these three factions (in reference to Cambodia's flags during the French colonial times, the Kingdom of Cambodia, and the Khmer Republic) hint at the culturo-political atmosphere during the discussed ten-year timeframe (Fig. 1a–f). The defeated DK retained its red flag containing a stylized yellow three-tower temple elevation, and the PRK produced a blood-red flag containing the same red-yellow contrast and featuring a similar tower silhouette—a clear visual proof that both regimes, despite being at war with each other, shared the same communist base in the cultural-revolutionary (bloody) struggle in Southeast Asia that went back to the 1950s Viet Minh/Khmer Viet Minh movement against Western imperialist powers. The UN (and UNESCO as its cultural representative), on the other hand, tried to remain neutral, although it did recognize the Khmer Rouge and blocked all diplomatic invitations from the PRK. Access to any civilizing efforts in Cambodia ultimately had to include all the stakeholders in Angkor's cultural heritage under the accepted UN Transition Authority. Although UNTAC's flag depicted the outline of Cambodia on a blue (neutral) background, like its declared enemies its coat of arms also made use of the iconic tower silhouette of Angkor Wat.

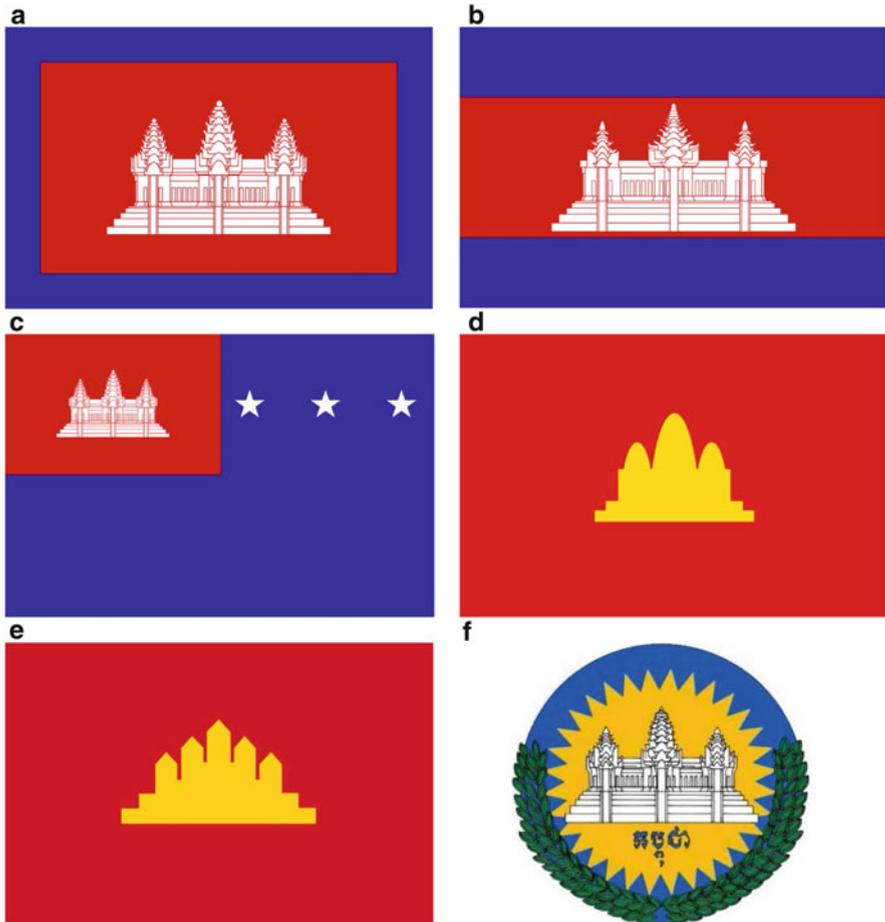


Fig. 1 (a) The flags of French colonial Cambodia (1863–1953); (b) Kingdom of Cambodia (1953–1970); (c) Khmer Republic (1970–75); (d) Democratic Kampuchea (1975–1979); (e) the People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979–1989); (f) the coat of arms of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) flag

People's Republic of Kampuchea

In 1979, the first year of its existence, the PRK embarked on an ultimately unsuccessful campaign to gain international recognition;² it published a series of small books and leaflets in order to disseminate its mission of creating a new, re-civilized state. However, the PRK's justification for this was based entirely on

²For the general history of the PRK, see Klintworth 1989, Chhim 2000, Slocomb 2003, for its political strategies compare Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1983, 1985.

the supposedly victorious sacrifices and the “long and arduous struggle” of the Khmer people in ridding themselves of the genocidal “Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique” that had “massacred 2 million” inhabitants over a period of four years. In 1979 the *Ministry of Information, Press, and Cultural Affairs* in the *Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Council* announced “The birth of new Kampuchea” on the title page of a French–English publication. Along with a map of the national territory and a photo of Heng Samrin, the text on the cover was directly related to the new flag’s meaning as described in the new national anthem written by Keo Chenda, the former Viet Minh and future minister of information, press, and culture: “We draw our strength from our unity and stand ready to shed our blood for victory [...] The blood-red flag with five golden towers is raised and will lead the nation to happiness and prosperity” (Ministry of Information 1979, 10). In the constitution that was released some time later in 1981, §88 also explicitly referred to the five towers of the Angkor Wat temple. Celebrating the January 1979 victory, President Heng Samrin outlined the PRK’s revolutionary mission to re-civilize the country—after the completely uncivilized Khmer Rouge auto-genocide—using various cultural heritage metaphors:

Blood of our men and women cadres [...] flowed in rivers through this land, and their bodies have filled, so to speak, all bomb craters, lakes and ponds of our country [...] Kampuchea had become a sea of blood under the sway of the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique, betrayers of the Fatherland [...] They banned all levels of education, keeping the people in complete ignorance [...] *At the same time they trampled under foot our brilliant millennia-old civilisation and turned the radiant land of Angkor into an area of devastation, flowing with blood and strewn with corpses. Owing to their policy, many ancient temples, gardens and parks, which had been built by the skilful hands of our people and were representative of our brilliant civilisation, were seriously damaged and turned into wilderness.* Our people’s ways, customs, and fine traditions were flouted. [...] The Pol Pot-Ieng Sary traitors cheaply sold out our country and people to become instruments of Peking’s expansionist policy, which was materialized in the most perfidious schemes of annexation and pursued a policy of genocide and plundering our natural riches [...] They are reactionary, barbarous and warlike people, more cruel than Hitler’s fascists [...] It was in this spirit that the National United Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea was born and made public its 11-Point Political Programme on December 2, 1978 [...] Not to be separated from the all-round assistance of the peoples in the socialist countries. . . it is the victory of peace and justice-loving people in the world. (Ministry of Information 1979, 66–77).

