

HIDE FIGURES OF THE RĀMAKIEN
at the Ledermuseum in Offenbach, Germany

by

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In the summer of 1963 I was kindly invited by the German Government to inaugurate the Exhibition of Thai Art, which was to take place in Munich. My commitments did not however allow me to fix a definite date for some time; and by the time I arrived in Munich a few days before the date appointed for the inauguration I found that the Minister President of Bavaria had been invited to perform the duties originally scheduled for me. After the exhibition had been inaugurated we were invited to visit centres of German culture—Berlin, Hamburg, Bonn, Rothenburg, Nürnberg and Heidelberg, ending our tour with a visit to the Ledermuseum at Offenbach on the outskirts of Frankfurt whence we flew to Paris.

At Offenbach the Bürgemeister invited me to visit the Ledermuseum where, under the enterprising leadership of the Curator, Dr. Gall, an attempt had been made to exhibit every possible use of leather in any form by mankind all over the world. Here I was shown the hide figures of our classical *Nay*, of which some two hundred were said to have been collected. The method adopted was to mount the figures on rails thus rendering them possible of being drawn out individually for exhibition in front of a cloth screen with a light behind somewhat in the same way we show them in this country. In congratulating the Curator for the enterprise and care in exhibiting these figures I took the opportunity to suggest that their presentation before the lighted screen could be improved if the figures could be exhibited more or less in accordance with the narration of the classic Rāmakien. The Curator then agreed to have them photographed and sent to me in Bangkok later for due rearrangement.

Finding that the figures were still incomplete, I suggested that I would write a note giving a consecutive story, at the same time filling up the gaps with additional narrative according to the *Rāmakien*. This should enable the operator in Offenbach to present a sufficiently

consecutive narration. I planned in fact to give a trial exhibition in a lecture to the Siam Society. This however has been delayed by various circumstances.

The above note was shown to the Hon. Editor and the Director of Research of the Siam Society who persuaded me to offer it for publication in the JSS after having obtained permission from the Museum who are the owners of the figures.

The classical *naṅ* was originally in the time of King Nārāi of Ayudhyā based upon the theme of the *Samudaghos* though in all probability on the story of Rāma as well. It is not the same as the southern variety called *naṅ taluṅ*, understood to have been a variety coming from Pataluṅ, an old seat of culture of no known date. The Thai story of Rāma, like most other south-east Asian versions of the story of Rāma, are neither translations nor adaptations of the Sanskrit classic of the *Rāmāyana* attributed to Vālmīki. Their sources might have left India even before the Sanskrit *Rāmāyana* took shape. They lack the element of divinity, being merely literature or just a dramatic work. In any case it has taken a firm hold of the popular mind and is known everywhere in east Asia and even beyond.

The photographs of these figures are marked on the back thus:
Siamesische Schattenspiel: Inv. Nr
platte Nr

In the following note each photograph will be referred to by its inventory number.

The greater number of these plates relate the war waged by Rāma upon Ūosakanth, King of Loṅkā, apparently the most popular section of the classic for the audiences of Bangkok and Siam. Rāma, eldest son and heir of the King of Ayudhyā, honouring the pledge given by his father to a younger wife, goes into exile with his wife and brother Laksh and they meet with adventures including the forceful abduction of his wife by Ūosakanth (Rāvana), King of Loṅkā (Laṅkā). Rāma, acquiring allies from the aboriginal states of Jompū and Khīdkhin, whose people are described as monkeys, wages war upon the demon-king Ūosakanth. The war is usually the most popular episode for the shadow-play as well as the Khōn dances.

From these figures it is possible to reconstruct a fairly consecutive narrative, thus :—

No. 5383 depicts Rāma bending the bow which may be the action of the tournament at Mithilā which won for him the hand of Sīdā (Skt. Sītā) daughter of the King of Videha. To this may be appended the figure in which a prince, perhaps Rāma, rides on a horse 4637 with a retinue of human soldiers of his own state 5344, 5346. The figure of a female servant could be attached at this juncture 5376.

Figures of the demon side are Queen Aggi 5381, consort of T̄osakanth; one of the two chief ministers 5367, or perhaps P̄īpek (Skt. Vibhishana) brother of T̄osakanth who was later banished and joined the enemy; a demon officer in a warlike attitude 5392 and perhaps the park in which T̄osakanth kept Sīdā in captivity 9370.

Rāma pitches his camp on the bank of the ocean opposite the demon citadel of Loṅkā and holds a council of war (no plate), at which his generals sit. They are in single figures, : Laksh (Skt. Lakshman) 5362 brother of Rāma; Prince P̄īpek of Loṅkā, his ally (Skt. Vibhishana) 5360; Sukrīb (Skt. Sugrīva) King of Khīdkhin (Skt. Kīshkinda) 5358; Jomṣūpan of Khīdkhin (Skt. Jāmbavān) 5099; Hanumān (Skt. Hanumān) 5364; Oṅkot (Skt. Aṅgada) nephew of Sukrīb 5411; Nīla-ek a monkey officer 5365. We also have single figures in warlike attitudes of Sukrīb 5349 and minor generals 5366 and 5374.

The scene is now shifted to Loṅkā where the demon-king's niece, Beṅyakāya, 5370, 5371 disguises herself under T̄osakanth's order as Sīdā to float midstream as if dead so that Rāma would give up the struggle. There is no figure illustrating this episode. The ruse is discovered.

Rāma decides to build a causeway to the island of Loṅkā, for which task Sukrīb is to superintend 5377, and two simian generals Hanumān and Nīlapāt are assigned; but they quarrel among themselves 5318, 5335, 5336 and 5373. The quarrel settled, Hanumān takes sole charge but fishes of the ocean under the direction of their leader, Subarnamacchā, carry away the stones 4628.

The bridge is finally built. Indra sends the celestial charioteer Mātali 5375 to offer his chariot to Rāma. We have here a picture of Rāma and Laksh mounted thereon 5323.

By way of courtesy according to protocol Rāma sends Oṅkot 5380 to try to persuade the demon-king to agree to peaceful means of ending the quarrel. Being refused admission into the citadel Oṅkot neglecting protocol demolishes the walls 5337 and fights the demon officers who have been ordered by the demon-king to arrest him 5338.

