

شمس CHAM

CULTURE & HISTORY STORY
OF CAMBODIA

R Killean, R Hickey, L Moffett, D Viejo-Rose
Farina So, Vannara Orn
Documentation Center of Cambodia

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FARINA SO, VANNARA ORN - DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA

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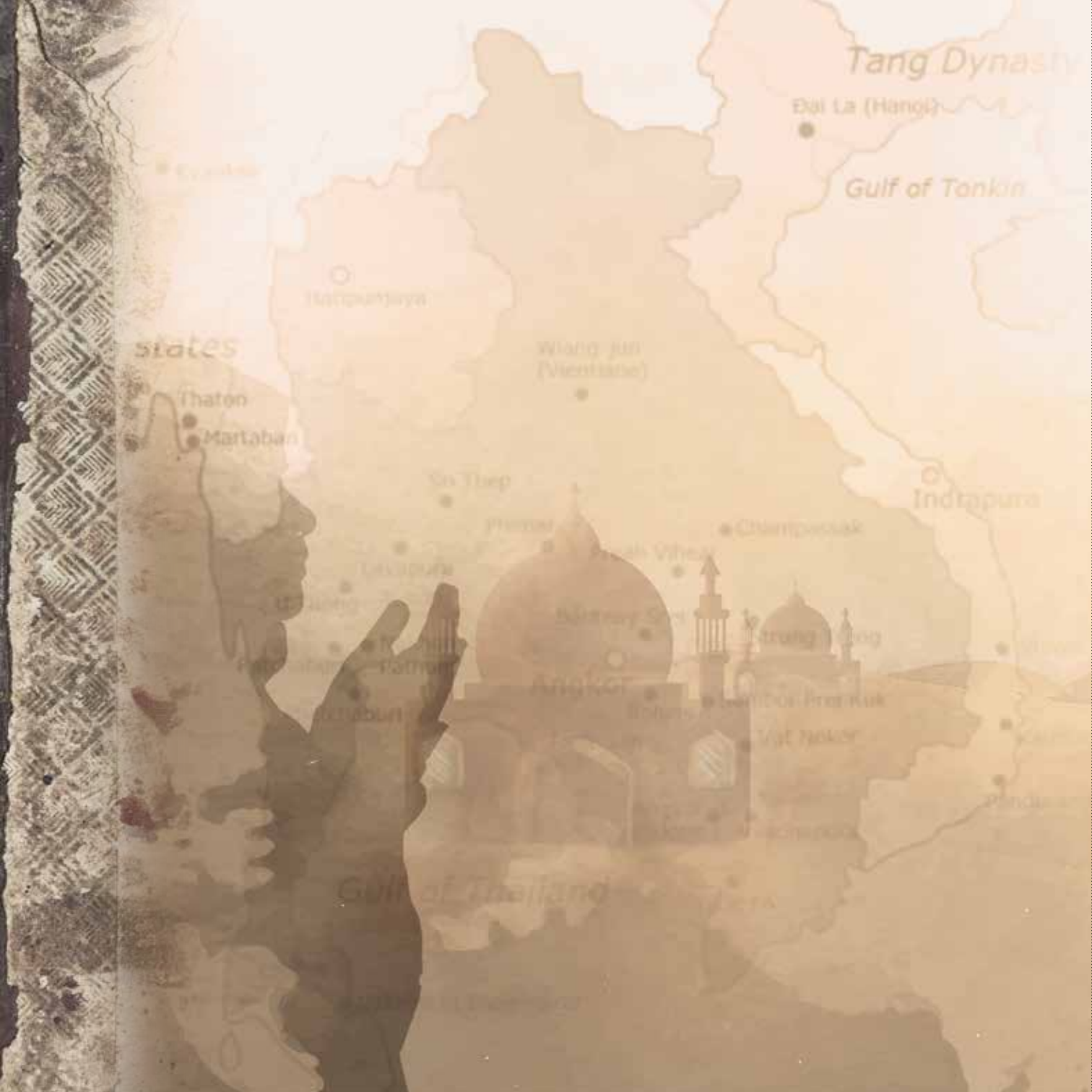
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Tang Dynasty

Dai La (Hanoi)

Gulf of Tonkin

Hatchin Jaya

states

Ihaton

Martaban

Wiang Jun
(Vientiane)

Su Thiep

Indrapura

Champrusak

Prumot

Angkor Vihara

Luxapura

Angkor Wat

Angkor Wat

Angkor

Angkor Wat

Vat Phnom

Gulf of Thailand

INTRODUCTION

The destruction of cultural property during times of conflict can amount to a war crime, a crime against humanity or genocide. cultural property can include land, buildings, monuments, artistic works and other objects of 'great importance to the cultural heritage of every people'.¹ International law also protects things that are not physical, such as language, performance and religious practices.² Culture is very important to humanity and to future generations. Its destruction makes our world less diverse and interesting. However, it is clear that communities are the most directly affected by attacks on their cultural property, which can harm their connection to their history and identity.

In 2017, a group of researchers from Queen's University Belfast came to Cambodia to work with the Documentation Center of Cambodia. They came to learn about the Cham people of Cambodia, and to hear about their experiences during and after the Khmer Rouge regime. The project, which is called 'Restoring Cultural Property and Communities after Conflict', aimed to understand how the Cham were impacted by attacks on their culture and to learn about their lives after the Khmer Rouge regime. It also aimed to find out how the attacks on Cham culture could be repaired.

Over two weeks in March 2017 the team travelled around Cambodia, conducting interviews and focus groups with some 75 members of the Cham communities in Phnom Penh, Kandal province, Kampong Chhnang, and Kampong Cham. The team spoke with a range of voices in the Cham community to learn about Cham identity, history and cultural practices. They visited a number of Cham mosques and madrassas, meeting with religious and community leaders. They also held focus groups with other members of the communities, including women and youths.

