

A RĀMĀYAṆA RELIEF FROM THE KHMER SANCTUARY AT PIMAI IN NORTH-EAST THAILAND¹

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The recent restoration of the main *prāsāda* at Pimai by the Fine Arts Department with support from a SEATO team under the leadership of Dr. B. Groslier, makes it possible for the first time to examine the Rāmāyaṇa reliefs on the monument.²

For the purpose of identification we present one sandstone relief of the main *prāsāda* of Pimai representing one episode from the Rāmāyaṇa; we shall compare this with representations of the same episode from other reliefs in Thailand and in Indonesia.

The Building of the Causeway to Lankā. Figure 1.

This stone relief shows Rāma's monkey army in the heroic act of building the causeway from India to Lankā as described in Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa, Yuddha Kanda, chapter 22 under the title 'The Army crosses the Sea'. The identification of this relief is certain and it is in accordance with the text, though as we shall see, with one major deviation.

Description

The restored lintel is placed above the door of the *avant-corps* of the main *prāsāda* on the West, below the restored large triangular tympanum that seems to represent the Death of Rāvaṇa. Figure 2.

1) This study was made possible through a grant received from the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) of the Netherlands Government. In a previous paper another aspect of a relief from Pimai was discussed; see 'The Buddhist Tutelary Couple Hārītī and Pāñcika Protectors of Children, from a Relief at the Khmer Sanctuary in Pimai' *Journal of the Siam Society* vol 56 pt 2 July 1968 pp 187-205.

2) Boeles, *op. cit.* p 187 note 1.

This tentative identification is based on the representation of the same battle ending in the death of Rāvaṇa (Totsakan) on a parallel relief as shown in the magnificent tympanum opposite on the East side of the main *prāsāda*.³ Figure 3. Here, however, we are concerned with closer study of the lintel showing the building of the causeway (Fig. 1). The lower lintel, broken vertically in the centre, shows two levels of action. On the lower level, four monkeys are rushing forward, each carrying on the right shoulder a boulder to be used in constructing the causeway seen in the right half of the relief. The work is being carried out under the supervision of four armed monkey generals, possibly wearing crowns. According to the text, among them could be Vibhīṣana (Phipek), Angada (Ongkot) and Hanuman. On this same lower level to the right we see the sea greatly agitated from construction of the causeway. The sea is represented by many aquatic creatures: large and small fishes, sharks (?), sea serpents, a tortoise, crocodiles (?) and two huge mythical sea monsters with beards. In the far right corner we see a serpent in an attacking posture surrounded by flames. Above the head of this serpent, on the upper level, is a ṛṣi seated in deep meditation with the palms of the hands joined, elbows resting on drawn-up knees. The ṛṣi are friends of Rama and support his cause.

On the upper level in the left corner is a monkey breaking up the rocks using a tree as a lever. Above him, on the mountain, is again a seated ṛṣi, his outstretched left hand blessing the heavy stone carried by a monkey standing before him. Other monkeys, each carrying a rock or boulder on the right shoulder, are marching

3) As a result of the restoration we must withdraw our previous identification of the heavenly building as a *kūṭāgura*, shown on that relief and supported by the head of Brahmā (Boeles, 'Two Aspects of Buddhist Iconography in Thailand' *Journal of the Siam Society* vol 48 pt 1 June 1960 pp 74-77 and fig 6). It now becomes clear that this *kūṭāgura* is Kuvera's heavenly chariot *Puṣpaka* (*Butsabok*) by which Rāma and Sitā are returning to Ayodhya (Fig. 3). The lintel placed below this tympanum might represent the episode of Śurpanakhā (Samanakhā), daughter of Rāvaṇa, trying to seduce Rāma in the forest. She is seen being punished by Lakṣmana (Rāmāyaṇa; Aranya Kanda, Chapter 18). The identification is not certain since the punished person seems a male ogre.

toward the causeway. A crowned monkey, possibly Sugrīva, is seated behind a seated crowned warrior carrying a bow who could be Lakṣmaṇa. What is in the centre of the upper level is not clear as the figures have been damaged. Then follows three monkeys in the act of receiving rocks which are then dumped into the sea by a host of flying monkeys, all carrying rocks in their outstretched hands.

Below, however, seamonsters are destroying the stone causeway; carrying away the boulders being dumped into the sea by the monkeys. At the end of the causeway stands a crowned warrior apparently pointing with his left hand to the breach. This warrior could be Rāma who has threatened Sagara, King of the Oceans, to shoot at the sea and consume its waters by the shafts of his mighty bow. This threat was averted by King Sagara's pleading and offer of support, as a result of which the causeway could be finished—according to Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa.

