

THE LIFE OF THE RĀMĀYAṆA IN ANCIENT CAMBODIA:
A STUDY OF THE POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL ROLES OF
AN EPIC TALE IN REAL TIME (I)¹

Siyonn Sophearith
Ph.D. candidate, University of California, Berkeley

Introduction

The Rāmāyaṇa was first composed in Sanskrit and is attributed to the sage Vālmīki. It was gradually disseminated to many countries in Asia, in some important ways regardless of beliefs or religions. Today, the epic is still very present in many traditions in Southeast Asia, although the majority of the people do not practice Hinduism. In Southeast Asia now, the epic is not in Sanskrit, as it is in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, but in vernacular languages. Researchers are not really sure whether the epic was first introduced into Southeast Asia in Sanskrit or in other Indian vernacular languages, for the Tale was written also in Indian vernaculars. Smith states that “most of the vernacular versions of the Rāma story appeared late in the so-called medieval period of India’s history, between the twelfth and sixteenth / early seventeenth centuries (Smith 1983: 30).”

In Southeast Asia, the Rāmāyaṇa is known by many names, such as *Rāmakiem* in Thai, *Rāmakerti* in Khmer, *Phra Lak Phra Lam* in Laotian, and Rāmāyaṇa *Kakawin* in Javanese. Not only is the name different in each of these contexts the content of the epics is as well. Each tradition has added to, removed from or otherwise modified the epic, presumably in accordance with local preferences and knowledge, over the course of time and space. In the Cambodian versions, if the epic describes a forest, then it localizes the forest in Cambodia itself, or, in another example, it

¹ This article is the first of two based on my MA thesis, presented at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2003. Many thanks to my Berkeley advisors, A. Thompson, J. Williams and R. Goldman, for their guidance and support. The second of the two articles is to appear in *Udaya* 7.

would seem that if some scenes in the epic do not conform to the preferences of the audience, then they are modified. These variants also differ at different times and locations within a single culture. In Cambodia the sixteenth–seventeenth century text is, for example, to some extent, different from contemporary oral traditions.

Rāmāyaṇa studies, both looking at Indian versions of the epic as well as versions outside of India, have long attracted researchers. Articles and books have been published, and conferences have been held, all to discuss and present this epic with many different focuses. Rāmāyaṇa studies, as an academic field, are in and of themselves extensive, with researchers approaching the epic from numerous different angles.² This essay will concentrate on the Rāmāyaṇa in Cambodian tradition, most specifically in the ancient period (sixth–thirteenth centuries). Before presenting my particular research perspectives and questions, I will give a brief overview of research on the Cambodian Rāmāyaṇa tradition to date.

Rāmāyaṇa Research in Cambodia: the State of the Art

From the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the beginning of scholarly research on Cambodian culture, the Rāmāyaṇa was an important focus of interest. Several modern scholars have paid close attention to different aspects of the Rāmāyaṇa, as it appears in Khmer tradition. I will first focus on those scholars who have worked closely on the literary tradition. In the 1930s, S. Karpelès collected Cambodian manuscripts of the Rāmāyaṇa and published them in 16 booklets constituting what has often been called the “classical Rāmakerti” (Pou 1983: 255). It is this composite text that has been taught in schools in the modern era. S. Pou, a linguist, collated and edited middle period manuscripts, dating to the sixteenth–seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These texts differ little from that of Karpelès. However, Pou sees in them two separate versions, which she has entitled Rāmakerti I (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries) and Rāmakerti II (eighteenth century) (Pou 1979 and 1982). Pou has published several meticulous French translations and analyses of these manuscripts. She has also published many articles related to studies of the epic (see full bibliography).³ J. Jacob has also translated the Khmer Rāmāyaṇa texts, the same texts that

² A major project to publish an annotated translation of the entire Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa is currently being directed by R. and S. Goldman at the University of California, Berkeley. A new French translation by M.-Cl. Porcher recently appeared in the Pléiade editions. In my bibliography I attempt to include all work published to date on the Cambodian version, as well as a selection of the most important work on other versions or other pertinent questions concerning the Rāmāyaṇa.

³ Her work on the Rāmāyaṇa is largely linguistic, and indeed her well annotated translations are monumental accomplishments. Pou’s analyses of the Rāmāyaṇa are largely confined to considerations of textual genealogy in relation primarily to Vālmīki, and general cultural considerations of the Khmer Buddhicization of the originally Hindu epic.

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Pou did, into English (Jacob 1986). In the 1960s-70s two important recordings of oral traditions were made. The first was of a storyteller named Ta Krud; the second, a storyteller named Ta Chak. According to F. Bizot, who recorded and studied the Ta Chak version, this esoteric rendering of the Rāmāyaṇa can be philologically dated to the seventeenth-eighteenth century (Bizot 1983: 264). Recently, Pi Bunin recorded another oral tradition narrated by Ta Soy (Bunin 2000). This oral tradition once existed as a written text, which was destroyed during recent wars. The “Ta Soy text” is used for a type of masked dance drama known as Lakhon Khol and performed to solicit rain or expel disease. Other diverse studies, drawing on additional material, such as art, language and custom, have also contributed to our understandings of the tradition as a whole in Cambodia.