One of the things that was often said to the team was that there was a need for more books and materials to tell the story of the Cham's history and culture. Many people who survived the Khmer Rouge regime wanted their children and grandchildren to understand what happened to them during the regime. To help with this, and to say thank you to the communities who shared their stories, the team have created this report. It is not a complete history of the Cham, but the team hopes it can be useful for people who would like to know more about what happened to the Cham community. The report combines what the team learned about the Cham during their background research, and the stories that were shared with them while they were in Cambodia.



ABOUT THE BOOK COVER

KITAB (*a holy book of Qu'ran*)

~

I would like to send a brief letter about the conservation and history of Kitab books to Haji and give it to Farina [So]. I met her and she asked me to write a letter about the story behind these two holy books, about how I hid them during the Khmer Rouge regime and protected them until now. She told me that she was also a relative of Haji as well, so she asked me to leave this letter with her.

My name is Sou Lai Abdullah called (Sou Sman), I live in Kampong Pil village, Wat Ta Min commune, Sengke district, Battambang province. I preserve the Kitab, namely Sirilsalinkin, which was buried underground, bound with a thick rope, and a skirt (Sarong) and covered in plastic next to a river called Au Srolao. It is located in Au Srolao village, Wat Ta Min commune, Sengke district, Battambang province. I buried a lot of Kitabs, they were damaged as they were close to a river, so there are only these two big ones remaining. I knew that water would flood the Kitabs, but I could not bring them in the house because if the Khmer Rouge saw them, our lives would be in danger. Sirilsalinkin describes a journey toward AkeiRatt, which means that it follows Allah's words and describes Kitab Tasfa (peace of mind). There are two chapters in these Kitab: Part 1: called (Mahamat) the describes the law of Allah on giving and committing good deeds. Part 2: called (Maamalat) explains how to do business without exploiting other people. Part 3: called (Mahalakat) explains how to achieve peace of mind and physical health. Part 4: called (Monachiyat) explains religious practice and mediation.

Former Islamic leader Sou Lai Man was living in Kampong Pil village (called Au-Kcheay). I would like to pay my respects to Mr. Haji Samrith Tor.

~

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WHO ARE THE CHAM?

Where do the Cham come from?

The Cham are thought to be the descendants of the Sa Huynh, an ancient people who travelled from the Malay Archipelago to the coast of what is now Vietnam some time before 600 BC.³ It is likely that they moved in order to establish ports from which to trade between Malay Archipelago and China, as well as with the Annamite Highlands.⁴

The Cham established the Kingdom of Champa (also known as Linyi by the Chinese) in the 2nd Century.⁵ This Kingdom stretched along the coast from the centre to the south of Vietnam⁶ and was divided into several regions, including Quang-nam, which was considered the Cham holy land, Amaravati in the North, Vijaya, Kauthara, Indrapura and Panduranga in the South.⁷ Champa was mostly known for its international trade, particularly in ceramics, and its connections to major seaports.⁸

The Cham spoke an Austronesian language that originated from the Pacific area of the world.⁹ They had a distinct art and culture,¹⁰ which was influenced by the location of Champa in between two significant historic Asian civilisations: India



Map of Southeast Asia circa 900 CE,
Champa shown in yellow.

1 Champa Sculpture, held in the Vietnam National Museum of Fine Arts

2 Cham script, Po Klong Garai Temple



Photo: Belfast team

and China. Champa also built close relationships with Southeast Asian states and with the islands in what is now Indonesia.¹¹ As a result, the rich arts of Champa demonstrated a variety of cultural influences.¹² Variance in culture, customs and religious practices also existed between the different regions.

These influences were reflected in the type of inscriptions the Cham sculptors carved into their temples, which had a distinctive Cham style, and included images of Cham jewellery, textiles and calligraphy. Cham art can also be found in the Museum of Cham Sculpture, in Hải Châu District, Đà Nẵng, central Vietnam, and in the Guimet museum in Paris. Vietnamese literature on the Cham places heavy emphasis on the historical cultural importance of the Cham civilisation.¹³

The Cham were fishermen, rice cultivators, farmers and the builders of temples.¹⁴ Their temples and their architecture also had a distinctive style, which usually featured brick towers. This was different from the approach of the Khmer people, who tended to use stone. The remains of their religious monuments can be found in Vietnam and Cambodia to this day. Examples include Mi-Son and Po Nagar, near Nha Trang, and Po Klong Garai, near Phan Rang. The 6th century Cham temple of Mi-Son is the oldest architectural monument in Southeast Asia, and demonstrates how the Cham were greatly influenced by Hinduism and Indian culture. Sadly, many Cham monuments and works of art have been damaged by the wars of the 20th century.

1 Po Nagar,
near Nha Trang

2 Po Klong Garai, near
Phan Rang

3 Tháp Po Rome,
Ninh Thuận, Ninh
Phuoc Province



Photos: Belfast team

There are many famous Cham kings in folklore. Che Bong Nga was a king in the Kingdom of Champa from 1360 to 1390. Although he eventually lost his war against the Vietnamese, he is remembered for his numerous triumphant battles¹⁷ and for his diplomatic skills.¹⁸ Perhaps the most famous Cham king is Po Rome, who ruled Champa from 1627 to 1651. He is remembered for being a beloved king, and for building numerous brick tower temples. Po Rome Tower can be found in Ninh Phuoc province in Vietnam, it is still visited by Cham people during festivals and ceremonies. It is thought to be the last tower of the Cham which was made in the brick style.

The Kingdom of Champa faced security threats from both Cambodia and Vietnam. Champa was a rival to the Khmer Kingdom at Angkor and fought several wars against them from the 10th Century onwards. In 1145, under King Suryavarman II, Khmer armies invaded and occupied Champa for several years. However, the Cham developed a large fleet, and in 1177 sailed into Cambodia, pillaging Angkor.¹⁹ This battle and the eventual defeat of the Cham is portrayed at Bayon Temples. King Jayavarman VII later retaliated, killing a Cham king.



