THE SOURCES OF KHMER /œə/

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern Khmer</th>
<th>Old Khmer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/iː/ &lt; i, ī, e, ya</td>
<td>/iː/ &lt; i, ī, e, ya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/i/ &lt; e</td>
<td>/i/ &lt; e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/œː/ &lt; e</td>
<td>/œː/ &lt; e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/œ/ &lt; e, u, a(i)</td>
<td>/œ/ &lt; e, u, a(i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/eː/ &lt; e, ya</td>
<td>/eː/ &lt; e, ya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/ &lt; e, u</td>
<td>/e/ &lt; e, u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/œː/ &lt; ā</td>
<td>/œː/ &lt; ā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/œː/ &lt; e</td>
<td>/œː/ &lt; e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


²Vowels marked off by slants are phonological; those given in italics are orthographic.
§2 In the dictionary of Jacob\(^3\) we find twenty-six forms containing /əə/. Whatever the possible total number of such forms might be, we may reasonably assume that these twenty-six are of relatively common occurrence.

1. ƙwəŋ v. go around.
2. ƙdəŋ n. mortar with pestle.
3. ƙbəŋ n. tile.
4. ƙwəŋ n. raised edging around house...
5. ƙwəŋ" n. equipment, set of utensils...
6. ƙwəŋ v. making steady progress...
7. ƙuŋ v. perplexed.
8. ƙuŋ v. believe.
9. ƙuŋ v. increase.
10. ƙumən n. belief.
11. ƙumən v. take a roll-call...
12. ƙən n. dwarf.
13. ƙən v. urge, exhort, prod, press for an answer.
14. ƙən v. = ƙən.
15. ƙən v. be tired physically or mentally...
16. ƙən v. fresh, light (of colour).
17. ƙoŋ v. = ƙọŋ.
18. ƙuŋ n. friends, close associates.
19. ƙuŋ n. story, matter, event, play.
20. ƙuŋ-ƙuŋ(k) n. battle-field..., stage...
21. ƙuŋ-ƙoŋ v. often, frequently.
22. ƙuŋ v. yellow.
23. ƙuŋ v. quick.
24. ƙwə n. speed.
25. ƙwə n. limp...
26. ƙwə n. bold.

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

27. (kda:) ƙə n. hard-boarded bed.
28. ƙwək v. ask for something importantly.
29. ƙwək n. ruler, measure; stick used as weapon.
30. ƙwək v. make go aground.
31. ƙwən n. floating weeds in marsh...
32. ƙwən n. albino.
33. ƙəkən n. plant name.
34. ƙoŋ n. provincial governor (obsolete).
35. ƙwə v. almost the same.
36. ƙə v. shrink (morally).


\(^4\) /əə/ and /əə/ are the same vowels, /ə/ being used to distinguishing contrasting orthographies.
37. លំហ-លំ n. fame.
38. លំហ v. skin very carefully.
39. ស្លោក v. be depressed.
40. ស្លា v. half-drunk.

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

1. កំណ. Source uncertain.

2. កាយ. Cf. Thai krà?داول 'a stamp mill'. Note that the Thai form has mai ek. Thai loans from Khmer usually have no tone marks. Khmer កាយ may therefore have been borrowed from Thai krà?داول and reduced to its present form.

3. កំណ. Cf. Thai krà? dbname 'a tile used for roofs, floors or walls', with mai tho.

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

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

6. ក្រាន. Source uncertain.

7. ផ្លោះ. Cf. Thai ផ្លោះ (ŋɔ:i) 'slow, tardy, sluggish', which has mai ek.

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


10. កំ្ពុ្. Derivative of កំ្ by infixation of /-្ម-/. Derivatives of loanwords are not rare in Khmer.

11. កំ្ពុ្. Source uncertain. This form is used as a noun corresponding to កំ្; e.g., វើក្ម រ្ស្ឋ.ng ប្ណ៍ កំ្ពុ្ សុុុ th 'he studies hard but makes no progress'. It may be a derivative of កំ្, though the infixation of /-្ម-/ is not found elsewhere.

12. ទុុុ. Source uncertain.

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


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

16, 17. ផុុុុ, ផុុុុ. Source uncertain.

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


20. កុុុ-រុុុ(k). Cf. Sanskrit ra para nga 'battlefield'. We
have no other examples of the change Sanskrit /a/ > modern Khmer /ǝ/, however.


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

23. លៀត. Source uncertain, but cf. Vietnamese lượn 'to fly like an arrow'.

24. បេសាល. Derivative of លៀត by inflexion of /-b-/ (see item 10).

25. ល្ិោជ. Source uncertain.


30. ប័រក្រែង. Derivative of ក្រែង (item 1) by prefixation of /ប-/.

31. បំណ. Source uncertain.

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

33. ម៉ែក្រមៈ (orthography: ម៉ិក្រមៈ). Cf. Thai มหา 'name of same plant as in Khmer'. The divergence of the orthography from the pronunciation of the Khmer form can by accounted for only by assuming that it is still written as it was once in Thai and that it was formerly pronounced as in Thai as well. Following voiced initials, Old Khmer */a/ before ??, k, ញ/ is
reflected by /ɛə/. 6

34. cau-μώρη. Cf. Thai cau-μώρη 'governor of a μώρη', < cau 'lord, prince', with mai ek, + μώρη 'land, domain, country; territorial division, city-state'.

35. rəλə. Source uncertain.

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


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


40. sμεη. Source uncertain, but possibly a derivative of item 26.

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

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