Rāma again presides over a council of war 5334. The single figures of simian generals above may be brought in here again in an exhibition of the shadow-play. Monkey officers and soldiers now exhibit their prowess in exultation over the coming excitement of fighting 5247, 5356, 5367, 5368, 5389, 5390. There is also a scene of forage, 5357.

One of the first demon leaders in the war of Loṅkā is the magician Maiyarāb, King of the Netherworld and a nephew of the demon-king of Loṅkā. He employs luminous sticks to feign stars in heaven and a pipe through which he blows sleeping powder to put his enemies to deep sleep. Our figures are: Maiyarāb 5378, Maiyarāb wielding his luminous sticks 4623, Maiyarāb using his blow-pipe 4624. Kumbhakarn, brother of the King of Loṅkā comes in next 3807. One of the episodes of his battle is that of his stratagem in lying down on the bottom of the stream whence the monkey army derives its water supply and thus prevent flow of the precious liquid, from which Hanumān is sent to drive him out 5324. His long sword sends Laksh swooning on the battlefield (no plate), whilst Rāma waiting in camp comes out on hearing the news of his brother being wounded 4626 and tries to pull out the sword without avail 5320. The sword has to be pulled out by a mystic concoction which Pīpek is preparing 5354.

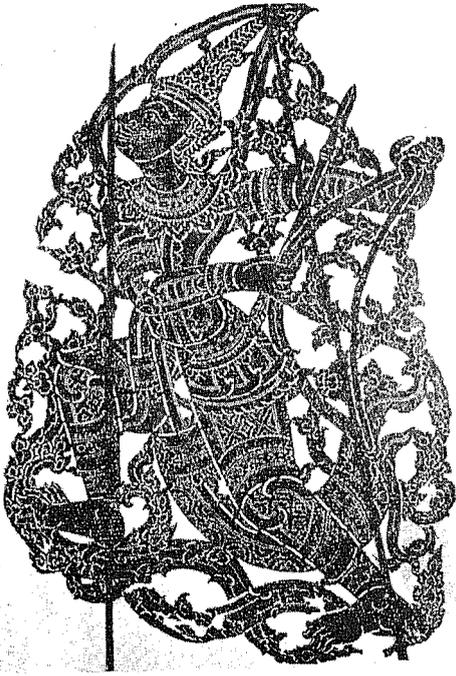
An episode which is more fully portrayed here is that of the battle of Indrajit, son and heir of the King of Loṅkā. We commence with Tōsakanth giving orders 5328 to a young nephew to summon Indrajit to give battle, then a standing figure of Indrajit 5382 and a corpse of the criminal who is instructed to portray Sīdā and beheaded in sight of Prince Laksh at the head of his army. The picture here is that of the

criminal who after death reverts to his demoniac form 5355. Then in order to carry out his rite of vivification of his arrow undisturbed, Indrajit gets a cousin Maṅkarakarna (Skt. Makarāksha) to make a delay action in which the demon prince, a skilled archer, shoots at Rāma almost piercing the latter's mail coat 3945 and then, finding himself getting worsted, creates by magic numerous figures of himself 4622 but is finally killed. Meanwhile Indrajit performs his mystic rites 5345 till frustrated by the enemy who got to know of it from Pīpek. Nevertheless he comes out to battle disguised as Indra on his celestial mount Erāwan and thus disguised shoots down the whole army including its leader Laksh who lie as good as dead on the battlefield. Hanumān however had dodged the mystic weapon and jumps up to engage the pseudo god on the elephant with the result that he drops down to the ground unconscious 3948 and is to be seen there by the side of Laksh 5348. Rāma who has not come out with his army hears of it and hurries to the battlefield only to fall down fainting from grief. The demon-king sends Sidā on a celestial chariot to have a view of her dead husband and his brother but is assured by her companion that they are not dead though unconscious for a time for no widow can sit mid-air on this heavenly chariot 3808. Having recovered Laksh is sent out again to battle borne on the shoulders of Hanumān 5350. This time he shoots arrows and badly wounds Indrajit 5342 and engages in a duel 3944 with him. Losing everything he possesses Indrajit retires from the battle to bid farewell to his parents and wife 3946 and comes out again next day to fight a duel 5340 before he is finally shot in the air and killed.

Several princes and allies of Loṅkā continue the fight for a long time. Two of them are represented here in the persons of Satthāsūra who sits 5363 receiving orders from the demon-king. After his death at the hands of Rāma (no plate) another nephew of the demon-king, Virunčambaṅ, coming out to battle on his war chariot 3949, assumes invisibility and rides his black horse killing the simian hosts 5343; but finally disappears to hide in the ocean by the end of the world. Hanumān is sent after him and got information from a young maiden in a cave 5929 as to Virunčambaṅ's whereabouts. On discovering the demon they fight 3947 and the demon is killed.

Now comes the last and most important stage of the war. Though having taken shares in the fighting at intervals, Ūosakanth, now reft of most relatives and allies, engages the enemy in earnest by leading successive attacks in person. Our figures at this stage show Rāma in battle 5388, Ūosakanth on his war-chariot 5332, Ūosakanth in a duel with Rāma 5317 & 5322, Ūosakanth, sole, in a fighting attitude 5387, his officers in fanciful uniforms of a door-sentinel – dvārapāla – 5347 & 5353, Ūosakanth in a fighting pose (the work of an artist similar in style as 5332, 5317, 5322) 5386, Ūosakanth and Rāma again in duel 4629; then the demon-king again on his war-chariot 5337. Then the hermitage of Ūosakanth's preceptor 5327, who believing in Hanumān's good faith in asking to join the demon camp presents the monkey general to the demon-king. At first naturally suspicious Ūosakanth comes to believe his old preceptor; and, bestowing high honours on Hanumān makes him his heir 5331, 5379. As heir to the throne of Loṅkā Hanumān comes out to battle in full state on the war-chariot of the demon court 5316. No. 5369 is a curious figure of Hanumān dressed as the Prince Royal of Loṅkā bearing Rāma and Laksh on either hand. The classic Rāmakien of whichever version has none such incident. The only explanation that occurs to the writer here is that the figure conveys a visualisation of an offer which Hanumān makes to the demon-king to bring the enemy and deliver them into his hands. In the last but one battle of Ūosakanth he is badly wounded 5321, his head and trunk cut apart but by means of his magic he is restored to normal. He retires into his citadel dejected and is comforted 5319 by his queens. After a night's respite he takes leave of them 5326 and assuming the form of Indra the god goes out to his last battle from which he knows he would never return.

