Towards a textual approach of the inscriptions in Old Khmer

About TA and MAN

Joseph Deth Thach, SEDYL (INLACO-IRD-CNARS), Paris
deth.thach@gamail.com
Denis Paillard (UMR 7110) Univ. Paris Diderot
denis.paillard@linguist.jusieu.fr

1. The Old Khmer syntax gave rise but to a very few works (S. Pou, Ph. Jenner, J. Jacob, Ch. Sak Humphry). On this account, the publication of the Old Khmer Grammar by Jenner and Sidwell is an important event, as this work is the first one to give an overall view of the Old Khmer grammar. One of the main difficulties stems from the use of a series of grammatical markers (usually referred to as "particles"), such as ta, man, gi, nu, pi, etc. opening a wide range of various values (for a detailed inventory, cf. Jacob, 1991 and Jenner & Sidwell, 2010). The term 'particle' means that these units don't have any precise syntactic function but - as we will see later - a discursive function. This is confirmed by the notable divergences in the characterizations, and even in the translations of those words. A quite instructive statement of all the translations given for man can be found in Sak Humphry (2005: 228). The characterizations of those words wave between too highly abstract and general formulations on the one hand, and pell-mell local values with no link whatsoever, on the other hand.

2. In this talk, we argue that these words must not be studied only within the frame of the clause where they appear, but within that of the whole text forming the inscription. This comes down to grasping the inscriptions as texts as a whole. This textual approach leads to a more general question: the writing of the Khmer language from the VIIth century (or even before) started with the rising of another linguistic system, in particular at the syntactic level. On this matter, we share Sak Humphry's reservations about considering the Old Khmer (at least the pre-Angkorian Khmer) as a « spoken dialect which was recently reduced to writing » (Chakravarti, quoted by Sak Humphry 2005), and we conversely agree with Jenner when pointing out in the introduction of his Angkorian Khmer Dictionary that the Old Khmer specialists must face with the same theoretical and methodological difficulties as the Old English or Old French ones. Let's point out for example the invention of the anaphora construed with the reduplication of the deictic demonstratives neh, noh: neh bhūmya ta roḥh neh ta ti vappā steṇ 'aṇi vraḥ tannot chkā vraī (K. 344: 18, A.D. 985)
“This land aforesaid on which the father of the steñ ‘añ of the vrañ Tannot had cleared the forest”

3. This communication presents a study of two markers: ta and man. We notice that Jenner gives the same inventory for the values of those two markers in the pre-Angkorian and in the Angkorian Khmer dictionary. This does not however invalidate the differences in their uses from one period to the other. We will show that those two markers can be characterized through their contribution to building up the text. This "textual" characterization provides a framework for the description of their local syntactic functions.

4. Study of man

“At the moment I can think of no form more in need of clarification than man, an item which is at once pervasive in the inscriptions and still, after a centur of study, largely unknown” (Jenner 1992).

In this paper, Jenner distinguishes two classes of uses of man: 1. As a demonstrative pronoun; 2. As a relative pronoun. In the dictionary (2009) and in the Old Khmer grammar (2010) man is no longer defined as a demonstrative; It comes under two entries:

Man1: “a general conjunction with two main meanings developing out of ‘at the time that’: ‘when’, ‘then’ and ‘for, because, since’”.

Man2: “introduces a clause of indirect discourse.” Let's point out that this use of man is only to be met in Angkorian Khmer.

We argue hereafter that there is no reason to distinguish man1 and man2.

Let's point out that man disappears in post-Angkorian Khmer

In various uses (temporal subordination, indirect speech, relative, interpolated clause) man introduces a clause whose status comes from another clause working as the main clause. Its characterization as operating a "general subordination" means that man, from a discursive point of view, contributes to assessing the information according to its importance, integrating secondary pieces of information completing what makes the main topic. This quite general function can account for its syntactic under-determination, and may perhaps explain one of the reasons why it
disappeared in Middle Khmer, whereas various subordinating words appeared, each one of them with a precise syntactic function. Actually, this differentiation is at work very early (cf. d.).

