

**MALCOLM MACDONALD AND KING NORODOM SIHANOUK: A
BRITISH DIPLOMAT AND THE ALLURE OF CAMBODIAN
ELEPHANT DIPLOMACY**

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Abstract: For centuries, Cambodian monarchs have used elephants as weapons of war, beasts of economic burden, ritualized symbols of political statecraft, the legitimisation of kingship, a physical link to divinity, and as powerful grand-diplomatic gifts sent to neighbouring kingdoms. With the arrival of the European empires into Southeast Asia after 1500, natural fauna was much sought after in the development of the European zoological industry. This reflected the social Darwinism inherent within European civilisation's global mission. In such circumstances, Cambodian monarchs quickly recognised the continued diplomatic value of sending elephant related gifts to the imperial court of Napoleon III. In the twentieth century, the Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk expanded upon such diplomatic overtures. The current paper, therefore, considers the importance of Cambodian elephant diplomacy from the early-Angkor period (c.802) to the advent of the Cold War (c.1948-50) wherein Sihanouk used the allure and mystique of the exotic to entice the regional British-vice-roy Malcolm MacDonald into falling for the magnetism of the Cambodian sublime.

Keywords: Malcolm MacDonald; Norodom Sihanouk; Cambodia; elephants; diplomacy

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