

## Summary

# Dossier relating to British Museum Asset 1380796001 (Cambodian Angkuoch)

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Collaborators: SONG Seng, SAY Tola, THON Dika, Cambodian Living Arts (Cambodia)

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### Asset 1: Jew's harp found in Cambodia



Asset Number: 1380796001

View: Full: Front

### Full Description

Jew's harp made of cane.

### Dimensions

Height: 0.80 cm

Width: 23.50 cm

Depth: 1.00 cm

Weight: 1.00 g

### Provenance

Donated to the Museum by W Hanson Rawles in 1966

**Location of Production:** Unlisted

**Date of Production:** Late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

**Findspot:** Cambodia

**Date of Acquisition:** 1966

**Location:** Onsite, non-public

**Location Reference:** WCEC/B3/bay5/rack15a/unit3/10

**PRN:** EAS21938

# Summary

This Dossier, comprising this summary document and fifteen associated files, is envisaged as an Appendage to the catalogue entry for British Museum Asset 1380796001, a musical instrument called *angkuoch* (Cambodian Jew's harp or mouth harp). The intended purposes of making this Dossier publicly available are (1) to expand and enrich the currently extremely limited knowledge about this Asset, including contextual and social factors, and (2) to duly acknowledge the likely provenance of the instrument, especially its likely maker MONG Keuy.

The information in this Dossier was collected in January 2020 during fieldwork in Siem Reap Province (Cambodia) for the project *Documenting the instrument and instrument-making of Angkuoch, Cambodian mouth harp*, Small Grant 02 of the Endangered Material Knowledge Program of the British Museum (<https://www.emkp.org/documentingcambodianmouthharp/>).

On the basis of evidence generated through this project, it seems probable that bamboo *angkuoch*-maker MONG Keuy (c1937-2012) from Preah Dak village, or his father or grandfather, was the maker of Asset 1380796001. MONG was a prominent, prolific and publicly engaged *angkuoch*-maker in Siem Reap Province in the 1950s and 1960s.

Project participants who contributed information to this Dossier ('Informants') include MONG Keuy's second wife LAV Mech, his daughter KEUY Leakhena and his son KEUY Ratha, all of whom still live in Preah Dak village. All three believe that the Asset bears strong resemblances to instruments made by MONG. Ratha in particular, himself a maker of *angkuoch*, reflected in detail, and on video recording, on the catalogue photograph of Asset 1380796001 (replicated on page 1 of this Summary document) and its similarities with – and some differences from – his father's typical style and technique.

Notably, two Informants from outside MONG's own family corroborated the view that MONG Keuy (or a direct family member of his) likely made the Asset. Brothers CHI Monivong and CHI Chen, who live in the neighbouring village of Srah Srang, have an artistic lineage to MONG: their father KRAK Chi learnt to make *angkuoch* from MONG in the 1990s. KRAK later went on to teach both these sons of his how to make *angkuoch*. This lineage would seem to equip the brothers well to recognise distinctive features of MONG's *angkuoch* instruments.

Upon being shown a printed copy of the British Museum catalogue entry (text and photograph) for Asset 1380796001, all these Informants offered statements supporting a hypothesis that MONG made the Asset. A selective list follows.

- KEUY Ratha identified several specific similarities between the apparent features of the Asset and his father's instruments, including its 'round' head, its absolute measurements and the relative measurements of its parts;

- CHI Chen stated that the thick ‘top knotch’ of the instrument, and its thick head and body, suggest to him that the Asset was made by MONG;
- CHI Monivong stated that the style of the Asset appears the same as the one taught to him by his father KRAK Chi, who in turn was taught by MONG in the 1990s, and thus that the Asset is consistent with the style of MONG;
- KEUY Ratha (and the research team) could discern in the catalogue photograph a carved ‘breast’ on the lamella (tongue) of the Asset, which, according to Ratha, was both an innovation of MONG and a unique characteristic of his *angkuoch*. According to Ratha, MONG’s own father had instead put wax on the lamella to serve the same acoustic function; only MONG Keuy carved the breast into the instrument itself. For this reason, he believed the Asset was made by his father rather than his grandfather.

Further detail about these claims, and further evidence in support, are contained in File 02 (Field Notes) and Folder 03 (Interview Transcripts).

CHI Chen and KEUY Ratha both stated that MONG Keuy often etched four (or not more than five) parallel lines on the body of his instruments. However, this marking is not discernible on the Asset from the catalogue photograph. Ratha proposed that a physical examination of the Asset may reveal this marking; alternatively, MONG may not have included this marking on this particular instrument.

