

The first plaster casts of Angkor for the French *métropole*

From the Mekong Mission 1866-1868,
and the Universal Exhibition of 1867, to the *Musée khmer* of 1874

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Introduction – Angkor Wat as a French *lieu de mémoire*?¹

The temples of Angkor are today a fixed part of France's postmodern myth-making about a lost colonial empire in the Far East called *Indochine*. The largest religious stone building in the world – the 12th c. CE temple of Angkor Wat – even made it to a double page of Pierre Nora's giant book project of the French *lieux de mémoire*, but not as the original temple site in Cambodia, but as a life-size replica of the *Exposition coloniale internationale* in Paris of 1931 (Ageron 1984) (Fig. 1): with a focus on the French colonial propaganda to stage Angkor as a French *patrimoine culturel*, not a single word was lost in Nora's œuvre about the giant operation of this ephemeral reconstitution itself, which easily counts today as the largest architectural representation of non-European architecture ever executed on the European continent. In order to approach this phenomenon of a symbolic transfer from the colonial Orient into the centre of French power, and to engage with the massive physical transfer of architecture over immense distances between two continents, we employ the term 'translation'. The analysis of hidden power constellations existing within the translation process that occurs between cultures – in this case between Asia and Europe – is an emerging feature in transcultural studies² and is associated with what had been conceptualized with the 'translational turn'. Yet, given the prevalent focus on texts and images, techniques of direct material translation – such as plaster casts – are rarely discussed. Although the historico-cultural significance of this form of physical copying and of exhibition in European museum collections has been rediscovered quite recently (Frederiksen & Marchand 2010), and the special relevance of the plaster casts of Angkor have entered the French discussion (Dumont 1988; Dagens 1989: 45-69; Zéphir 1996; Baptiste 2002, 2013; Falser 2011, 2013a-e; Baptiste & Zéphir

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1. All English translations of French sources are by the author, but some quotations are cited in their original French version in order to give the reader an idea of the typical formulations of their time.

2. This article is part of the author's project "Heritage as a Transcultural Concept – Angkor Wat from an Object of Colonial Archaeology to a Contemporary Global Icon" at Heidelberg University (Falser forthcoming).

2008, 2013³), the analysis of the casts' importance in colonial translation politics remains a desideratum. Consequently, this paper explores the hypothesis that plaster casts were a powerful translation tool used to appropriate the locally built heritage of the Indochinese colonies for its representation in the French *métropole*⁴. As we shall see, the display modes of these very first casts from Angkor were far from being well defined in the 1860s and early 1870s and underwent various, quite different and surprising changes in context. Our study will focus on five different stages in the art historical canonization of Angkor in Europe: (1) the first French plaster casts from Angkor Wat as executed in the context of the French Mekong Expedition of 1866-1868; (2) the casts' embedding into the Parisian Universal Exhibition of 1867; (3) the picturesque display modes of Oriental plaster casts in the *exposition permanente des colonies*; (4) the first explicit plaster cast mission to Angkor under Louis Delaporte in 1873 which finally led (5) to the foundation of the *Musée khmer* in Compiègne in 1874 as the first of its kind in Europe.

The faked starting point of Angkor Wat for the European stage: Footnote 2 on page 48 of Garnier's *Voyage d'exploration en Indo-Chine*

Des moulages en soufre de ces bas-reliefs ont été envoyés par le commandant de Lagrée à l'exposition universelle de 1867, et figurent aujourd'hui à l'exposition permanente des colonies (Palais de l'Industrie, pavillon XIV). Ils permettent de juger des dimensions et du relief de ce genre de sculpture.

(Garnier 1873, vol. I, 48, n.2)

The above-cited footnote gives us an important indication of how the first plaster casts of the temple of Angkor Wat appeared on the European stage. These plaster casts mark the beginning of the astonishing 'career' of the physical representations of Angkorian temple architecture in France, which began quietly during the 1867 Universal Exhibition in Paris and reached its peak with the *musée Indo-chinois* in the Parisian Trocadéro Palace (1880s to 1925/36) and with the colonial exhibitions in Marseille (1906, 1922) and Paris (1931). It ended exactly seventy years later, during the Parisian International Exhibition in 1937, with a small Angkorian-styled pavilion in the middle of the Seine River at a moment when the French colonial project found itself in deep crisis.

This annotation was a three-line-long footnote that appeared in the 600-page volume I (*Partie descriptive, historique et politiques*) on page 48 within Section IV (*Description du groupe de ruines d'Angkor*) of the publication entitled *Voyage d'exploration en Indo-Chine*, an expedition which took place in 1866-1868, but was only published in 1873. The mission was led by the commander (*capitaine de frégate*) Ernest Doudart de Lagrée (1823-1868), who had acted as the ambitious mediator between the Cambodian king Norodom I and the French colony of *Cochinchine* concerning the installation of the French protectorate over Cambodia. Participants in the mission included, among others, Francis Garnier,

3. The results of the exhibition "Angkor. Naissance d'un mythe – Louis Delaporte et le Cambodge" at the Musée Guimet from October 2013 to January 2014 could unfortunately not be incorporated into this article. In the catalogue, however, the Mekong Mission of 1866-1868 was rather uncritically glorified as part of a French-national master narrative, Delaporte's status as the first organized 'thief' of Angkorian artefacts for French museums silenced, and the important role of the 1867 Universal Exhibition to stage the first plaster casts of Angkor ignored.

4. For the politics of representation of colonial heritage in European centres of power during universal exhibitions, compare with the case of the Dutch Indies in Bloembergen 2006.

lieutenant and inspector of ‘indigenous affairs’, and the author responsible for the 1873 publication after de Doudart de Lagrée’s death; and Louis Delaporte, *enseigne de vaisseau* and draughtsman for the publication (Garnier 1873/I: 11; compare Julien 1886: 219–221, and in general Gomane 1994; for Delaporte in general, see Beauvais 1929). The mission’s aims were to explore the navigability of the Mekong River into the southern Chinese province of Yunnan, and to collect a wide range of additional information on the region. As a consequence, the visit to the temples of Angkor – at this time on Siamese territory – was a short side trip of a few days. However, inside the 1873 publication with its three volumes, containing more than 1000 written text pages, 250 illustrations, 70 plates and various maps (Fig. 2) and architectural plans, the description of the Angkorian temples was quite prominently placed to establish the myth of Angkor within the French project of Indochina; but important details were omitted.

Leaving Saigon on 5 June 1866, the mission continued on 21 June for the ruins of Angkor. This trip was to provide a “definitive consecration” of Doudart de Lagrée’s private studies of the temples (Garnier 1873/I: 22), which had been undertaken only a few months before the mission itself. This was the reason why the fifty-page long description of the Angkorian temples in chapter IV referred entirely to Doudart de Lagrée’s private notes, which were “rediscovered” after his sudden death during the expedition, and only slightly altered and retrospectively augmented by Garnier (1873/I: 23). Only the descriptions and impressive drawings by Louis Delaporte in the attached *Atlas*-section resulted from the mission itself, and were presented in a hybrid mix of detailed maps and architectural drawings of the temples on the one hand, and interpretative, exoticised, and even invented illustrations of a ‘forgotten temple ruins forlorn in the jungle’-trope on the other. Original photographs were also taken during the mission by the Saigon photographer Émile Gsell, which survive to this day in his undated photographic album called *Vues des ruines d’Angkor Wat et d’Angkor Thom* (Gsell 1866). For the fourteen pages in chapter IV called *Description du groupe de ruines d’Angkor* (Garnier 1873/I: 44–57), the reader was brought right into the temple of *Angkor Wat*. The architectural photographs of Angkor Wat in the above-mentioned Gsell album were transformed into wood engravings (Figs. 3a,b) – except the one showing the perfectly proper site of a Buddhist monastery with stilted wooden houses to the north of the central passageway in front of the second enclosure (Fig. 4). The reason for the author’s omission of this illustration by Gsell is easily explained: Garnier’s description of Angkor Wat intended to perpetuate the image of a temple that supposedly “fell into ruins even before its completion” which – despite being in reality an “object of general veneration” as a transregional pilgrimage site – became overgrown with dense tropical vegetation and remained unprotected by the local population and the ignorant monks on the site (Garnier 1873/I: 54, 57) (Fig. 5). The description led the visitor up to the cruciform gallery and the rectangular galleries of the bas-reliefs with an almost uninterrupted overall length of 800 metres. It was exactly at that point – in combination with an illustrated close-up of a bas-relief (from a photograph by Gsell) on the following page (Figs. 6a,b) – that an unspectacular footnote gave the indication that samples of these decorative panels were copied in sulphur casts⁵ and sent by Doudart de Lagrée to the 1867 Paris Universal Exhibition (see introductory quotation). On 1 July 1866, after no more than one week on the site, the mission left Angkor Wat and travelled by elephant to Siem Reap, had again a stopover in Phnom

5. The *moulage au soufre* was one of many options for moulds in the 19th century, and was mainly used for the copying of small-scale medals.

Penh and left the country across the Cambodian-Laotian frontier near Stung Treng, where the Mekong River proved to be unnavigable. The mission continued to Bassac and the Khmer temple of Wat Phu. It finally reached Luang Prabang and the site where Henri Mouhot had died in 1861, and erected his tombstone in May 1867. By this time, French historiography had already hailed Mouhot as the ‘French discoverer’ of Angkor Wat, despite the facts that his journey to the temple had been financed by the British, and the Catholic chaplain Bouillevaux had already visited Angkor ten years earlier in 1850 on the basis of older reports.

The public historiography addressing France’s supposedly peaceful cultural interest in Angkor during the 1860s was, and still is, defined by this master narrative of an official mission. On the contrary, Commandant Arthur Bonamy de Villemereuil’s 1883 publication of Doudart de Lagrée’s manuscripts embed the history of the plaster casts in their purely political context. After Doudart de Lagrée’s documents on the history of Cambodia, Villemereuil’s publication compiled a detailed list of “political and diplomatic documents concerning the contemporary situation in Cambodia” that shed light on France’s, and especially Doudart de Lagrée’s, ambitious colonial visions. He continued with the latter’s writings about the “archaeology of Cambodia”, his collection from Cambodia (with a full list of the fruits of his stay, including plaster casts, see below), his private letters about his travels, and finally with documents detailing the Mekong mission. In the selection of historical documents on Cambodia, Villemereuil quoted the Treaty of 11 August 1863 concerning the French-Cambodian protectorate (no word about Angkor), signed by the Commander-in-Chief of Cochinchine, Admiral de La Grandière, in the Palace of Udong, then still the capital of Cambodia (Villemereuil 1883: 89–93). The next document cited was the Cambodian-Siamese Treaty of 1 December 1863, in which Cambodia had silently reconfirmed its status as “a tributary state of Siam” (§1) and its cession of the provinces of “Pratabong and Nakon Siamrap” (Battambang and Siem Reap including Angkor) since 1795 (§8.1) (Villemereuil 1883: 95–101). In the following twenty-five pages, Villemereuil provided a unique insight into Doudart de Lagrée’s fierce protest against Cambodia’s tributary politics towards Siam in the case of Angkor. In two letters to Admiral de La Grandière on 12 December 1863 from Kompong Luong and shortly after to the Cambodian king *ad personam*, Doudart de Lagrée accused Siam’s aggressive diplomacy of attempting to gain control over Angkor, a territory which, according to him, should have been inside the French protectorate, not least to “guarantee Cambodia’s freedom under France’s protection” (Villemereuil 1883: 102–106). In a letter dated 20 May 1865, sent from the same spot close to the border, Doudart de Lagrée openly gave his opinion on the situations: “The Cambodians do not attach great importance to the treaty with Siam [...] I confess that I, personally, do not feel enthusiasm either. It seems to me that our treaty is, forthrightly affirmed, entirely insufficient. Did we really come to Cambodia not to touch upon it [upon Angkor]? That we should really pawn our future [in Cambodia] with a [single] formal paragraph seems [totally] pointless to me!” (Villemereuil 1883: 123). Villemereuil also mentioned one of the most important documents in this context, a memoir dating from 8 January 1866. He states that, in his memoir “on the illegitimacy of the Siamese claims to the possession of Battambang, Angkor, and the Cambodian parts of Laos”, Doudart de Lagrée declared that Siam’s 18th-century intentions were “insidious” and, furthermore, that the “secret treaty of 1863” between Cambodia and Siam was a “violent and shameful extortion” and “spoliation”, requesting the “immediate determination of Cambodia’s territorial limits which had been so urgently demanded by the Bangkok court” (Villemereuil 1883:

115–119). This was the real reason (and not archaeological interest, as the official story had it later) that Doudart de Lagrée undertook two journeys to the Cambodian–Siamese border zone in early 1866. His “second voyage in March 1866” (Villemereuil 1883: 225) resulted in the compilation of a larger dossier on the Cambodian archaeological sites, including “Angkor et les monuments de la région Nord du Cambodge” (Villemereuil 1883: 220–261). The tragic incident that occurred during Doudart de Lagrée’s eight-day visit to Angkor in March 1866 was never circulated in the official historiography, but was well described in his lengthy internal report to Admiral de La Grandière, dated Phnom Penh, 5 April 1866. Initially, he had just planned to go to Angkor for two days to prepare the itinerary for the forthcoming mission, but he was confronted with a great disappointment on arrival, which necessitated him to hastily produce the first French casts from Angkorian temples right away (Villemereuil 1883: 446–447):

Upon my arrival in Angkor, I learnt that we had been anticipated. An agent from the English consulate in Bangkok, and a skilful photographer were already at work. [author’s italics] They had arrived with ministerial orders from the authorities of this country [...] and the English consul even had a letter from the Siamese king himself. Some days after their arrival, a Siamese mandarin came with an express order to come to help them and to draw the grande pagode [of Angkor Wat]. In fact, the agent was called Mr. Kennedy and the photographer Mr. Thompson [sic] from Singapore, the mandarin was the superintendent of the pagodas of Angkor. These gentlemen did not tell me that they were on an official mission, but that might have been well the case. They asked me for some information (of course, I said nothing) about the French explorative project, which had already been well known for several months in Bangkok. I do not have to say how embarrassed I was to see that we had been outstripped at Angkor. How much reason there is to fear now that, as a result of our much-delayed expedition, the English will foreclose us at the heights of the River [Mekong]! From Bangkok the distance to Yunnan is shorter [...] we may encounter some bad consequences: the English are not the ones to prepare an easy route for those arriving after them.

The French indeed failed to circulate an official photograph of Angkor Wat before the English: in 1867, John Thomson published his photographic album *The antiquities of Cambodia – a series of photographs taken on the spot, with letterpress descriptions* in Edinburgh (Thomson 1867). It included a plan of Angkor Wat and sixteen photographs, including Angkor Wat’s main entry and central passage way (Fig. 7), architectural features, and selected bas-reliefs. It is interesting to note that in this early race for scientific (and this meant political) primacy over Angkor on Siamese territory, suitable ad-hoc recording techniques and translation methods were considered decisive. As a result, Doudart de Lagrée decided to change his plans and to extend his stay in Angkor to check out the situation, undertake studies, and acquire as much information as possible in order to be at least the first to send home physical proof from the temple. Doudart de Lagrée was, as he himself admitted in his report, “neither well prepared for really serious work [*in situ*] nor well equipped with suitable instruments [...] Saigon had not been able to deliver either plaster for the moulds or paper for imprints, [his] draughtsman from Saigon, Lefèvre, was missing, and taking any photographs was impossible”. In addition, in light of the authoritative presence of the English, the locals seemed reluctant to help a Frenchman. “Leaving Angkor at the same moment as the English”, Doudart de Lagrée had at least taken “the exact measures of Angkor Wat for a floor plan, [...] moulds from a certain number of

sculptures with cement and with all the sulphur which [he] was able to find in the region". From ten kilometres away, he had used a little suitable earth for imprints ("estampes"), only to find that "on his return many of the pieces had been broken in the carriages". He copied some minor inscriptions and also took away some original sculpture pieces. In a letter to his sister-in-law, dated Kompong Luong 16 April 1866, Doudart de Lagrée again reported on his excursion to Angkor (Villemereuil 1883: 450–451), but he was already at work on the French monopolistic myth about the discovery of Angkor: "[He] had seen beautiful things, [...] had gone *where no European had been before* [author's italics], [...] had seen totally unknown ruins and met the savages." Additionally, Villemereuil published the comment "The art objects which had been collected by Captain de Lagrée in Cambodia" in April 1866 and sent to Paris (Villemereuil 1883: 305):

In the report and the letter of 5 and 16 April 1866 [...] M. de Lagrée tells us about the difficulties he encountered in moulding the bas-reliefs of *Angkor Vat* and in transporting these fragile *œuvres* in oxcarts, where many of them were destroyed. To these *moulages*, he added these from Phnom Bachey and [original] objects of stone, bronze, *terre cuite*, and wood, which he had collected all around. These *specimens de l'art des Khmer* constituted a collection which was unique in its genre [Footnote 1] and was in one of the first exhibitions in Saigon, the object meriting the greatest distinction. [Footnote 1: It is, in fact, the first time in Europe that such a thing has been exhibited. Today, this collection is outdistanced, without any possible comparison, by the Musée khmer being organized in the Trocadéro by M. Delaporte, and composed of remarkable pieces brought by him from Cambodia in 1873.] From here, this collection was sent to France, where it was shown at the Universal Exhibition of 1867 in Paris, and later transferred to the *Exposition permanente des colonies*. The brothers of M. de Lagrée paid him homage in this institution, which still possesses this collection in a sensibly reduced version. In all these transports, many of the *moulages* had been broken, and it is due to the infinitely patient work of the curator, M. Aubry-Lecomte, that some of these casts could be reconstituted. Thanks to the courtesy of the current curator, M. de Nozeilles, with the help of the specialist M. Feer, Indian specialist at the *Bibliothèque nationale*, and of M. Delaporte and Harmand as the brave explorers of Cambodia and Indochina, we were able to study this collection and add some details to the original list, which was a copy sent from Saigon at the same moment as the collection itself by M. Vial, *capitaine de frégate* and *directeur de l'intérieur* in Cochinchine.

The original collection of Doudart de Lagrée had, according to the author, been comprised of nineteen original sculptures, fifteen sulphur casts (six from Angkor Wat), and twelve cement casts (eleven from Angkor Wat) of bas-reliefs and inscriptions, and four religious and civil manuscripts. By the time of the 1883 publication, however, half of Doudart de Lagrée's collection "did not exist anymore".⁶ His harvest from Cambodia was shipped from Saigon on the *La Creuse* in September 1866. Its arrival in Paris was reconfirmed by Aubry-Lecomte, who fixed the heavily deteriorated collection, the bad condition of which was primarily the result of its having been hastily gathered, owing

6. In his 1879 publication, Villemereuil listed, in Appendix I, a slightly different list of Doudart de Lagrée's collection from Cambodia that was reconfirmed by Aubry-Lecomte: eight cement and five sulphur mouldings of bas-reliefs, four sulphur mouldings of inscriptions, eight pieces of sculpture debris, one fragment of a Buddha statue, six diverse heads in granite, one pendant of baked clay, five pieces of pottery debris, and two pieces of bronze statue debris (Villemereuil 1879: 62–65).

to colonial rivalry in Angkor between France and Great Britain during these few days in 1866. On 15 July 1867 – the height of the Universal Exhibition in Paris, which was also attended by Siam as a sovereign monarchy – the French-Siamese treaty reconfirmed in §4 that “the provinces of Battambang and Angkor [Nakhon Siemrap] would stay on the side of the Siamese kingdom” and that “the frontiers between both nations on Cambodian territory would be delineated as soon as possible by a joint commission of Siamese and French officers” (Villemereuil 1883: 121–123, here 122). Soon after, however, the French would enforce their colonial claim over Angkor.

The polysemy of objects and the casts from Angkor: The Universal Exhibition of 1867 and its classification system

After the first exhibitions claiming universality were held in London in 1851 and Paris in 1855, the Parisian Universal Exhibition of 1867 formed France’s second exhibition. Under the title *Exposition universelle d’art et d’industrie* (1 April to 3 November 1867), it attempted to display, and at the same time prove, the direct relation and intertwined character of works of art and industrial products, as the central human creative spheres within the great project of universal progress. This was an approach that tried to merge the traditions of art and industrial trade exhibitions from the 18th century onwards. As the showcase of the *Second Empire* under Napoleon III, the event was under the strong influence of Saint-Simeonian universalism. The central site of the exhibition comprised the 50-hectare *Champs de Mars*. It was transformed (for the first time in universal exhibitions) into a park for pavilion displays around a giant *palais de l’exposition* with its floor plan of two circular edges, a rectangular intermediate section including a central garden, and the overall dimensions of 490 x 380 m (Fig. 8). The general goal of all universal exhibitions was to depict the civilising status of the whole globe (or better still, to stage what was supposed to be a globally valid ideal of the concept of civilisation) with all its regions, nations, and products acting. But how could one classify and embed a cultural product – in this case the first cast or original specimen of Angkorian art in Europe – into a valid model to exhibit world civilisation if its cultural, geographical, and artistic origins and status were still white spots on the mental and physical map of the exhibitions’s host nation? A guide for exhibitors and visitors written by Henri de Parville brought the problem and challenge for the layout of the exhibition into stark relief. In order to overcome the earlier tradition of separate expositions (or separate sections) of industrial products and *Beaux-Arts* displays, and to counterbalance the increasing homogenisation of the exhibited product range of the different competing nations, the new display system should take into consideration both national particularities and entities and the useful comparability of the products. As a solution, he referred to the “principle of a Pythagorean table with a double entry, where a series of fields could at the same time be crossed longitudinally and transversally” (Parville 1866: 18). A schematic floor plan of the 1867 exhibition indeed revealed twenty-four different radiating compartments, organising nations and groups of nations according to the importance attributed to them (Fig. 9). From a total of about 150,000 m², France alone took up more than 60,000 m² (including the sections *Algérie* and *Colonies françaises* at the western edge), followed by Great Britain with a bit more than 20,000 m². ‘Less important’ nations from Asia, such as China, Japan, and Siam, shared only one miniscule spoke in this materialised wheel of civilisation.

As one single, ground-floor open space, the building was flooded with natural light, organised with several entries at the sides, with radiating corridors from the edge to the

central garden, and built using an interior modular assembly system of lightweight partitions. Following the grid, a parallel and even overlapping arrangement of artistic *and* industrial products was made possible. Following the double-entry system of objects, the classification system was naturally the central key to the complete depiction of the world. It introduced a new thought pattern that arranged the objects and products in developmental narratives, tracing developments from physical to intellectual needs (from food, clothing, and furniture to art), and from raw materials to industrially processed products, as well as their intellectually appropriated status. The classification system contained ten groups with a total of ninety-five classes (Exposition universelle de Paris 1867c: 581–602). Special attention was paid to the artistic product line, from its practical perspective at the outer and larger edge of the exhibition plan, to its applied character in the central section, and its refined and most civilised treatment in the inner core of the exhibition. Here we will focus on the inner part of the central ring with its section of “Material and applications of the liberal arts” (Groupe II in gallery II: *matériel et applications des arts libéraux*), which materialised intellectual achievements, and the neighbouring inner ring that was occupied by the pure art objects themselves (Group I as gallery I: *Œuvres d’art*) to illustrate the most refined degree of civilisation. When it came to the section on the French colonies, the double entry system of each object (according to its national affiliation and product classification) brought additional unintended facets to the intentional “polysemy of the objects” (Barth 2007: 21). At the same time, it caused a contradiction in the object’s proper assignment within the classifying narrative of civilisation. The question remained: where to put cultural and even artistic objects from the colonies, if the dichotomy of the civilised *métropole* and the colony that was still to be civilised – as the central goal of the colonial *mission civilisatrice* – had to stay intact? Could Angkorian sculptures from the extinct Khmer empire of the 9th to 13th century CE be displayed in the same section as a contemporary French *Beaux-Arts* painting? Where to put plaster casts from sculptures of forgotten ruins that could not be dated and located exactly and that did not even belong to the young French colony in Indochina? By definition of the *Règlement général* in §1.1, *copies* of pieces of art were excluded from the beaux-arts group I. Seen from the geographical-political assignment, Angkorian objects should have appeared in the very small Siamese section which was, of course, unthinkable for the French host with its imperial ambitions for the much-desired temple site.