In 1969, the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh attempted a synthetic analysis of the epic in Cambodia. This publication includes a brief but insightful note on the Rāmāyaṇa in ancient Cambodia by Bernard-Philippe Groslier (Groslier 1969). Many studies of iconographic and performance traditions from ancient to modern times have also proven relevant. G. Coedès’ extensive work on Cambodian civilization looking at both iconography and inscriptions makes frequent reference to the Rāmāyaṇa. He published numerous articles on different manifestations of the Rāmāyaṇa in Cambodia. L. Finot’s work in these same domains also touched frequently on the Rāmāyaṇa (see full bibliography). S. Singaravelu compiled previous research on the Rāmāyaṇa in the Cambodian tradition from ancient times to the present-day in an attempt to compose a synthetic study (Singaravelu 1982). In a series of publications, J. Filliozat studied the Rāmāyaṇa throughout Southeast Asia, but his main discussion was on the Rāmāyaṇa in Cambodia (Filliozat 1983). E. Porrée-Maspéro studied the Rāmāyaṇa in everyday life (Porrée-Maspéro 1983). V. Roveda has recently worked closely on Khmer iconography (Roveda 1997 and 2002). At the same time, Ly Boreth devoted an art historical dissertation to representations of the Rāmāyaṇa at three ancient Khmer temples (Banteay Srei, Baphuon, Phimai), as well as a modern Lao temple.

There are many other researchers who have worked directly or indirectly with the epic who are not mentioned here. However, research on the Rāmāyaṇa still needs to be done. In sum, the post-Angkorian “classical text” has received the most sustained attention, thanks to linguist Saveros Pou, inspired by her teacher, F. Martini. However, what might be the basis of Rāmāyaṇa studies in Cambodia, the epic in ancient times (sixth-thirteenth century), has only been sporadically and unevenly treated. Though many publications have appeared, no one has yet successfully completed thorough analyses of the epic in the ancient period with reference to Indian sources.⁴

⁴ The Royal University of Fine Arts 1969 publication attempted this in many ways, but failed to work in a detailed and systematic manner with epigraphic and iconographic material.

A Brief History of the Rāmāyaṇa in Cambodia

The oldest mainland Southeast Asian Sanskrit inscription, found at Vo Canh, on the coast of central Vietnam, and dated palaeographically to the end of the third century A.D., indicates the presence of the epic in the Southeast Asian mainland (Filliozat 1983: 193).⁵ In Cambodia proper, the earliest known evidence of the Rāmāyaṇa was from a Sanskrit inscription dated to the sixth century. In addition, a sculpture of Rāma, which was found in Takeo province, is stylistically dated to the same period. From that point on, there are a number of allusions to the epic in inscriptions and iconography. However, in spite of the available evidence we do not have an ancient text or know what one might have been like.

The earliest text known in Cambodia, mentioned above as Rāmāyaṇa I, and philologically dated to the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, is written in very beautiful Khmer verse. This text is entitled “Rāmakerti,” the “Glory of Rāma.” Rāma figures as a Bodhisattva, such that the Rāmakerti is itself a sort of *Jātaka* tale, fully integrated into the Theravada Buddhist complex (Pou 1989: 6). The text is very close to the Vālmīki version. In Vālmīki terms, the text starts from the Bālakāṇḍa and ends with the Yuddhakāṇḍa. However, the Khmer epic omits numerous scenes, including the death of Rāvaṇa. It is generally understood that the text is therefore not complete. This point, however, raises important questions regarding vernacularization and localization, which I will treat at greater length in this study (with reference to Pollock 1996; 1998). Why is it “incomplete”? To what extent should we consider it a complete text? Which version should be considered the complete version? Do we have to use the critical edition of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa as the complete version, a text which is itself a scholarly compilation? In Indian tradition, Kuśa and Lava—the sons of Rāma and Sītā—are the narrators of the epic. They learned the story from the sage Vālmīki. Vālmīki heard the story from Nārada, the celestial sage, and then he composed it in verse. The story is transmitted orally. As many scholars have pointed out in other contexts, the authority of the written text is based on its oral genealogy.⁶ Similarly we might say that, in contemporary Cambodia, storytellers also learnt the story by heart only in hearing it recited. Others however, learnt the story from palm-leaf manuscripts. These narrations were performed in shadow theater and masked dance drama. Sometimes, particular episodes are performed for specific religious events. In addition to their religious function, these performances also entertain the audience. It is therefore necessary for narrators and performers to make their material relevant to

⁵ Filliozat believes this inscription to suggest the Vālmīki Sanskrit version itself as the source text.

⁶ I became aware of this phenomenon especially in reading Messick’s *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*. Many thanks to J. Hadler for pointing this out to me.

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their audience. To accomplish this, narrators and performers modify and express the concepts of the story in a way that the audience may be better able to understand and be entertained. This is to say that the episodes of the Rāmāyaṇa performed are the Rāmāyaṇa for those people at that time and place. The texts were written for the performances; therefore only some episodes have been selected and developed. In beautiful verse, a specific manuscript relates the Rāmāyaṇa, but, for example, only the episode where Vaiy Rāb magically puts Rāma to sleep and kidnaps him to his own realm. The narrators briefly introduce the whole story and then begin the specific episode they aim to perform. Why did this episode merit composition as a manuscript in and of itself? What was its specific use? These questions remain unanswered. Similarly, we should ask why oral narrations recorded in the twentieth century, like much ancient art, are focused on the war (Yuddhakāṇḍa). Now, it is also very likely that the earliest known Khmer written version was also a sort of theatrical libretto (Pou 1989: 3). The text may well have been complete for its specific purpose. And of course any “complete” text, such as the Vālmīki, might better be considered a sort of falsification of tradition, made complete by compilers rather than practitioners, or those using “fragments” for specific purposes. More research needs to be done on this.