This characterization of *man* as a general subordinating item is not of a syntactic kind strictly speaking, but gives *man* a textual function related to what the so called hierarchical structure of the information delivered by the inscriptions. By general subordination, we mean that the sequence introduced by *man* adds further information to the main one. This makes it possible to understand its various uses.

a. *man* introduces a sequence used as a temporal reference to the main event:

(1) [...] sthāpanā vrah śivalinga duk khñuṇṭ ta gi *man* vrah pāda parameśvara dau kurūṇi ni 'āy mahendraparvata steṇ 'aṇī śivakaivalya dau 'āṅgayav ta nagara noḥ ukk paṃre ta vrah pāda parameśvara rūva noḥh 'nau [...] (K. 235C: 69-70)

“[he] set up the holly sivalinga, [and] assigned slaves to it. When H.M. Paramesvara went forth to rule and hold sway in Mahendraparvata, the steṇ 'aṇī Sivakaivalya went and settled in that royal city as well, continuing to serve H.M. Paramesvara as before.”

(2) 871 śaka man loṇ 'ap vrah tāṃvvaṇ slāp śūnyā 'āśrama noḥ dau (K. 215: 5-6, from *Old Khmer Grammar*, ex. (330))

“[In] Śaka 871 when the loṇ 'Ap of vrah tāṃvvaṇ died, the said 'āśrama fell vacant”.

- *man* vrah pāda parameśvara pratiṣṭhā kamrateṇ jagat ta rāja 'nau nagara śrīmāhendraparvata vrah pāda parameśvara kalpanā santāna 'nak stuk ransi bhadraptattana gi ta jā smiṇ nā kamrateṇ jagat ta rāja pradvann dau (K.235C: 56-58 (974 śaka))

“when H.M. Parameśvara established the sovereign High Lord of the World in the royal city of śrīmāhendraparvata, H.M. Parameśvara caused a family line of the people of Stuk Ransi of bhadraptattana to be the one to serve as officiants before the Sovereign Lord of the World from that time on”

b. *man* introduces a sequence expressing or making explicit the ins and outs of the main event:
(3) *tai kaṁbha khñum vāp nos pralāy man vāp nos jā vargga ta kamstei oy tai kaṁbha kamstei jvan ta vraḥ* (K. 221N: 9-10, from Jenner: 1992, (25))

“Tai Kaṁbha, a slave of the *pater* Nos of Pralāy: because the *pater* Nos, who is of the *Kamstei*’s chapter, gave her to the *Kamstei*, who offered [her] up to the *vraḥ*”

(4) *tai kampit stuk cadoň khum kamstei śri virendravarmma sruk vasantāpurā ti oy ta teñ tvan pās khmau ta ‘nak khloň kamstei man teñ tvan pās khmau mān saṃvandhi nu kamstei śri narapatindravarmma* (K. 221N: 2)

“*tai Kampit of stuk Cadoň, a slave of the kamstei Śri Virendravarmma of sruk Vasantāpurā, was given to the teñ Tvan of Pās Khmau, wife of the kamstei [Śri Virendravarmma], because she had a relationship by marriage with the kamstei Śri Narapatindravarmma*”

(5) *yal man nēḥ tai kanhyañ ti vāp rau oy thlāy krapī […]* (K. 233B:7, from Jenner: 1992, (8))

“Seeing that this *tai* Kanhyañ had been given by the *pater* Rau in exchange for a buffalo […]”.

c. *man* introduces a sequence attributing a property to a noun. This doesn’t mean that *man* should be characterized as a relative pronoun. Neither *man* nor *ta* can be categorized as relative pronouns in Old Khmer (the only relative pronoun in Old Khmer is *tel*; ex. (7)). The sequence introduced by *man* can be characterized as an apposition (cf. (8)-(10)).

(6a) *gi nēḥ vnok phoň tel ge kloň śobhājaya ‘aň oy ta vraḥ kaṁmratāň ‘aň śritripurāntakesvara* (K. 904B: 12-13)

“It is this team [of slaves] that the princess Śobhājaya ‘aň has given to My Holy High Lord Śri Tripurāntakesvara” (Jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (322))

(6b) *gi sre ta tel ti kurāk śuragrāma tve ai cdiň vridāń* (K. 927: 2)

“The ricefield which is being cultivated by the kurāk of Śuragrāma on the river Vridāń” (Jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (141)).