The French colonial section of the exhibition was represented by the French war and navy ministry and figured as an extremely thin spoke-like attachment to the southeast of the vast display of the French *métropole*. Along with a special section on Algeria, all the other French colonies from all four regions of the world were packed into a coherent space that was too small to properly distinguish the colonies’ different cultural characteristics.⁷ By studying the official *Catalogue des produits des colonies françaises* with a focus on the Indochinese colony of *Cochinchine* and the new *protectorat du Cambodge*, the listed entries, to some extent, appear quite logical and are, for our case, quite interesting. Following the narrative of ‘high’ European and ‘low’ Asian civilisation, the large majority of products from Cochinchine and Cambodia appeared in the higher-numbered groups of *raw* material and products, for example, rice, pepper, tea, and sugar in group VII (food products), or different types of wood in group V (products

7. They covered America with *Martinique, Guyane, Guadeloupe, St. Pierre et Miquelon*; Africa with *Sénégal, Côte d’or* and *Gabon, Réunion, Mayotte* and *Madagascar*; Oceania with *Tahiti* and *Nouvelle-Calédonie*, and, finally, Asia with the *Établissements français dans l’Inde* and *Cochinchine* (Aymar-Bression 1868: 591; Notices 1866).

of extractive industries). Group IV (clothes) mentioned *costumes annamites* (nr. 291 in class 35) with the name of the sender “Comité agricole, De Lagrée, Bordot” (Exposition 1867a: 19), and group III (furniture and other housing objects) indicates porcelain and annamite pottery (nr. 151 in class 17 from “De la Grée” [sic] (Exposition 1867a: 11) or a candleholder with mother-in-pearl incrustations (nr. 204, in class 26) from “Francis Garnier” (Exposition 1867a: 14). However, in the most ‘civilised’ section containing art objects (group I), Cochinchine together with *all* other French colonies was represented by only six entries, compared with almost 1,400 entries in the entire catalogue: no oil paintings (class 1), only one entry as “decorative painting” in class 2 (paintings and drawings) sent by “Garnier, Comité agricole” (Exposition 1867a: 2). Finally, between and bridging the sections of the arts and the applied arts, was group II (*matériel et application des arts libéraux* – materials and applications of the liberal arts), which brings us to our central findings. This group comprised eight classes, almost all of which included entries from Cochinchine (Exposition 1867a: 2–9): class 6 (products of printing industry and book trade) with “one Cambodian manuscript on paper” and “four manuscripts on palm leaves” sent by “De la Grée”, class 9 (prints and photographic camera) with “photographic albums from Cochinchine and Cambodia” sent from the “Scientific commission of Cambodia” (most probably with Gsell’s album on Angkor), classes 10, 12, and 13 (maps and instruments of geography and cosmography) with an “atlas of the French colonies and map of Cochinchine” provided by the *ministère de la Marine*. Class 8 (*application du dessin et de la plastique aux arts usuels* – application of drawings and modelling in the common arts) mentioned the casts of Angkor. Entry number 89 from Cochinchine reads (Exposition 1867a: 5):

Moulages en soufre pris dans les ruines d’Angkor – fragments en grès et en poterie de statues décoratives d’Angkor [author’s italics] – Tête en bronze d’une statuette du Bouddah, provenant de la colonie de Phoum-Morcaï, province de Kouposédi – un fragment de tête et une statuette en bronze, provenant de Phoum-Bachq – trois fragments de statues en grès (De Lagrée).

Summing up the entries from the catalogue of the French colonial section, we see that Doudart de Lagrée (as well as the later mission of de Lagrée/Garnier) had sent quite a large variety of objects and products to France. These varied from daily decorative household objects, descriptive material such as maps, photo albums, and books, to original decorative artwork – including *original* Angkorian sculptures and fragments and *cast-copies*. These had to be incorporated into a colonial display, which opened in April 1867. Taking into consideration the difficulty of packing and transporting these objects by elephant and small barges from the site to the Cambodian Great Lake, their shipping to Saigon (and from there by a French steamboat from Saigon to Marseille over a land bridge between the Red Sea and Alexandria), one can imagine their arrival *à la dernière minute* on the *Champ de Mars*. The lack of time for a conceptual partition of the different objects may be one explanation for why *all* objects from Angkor, both originals and copies, landed in the colonial section of group II/class 8. Thus, owing to their nature as copies, the bas-reliefs from Angkor Wat were classified in the more technical section containing reproduction techniques of art instead of in the art section. The strange contrast created by including the Angkorian casts within a collection of European high-tech reproduction techniques and their products and juxtaposing them with the colonial low-tech ethno-

graphical displays (Figs. 10a,b) that served a Eurocentric narrative about simple-minded Cochinchinese natives, was striking :

Dans la colonie naissante de la Cochinchine, la race annamite se ressent du positivisme chinois; la folle du logis rêve peu de divinités; la main aime mieux s'appliquer à des œuvres plus utiles; elle guide le buffle dans les rizières; elle tisse la soie, le coton. [...] elle cisèle l'or et l'argent pour bijoux, fouille et incruste de nacre les meubles pour vendre au dehors ou orner la maison. A ces travaux des indigènes l'esprit européen vient apporter ses procédés et ses conseils; *il recueille avec curiosité les débris des antiques civilisations qui ont, à des âges inconnus, régné sur le pays; dans la vitrine des arts libéraux se voient des peintures, des sculptures, des vestiges d'architecture qui font un singulier contraste avec l'art sans caractère de l'état actuel.* [author's italics]

(Duval 1867b: 387)

Some months earlier, in the *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, the same author had already published one of the very few detailed critiques of the display in the French-colonial section:

[...] *des fragmens [sic], détachés par les soins de M. de Lagrenée [sic] des ruines du temple d'Angkor, dans le Cambodge, nous reportent en des siècles et des pays que la science historique n'a pas encore éclairés* [author's italics]. Les calculs les plus timides font remonter à quinze cents ans avant l'ère chrétienne ces bustes de granit, modelés avec un art que les Grecs de la meilleure époque ne désavoueraient pas.

(Duval 1867a: 2)

Moulages appeared not only in class 8, but also at the other end of group II in class 13 (*Cartes et appareils de géographie et de cosmographie*), where their highly contested purpose in the colonial game of appropriating, classifying, and displaying the civilisation of the whole planet became much more evident. Next to galvanoplastic reproductions from the war ministry, the *Société d'ethnographie* installed an “ethnographic collection of nude images of different human races” along with “sculptures and plaster casts of the principle characters of ethnographic groups” (*Exposition universelle de 1867b*: 45, 46; compare Cordier's ethnographic installation in the *Musée permanent* later in this analysis).

It would be too simple to conclude with the statement that the first material translation of the Angkorian temples for the European continent in 1867 was a pure mis-translation as far as their future display mode of a ‘correct’, more picturesque and exotic embedding in an appropriate Oriental art section was concerned. On the contrary, they were displayed in a very prominent section of the 1867 Exhibition against the background of a then hotly debated question about how industrial technology could serve public education in – and through the popularisation of – art. Or, in other words, how art could continue to play an important role at the beginning of the age of mechanical reproduction without supporting a de-valorisation of its own notion of authenticity, originality, and artistry. It was in this section that the question of the role was debated that *copies* of artworks played in this celebrated “new temple of industry” in the 1867 Exhibition display of an “abridged version of the human genius” (Dubois 1867: 3, 4, 60). As it was listed in the *Catalogue officiel* on group II, class 8 with 251 entries, Doudart de Lagrée's ‘sulphur casts’ of the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat found their unexpected, European equivalents with the following highly exotic names (*Exposition universelle de 1867b*: 28–36): *chromolithographies, photo-*

graphies estampées en relief, imitations de peinture par la gravure typographique, procédés de sculpture sur plâtre, groupe en relief de carton-plâtre peint, gravures paniconographiques, photosculptures, and finally, *galvanoplastie*. These different mechanical and chemical techniques could reproduce or even multiply two- or three-dimensional original objects in different materials and at one-to-one or even at reduced or enlarged scales. Eugène Dognée's publication *Les arts industriels à l'exposition universelle de 1867* constituted an impressive analysis of the relevance of these products. Casts were introduced not as objects of art per se, but as *spécimens* of a reproducible procedure that could be used to embellish useful products (compare Baltard 1868). Their function as truthful decorative elements would be predefined as "useful" for the hybrid architectural reconstitutions of Angkor in future exhibitions. As an intermediate product in an artistic process, plaster casts were referred to by Dognée as an "economical reproduction of expensive sculptures" (Dognée 1869: 520) which could find their way, "hidden under a golden sheet", into luxurious apartments, be a "more useful application [for the] vulgarisation of good models for art schools", or be most useful for the "cheap and faithful popularisation [and] diffusion of the best works of art of antiquity and younger era [...] without the necessity of difficult travels"; that is, in the displays of museums containing masterpieces from "all regions and all times". Dognée concluded: "Plaster casts have to fulfil an exemplary role. In the 1867 exhibition they proved worthy of their glorious participation in the artistic education of the people" (Dognée 1869: 523–524). As an important example of this, he quoted the galvanoplastic reproductions in the South Kensington Museum in London that were part of a "radical reform of the public taste". Dognée shared this opinion of this museum with his British colleague Richard Redgrave, who, as art director of this London museum, praised its "splendid and unequalled contribution of reproductions of objects of art" for the 1867 Exhibition. These reproductions included a giant plaster cast of the door of the Spanish cathedral of Santiago de Compostella and "electrotypes from the coronation plate in the Tower" (Redgrave 1868: 151). Referring to the plaster casts that France had produced of the column of Trajan from earlier copies in London, and to British moulds coming from objects in the Parisian *Musée de l'artillerie* in the context of the 1855 Exhibition, Redgrave finally concluded his own report on class 8 of the 1867 Exhibition: "Thus there are indications to show that the movement is progressing, and we may hope that shortly a system of interchanges will be set on foot by which our own and all other collections for increasing the taste in and feeling for good art will be rendered more complete, and spread into manufacturing localities where, from the necessary rarity of fine objects, such art could not otherwise be seen and studied" (Redgrave 1868: 168). Indeed, through the strong efforts of his colleague Henry Cole, whose energetic negotiations during the 1867 Exhibition helped him acquire a large collection of plaster casts for the casts courts of the South Kensington Museum, the *Convention for promoting universally reproductions of works of art for the benefit of museums of all countries* was signed the same year in Paris by the aristocratic leaders of European nations, ranging from Great Britain's Albert Edward and the Prussian Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, to Prince Napoleon of France and Czar Alexander of Russia, and others. The convention was a ground-breaking development of a pan-European exchange network for the low-cost circulation of art objects and entire "historical monuments" through the medium of plaster casts for museum displays.

To conclude, within the international flows of copies and even copies of copies, these supposedly immobile and internationally renowned icons of cultural heritage – from single precious objects to architectural elements and whole historical monuments from

all over Europe and the world – became highly mobile and increasingly lost their fixed local identity, exploitable national affiliations, and relevance of legal ownership. At this moment, the modern colonial enterprise was just developing, and the appropriation of the art and architectural manifestations in colonised territories (such as India and Indochina) for the European heritage market was about to begin. However, if the casts from Angkor were placed in a prominent position in the above-mentioned metropolitan discussions, neither their artistic value as copies from the largest Asian temple site of Angkor Wat nor their political relevance in relation to France’s cultural-political rivalry with the British over Angkor on Siamese territory, with Doudart de Lagrée as the crucial figure, was acknowledged or discovered. This would only happen at the 1878 Exhibition (Falser 2013b).

The palais de l’Industrie after 1855: A laboratory for the Exposition permanente des colonies and the Union centrale des Beaux-Arts appliqués à l’Industrie

What is particularly interesting in Redgrave’s report, mentioned above, is his detailed, up-to-date knowledge about the French roots of the practice of taking plaster casts of art objects. This knowledge was made clear when he brought one important institution into the debate – the *Union centrale des Beaux-Arts appliqués à l’Industrie*, which had organised its first exhibition in 1865 in the *palais de l’Industrie*, the site of the Universal Exhibition of 1855 (*palais de l’Industrie 1875*)(Fig. 11). The central building of the 1855 Exhibition played a crucial role insofar as two institutions residing in this building after 1855 helped to pre-define certain display characteristics of cultural heritage, from Angkor in particular.