Ministry of Information (1979) *The Birth of New Kampuchea*

Vice-President Pen Sovann’s speech to the *National United Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea* drew parallels between Angkorian civilization and the tradition of a revolutionary and socialist mission in order to mandate the protection of this glorious heritage. In the little Vietnamese book entitled *Cambodia—Victory by a Pure Revolution*, published in Hanoi in 1979 (Fig. 2), this tendency turned into a veritable invention of tradition. The cover of the booklet depicted the face-towers of the Angkorian Bayon towers as a late-modern socialist abstraction, and although chapters one and two focused on “The Betrayed Revolution” of the Pol Pot regime and “The Resistance Fight for a Pure Revolution,” chapter one offered an unctuous treatise on “The Country of Angkorian Glory.” The basic message was that this “country of temples [...] rich and beautiful,” and “Angkorian glory,” was a result of

Fig. 2 Book cover of the Vietnamese 1979 publication *Cambodia—victory by a pure revolution* (Source: People’s Republic of Kampuchea 1979, cover)



the “hard labour work of the Khmer people [who were full of] love, independence, justice and diversity [...] and hated any kind of pressure regime.” “A nation that had developed to such a glory” could not accept the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime of slavery and cruelty and proved that it had “enough energy and power to fight back” (People’s Republic of Kampuchea 1979, 11–15).

In 1984, decisions were made to set up a “committee for the care of the Angkorian temples” and the government planned a culturo-political “mass campaign” in which cadres and civilians were obliged to do volunteer work at the Angkor site to “ensure orderliness and restore the area to its original beauty,” an area that had suffered under the Khmer Rouge programme to “destroy our national cultural health.”³ Despite this rhetorical support for Angkor as a constructed past for the socialist present and the glorious future, the war-time efforts of the 1980s Heng Samrin-government concerning Angkorian heritage were limited by their small budget for social services, including for education and culture.

However, the PRK played its most relevant culturo-political card on the international, Asian stage. In 1980, with strong support from Indira Gandhi’s Congress Party and as part of the Congress Party’s diplomatic rapprochement towards the USSR, India recognized the PRK. And as the only non-Warsaw Pact country to do so, India was rewarded with the project to restore Cambodia’s greatest cultural

³“Decision concerning the setting up of a committee to report on and care for the Angkorian temples,” no. 49SSR, for COM, chairman Chan Si, (16.3.1984, Phnom Penh). Mentioned in Slocomb 2003, 184 and 305.

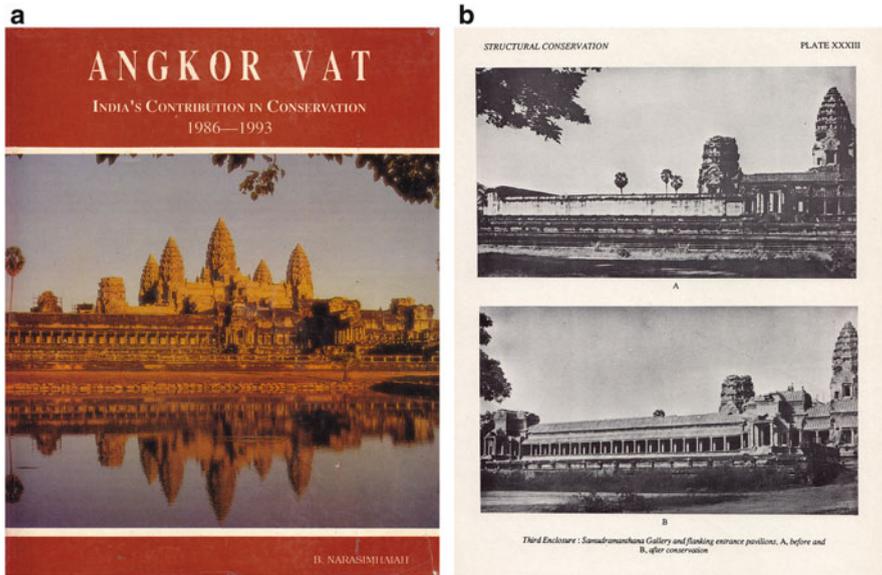


Fig. 3 Book cover (left, **a**) and page (right, **b**) from: *Angkor Vat. India's Contributions in Conservation* (1986–93) by the Archaeological Survey of India (1994) (Source: Narsimhaiah 1994, cover, plate 33)

highlight—the temple of Angkor Wat. The first negotiations and contact visits made by experts from the Archaeological Survey of India commenced in 1980 and survey work was initiated shortly thereafter; but the major physical interventions took place between 1986 and 1993 (Fig. 3a, b).

These basically comprised structural repair work including the re-assembling of the temple's outer southeastern gallery, which had been dismantled for an intended restoration (*anastylosis*) by the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFO) (right before its archaeologists were forced out of Cambodia in 1972 due to the escalating civil war), and a complete chemical cleaning of the temple that was internationally criticized for its highly aggressive procedure and for its devastating effect on the temple's colour scheme.⁴ This Indian civilizing (i.e. restoring) mission to Angkor was also exploited as a means of underlining India as the birthplace of a “Greater Indian” culture in Asia and thus its supposed role as the caring mother of Angkor, which was considered to be “a part of the larger heritage of India and the world” (Narsimhaiah 1994, xi–xii; cf. Chakraborti 1985, 82–89).

⁴ See the undated report of the Archaeological Survey of India “Conservation at the Angkor Wat during the season 1986–7 and 1987–88.” UNESCO Archives Paris, dossier CLT.CH.191/1986–1989.

