



Children climbed trees to pick these berries...
"eat the red ones, not the green... they can kill you" they called down me.



Cambodia

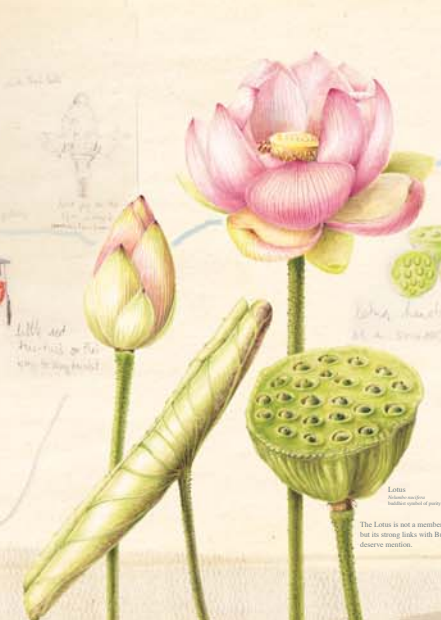
The Mekong River ends by losing itself into the South China Sea below Phnom Penh. It is joined to the Tonle Sap river by a canal which opens out into the vast Tonle Sap Lake above which rise the magnificent ruins of Angkor Wat. The monks have baskets of culinary ginger and turmeric for sale. The latter is often mixed with water and used as a household disinfectant.

It is dangerous for anyone, farmer or plant hunter, to stray from the cleared paths as many unscrupulous landowners remain hidden. And just in case that doesn't imply some by preventing humans from gaining entry.

Elsewhere in Cambodia large tracts of forest have been destroyed by illegal logging companies. Who knows how many species have been lost?

Elettaria cardamomum

In Cambodia there is a region known as the Cardamom Mountains. It is said that cardamom was once grown here as well as to a past king. *Elettaria cardamomum* is an expensive herb, and so there are many substitute gingers throughout S. E. Asia. Other ginger used as substitutes of cardamom are different species of *Amomum* e.g. *A. rotundum*, *A. subulatum*, *A. crinitum*.



Lotus
Nelumbo macrodon
traditional symbol of purity

The Lotus is not a member of the Ginger family but its strong links with Buddhism in this region deserve mention.



Laos



Elingera species



At dawn each morning long lines of "turmeric-orange" robed monks file past the villagers collecting alms of food in golden bowls. The day starts suddenly in the Far East and it is soon too hot for me to remain on my stool drawing. The endless line of orange and gold has evaporated with the heat into the shady temple courtyards where orange lengths of cotton, the monks' robes, are hung to dry.



Turmeric is traditionally used to dye the orange robes of the Buddhist monks by boiling the rhizome.



Elettaria elatior

A day spent showing photos and sketches of ginger plants eventually led me to yet another stilted village. There I found *Zingiber officinale* grown for culinary use along with *Elettaria elatior*, the torch ginger, which unusually was not grown for its edible young shoots but for its beauty. This was by far the largest "garden" I had seen; part of it was in cleared jungle, the rest laid in a tributary of the Mekong. This islet was reached by a series of planks and rocks over which one carefully picked one's way.