

THE SOURCES OF KHMER /wə/

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§1 Of the thirty-four vowels of modern Khmer thirty-two can be traced back to Old Khmer while the remaining two, /wə/ and /ə:/, cannot.<sup>1</sup> In the present paper I propose to suggest, if not demonstrate, that /wə/ was introduced into Khmer some time after the Old Khmer period through borrowing from neighboring languages, most notably Thai and Vietnamese.

To place what follows in perspective I first account for the modern reflexes of the Old Khmer vowels:<sup>2</sup>

|                    |                |                  |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------|
| /i:/ < i, ī, e, ya | /w:/ < i, ī    | /u:/ < o, va     |
| /i/ < e            | /w/ < i, ya    | /u/ < u          |
| /è:/ < e           | /ə:/ < e       | /ò:/ < o         |
| /è/ < e, u, a(i)   | /ə/ < u, a(u)  | /ò/ < a, u       |
| /e:/ < i, e, ya    | /ə:/ < ?       | /o:/ < o, va     |
| /e/ < e, u         | /ə/ < i, e, ya | /o/ < u          |
| /è:/ < e           | /a:/ < a, ā    | /ò:/ < a, o      |
| /ε/ < e            | /a/ < a, ā     | /ò/ < a, o       |
| /iə/ < e, ya, yā   |                | /uə/ < o, va, vā |
| /èə/ < a, ā        |                |                  |
| /εə/ < a, ā, o     |                | /ɔə/ < a, ā      |
| /ae/ < e           | /aə/ < e       | /ao/ < o         |

<sup>1</sup>The correlation between the Old Khmer vowels and those of modern Khmer has been worked out in four earlier papers. See Sakamoto Yasuyuki, "e de khmer ancien," in *Ajia Afurika Gengo Bunka Kenkyū / Journal of Asian and African Studies (JAAS)*, 3 (1970): 28-43; "i, ī, ya, yā de khmer ancien," in *Tōnan Ajia Kenkyū*, 7 (1970).4: 492-503; "Sur quelques voyelles de khmer ancien," in *JAAS*, 4 (1971): 53-73; and "a et ā de khmer ancien," in *JAAS*, 7 (1974): 75-100.

<sup>2</sup>Vowels marked off by slants are phonological; those given in italics are orthographic.

§2 In the dictionary of Jacob<sup>3</sup> we find twenty-six forms containing /wə/. Whatever the possible total number of such forms might be, we may reasonably assume that these twenty-six are of relatively common occurrence.

1. kwəŋ v. go around.
2. kdwəŋ n. mortar with pestle.
3. kbwəŋ n. tile.
4. khwəŋ n. raised edging around house...
5. krwəŋ<sup>4</sup> n. equipment, set of utensils...
6. krwəŋ v. making steady progress...
7. r̄wəŋ v. perplexed.
8. c̄wə v. believe.
9. c̄wəŋ v. increase.
10. c̄wəŋ n. belief.
11. c̄wəŋ v. take a roll-call...
12. twə n. dwarf.
13. twəŋ v. urge, exhort, prod, press for an answer.
14. twəŋ v. = twəŋ.
15. n̄wəŋ v. be tired physically or mentally...
16. prwəŋ v. fresh, light (of colour).
17. prwəŋ v. = prwəŋ.
18. phwəŋ n. friends, close associates.
19. rwəŋ n. story, matter, event, play.
20. rwəŋ-rwəŋ(k) n. battle-field..., stage...
21. rwəŋ-rwəŋ v. often, frequently.
22. lwəŋ v. yellow.
23. lwəŋ v. quick.
24. lbwəŋ n. speed.
25. lm̄wəŋ v. limp...
26. swəŋ v. bold.

§3 To the forms just listed fourteen others may be added:

27. (kda:) r̄wə n. hard-boarded bed.
28. r̄wək v. ask for something importunately.
29. thwək n. ruler, measure; stick used as weapon.
30. bəŋkwəŋ v. make go aground.
31. bwəŋ n. floating weeds in marsh...
32. phwək n. albino.
33. m̄əkklwə n. plant name.
34. cau-m̄wəŋ n. provincial governor (obsolete).
35. r̄lwə v. almost the same.
36. r̄wə v. shrink (morally).