Liberate Cambodia—Save Angkor! Democratic Kampuchea before and after 1979

However, the central culturo-political game—a cleverly invented mission to civilize, with a clear territorial goal—was played by the Khmer Rouge during the mid-1980s. As the UN-recognized representatives of a country whose territory was occupied by the Vietnamese-backed enemy, the exiled DK-government underwent a considerable change of strategy towards the cultural heritage of Angkor between its status as “1975–79: in power/on territory—but internationally mistrusted” and “1979–1989: out of power/out of territory—but internationally recognized.” Before 1979 the references to Angkor seemed to be almost non-existent in internal documents, and official ones served only as a “tool in public relations” in the name of the revolution (Chandler 1983, 43; cf. Sher 2003; cf. Chandler 1976). This was already evident in the national anthem text (drafted by Khieu Samphan) that declared the “great victory of the 17th of April [1975, the occupation of Phnom Penh] more wonderful and much more meaningful than the Angkor period.” As previously mentioned, the blood-red revolutionary background of the KR-flag featured a three-tower silhouette of a temple, which symbolized the “national tradition and the People of Kampuchea who defend and build a country that grew more glorious every day” (Jennar 1994, 70). In the first years of the revolution, public speeches made by high-ranking Khmer Rouge reveal considerable propagandistic efforts to *downgrade* Angkorian civilization. During the celebrations of the first anniversary of the revolution of 1976 the “building of a new nation” and the “rebirth of the national soul” was proclaimed (most probably by Pol Pot himself), and Angkor was ranked third and last on the list of “masterpieces.” After the revolution and “the great revolutionary movement of transforming the Kampuchean countryside into a garden of rice crops,” which was seen as the ultimate proof of “collective heroism,” Angkor was even denounced: “The previous generation preferred the magnificent masterpieces of the Angkorian period. Our people built Angkor, but we are not very proud of that because the people at that time were in a slavery agriculture regime and were seriously exploited by the feudalists of that generation” (Pol Pot 1976). During Pol Pot’s famous 1977 address in honour of the 17th official anniversary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, these various elements were streamlined into a stricter “periodization of Cambodian history,” which was combined with the discourse on the tradition of Angkor (Chandler 1983, 34–56). At this point Angkor (mentioned just once in a sixty-eight page transcript of the speech) ranked somewhere between an undefined earlier period of primitive communism and the new era that emerged after 1975; nonetheless, it served as proof of the high achievements realized under forced collective labour. To quote Pol Pot (compare the longer citations in Henri Locard’s contribution and in my epilogue in this volume): “Long ago there was Angkor. Angkor was built during the era of slavery. Slaves like us built Angkor under the yoke of the exploiting classes for the pleasures of the king. [If] Our people were able to built Angkor, [then] they can built everything” (Pol Pot 1977, 50). Besides these rare references to Angkor, it can be said that Angkorian civilization was heavily provincialized by the Khmer Rouge before 1979 when it was

defined as a purely national phenomenon without any historical embedding or inter- or transcultural entanglements, or even acknowledgement of its being one the great cultural achievements of human civilization or a world wonder.

Shortly after the Vietnam-based Heng Samrin government took over Phnom Penh and forced the Khmer Rouge to the northwestern borderland between Thailand and Cambodia, the Security Council and General Assembly of the UN—with the USSR's veto, but with the support of the ASEAN countries—condemned the invasion and demanded the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces from Cambodia in repeated resolutions. The Khmer Rouge were now obliged to fight their war in two directions: first, on the battlefield inside Cambodia (which also touched the territory of Siem Reap/Angkor) in the form of a guerrilla strategy; and second, on the diplomatic field outside of Cambodia (Fig. 4a, b) (and here we

a



b

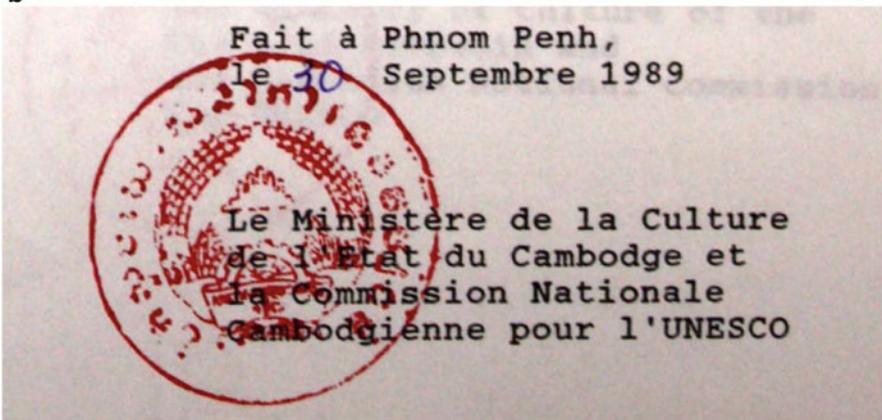


Fig. 4 Stamps from the UNESCO-correspondence of the Khmer Rouge in 1981 (a) and the Vietnamese government in Cambodia in the final transitory status into the *State of Cambodia* (b) (UNESCO Archives)

shall focus only on the relationship to UNESCO in Paris) in the form of a newly invented political mission for the protection of Cambodian cultural heritage, a mission to civilize using the adopted humanitarian rhetoric of and for a Western-democratic audience.

This mission underwent the following three major phases: first, the search for an inner-political consolidation and international culturo-political strategy (1979–1982); second, the coalition government and its propagandistic mission to civilize (1982–85); and third, a perestroika for the civilizing mission in Angkor (1985–1990).

The Khmer Rouge as the Representatives of Cambodia at UNESCO: A New Civilizing Mission within the Cultural Heritage of Angkor

Search for an Inner-Political Consolidation and an International Culturo-Political Strategy (1979–1982)

During the first months after its expulsion from Phnom Penh in 1979, the DK government was busy establishing its exile government and the guerrilla bases along the Khmer-Thai border. Astonishingly, international solidarity for the exiled Khmer Rouge amongst leftist intellectuals was well organized and resulted in three Kampuchea conferences: Stockholm in 1979, Tokyo in 1982, and Bangkok in 1987. Kampuchean culture, with Angkor as its symbol, was a constant emblematic topic at these events. In the same year, the propagandist medium *Voice of Kampuchea* announced the new political line of the Khmer Rouge: “Our struggle is no longer one of ideology, but one of defending the territory and race of our beloved Kampuchea, which is as dear as our lives” (Raszelenberg and Schier 1995, 31). This discourse transcended race and territory and spilled into the culture section. In 1980 Thiounn Mumm, the new chairman of the scientific and technical commission of DK, presented the Khmer Rouge’s new rhetoric of a supposedly civilizing mission both in a personal letter to the Senegalese director-general of UNESCO between 1974 and 1987, Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow, and publicly during the 21st General Conference of UNESCO in Belgrade (September 23–October 28, 1980) (cf. General Conference 1980). The main points of his argumentation formed future culturo-political features and systematically adopted Western Cold War rhetoric on humanity and global heritage (Thiounn 1980):

