

Sihanouk's Reflections on Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak

Beijing, November 5, 2006

Dramatic–Funny–Tragic Story

My "dear cousin" Sisowath Sirik Matak,
by Sihanouk

Section I: The Blind Reliance on Foreign Intervention

Original Translation:

On the morrow of his "triumphant" Putsch on the date of March 18, 1970, when the international press asked him if he was optimistic regarding the future of his new Regime, the brilliant Sisowath Sirik Matak replied: *"The U.S.A., capable of conquering the MOON, will obviously be in a position to preserve Cambodia for us (i.e., himself, Lon Nol, Tim Von, Cheng Heng, In Tam, Lon Non, Douc Rasy, etc...). He who can do more can do less."*

We saw what followed... (April 17, 1975).

The U.S.A. could do the "more" (the Moon) but not the "less" → Cambodia.

Historical Explanation & Context:

In this opening section, Sihanouk directly targets the political naivety of Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak, a key architect behind the March 18, 1970 coup d'état that overthrew Sihanouk's neutralist government and established the pro-American Khmer Republic. Sirik Matak famously leaned on the French philosophical maxim *"Qui peut le plus peut le moins"* (He who can do more can do less) to rationalize his absolute reliance on the United States military apparatus. Sihanouk highlights the severe, tragic historical irony of this statement: while the U.S. possessed the unparalleled technological capacity to land astronauts on the moon, they ultimately lacked the political resolve or strategic ability to prevent the rapid collapse of the Khmer Republic. The date Sihanouk inserts—April 17, 1975—marks the catastrophic fall of Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge, which initiated the Cambodian genocide.

Section II: The Foie Gras Incident and Family Politics

Original Translation:

1973. My Mother, dying, was able—thanks to the President of the USA and H.E. Chou En-Lai, PRC—to leave the "Khmer Republic" and join me in China.

Among others, my eldest daughter Buppha Devi and my ex-wife, H.R.H. Princess Sisowath Pongsangmoni, (*handwritten margin note: were part of the entourage of Her Majesty my mother*).

Sirik Matak, one of the "Masters" of Phnom Penh, had entrusted to one of the ladies of the entourage of H.M. the Queen, my revered Mother, a few cans of foie gras from France: this foie gras was for me.

But it was my duty to send all these cans of foie gras back to Sirik Matak in Phnom Penh, c/o Mme Bun Nak, a niece of my mother.

My daughter Buppha Devi then said to Bun Nak: *"I adore foie gras. Give me all these cans! I am going to stuff myself with them."* (For my honor).

In Phnom Penh, fortunately, Princess S. Pongsangmoni made it known to Sirik Matak that I had refused to receive his delicious gift. But Buppha Devi ate all these foies gras sent to China by Sirik Matak.

Historical Explanation & Context:

This section pivots from broad geopolitical critique to an absurd, intimate domestic anecdote that underscores the complex royal family dynamics defining the upper echelons of Cambodian politics. Both Sihanouk and Sirik Matak belonged to the Cambodian royal house, making them cousins, yet they stood on opposite sides of a bitter civil war. By 1973, with Phnom Penh under heavy siege, Sirik Matak attempted a subtle diplomatic overture by sending a luxury gift of canned French foie gras to Sihanouk in Beijing, utilizing the traveling entourage of the ailing Queen Mother Sisowath Kossamak. Sihanouk describes a calculated game of face and honor: politeness mandated rejecting a peace offering from the man who overthrew him, yet his daughter, Princess Buppha Devi, famously circumvented this diplomatic impasse simply by eating the luxury food herself. The anecdote portrays the leadership of the failing Khmer Republic engaging in aristocratic trivialities while their state crumbled.

Section III: The Collapse

Original Translation:

On the eve of the death of the "Khmer Republic"

T.S.V.P. [Please Turn Over]

Historical Explanation & Context:

The page abruptly ends on an ominous note as Sihanouk begins to transition into the final days of the Lon Nol–Sirik Matak regime. The "death of the Khmer Republic" refers to the complete disintegration of the state administration and military lines as U.S. funding was severed, leading directly to the tragic executions of almost the entire political elite—including Sirik Matak himself, who refused an offer of American evacuation and was executed by the Khmer Rouge shortly after they entered the capital.

Histoire dramatique - drôle - tragique
Mon "cher cousin" Sisowath Sirik Matak,

par N. Tihanouk

Beijing, le 5 novembre 2006

I/- Au lendemain de son "triomphal" Putsch en date du 18 Mars 1970, à la Presse internationale qui lui demandait s'il était optimiste quant à l'avenir de son nouveau Régime, le brillant Sisowath Sirik Matak répondit: "les U.S.A., capables de conquérir la LUNE, seront évidemment en mesure de conserver pour nous (c. à d. lui même, Lon Nol, Tim Var, Chéng Héng, Trirk Hoanh, Lon Non, Douc Rasy, et c...) le Cambodge. Qui peut le plus peut le moins".

On a vu la suite ... (17 Avril 1975).

Les U.S.A. pouvaient "le plus" (la lune) mais pas "le moins" → le Cambodge. suivre

→ J'ai saisi l'opportunité de la suite de la suite ma mère.

II/- 1973. Ma Maman, mourante, fut, grâce au Président des USA et F. E. Chen En-lai RPC, quitter la "République Khmère" et me rejoindre en Chine.

Entre autres, ma fille aînée Buppha Dévi et mon ex-femme, T.A.R. La Princesse Sisowath Pongsânmoni, Tirik Matak, l'un des "maîtres" de Phnom Penh, avait confié à l'une des dames de la suite de T. M. La Reine ma vénérée Mère quelques boîtes de conserve de foie gras de France: ce foie gras était pour moi.

Mais je me devais de renvoyer toutes ces boîtes de conserve de foie gras à Tirik Matak, à Phnom Penh, c/o Mme Bun Nak, une nièce de ma mère.

Ma fille Buppha Dévi dit alors à Bun Nak: "J'adore le foie gras. Donne-moi toutes ces boîtes! Je vais m'en empresser." (pour mon honneur)

A Phnom Penh, heureusement, La Princesse S. Pongsânmoni a fait connaître à Tirik Matak que j'avais refusé de recevoir son délicieux cadeau. Mais Buppha Dévi a mangé toutes ces foies gras envoyés en Chine par Tirik Matak. suivre

III/- A la veille de la mort de la "République Khmère"

T. S. V. P.

suivre