Among other surviving Khmer written texts, of most significance for this present study are *Lpoēk Nagar Vatt*, *Traibhed* and *Vaiy Rāb Saṅdam Brah Rām* and *Bandam Bāli*. The *Lpoēk Nagar Vatt*, a manuscript arguably dated to the seventeenth century, describes the bas-reliefs of the Rāmāyaṇa at Angkor Wat temple. The meters of this text and the Rāmakerti I are very similar. Remarkably, there is no extant Cambodian version of the Mahābhārata, which was, however, extremely popular in ancient Cambodia. This stark contrast between the prominence of the Rāmāyaṇa and the disappearance of the Mahābhārata in post-Angkorian times surely has significance. This phenomenon has long been noted, but never sufficiently explained.⁷

A number of undated manuscripts of the “Traibhed” or “Traiyug” also contain interesting information for our subject (Pou 1989). Part of the text describes Hindu cosmogony, while the rest of it relates the Rāmāyaṇa with a focus on the origin of each character. The text also relates that a great sage tests the gods Brahma, Śiva and Viṣṇu to see who is the most compassionate and powerful, so that one of them can be chosen to save the world from the Demons’ domination. The great sage, finally, chooses Viṣṇu. The style of the Traibhed is unique in that it would not seem to be a text for performance. It is only in prose and has nothing which could be interpreted as stage directions. Unfortunately, the text is again “incomplete.”

As mentioned above, three important oral traditions have been recorded, transcribed and studied.

⁷ One common speculation is that Theravadin Buddhists more readily adopted the Rāmāyaṇa than the more violent Mahābhārata.

The contents of two of the oral stories, narrated by Ta Chak and Ta Soy are very similar, although these two men lived in different provinces and at different times (Ta Chak, of Siem Reap, was probably born in 1897 and his date of death is unknown; Ta Soy, from Kandal, died in 1995). The story narrated by Ta Chak is longer and more poetically beautiful than Ta Soy's. Ta Soy was illiterate, and died before finishing his narration for recording. The third famous narrator was Ta Krud; unfortunately I have been unable to consult his recorded text.

Finally, the epic has also been well embedded into the daily life of the Khmer people for centuries. Names of trees or plants are, for example, based on characters in the Rāmāyaṇa. For instance, Lambaen braḥ Rāma, the “javelin of Rāma,” is a kind of orchid; Doḥ nān Setā, “the breasts of Sītā,” is also a kind of orchid; and Srama Piphek, “Vibhīṣaṇa Srama fruit.” Villagers, who are not bards, can also explain why such plants are named in these ways by relating episodes of the Rāmāyaṇa or by otherwise explaining how they are derived from the epic tale.

The abovementioned texts each contain different episodes. The sixteenth-seventeenth century text is different from those of the Traibhed, as well as the oral traditions and the Vaiy Rāb saṅdam Brah Rāma, etc. The variety of the episodes in each text is very significant: if we were to piece together the information contained in all of the texts, we would have our own “complete Rāmāyaṇa.” Though in philosophical and poetic terms the Khmer tradition is undoubtedly less complex or elaborate than Vālmīki, the variety of episodes developed and the variety of its use make it a document of comparable importance in Cambodian tradition.

The Rāmāyaṇa : a Template for the Study of Society

In a study on the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, R. P. Goldman and S. Goldman write:

A second critical level on which the Rāmāyaṇa operates powerfully is the social. The poet has skillfully crafted his central characters, and the situations in which they find themselves, to be monovalent examples of idealized positive and negative role models in Hindu society. Thus Rāma is the ideal son, elder brother, husband, monarch, and general exemplar of a favored Hindu norm of masculinity. He is handsome, energetic, brave, compassionate, stoic, and wholly committed to the governing principles of dharma by which society, and indeed the entire cosmos, is supposed to be regulated (Goldman: 15).

The Rāmāyaṇa, these authors tell us, functions as a treatise for socio-political constructions of early India. Following this fundamental notion, in the present study I aim to study the presentations and the adaptations of the Rāmāyaṇa in ancient Cambodia in order to explore how the

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epic functioned in politics, religion and moral education in ancient Khmer society.

Unfortunately, and as should be clear in my above exposition, we do not know the nature of the Rāmāyaṇa as a text in ancient Cambodia, though past research has indicated that the ancient texts were very close to the Vālmīki version. I am not attempting here to reconstitute the ancient texts, because that would be an impossible task. Moreover, our knowledge of political and religious practices in ancient Cambodia is relatively limited. The fact that Cambodia adopted Theravada Buddhism in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, and has since remained Theravadin, blurs our understanding of the Rāmāyaṇa in ancient, primarily Brahmanic Cambodia. Nonetheless, we can understand some aspects of ancient traditions by looking at contemporary practices in Cambodia and other countries in South and Southeast Asia. To develop understandings of the texts used in ancient Cambodia, therefore, I will focus on ancient Cambodian sources, namely Sanskrit inscriptions and art, but I cannot avoid using the available middle period and contemporary texts and traditions as they reflect on ancient times.⁸ In addition, I will also consider as points of comparison other texts of Thai, Malay, and Laotian traditions. Finally to understand the Rāmāyaṇa in ancient Cambodia, we need to consider not only the Indian Vālmīki, but also other Indian epics and Purāṇas.

Drawing on these multiple sources, but again with a strong focus on close readings of ancient Sanskrit epigraphy and iconography, I will explore how in ancient Cambodia, episodes of the Rāmāyaṇa were used not only to exalt the kings and impart the message to the people to behave properly and to abide by the law, but also, perhaps, as a constant threat of critique of abuse of royal power or unethical behavior. In short, I will argue that the epic represented the Dharma both as embodied by royal order, and as a model perhaps not yet attained. For while the authors and the artists praise Rāma-the-King, they also suggest sharp critiques of Rāma's weaknesses. The work of J. Scott, O. W. Wolters and P. Mus has inspired my thinking here. Firstly, they have shown me methods of inquiry which challenge initial interpretation to find "hidden meaning" in expression. Scott's idea of *hidden transcripts* inspired me to think more critically of power relations between leaders and the people (Scott 1990). Those relations described by Scott in the modern Southeast Asian context are remarkably similar to those recorded in the Rāmakerti. Wolters' work on the "mandala" and the "man of prowess" paradigms are helpful in better understanding power structures and usurpations in ancient Cambodia (especially Wolters 1999). Similarly, Mus' work on indigenous Southeast Asian cults has encouraged me to try to think about the idea of "indigenous perspectives" (Mus 1933).