1. The “marvellous cultural heritage of Angkor” (only few years earlier declared a symbol of enslavement) was now “one of the great world civilizations” due to “the construction of an extremely rational irrigation system” and a source of “pride for the Kampuchean people [...] who built it”;
2. “After the liberation of the region of Angkor in 1970 [the coup d’état against Norodom Sihanouk, MF] by the [our] army, these monuments, along with other cultural heritage like the National Museum and the Silver Pagoda in Phnom Penh, were affectionately maintained and protected”;
3. The Vietnamese forces had turned Siem Reap and Angkor into a “combat zone” with a military base and missile and artillery installations only a few kilometres from Angkor Vat [the Phnom Bakheng hill fortification, MF] and soldier camps inside the perimeters of historic monuments;
4. The “Vietnamese expansionist aggressors” committed a “crime” in the “massive extermination of the people with conventional and chemical weapons and through famine,” with “systematic destructions of all economic, industrial, agricultural and in particular cultural infrastructures” and with the “pillage of Angkorian statues, bas-reliefs to be found for sale in Saigon and Hanoi”—in short, with the “wanton aim to destroy Kampuchea’s cultural and historic roots and to turn its people into a minority without a past or historic evidence”;
5. But the Khmer people proved its “untamableness [original French: *indomptabilité*] as the builders of Angkor” and “will never accept to live under foreign domination [...] the nation of Kampuchea will never disappear, the grand civilization of Angkor will continue to live forever in the spirit, the souls and the heart of its dignified descendants”;
6. Finally, UNESCO should intervene against such destruction, pillage, and “genocide” and the DK was willing to collaborate with UNESCO to restore the cultural heritage of Angkor, but *only* under the “undebatable condition of the total liberation, independence and sovereignty of the country” after the full withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops.

However, a simple telex addressed to the UN headquarters of culture in April 1981 proves that the DK-UNESCO delegation with Ambassador Ok Sakun as its permanent delegate was not at all ready to enhance this hastily invented civilizing mission with credible propaganda material (Fig. 5). Even if the acting director-general of UNESCO had, during the Belgrade Conference in 1980, already spoken about the idea of a “military neutralisation of the Angkor Zone” as the political condition for any cultural action programme, his suggestion would be the subject of difficult internal debates in the years to come. Ok Sakun, on the other hand, warned M’Bow to contact the Heng Samrin government in Phnom Penh or to visit Angkor under its occupation but made—and that was the official line all the way up to the president of the DK who was the alleged “victim” in the regional conflict—the topic of a “neutralized Angkor” the diplomatic hostage for the DK’s central demand for the unconditional withdrawal of “the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as aggressor” from Cambodia.

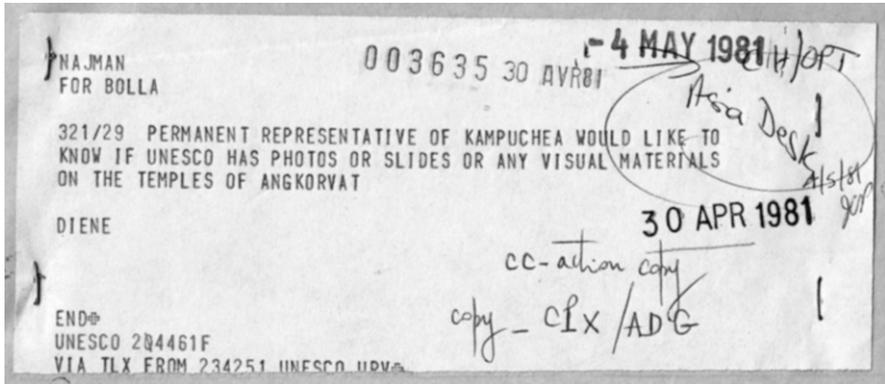


Fig. 5 Telex by the *Khmer Rouge Permanent Delegation to UNESCO* in Paris (April 30, 1981) requesting visual material for the Angkor case (UNESCO Archives Paris)

After the visit of Ieng Sary, the DK-Minister of Foreign Affairs, and his delegation at UNESCO in 1981 (just a few days after the International Conference on Kampuchea in New York under the auspices of the UN), Ok Sakun even invited the director general for a visit to the supposedly DK-controlled site of Angkor. M'Bow insisted on the following: (1) any action by UNESCO "should be shielded against all political interpretation"; (2) UNESCO's mission for "saving Angkor was a purely scientific and technical undertaking" in relation to §§19/23 of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict; and (3) it was a "humanitarian" task, since UNESCO initially acted in Cambodia under the "lead agency" of UNICEF installed in Phnom Penh (M'Bow 1982). In an effort to bypass the UN resolutions, UNESCO's mission to re-civilize Angkorian heritage as part of a humanitarian action programme was publicly supported by Willibald Pahr, the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, during the UN General Assembly in October 1982, and was internationally acclaimed. The case on Angkor became an abstract, metaphorical substitute for virtually every country's political positioning in the highly complex late-Cold War constellation. However, during the 115th session of the Executive Council in 1982, M'Bow admitted that he was not happy with the UN recognition of the DK that had to be respected by his cultural sub-division and which blocked UNESCO's direct actions on Cambodian territory.

Angkor became the subject of wild speculation after different missions and visits in 1981 (UNICEF, a Polish ICOMOS-mission, the Japanese expert Ishizawa) reported both collapsing and undamaged temples that were heavily overgrown due to many years of neglect. In the meantime, an undated statement by the



Fig. 6 Press releases of the Permanent Mission of Democratic Kampuchea to the United Nations (a, left: Issue of November 1982, cover; b, right: Issue of August 30, 1982, 2) (UNESCO Archives, Paris)

Vietnamese government alerted UNESCO to the invented rumour of a “new genocide under the Heng Samrin administration,” which had actually liberated Phnom Penh and saved the Kampuchean people from extinction.⁵ On April 5, 1982 the DK’s Permanent UN-Mission published a 14-page special issue press release called “The Marvellous Monuments of Angkor and their Strategy” (see Fig. 28 in the epilogue of this volume), and the “national resistance against the Vietnamese aggressor” was a permanent slogan in published media (Fig. 6a, b).

Using almost the same word choice, it basically summed up all the relevant points mentioned above. It accused the “Hanoi authorities” of “taking advantage of the world-wide reputation of the monuments of Angkor” and disguising a “political purpose” to gain international recognition through a supposedly “cultural” mission: “Actually, they want to take advantage of the emotion caused by the fate of the monuments of Angkor to achieve their diplomatic manoeuvres and aims.” They declared this to be “odious hypocrisy” and above all the “root cause of the present

⁵ “The monks have returned to the restored pagodas to pray Buddha [...] Kampuchea is on the way of rebirth. On the tombs of the victims of a monstrous genocide, a whole nation, strong from the glorious past of the Angkorian civilisation, revived and is marching firmly straight on, following this era’s common trend [...] under the flag of Marxism-Leninism” (Truong Chinh 1981/82).

tragedy of the monuments of Angkor” (Permanent Mission 1982, 13–14). However, the press release closed with exactly the same manoeuvre, arguing that the “preservation and restoration of the monuments of Angkor” was dependent on national independence and sovereignty. Additionally, it recycled images (previously published in *Le Figaro* and *The Washington Post*) of peaceful tourists at the site and of some of the 2,000 Khmer Rouge workers and caring guards in Angkor *before* the regime change in 1979.