(7) *kñum tāň suvarṇa man parigraha ta kurāk vyādhapura* (K. 109N: 24)
“Slave of the tāñ Suvarṇa whom [she] received from the kurāk Vyādhapura” (Jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (143)).

(8) - khūm man duk ta 'āśrama yogendrālaya (K. 33: 24, A.D. 1017)
   “Slaves whom (I) assign to the āśrama of Yogendrālaya” (Jenner, 1992: (5))
   - dravya man oy ukk khlās 1 jyaṅ prāmvyal vat 1 jyaṅ 3 tāmmyra 1 'so (K. 420: 48, A.D. 878-977)
   “Valuables which (he) has given in addition: 1 ewer (weighing) 7 jyaṅ, 1 vat (weighing) 3 jyaṅ, 1 elephant, white” (Jenner, 1992: (6))

(9) - jmaḥ ge kḥu man mṛatāṅ śakrasvāmi oy ta vṛah (K. 904A: 21-2, A.D. 713)
   “Noms des esclaves que Mṛatāṅ Sakrasvāmi donne au dieu…” (Jenner, 1992: (7)); C IV : 62

d. man introduces a clause of indirect discourse (only found in angkorean period)

(10)- svāmī nivedana man sre dai mvāy jėṇ cval kamlunī gol ukk (K. 262S: 25-6, A.D. 983)
   “The owner stated that another ricefield of one jėṇ also lay within the boundary markers” (Jenner, 1992: (4))

(11)- tī vṛah kamaratēṇ ‘aṅ nāṃ dau samakṣa nu stę ‘aṅ vṛah guru nu vṛah sabhā vāp dharma kathā man nēḥ sre nēḥ ta prāṃvyal jėṇ tī o靥 ta vṛah kamaratēṇ ‘aṅ ‘aḥ dvijendrapura vyat (K. 262S: 7-8 (904 śaka))
   “Brought by V. K. A. into the presence of Stēn ‘Aṅ Vṛah Guru and the Holy Court, Vāp Dharma declared that it was indeed really this seven-foot [foot as in 12 inches?] rice-field which he had given to V. K. A. Dvijendrapura”

e. Jenner (1992) mentions a series of uses of man combined with another marker: cf. nu man, roḥ man, hetu man. Those combinations point to a syntactic differentiation at work. It is possible to give nu man such meanings as also, moreover, with that, according to Jenner, which comes down to introducing additional information to a first one:

(12)- nu man poṅ chāṅ ktiṅṅ sre poṅ tel poṅ matiśakti ta paṁre tem gui laṁas ai kaṅjrap ‘mac purandarapura soṅ ktiṅ ra gui ge ‘ṇak vṛah kanaṁṅ dār canlekg yugala ta gui ukk yau 4 nu man gui saṅ kara ta ge (K. 493: 21-3, A.D. 657)
“Also, the poñ Chāṇ who had owed (me) the ricefield of his which poñ Matiśakti, his former servant, had keased to the prisoners of war assigned to Purandrapura, did indeed repay his debt. The devotees of the younger vraḥ asked of him 4 yau of double cloth besides, in addition to which he paid their fees”. (Jenner, 1992: (16))

Whereas nu man can be found in pre-Angkorian as well as in Angkorian, roh man and hetu man are only to be met in Angkorian – which can be seen as a syntactic differentiacion at work.

(13)- gi roh man ti sabhācāre xxx (233A: 4, A.D. 878-977),
  “this is how ... by the council’s agent.” (Jenner, 1992: (18))

(14)- vāp jinendrānanda pandval vraḥ śāsana ta vāp vrahma roḥḥ man ti kaṁsteṅ pandval oy sre neḥ ta vāp vrahma siddhi (K. 566B: 1-2, A.D. 978-1077)
  “The pater Jinendrānanda communicated the royel instruction to the parter Vrahma (and), as (he) had been charged by the kaṁsteṅ, gave this ricefield to him in perpetuity...” (Jenner, 1992: (19))

(15)- ka gi noḥ bhūmi noḥ ta srac ti jau hoṅ hetu man māṅ ’apavāda nu ‘nak vraḥ thpall vyahāra (K.348: 2-3, A.D. 954)
  “It came about that this piece of land was eventually acquired because there had been opposition (to its sale) by the people of the vraḥ Thpal, who had taken the matter to court.” (Jenner, 1992: (20)).