⁸ I will examine only Sanskrit inscriptions, to the exclusion of Khmer language inscriptions, as the latter contain only very indirect reference to the Rāmāyaṇa through the occasional mention of a proper name.

In the following, I will present the episodes and characters of the Rāmāyaṇa which can be readily identified in ancient Cambodian epigraphy and iconography. Here, I will discuss the ways in which the Rāmāyaṇa of ancient Cambodia would seem to resemble or differ from the Vālmiki version, with a focus on localization of the epic.

In a second installment, to appear in the next volume of *Udaya*, I will analyze this material to explore the ways in which the Rāmāyaṇa was used to yoke political expression and religious values in view of establishing a certain social and moral order in ancient Cambodia. In this study I will not, again, reconstruct the complete ancient Khmer Rāmāyaṇa. Yet, by considering as thoroughly as possible the series of episodes or other references represented sculpturally and verbally from the sixth to thirteenth centuries, and in analyzing how these functioned or were used in society, I hope to establish some sort of complete vision of the life of the Rāmāyaṇa in ancient Cambodia.

Presentations of the Rāmāyaṇa in iconography and Sanskrit inscriptions in ancient Cambodia

In order to provide a clear understanding of the material on which further analyses will be based, in this first installment, I will provide a detailed account of specific episodes and characters from the Rāmāyaṇa that can, to my knowledge, be positively or hypothetically identified in ancient Khmer iconography and epigraphy.⁹ I have chosen to organize the presentation of these episodes and characters based on the narrative order of the Rāmāyaṇa, a choice I will discuss below.

Before proceeding to this compilation of material, however, I would like to briefly discuss the general nature of the source material. Although both iconography and inscriptions are important to this study, the Rāmāyaṇa was not presented in inscriptions to the same extent as it was in iconography. Inscriptions, in Sanskrit and Khmer, are the only texts which remain today from ancient Cambodia. The intentions of inscriptions appear to be not to narrate the epic, but rather

⁹ In my citations of Sanskrit, I will provide Coedès' or Barth and Bergaigne's French translations in the body of my text, with the Sanskrit in notes. This is due to my enduring limitations in both Sanskrit and English. Though posing something of an obstacle to non-French readers, the French translations are used here primarily for identifying the occurrence of specific episodes, and are not analyzed in their own right. In future work, in which I pay closer attention to meaning of the texts in question, I plan to work directly from the Sanskrit, with reference to French translations, to provide my own English translations.

Though I have attempted to be comprehensive in this compilation of episodes occurring in ancient Cambodian epigraphy and iconography, I would welcome any scholarly feedback on episodes I have missed or perhaps misidentified. This will certainly be helpful in my subsequent analysis of the material in question.

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to enhance the truth of invocations for and meritorious acts of devotion to different gods. Inscriptions always praise kings or other important personages, and the Rāmāyaṇa is frequently excerpted in order to compare the person being praised in the inscription to a character in the Rāmāyaṇa.

Given the limited amount of information available in inscriptions, iconography takes on an especially important role in studies about ancient Cambodia. Iconographic evidence is limited to stone sculptures and bas-reliefs. Remarkably, although sculptures were common in ancient Cambodia, they were not at all commonly used to represent the Rāmāyaṇa. Art historians have identified only a few sculptures, for example, a figure of Rāma from Ta Keo, and a sculpture of the fight between Sugrīva and Vālin from Koh Ker. On the other hand, representations in bas-reliefs were very popular. Many episodes were carved on walls, lintels, pediments, and pilasters of ancient temples, narrating particular scenes of the epic. Nonetheless, in Cambodia these bas-reliefs rarely attempt to present the story of the Rāmāyaṇa, in contrast, for example, to bas-reliefs at Prambanan, Indonesia, which are carved with a series of episodes narrating the epic from beginning to end. The only example from Cambodia, which is at all comparable, is the series of bas-reliefs of the northwestern gallery pavilion at Angkor Wat. There the span of the entire story is covered, but not every episode is depicted. I will discuss these scenes in greater detail below. In general, we can say that this selective artistic representation of episodes is remarkably similar to the use of the Rāmāyaṇa in epigraphy. However, the function of the art (to enhance the truth, to praise Kings, etc.) is not so readily apparent to the scholarly eye. I will discuss this further in the concluding installment.

Though iconographic representation of the Rāmāyaṇa can be found throughout ancient Khmer art, it appears most abundantly on the eleventh to thirteenth-century temples, particularly the Baphuon, Banteay Samre, Thommanon and Angkor Wat. This is perhaps partly because the materials used to construct later temples were sturdier, allowing the images to remain intact. Another possible contributing factor may be that in the eleventh and especially early twelfth century Vaiṣṇava cults were very widely adopted. Many temples in the Angkor complex were dedicated to Viṣṇu.