The whole representation of this famous episode is one of great activity and leaves no doubt that the causeway will be completed satisfactorily. Our attention again is drawn to the corners on the upper level, in each of which is a ṛṣi. The monkey standing before the seated ṛṣi in the left corner, and receiving a blessing on the rock being carried, could be Nala, chosen to be the builder of the causeway on the recommendation of King Sagara.

We are unable to identify the ṛṣi in the upper right corner. But the upright *nāga*, surrounded by sacred flames and placed beneath him, could be a representation of King Sagara, also called Samudra, the Lord of streams and rivers.

In this depiction of the entire episode of the construction of Nala's causeway there is one major deviation from the text of Vālmiki. In the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa no mention is made of damage to the causeway caused by the removal of boulders by aquatic creatures. The parallel representation of this episode at Prambanan (possibly early 9th century A.D.) (Fig. 5) also deviates from the text of Vālmiki in this way—great fishes and seamonsters carrying away the boulders dumped into the ocean by the armies of monkeys. Stutterheim has observed this together with other deviations in the representation of

this *epos* at Prambanan and concludes that Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa cannot have been used as the text for the sculptures on these reliefs⁴. However, the *hikayats* from Java do not appear to mention this incident either. It is remarkable, therefore, that the Rāmakien of Thailand describes the carrying away of the stones by fishes at length. For an explanation of the Pimai relief, then, we look to the Rāmakien rather than to the text of Vālmiki.⁵

The Building of the Causeway as Represented on Other Reliefs.

Candi Prambanan (Lara Djonggrang) Central Java.

On the Rāmāyaṇa reliefs of Caṇḍi Prambanan the representation of this episode is in general agreement with the relief from Pimai as described⁶. Basically the same story is told and the destruction of the causeway by the action of seamonsters carrying away the rocks dumped into the sea by the monkeys receives even greater emphasis. Figures 4 and 5.

Candi Panataran East Java (c. 13th century A.D.).

In the Rāmāyaṇa reliefs of this caṇḍi the building of the causeway is represented also. The damaging of the causeway by seamonsters is not depicted, though the sea and the heads of fishes between the waves are prominent.⁷

Vat Phra Jetubon Bangkok (18th century A.D.).

The building of the stone causeway (*Rāma setu*) to Lanka is represented also on the marble reliefs along the balustrade of the *Uposatha (Bot)* of Wat Phra Jetubon (Wat Po) in Bangkok. Here the story follows the traditional Rāmakirti (Rāmakien) as it is now known from the version of King Rāma I (1782-1809). The origin of these 152 reliefs is not certain but there is reason to believe they

4) Stutterheim, W., *Rāma-Legenden und Rāma-Reliefs in Indonesien* 1925, Textband, p 177. Stutterheim notes 13 deviations from Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa of which the deviation of the fishes taking away the stones from the causeway is listed as number 11.

5) Velder, C., *Der Kampf der Götter und Dämonen* 1962 pp 126-31.

6) Stutterheim, *op. cit.* Tafelband, figs 62-65.

7) *Ibid.* fig 183.

were brought to Bangkok from Ayudhya by King Rāma I for the glorification of Vat Phra Jetubon during the restoration in his reign. These reliefs are placed against the outside wall of the upper balustrade of the *Bot* and almost all carry underneath a contemporary inscription, also in marble, in Thai verse explaining the episode depicted. The relief that carries inscription 89 shows the monkeys dumping the stones in the sea and, at the same time, the seafishes carrying away stones held between their teeth.⁸ Figure 6. The inscription reads:

๘๙	นานาพานเรศชอง	ลับสน
	หักหอบโศคเขาน	แซ่ชอง
	นับสมุทตจภูวดล	ดาลเพิก พังแเส
	ถนถนถึงทุ่มทอง	ทาน้ำรำไร ฯ

In free prose translation:

The host of monkeys obeying their great chief all worked non-stop. All and everything was in motion, rocks were broken and carried to the landing to be thrown into the water at the landing. The noise they made in working was so terrible that it sounded as if the oceans and the earth were breaking up.

Inscription 90 of the next relief (Figure 7) explains that the fishtailed Queen Suvarṇamacchā, daughter of Totsakan and at his command, orders the fishes to take away the stones of the causeway.