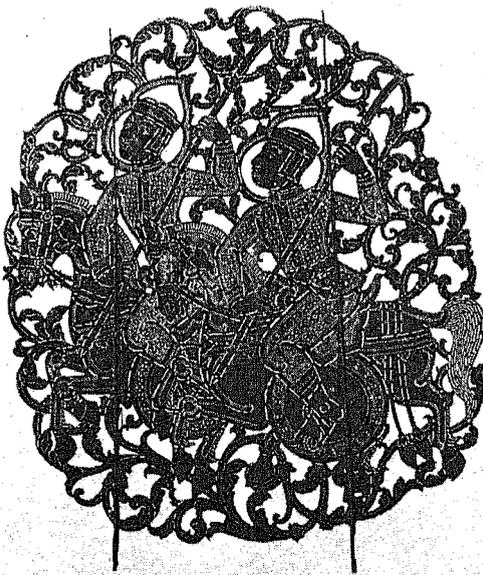
The remainder of the figures are mostly comic (5516, 5517) which have no bearing on the narrative. They were probably used to fill in gaps or complete ensembles in an exhibition of the shadow-play.



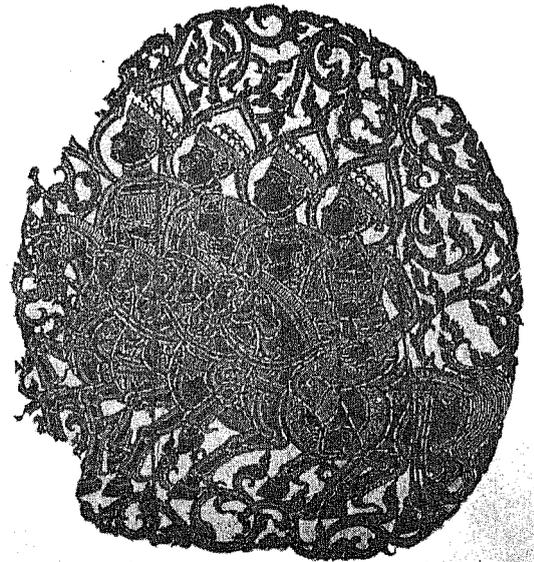
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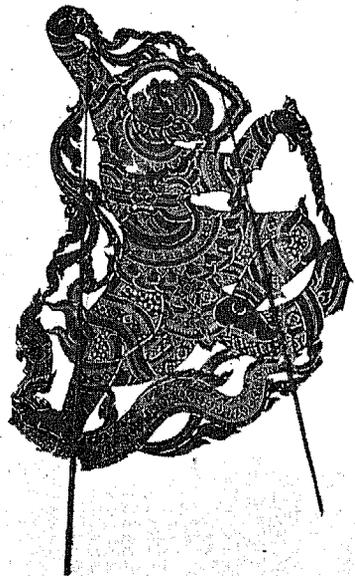
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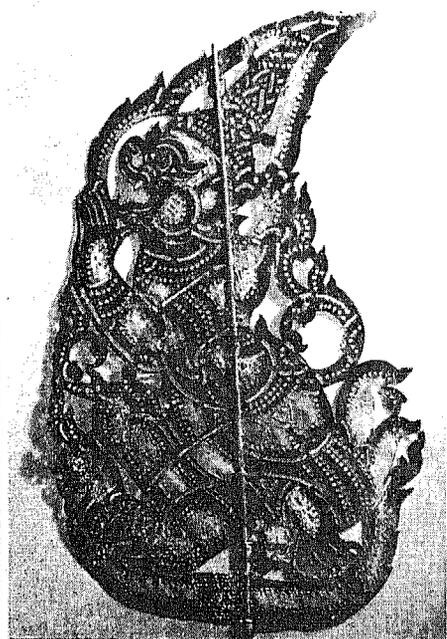
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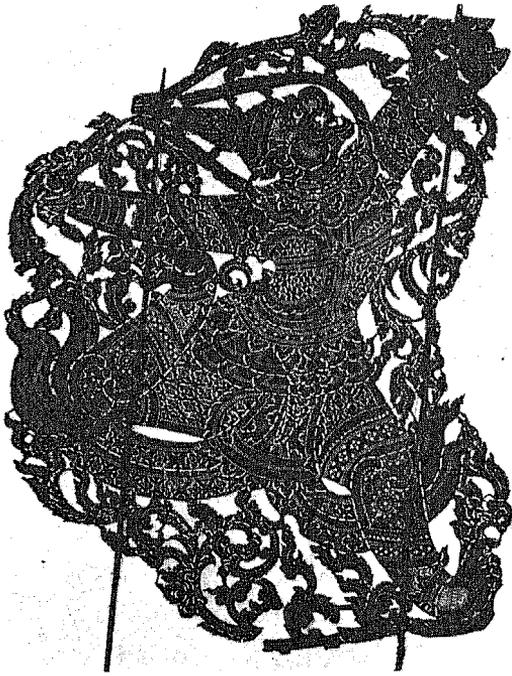
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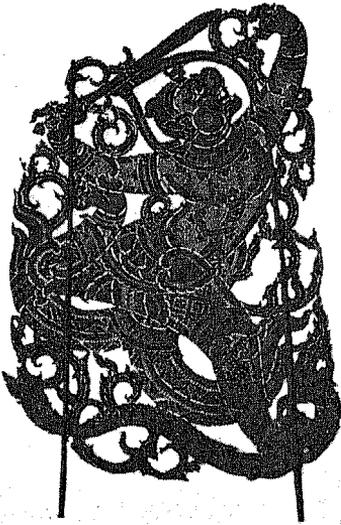