5. Study of ta

The particle ta in Old Khmer is most frequent, showing numerous uses (much more indeed than man) and is commonly to be found three or four times in the same sequence

(16)- nau ge ta lopeya neh dau jā ta dvātrimśanaraka nau ge ta vardheyā gi dau sthita
  ta svarga (K. 742: 9-11)
  “Those who do damage to them – [they] shall go to deserve the thirty two hells. Those who promote them – [they] shall go to abide in heaven” (Jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (333)).
It seems difficult to find a coherence in all those various uses. *ta* is still used in modern Khmer, with one use only, introducing a qualitative:

(17a)- *koat ciə sih Ø laʔta: muʔŋ neak*

3sg. to be student Ø good one CL.

“He is a good student”

(17b)- *koat ciə sih ta (/da:/) laʔta: muʔŋ neak*

3sg. to be student *ta (/da:/) good one CL.

“He is a very good student”: He is unique/special. *Ta* is translating here by “very” in the way that “to be good” is given as a new and important element in the sentence.

Jenner, at the end of his paper (1981), gives the following conclusion: “The evidence suggests that the various irreconcilable fonctions that have been imputed to *ta* are the result of reading our own grammatical categories into a language which does not necessarily have the same categories.” The Old Khmer grammar (2010), gives the following characterization for *ta*: “optional subordinating conjunction, untranslatable. Widely misunderstood, it was first recognized for what it is by the linguist François Martini, who called it a particule d’inhérence – an insight promptly forgotten (...). The sole function of *ta* is to relate a modifier to its head when such marking is felt to be needed” (2010: 34).

We can see that this grammar takes up Martini’s suggestion, just adding a consideration at the discursive level: “when it is needed...”. But in order to determine the conditions “when it is needed”, the further question of “when it is not needed...” has yet to be answered. This dual question shows the author’s point of view: when introduced by *ta*, the sequence is given a special importance as regards its informative content (in his comments of some examples, Jenner points out the discursive function of *ta*). Concerning this point, unlike Jenner, we don’t think that *ta* is a subordinating conjunction, but a discursive particle, which is why we often see sequences with either Ø or *ta*. In other words, the scope of *ta* is discursive one, but not syntactic one.

Our analysis of *ta* will be limited to four types of data
A. Constructions showing an alternative Ø / ta. In his paper dated 1981, Jenner draws attention to many sequences where, with the same lexicon, ta is either present or absent

(18a) … ji ge ta si ge ta kantai… (K. 451N : 4, A.D. 680)

[Their] ancestors ones ta male ones ta female...

“Theyir male and female ancestors…” (Jenner, 1981: (48))

(18b) … kīṃṭ Ø si [vā .....] kīṃṭ Ø kantai [ku …] (K. 712, A.D. 7th Cent.)

slave Ø male [names...] slave Ø female [name...]

(19a) ge ta daś sak gi mās vraḥ prak laṅgau saṃrit canlek sre daṃrīṇi tmur... dau nirayasthāna nu 'ji ge ta si ge ta kantai 'me ge 'tā ge kon cau (K.451N: 1-4; A.D.680)

“Persons who seek to divert gold belonging to the divinity, silver, copper […] – they shall go to hell along with their ancestors male and female, their mothers, their grandfathers […]” (Jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (318)).

(19b) 'amnoy poṇ [...] 'āy ta vraḥ kamratāṇ 'aṇ śrī. kīṃṭ Ø kantai ku (K.559I: 1; A.D.6th C.)

