The Contribution of the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient with Respect to the Cultural Heritage of Angkor during the Past 100 years

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Discovery of the Asian Atlantis and the colonial appetite for Angkor

Explorations and inventories

In the middle of the 19th century, a century devoted to the exploration of the remoter parts of the planet, the publication of the description of Angkor by the French botanist and explorer Henri Mouhot made a huge impact in Europe. It appeared that a new Asian Atlantis had been found, and its myth was born. This myth especially took hold in France who at that time was trying to promote its colonial development in Asia. Angkor Vat became a symbol of a colonial policy that could restore the greatness of the Cambodian people. Deeply associated with this political movement and its inherent struggles, various explorations were launched in and around Angkor. The most famous one is certainly the expedition directed by Doudart de Lagrée who in 1866, tried to row the length of the Mekong, to its source in China. This expedition consisted of a multi-disciplinary team, with one part devoted to the media (a photographer Gsell and a draftsman Delaporte). Various other expeditions followed and especially focused on Cambodian antiquities and Angkor in particular. These expeditions brought France drawings, surveys, moulding and statues (Delaporte, Fournereau,) which were exhibited in various "salons" and "expositions universelles" (1878). This finally culminated in the creation in Paris

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of a particular section at the Colonial museum for these exhibits and an impressive reconstruction (made with plaster) of Angkor Vat itself (Marseille 1922 and Paris 1931). In parallel, less media and more scientific oriented explorations were undertaken in Cambodia after the creation of the French Protectorate. This research focused on one primary objective at that time. To construct a "History" of Cambodia (all be it, from a western point of view) from the chronicles (De Lagrée, Leclère...) by recording and cataloguing the stone inscriptions and monuments (Aymonnier, Fournereau, Dufour).

The creation of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient

In the last years of the 19th century, France had consolidated its position in Indochina. The exploration phase was over, and the early initiatives tended now to develop into long-term actions. In this respect, the French "Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres" and the Governor P. Doumer promoted the creation of permanent scientific organisations to study the history of its colonies. On the 10th of January 1900, the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) was created on the model of other existing Ecoles Françaises in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Egypt. EFEO was charged with archaeological and philological investigations in Indochina and in neighbouring countries, a charge it assumed in Cambodia even after its independence and up until 1975. Installed in Hanoi and directed by Finot -a Sanskrit epigraphist- EFEO first launched systematic exploration campaigns to inventory the monuments and inscriptions. The areas of investigation were large: Champa (Parmentier) and Cambodia (surveyed by Lunet de

Lajonquière) including Angkor -despites of its location in Siamese territory- with a first permanent mission clearing the reliefs of the Bayon temple (H. Dufour, C. Carpeaux). In 1907, Angkor, Battambang and Sisophon were retroceded to Cambodia, and Angkor arrived naturally and officially within the scope of EFEO. Charged with its study and its preservation, EFEO established in 1908 its permanent presence through the founding of the Conservation d'Angkor.

The Tangible contributions of EFEO

Outside Angkor

Before describing further tangible contributions of EFEO in Angkor, I would just like to recall that this institute kept and developed an active role on the tangible conservation of cultural heritage sites elsewhere in Cambodia. Of course, the work at Angkor is the most famous and spectacular, but other important work was undertaken in various Cambodian provinces. One should be reminded of the long and impressive studies and surveys realised for instance by Parmentier in remote parts of the country, usually including emergency consolidations. Our present knowledge of great monuments like Koh Ker or many pre-angkorian temples is indelibly attached to his name. In the 1930s, following the example of the Conservation d'Angkor, a Conservation de Cochinchine - Cambodge was created and then realised various archaeological and architectural monographs of ancient shrines, and important restorations were begun (Phnom Chisor, Ashram Maha Ruseï...). Other sites were also studied and some-

times excavated (Sambor by Goloubew, Mlu Prei by Levy...). Such work stopped after WW2, and resumed again with the excavation and survey campaigns directed by B.-P. Groslier on various sites of different periods (Mimot, Sambor, Prah Kahn of Kompong Svay...). Actually, investigations conducted on ancient Cambodian heritage sites outside Angkor are still going on, in particular with the research of B. Bruguier.