4 Bayon Relief of the Khmer going to war against the Cham.

Photo: Belfast team

The growth of Vietnam (Dai Viêt) posed another challenge to the Champa Kingdom. Overpopulation in the north meant the Vietnamese started expanding into neighbouring countries.²⁰ The capital Vijaya was lost to Vietnam in 1471, but this did not immediately lead to the end of Champa, as the royal family moved south into the southern regions.²¹ Over time, the Cham lost political power, as Vietnamese turned Champa into smaller regions and turned the Cham kings into local officials.²² Following the fall of Panduranga, the Kingdom of Champa became part of Vietnam in the 17th Century, although there may have continued to be Cham territory in Vietnam until as late as 1883.²³

There is still a Cham community living in Vietnam. However, many others fled to the isle of Hainan, to the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java and to Cambodia.

When did the Cham come to Cambodia?

It is estimated that Cham people have been in Cambodia since the 11th Century, with many arriving in the 15th Century. Scholars have identified four main stages of migration: in the 13th, 15th, 18th and 19th centuries.²⁴ These migrations usually followed a period of conflict, although smaller numbers of Cham also migrated in between these periods.

The first migration likely followed the fall of Virajaya, and involved Cham travelling by ship up the Mekong Delta, and then along the Bassac River to the Cambodian capital in Udong.



Kingdom of Champa, 1300s.

Photo: Belfast team

The second migration occurred in 1692 and followed the fall of Panduranga. At this time, the Cham monarchy fled to Cambodia and petitioned King Jayatetha III for refuge.²⁵ The King allowed them to settle around Cambodia.²⁶

It is likely that it is during this migration that the Jahed community arrived in Cambodia,²⁷ resulting in the establishment of what is now known as the Imam San community.²⁸ The Jahed were connected to the Champa royal family and the aristocracy of Panduranga, and developed a close attachment to the Khmer Royal family as a result of being allowed to settle in the Ugon area.²⁹

Further migrations occurred in the 18th Century, during a series of further revolts against the Vietnamese,³⁰ and a final migration occurred between 1830 and 1935, following further rebellions and the suppression of Cham religious and cultural practices in Panduranga. This migration included members of the royal family and their supporters.³¹

It should be noted that the Cham community in Cambodia is often also viewed as encompassing another Islamic ethnic group, who have a different history. This group, known as the *Chvea*, may have originated from Javanese and Malaysian communities, and may be descended from unions between Malaysian settlers and Khmer people. They arrived in Cambodia through trade, particularly maritime trade.³² They have been in Cambodia for several centuries; it is estimated that they may have arrived before the 14th century.³³

Despite these differences, the 'ethnic' label of Cham is often used to cover both groups in Cambodia, regardless of their origins.

What Religion do Cham People Practice?

The Cham people have practised many religions over the course of history. Their most ancient beliefs were in an 'Earth Mother' goddess known as Yan Po Nagar.³⁴ The Earth Mother image is an ancient agriculturally oriented one, which connects communities to the land and soil.³⁵ This type of religion is common in ancient agricultural societies.³⁶

After meeting with Indian traders in the 3rd and 4th Centuries, some Cham began to practice Hinduism and Hindu-Buddhism, while others focused on ancestor worship and Cham indigenous beliefs.³⁷ From the 10th century onwards, the Cham began to encounter Muslim traders,³⁸ leading to a slow conversion to Islam amongst the Cham population.³⁹ This conversion probably began amongst the general population, before spreading to Cham leaders in the 15th century. Certainly, there is no record of a Cham Muslim King prior to 1676.⁴⁰ It has been argued that Islam was attractive to the Cham working class because it offered a simple way to connect with God, in comparison to more complex Hindu rituals.⁴¹ It has also been argued that the concept of a Muslim brotherhood hastened conversions, as a way of enhancing trust and therefore trade between different islands and countries.⁴²

While many Cham living in Vietnam continue to practice Hinduism or Buddhism to this day, the majority of Cham in Cambodia now practice Islam. This may be linked to the different responses to the Vietnamese invasion of Champa. It seems that while Hindu and Buddhist Cham sought to be accommodated by the Vietnamese, Muslims were more likely to migrate after Champa's defeat.⁴³ Once in Cambodia, they may have encountered the Chvea communities, contributing further to their conversion.

1 Al-Serkal Mosque in
Phnom Penh

2 Mosque in
Kampong Cham

3 Mosque in Svay Khleang

4 Cham script



Historically, Cham people who lived in the countryside sometimes mixed Islam with their indigenous culture, leading to a type of 'folk Islam'. This combined Islam with animistic elements.⁴⁴ Since the 1970s, the majority of Cham have practiced Sunni Islam, meaning they are orthodox Muslims who follow the Shafi'I school. These members of the Cham community observe the five pillars of Islam: 1) Shahadah, the declaration of faith; 2) solat, the five daily prayers; 3) zakat, the personal



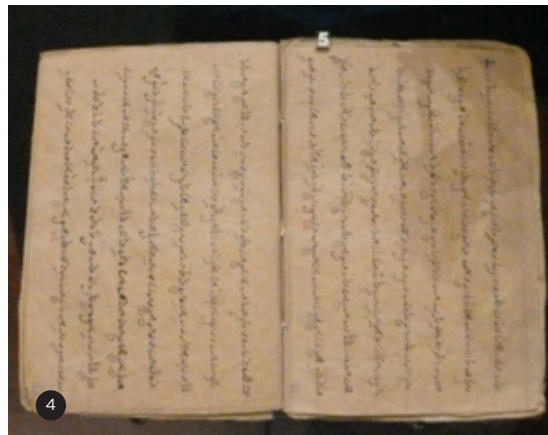
taxes paid during Ramadan and on wealth, and shadaqah, charity; 4) sawm, Ramadan fasting; and 5) haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca (for those with the financial ability).⁴⁵

However, there are other Islamic practices within the Cham community. The Jahed (or Cham Sot) form part of the Imam San community (mentioned above).⁴⁶ Imam San was a Cham who lived in Cambodia in the 19th Century, and who was given land by the Khmer King Ang Duong. The followers of Imam San practice a less orthodox form of Islam, which involves praying on Fridays instead of five times a day, and which does not require pilgrimage to Mecca.⁴⁷ The group also celebrate Imam San's birthday in October, travelling to his temple at Udong's Phnom Katera.