After some first remarks on the necessity of creating a museum of colonial products right after France’s first Universal Exhibition of 1855 (Mestro 1855, compare Blum 1894), the *Exposition permanente des produits de l’Algérie et des colonies* was founded by decree in 1858. In 1859 the collection found a home in the *palais de l’Industrie* – with Aubry-Lecomte, *sous-commissaire de Marine*, as its curator, and a small local committee for the different sections of Algeria, Guadeloupe, Senegal, and Guyane. A *Guide du visiteur* from 1860 reconfirmed the installation of the exhibition inside the southern gallery of the *palais de l’Industrie*’s first floor, accessible by gate XII of the building. The display focused on four major thematic groups: vegetable products, minerals, animal products, and “indigenous industries and ethnography” (Cardon & Noiret 1860: 8). As the guidebook described it, the visitor of the *Exposition permanente* was confronted with a strange display of different colonies at the entry to the exhibition’s gallery. This combination of colonial products, cultural heritage objects, and ethnography inside the exhibition found its apex in the display of sixteen lifelike busts and bodies of indigenous “Algerian types” by Charles Cordier, the French ethnographic sculptor who was also to garnish the ethnographical gallery of the National History Museum in Paris (later *Musée de l’Homme*) with a similar display. Calling these busts *spécimens des beaux arts*, the guidebook quoted a catalogue that summarised the approach of the artist. Also interesting for “the anthropologist, the ethnographer, anatomist, philosopher and historian”, his art was “not a simple individual episode, a pure fantasy”, but part of the description of the “great movements of humanity”; his “faithful reproductions of the types of different races [were] necessary to throw light on the study of the biological and moral sciences, and to give them a solid basis through the sculpting which [serving this approach] had never had a more profound signification, a more general interest” (Cardon & Noiret

1860: 97–98). Together with its colonial-political mission and economic propaganda, two highly important facets of the *Exposition permanente* entered the displays of Angkor in future exhibitions: the combining of lifelike ethnographic staging *together* with artistic sculptural interpretations as “reproductions fidèles” of the colonised Other, and, their function of describing the great lines of humanity. According to the important footnote in Garnier’s 1873 publication quoted above, it was also this context and display mode of the *Exposition permanente* into which the sulphur casts from Angkor by Doudart de Lagrée were transplanted after their seven-month long display at the 1867 Universal Exhibition.

In the same year (1858) that the larger *Exposition permanente des colonies* was created, the French *Société du progrès de l’art industriel* was founded to assist the fusion of the applied arts with industrial developments. Its first *Exposition de l’art industriel* was opened in the *palais de l’Industrie* in 1861 with a focus on drawings and models for the application of art in relation to mechanical reproductions (compare group II/class 8 in the 1867 Exhibition). The *Société de l’Union centrale des Beaux-Arts appliqués à l’Industrie* was founded in 1864, and its bylaws defined the final goal “to foster these cultures of art which served the realisation of the beautiful and the useful” and to support those works of art that helped “augment the public taste for the beautiful”. As defined in §5 of the foundation text, the institution was convinced of the advantages of the “universalisation of the applied arts into industry” (Union centrale 1865: 35). Once again, the Department of Science and Art of the South Kensington Museum in London was the major reference, itself partly founded on display methods from the earlier *Oriental Repository* inside the East India House, and the later India Museum (Falser 2013c). The first exhibition of the *Union centrale* took place in 1865 in the *palais de l’Industrie*, two years before the Universal Exhibition of 1867. Original works of art were displayed next to industrial reproductions, and their different conceptual distinctions and artistic values were blurred and merged. The nine groups of applied arts, which covered the themes from the decoration of housing and furniture to the issues of teaching and vulgarisation, greatly influenced the classification system of the universal exhibition two years later. In ten sections the 1865 exhibition catalogue covered the special section of a *Musée rétrospectif* formed by the periods stretching from antiquity to the Renaissance. As the Union’s president Ernest Guichard pointed out in the preface, the 1865 exhibition had been organised for French industry as a preparative undertaking towards the “European competition” of the 1867 Universal Exhibition (Union centrale 1867: v–vi). Despite this focus on French products, section 2 on the “Middle Ages to Renaissance” also covered Roman and Assyrian antiquities, as well as there being a section on “Oriental Art” containing bronzes, lacquerware, faience, and porcelain from India, Persia, China, and Japan. With its ‘original’ works of art, this section on Oriental art mutated into a special *Musée oriental* that was displayed at the Union’s headquarters at the place Royale (Fig. 12). As the *Guide du visiteur* of 1869 speculated, the museum’s eight rooms finally received, once the 1867 Exhibition had closed its doors, the original ethnographical art objects from French-India and Cochinchine that had belonged to the *ministère de la Marine et des colonies* and had most probably originated partly from Doudart de Lagrée’s missions (Union centrale 1869: 41). Despite the institution’s early approach of evaluating plaster casts as *original* products of the applied fine arts, the *Union centrale* also hosted exhibitions of plaster casts that were conceived as copies of French architectural *patrimoine*. Its 5th exhibition in 1876 displayed objects from the archives of the *commission des Monuments historiques* with Viollet-le-Duc. Besides drawings and photographs of French monuments (including Roman and Arabic architecture in Algeria), the visitor could explore almost

one hundred full-scale plaster casts from French historic monuments, including 12th-century architectural sculpture from the collection Geoffroy-Dechaume (*Union centrale* 1876: 91–98). Only a few months later, this collection would find its home inside the *palais du Trocadéro* of the Universal Exhibition of 1878.

Together with the ethnographic character of the *Musée permanent des colonies* with its colonial-political and economic approach and the exhibitions of the *Union centrale des Beaux-Arts appliqués à l'Industrie* with its focus on industrially applied arts, we might call the *palais de l'Industrie* a test laboratory for the staging of French and colonial cultural heritage in the medium of plaster casts. When Doudart de Lagrée's plaster casts and originals were finally displayed in the *Musée permanent des colonies*, it was reported that his brothers, after his death, allowed the following lines to be installed above his Angkor collection: "Mort victime de son zèle pour la science – Died a victim of his zeal for the sciences" (Villemereuil 1879: 62). The plaster casts from Angkor would, however, take a totally other direction under the main protagonist of the next few years to establish a coherent Angkor collection in Paris: Louis Delaporte.

Cracking the translation code of Khmer temple architecture: Delaporte's mission to Angkor in 1873

[Des] fonds nécessaires des Beaux-Arts [...] ils seront d'ailleurs certains d'être utiles à la Colonie, qui leur vient en aide avec une grande bienveillance : *ils concourront, en effet, par leurs travaux, à la faire mieux connaître, à tirer de l'oubli les merveilles que produisit jadis son antique civilisation, à recueillir de précieux matériaux pour la reconstitution de son histoire, et en un mot, à attirer l'attention des savants, des artistes, et de toute la France éclairer sur un pays français, appelé sans doute à un grand avenir* [author's italics] [...]. Le but de l'excursion aux ruines Khmers est, avant tout, de recueillir pour les envoyer plus tard dans les musées de France, le plus grand nombre possible de sculptures, objets d'art, moulages de bas reliefs, reproductions d'inscriptions, et autre échantillons artistiques et archéologiques choisis dans les monuments explorés.⁸

In the year 1873, when the impressive publication *Voyage d'exploration en Indo-Chine* was finally published, the first really comprehensive French mission to Angkor took place. The planning, execution, and outcome of this *mission scientifique aux ruines des monuments khmers de l'ancien Cambodge* to collect Angkorian objects for "our national museums" was published in April 1874 by Louis Delaporte (1874: 2516), its restless spiritus rector, in a detailed 6-page report for the *Journal officiel de la République française*. This report was addressed to the main sponsor of the mission, the *ministre de la Marine et des Colonies et au ministre de l'Instruction publique, des Cultes et de Beaux-arts*. Most important, the 1874 report provides us with a detailed list of what we conceptualize as the first massive material translation of Angkor for the French public. Its objects had been, since August 1874, displayed in the small *Musée khmer* in the *palais de Compiègne*, 75 km northwest of Paris. Even though Delaporte's project focused entirely on Angkor, the preparative correspondence shows that his argumentative strategy to finance this undertaking was quite similar to the political and commercial goals of the Doudart de Lagrée–Garnier mission in 1866–1868. In an undated 7-page letter, Delaporte scrutinised

8. Louis Delaporte to Marie Jules Dupré, gouverneur de Cochinchine, Saigon, 14 July 1873 (ANOM INDO GGI 11795 – Mission Delaporte 1873–1882).

the “usefulness of an explorative mission to the basin of Tongkin and its neighbouring regions”. He referred to the Tonkin-Yunnan area as “rich in carbon”, and to the importance of the “Yang-se-king route for the European trading goods” (he mentioned the earlier Mekong mission as a reference), as well as to the goal to “make our merchants aware of these regions’ products and industries”. He deemed the future results to be highly relevant to the parallel inquiries of the “geographical societies in London and Berlin” and the “commercial networks [already] established by German and American agents”. As a concluding remark, he calculated that a year would be needed for this mission, with costs totalling F 30 000.⁹ In an earlier letter from 1873 to Admiral Dupré – who was at that time *gouverneur de la Cochinchine* and had high ambitions to incorporate the province of Tonkin into the French colonies in Indochina where Garnier had just died on the battlefields after capturing Hanoi – Delaporte listed his efforts to finance his mission. He mentioned his unsuccessful approaches to other ministries, and formulated his idea “to make plaster casts and to obtain original specimens [*échantillons*] of the Khmer ruins by permission of the Cambodian king [...] to be sent back to France where they would easily find the best places within the collections of the Louvre”.¹⁰ As a major political player in the French-colonial project and also co-sponsor of the 1873 publication, the *Société de géographie* was considered one suitable financial partner. Along with the support of the *ministre de la Marine* Admiral Pothuau and its *directeur des colonies* Baron Benoist d’Azy, Delaporte’s major politico-cultural liaison was with the *direction des beaux-arts* under the *ministre de l’Instruction publique, des Cultes et des Beaux-arts* Jules Simon. This *direction* was the Third Republic’s newly installed institution to oversee art and art production for the state under its first director Charles Blanc. Delaporte was granted F 10 000 to “gather, during [his] stay in Cambodia, statues, bas-reliefs, columns and other architectural elements and sculptures of archaeological and art historical interest, and to deliver them to a French outpost, from where these fragments would be transported to France by boats of the state”.¹¹ On 20 May 1873, well equipped with art works as gifts for the Cambodian king and his mandarins, Delaporte left France on his *mission d’exploration du Tonkin* to Cochinchine, where he arrived five weeks later. On arrival in Saigon, several letters to Governor Dupré, dating up to mid-July 1873, confirm Delaporte’s efforts to obtain suitable personnel for his project; by that time it focused entirely on Angkor, along with a diplomatic side-visit to the Cambodian king in Phnom Penh with the help of Jean Moura (*lieutenant de vaisseau* and French *Représentant du protectorat du Cambodge* in Phnom Penh). With a patriotic undercurrent in his 1873 letter, dated conspicuously on Bastille Day (14 July) (compare quotation above), Delaporte placed his archaeological mission right in the ideological centre of the French-colonial *mission civilisatrice*. According to Delaporte, the funds provided by the Beaux-Arts directorate would help to salvage the marvels of the ancient Khmer civilisation which had entirely sunk into oblivion; to reconstitute its history by the collection of precious materials; and to attract the attention of the savants, artists, and all France to “shed light on this French country with a grand future”. As regards the process of material translation, Delaporte’s aim of collecting “the largest possible number of sculptures, art objects, plaster casts of

9. Louis Delaporte, “Utilité d’un voyage d’exploration du bassin de Tongkin et des régions”, 7 p., undated letter (ANOM INDO GGI 11795).