The "Conservation d'Angkor"

Since 1908, the Conservation d'Angkor, being an off shoot of the EFEO, has realised both preservation and investigation works. Although these works were usually closely associated to each other, I will separate them quite artificially, as their evolution is quietly different and did not follow the same rhythm. Restoration will be presented as representing tangible contributions, historical and archaeological studies as intangible contributions, even if the latter have an important influence on the tangible aspects of the management of cultural heritage.

Restoration

The first task of the first Curator, J. Commaille, was immense, especially with the limited budget devoted to this. In fact, Conservation d'Angkor had to transform the existing "wild" forest in an organised and known territory, to reveal the architectural spaces and to restore their logic and splendour. With this in mind, the aim was to provide secure visitor access, to plan roads and to consolidate and to study the monuments... Priority was of course given to

clearing the monuments of their strangling vegetation, and naturally, works started on the main temples, Angkor Vat and Angkor Thom, especially the Bayon and the Royal plaza. Needless to say, under the tropical climate, the clearing task proved very a slow and continuous process. One should not be surprised to learn that this first clearing phase went on for more than 20 years. Large and great monuments like Pre Rup or the Bakong for instance had been cleared only by the late 1930s. At the beginning, the choice was obviously to remove the forest from inside the temples. But as this work progressed and the temples were liberated one by one, it also appeared important to keep some of them in their abandoned context in order to satisfy the romantic aspect of the angkorian myth. Some "second rank" monuments -like Ta Prohm for instance- were then chosen to be left in a state of "controlled vegetation". However, one should not forget that long and patient clearing works were made at this temple in order to provide visitor access, and that the only vegetation left remaining was the most spectacular. Indeed, the goal has never be really to leave the temple "as it was", but to dramatise the conflict between man and nature, to create a theatrical setting corresponding to romantic expectations and then, indirectly, to promote the restoration conducted in other temples.

A second phase began with Marchal in 1916 who continued the clearings but quite systematically associated this work with partial consolidations. Famous for his "jambettes" (small concrete props), Marchal intervened in nearly all of the monuments of Angkor, generously installing shoring, propping and metal cramps from the base to the ceiling. However, wooden shoring being destroyed after only a few weeks by termites, the only durable substitute was

concrete. These limited repairs and consolidations were of course visible and sometimes unsightly, but they reduced the disturbance. We should not misunderstand this strategy and consider it as a "less is more" method; in fact, the obligation was to "respect" the monuments' antiquity, a concept in great favour at the beginning of the century. The choice to limit the scale of the interventions and to do it everywhere was also -and mainly- dictated by the low level of resources available compared to the scale of the site. Another limitation was the technology used, the early restorers were unable to deal with various configurations and complex structural pathologies. On that very structural point of view, Marchal also attempted some limited reconstructions "as it was" but, without providing any reinforcement of the foundations and embankments on which the structures were elevated, most of these endeavour failed.

The third phase started by chance in Angkor, after Dr. van Stein-Callenfells, the director of the Indonesian archaeological department, visited the site in 1929 and, strongly criticised the Marchal interventions. He invited Marchal to apply the technology he was using: anastylosis. This method was already in use in other archaeological sites, due to the evolution of restoration standards in Europe at that time. It consisted of totally dismantling the remaining structure, consolidating the ground (with or without a new concrete slab) and carefully reconstructing all of the structure from the ground up with its own original components. The structure was to be completed with previously missing elements identified lying on the ground around. The first test was undertaken on the small, finely sculptured temple of Banteay Srei. Not only visitors have considered this operation as very successful, but also politicians and curators.

This rebuilding process, using only a very small amount of new materials, allowed the restorers to present the monument in its "original state", clearly increasing its monumental impact and facilitating the understanding of its composition and the quality of its architectural spaces. From a scientific point of view, anastylosis became a crucial method for acquiring knowledge, the dismantling of a structure offering a wonderful opportunity to analyse the temple in detail. Scientific research was not only associated with restoration, it was also the guarantee of an authentic end result. From the technical perspective, anastylosis was a durable -if not final- solution for the various pathologies. In the followings years, this technique was applied and modified on various stone monuments and configurations, from integral dismantling to limited ones, with or without concrete reinforcements: Prah Kahn, Ta Prohm, Bayon, Prah Palilay, Prasat Prei, Banteay Samrè... The case of the Bakong (at Roluos) was particularly spectacular: in spite of WW2 and the difficult conditions, Glaize managed to entirely rebuild the central sanctuary from "nearly nothing", all the structure being previously destroyed and blocks spread around on the ground.