What Language do Cham Speak in Cambodia?

The Cham language comes from a group of languages known as Austronesian, which were historically spoken in the Pacific from Easter Island to Madagascar and from Borneo to Papua. The Cham language is therefore related to many other Asian and Pacific languages. Cham script has the same origins as Khmer and Mon scripts.

Nowadays, Cham in Cambodia speak both a Western Cham dialect, as well as Khmer. Western Cham is distinct from Eastern Cham, which is spoken in central Vietnam.⁴⁸ Some Cham also speak Arabic, and many use Arabic script instead of traditional Sanskrit-derived Cham script when writing in their Cham language. The Jahed/Cam Sot community read and write in classic Sanskrit-derived Cham script.⁴⁹



Photos: Belfast team



THE TREATMENT OF THE CHAM PRIOR TO THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME

Prior to the French Protectorate

Following the largest Cham migration to Cambodia in the 15th Century, the Cham settled in various parts of Cambodia, including Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampot, Pursat, Battambang, Kandal, Phnom Penh, Kampong Thom, and Kratie. The majority of Cham lived along the Mekong River in Kampong Cham Province, but large communities of Cham lived in Kroch Chhmar District and Kang Meas District.⁵⁰ Kroch Chhmar district within Kampong Cham has long been considered the heartland of Cambodia's Cham Muslims. According to legend, it was the first place the Cham people settled after emigrating from Vietnam. Indeed, Kampong Cham means port of the Cham.⁵¹

Many Cham lived in distinct communities, forming separate villages from the Khmer

majority and working as fishermen, butchers, gardeners, farmers, foresters, rubber plantation workers, blacksmiths, traditional herbal sellers/healers, and weavers.⁵² Most Cham practiced small-scale family fishing on the rivers, especially the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers. In more heavily populated areas, the Cham built mosques which served as places of worship, as well as community hubs and centres for Islamic knowledge.

By the time the French arrived in the 19th Century, it appears the Cham enjoyed the same rights as the Khmer people. The first French to arrive in Cambodia commented on the good relations which existed between the Cham and their Khmer neighbours, noting that 'a Muslim population and a Buddhist people [were] living together in almost brotherly relations'.⁵³



During the French Protectorate

In 1863, Norodom signed a treaty acknowledging a French Protectorate over the Kingdom of Cambodia.

During this protectorate (1863 – 1953), Cham people were not very involved in political or administrative life, and little is recorded about the role they played within the Kingdom. It is possible this is due to their resistance to French schools, which may have been seen as a threat to their Muslim faith. Without the required diplomas, Cham found it harder to engage in the administrative and political life of the country and were denied opportunities for social and economic advancement.⁵⁴

In 1874 the French carried out a census of their protectorate and found that 3% of the population were Cham.⁵⁵ However, it must be noted that the French often referred to the Cham as ‘Malays’, misunderstanding their ethnic origin.⁵⁶ This may have had an impact on how the Cham appear

in historical documents from this time, as little distinction was made between different groups of Muslims.⁵⁷ The French at one point considered identifying the Cham and Malay as ‘foreigners’ who might be threatened by the Khmer majority, but dismissed the idea as most of the Cham and Malay population had not been born abroad, and Cham and Malay individuals had served in the Cambodian government. Thus, they were considered a minority, but not foreign.⁵⁸

While the Cham may not have had close links with the French, they appear to have had a good relationship with the monarchy. For example, a Cham man named Haji Osman Paung or Sulaiman was a close friend of King Monivong and was made royal representative for the Cham throughout the country. The King named him Boteh Chang-wang, or Jang-vang Ba-ror-tes, meaning foreign director.⁵⁹ The Cham also developed links with Muslims from other countries, particularly within the Malay peninsula, and developed centres for Islamic study.⁶⁰



Photo: DC-Cam Archives

King Norodom



FULRO Flag



Photo: DC-Cam Archives

Late General Les Kosem Greets Cham Muslims Leaders in a Cham Village

Following Independence

Once Cambodia had obtained independence, the Cham became known as the Khmer-Islam, meaning their ethnic identity was no longer acknowledged.⁶¹ This was part of a policy put in place by King Norodon Sihanouk, who redefined and expanded the historic term 'Khmer' to include a range of different ethnic identities, such as the 'Khmer Leu' for Highlanders, and 'Khmer Krom' for the Khmer speaking communities in the Mekong delta.⁶² Although

the Cham appear to have embraced this classification, it obscured the differences that existed within the Muslim community, for example between the Chvea, who had a different historical background, and the Cham.⁶³

In the years following independence, the Cham advocated for more social, religious and economic status. In 1964, some Cham joined a grouping called the Front Unifié de lutes des Races Opprimées (FULRO), which advocated for greater autonomy and independence for

minority groups, including the Montagnard and Khmer Krom peoples. The Cham group was placed under the leadership of Les Kasem (or Po Nagar), who had previously established a Champa Liberation Front in the 1950s, and who held a prominent position in Khmer political and military circles. The Khmer government largely supported FULRO, even encouraging FULRO to seek independence for minority peoples at an Indochinese People's Conference in Phnom Penh in 1965.