<sup>3</sup>Judith M. Jacob, *A Concise Cambodian-English Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

<sup>4</sup>/wə/ and /w̄ə/ are the same vowels, /̄/ being used to distinguish contrasting orthographies.

37. lùəŋ-lù n. fame.  
 38. lùəy v. skin very carefully.  
 39. smuək v. be depressed.  
 40. srwəŋ v. half-drunk.

§4 To the best of my knowledge and belief these forty items comprise nearly all of the corpus on the basis of which any investigation of Khmer /wə/ must be made. I turn now to comment as briefly as possible on the sources of the above forms insofar as they are known.<sup>5</sup>

1. kəəŋ. Source uncertain.

2. kəwəŋ. Cf. Thai krà<sup>?</sup>dùəŋ 'a stamp mill'. Note that the Thai form has *mai ek*. Thai loans from Khmer usually have no tone marks. Khmer kəwəŋ may therefore have been borrowed from Thai krà<sup>?</sup>dùəŋ and reduced to its present form.

3. kbəəŋ. Cf. Thai krà<sup>?</sup>bəəŋ 'a tile used for roofs, floors or walls', with *mai tho*.

4. khwəŋ. Cf. Thai khwəŋ 'dam, dyke, retaining wall, embankment', with *mai ek*.

5. krwəŋ. Cf. Thai khruəŋ 'mechanism, machine, engine, appliance; an instrument; an agent; material, (food-) stuff, ingredients, food; utensils', with *mai ek*. The /k/ of Khmer krwəŋ is from Old Khmer <sup>\*</sup>/g/, while the /kh/ of Thai khruəŋ is from Old Thai <sup>\*</sup>/g/. The borrowing must consequently have taken place before the sound change <sup>\*</sup>/g/ > /kh/ occurred in Thai.

6. krwəŋ. Source uncertain.

7. rùəŋ. Cf. Thai rùəŋ (rǔ:i) 'slow, tardy, sluggish', which has *mai ek*.

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<sup>5</sup>My chief authority for the Thai forms cited is So Sethaputra, *New Model Thai-English Dictionary*. Library Edition (Samrong, Samud Prakan: So Sethaputra's Press, 1965). For the tones of Thai my diacritics follow standard usage: zero = mid-level; /`/ = low-level; /~/ = high-falling; /'/ = high-rising; /~'/ = falling-rising. For Vietnamese my authority is *Việt-Hán từ-điền tôi tân* (Saigon: Nhà Sách Chin Hoa, 1973).

8. *cùə*. Cf. Thai *chǎə* 'to believe', with *mai ek*. The /c/ of *cùə* is from Old Khmer \*/j/ while the /ch/ of *chǎə* is from Old Thai \*/j/.

9. *cùən*. Source uncertain.

10. *cùmnùə*. Derivative of *cùə* by infixation of /-ùm-/. Derivatives of loanwords are not rare in Khmer.

11. *cùmrùən*. Source uncertain. This form is used as a noun corresponding to *cùən*; e.g., *vìə khəm rìən pontae kmìən cùmrùən sǎh* 'he studies hard but makes no progress'. It may be a derivative of *cùən*, though the infixation of /-ùmr-/ is not found elsewhere.

12. *tuə*. Source uncertain.

13. *tuən*. Cf. Thai *tuən* 'to warn, caution; to remind'. Despite the fact that Thai *tuən* has the mid-level tone, it is almost certain that Khmer borrowed it from Thai rather than the other way around; for in almost all cases Old Khmer \*/t/ before a vowel becomes modern Khmer /d/, a circumstance suggesting that modern /t/ in this environment are loans.

14. *tùən*. See 13.

15. *nùəy*. Cf. Thai *nùəy* 'to be tired, exhausted', with *mai ek* and initial orthographic *hn*. There is no discernible reason that Thai would borrow Khmer *nùəy* and then represent it with the "aspirated" *n*.

16, 17. *prwəŋ*, *prùəŋ*. Source uncertain.

18. *phùən*. Cf. Thai *phǎən* 'friend', with *mai ek*. The /ph/ of Thai *phǎən* is from Old Thai \*/b/, whereas Old Khmer \*/b/ yields modern Khmer /p/ rather than /ph/. Hence Khmer borrowed *phùən* from Thai after the \*/b/ > /ph/ change occurred in the latter.