After various difficulties following WW2 and the independence of Cambodia, a new phase started in the 1950s with the increasing resources devoted to the Conservation d'Angkor by the Cambodian and French governments. This period is usually known as the "golden age" of the Conservation d'Angkor, as Angkor was then the largest archaeological site in the world. Conservation d'Angkor was then integrated into the Cambodian ministry of Fines Arts but its direction was still committed to EFEO with no qualified national having been trained and pre-

pared to succeed. New equipment and larger budgets permitted a new and larger scale of restoration work and the elaboration of real long-term strategies of development. Conservation d'Angkor, well furnished with its thousand people, new offices and workshops, was then in full flight, dealing with and assuming joint regular maintenance and the monitoring of all the monuments on site, one-off consolidations and large strategies, for instance on the Royal plaza (Bapuon, terraces) or around the Bakheng. From a technical aspect, restoration enlarged the scope of pathologies to be cured, and developed a new anastylosis, integrating structural and drainage problems. Later, Conservation d'Angkor began to deal with larger complex structures such as the Bapuon, a temple that had endured a nightmare of successive collapses since the beginning of the century. Unfortunately, all efforts were abruptly interrupted in 1970 when the Khmer Rouge invaded Angkor, and with the war, the Conservation d'Angkor was dissolved finally in 1975 after the fall of Siemreap.

Since 1990, EFEO has participated actively in the international campaign to save Angkor under the coordination of UNESCO. EFEO re-opened its centre in Siemreap in 1992 and, uninterrupted since then, has initiated various restoration programs under the supervision of J. Dumarçay. Considering the situation in 1992, the choice was naturally to assist Conservation d'Angkor and later the APSARA authority (consultancies and maintenance programs) and to finish work-sites interrupted during the 1970s. Two large programs were recommenced. The Royal terrace was started in 1993 and the planned phases completed in 1999 (Dumarçay and Pottier) and the huge task of restoring the Bapuon, begun in 1995, is scheduled to finish in

2004 (Royère). In the meantime, EFEO and Conservation d'Angkor archives have been made available for any other team involved in restoration or research on the site.

The Intangible contributions of EFEO

The crucial contribution of EFEO to the restoration of the Angkor monuments is undoubtedly the most visible face of EFEO's contribution to Cambodia's cultural heritage, but it is definitely not the only valuable one. Less tangible operations have been also conducted in and outside Angkor, helping Cambodians to preserve and re-build their national past. For example, who remembered the names of great khmer kings like Jayavarman VII or Suryavarman II before the 20th century? These names, and their history have been patiently rebuilt by generations of scientists working directly or indirectly at EFEO, whose names are indelible in the Khmer studies field: Finot, Pelliot, Cœdès, Mus, Stern, Boisselier, G. and B.-P. Groslier...

Outside Angkor

Before focusing again on the contributions at Angkor, I will recall other ones made to the Cambodian cultural heritage.

I can recall for instance the active role played by EFEO since the beginning of the century through the creation of the cultural heritage protection laws and regulations. This was one of the very key purposes of the long inventory campaigns carried out by Lunet de Lajonquière. This resulted in the promulgation of the first law for the "Monuments Historiques" in Cambo-

dia in February 1901 and was regularly updated from 1905 until 1953. As a result of EFEO, Angkor was awarded a special status and been protected as a whole delimited area since 1925, the scope being later extended. To my knowledge, Angkor was the first archaeological park established in southeast Asia. Today EFEO still provides advice and assistance to the Cambodian authorities (contributions to the ZEMP, new archaeological cartography, and consultancies on legal aspect...).

EFEO provided another important contribution, through the creation of the National Museum of Phnom Penh initiated by G. Groslier in 1920. EFEO provided numerous statues and artefacts from various sites and excavations, mostly of course from the Conservation d'Angkor storeroom, but not only. The Museum remained under EFEO responsibility with M. Giteau until the 1960s when it finally returned to Cambodian hands. At the same time, EFEO promoted the creation of a provincial museum at Battambang. Since 1995, EFEO still contributes to Phnom Penh, especially with the creation of a restoration team directed by B. Porte.