“donation of pater [name] to the Lord [śrī+name]: female slaves [names]…”

(20a) neḥ ti mratāṇ khloṇ śrī nṛpendropalpa sruck cās varṇa 'nindittipura tem 'anumoda nu kule ta jmaḥ vāp mādhava vāp vrahmaśīva vāp dharmma caṃnat oy gussa ta vraḥ kaṃsteṇ 'aṇ śrī lakṣmipatīvarma (K.1198B: 5-6; A.D.1014)

“This was given outright by the chief lord Śrī Nṛpendropalpa of the old sruck […] the Aninditapura order with the consent of [his] kinsmen the vāp Mādhava, the vāp Brahmaśīva [and] the vāp Dharma, [all] of the settlement, to the holy My Kaṃsteṇ Śrī Lakṣmipatīvarma” (Jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (336)).

In the translation ‘ta jmaḥ’ is not translated.

(20b) mahāsenāpati mvay jmoḥ śrībhūbanāditya iśvaradvipa nāṃ sāsana rājādhirāja mok ta kuruṇ sunat ta prabhutva nā dhānyapura pandval pre jvan bhūmi sre nibandha braḥ pūjā kamrateṇ jagat (K.966/II: 12-17; A.D.1167)

“A commander by the name of Śrī Bhūbanāditya of Ĩșvaradvipa brought a directive from the overlord of kings to the kuruṇ Saunatta, headman at
Dhānyapura, bidding [him] offer up riceland dedicated to the holy worship of the High Lord of the World” (Jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (350)).

(21a)- si tai neh ta ‘ampāl neh ‘ārīgva ta cāmnat stuk vryārī prasap bhūmi vnam vvak thve raṅko thlvaṁ praṇvyaal mi mvay śaka cāmnāṁ ta kāmnstrateį jagat liṅgapura (K. 249: 11-13, A.D. 1116)
“These males [and] females of this group are to reside in the settlement of Stuk Vryaṅ, adjacent to land belonging to Vnam Vvak, [and] are to produce seven thlvaṁ of milled rice each year [as] an allowance to the Hight Lord of the World Liṅgapura” (jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (341)).

(21b)- vā ta daṅ kmi sakk neh kñīṃ pradāna droṇ neh raṅko cāmnāṁ ge ‘āy ta vraḥ kamratāṅ ‘aṅ śri ‘amarāśvara ‘ampall kula ge phoṅ yāvat sūryyacandrasya tāvat narakaduḥkhhitāḥ (K. 127: 11-13, A.D. 684)
“Miscreants who would seek to steal these slaves given [by the sovereign] and milled rice Lord for their provision at [the sanctuary of] My High Lord Śri Amareśvara shall know te sufferings of hell with all their kinsmen for as long as the sun and the moon [shall shine]” (Jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (320)).

(22a)- khloṅ vala jraleń jvan khñum Ø 4 ta vraḥ thmur piy danyim (K. 369: 9-10, A.D. 10th C.)
“The Chief of the population of Jraleń offered four slaves to the God [and] three pairs of oxen”

(22b)- (man) khloṅ vala chok phlāṅ ‘amvi lā śarira pi nu divarāngata jvan khñum ta pvan (K. 523D, A.D. 1118)
“(par la suite) le Chef de la population de Chok Phlāṅ, en quittant son corps pour aller au ciel, a offert encore quatre esclaves” (Cœdès, IC. III : 136)

(23a)- vvaṁ ‘āc ti ‘nak ta hīnajāti yok dau pi paṅjā ‘nak Ø khloṅ (K. 444B: 3-4, A.D. 974)
“Les gens de la classe inférieure ne pourront les [ti=cês femmes] prendre pour en faire leurs épouses (wives)” (Pou, NIC III : 133, 2001)

(23b)- pre saṅ gol ta gi bhūmi noḥ vvaṁ ‘āc ti āyatta ta ‘nak ta khloṅ ni nā vraḥ kamraten ‘aṅ ta paraṃēśvara (K. 933B: 10-11, A.D. 978)
“Il ordonna de planter les bornes de cette terre. Qu’elle ne relève pas de l’autorité des gens qui sont khloṅ (chief) au service de K. A. Parameśvara” (Cœdès, IC. IV : 50)
In all those examples, the presence of *ta* has no real syntactic justification. *Ta* seems to do no more than point out the importance of the information given by the sequence.