In the same month—April 1982—the first large international exhibition on Angkor took place in the very centre of the international states community. National Geographic presented their photo panels of the site in the lobby of the UN headquarters in New York along with an entreaty to demilitarize Angkor. In addition to the opening remarks made by UNESCO representatives and Wilbur Garrett, the publishing director of *National Geographic Magazine*, Ambassador Thiounn Prasith, the permanent UN-delegate of DK, used the opening to denounce the Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin government as cultural barbarians and to underline the “magnificent cultural patriotism and the brave fight of the people for the several thousands of years old civilisation and their national identity.”⁶ The *National Geographic Magazine* published a cover story entitled “The temples of Angkor: Will they survive?” in May 1982 (Fig. 7a, b).

In contrast to the Khmer Rouge polemic displayed at the exhibition, the photo stories in *National Geographic* “slightly lifted the veil of secrecy” that had lain across the long suffering, civil war-prone people and the Angkor temples. The pictures were breath-taking and the message was simple: “Despite rumours and exaggerated reports that the temples were demolished or severely damaged, we can report that, amazingly, they are nearly unscratched by the years of war,” but after the menacing vandalism of the last decade and the fast-growing vegetation the article concluded that “After a thousand-year cycle of destruction, decay, and rebirth, the ancient complex of temples now desperately needs a renewal of the loving and expert preservation and reconstruction once lavished on it by Cambodia and France” (Garrett 1982, 548–51). Although one article in this issue provided deep insight into the plight of the recovering Cambodian people who were living under a Vietnamese-backed government that was accepted passively after the trauma of the Khmer Rouge terror, another took the reader on a tour through the temples with Pich Keo, the acting but isolated Angkor conservator on-site and concluded: “In short, I have learned that the major problem at Angkor of late has been neither war damage nor thievery, but simply neglect” (Garrett 1982, 585). Despite this relatively optimistic vision of Angkor’s cultural heritage, the propaganda machine of the exiled Khmer Rouge regime was getting ready to take off.

⁶ *Bulletin d'information, Délégation permanente du Kampuchéa Démocratique auprès de l'UNESCO* 10 (May 3, 1982): 15–16.

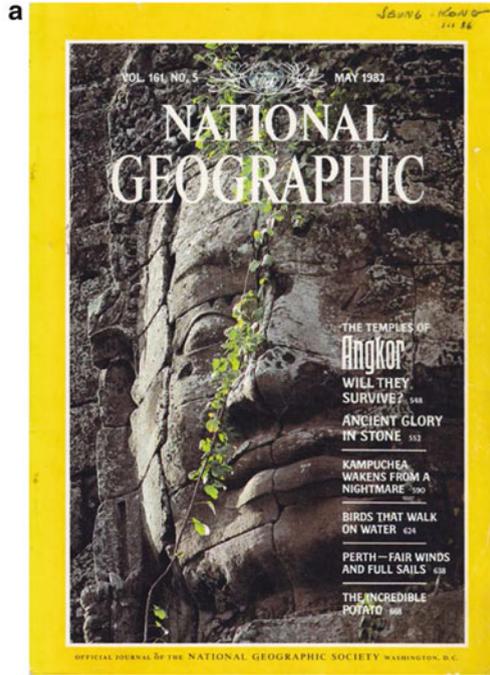


Fig. 7 “The temples of Angkor: Will they survive?” cover story of *National Geographic Magazine* (May 1982). Above/a: cover, **b**: Vietnamese soldier in front of Angkor Wat (Source: National Geographic Magazine (May 1982), cover, 550/551)

The Coalition Government and its Propagandistic Mission (1982–85)

On June 22, 1982, under pressure from the Chinese, Prince Norodom Sihanouk (who was living in exile in Beijing and Pyongyang) finally agreed to form the *Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea* (CGDK) as its president, with the Khmer Rouge under Khieu Samphan as vice-president and minister of foreign affairs, and the Republican Son Sann (the former president of the Khmer Republic until 1975) as prime minister. Despite being a royal-communist-republican resistance pact against Heng Samrin, all factions of this tripartite coalition kept their own political identity and their own military forces gathered along the Thai-Cambodian border. However, the ideological rapprochement between the prince and the Khmer Rouge was not a new phenomenon—on the contrary. The temples of Angkor played an important role in this development. Three years after the coup d'état of the Lon Nol regime against Sihanouk in 1970, the prince made a quasi-official visit to the Khmer Rouge strongholds, or the *People's Armed Forces of National Liberation of Cambodia* as it was called in the a published photo album of the visit (People's Armed Forces 1973, n.p.). The trip was publicized as Sihanouk's cultural pilgrimage from China to Angkor (researchers still doubt the authenticity of these images, especially the photomontage cover with Sihanouk in front of Angkor Wat, compare the contribution of Henri Locard in this book). In these photos he and Princess Monique posed in Khmer Rouge uniforms with Hou Youn, Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan and others⁷ and were depicted at the temples of Angkor Wat and Banteay Srei (Fig. 8a, b). After the 1973 visit to Angkor, Sihanouk undertook the same symbolic pilgrimage again in July 1981 with “[our] heroic fighters” from the Khmer Rouge, into “the deep interior of the [our] fatherland,” supposedly travelling by “automobile, on foot and on the back on an elephant,” as he told the UN General Assembly in September 1982.

With the celebrated and internationally accepted figure of Norodom Sihanouk as president of the *Coalition Government*, the Khmer Rouge gained confidence and the *Délégation Permanente du Kampuchea Démocratique auprès de l'UNESCO* published two “Angkor Dossiers” in 1982 and 1983 (Fig. 9a, b). The main issues were the following (quotes collected from the dossier of 1983, see *Délégation Permanente* (1983), and compare quotation in the epilogue of this volume):

1. Angkor was geographically and mentally re-invented as the “heart of Kampuchea” and the “soul, the spirit and even the body of the Kampuchean people,” and as a symbol “not only the heritage of the Kampuchean people, but equally of the whole humanity.”
2. The time span of 1970–75 [the Lon Nol civil war] did “very little damage to the temples” [a comment probably made as a political concession to the republican partner in the newly founded coalition government]. The Khmer Rouge

⁷ Cf. with Fig. 1 in Locard's contribution, and Fig. 23 in the epilogue in this volume.



Fig. 8 Sihanouk with Khieu Samphan (*left*), and with Monique in Khmer Rouge uniforms in front of the temple of Banteay Srei (*right*), in “Prince Norodom Sihanouk, head of Cambodia, in the liberated Zone,” published by the People’s Armed Forces of National Liberation of Cambodia (1973) (*Source*: People’s Armed Forces of National Liberation of Cambodia 1973, n.p.)