The inventory would not be complete if we forget EFEO's involvement in the creation by S. Karpélès of the Buddhic Institute in 1930 in Phnom Penh (then called the "Institut indigène du bouddhisme du Petit Véhicule"), an institute promoting the publication of the Tripitaka in Cambodia. Actually, the EFEO office in Phnom Penh has been actively working since 1990 on the study, publication and restoration of ancient palm leaves buddhist texts (de Bernon).

Intangible contributions in Angkor

Back at Angkor and still related to the Conservation d'Angkor, numerous architectural, archaeological and historical investigations have been realised since 1900. It has already proved a risky challenge to summarise all the above restoration work undertaken during so many years, and it may prove more difficult still to present here all the studies accomplished since then. So I will just indicate here some general phases of field investigations, without mentioning further studies published in EFEO publications. One can always have a look at the publication list and BEFEO tables to get an idea of the work achieved.

Archaeological research

I commented above on the impressive tasks undertaken during the first years of the Conservation d'Angkor. We should not be surprised then if archaeological investigations were not the most urgent matter to be addressed. Nevertheless, deeply associated with the clearings work, research has proved very fruitful since the beginning, even if it has stayed closely linked with the monuments and epigraphy. However, most of these studies are now out of date, but some remain unsurpassed, like the study of the "buddhist terraces" of Angkor Thom undertaken by Marchal in 1919.

A revolution occurred in Khmer chronology during the late 1920s with the work of Stern and Cœdès, raising different problematic and new hypotheses in some - if not all- of the periods spanning the history of Angkor. Numerous "missions archéologiques" were launched in

the 1930s: by Goloubew on Yaçovarman's capital and Angkor Thom, by Marchal in the royal palace, by Stern and Coral-Rémusat in pre-angkorian and angkorian settlements in Roluos and at Phnom Kulen, especially by Trouvé who had a particular gift for nosing things out. For instance, he discovered and excavated Ak Yum and the four açramas of Yaçovarman, identified various territorial and hydraulic infrastructures, excavated the sacred foundation deposit of Angkor Vat and discovered the original Buddha statue of the Bayon, all this in only three years! In real terms, the archaeological knowledge at the end of the 1930s was radically different from that available ten years before.

During WW2 and the following years, research paused and excavations started again with Boisselier in the 1950s. But the main development in this post-war period was marked by the arrival of B.-P. Groslier in 1953. The son of G. Groslier, he was the first archaeologist to be in charge of the Conservation d'Angkor from 1960 (the previous curators were mainly architects). B.-P. Groslier introduced the "new archaeology" to Angkor, not only in terms of methods, but also in terms of the subject itself. Research was extended to more civilian aspects of the angkorian civilisation (excavations of the royal palace of Angkor Thom 1953-1958, exploration and excavations in Roluos in 1957-1959, excavations of the burial site at Sra Srang in 1963). The research became also multi-disciplinary, involving close cooperation between the epigraphists, architects and art historians at Conservation d'Angkor. Thus the scope of the investigations was widened to include statuary, ceramics, bronzes. At the same time, training was developed both at the new university of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh where former members of the Conser-

vation d'Angkor taught (Nafylian, Dumont) but also inside the Conservation d'Angkor itself (B.-P. Groslier Dagens, Dumarçay). The upheavals of the 1970s interrupted this productive period before the completion of many studies, but in spite of the loss of valuable research time, some excellent documentation and numerous publications provide evidence of the contribution made during these years.

Away from Angkor, Khmer studies still continued at EFEO after 1970, enlarging again the scope of the discipline to include the nearby Khmer monuments in Thailand. In 1990, EFEO launched two new research programs at Angkor. The first occupied with the study of statuary, an essential task for the prevention of looting (Dagens, Dalsheimer), the other focusing on the Khmer conception of space on different scales, "from the temple to the city and territorial management" (Royère, Gaucher, Pottier, Bruguier).

EFEO is celebrating its centenary this year; its long association with Angkor has shown its capacity to continuously adapt itself to the various conditions, political movements and challenges that have arisen during this century in Cambodia and elsewhere in Asia. EFEO's devotion to Angkor is still passionate. This overview of a 100 years of contributions can only be concluded with the hope that the contributions of the next 100 years will be even more valuable for the Cultural Heritage and preservation of Angkor.