B. *ta* after a verb. For a series of verbs *ta* is used to introduce one of the arguments of the predicate: the beneficiary in the case of the "give" type of verbs, the 'source' for the 'receive' or 'get' type of verbs

(24)- *dadhiṣṭaśāgara pradāna sre ta vrah* (K. 688 : 2-3, A.D. 719)

“[the Lord] Dadhiṣṭaśāgara [has] given ricefields to the Shining One”

(Jenner, 1981: (1))

(25)- *kṛṣṇa tāṇ suvarṇa man parigraha ta kurāk vyādhapura* (K. 109N: 24, A.D. 655)

“Slaves of the tāṇ Suvarṇa which [she] received from (=ta) kurāk Vyādhapura” (Jenner, 1981: (8))

With the "give" type of verbs, the following constructions are found:

- (Subject) + COD + V + Ø + beneficiary
- Subject + V + *ta* + beneficiary + COD
- Subject + V + COD + *ta* + beneficiary
- Subject + V + COD + *ay (ta)* + beneficiary

(26)- *kṛṣṇa 'amnay jaṇ 'aṇ ai ta vrah kamratāṇ 'aṇ mahāgaṇapati [...] kantai ta pos oy (ya)jamāna kpoṇ* (K. 557: 2-3, A.D. 611)

“Slaves given by Jaṇ 'Aṇ to V.K.A Mahāgaṇapati: [list of donation...], religious females [are] given to the sacrificer of the *kpoṇ*”

(27)- *mratāṇ Śrīprathivinarendra oy ṛḍval ta teṇ vasudevi oy sratāc ta teṇ indrāṇī* (K. 956: 17-18)

“Mratāṇ Śrīprathivinarendra gave [the land] Ṛḍval to *teṇ* Vasudevi, and gave [the land] Sratāc to *teṇ* Indrāṇī”

(28)- *[date] poṇ uy oy kṛṣṇa ai ta kpoṇ kammatāṇ 'aṇ* (K. 557N: 1, A.D. 611)

“[date] *poṇ* Uy gave slaves to *kpoṇ* Kammatāṇ 'Aṇ”
With the "give" type of verbs, the new item is the beneficiary / recipient of the transfer (the relation between the subject and the object transferred is preconstrued). Using *ta* means focusing on the beneficiary's identity.

In the locative constructions, the preposition *ai* can be used alone, but also combined with *ta*: either *ai ta* or *ta ai* (with "give" verbs, *ai ta* is only to be found). In the case of *ta ai*, the localization as a whole is considered as new. In the case of *ai ta*, the identity of the place only is new.

(29) - *jmaḥ ge kṛṇum tāṇ ta ai puran ta te lo tā vṛah* (K.904B : 19)
   “Names of the slaves of the tāṇ à Puran which were given to God [list of names]” (Jenner, 1981: (37))

(30) - *gi ti sthāpanā 'āy bhadrapattana* (K. 235D : 16)
   “This was set up at Bhadrapattana”(Jenner & Sidwell, 2010: (31))

(31) - *saṅ bhraḥ buddharupa ai ta sthāna pākāṇa neḥ* (IMA 2 : 20-21)
   “[I] set up the images of Buddha in/at (= ai ta) the Bakang” (Jenner, 1981: p. 79)

C. Apposition.
This term is used to characterize a series of uses. Let's point out two of them:

– *ta* is used to individuate an underspecified N:
(32) - *dāsa ta paṅgan pos chol caṃin vṛah śivayajña* (K. 470 : 25, A.D. 1327)
   “Slaves detailed to clean up the remains of cooked food from holy offerings to Śiva (Jenner & Sidwell, 2010: (354)).

(33) - *vṛah pre nāṃ kule ta stri puruṣa mok ukk* (K. 235C : 63-64, A.D. 1052)
   “The royal one bade [him] bring also the members of his family, female and male”.

