

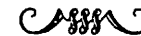
HENRI MOUHOT'S DIARY

TRAVELS IN
THE CENTRAL PARTS OF SIAM,
CAMBODIA AND LAOS
DURING THE YEARS 1858-61

ABRIDGED AND EDITED
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OXFORD
IN ASIA
Historical
Reprints



KUALA LUMPUR
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON NEW YORK
1966



Drawn by M. H. Rousseau, from a Photograph.

HENRI MOUHOT

ceros breaking down the bamboos which oppose his progress towards the brambles encircling our garden, on which he intends to banquet.

If you ask who are this strange people, living retired on the table-lands and mountains of Cambodia, which they appear never to have quitted, and differing entirely in manners, language, and features from the Annamites, Cambodians, and Laotians, my answer is that I believe them to be the aborigines of the country, and that they have been driven into these districts by the repeated inroads of the Thibetians, from whom they evidently descend, as is proved by the resemblance of features, religion, and character.

The whole country from the eastern side of the mountains of Cochin-China as far as 103° long., and from 11° lat. to Laos, is inhabited by savage tribes, all known under one name, which signifies 'inhabitants of the heights'. They have no attachment to the soil, and frequently change their abode; most of the villages are in a state of continual hostility with each other, but they do not attack in troops, but seek to surprise each other, and the prisoners are sold as slaves to the Laotians.

Their only weapon is the cross-bow, which they use with extraordinary skill, but rarely at a distance of more than twenty paces. Poisoned arrows are used only for hunting the larger animals, such as elephants, rhinoceros, buffaloes, and wild oxen, and with these the smallest scratch causes death, if the poison is fresh; the strongest animal does not go more than 50 paces before it falls; they then cut out the wounded part, half roast it without skinning or cutting it up, after which they summon the whole village by sound of trumpet to partake of it. The most perfect equality and fraternity reign in these little communities. The strongest European would find it difficult to bend the bow which the Stiên, weak and frail as he appears, bends without effort, doubtless by long practice.

They are not unacquainted with agriculture, but grow rice and plant gourds, melons, bananas, and other fruit-trees; their rice-fields are kept with the greatest care, but nearly all the hard work is done by the women. They seldom go out in the rainy season on account of the leeches, which abound in the woods to such a degree as to render them almost unapproachable; they remain in their fields, where they construct small huts of bamboo, but as soon as the harvest is over and the dry season returns they are continually out fishing or hunting. They never go out without their baskets on their backs, and carrying their bows and a large knife-blade in a bamboo handle. They forge nearly all their instruments from ore which they procure from Annam and Cambodia. Although they know how to make earthen vessels, they generally cook their rice and herbs in bamboo. Their only clothing is a strip of cloth passed between the thighs and rolled round the waist. The women weave these scarfs, which are long and rather pretty, and which when well made often sell for as much as an ox. They are fond of ornaments, and always have their feet, arms, and fingers covered with rings made of thick brass wire; they wear necklaces of glass beads, and their ears are pierced with an enormous hole, through which they hang the bone of an animal, or a piece of ivory sometimes more than three inches in circumference. They wear their hair long in the Annamite fashion, and knot it up with a comb made of bamboo; some pass through it a kind of arrow made of brass wire, and ornamented by a pheasant's crest.

Their features are handsome and sometimes regular, and many wear thick mustachios and imperials.

Quite alone and independent amidst their forests, they scarcely recognise any authority but that of the chief of the village, whose dignity is generally hereditary. For the last year or two the King of Cambodia has occasionally sent the mandarin who lives nearest