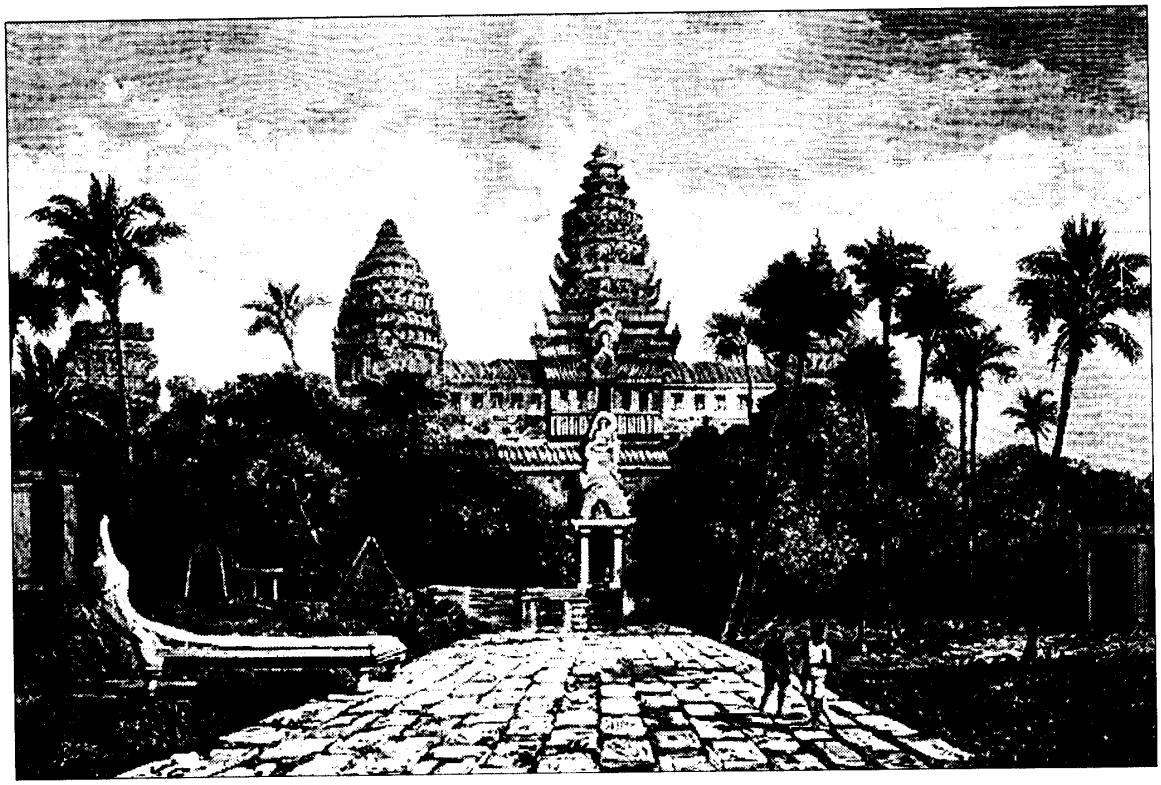

Fig. 1 Angkor Vat, Cambodia (1863)