๙๐	มัจฉานาเรศให้	ฝูงปลา
	คอยคาบศิลาพา	สายหร่าย
	ไรไรเรียกคงคา	คนค้ำ หายแเส
	วายุบุตรเห็นเหตุร้าย	เร่งร้อนใจถวิล ฯ

8) ๘๘, ๘๐, ๘๒ ประชุมจารึกวัดพระเชตุพน เล่ม ๒ ราชบัณฑิตยสถาน พ.ศ. ๒๔๗๒ หน้า ๓๓๖, ๓๓๗.
See also: H.H. Prince Dhanivāt, 'The Inscriptions of Wat Phra Jetubon' *Journal of the Siam Society* vol 26 pt 2, 1933 pp 143-70.

In free prose translation :

Macchā the Queen of the sea, seeing the stones coming down to fill the sea, commanded her host of fish to grab them all piece by piece and take the dangerous stones away. The waters that seemed to be filled up in the day time thus became deep and watery again during the night. Hanuman saw this and knew that he was up against a real problem and his heart was worried.

Inscription 91 tells of Hanumān diving into the sea in search of the cause of the trouble and at last discovering the beautiful mermaid. Hanumān is able to seize her and to hold her tight to his breast.

Inscription 92 describes the famous interlude that follows :

๙๒	เสร็จสองสังวาสแล้ว	โคมลา
	วอนว่าวานนางปลา	บ่าวพ้อง
	คนคาบศีลามา	ดุจดั่ง เต็มแฮ
	ครั้นเสร็จโคมลาน้อง	สู่ท้าวทูลแถลง ฯ

In free prose translation :

They both fell in love and when they had become man and wife Hanuman begged leave of his new found love. He begged her to tell her host of fish to bring back all the rocks that they had taken away and pile them up as they were before. When he saw the task done he again bade goodbye to his queen and hurried to report to his Lord.

In the pertinent relief, Hanumān dallies with the mermaid Queen by seizing her breast while the golden macchā in a classical gesture pushes Hanumān's arm away. Figure 8. After having made love, the beautiful Queen orders the fishes to bring back the stones and the causeway can then be completed. Their love is blessed with the birth of a son Macchānu; on the stage he is represented as an uncrowned fishtailed monkey.⁹ In the Rāmākien,

9) Stutterheim, *op. cit.* Tafelband, figs 98 and 99.

Hanumān is a great lover on several occasions but his adventures always have one noble goal: to help Rāma win back his wife Sitā.

In the *nang yaai* (the great hide screens) as performed in the Royal Palace, the episode of the building of the causeway and the carrying away of the stones by fishes, large and small, is represented also.¹⁰

In the representation of the building of the causeway, the Rāmāyaṇa reliefs of Pimai and Prambanan both depict the carrying away of stones by fishes. This important incident is not mentioned in Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa and, therefore, another version must have been followed, the origin of which is uncertain, though it is in harmony with the Rāmākien as evidenced by the reliefs of Vat Po.

The interlude between Hanumān and Suvarṇamacchā, the mermaid Queen, is in great favour in Thailand. It seems a particular manifestation of what has been called 'local genius'¹¹.

10) H.H. Prince Dhaninivat, Kromamun Bidyalabh, 'Hide figures of the Rāmākien at the Ledermuseum in Offenbach, Germany' *Journal of the Siam Society* vol 53 pt 1 January 1965 pp 61-66 fig 4628. On the stage as *khon*, this episode is described by Dhanit Yupho, *Classical Siamese Theatre* Bangkok 1952 p 129 item 46 : Phra Rām crossing the sea with his armies.

11) Bosch, F.D.K., 'Local Genius en Oud-Javaanse Kunst' *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde. Nieuwe Reeks* deel 15 no 1, 1952.