10. Delaporte to Dupré, Paris, 3 January 1873 (ANOM INDO GGI 11795).

11. *Chef du bureau des beaux-arts* Alexandre to Delaporte, Paris 12 May 1873 (ANOM INDO GGI 11795).

bas-reliefs, reproductions of inscriptions, and other artistic and archaeological specimens”¹² never distinguished between original objects or their substitutions; the choice between original or copied *échantillons* for France depended apparently on their translatability with regard to size, weight, transport, and infrastructure. Nor did Delaporte care about the legal ownership of these Angkorian properties, which were *not* placed within “a French country” until 1907; they were on Siamese territory at this time, as he mentioned himself :

Le 13 septembre, nous arrivâmes à Angkor Tom. Je trouvai la mission installée dans une grande case en bambous construite à notre intention au milieu du groupe des ruines [...]. La province d’Angkor fait partie du royaume de Siam ; nos rapports avec les mandarins de cette nouvelle contrée devaient être différents de ceux que nous avions entretenus avec les mandarins du Cambodge. Déjà, lors de son passage à Siem Reap, chef-lieu de la province, M. Bouillet avait eu une entrevue avec le gouverneur. *Ce mandarin s’était montré très effrayé de notre arrivée et avait déclaré que des ordres permanents du roi de Siam s’opposaient à l’enlèvement de statues ou sculptures des monuments d’Angkor. Ces ordres nous étaient connus d’avance. M. Bouillet avait donc rassuré le mandarin en lui disant que nous désirions seulement visiter et étudier les ruines, recueillir des inscriptions et prendre des moulages de sculptures et de bas-reliefs* [author’s italics]. Pour aplanir les difficultés de ce côté, j’envoyai prendre à bord de la canonnière mouillée à l’embouchure de la rivière des cadeaux que j’offris au gouverneur, et il consentit, en échange, à nous fournir les guides et les hommes dont nous avons besoin.

Delaporte’s report in the *Journal officiel* listed all the major participants in the sixty-man expedition who were collected on one gun- and one steamboat. These included Félix Gaspard Faraut, *conducteur des ponts et chaussées* and special assistant for the excursion to the ruins, together with three mechanics from the navy to draw architectural plans; the engineer-hydrograph Bouillet; the civil engineer and geologist Ratte; the naturalist Jullien from the Natural History Museum in Paris; the naturalist and navy medical doctor Jules Harmand; a dozen sea- and militiamen; three interpreters; and, last but not least, the *capitaine d’infanterie de Marine* Auguste Filoz as a specialist for moulding. The mission brought with them lifting jacks, saws, levers for the “manœuvres of the stones”, and “plaster and cement” for the moulds (Delaporte 1874: 2516). As a starting point for his report, Delaporte repeated the typical colonial narrative of the Khmer temples sites: as remarkable artworks, they had been destroyed by war, abandoned for centuries, left in a state of disintegration, and were deserted, ignored, and even feared by the indigenous population, who viewed the sites with “superstitious terror”; and, finally, they were covered by a devastating layer of vegetation, and it was only with an “axe in the hand” that one could reach the temples.

The collection of “20 carriages” full of original pieces from the temples of “Beng Mealea and Préacan” on the Cambodian side was under the care of Faraut, the “detachment of the sculptured surfaces from big stone blocks required”, in the middle of trees and liana and under the conditions of constant bad weather, “a slow and exhausting use of the saw [sic!]”

12. Delaporte to Dupré, Saigon 14 July 1873 (ANOM INDO GGI 11795). The sites (from “Compong Svai to Lovéc, Préacan, Mélea, from Pnom Culen to Angkor-Wat, Angkor-Thom and the surrounding temples like Pnom Crom to Ko Ker”), and the personnel were mentioned in the letters dated to 5, 14, and 17 July.

(Delaporte 1874: 2546).¹³ Is this account evidence of Delaporte’s forceful detachment of original temple material? In a letter from “Mealea” to Dupré dated 2 September and later depicted in his 1880-publication *Voyage au Cambodge*, he described how seventy to eighty Cambodians helped with the excavations; some objects were cut into pieces with stone saws, fourteen ox carts were needed to bring the original giant statue of the Preah Khan to the neighboring village of Stung, and rafts of bamboo sticks were used to transport smaller objects from the Preah Khan temple on the small river (Fig. 13a).¹⁴ After Delaporte and Ratte’s return from Phnom Bok temple, the mission arrived in Angkor Thom on 13 September 1873. Since they were on controlled Siamese territory, the major obstacle was yet to be cleared out of the way (or silently bypassed): as Delaporte indicated (see the original quotation above), the Siamese mandarin in the nearby village of Siem Reap was “shocked” by the arrival of the French mission and strictly “prohibited any removal of statues and sculptures from the Angkor site” (Delaporte 1874: 2546–2547). To appease him, Delaporte had loads of wood delivered for the Siamese king’s intended palace nearby.¹⁵ Although his staff silently continued to remove originals from the site, he assured the official that they were just making moulds and plaster casts. Besides visits to almost all the known sites in the Angkor area and the execution of scale drawings, detailed indications, and photographs from the Bayon, Jullien also made a test-series of moulds from the bas-reliefs of the Bayon and the head of the famous statue of the Leper King. Filoz was installed at Angkor Wat. However, owing to the limited resources (the mission’s stock of plaster and cement had been completely decimated by the constant rain), the options for a massive material translation were limited. As reconfirmed in a *dépêche télégraphique* sent at the beginning of October, Delaporte was preparing to remove one large sculptural ensemble of thirty big stones with two giants and a balustrade (today on display in the Musée Guimet in Paris), from a “locally abandoned monument” (he referred to the Preah Khan), for a future “great effect in Paris”.¹⁶ But the local governor refused to help with the transportation. Étienne Aymonier was called from Phnom Penh to provide letters of recommendation and to request Moura to provide suitable junks and diesel oil. Additionally, almost all the mission’s participants fell severely ill, and Delaporte returned to Phnom Penh and Saigon. Filoz was left behind for his month-long undertaking of the moulding of the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat. However, the transportation of the largest objects caused considerable problems and parts of the famous Naga balustrade fell into the lake. This might have been the reason why Delaporte executed a copy of another head from the balustrade in a plaster cast to complete his display within the ethnographic show in the Trocadéro during the 1878 Universal Exhibition (Baptiste 2013, Falser 2013b). Delaporte reported this incident, along with his strategy of bribing the local officials, in an unofficial *Note complémentaire*:

J’ai réservé pour cette note supplémentaire certains détails intéressant particulièrement la Direction des Beaux-Arts, mais qu’il me semblerait utile de ne pas

13. Delaporte’s need of “some stone saws, which could not be found or fabricated on site” was even telegraphed to Phnom Penh and Saigon. (*Dépêche télégraphique*, 30 August 1873, ANOM INDO GGI 11795).

14. Delaporte to Dupré, Méalea 2 Septembre 1873 (ANOM INDO GGI 11795).

15. Delaporte to Dupré, Méalea 2 Septembre 1873 (ANOM INDO GGI 11795).

16. Moura to Dupré, *Dépêche télégraphique* Phnom Penh 2 Octobre 1873 (ANOM INDO GGI 11795). In a letter of 12 October, Delaporte reported that one junk had sunk in the lake on its way to Phnom Penh.

livrer à la publicité. Je n'ai pas parlé dans mon rapport des sculptures rapportées des monuments d'Angkor. Le gouvernement siamois, éclairé sur leur valeur, s'est jusqu'à présent montré jaloux de leur conservation et n'a permis à personne d'en rien enlever. Cependant, grâce à quelques cadeaux distribués au Gouverneur de la province et à ses mandarins, il nous a été possible de nous procurer plusieurs morceaux intéressants [...]. Dans une excursion aux magnifiques ruines de PraKane, tout près d'Angkor-Tôm, nous découvrîmes quatre chaussées semblables à celles qui existaient jadis à Angkor-Tôm, bordées de géants supportant d'énormes dragons. En arrivant à la chaussée orientale, je fus frappé de l'effet imposant d'un groupe de deux géants dont l'un, à cinq têtes, tient entre ses dix bras les neuf têtes du dragon. Un seul morceau manquait à ce groupe. Bien qu'un peu fruste et très détérioré par le temps et par le contact des arbres, il me parut si remarquable que je résolus de faire tous mes efforts pour le rapporter en France. Avec des peines inouïes nous réussîmes à faire transporter les trente lourdes pierres dont il était composé jusqu'au bord de la rivière, à plus de cinq kilomètres de distance. Le Gouverneur, qui nous avait d'abord promis des barques, voyant une masse si considérable fut effrayé et refusa de nous la laisser enlever. J'envoyai immédiatement la chaloupe à vapeur chercher d'autres barques à Phnôm Penh. Le jour où elles arrivèrent le Mandarin avait enfin consenti à nous fournir dix pirogues avec lesquelles nous transportâmes nos blocs jusqu'au lac. Ils furent alors chargés moitié à bord de la canonnière, moitié sur les barques arrivées de Phnôm Penh. J'étais alors dans un tel état de maladie que je ne pus les surveiller pendant la traversée. La barque qui contenait les neuf têtes du dragon se remplit d'eau par un gros temps et coula dans le lac. Un radeau apportant de Pracan un grand lion dressé sur ses pattes de derrière, pièce très belle et très rare, fut aussi abandonné par les indigènes à l'embouchure de la rivière de Stung. [...] Enfin, dans les parties les plus ignorées du groupe d'Angkor où nous avons pu pénétrer, nous avons vu des statues d'une beauté supérieure à celles qui sont plus connues, et d'autres précieux morceaux de sculpture. Si la France veut faire plus tard de nouvelles acquisitions, elle aura la libre disposition de ce qui appartient au Cambodge. Le roi de Siam, actuellement sous le coup d'une revendication par la France de la province d'Angkor et des autres provinces cambodgiennes qu'il occupe, ne refuserait peut-être pas l'autorisation de recueillir des objets d'art à Angkor, si la demande lui en était directement adressée par le Gouvernement français. Dans cet état de choses et pour éviter de donner l'éveil à d'autres gouvernements, j'ai trouvé préférable de ne pas parler dans mon rapport des sculptures recueillies sur la province d'Angkor. [author's italics]¹⁷

With the help of Aymonier, the original objects and moulds were transported on several smaller skiffs to the larger boats of the mission, which reached Saigon on 13 October. Jean Moura in Phnom Penh was charged with retrieving the original sculptures that had been removed but left behind in Angkor, and Delaporte decided to cancel the second part of the mission to Tonking owing to his bad health and “the latest political status in this country”. Taking the next available *paquebot* for France, he left Ratte and Jullien in Saigon to wrap up “our sculptures” (Delaporte 1874: 2547) and to load them on the state carrier *Aveyron* for transport to France.

Never before in modern history had such a massive material translation of the Cambodian temple sites to the European continent been attempted. Delaporte closed his 1874 report,

17. Letter of Delaporte to the Direction des Beaux-Arts, CP/F/21/4489/3a. I am grateful to Julie Philippe, who wrote her *thèse* on Delaporte's missions (Philippe 2011), for this information.

listing the “results of the mission”, with the following six points: 1) the “acquisition” of about seventy original sculptures and architectural fragments, the most important of which were a group of two crouching giants, several Buddha statues, and architectural fragments of pilasters, columns, capitals, doors, windows, cornices, sculpture bases etc.; b) a moulding of the head of the famous Leper King and of a large fragment of the bas-reliefs of the Bayon temple; 3) thirty-four moulded panels of the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat, forty-five mouldings from other temples, including Préacan; 4) the new discovery of more than ten ruins; 5) plans, drawings, and photographs of twenty remarkable ruins; and 6) a collection of inscriptions around Angkor Wat. However, the final paragraph of this report to the minister recalls Delaporte’s vision of an “installation of the artistic collection resulting from [this] mission” to the once-powerful Angkorian region – at this moment still on Siamese territory, but in Delaporte’s view a “region whose destiny was to be bound to France” (Delaporte 1874: 2548). Back in France, Delaporte expressed his patriotic civilising vision of surveying the “unexplored regions of central Indochina”, including the “ancient Cambodian provinces”. These “were just recently abandoned to Siam but today energetically reclaimed by King Norodom and, by the Cambodian heart of their inhabitants, their race, and language, determined to come back to France [*redevenir françaises*]” (Delaporte 1875: 200). In 1877, Delaporte published a thirty-four-page description of his mission to Angkor in the *Revue des deux mondes*. Concerning Angkor Wat, he mentioned “one village and several monasteries, pilgrims, and monks” and the “dull superstition of the modern populations” on the site (Delaporte 1877: 451–452), but he focused primarily on the heroic French mission against the resistant Siamese, the dense vegetation, the heat, pouring rain, and health problems to gather original and copied specimens from the forgotten ruins of Angkor in Cambodia, which had finally “entered the domain of science for archaeologists, language scholars, Indianists and Sinologists”. In short, they had created “a scientific edifice in Indochina to rival what English Indianists had patiently created in their grand Asian colony” (Delaporte 1877: 455). This missionary undertone was again heard in his 1880 publication *Voyage au Cambodge*, and it once again proved the great *political* importance of plaster casts from Angkor to the foundation of the French *mission civilisatrice* in Indochina – an aspect most often ignored by French (art) historiography.