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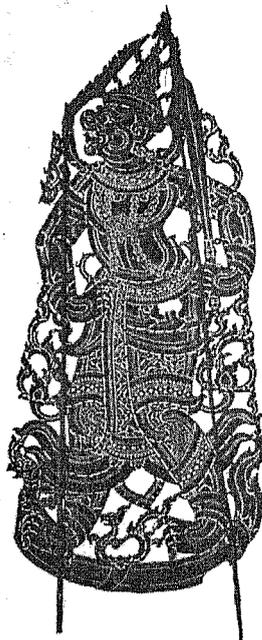
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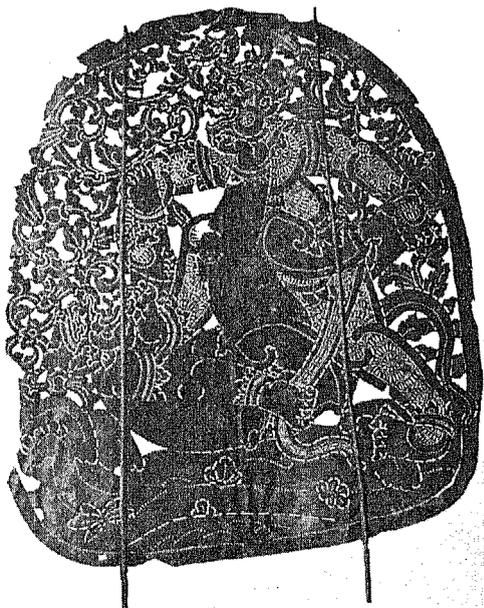
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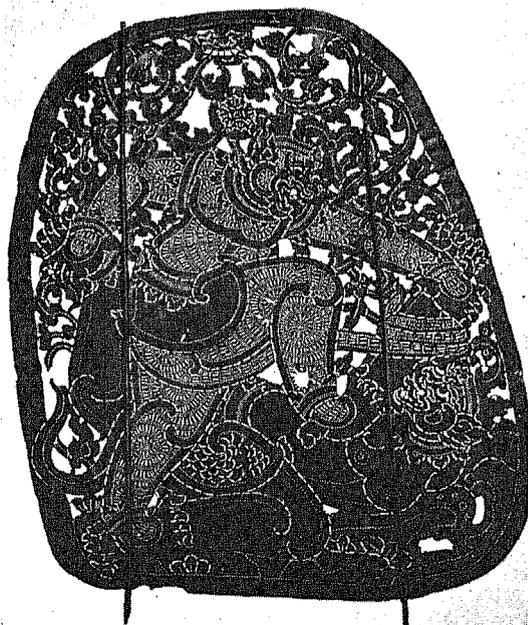
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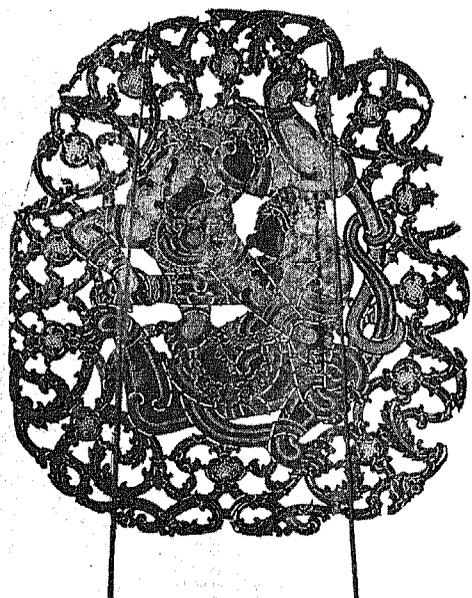
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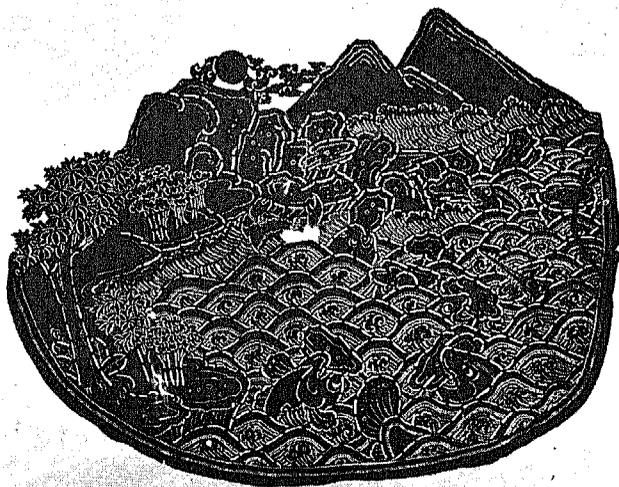
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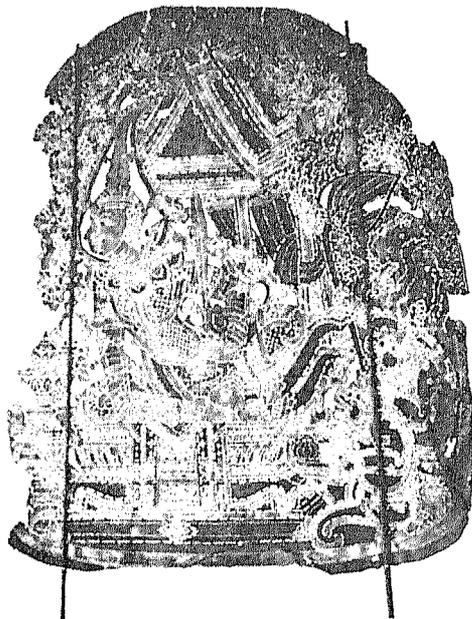