Given the importance of iconography in ancient Cambodia, it is not surprising that scholars have long given extensive treatment to it. These studies are generally focused on religion and seek to identify particular iconography with specific scenes or characters in Indian religious texts. They are preoccupied with finding a singular text or religious figure with which to identify a particular iconography. These analyses have frequently overlooked possible discrepancies between text and application of text which exist not only in the Cambodian setting, but also in the Indian setting. In both settings this is further complicated by changes, which effect traditions over time, and in

the Khmer setting changes over space as the Indian texts were localized into Khmer surroundings. Often times these iconographies resist association with a single text which results in scholars disagreeing on which specific text, scene or character is represented in a certain iconography or critiquing the iconography as being “inaccurate.” I would like to bring into question this idea of accuracy and the way in which Khmer iconography is localized as a representation in Cambodian contexts. Here I will be identifying iconography which can be associated with the Rāmāyaṇa, without however implying that these texts are *only* representations of the Rāmāyaṇa. In fact, on the contrary, much of the iconography I have identified as relating to the Rāmāyaṇa has already been identified as relating to other texts. In this way I hope to provide research, which will open up more possibilities for understanding ancient Khmer iconography, using existing interpretations, as well as Indian and Khmer texts. For each of the images I discuss, I will account for previous identifications of which I am aware, and justify my own interpretation. To do so, I consult a variety of Indian and Cambodian texts, including but not limited to ancient Sanskrit inscriptions, along with the general setting of the iconographic representation. Whenever possible I have tried to point out associations between texts and iconography. We should note that there are many episodes which are represented iconographically, but which are not mentioned in inscriptions; and vice-versa, there are some episodes mentioned in inscriptions for which I have not seen any iconography. As interpretation of the bas-reliefs is necessary to their identification, in this first Part I elaborate more extensively on iconography than on epigraphy. Analyses of epigraphy will be given further consideration in the final Part to appear in *Udaya* 7.

I could have ordered my presentation chronologically based on the believed date of production of iconography or inscriptions or according to their locations at specific temples; instead, I have chosen to organize my presentation according to the narrative order of the Rāmāyaṇa. The chronological and locational approaches would have inhibited developing understandings of the whole context of the epic as it applied in society. Organization by the order of the Rāmāyaṇa, on the other hand, provides a general overview of the epic in a manner which facilitates my analysis: it allows me to see what parts of the story have been especially adapted to Cambodian contexts, what parts are less emphasized or not present; this information is not insignificant when looking at the role the Rāmāyaṇa played in Khmer society. As mentioned above, we do not know what ancient Rāmāyaṇa texts were like in Cambodia.¹⁰ To organize the presentation, I am therefore using what is generally understood to be the most complete compilation of the Rāmāyaṇa, the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa.

¹⁰ This method admittedly presents one important shortcoming insofar as the images and textual excerpts are taken out of their particular contexts. In further work, I hope to remedy this, by situating the citations in context.

Meeting of Vālmīki and Brahmā

In the first book of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, the Bālakāṇḍa, the sage, Vālmīki, asked a celestial sage, Nārada:

Is there a man in this world today who is truly virtuous? Who is there who is mighty and yet knows both what is right and how to act upon it? Who always speaks the truth and holds firmly to his vows?

Who exemplifies proper conduct and is benevolent to all creatures? Who is learned, capable, and a pleasure to behold?

Who is self-controlled, having subdued his anger? Who is both judicious and free from envy? Who, when his fury is aroused in battle, is feared even by the gods? (Goldman 1984: 121)

Nārada responded that the person Vālmīki inquired about was Rāma and told him his story. After listening to the story of Rāma, Vālmīki went to bathe at the Tamasā River. There he saw two lovely birds mating near his bathing place. As he was watching, a Niṣāda hunter killed the male bird. Vālmīki was saddened by the killing of the bird and so he cursed the hunter: “Since, Niṣāda, you killed one of this pair of *Krauñcas*, distracted at the highest of passion, you shall not live for very long” (Goldman 1984: 127). The curse was made in verse: the sage himself was surprised because of his grief or *śoka*, and he composed a poem or *śloka*. After Vālmīki returned from his bathing place, the god Brahmā visited him and asked him to compose the entire story of the Rāmāyaṇa using the meter of the *śloka* that he used to curse the Niṣāda hunter (Goldman 1984: 127-29).

Vālmīki is traditionally acknowledged as the composer of the Rāmāyaṇa, and he, like Vyāsa, the composer of the Mahābhārata, plays an important role in the Rāmāyaṇa, especially at the end of the epic. In Southeast Asia, he has been known and worshiped since at least the seventh century. One of the first references to his cult that we are aware of is a Cham inscription at Tra Kieu, located in what is now central Vietnam. The inscription, studied by P. Mus, is dated to the seventh century and indicates that King Prakāśadharmā erected and worshipped a statue of the sage Vālmīki. Interestingly, the inscription mentions the legendary visit of Brahmā to the hermitage of Vālmīki and the composition of the poem (Mus 1928: 150). Mus further suggests that Vālmīki may have also been worshiped in Cambodia, in the pre-Angkorian settlement at Sambor Prei Kuk (Mus 1928: 149).

Although without any associated concrete evidence in plastic art, several Khmer inscriptions also mention Vālmīki. A ninth-century inscription found to the northeast of Thnal Baray at

Angkor, relates:

La bouche des rois racontait sa gloire, et leurs femmes la chantaient: Rāghava n'a eu pour chantre que son propre fils, célébrant sa gloire telle qu'il l'avait entendu raconter par Vālmīki (Bergaigne 1893: 290, K. 281, face C, stanza XXVII).¹¹

This inscription tell us that Vālmīki is a narrator of the Rāmāyaṇa and he also teaches Rāma's son(s) the story of Rāma as it is described in the Uttarakāṇḍa and the Bālakāṇḍa of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. A vestige of a tenth-century inscription, of a Buddhist Terrace at Angkor Thom, reads "Le Guru, le fils de Bhṛḡu, Vālmīki..... (Coedès 1942: 184, K. 491, st. I)."¹² Together, these texts demonstrate that ancient Khmer knew of the sage Vālmīki. In middle period texts, Pou explains that Vālmīki is known as Vajjamrik. This new name is a result of phonetic mutation (Pou 1981: 21). Only the name Vālmīki appears to be known today, and this only through formal education based on colonial research.