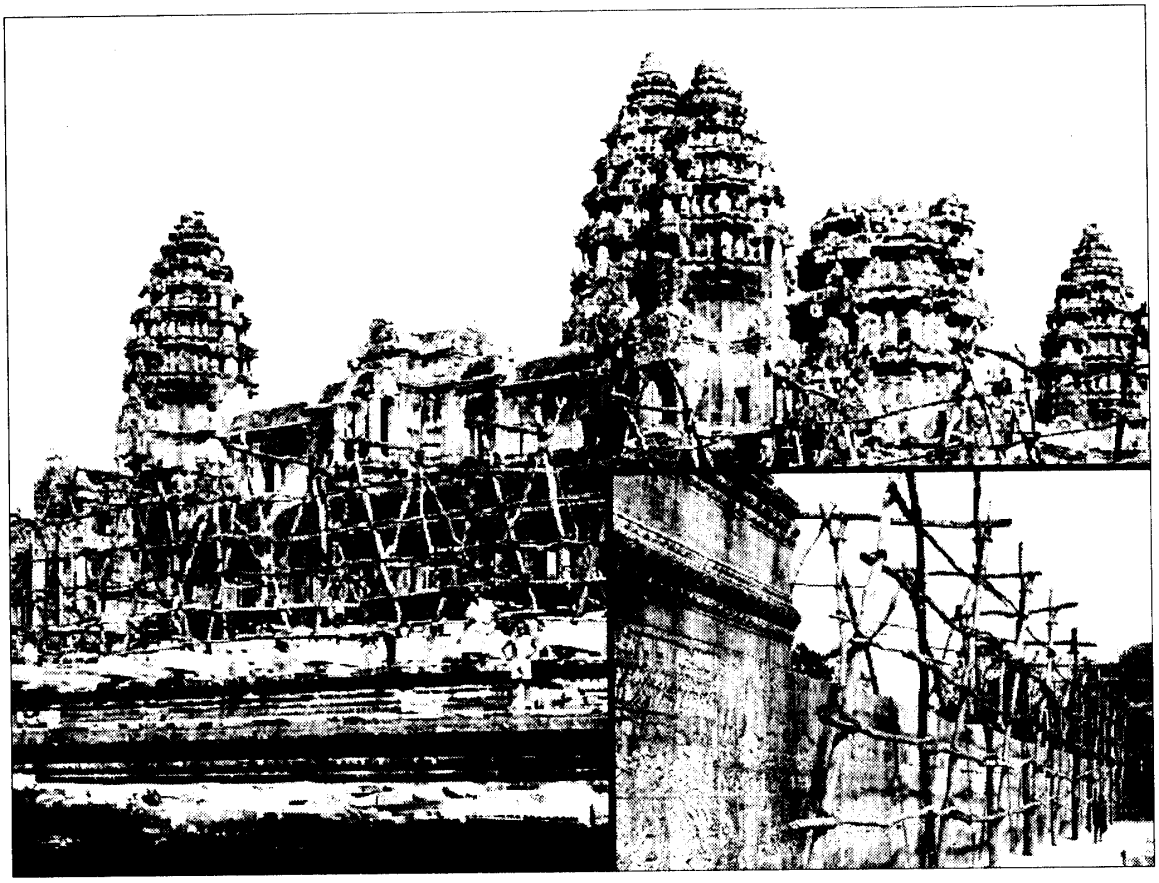

Fig. 2 Angkor Vat, Cambodia (1949)