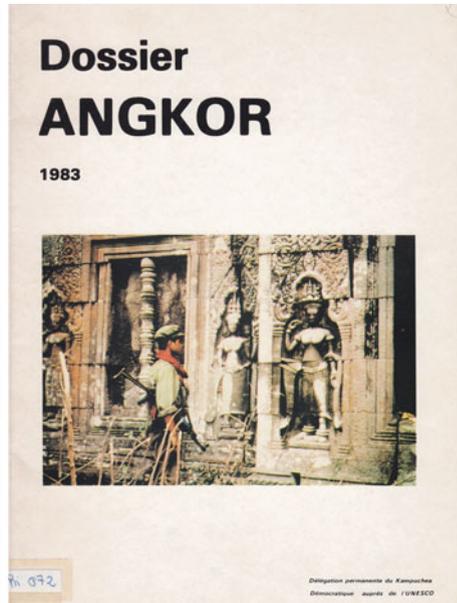
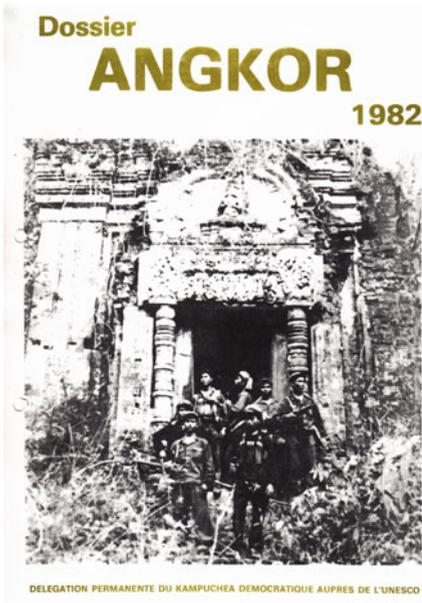


Fig. 9 “Dossier Angkor” (a, *left*: 1982; b, *right*: 1983), published by the *Délégation permanente du Kampuchea Démocratique auprès de l’UNESCO* (ICOMOS International Archive, Paris)

government in 1975–1978 “had not forgotten Angkor, but cared for it with 2,700 people” and the site had been used for various diplomatic visits and even for tourists. However, the Vietnamese Heng Samrin government endangered the site through destruction and pillage [compare with the story from *Paris Match* in its 1982 November issue], the proximity of military installation, internationally barred chemical and biological weapons, and random vandalism. It made Angkor a “display window for its alleged pacification” and therefore “in total immorality as hostage” for the manipulation of international opinion, public endorsement, political recognition, and colonial expansion.

3. Quoting Prince Sihanouk, DK could not accept UNESCO initiating and conducting any restoration project in Angkor, since this would be a de facto recognition of the Heng Samrin government.
4. “Quel avenir pour Angkor?” As a territorial and symbolic centre—both nationally and internationally—Angkor represented a strategic zone of importance and its defence was not only “a preoccupation for all Khmers” and their army but also a civilizing mission for the international preservation community.

As mentioned above, the Angkor discourse was entirely adjusted to the international public and mirrored enemy-stereotypes from both the Hot and Cold War rhetoric (from biological warfare to ethnic extinction programmes) using Westernized “cultural heritage of humanity” slogans. However, tales of bloody class and national struggle sacrifices, like Khieu Samphan’s statement on the occasion of the traditional Khmer New Year (or the 9th anniversary of DK) dominated internal political speeches at that time, and Angkor was only rarely mentioned.

In the meantime, newspapers reported that the ASEAN-EC ministerial meeting in Bangkok on April 12, 1983 had welcomed the proposal of a security zone along the border and the restoration of Angkor under the condition of its being declared a “zone of peace.”⁸ However, a neutralization of Angkor was no solution for the conflicting parties in Cambodia who both claimed to be the legal custodians of Angkor’s heritage: the coalition government issued a “Memorandum on the problem of Angkor” in February 1984 (Permanent Delegation of Democratic Kampuchea 1984) and rejected all these “noble ideas of peace- and justice-loving countries and the international community,” referring to the obvious “gap between the goal longed for to safeguard Angkor and the inevitable grave consequences for the struggle for survival of the Kampuchean people” (Permanent Delegation 1984). The PRK’s foreign minister, Hun Sen, was quoted as rejecting a “demilitarized zone (DMZ)” as simply a backdoor means of interfering in internal affairs: “If people want to help, they should send the money to us [...] our Angkor is in a state of safety.”⁹ In the meantime, National Geographic’s Angkor exhibition travelled from the UN headquarters in New York and around the world from Washington in 1983 to Vienna, Marseille, and Barcelona in 1985 with an intermediate stop at the

⁸“ASEAN welcomes Angkor Wat plan.” *Bangkok Post*, September 11, 1984.

⁹Ted Morello. “Bid to save Angkor. A proposal to protect Cambodia’s most revered monument is rejected by Heng Samrin regime.” *Economic Review*, December 6, 1984.

UNESCO headquarters in Paris in February/March 1984. The inauguration ceremony on February 23, 1984 produced the same canon of heritage discourse by the main protagonists, Director-General M'Bow and Ok Sakun. After its past status as a colonial concern under the French, a nationalist object in the Sihanouk and Lon Nol era, and a highly provincialized (regionalized) point of reference during the Khmer Rouge/Heng Samrin revolutions, John G. Morris, the European correspondent of *National Geographic*, predefined the heritage slogan that would, after the rebirth of Cambodia under UN supervision in the 1990s, finalize the transformation of the cultural heritage of Angkor into a globalized icon: "Angkor must live for all humanity!"¹⁰

The End of the Cold War: *Perestroika* for the Civilizing Mission in Angkor (1985–1990)

This paper focuses on the three different civilizing missions developed for the same cultural entity (Angkor) by three different political/institutional protagonists—the PRK, DK, and UNESCO. It is astonishing that all three of these factions underwent major culturo-political transformations in their heritage discourse between 1985 and 1990. To a very large extent this was related to the dramatic political changes that occurred at the end of the Cold War, particularly the fall of communism and the problematic status of and changing power constellation between China (backing the Khmer Rouge) and Russia (supporting Vietnam and the PRK).