During the Khmer Republic

By the time General Lon Nol toppled the monarchy in 1970, approximately 200,000 Cham lived in Cambodia, compared to approximately 60,000 who still lived on their historic territory in Vietnam.⁶⁴ This made them the largest indigenous minority living in Cambodia.⁶⁵

The difference in religion meant there was some distance between Cham and Khmer communities, and some Cham reported feeling discriminated against. Some Khmer people believed that the Cham could practice black magic and would go to them for spells or predictions of the future.⁶⁶ However, it seems that the relationship between Cham people and Khmer people was generally positive, particularly in rural communities.⁶⁷

Politically and militarily, the Cham had a good relationship with the Republic, with a number of Cham people rising to political prominence. Les Kasem was given command of a Cham army battalion, who became notorious for their destruction of Khmer Rouge villages, and who eventually had to be reassigned to other units due to their brutal reputation.⁶⁸ Politically, five Cham were elected as members of parliament (one to the senate and four to congress).⁶⁹

Lon Nol continued to support the creation of a Cham state, who would be allies of the Khmer Republic against the Vietnamese.⁷⁰ In 1971, the Khmer Republic officially drew a new map which acknowledged Champa as a state and welcomed a delegation from the newly proclaimed state to Phnom Penh. Lon Nol's support to the Cham can be linked to his anti-Vietnamese sentiments; his regime was characterised by the expulsion and massacre of many thousands of Vietnamese civilians, as well as attempts to unite other minority groups.⁷¹ It is therefore probably that he was using the Cham community to pursue his own goals.⁷²

Regardless if the motivation, the attempt to revive the state of Champa was very short lived and ended with the arrival of the Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh in 1975. At this time there were approximately 250,000 Cham living in Cambodia.⁷³



Khmer Rouge fighters in
Phnom Penh, 17 April 1975

LIFE UNDER THE KHMER ROUGE

The Khmer Rouge

The Khmer Rouge came to power in Cambodia on the 17th April 1975.⁷⁴ When they captured Phnom Penh on the 17th April, this marked the beginning of the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) era, during which the Khmer Rouge attempted to create a 'New Cambodia' based on farming and communism.⁷⁵

The Khmer Rouge made people leave their homes and march into the countryside.⁷⁶ When they arrived there they were forced to work.⁷⁷ Families were split up; ⁷⁸ parents were separated from their children and husbands and wives from each other.⁷⁹ Some people were forced to marry strangers.

Money, markets, normal schools, private property, public transportation, foreign clothing, religious practices, and traditional cultural practices were all forbidden.⁸⁰ Communication with people outside Cambodia was not allowed. Journalists and reporters were sent away, planes stopped travelling in and out of Cambodia, and people were not allowed to cross the border.⁸¹

The Cambodian people lived in fear of being tortured and killed for being a traitor. The Khmer Rouge targeted intellectuals, city residents, Buddhist monks, minority people such as the Cham, Vietnamese and Khmer Krom, 'treacherous' members of the Khmer Rouge, and anyone else considered an enemy.⁸² Over the course of three years, eight months and twenty days at least 1.7 million people are believed to have died, either through murder, or through starvation, exhaustion and disease.⁸³

Attacks on Cham Culture

Although the Democratic Kampuchea Constitution stated that: "Every one of the people has the right to believe in faith or religion and has the right not to believe as well," it also made clear that "Reactionary religions that damage Democratic Kampuchea and the Kampuchean people are absolutely forbidden." The Khmer Rouge made their approach to religion clear on 20 May 1975 when they held a conference in Phnom Penh and decided to "Eliminate religions, as they are all reactionary."⁸⁴

Cham people, like people of other religions, were therefore not allowed to practice their religion or culture and were forced to do things that were forbidden by their religion.⁸⁵ Cham scholar Farina So has identified several policies which were used to target the Cham. The first policy was killing religious leaders, Islamic teachers, and those who challenged the revolution. Two Cham Islamic leaders who were interviewed for this project recalled that:

It is very important to know that the grand Mufti was born here, and then he was based here, and, so talking about religious, people or leaders, he represented the highest. He was, when the Khmer Rouge banned religion, he still tried to practice religion, especially prayer, and when the Khmer Rouge found him, he was killed. Even his two deputies were also found practicing or praying, and then, later on, were arrested and put at Wat Chakap in Pursat and killed there. To me, it seemed that they targeted the educated or those who knew about Islam.⁸⁶

So, I also feel that you know Khmer Rouge also targeted Hakim and religious teacher. For example, my uncle was the Hakim here, he was evacuated to another place and then he was killed.⁸⁷

Khmer Rouge Dance
Troops posted themselves in
front of a mosque, 1977.



Photo: DC-Cam Archives


The second policy was destroying copies of the Qur'an and other religious books. Religious items such as the keitap (a book teaching Islam and explaining the Qur'an), the sarong and the fez, and the makhma (a prayer garment for women) were confiscated. The Khmer Rouge destroyed or profaned Qu'rans and other Islamic religious books, for example by burning them, throwing them in the river, or using them as toilet paper.⁸⁸ Survivors shared these stories with the research team:

All the cultural properties were destroyed; they burnt the Qur'an, which is the holy object of Islam.⁸⁹

We lost the holy book during the Khmer Rouge regime and we cannot find it.⁹⁰

The third policy was profaning mosques and graves. The Khmer Rouge closed or destroyed mosques or used them for other purposes such as communal dining halls, store houses, or facilities for pigs.⁹¹ For example, one religious leader told us that:

The Mosque was not destroyed but used as a storage, the Khmer Rouge used it as a storage for some kind of construction equipment or construction material like cement and all kinds of things because the Khmer Rouge, of course, were building a dam and they used all those materials to supply the dam.⁹²



The Khmer Rouge also closed Qur'anic schools and forced people to give up their religion and believe in Angkar instead. Cham people considered these policies as an attack on their life and the life of their community. As told to the research team by one Islamic leader:

When the Khmer Rouge destroyed the mosque, it's like they hold our mosque hostage or it's like they arrest our children. I feel suffering. ⁹³

Another policy highlighted by Farina So was of treating minority groups as if they were the same as Khmer. ⁹⁴ The Khmer Rouge banned all ethnic, national, religious, racial or cultural differences. They declared:

There is one Kampuchean revolution. In Kampuchea there is one nation, and one language, the Khmer language. From now on the various nationalities do not exist any longer in Kampuchea. Therefore, individuals must change their names by taking new ones similar to Khmer names. The Cham mentality are abolished. Those who do not abide by this order will reap all consequences. ⁹⁵