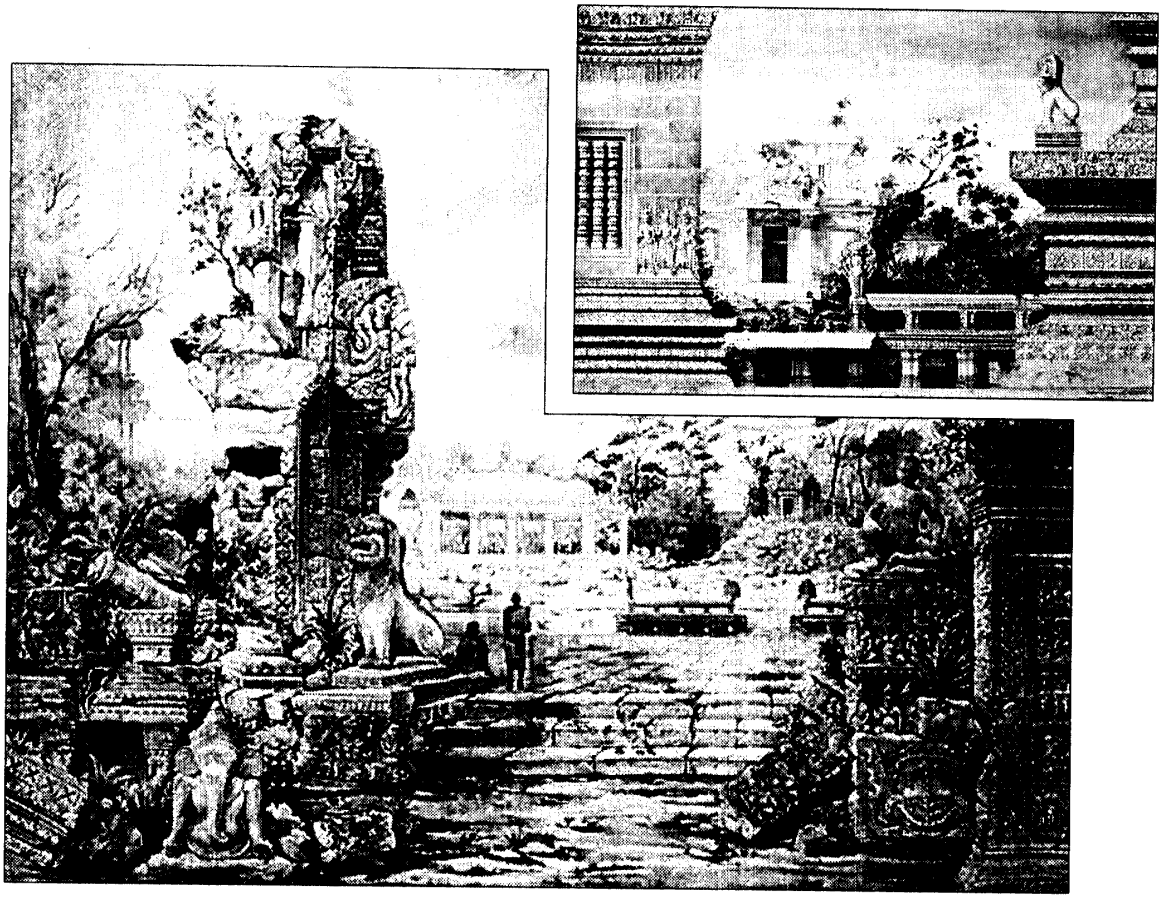

Fig. 3 Angkor Vat, Cambodia (1889)

Fig. 4 Gate of Angkor Thom, Camboidia (1921)