If MONG Keuy were its maker, this would date Asset 1380796001 to the mid-twentieth century – some time between the late 1940s and its donation to the British Museum in 1966. This is somewhat later than the date of production provided in the catalogue entry, ‘Late 19th to early 20th Century’. MONG was already making *angkuoch* as a young boy in the late 1940s and early 1950s and selling them locally to tourists at local markets and temples, so his instruments would have been in local circulation for a potential acquirer, such as W Hanson Rawles, to encounter.

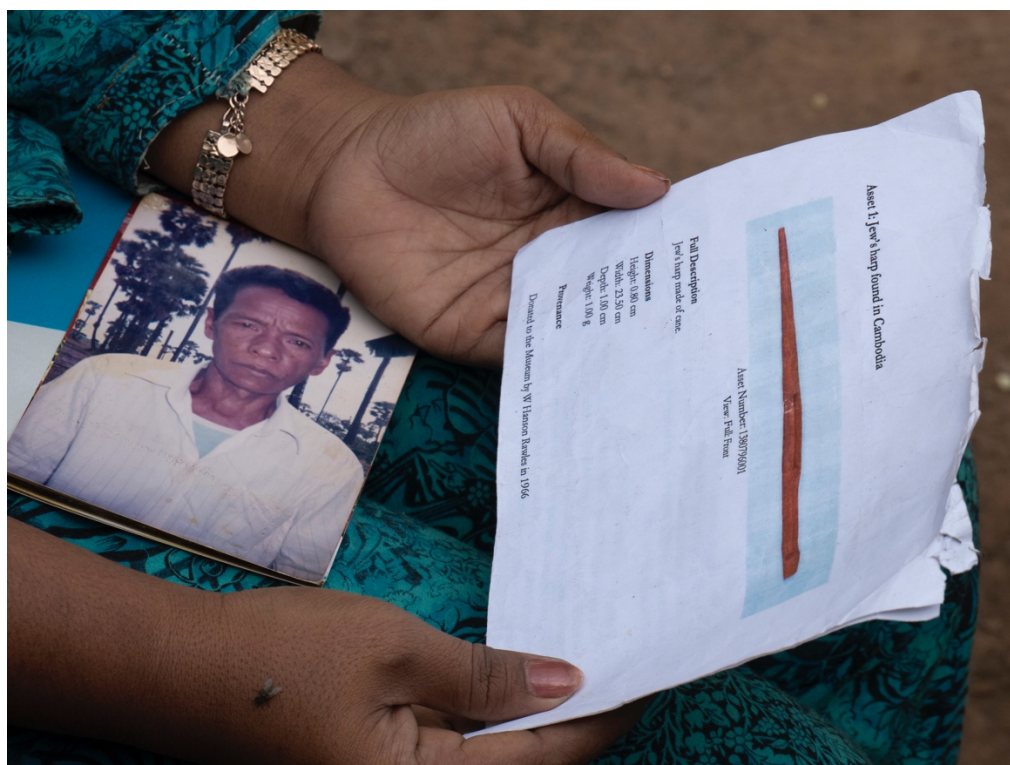
Nothing more is known of W Hanson Rawles than that he donated this Asset to the British Museum in 1966. It is feasible that Rawles acquired the *angkuoch* directly from the young MONG Keuy sometime before or during 1966. However, if Rawles had known that MONG made the Asset, then even if he did not make note of MONG’s name, he arguably should have been able to provide the British Museum with more precise information about the Asset’s ‘Findspot’ and ‘Location of production’, and more accurate information about its ‘Date of production’, than is represented in the British Museum catalogue entry (though this assumes that Rawles donated the instrument to the Museum with some form of accompanying statement). Alternatively, Rawles may have acquired the instrument indirectly – from a local

market, perhaps, or as a gift – in which case the vague catalogue entry information about the Asset’s date and location of production could either be Rawles’ best guess, or the Museum’s.

Given that *angkuoch*-making skills and techniques were (and still are) typically intergenerationally transmitted within a family, an alternative explanation for British Museum’s recorded date of production for Asset 1380796001 (late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century) is that the Asset was made by MONG Keuy’s father or grandfather. While this would address the date discrepancy, it seems to contradict the information provided by KEUY Ratha about the differences in *angkuoch*-making technique and style between MONG Keuy and his father (Ratha’s grandfather), as well as overlook the plausibility of W Hanson Rawles encountering one of MONG Keuy’s instruments in circulation, mid-century.

The relative merits of either argument – that the Asset was made by MONG Keuy or by his father or grandfather – hangs at least to some extent on the accuracy of the date of production in the British Museum catalogue entry. On the balance of available evidence, it seems most plausible that MONG Keuy made Asset 1380796001.