19. *rùəŋ*. Cf. Thai *rǎəŋ* 'story, narrative, account', with *mai ek*.

20. *rùəŋ-rùəŋ(k)*. Cf. Sanskrit *raṇarāṅga* 'battlefield'. We

have no other examples of the change Sanskrit /a/ > modern Khmer /wə/, however.

21. rṃəy-rṃəy. Cf. Thai rṃəy-rṃəy 'continuously', with *mai ek*.

22. lṃəŋ. Cf. Thai lṃəŋ 'yellow', with initial *hl* (see item 15).

23. lṃən. Source uncertain, but cf. Vietnamese *lṃən* 'to fly like an arrow'.

24. lbwən. Derivative of lṃən by infixation of /-b-/ (see item 10).

25. lmṃəy. Source uncertain.

26. swəŋ. Source uncertain.

27. ṃə. Cf. Vietnamese *ngṃə gḍ* 'hard-boarded bed', with tone /./.

28. ṃək. Source uncertain.

29. thwək. Cf. Vietnamese *thṃək* 'ruler, measure', with tone /'/.

30. bəŋkwəŋ. Derivative of kwəŋ (item 1) by prefixation of /bəŋ-/.

31. bwən. Source uncertain.

32. phwək. Source uncertain, but cf. Thai *phṃək* 'albino'. In this case the direction of borrowing cannot be determined inasmuch as the /ph/ of Khmer *phwək* reflects Old Khmer *\*ph/* while the /ph/ of Thai *phṃək* reflects Old Thai *\*ph/*, and no changes have intervened to provide a clue.

33. mṃəkklwə (orthography: məkklwə). Cf. Thai *má'klwə* 'name of same plant as in Khmer'. The divergence of the orthography from the pronunciation of the Khmer form can be accounted for only by assuming that it is still written as it was once in Thai and that it was formerly pronounced as in Thai as well. Following voiced initials, Old Khmer *\*a/* before /ʔ, k, ŋ/ is

reflected by /<sup>h</sup>ə/.<sup>6</sup>

34. cau-<sup>h</sup>uəŋ. Cf. Thai <sup>h</sup>câu-<sup>h</sup>uəŋ 'governor of a <sup>h</sup>uəŋ', < <sup>h</sup>câu 'lord, prince', with *mai ek*, + <sup>h</sup>uəŋ 'land, domain, country; territorial division, city-state'.

35. rə<sup>h</sup>l̥ə. Source uncertain.

36. r̥ə. Thai r̥uə '(*of customs*) to fall into disuse; (*of one's knowledge*) to become rusty', with *mai tho*.

37. l̥uəŋ-l̥. Cf. Thai l̥uəŋ-lu 'rumor', with *mai ek* on the first constituent.

38. l̥uəy. Cf. Thai l̥uəy 'to saw, saw off', with *mai ek*.

39. s<sup>h</sup>uək. Source uncertain.

40. s<sup>h</sup>uəŋ. Source uncertain, but possibly a derivative of item 26.

\$5 As has been said, the foregoing forty items represent the great majority of Khmer forms containing /<sup>h</sup>ə/. Two of these, items 14 and 17, are mere orthographic doublets of other forms in the list; three, items 10, 24 and 30 (and possibly items 11 and 40), are derivatives of other forms in the list. These reduce to thirty-five the effective total of the forms to be considered. Fourteen of these have been found to be of uncertain source. The remaining twenty-one, however, show an unmistakable relationship to comparable forms in Thai, Vietnamese and, in a single case, Sanskrit. This proportion (60%), taken in conjunction with (a) the low frequency of forms with /<sup>h</sup>ə/ and (b) the circumstance that /<sup>h</sup>ə/ cannot be reconstructed for Old Khmer, is ample enough to demonstrate with fair probability that /<sup>h</sup>ə/ came into Khmer after the Old Khmer period and by way of loans from Thai and Vietnamese for the most part.

<sup>6</sup>In very general terms, loans from Thai into Khmer appear to be modeled not on orthographic forms but on spoken forms.