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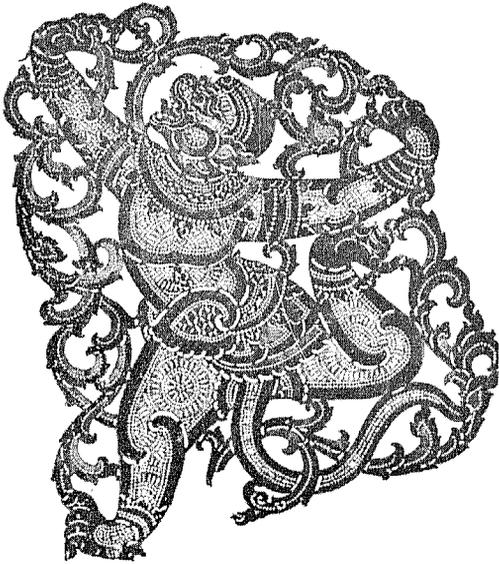
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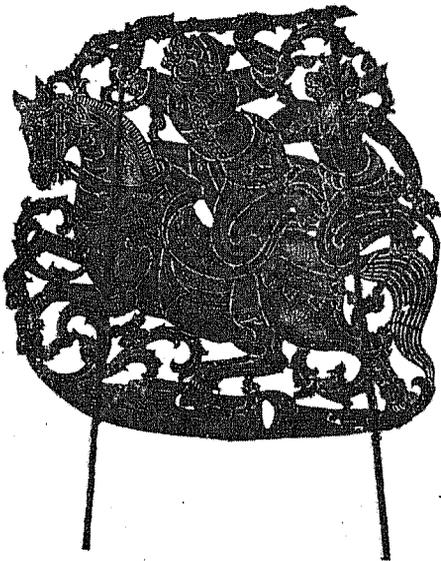
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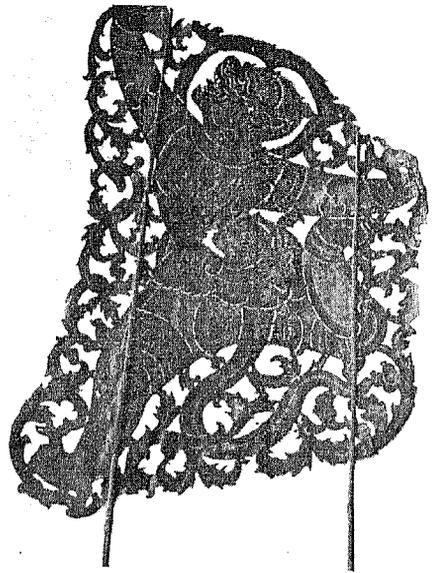
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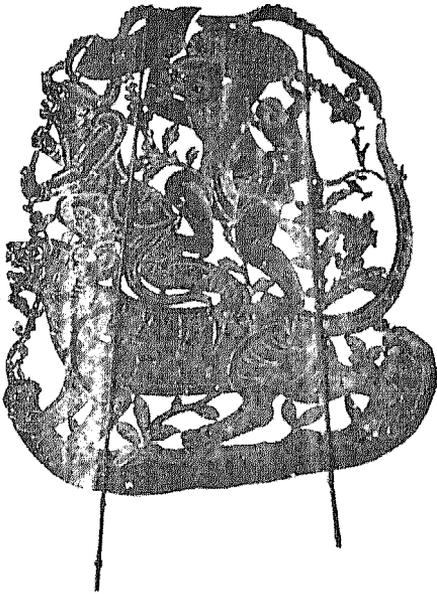
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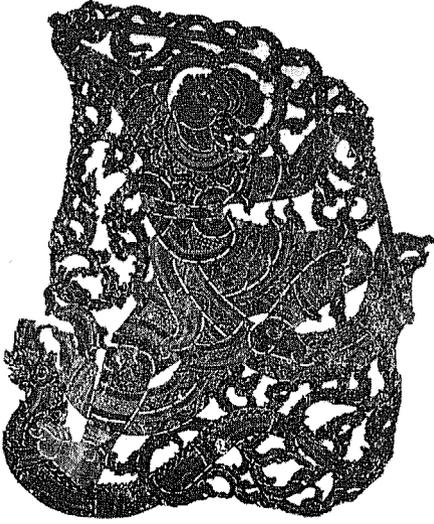
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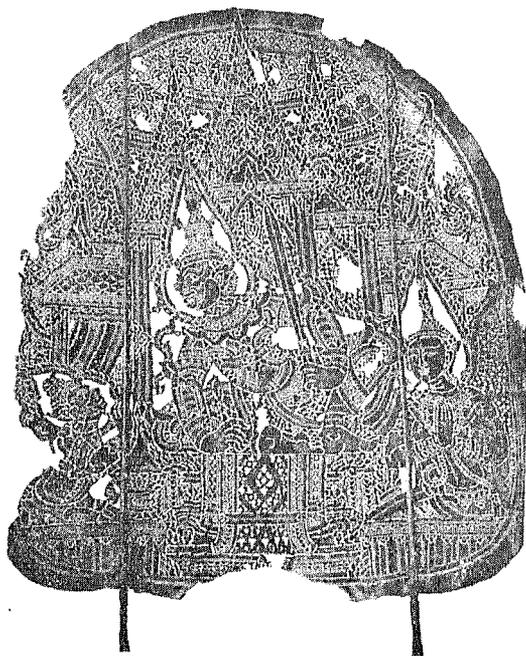
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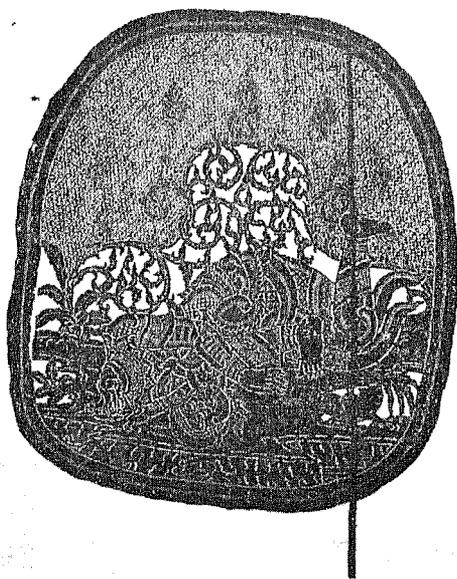