I have found only one iconographic example which I believe to refer to Vālmīki: an eastern pediment of the dancing hall of Banteay Chhmar, a temple dated to the twelfth–thirteenth century. At the center of the pediment, a four-faced god, none other than Brahmā, is sitting. On his right, two *brahman*s are paying homage to him. One of the *brahman*s is playing a harp and another *brahman* appears to chant or read texts to Brahmā. On Brahmā's left, a hunter is shooting an arrow at two birds (Fig. 1). This pediment may well recount two important scenes: the killing of the bird and the meeting of Vālmīki with Brahmā, with reference to Vālmīki's grief and his composition.



Fig. 1. Pediment, Banteay Chhmar, 12th-13th (Photo by Nou Boramey)

¹¹ bhūbhṛinmukhoditaṃ yasya yaśo gāyanti tatstriyaḥ
 valmīkajamukhodgīrṇaṃ svaputro rāghavasya tu
¹²
 gurubhārggavavālmīki

Tempting Ṛśyaśṛṅga

In the *Bālakāṇḍa*, it is related that King Daśaratha, who yearns for sons, orders an official, Sumantra, to convene all the royal priests and Gurus in order to find a solution to this yearning. Before doing as commanded, Sumantra told the King an ancient story which he had heard from a sacrificial priest about the sage Ṛśyaśṛṅga, a son of Vibhāṇḍaka and a grand son of Kāśyapa.

The kingdom of King Romapāda, called Aṅga, was stricken by drought. King Romapāda asked for the advice of his royal priests and ministers. One of his priests told King Romapāda that he should bring Ṛśyaśṛṅga to the kingdom. However, no one dared to do so because they were afraid of the forest seer. Finally, the priests decided to use beautiful women as the means to lure the seer and bring him into the city. They sent the most beautiful courtesans to stay near the hermitage of Ṛśyaśṛṅga. After seeing those women, Ṛśyaśṛṅga thought that they were also sages. Then, he invited them to his hermitage. The women also invited Ṛśyaśṛṅga to their place. The courtesans were happy and told Ṛśyaśṛṅga that he should go to their hermitage where he would be solemnly welcome. He decided to go with them. Only once the seer arrived at the kingdom did the gods bring the rain (Goldman 1984: 139-143).

There are no references in Cambodian epigraphy to the episode, but the story is related in the *Traibhed* (EFEO ms. 259). This text, like Indian texts, mentions that Ṛśyaśṛṅga prepared a sacrifice for King Daśaratha to obtain children. The sage provided sacrificial rice to each of the three wives of Daśaratha.

I would like to suggest that a northern pediment of the central tower of Banteay Samre temple clearly represents this scene (Fig. 2). The pediment is divided into two sections. The upper section represents a person sitting on a throne. Unfortunately, damage prevents identification of this person. A figure sits on either side of the base of the throne. These are most likely women. Above those figures, *apsaras* shower flowers upon them. The lower section features a bigger figure of a dancing girl at the



Fig. 2. Northern Pediment of the central tower of Banteay Samre, 12th century (Photo by author).

center, with musicians on her right. To the left of the dancing girl is a smaller dancer toward whom a *brahman* walks. Above the musicians, two *brahmans* sit facing one another. In my hypothetical reading, these two brahmans are probably Ṛśyaśṛṅga and his father Vibhāṇḍaka. The dancing girls and musicians are the group of courtesans who have been sent to bring Ṛśyaśṛṅga to the city. The sage walking towards the woman is Ṛśyaśṛṅga.

Fight between Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha over a Wish-fulfilling Cow

In the Bālakāṇḍa, Viśvāmitra, the son of Gādhi, was a king. While he and his armies were roaming the earth, they reached the hermitage of Vasiṣṭha. Vasiṣṭha greeted King Viśvāmitra and his armies with delicious foods, juice, liquor and wine prepared by a cow named Śabalā. After eating, Viśvāmitra wanted the cow from Vasiṣṭha, saying:

Please give me Śabalā in exchange for a hundred thousand cows, for holy man, she is truly a gem, and all gems belong to the king. Therefore, brahman, you must give me Śabalā. By rights she is mine (Goldman 1984: 224).

Vasiṣṭha disagreed and said:

I would not give you Śabalā, your majesty, for a hundred thousand or even a thousand million cows—not even for masses of silver (Goldman 1984: 224).

Upon hearing that, Viśvāmitra ordered his army to abduct the cow. The cow was very upset and went to ask Vasiṣṭha why he had abandoned her. Vasiṣṭha told her that the king's army had abducted her. She angrily asked for Vasiṣṭha's order to kill Viśvāmitra's armies, which Vasiṣṭha agreed to. A battle started and all of Viśvāmitra's forces were killed including his hundred sons. Viśvāmitra was very dejected. He installed his only surviving son on the throne and left for the Himalaya to propitiate Śiva. There he performed penance until Śiva was satisfied and granted him the knowledge of the science of all weapons and spells. With these great powers, Viśvāmitra went again to Vasiṣṭha's hermitage. He used all the weapons to try to kill Vasiṣṭha, but he could not kill him even though Vasiṣṭha used only a brahman's staff. Finally, Viśvāmitra thought:

The power of the Kshatriyas is not power at all. Only the power of Brahman's energy is power indeed. All my weapons have been destroyed by a single brahman's staff (Goldman 1984:224).

In ancient Cambodia, the inscription of Lonvek relates:

Le fils de Gādhin ne réussit pas, par les moyens de la puissance royale, à

s'emparrer de la vache Nandinī; mais lui, par ces (même moyens pratiqués) selon la méthode des contraires, sut la réduire en son pouvoir (Barth 1885: 140, K. 136, face B, st. XXIX).¹³

This inscription does not give us a full account of the episode, but an important excerpt. It stresses two crucial moments of the epic: the fight between Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha over the cow and the defeat of Viśvāmitra, in spite of his enormous army and great weapons, those of the *ṛṣatriya*. The power relations between the *ṛṣatriya* and the *brahman*, which this citation insists upon here, will be discussed in Part 2.