As a precious first-hand source of this project at Angkor, the notes of Auguste Filoz were published in 1889 and counterbalanced Delaporte’s master narrative. More importantly, this publication provides one of the most detailed accounts of the exhausting process of the moulding work at Angkor Wat, and a rare account of the real voices – the monks – at this lively and far from abandoned temple site of Angkor Wat (Filoz 1889: 71–72, 73, 75):

Je crains bien que les haines provoquées par la mission Delaporte ne retombent sur nous. Je mets aussitôt mon uniforme, et me rends, avec deux annamites, chez le chef des bonzes. Informé de notre arrivée, ce personnage, qui est, dit-on, parent du roi de Siam, vient nous recevoir à l’entrée de sa case et me fait assoir à ses côtés. Notre démarche semble le flatter. Cependant il cause avec animation et se plaint, dit l’interprète, de la mission Delaporte, qui a enlevé des idoles et pillé le pays. Il ajoute que le mieux pour nous est de partir au plus vite. Je réponds, sans me troubler, que la mission a toujours agi avec l’assentiment de l’autorité et payé ce qu’on lui a fourni. Notre hôte réplique, non sans quelque amertume, que M. Delaporte n’est jamais venu le voir. Aussi, je me félicite de ma visite et j’essaie de faire comprendre au chef des bonzes que nos travaux

sont bien plutôt utiles que nuisibles, puisque nous nettoions et réparons les sculptures, au lieu de les dégrader. Son ton se radoucit ; [...] Un groupe de bonzes se dirige vers nous. Le chef de la bonzerie ouvre la marche ; il vient nous rendre notre visite. [...] On voudrait aussi savoir à quoi peuvent servir mes travaux. Les moules en creux ne disent rien. Je fais étendre une couche de ciment sur le sol; puis, je verse de l'huile sur une des empreintes que j'applique sur le ciment. Cette série de démonstrations produit le meilleur effet. J'apprends, enfin, à ces messieurs que, grâce à des missions comme celle de M. Delaporte, la France possède, pour servir à l'instruction de ses enfants et à l'histoire du génie de l'homme, des spécimens de l'œuvre de tous les peuples, qu'elle conserve dans de splendides palais. 'Y a-t-il donc ailleurs des monuments aussi beaux que les nôtres ?' me fait demander l'un des bonzes. Je lui réponds, en toute sincérité, qu'il y en a peu – 'C'est que, ajoute-t-il, nos monuments sont l'œuvre, non pas des hommes, mais des anges.' [author's italics]

Auguste Filoz, *Capitaine, Chevalier de la légion d'honneur, officier d'Académie, membre de la société des Orientalistes*, (as he was announced in the book title), reached Angkor when Delaporte's mission (according to Filoz comprising 150 participants in total!) had already installed their tents inside Angkor Thom near the Bayon temple (Fig. 13b). In his travel notes, Filoz consecrated an entire eighty-page section entitled *Séjour aux ruines* to his work on the mouldings. Delaporte and his colleagues – at this point all severely ill – left the site in twenty-seven ox carts and Filoz was left behind with three Annamites and one soldier. These installed themselves right next to the monastery with its "one hundred pretty constructions [my emphasis] by the monks and their servants" inside the compound of Angkor Wat. What one comes to understand (see quote above) in reading this account is that Delaporte was quite detested by the monks for having "looted" [sic!] Angkorian temple sites and "the whole country" and had "never even contacted the chief monk" at the largest monastery of the region – a disrespectful and unthinkable oversight in the eyes of the local culture. At this point, in an attempt to explain the copying nature of the moulding technique, Filoz defended Delaporte and his own mission to bring some *spécimens* to the French public. A unique feature of Filoz's report is that the voices of the local monks are heard through their questions about "the other" and their own explanations of the divine status of their temple, "built not by human beings but by angels" (Filoz 1889: 75). Filoz judged that large parts of the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat were too fragile to withstand the use of cement for his mouldings, and proposed (however only in theory) the use of a kind of moistened papier-mâché. As he mentioned himself, his more than forty "carton-pâte"-moulds (Chinese paper and glue) of "the beautiful bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat" were only a second choice to "spare his limited stock of cement" (Filoz 1889: 86). These moulds were destroyed by humidity and insects. Filoz's report is also a document of his personal struggle during this moulding (*qua* translation) project. He was ill, attacked by mosquitos and suffering from the penetrating smell of bat guano, and his hands were burning from working with the cement (a procedure which also caused considerable damage to the original surfaces of the temple!¹⁸). He even fell from a scaffold in the northern gallery and was constantly observed by helpful but vigilant monks. Relief came with a three-day cremation ceremony at the site and, best of all, with the

18. I am grateful for the information provided by the British stone conservator Simon Warrack at Angkor Wat. According to his observations, it seems obvious that large parts of the famous apsarās, bas-reliefs, and tympana of Angkor Wat were damaged during these cement mouldings.

unexpected visit and a “shared bottle of Bordeaux” with his “good old friend Etienne Aymonier from Phnom Penh” (Filoz 1889: 76–78), who was working at the same time on the first Cambodian dictionary. After these first trials, Filoz’s successful moulds were executed with several layers of cement under a thin coating of coconut oil, and comprised various parts of the galleries of Angkor Wat, the temples of Bayon, and Phnom Krom in Siemreap province, and of Preah Khan in Kompong Svay province. On 30 October 1873, after thirty-six days, Filoz and his three colleagues left Angkor Wat for Siem Reap with eight ox carts. This removal was not without incident, for the monks were very angry that they could not check Filoz’s “considerable harvest”; the group also had a serious accident on the way, owing to a tiger attack during which damage was inflicted on “a considerable part of the moulds” (Filoz 1889: 109). Back in Phnom Penh, Filoz showed his mouldings to Moura and Aymonier and was even presented to the Cambodian king Norodom I – just before his planned return to Angkor: “this time with appropriate material, indispensable provisions and tools” (Filoz 1889: 162).

In December 1873, with Delaporte’s report in his hands, Charles Blanc, the *directeur des beaux-arts*, pledged his support with another F 1000 for Félix Faraut’s return to the Angkorian region to finish his work. This was “evidently of an interest of the first order, as much for the general history of the Asian civilisations as for the special history of fine arts”.¹⁹ As *conducteur des ponts et chaussées en mission scientifique dans royaume Siam*, Faraut was responsible for visiting Khmer temples in the Battambang-Siem Reap region and for drawing detailed plans and elevations from the Delaporte mission, but he had to return in June 1874 for health reasons.²⁰ Around the turn of the year 1873/74, 102 boxes containing moulds and original objects from the Delaporte-Filoz-mission (such as elements of the Naga balustrade) arrived in Paris via the colonial port of Marseille.²¹ To Delaporte’s surprise, the Louvre museum refused this cultural harvest from Angkor, which remained unpacked in the courtyard of the museum for several weeks to suffer from the harsh winter climate.²²

The Musée khmer in Compiègne

Correspondence between the *directeur des beaux-arts* under the *ministère de l’Instruction publique* and the *ministère des Travaux publics* indicates that the idea of installing the objects from Delaporte’s mission in the *Palais national de Compiègne* some 75 kms northeast of Paris was already gaining vigour in February 1874. This was close to the castle of Pierrefonds, which was at that time undergoing the idealistic reconstruction work of the architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (Delaporte’s later competitor in obtaining

19. Blanc to Dupré, Palais Royal, 6 December 1873 (ANOM INDO GGI 11795).

20. In a letter from Saigon dated 9 June 1874 written to the *directeur de l’Intérieur* under the new *gouverneur de la Cochinchine* Charles Le Myre de Vilers, Faraut summed up his mission (ANOM INDO GGI 11796 – Mission Faraut: Exploration d’Angkor, 1874–1882).

21. A six-page inventory, *Etat du contenu des caisses renfermant les objets rapportés par la mission du Cambodge dirigée par Mr le lieutenant de vaisseau Delaporte pendant les mois de juillet, août, septembre, octobre 1873*, contains a detailed list of all items (AMN Z4 – Arrivée des objets apportés par Louis Delaporte du Cambodge).

22. In a letter dated 27 January 1874, from the secretary general of the *Musées nationaux* to the director of fine arts, the objects were judged to be valuable exhibits, but the limited space in the Louvre was a problem (CP/F/21/4489, quoted in Baptiste & Zéphir 2008: 14).

exhibition space in the Trocadéro Palace); both sites were conceived “to attract visitors”. Indeed, it may have been the proximity of the collection to his own restoration project that had occasioned Viollet-le-Duc’s visit to Delaporte’s museum and formed his pejorative view of Khmer art.²³ However, a note dated to the same month suggested that Delaporte’s findings might be displayed in the *Exposition permanente des colonies* in the *palais de l’Industrie* before their journey to Compiègne.²⁴ Delaporte was in contact with the state architect Joseph-Auguste Lafollye, who was charged with adapting the palais for a transcultural exhibition *parcours* (Figs. 14a,b), including the plaster casts from Mexico from the mission of Léon Méhedin. The large and rectangular vestibule (*salle dite des colonnes*) was reserved for Delaporte’s “musée d’antiquités orientales”. In the upper level, Lafollye also planned the exhibition space of the *salle de fêtes*, which held a few canvases removed from the Louvre. He intended to re-use vitrines that had become available after the existing collection of the *musée Gallo-Romain* had been moved to St. Germain for the duration of the refurbishment.²⁵

In April 1874, seventeen other boxes of moulds from Angkor arrived. These were ‘re-translated’ in Paris into 600 kg plaster casts and shipped by water to Compiègne, where they were unwrapped in the presence of Delaporte in mid-May 1874. Finally, on 18 August 1874, the first *Musée khmer* on the European continent was inaugurated by the *directeur des Beaux-Arts* Charles-Philippe de Chennevières-Pointel. An undated guide, called *Une visite au Palais de Compiègne, au musée Cambodgien, au musée Gallo-Romain et dans les galeries de tableaux suivie d’une promenade dans le parc*, may count as the earliest popular account of Delaporte’s installations (Fig. 15a) (Dubois n.d.: 9–20). After a short, rather glorifying introduction to Delaporte’s first mission to Angkor, the different exhibits were introduced (see description below). However, for Delaporte, this event was just one transitional point in his larger vision, that shone through his letters to de Chennevières-Pointel just a day before the opening. Delaporte thanked him for his coming visit, but asked at the same time for six more months to finalise his architectural drawings. Formulated “from the point of view of historical and archaeological studies”, he did not find the original objects displayed, but rather the plaster casts to be “the most interesting parts” of his collection. These would, together with detailed drawings, “permit an entire reconstitution of the most remarkable monuments of Khmer architecture”.²⁶ Delaporte’s final goal was not to follow the current fragmentary aesthetics of singular, relatively small-scale originals on pedestals, as tested in his newly finished museum and depicted in the eleven-page entry on *Khmer (Art)* in Ernest Bosc’s important *Dictionnaire raisonné* (Bosc 1879: 24–35) (Fig. 15b,c) and in rare photographs. What Delaporte aimed for was a picturesque overall ensemble of originals and (undistinguishable) plaster casts around three-dimensionally reconstituted temple architectures – a display mode which had, in fact, already been tested in Alexandre Lenoir’s *musée des Monuments français* around 1800, and which Delaporte knew from London’s South Kensington Museum

23. In the conclusion of Viollet-le-Duc’s 1875 publication *Histoire de l’habitation humaine* (also covering central Asia, Buddhist India, and the Far East), the staged voice of an “Architect” judged Khmer art, after visiting the “palais de Compiègne”, to be an “art of decadence” and the Angkorian ruins “insignificant” leftovers in the middle of the vast Asian continent (Viollet-le-Duc 1875: 356, 357).