The first major change concerned the PRK in January 1985 when, after the mysterious and sudden death of his predecessor Chan Si, Hun Sen was appointed the world's youngest prime minister. This marked an end to the old guard socialist revolutionaries in Cambodia, and Hun Sen gradually outgrew Heng Samrin's image as a Vietnamese-controlled puppet leader. Thanks to the slow recovery after 1979 and after severe floods, disastrous harvests, failed agricultural reforms, and international trade restrictions, by 1985 the PRK's economy found itself in deep crisis; Hun Sen had to initiate the gradual de-socialization of Cambodia's economy. With no money to hand, the cultural sector, including the preservation of cultural heritage, was either restricted to sporadic, small-scale initiatives or, as regards Angkor, dependant on selected international campaigns by India at Angkor Wat and a Polish mission on basic temple investigations. Despite victories during the 1984/85 dry season offensive to destroy the enemy's military camps in order to fortify the Cambodian-Thai border (called the "K5-plan") and to protect major strategic points inside Cambodia including Siem Reap and the Archaeological Park

¹⁰ [UNESCO Press Release 12](#) (February 1984) and an internal report both in UNESCO Archives Paris, dossier CLT.CH.THS.APA 566 (1982–1986).

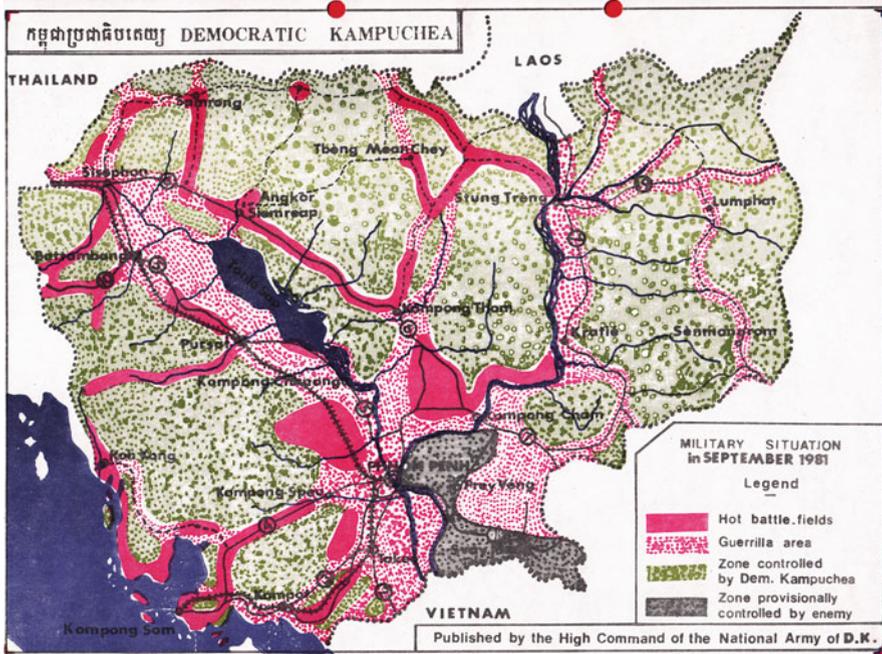


Fig. 10 Battle map including the zone of Angkor (Source: Délégation permanente du Kampuchea 1983)

of Angkor,¹¹ the morale in the PRK’s army was at an all-time low in the face of the effective propaganda campaign that was being waged by the resistance forces after their successful coalition. Faced with mounting international pressure, Hun Sen finally agreed to start direct proximity talks with Norodom Sihanouk in order to work toward national reconciliation.

Because of their destabilizing martial image and their unwillingness to negotiate with the PRK, after 1985 the Khmer Rouge, with Khieu Samphan as president and Son Sen as vice-president, lost more of its international credibility. Military maps from 1984/5 (Fig. 10) demonstrate the different military strategies of the conflicting parties.

¹¹ Heng Samrin’s army installed artillery at the Phnom Bakheng, a temple hill not far from Angkor Wat, and controlled the major entry points to the city of Siem Reap. However, the Khmer Rouge were a constant threat, especially during the night. There are even reports of fortification works inside the Angkor Park after 1982 that could not be verified for this research: “[...] the frequency and the difficulty of the levies increased. The work involved cutting swathes in the forest and erecting strategic barriers around villages. The first clearing seems to have taken place in the park of Angkor in late 1982. They then occurred almost everywhere in the country for the purpose of destroying the guerillas’ sanctuaries, situated in the dense forests of the mountains and plains.” (Martin 1994, 222).

According to the publication *Undeclared War against the People's Republic Kampuchea* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1985) the PRK focused on the fight against the coalition's strongholds along the Thai border, whereas the DK concentrated their guerrilla war efforts in the core zone around the Tonle Sap lake, including the Angkor zone. It speaks to the continuing militaristic strategy of the DK that the permanent delegation of the DK to UNESCO constantly (re-)published battle maps and "front news" about attacks on and temporary occupations of PRK/Vietnamese installations in Siem Reap and Angkor in their *Bulletin d'Information*, in press releases, and in the indirect communications between delegate Ok Sakun and the UNESCO's director-general. In the meantime, in 1986 Sihanouk presented an 8-point plan in Beijing that, apart from calling for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops, a cease-fire, UN-supervision, free elections for a non-aligned, neutral and non-Vietnam-aggressive Cambodia, also included the offer of a quadripartite government with Heng Samrin's PRK and Sihanouk as president.

Whereas UNESCO was still dependent on indirect UNICEF-endorsement for ideas about a non-governmental consortium to "save" Angkor, it was the year 1987 that brought about the greatest shift in direction. On June 12, 1987 *Xinhua News Agency* in Beijing broadcast Son Sann's proposal to start "technical talks between the parties to the conflict without political preconditions to create a 50 km security zone around Angkor Wat."¹² His official letter from June 15, 1987 for a "cultural zone of peace" was commented on by Ok Sakun of the Khmer Rouge in a letter to M'Bow on June 16, where he remarked that large parts of the monument group of Angkor were now under the control of the national army of DK. Even if the PRK rejected this proposal as a strategy to penetrate deeper into the country, it gave UNESCO its first official mandate for providing international assistance toward the establishment of a demilitarized zone at Angkor under the 1954 Hague Convention. A few weeks later M'Bow wrote—along with a "thank-you" note to Son Sann—a letter to the UN's secretary-general Javier Perez de Cuellar outlining Son Sann's proposal and extending an invitation to personal talks about "a mechanism for UNESCO's task without any political and legal implications."¹³ A positive response arrived in August 1987 with reference to a special UN-agent for humanitarian affairs in Southeast Asia. At about the same time, the first direct talks between Sihanouk and Hun Sen took place in northern France (December 2–4, 1987) and the prince renewed a proposal for the neutralization and demilitarization of the Angkor Wat area by appealing to the international community, which included the UN, UNESCO, and the EFEO.