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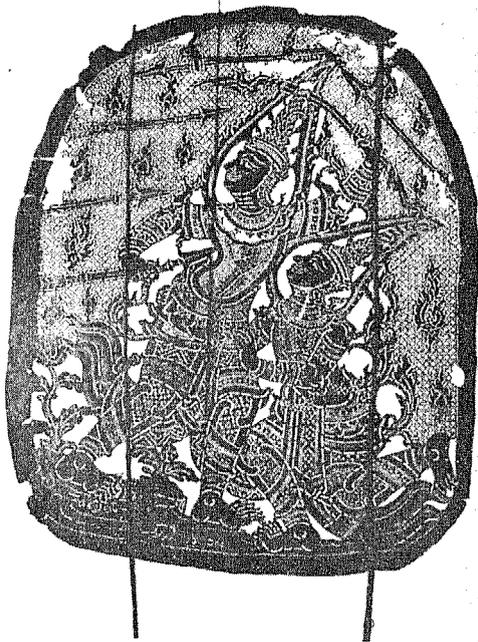
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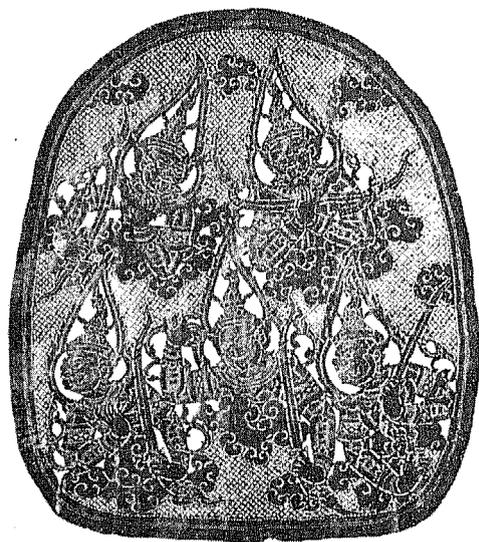
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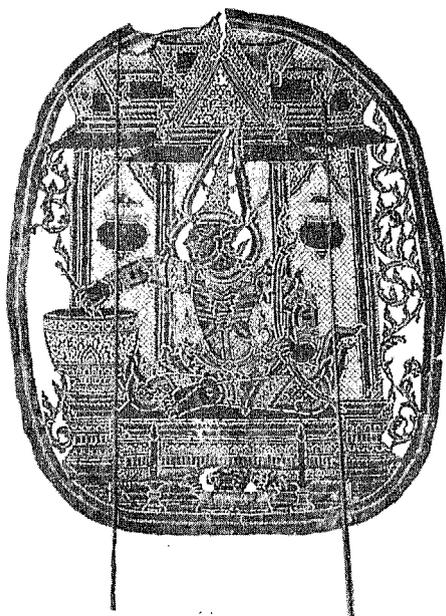
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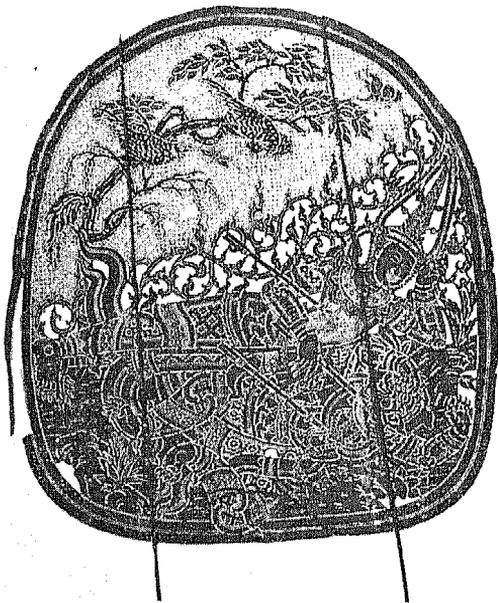
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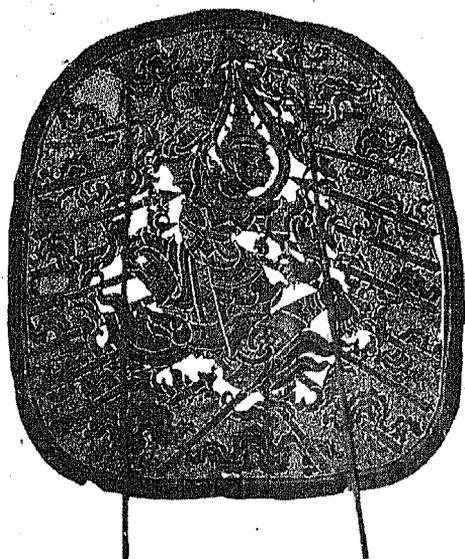
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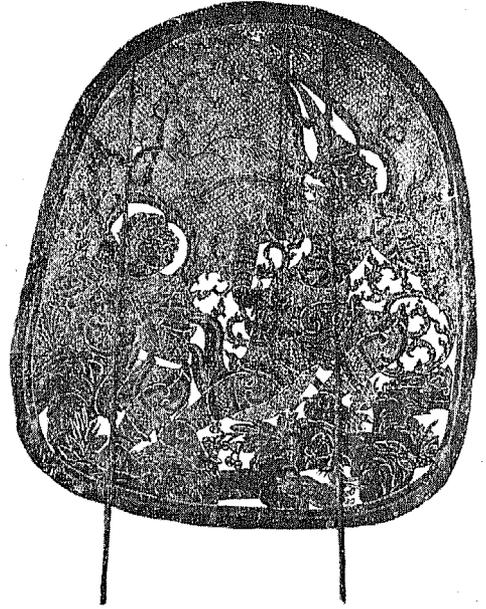