24. These early letters date from 25 February 1874 (CP/F/21/4490 – palais de Compiègne, 1874–1879).

25. Lafollye to Chennevières, Compiègne 10 March 1874 (*Installation d’un musée d’antiquité orientales au palais de Compiègne*); and the director of public buildings to the minister of public instruction, Versailles, 26 March 1874 (CP/F/21/4490).

26. Delaporte to Chennevières, Paris 17 August 1874 (CP/F/21/4490).

(Falser 2013c). In a letter dated 1 February 1875, Delaporte listed architectural drawings of fifty-two Khmer temples that would help him to reconstitute the primary Khmer temples – as large as those from Egypt and “as delicately ornamented as our buildings from the Renaissance” – and to “revive them as they were in their epoch of splendour. A thousand details of their charming sculptures could be used by our arts and our modern industry, as much as the reconstitutions of their ensembles would be a veritable revelation”. In this aspect, Delaporte came quite close to the approach of the applied art industry that we have discussed above.

At this point, his collection already comprised eighty original pieces, 120 plaster casts, and fifty photographs.²⁷ In 1875, the Comte de Croizier, president of the *Société académique indo-chinoise de France*, of which Delaporte was also a member, published his book *L'art khmer*, which comprised an architectural study of the old monuments of Cambodia, a list of all explored sites, and, most importantly, the first *catalogue raisonné du Musée khmer de Compiègne*. This catalogue (Fig. 16) proved that Delaporte's understanding of a correct representation of Khmer art was not strictly bound to the notion of ‘original and authentic art objects’ that would dominate the museum landscape from the *fin de siècle* onwards. It contained altogether 204 entries with twenty-two statues, ten animal-like architectural decorations (including the previously mentioned giant Naga sculpture with a dimension of 3,5 x 4 m), fifteen steles, thirty-nine architectural objects and objects in reliefs (Fig. 17), seventy-eight plaster casts with mostly larger decorative panels and bas-reliefs, four inscriptions, and fifty rubbings (*estampes*) (Croizier 1875: 91–139). What Delaporte actually aimed at, and what was already identifiable in this first catalogue (compare Cœdès 1910), was a comprehensive set of almost all the representative architectural elements of the classical period of Angkor. In the years to come, and on subsequent missions, his collection of pilasters, columns, balusters, friezes, cornices, and lintels would serve as a kind of ‘cracked generic code’ of Khmer temple architecture and as a basis for all the hybrid re-assemblings in his own *musée Indo-chinois* (Guérinet n.d., Falser 2013c) and in universal and colonial exhibitions until 1937 (Falser 2011).

Concluding remarks

If the 12th-century Cambodian temple Angkor Wat staged during the *Exposition coloniale internationale* of 1931 in Paris was probably the largest architectural reconstitution of a non-European structure ever built on the European continent, and has counted since then as an architectural masterpiece in the canon of (Occidental) art historiography, the beginnings of its French career in the 1860s and early 1870s underwent curious and, until today, quite unknown developmental stages. To shed light on these earliest circumstances of a physical ‘translation’ of Angkor's temple architecture for the European public was the general aim of this paper.

The physical career of Angkor Wat in France started in 1867. As mentioned in a small footnote in a belated mission report in 1873 – and as colonial historiography has it wrongly until today –, the first casts from Angkor were supposedly made as a mere cultural by-product of a French scientific mission between 1866 and 1868 to explore the commercial navigability of the Mekong River into Southern China. In reality, they had been made some few months earlier, in April 1866, as part of a hasty attempt by the Saigon-based French-colonial commander, negotiator, and later mission leader Doudart

27. Delaporte to the *directeur général des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, 1 February 1874 (CP/F/21/4490).

de Lagrée to compensate the inability of France to depict Angkor in the very first official photographs before its major European rival for Siamese soil (and this included until 1907 the territory of Angkor proper), namely the British, for whom the Scotsman John Thomson had photographed Angkor in early 1866 for his publication in 1867. Used as an ad-hoc recording technique and politically contested translation method to physically represent Angkor in Europe within the colonial competition in Southeast Asia, Doudart de Lagrée's sulphur and cement casts from Angkor Wat, together with original sculptures and ethnographical specimens, were sent from Saigon to Paris in extremely time-consuming and logistically difficult conditions. Only a few survived the journey to the French capital.

The casts themselves were, without the controlling influence of their *in situ* makers, embedded into the Universal Exhibition's classifying system which aimed to define and represent the civilising levels of all nations on the planet from the hegemonic perspective of the exhibition makers. Because of the ambiguous status of the casts – as specimens of a high but extinct civilisation; being from a supposedly degenerate country, yet a colonial part of the progressive French *grande nation*; being displayed inside the dominant French section of the 1867 Exhibition, but only at its peripheral colonial section; representing the world's most astonishing temple art, but as mere copies or substitutes – their embedding within the Exhibition's rigid classification of ten groups with ninety-five classes was a complex undertaking. Within the polysemy of all objects inside a double entry-system of both national/regional and thematic affiliation, the plaster casts from Angkor landed not in a section of original fine art from the *métropole* or low-tech ethnographic art from the colonies, but in group II/class 8 of high-tech products of state-of-the-art mechanical reproduction methods of art, including chromolithography, photosculpture, and galvanoplasty. In contrast to their later valuation as authentic decorative elements attached to hybrid pavilion architectures *à la angkoriennne*, the Angkor casts landed in a truly elementary section of the 1867 Universal Exhibition, even if their display might have been perceived by the French public in a similar way to that of all the other exotic “idols of the Champs de Mars” (Fig. 18). Advocates of industrial art or industrial applied arts underlined, with recurring reference to the educational mission of the London-based South Kensington Museum (the greatest reference for Delaporte's museological concept), the role of low-cost replicas of renowned art works within the general framework of social progress, egalitarian ideas and practices, and a radical reform of public taste. As had been agreed by the signing by the leading European nation-states of the *Convention of universal reproductions of artworks* during the Paris event of 1867, plaster casts were considered a powerful medium to display (appropriately) all cultural heritages, from all times, from all over the world (including the colonial Orient), simultaneously in different free-access and permanent (Occidental) museum spaces. The casts from Angkor had been part of this project from the very first. They migrated before and after the 1867 Exhibition to the *palais de l'Industrie*, the main building of the 1855 Universal Exhibition, with its *Musée permanent des colonies*. Whereas the *Union centrale des Beaux-Arts appliqués à l'Industrie* in the same building organised exhibitions to foster the appreciation of mechanically reproduced art, such as plaster casts, as valuable objects *sui generis* (a quality which has also been rediscovered today), and extend their approach into the domains of cultural heritage in general and oriental art in particular, the casts from Angkor were now embedded – next to the commerce-oriented exhibition of indigenous industries and lifelike imitations of the ‘noble savage’ – into a new scientific display mode to represent and hierarchize the colonial world: ethnography.

If Doudart de Lagrée's first casts from Angkor in Paris went unnoticed at the 1867 Paris Universal Exhibition, then Delaporte's specific Angkor mission in 1873 counts as what we have conceptualized as the first massive material translation of Angkor for the French motherland. Still embedded in a rhetoric of colonial conquest – the project was termed mission explorative du Tonkin and co-sponsored by the expansionist *Société de géographie* – his aim was, firstly, to salvage the archaeological marvels of the forgotten antiquity of Angkor in a land of a nowadays 'totally ignorant' population, and, secondly, to reconstitute the history of what he already termed a French country in the form of an effective public exhibition *parcours* in Paris. As we have been able to reconstruct from internal correspondence and official reports, the naval captain, gifted draughtsman and ardent dilettante in Khmer arts, Louis Delaporte, hardly distinguished between original artefacts and their substitutions (*échantillons*) in plaster casts. Their translatability (or transferability in the case of originals) between Angkor and France totally bypassed effective property rights on site (Angkor was still on Siamese territory and the local governor strictly forbade any removal of original objects), for one thing, and, for another, seemed to have simply depended on the size and weight of the desired stones within the ad-hoc transport infrastructure available. If Delaporte's popular reports in the *Revue des deux mondes* (1877), as well as his monograph *Voyage au Cambodge* (1880), helped to establish and stabilize the French-colonial heroic master narrative of 'Lost and rediscovered Angkor' to the present day, it was counterbalanced by the intimate report by his collaborating *moulage*-maker Auguste Filoz. Here, the tiring individual moulding (translation) work at Angkor Wat was described, the moulding technique with its destructive effect for the original stone surfaces noticed, and, not least, the critical voices of the monks from the one-hundred-hut-monastery of Angkor Wat with their remarks on Delaporte's disrespectful behaviour and his pillaging of the country heard. All of this combined insinuated what we have extrapolated as the earliest stage of a colonial procedure to convert the active Buddhist monastery of Angkor Wat on site into a dead re-Hinduicized ruin, and, back home, into an "archaeologized object" (Falser & Juneja 2013) of colonial longing, Occidental science (compare Falser 2013a), and voyeuristic exploitation.

However, when more than one hundred boxes of originals and mouldings from Angkor arrived in Paris, the Louvre Museum refused the Greek gift, and Delaporte had to set it all up in the *Palais national de Compiègne* near Paris, as the first version of a *Musée khmer* on French soil. Delaporte's museum, with a classical objects-on-a-pedestal attitude, opened in August 1874, without any differentiation of originals and *moulages*. Its Khmer exhibits were snobbishly repudiated as primitive and decadent art by Viollet-le-Duc, who certainly visited Compiègne during his restoration work on nearby Pierrefonds castle, and (in fact quite rightly) anticipated, in Delaporte's ambitious plans for an Indochinese museum in Paris, a direct (Oriental) rivalry to his idea of a (Occidental) *musée de Sculpture comparée*. At this point in time, Delaporte's first mission to Angkor to acquire a comprehensive set of all representative architectural elements of the classical period of Angkor had initiated what we have called a 'cracking of the generic code' of Khmer temple architecture. Together with his four additional plaster cast missions to Angkor up to 1900 (Fig. 19), Delaporte established an indispensable aesthetic and material source for his upcoming *musée Indo-chinois* (Fig. 20) and, more importantly, for all the outdoor pavilion-like reconstitutions *à la angkoriennne* to come in the next universal and colonial exhibitions in France (Falser forthcoming).

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Fig. 1: Angkor Wat representing the *palais de l'Indochine* in the International Colonial Exhibition of 1931 in Paris; in the foreground, Maréchal Lyautey with his British guests (Source: Roger Violet Paris).



Fig. 3a: The view from the central passageway towards the inner temple of Angkor Wat in an 1866 Gsell photograph (Source: Gsell 1866).



Fig. 3b: The view from the central passageway towards the inner temple of Angkor Wat in the 1873 Garnier publication, transcribed into a woodcut from the 1866 Gsell photograph (Source: Garnier 1873, vol. I, p. 45).



Fig. 4: Wooden houses of the active monastery on the compound of Angkor Wat in an 1866 photograph by Gsell (Source: Gsell 1866).



Fig. 5: Locals in the passageway of Angkor Wat as depicted by Delaporte in the 1873 Garnier publication (Source: Garnier 1873, vol. I, plate VI).



Fig. 6a: A photograph by Gsell of the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat (1866) (Source: Musée Guimet).



Fig. 6b: The photograph by Gsell translated into a woodcut depiction in Garnier's 1873 publication (Source: Garnier 1873, vol. I, p. 49).



Fig. 7: Angkor Wat, taken by John Thomson in 1866, published in his 1867 book *The antiquities of Cambodia – a series of photographs taken on the spot, with letterpress descriptions* (Source: St. Andrews Library, UK).



Fig. 8: Aerial drawing of the Champs de Mars of the 1867 Universal Exhibition in Paris (Source: Archives nationales, CP/F/12/11884/1).