This meant that Cham people were forced to do things that were prohibited by their religion. Traditional dress was replaced with the Khmer Rouge black pajamas, and women were forced to cut their hair and were forbidden from covering their head or wearing long dresses. ⁹⁶ The cutting of hair was a particular violation, as Cham culture prized long hair in women as a symbol of morality. ⁹⁷ A number of Cham women spoke to the research time about the suffering they felt at being made to do this:

We also feel really angry because the Khmer Rouge forced us to eat pork and cut our hair. ⁹⁸

We both cried when the Khmer Rouge forced us to cut our hair short. Since we were born we had never cut our hair, so we cried and we suffered. ⁹⁹

Cham people were also forced to eat pork, which was considered very offensive to their religion and culture. As described by one Islamic leader:

Not only did the Khmer Rouge force us to no longer practice our religion but also forced us to do many things which are against Islam. For example, eating pork, it is very serious for me that Khmer Rouge did that to the community. ¹⁰⁰

The Khmer Rouge also attacked Cham traditional modes of living. The Cham were sent to different parts of the country and made to live amongst Khmer, stopping them from living together in groups as was their tradition.¹⁰¹ This prevented them from teaching their children their culture and religion.¹⁰² One Cham woman remembered that:

The other thing is about communication or relationship between families, the Khmer Rouge also cut off or lessened relationship between families, like between parents and children, because they were separated by labour: children unit and adult unit. That's why they were not able to communicate with each other quite often. Also, they dared not to communicate even when they saw each other. That's why it was very hard during that time in term of religious practices and also personal life, like relationship between family members.¹⁰³

A Cham Islamic leader also recounted,

There was forced separation, for example this community before had about 700 families and they were separated and then only one or two families met each other during the evacuation.¹⁰⁴

Women were also forced to marry Khmer men, in an attempt to assimilate them through marriage.¹⁰⁵ Cham were also forced to change their names to Khmer-style names,¹⁰⁶ and their traditional languages were forbidden.¹⁰⁷



Cham Resistance

In some cases, the Cham tried to resist the Khmer Rouge's restrictions on their culture and religion. Some participants told stories about practising their religion secretly or praying in their hearts and minds:

Religion was in our hearts and minds, I sometimes did it secretly, just very little.¹⁰⁸

I just pray from secretly inside my heart.¹⁰⁹

Others carried out sitting-gesture prayers, which would traditionally only have been done by those who were elderly or unwell. However, it allowed the Cham to pray in more discreet ways, keeping their religious practice alive. In some cases, they would secretly perform burial rituals for Cham people who died.¹¹⁰ Some women, despite being forbidden from covering their hair, used their krama headscarf as a replacement.¹¹¹ During Ramadan, some brought their food home, so that they could fast in secret. As noted by Farina So, such acts, although small, 'gave them a very significant connection to their religion and identity.'¹¹² Cham people also tried to pass on their religion and culture to their children. For example, women would attempt to raise their children according to their cultural and religious beliefs and would perform Islamic rituals and give their babies

Muslim names.¹¹³ They would try to keep their children free from unhalal food and attempted to teach their children about their religion and culture as much as possible. However, these types of resistance were very dangerous. Cham people told the research team about members of their family who were nearly killed for praying:

My mother, she almost got killed by the Khmer Rouge because they found her praying secretly.¹¹⁴

My mother tried to hide from the Khmer Rouge but at one point she was found praying. That's why the Khmer Rouge called on her, punishing her and re-educating her because the Khmer Rouge said you were supposed to abandon religion.¹¹⁵

One Islamic leader recalled his uncle being killed for practising his religion:

My uncle was killed by the Khmer Rouge. He was killed very cruelly because the Khmer Rouge used palm leaf in order to kill, also cut his abdomen open, and only [because] he recited the Qu'ran.¹¹⁶

In addition to trying to keep their religion and culture alive, the Cham community also led uprisings on several occasions. These happened in Kroch Chhmar, a district within Kampong Cham province, in the district in Trea village in 1973 and in Koh Phal and Svay Khleang in 1975. Cham scholar Ysa Osman wrote a book about these rebellions, and collected survivors' stories from the Kroch Chhmar district. He noted that tensions between Cham Muslim populations and the Khmer Rouge had been building for years before the rebellions, and that the rebellions are remembered as resistance against the pressure that Khmer Rouge policy placed on Islamic faith and practice.¹¹⁷ The research team met survivors from Svay Khleang, who described it as a response to the Khmer Rouge's policies:

From 1970 to 1975 there was a demonstration by Cham people because they banned our religious practice... We are so angry to the Khmer Rouge so we decided start the rebellion, we cannot stand with the Khmer Rouge because they're always arresting people.¹¹⁸

Although these rebellions were very brave, they were unsuccessful. The Khmer Rouge suppressed the rebellions, and the persecution of the Cham increased for the duration of the regime. From 1977 onwards, the Khmer Rouge's policy escalated to include the intent of destroying the Cham as a group. It is estimated that 130 mosques were destroyed during this period.¹¹⁹ Cham Muslim men were specifically targeted for execution, due to their status as religious leaders and teachers, but also due to their role in a number of rebellions. Religious leaders, village leaders, imams and religious teachers were also specifically targeted, as demonstrated by their extremely low (10%) survival rate.¹²⁰ It is estimated that prior to 1975, Cham comprised approximately 10% of the Cambodian population (roughly 700,000 people).¹²¹ Estimates of how many died during the period range from 100,000 to 500,000 of the 700,000-strong community.¹²² Many of the participants had lost multiple family members, with three participants informing us that they had lost all of their relatives during the regime.¹²³ Because of this attempt to wipe out the Cham, the Khmer Rouge senior leaders Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan are charged with genocide at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia.