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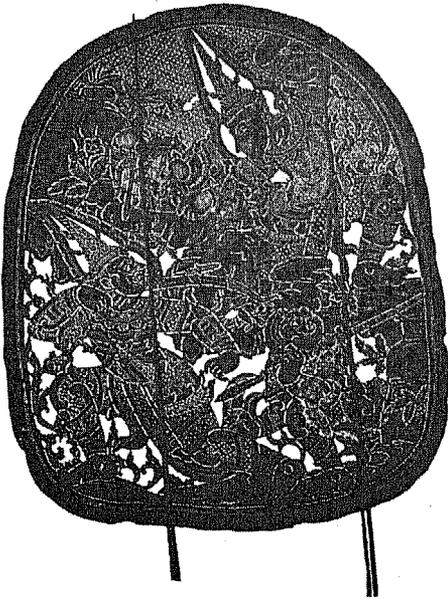
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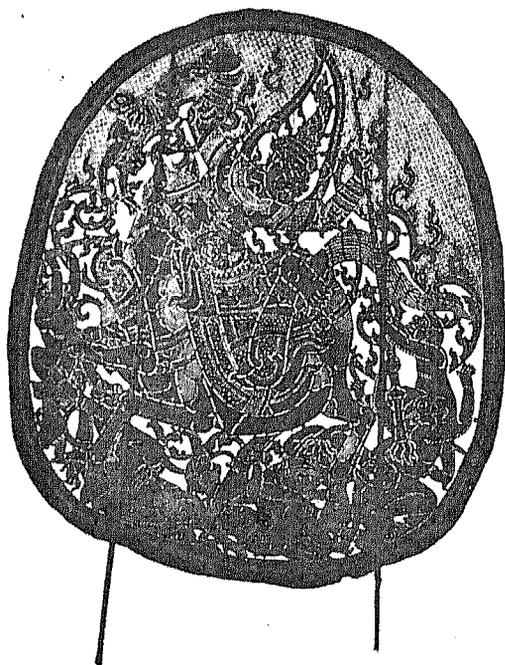
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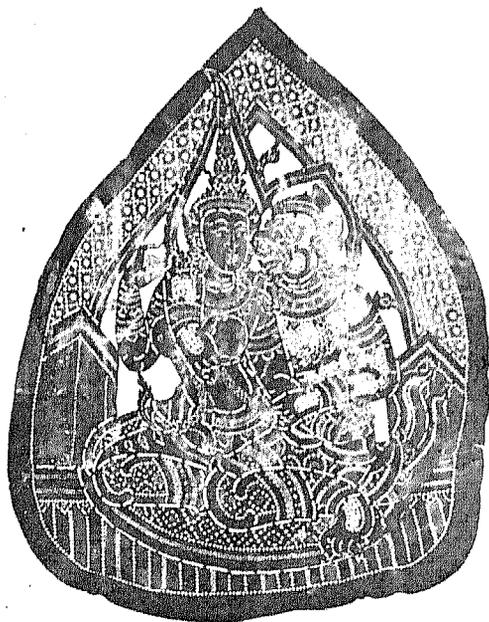
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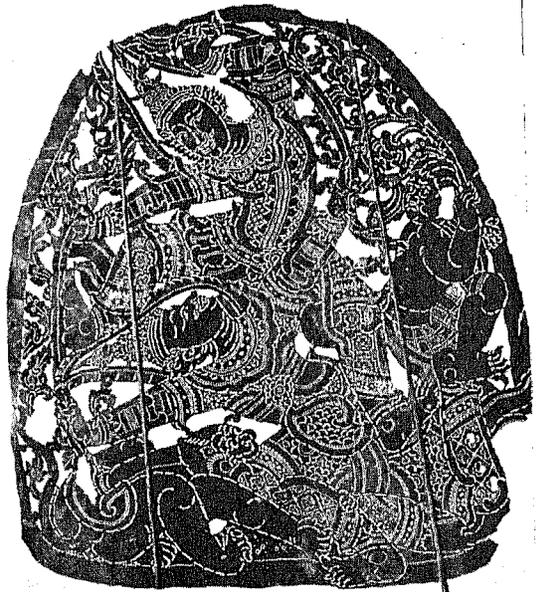
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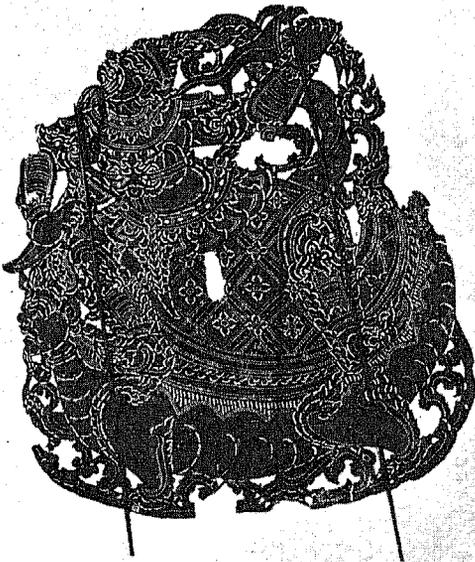
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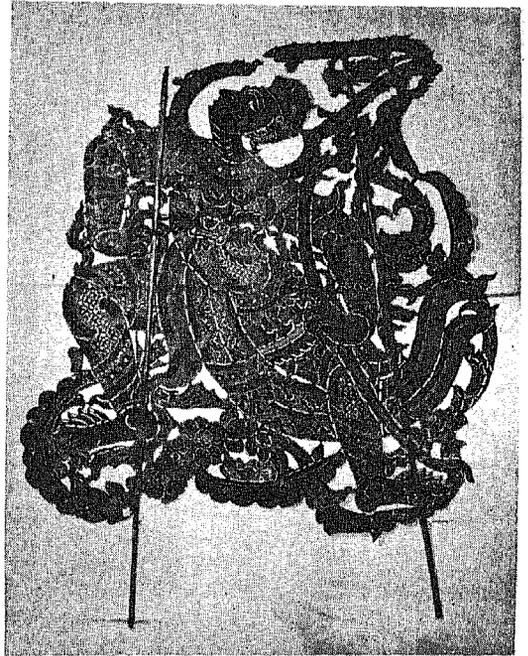
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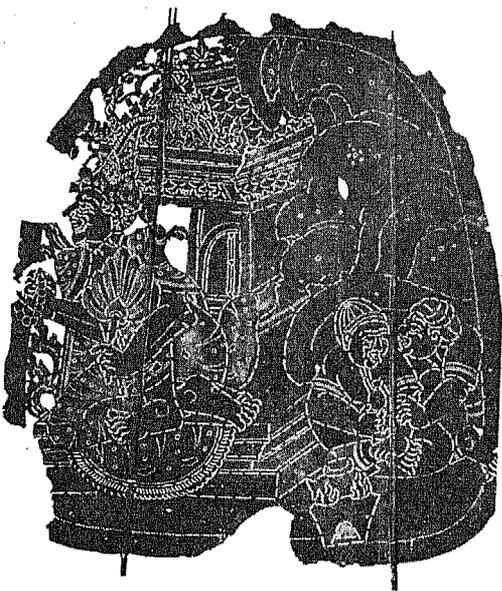