Catherine Grant  
Brisbane, Australia  
May 2020



**Dossier Folder 04 File 8:** KEUY Leakhena holding a photograph of Asset 1380796001, a Cambodian bamboo *angkuoch*, and a photograph of her father, *angkuoch*-maker MONG Keuy. Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 9 January 2020.

## Dossier contents

The following files comprise the Dossier relating to British Museum Asset 1380796001.

	File details	Contents
<b>Document 01</b>	01-Summary (PDF)	<i>(This document)</i>  <i>Outlines purpose, structure and content of this Dossier; presents a summary argument</i>
<b>Document 02</b>	02-Field-Notes-Excerpts (PDF)	<i>Presents excerpts of the project's Field Notes that relate directly to Asset 1380796001</i>  <i>Includes cross-references (in bold) to the four interviews contained in Folder 03</i>  <i>Note that complete Field Notes are included in the suite of project materials to be submitted to the British Museum and made publicly available via the EMKP website</i>
<b>Folder 03</b>	(PDFs)	<i>Transcripts in Khmer and English of interviews that relate directly, in whole or in part, to Asset 1380796001</i>  <i>Transcripts are provided in full; those parts relating directly to the Asset are highlighted</i>  <i>Mp4 video and wav audio files of these complete interviews, and metadata relating to the interviews, are included in the suite of project materials to be submitted to the British Museum and made publicly available via the EMKP website</i>  <i>Note that several further interviews conducted for this project refer indirectly or in passing to the Asset, or to MONG Keuy. Refer to complete project materials on EMKP website for complete transcripts</i>
	2020-01-07-CC-Interview	<i>Angkuoch-maker CHI Chen offers his reflections on the printed catalogue entry for the British Museum asset, including his belief</i>

## File details

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		<i>that the instrument-maker is MONG Keuy. 7 January 2020.</i>
	2020-01-09- KL&LM- Informal-Chat	<i>The wife (LAV Mech) and daughter (KEUY Leakhena) of bamboo angkuoch-maker MONG Keuy chat with research assistant SAY Tola at their home (Part 1). 9 January 2020.</i>
	2020-01-09- KL&LM- Interview	<i>The wife (LAV Mech) and daughter (KEUY Leakhena) of bamboo angkuoch-maker MONG Keuy in interview. 9 January 2020.</i>
	2020-01-17-KR	<i>The son (KEUY Ratha) of bamboo angkuoch-maker MONG Keuy speaks about the Asset (on the basis of the catalogue entry), and the similarities with (and differences from) instruments made by his father. 17 January 2020.</i>
<b>Folder 04</b>	(TIFFs)	<i>Photographs of individuals, all family members of angkuoch-maker MONG Keuy, who contributed information to this Dossier.</i>  <i>Further relevant photographs and audiovisual materials are included in the suite of project materials to be submitted to the British Museum and made publicly available via the EMKP website</i>
	File 1	<i>LAV Mech, wife of bamboo angkuoch maker MONG Keuy (c.1937-2012) with photo of MONG Keuy, at her home. Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 9 January 2020.</i>
	File 2	<i>LAV Mech, wife of bamboo angkuoch maker MONG Keuy (c.1937-2012). Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 9 January 2020.</i>

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File 3	<i>LAV Mech and her daughter KEUY Leakhena with photographs of their husband and father MONG Keuy (c.1937-2012). Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 9 January 2020.</i>
File 4	<i>Photograph of bamboo angkuoch maker MONG Keuy (c.1937-2012). Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 9 January 2020.</i>
File 5	<i>LAV Mech and KEUY Leakhena with photograph of Asset 1380796001, a Cambodian bamboo angkuoch. Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 9 January 2020.</i>
File 6	<i>LAV Mech and KEUY Leakhena with photograph of Asset 1380796001, a Cambodian bamboo angkuoch. Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 9 January 2020.</i>
File 7	<i>KEUY Leakhena with photograph of Asset 1380796001, a Cambodian bamboo angkuoch. Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 9 January 2020.</i>
File 8	<i>KEUY Leakhena holding photograph of Asset 1380796001, a Cambodian bamboo angkuoch, and photograph of her father MONG Keuy. Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 9 January 2020.</i>
File 9	<i>KEUY Leakhena, her brother KEUY Ratha, and their mother LAV Mech. Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 17 January 2020.</i>

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File 10

*LAV Mech with her family (a son-in-law, left, and three of her children to MONG Keuy).  
Photo: Catherine Grant, Preah Dak Village,  
Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 17 January  
2020.*

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