¹² Broadcasts of Xinhua News Agency Beijing on 12.6.1987 and on Radio Phnom Penh on 30.6.1987 (Summary of World Broadcasts by British Broadcasting Corporation), quoted in Raszelenberg and Schier 1995, 122.

¹³ Letter from M'Bow to Javier Perez de Cuellar, the secretary-general of the United Nations, New York (July 4, 1987). UNESCO Archives Paris, dossier CLT.CH.191/1986–1989.

Until mid-1988 several internal reports circulated, and a special task force was initiated for Angkor in February 1988, which judged the political and security situation on-site to be too complex and unpredictable for a concrete UNESCO-intervention. Frederico Mayor Zaragoza, the deputy-director and advisor, was elected UNESCO's new director-general in November 1987, but the preparative expert group for his July 1988 meeting with Son Sann in Paris still saw insurmountable obstacles in its call for a neutralized Angkor zone. Mayor informed Perez de Cuellar in New York that he intended to formulate a message to the Jakarta Informal Meeting of all Cambodian Factions, which was to be held a few weeks later (July 25–28, 1988), about UNESCO's readiness to assist. As an alternative, the Indonesian minister of foreign affairs suggested placing the region of Angkor under the symbolic protection of UNESCO. The subsequent UNESCO missions for the case of Angkor mirrored the rapid diplomatic rapprochements between Hun Sen and the coalition government. These were, from a highly political point of view, the direct result of the Sino-Soviet rapprochements and their mutual agreements to withdraw financial and military support for the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam. Whereas the UNESCO expert Etienne Clement still had to carry out his mission in October 1988 via UNICEF and the regional UNESCO office in Bangkok, subsequent international conferences on Kampuchea and the re-definition of Hun Sen's PRK into the *State of Cambodia* in April 1989 facilitated the next UNESCO mission of Claude Jacques (special consultant to the director-general of UNESCO for Angkor)¹⁴ and Ishizawa Yoshiaki (director of the Institute of Asian Studies, Sophia University in Tokyo) in direct collaboration with the government in Phnom Penh in May 1989 (Ishizawa and Jacques 1989; Jacques 1989). During Sihanouk's visit to UNESCO on September 1, 1989 Mayor directly *asked* the prince for his consent for UNESCO's activities (and not vice versa, as was later reported).¹⁵ The agreement between Sihanouk and Phnom Penh to "depoliticize" the issue of

¹⁴ The author would like to thank Mr. Jacques for his valuable insights into this period during his visit to and talk at the Heidelberg Conference in 2011, which finally led to this publication.

¹⁵ The minutes of this meeting were summarized in several points: "6. The DG stressed the need for immediate action to strengthen the on-going restoration efforts which have only received limited international assistance [...] 7. Assuring the Prince that Unesco's relations with the UN-recognized Coalition Government will remain unchanged, the DG requested the Prince for his consent for Unesco to assume international co-ordination of activities for the safeguard and restoration of the Angkor monuments and to carry out through indirect means, the most urgent tasks required to minimize the risks of irreparable damage. 8. The Prince, stating that Angkor was 'not only a heritage of the Khmer people, but of mankind,' agreed to Unesco taking on the responsibility of international co-ordination 'outside all political considerations.' He agreed to Unesco organizing a technical round table for Khmer and international experts on the restoration of Angkorian monuments, Unesco involvement in a survey and inventory of the Angkor complex and objects of the National Museum, assistance to the international (i.e. Indian and Polish) conservation teams and the training of Khmers in conservation skills. [...] 10. Ambassador Ok Sakun attributed the destruction of the monuments to the Vietnamese and stated that the site of the Angkor complex was situated in militarily contested zones. Prince Sihanouk, however, did not follow-up on the Ambassador's comments. [...] "Meeting between Prince Norodom Sihanouk and the director general (1.9.1989)," UNESCO Archives Paris, dossier CLT.CH.191/1986–1989.

Angkor paved the way for the famous “Appeal for Angkor” (The Ministry of Culture 1989, see quotation in the epilogue of this volume) that was made on September 30, 1989 when the international community was officially asked to help save Angkor. The introduction of the Australian *Evans Plan* in November 1989 and its modified approval by the Perm-5 countries in the UN’s Security Council in January 1990, along with the withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces from Cambodia, facilitated the most important civilizing mission in the history of the UN: the establishment of a *Transitory Authority for Cambodia* (UNTAC) in 1992/3 supervising new elections for a new state of Cambodia after the Paris Agreement in 1991.

Meanwhile, in February 1990 Norodom Sihanouk announced important symbolic changes in the coalition government: the name of Democratic Kampuchea was changed to “Cambodia” with a declared political orientation towards the “5th French Republic,” the national anthem was revised to the version of the independent era (second verse only), and the flag of Cambodia returned to its form before the coup d’état in 1970: “the silhouette of Angkor Wat in front elevation with three visible towers.”¹⁶ (Fig. 11).

However, UNESCO’s mission to civilize Angkor, including the nomination of the Angkor Archaeological Park for World Heritage Status, had only just begun, and the refrain “Save Angkor” would be heard once more (UNESCO 1992–1994, compare UNESCO Cambodia 1994)¹⁷ (Fig. 12).

Le drapeau national du Cambodge n'est plus le drapeau rouge de Pol Pot-Khmer Rouge mais le traditionnel drapeau de la nation cambodgienne depuis des siècles et dont voici le dessin en miniature:



(Silhouette d'Angkor Wat vu de face, dont 3 tours sont visibles. Silhouette en blanc et non pas jaune).

Fig. 11 Conceptualization by Norodom Sihanouk in a letter from February 1990 of the new (old) flag of Cambodia with the tower silhouette of Angkor Wat (UNESCO Archives Paris)

¹⁶ “§6: Le Régime du Cambodge est le meme que celui de la Ve République Française.” In *Delegation permanente de Cambodge auprès de l’UNESCO*, Information (No. 003/90, 14.2.1990). And further explanations: “§4: L’armoire nationale comporte comme motif central les trois tours visibles du monument d’Angkor Wat avec en arrière plan le soleil avec ses rayons, couleur or, irradiant autour d’Angkor Wat. Au-dessous d’Angkor Wat et l’encadrant en demi-cercle, une demi-couronne de feuilles de banian. Angkor Wat est le symbole de la nation, la civilisation et la grandeur du Cambodge. Le soleil et ses rayons symbolisent la renaissance nationale. Les feuilles de banian symbolisent le Bouddhisme, religion de l’Etat du Cambodge.”

¹⁷ For more details about this transformative period in the early 1990s see the introduction of Miura’s paper and the epilogue of this volume.



Fig. 12 “Save Angkor’. Angkor” (Source: News Bulletin of UNESCO 4 (July 1994), cover)

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