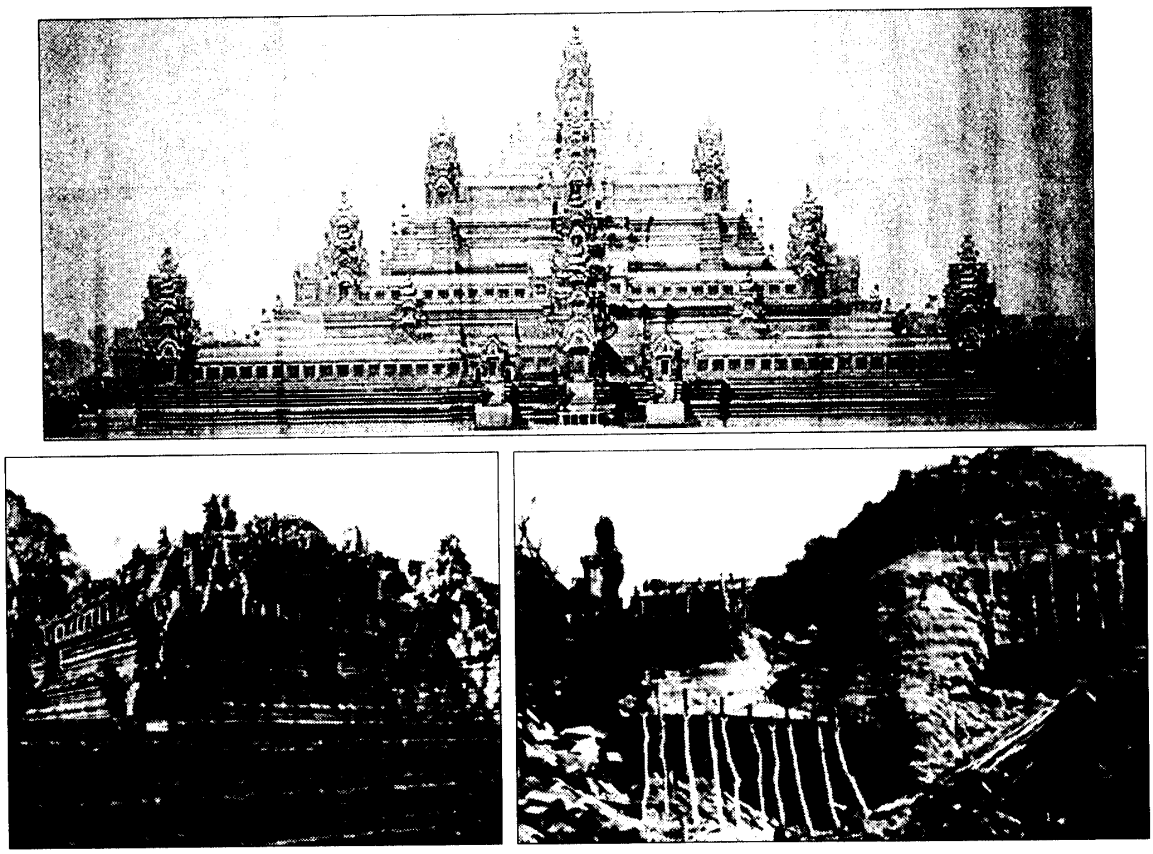

Fig. 5 Baphuon, Cambodia (upper: 1889, lower: 1952)

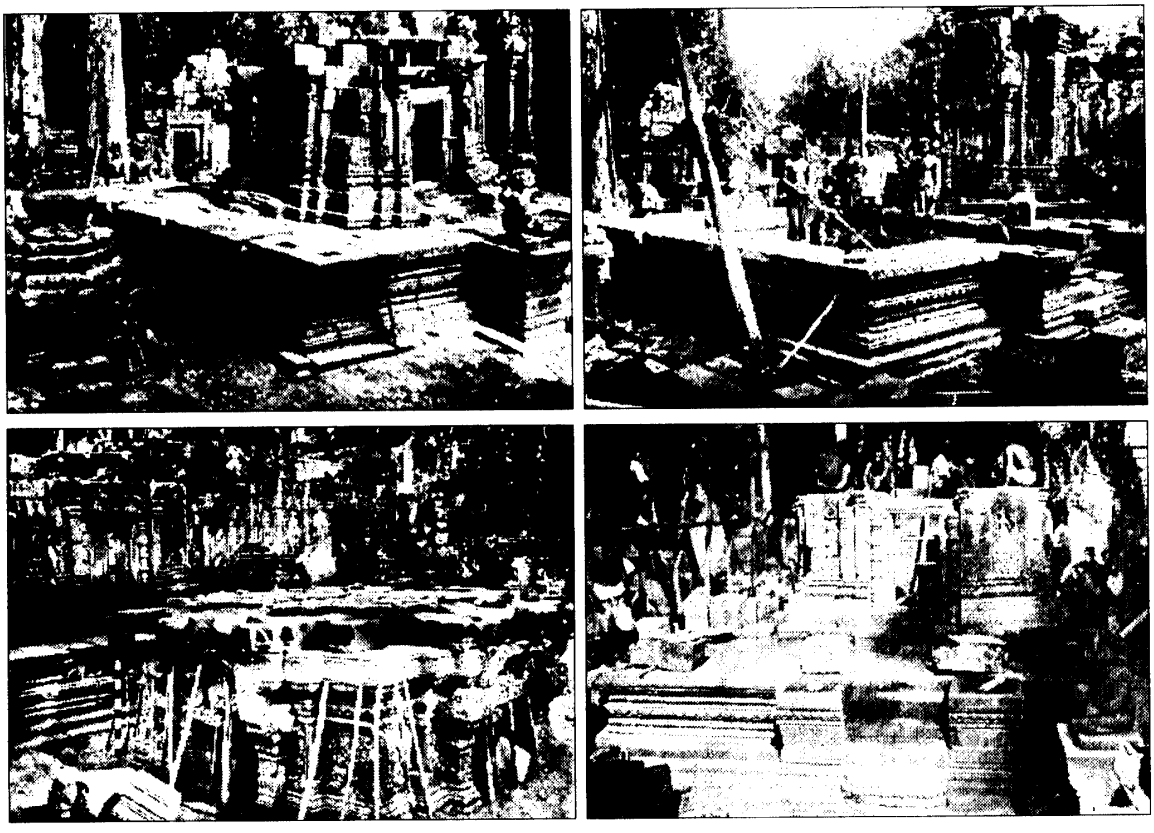

Fig. 6 Banteay Srei, Cambodia (1931-1934)