No iconographic representations of this episode can be positively identified. However, I would like to look at a western lintel of the central temple of the southern group of Sambor Prei Kuk, dated to the seventh century, which may represent the episode (Fig. 3). Six *brahmans* are depicted on the lintel. One of them, who is holding an unidentified object in his hand, stands in a position of attacking another *brahman* who is standing near him. It is possible that the *brahman* who is in the attacking position is Viśvāmitra: after receiving magic weapons and spells, Viśvāmitra came to Vasiṣṭha's hermitage to retaliate. The *brahman* who is standing in front of Viśvāmitra would, then, be Vasiṣṭha.



Fig.3. Western lintel of the central tower of the southern group of Sambor Prey Kuk, 7th century (Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Phnom Penh).

Representation of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa and the Story of Triśaṅku

Here I would like to call attention to a debatable bas-relief at the northwestern tower of

¹³ grahītuṃ aśakad rāja-
nandinīm gān tu yo dvandva-

śaktidvāirair na gādhijāḥ
vṛittyā tair vvaśam ānayat

the bas-relief gallery of Angkor Wat (Fig. 4).¹⁴ There are several panels sculpted on the wall. The topmost depicts two young men sitting in the middle of other important personages. Because of their headdresses, these people seem to be *keṣatriya* or gods. On the middle register, again a group of *keṣatriya* or gods sit. Above these images, two men are sculpted in a horizontal position. The two men appear to be the image of one person which is repeated in order to create the graphic effect of falling. The falling men are not dressed as *keṣatriya*, but rather as ordinary persons with messy hair. The people sitting below the figures on the third register seem to be princes, kings or gods as they wear crowns. The lowest registers of the wall, show three representations of a woman surrounded by her servants.

These carvings have puzzled researchers. Roveda suggests a linear reading of the panels “relating the entire image to a particular event in Kṛṣṇa’s life, that of Akrūra’s vision, which appear in several of the *Purāṇa*” (Roveda 2002: 144-145). He identifies the two young men in the

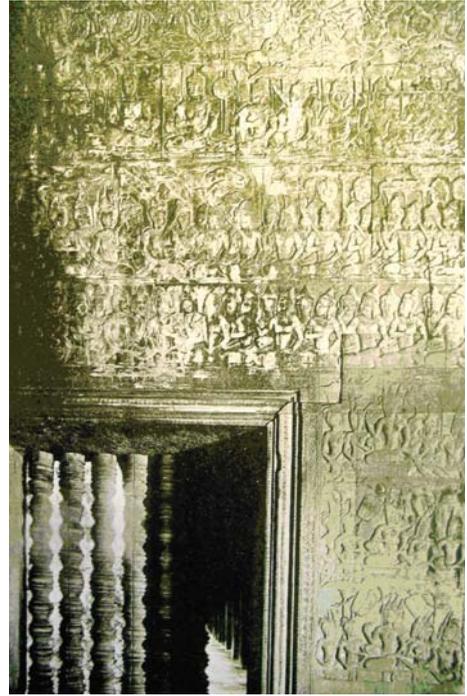


Fig. 4. Bas-relief at the northern gallery pavilion at Angkor Wat, 12th century (Finot 1932).

¹⁴ I would like to propose that, if we look at the general scheme of presentation in the bas-relief gallery, an attempt to represent the four Yugas may become apparent. Beginning with the Kṛtayuga (1), represented by the churning of the milky ocean in the large panel at the south section of the eastern facade, it continues on to the second age, Tretāyuga (2), marked by the war between Gods and Demons represented on the sixteenth-century panels of the northeast, and then on the western panel of the northern facade, and ending in the Battle of Laṅkā at the north panel of the western facade. The battle of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas marks the end of the third Age, *Dvāparayuga* (3). And the beginning of the last Age, *Kaliyuga* (4), is marked by the procession of the king and, finally, the heaven and hell panels of the southern facade end the cosmic cycle.

The northwestern corner tower of the bas-relief gallery is a particular case in that the majority or maybe all of the scenes represented are from the Rāmāyaṇa. The “pairing” position of the bas-reliefs of this pavilion is moreover remarkable. A series of reliefs are placed facing each other, forming pairs, in opposite walls of the pavilion. Are the images paired in order to express contrast and similarity? The killing of Virādha is paired with the killing of Kabandha. The alliance of Sugrīva with Rāma is paired with the alliance with Vibhīṣaṇa. The meeting of Hanuman and Sītā is paired with the journey to Ayodhyā (This would be a contrast of grief and happiness). The ordeal of Sītā is paired with the bas-relief that I am discussing here. What does this bas-relief represent?

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first register as Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. He further suggests that the second register represents the abluion of Akrūra where Akrūra submerges himself under the water two times. The scene is described in the *Brahmā Purāṇa*, which Roveda quotes, as follows:

Krishna's uncle, Akrura, has the task of escorting Krishna and Balarama to the city of Mathura to meet Kamsa. Before entering the town, the trio stops on the banks of the sacred Yamuna, which purges those who bathe in it of their sins. After washing themselves, Krishna and Balarama returned to their chariot parked in a shady grove. With their permission, Akrura also goes for the ritual abluion. He immerses himself and, while reciting the appropriate mantras, has a vision of Krishna and Balarama under the water. Amazed, he surfaces to ensure that they are both still in the chariot. He submerges himself a second time and has a vision of Vishnu sitting on the great snake Sesha (Ananta) (Roveda 2002: 145).

Roveda offers an interpretation of the next register with two peculiar figures: “the images of figures who seem to float, like in this case, seem most suitable to the depiction of an abstract concept, as proposed here, that of divine revelation (Roveda 2002: 145).” As for the figures, he simply suggests that they are likely to be the princesses mentioned in the text (Roveda 2002: 144).