Fig. 10a: A depiction of the French colonial section in the 1867 Universal Exhibition (Source: *Exposition de 1867 illustrée*, vol. II, 11 novembre 1867, p. 385).



Fig. 10b: A depiction of the display of the “Indes françaises” in the French colonial section of the 1867 Universal Exhibition (Source: *Exposition de 1867 illustrée*, vol. II, 23 septembre 1867, p. 172).



Fig. 11: palais de l'Industrie (Source: *palais de l'Industrie 1855-1875*, introduction).



Fig. 12: Book cover of the *Guide de visiteur au Musée oriental* inside the *Exposition des Beaux-Arts appliqués à l'Industrie* (Source: *Guide du visiteur au Musée oriental*, Paris, 1869, cover).



Fig. 13a: Depiction of Delaporte's 1873 mission to Angkor (Source: Delaporte 1880, p. 367, 13).



Fig. 13b: Photograph of the staff of Delaporte's 1873 (or Fournereau's 1888) mission to Angkor (Source: Musée Guimet).

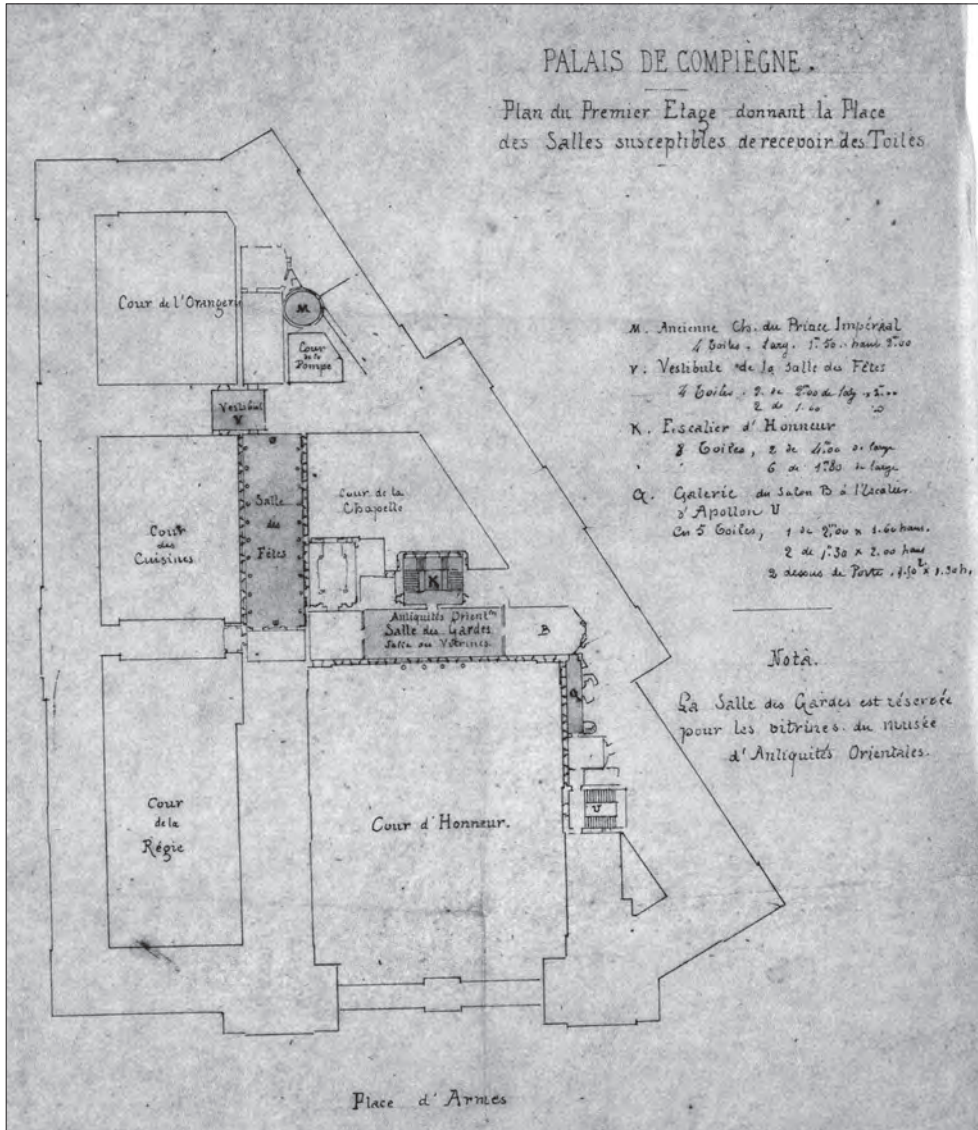


Fig. 14a

Figs. 14a,b: Plans of the *château de Compiègne* with the *Musée khmer*
(Source: Archives nationales, CP/F/21/4490).

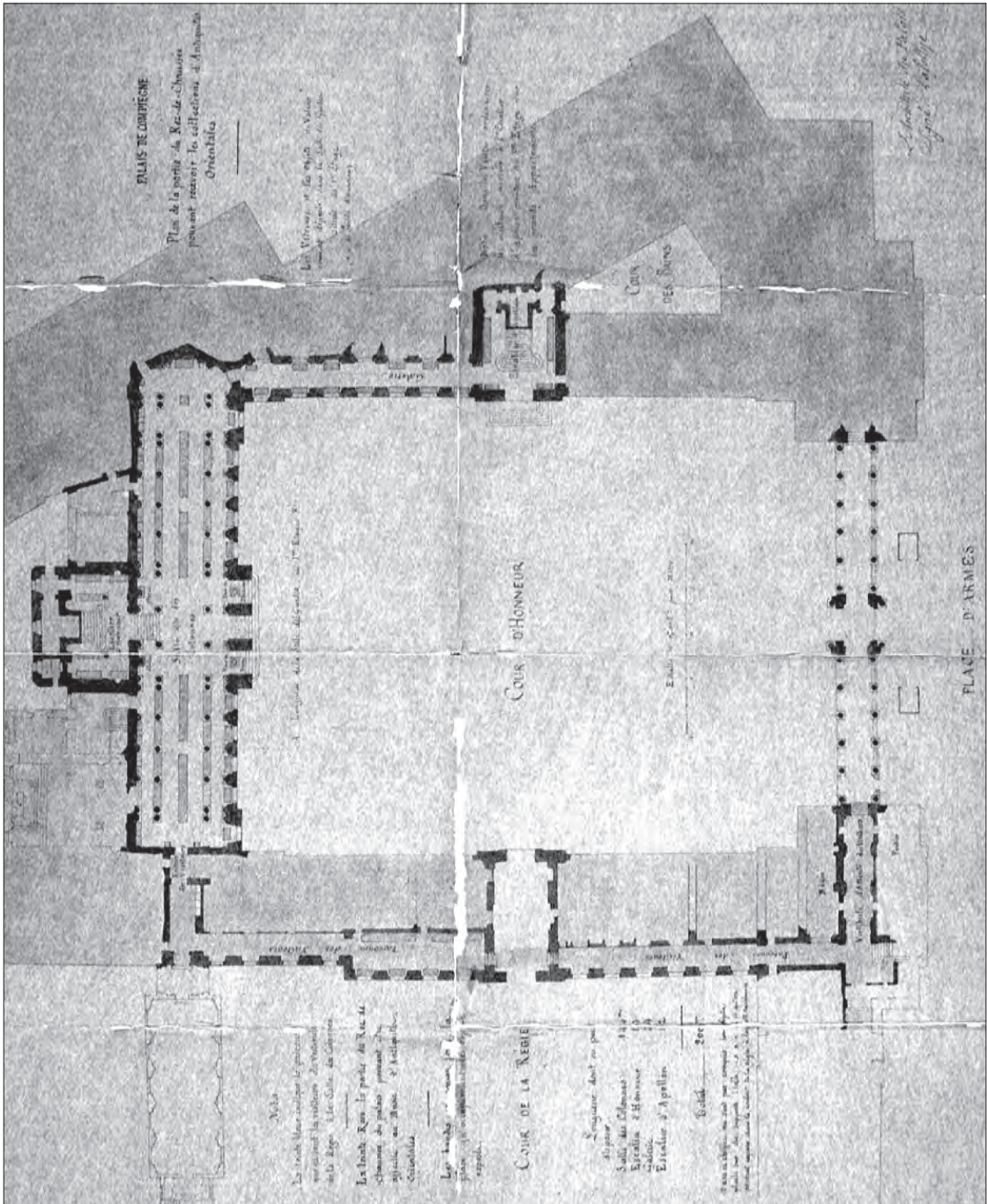


Fig. 14b (see caption on previous page)



Fig. 15a: Title page of the undated guide book *Une visite au Palais de Compiègne, au musée Cambodgien* (...), with a view towards the interior main façade (Source: Dubois n.d., inner cover).

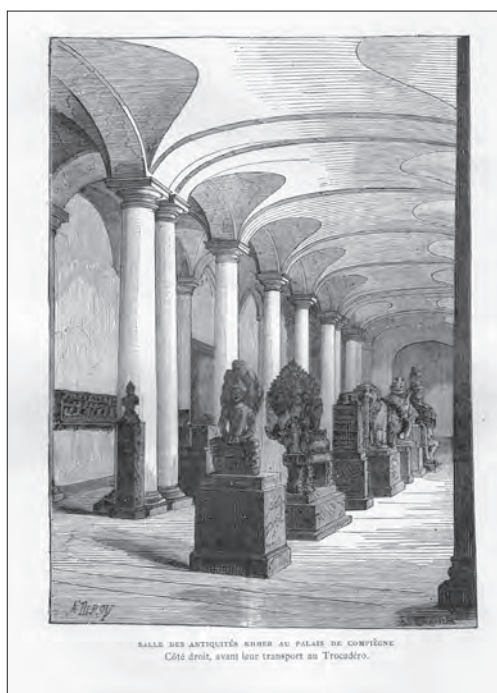


Fig. 15b: Inside the *Musée khmer* in Compiègne (Source: Émile Soldi, *Les arts méconnus*, Paris, 1881, p. 274).

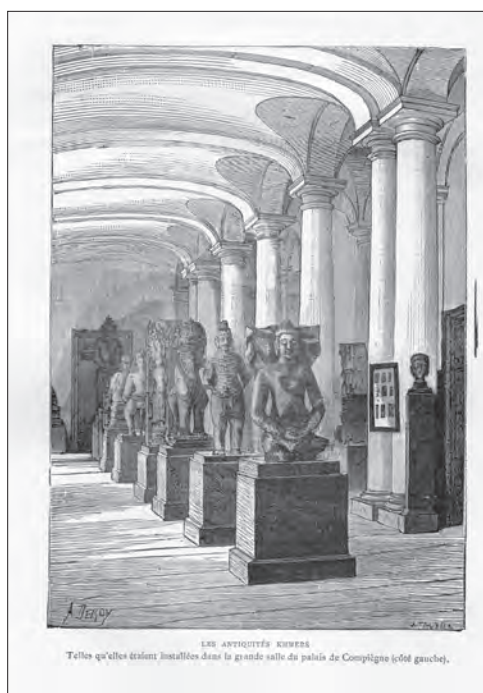


Fig. 15c: Inside the *Musée khmer* in Compiègne (Source: Émile Soldi, *Les arts méconnus*, Paris, 1881, p. 308).



Fig. 16▲▲: Title page of Croizier's 1875 catalogue of the *Musée khmer* in Compiègne (Source: Croizier 1875, title page).

Fig. 17▲: Depiction of a decorative lintel in Croizier's catalogue of the *Musée khmer*: plaster cast or original? (Croizier 1875, p. 80).

Fig. 18◀: *Les idoles au Champ de Mars* by Kreutzberger about the 1867 Universal Exhibition (Source: *Exposition de 1867 illustrée*, vol. II, p. 219).



Fig. 19: Depiction of Delaporte (or Fournereau?) during his mission to Angkor in 1874 (or 1888?) (Source: Musée Guimet).



Fig. 20: Different reconstitutions in Delaporte's *Musée indo-chinois* of the *palais du Trocadéro* (around 1900) as depicted on a postcard series of the neighbouring *musée de Sculpture comparée* (Source: private archive Emmanuelle Polack).