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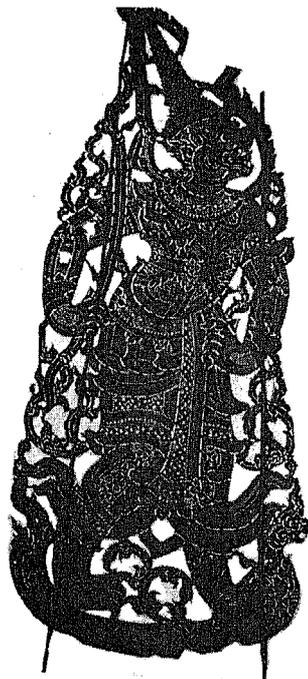
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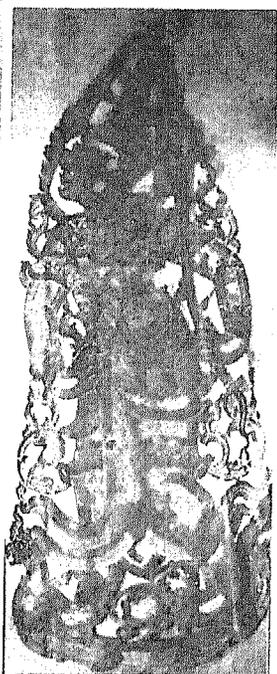
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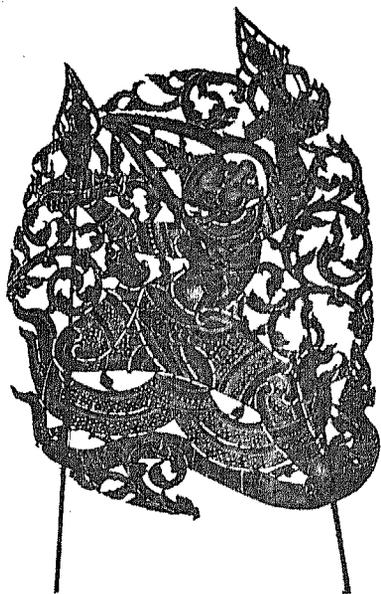
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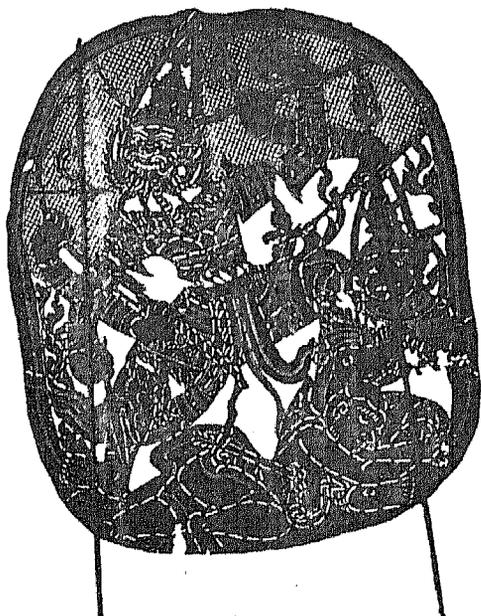
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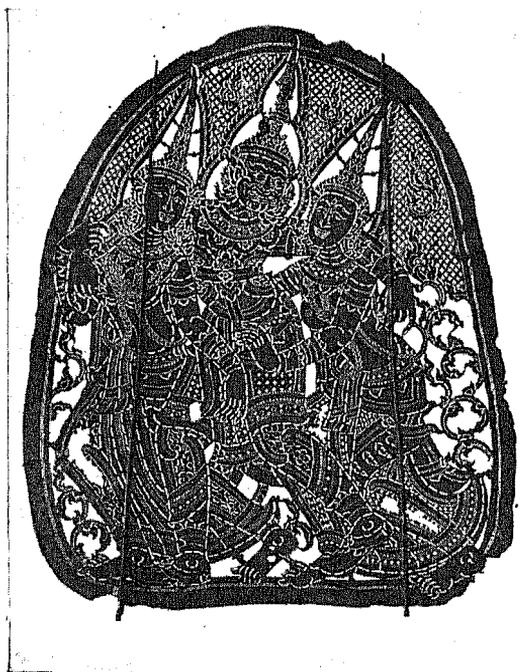
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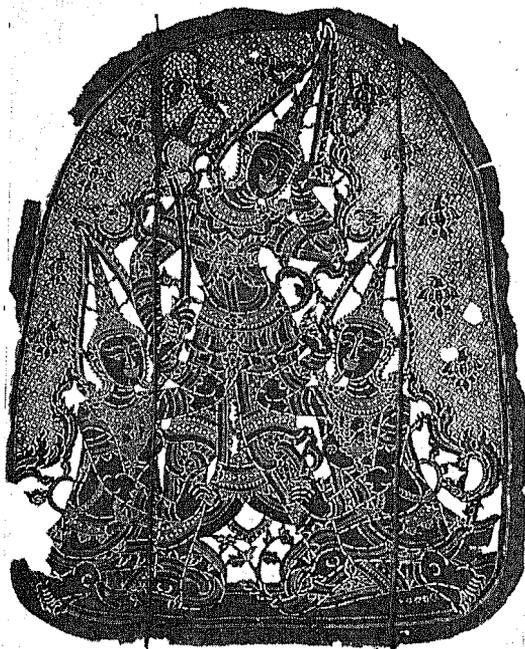
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