Minaret built in the 19th
century, in Svay Khleang,
on the Mekong River


Photo: DC-Cam Archives

AFTER THE KHMER ROUGE

In this section, we discuss what life was like after the Khmer Rouge. Cham communities worked together to rebuild what they could, and to reestablish the kind of life that had been destroyed during the regime. This was a slow process, but the Cham gathered together. Many who had been displaced during the regime made their way back to their village. Conditions were difficult, and Cambodia suffered from ongoing conflict and unrest for many years. There was little food, and building materials were in short supply, as were very ordinary household items like cooking pots. Many mosques had been destroyed, and many religious leaders were killed, but the Cham were free to practice their faith openly again. Very quickly they began to meet together and to build places to meet, and this helped to restore and pass on religious practice. Here we share some of the stories that were told to the research team during our field work. They are stories which reflect the hard work and commitment of the Cham communities to recovering and preserving Cham culture and identity.

“We came back step by step”

It is important to remember that the process of restoring Cham culture and identity took places in the larger context of the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime. Cambodia was a long way from recovery. Rice production had been good in the later years of the Khmer Rouge, but starvation and malnutrition were widespread, and there were shortages of drinking water, electricity, transport, medicines, schools and other essentials.¹²⁴ It was necessary to rebuild almost every aspect of life. For those forced to leave their villages during the Khmer Rouge, this included trying to find their way home. This too was slow. One Cham woman told us:



We came back step by step, first I was in Kampong Thom and after Vietnam liberate the country; we made a carriage for keeping rice and we go with it. Wherever dark, we cooked eat and sleep along the way until they found their community and I arrive the village in 1981. There was nothing remaining, the Khmer Rouge destroyed our properties and houses, the community was covered by the bamboo trees and I did not dare to walk around because it was quiet...First, I start a small business from the empty hand and we don't have even clothes to wear and we almost cannot find a cooking pot to cook rice. That's miserable. Moreover, we want to planted rice and vegetable but we didn't have any resource and strength compare to the society today.¹²⁵

The Vietnamese government organized villagers into *krom samakki* ("solidarity groups"), small groups of 10-15 families which owned their land collectively. Each group retained control over the produce of its land, which created confidence in the system and provided for a return to family living and cooking.¹²⁶ For the Cham, this seems to have been consistent with their previous practice before the Khmer Rouge of living in villages together. In the years that followed the regime, participants from different communities spoke of living collectively, and of rebuilding their homes and communal religious property:

After the regime people lived in a unity group. They took woods from the old houses to build a mosque, this was how they restored back their culture.¹²⁷

We tried to build our life with our bare hands and tried to build a hut and then build a Sorav [small religious building] close by.¹²⁸

Practicing religion again

In these times of very scarce resources, Cham communities very quickly took steps to build mosques and religious buildings. This reminds us that Islam is a very significant part of Cham identity. Indeed, Farina So has argued that in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge, the Cham defined themselves more in terms of their religion than their cultural identity, as they could pass on the knowledge of their religious practice. However, this too was difficult.¹²⁹ It is estimated that 130 mosques were destroyed during the Khmer Rouge period, and in the immediate aftermath very likely there was no place for the community to meet.¹³⁰ Additionally, village leaders, imams and religious teachers had been specifically targeted by the Khmer Rouge – maybe only 10% had survived¹³¹ – so there was a great shortage of religious leaders, and a need to develop capacity in religious training and teaching.

As their religious buildings and documents had been destroyed, the Cham had to share their religious knowledge with each other, explaining what they knew of their religious teachings.¹³² They may not have had any mosque in the village, but prayed in each other's homes or in small buildings erected in their villages:

The first time they teach their children about their religion, they did not have school but just below the house or under the tree.¹³³

It was important for the communities to create spaces to meet to practice their faith. As in previous times the Cham built mosques to serve as places of worship as well as community hubs and centres for Islamic knowledge. One Islamic leader told us:

It doesn't take long time, after the regime we start our practice and building mosques.¹³⁴

The participants we spoke to often reflected on the community's desire to rebuild mosques and to have a place to engage in religious practice, but not necessarily a desire for this rebuilding to be done in a particular way. The communities we spoke with rarely attached particular significance to rebuilding mosques in the style that they had been in before the regime. While two communities had done so,¹³⁵ other mosques had been modelled on the style adopted in other countries, such as Malaysia¹³⁶ and Saudi Arabia.¹³⁷ It seemed that participants prioritised having a space to gather, and some physical representation of their religion.

After the regime, we started to reorganized the mosque for practicing our religion.¹³⁸

They preserved their culture by building a mosque so people could unite together.¹³⁹

There was a sense that members of communities had input into the appearance of the mosque:

We cooperated with villagers to design the mosque. When people agree on the design we start project. If not, we have to design new one.¹⁴⁰

That is the idea of people in the community.¹⁴¹

Participants spoke of how religious leaders and committees managed the mosques on behalf of the community:

We have committee and deputy committee to take care of mosque and we raise money from the villagers.¹⁴²

So, this mosque doesn't belong to individual because usually even though the Hakim or community leader initiated the construction, it was built by the community not just an individual. The leader of the community is representative of the community but in general it belongs to everybody in the village.¹⁴³



Photo: Belfast team

Mosque in Kampong Tralach District Kompong Chhnang Province in 2017

This reflected how the Cham had managed their property prior to the regime, as highlighted by the Secretary General of the Islamic Council for Development of Cambodia:

Before the war, they also have management, they have mufti. They call mufti, the Islamic counselor there. Mostly, the mosque's built by themselves, by the community. So, I can see the difference. You see. At that time, our Cham people can raise funds within the community to build a very big mosque.¹⁴⁴

A New Mosque under Construction in Koh Thom district Kandal province



Photo: Belfast team


This reorganization of community and reintroduction of religious property management highlights a community driven recovery process, in which Cham communities worked together to rebuild what they could, and reestablish the kinds of societal structures that had been destroyed during the regime. These were later supported by changes to the Constitution of Cambodia, following the arrival of the UNTAC, when the law recognized private ownership of things, including religious land and buildings. Article 44 of the Cambodia Constitution says that all persons shall have the right to own private property, and that this will be protected by law.¹⁴⁵ The law also recognizes the ability of communities to own and manage their religious buildings.¹⁴⁶

Mosque in 2017 in Kampong Tralach, Kompong Chhnang

How was recovery supported?