– *ta* introduces a property qualifying an individual already identified:

(34) *teṅ tvan īo nu vṛah mūlasūtra ta putra sruk bhadreśvarāspada [...] yogapat jvan bhūmi piṅ chkar [...]* (K.475: 1-2, A.D. 1136)
“The tei tvan 'Lo and the Holy Mūlasūtra, her son, of sruk Bhadreśvarāspada [...] have joined together to offer up a tract of land at Piñ Chkar [...]” (Jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (348))

(35)- syaṅ ta gāl pi bhagavat pāda kamrateṅ 'aṅ ta guru śrīdivākarapāṇḍita chlaṅ havirvāda (K. 194A: 5-6, A.D. 1121)

“[These] were ones who were in attendance so that the bhagavat pāda My High Lord the spiritual preceptor Śri Divākarapāṇḍita might celebrate the havirvāda” (Jenner&Sidwell, 2010: (344))

D. About the expression kamrateṅ jagat ta rāja (see Thach, 2008)

Since Georges Coedès’ paper (ALB, 1961), the interpretation of kamrateṅ jagat ta rāji(y)a (k. 235) remains problematic. Coedès’ translation, taken up by many researchers, leads to « God –king » (kamrateṅ: “God” + jagat: “world” + ta: “who is” + rājiya: “kingdom / king”). In her paper (JA, 1998), Saveros Pou suggests translating this expression by « the god of the king /kingdom ».

Chhany Sak-Humphry (2005) translates the expression as « the Souvereign High Lord of the World ».

Adopting any of these translations has specific consequences about how royalty is represented in ancient Khmer culture. Interpreting the expression as referring to a god identified to the person of the king (first interpretation of G. Coedès) means that the king himself is the embodiment of the god. So the god bestows power and legitimacy to the king.

The interpretation of Chh. Sak-Humphry does not lay down any relationship between the god in question and the king (or the kingdom). Thus, the god is held as intrinsically unique, i.e. as the very sovereign of the gods, thus Indra. This translation does not render what is semantically conveyed by ta.

As for S. Pou’s translation it implies a direct relationship between the god in question and the king or the kingdom. S. Pou chooses to interprete ta as having a “genitive” value which is one of the possible translations of this word.

In kamrateṅ jagat ta rāji(y)a, ta introduces an external determination, meaning that rājiya “kingdom” or rāja “king” is not an integral part (as an individual) of the corresponding divinity.
The expressions kamrateñ añ or kamrateñ jagat, do not designate intrinsically a unique god (the god) but a god among other gods with a comparable status. ta rājya or rāja attributes a differential property (making it singular) to this god-individual, making him different from other gods of the same order (i.e. who can also be referred to by the expressions kamrateñ jagat or kamrateñ añ) as unique.

The presence of ta means that a god, amongst other gods, becomes unique as he is defined in reference to such king/ such kingdom. This god, because he is chosen by the king, becomes singular, unique, not on account of his identity, but because he is the god of this particular king. In other words, it is the king, a human being, who chooses a deity to be his personal “god”. When the king or the kingdom changes, this change applies to the god as well.

(36)- man vṛaḥ pāda parameśvara pratiṣṭhā kamrateñ jagat ta rāja ‘nau nagara śrimāhendraparvata [...] (K. 235C : 66-58, A.D. 1052)

“When His Majesty Paramesvara established the Souvereign High Lord of the World int the royal city of Śrimāhendraparvata [...]” (Sak-Humphry, 2005: p. 93)

This presentation of ta is not exhaustive. Various uses remain to be examined, in particular the frequent combination of ta with gui (ta gui, gui ta). This implies a systematic preparatory study of gui (which we do not consider as a weak demonstrative as defined by the authors of the Old Khmer Grammar (2010)).

This study of ta in its various uses show that in this case, the syntax of Old Khmer is not quite stabilized. ta has a textual value, indicating that the sequence it introduces is of special / main / new importance for the understanding or the text. This is what can be understood by “when it is needed”.

References:


JENNER, Ph., (2009a) *A dictionary of pre-Angkorian Khmer* (edited by Doug Cooper), ANU, Pacific linguistics PL 597.

JENNER, Ph., (2009b) *A dictionary of Angkorian Khmer* (edited by Doug Cooper), ANU, Pacific linguistics PL 598.