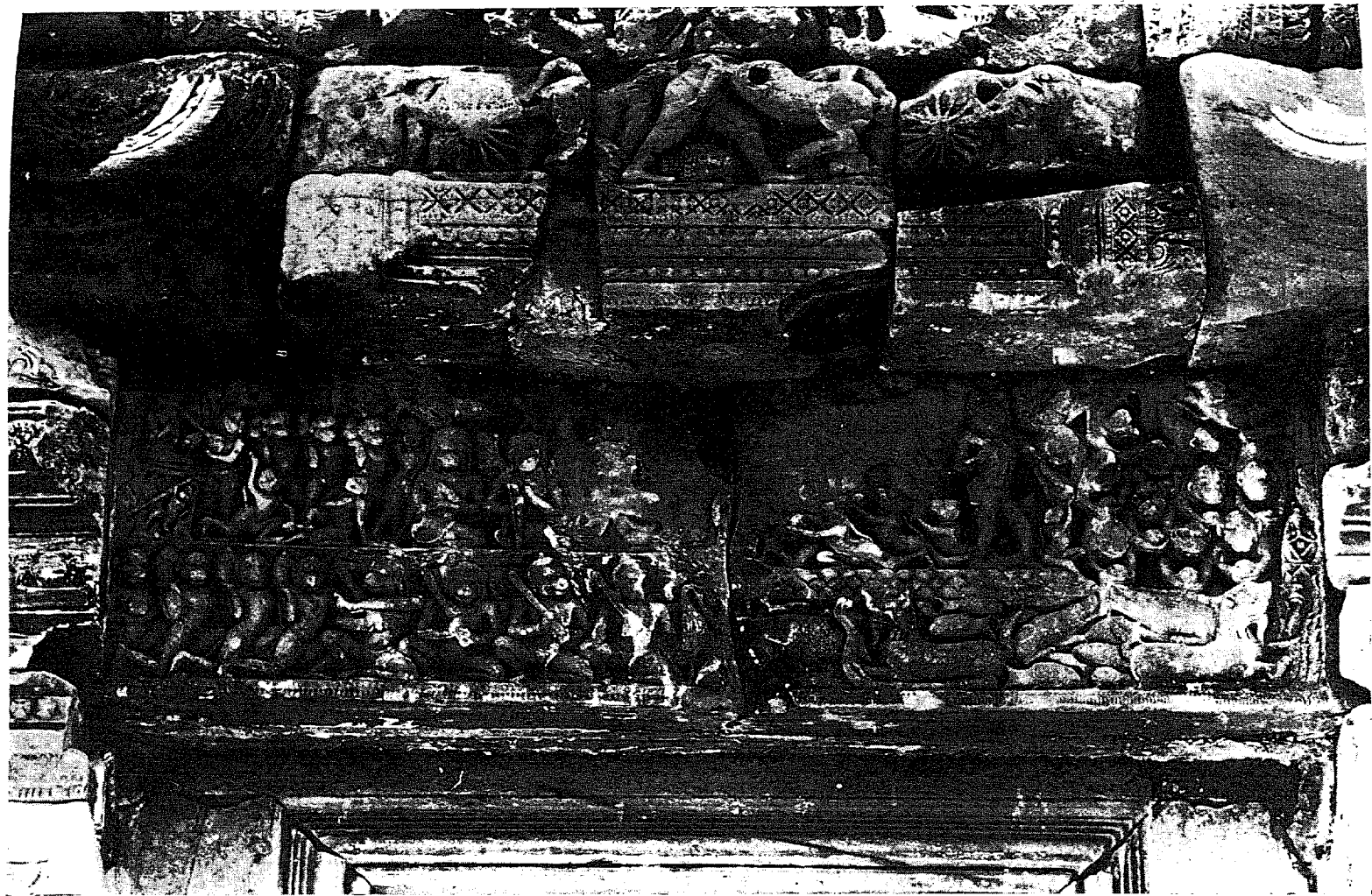


Figure 1. Lintel above door of the *avant-corps* of the main *prāsāda* of the Khmer Sanctuary at Pimai; West Facade. Early 12th Century A.D. Building of the causeway to Langkā.



Figure 2. Triangular tympanum above door of the *avant-corps* of the main *prāsāda* of the Khmer Sanctuary at Pimai; West Facade. Final battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa (Totsakan) (?).



Figure 3. Triangular tympanum above door of the *avant-corps* of the main *prāsāda* at Pimai; East Facade. Final battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa. Brahmā on *hamsa* supports the chariot *puṣpaka* in flight. Rāma's return to Ayodhya.



Figure 4. Candi Prambanan; Central Java. Construction of the causeway by Rāma's monkey army (Stutterheim's figure 63).



Figure 5. Cañdi Prambanan. Attempts at destruction of the causeway by fishes and seamonsters (Stutterheim's figure 64).



Figure 6. Vat Phra Jetubon; Bangkok. *Bot.* Building of the causeway. Marble relief carrying inscription number 89. (Marble quarried in Central Thailand).



Figure 7. Vat Phra Jetubon; Bangkok. *Bot.* Building of the causeway. Marble relief carrying inscription number 90.



Figure 8. Vat Phra Jetubon; Bangkok. *Bot*, West. Hanumān and Suvarṇamacchā (Suvarṇamatsya). Marble relief (43×43 cm.) carrying inscription number 92.