The Cham supported their recovery with their own hands, but also with the support of other communities. This includes some of the peacekeeping troops of the UNTAC, but also international donors and supporters.¹⁴⁷ Participants we spoke with shared stories of reliance on a wide range of sources:

The mosque was destroyed during Pol Pot regime 75-79 and we got funded from villagers in the community and donors in order to rebuild this mosque... we built this with our bare hands and there are only 3000 families. We asked sponsors like Battambang, Siem Reap and international funders like US, Malaysia, Canada.¹⁴⁸



When the UNTAC arrived in Cambodia, people realized that there are Cham people living in Cambodia. The Islamic community became known to the outside world then some donors came to help to build the community.¹⁴⁹

The mosque was built from the people, and also from the King and from DC-Cam.¹⁵⁰

The importance of international funding was particularly highlighted by the Ministry of Religion and Cult:

Muslim countries: Malaysia, Dubai you know also supported the Chama lot in terms of mosque reconstruction and also provided other kinds of support. All of these were made available to the community, especially after 1993. Especially when Cambodia was open to the world, especially in Muslim communities through diplomatic relations.¹⁵¹

A new mosque under construction in 2017 in Cham Leu Village, Prek Thmey Commune, Koh Thom District, Kandal Province

Coming out of the darkness - the next generation of Cham

The targeting of the Cham teachers and leaders during the Khmer Rouge created a great shortage of leadership capacity and made it very difficult for the Cham to collect and pass on their religious teachings. One Islamic leader recalled:

It was very difficult, you know, imagine that those who were educated left and only those who didn't know, and this is like living in the darkness. And even we had the mosque at that time, but in term of leadership or in other word Imam, the one who leads the community, you know, is not here, that's why it was very difficult for the community.¹⁵²

This loss of knowledge has also been acknowledged by lawyers working in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia:

We lost a treasure trove of Islamic knowledge, only new leader, of course they are young and less knowledgeable than the previous Hakim... something is missing because there is no continuity of the building upon the previous knowledge, they have to start from zero again.¹⁵³

The loss of human resources was also raised in a community focus group:

During the Khmer Rouge regime, everything had been destroyed. We tried to research it back, but we had limited resources. We lost the Koran, our language and our human resources. ¹⁵⁴

Losses of this kind have had a particular impact on the younger generations of Cham, many of whom do not recall and can scarcely believe the realities of life under the Khmer Rouge. As the Secretary General for the Islamic Council for the Development of Cambodia told us:

When we lost these human resources, we lost almost everything. I mean all the documents were burned. Now, our young people don't have any witnesses. ¹⁵⁵

We also spoke to Cham students and young people, who similarly noted the ongoing intergenerational nature of this harm:

The impact of the Khmer Rouge is about the lack of educated people because the Khmer Rouge kill a lot of educated people. The young generation try to gain knowledge, but it's not very effective so it does impact development and impacts me. ¹⁵⁶

The students also spoke of the difficulty they had in fully understanding what their parents and grandparents had experienced. However, they expressed a sense that this should be something they knew more about and a desire to learn more, as well as their feelings of pain at what their families had experienced.

CONCLUSION

We would like to thank you for reading this report. It is not a complete history of the Cham or the experiences of Cham communities before, during or after the Khmer Rouge, but we hope it can be useful for young people who would like to know more about what happened to the Cham communities, and about how the communities began to restore their identities. While the Cham communities we met with had worked hard to seek out funding and rebuild their cultural property and communities, the impact of the Khmer Rouge regime continued to be felt. The destruction of their cultural property and the attacks on their practices had left them with limited knowledge of their past, while the targeting of their religious leaders and teachers had impacted on the levels of cultural, religious and general education within communities.

As we mentioned earlier, the communities we spoke with often discussed the ongoing harm caused by loss of knowledge about their past. Members of the communities of all ages expressed concerns over a perceived absence of understanding within the younger community, both in relation to Cham identity, and in relation to the harm experienced during the Khmer Rouge regime. Indeed, when communities were asked about reparations they expressed a desire for facilities which educated people about Cham identity and their recent past:

Create a research center or library for Muslim community to places all kind of documents related to Khmer Rouge for the community to benefit from. ¹⁵⁷

The ideal reparation would be to build a museum space for exhibitions, so the generations can learn from what happened in the past. ¹⁵⁸

One Cham student mentioned the particular importance of government support in this area and of the value of visits to sites of former atrocity:

Government have to support any kind of study tour that related to genocide across the country of because it is important to learn from sites like Choeung Ek or Toul Sleng and propose other sites to be visited.¹⁵⁹

This report is intended to make a modest contribution to realizing some of these aims, respecting the wishes of the communities we met to recording and sharing their stories. While the impact of the Khmer Rouge continues to be felt, the Cham communities we met with have worked hard to rebuild their culture and identity. We visited many mosques, including some currently being built. These important places provide a space for communities to meet together and practice their faith, and they have played an important role in the restoration of Cham identity after the Khmer Rouge.

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- ¹⁰⁴ Interview with Islamic Leader and two others, Chroy Changva, 16 March 2017.
- ¹⁰⁵ Farina So, at 64.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ysa Osman, Oukoubah, at 4.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ysa Osman, Oukoubah, at 5.
- ¹⁰⁸ Focus Group, Cham Leu, Kandal, 18 March 2017.
- ¹⁰⁹ Focus Group, Cham Women, Ponnhea Kandal, 12 March 2017.
- ¹¹⁰ Farina So, at 60.
- ¹¹¹ Farina So, at 62.
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- ¹¹³ Farina So, at 43.
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- ¹⁴⁴ Interview with Secretary General ICDC, 16 March 2017.
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