The interpretation does not account for surrounding scenes which, as described in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, would likely have representations of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma's chariots, or Akrūra's vision where Balarāma is in the form of a Nāga with a thousand hooded heads and Kṛṣṇa, with four arms, sits on Balarāma (Wilson 1980: 756). Also problematic is the interpretation of the double images as floating in water. It seems awkward that images in water would be represented above the images of the important personages in the same register. I will offer an alternative reading which, unlike Roveda, will not follow a linear narration of one scene depicted in several registers, but rather several scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* depicted in different registers, as part of a larger representation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in this pavilion.

Researchers seem to agree that the peculiar images cannot be a mistake on the part of sculptors. I would like to read this bas-relief in different panels. I believe that the young men of the upper register are representations of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa meeting with other princes and ministers in Ayodhyā. Rāma is sitting on a higher platform, next to his brother Lakṣmaṇa who is sitting in a lower platform. The rest of the princes and ministers sit reverently around both of them. The lowest panels depict three women accompanied by servants. I believe that these are representations of Sītā at Mithila. The three women indicate three different times. If we look closely at the three panels of women, it becomes apparent that nothing is different except their

headdresses. The servants and the decorations are the same. The peculiar images in the middle register represent the episode of Triśaṅku, falling from heaven. The group figured below are the hosts of gods.

According to the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Triśaṅku was an ancestor of Rāma. He wanted to go to heaven in his human body. Bearing this desire, he went to ask Vasiṣṭha, his Guru, to perform sacrifices for him so that he could go to heaven, but Vasiṣṭha refused. He then went to Vasiṣṭha's hundred sons and asked them for the same thing. Instead of helping him, the hundred sons of Vasiṣṭha cursed him to be an outcast after which even his own ministers refused to allow him to be their king. Living as an outcast, he roamed many places until he finally met Viśvāmitra. Viśvāmitra agreed to help Triśaṅku fulfill his wish. By Viśvāmitra's great power, Triśaṅku flew to heaven. Unfortunately, Indra the king of the gods did not accept Triśaṅku and sent him down to Earth with his head facing downward. As he was falling headfirst towards earth, Triśaṅku screamed for help. Viśvāmitra said, "Stop! Stop!" and Triśaṅku stopped in the middle of the sky with his body pointed headfirst at the earth. In anger, Viśvāmitra created another heaven for Triśaṅku such that Indra felt fearful and agreed to let Triśaṅku stay in the southern heaven with his head facing downward (Goldman 1984: 232-238).

This episode is indeed mentioned in an inscription of the twelfth century. King Jayavarman VII is represented in a favorable light, in comparison with the Gods, with reference to the Triśaṅku episode.

C'est sans y avoir été poussé par autrui qu'il distribuait punitions aux coupables et récompenses aux méritants, tandis que c'est à l'instigation du fils de Gādhi que Vṛṣṇa a accordé le ciel à Triśaṅku, et (à l'instigation) de Brahmā qu'il a causé à Śiva cet obstacle (aux austérités) qu'est l'Amour (Coedès 1952: 243 K.288, st. XXV).¹⁵

Bow Contest

In the same corner tower, a bas-relief displays a man identifiable as a *keśatriya* by his headdress, and who is about to shoot an arrow at a target, a wheel with a bird on top of it. In front of the man, a woman sits on a platform surrounded by her servants. At his back, there are four men. One of them can be identified as a *brahman* by his hairstyle; the rest of them are dressed as

¹⁵daṇḍyapratīkṣyeṣv aparayukto yo yuñkta daṇḍāpcitī vṛṣā tu
gāṇ gādhiputrasya girā triśaṅkau pratyūham īśe smaram avjayoneḥ

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keṣatriya. The register below is carved with seated *keṣatriya*. Among them, two important figures sit on higher platforms. The lower register is, again, a group of *keṣatriya*. The lowest register depicts a group of people who seem to be making a journey (Fig. 5).

This bas-relief has long been debated. Scholars agree that it represents a *Svayaṃvara*; however, it is uncertain whether it is the *Svayaṃvara* of Sītā or the *Svayaṃvara* of Draupadī. Coedès suggests that this bas-relief represents the episode of the *Svayaṃvara* of Sītā. He explains that the man is Rāma, the man dressed as a *brahman* is Viśvāmitra and behind Viśvāmitra is King Janaka. Coedès looked at the possibility that the scene might depict the *Svayaṃvara* of Draupadī, but then dismissed it as impossible because the four men are not dressed as *brahmans* and Karṇa and Dhṛṣṭadyumna are not identifiable (Coedès 1911: 187). Finot disagreed with Coedès, suggesting that this episode represents the *Svayaṃvara* of Draupadī, because Rāma, at Sītā's *Svayaṃvara*, broke the bow rather than shooting at a target. Finot concludes that the bas-relief is not the *Svayaṃvara* of Sītā as it does not agree with the Rāmāyaṇa texts (Finot 1912: 193). Later, however, Przulski worked to confirm Coedès' conclusion that the bas-relief represents the *Svayaṃvara* of Sītā through a comparison with a bas-relief at Prambanan temple in Java (Przulski 1921-22: 322-325). Stein Callenfels, by looking at Javanese and Malay texts, agrees with Finot that the relief represents a *Svayaṃvara* of Draupadī (Stein Callenfels 1933: 1-9).

Though we cannot dismiss the possibility that this represents Sītā's *Svayaṃvara*, I believe we can make a good case for the scene depicting the *Svayaṃvara* of Draupadī by saying that Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Karṇa, who Coedès believes are not represented, are actually presented in the second register. The man sitting on the higher platform would be Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and another man behind him would be Karṇa. The man lifting the arrow would of course be Arjuna, and the four men lined up behind him would be his four brothers. The representation of a *brahman* in the dress of *keṣatriya* (whom Coedès identifies as King Janaka) does not necessarily refute this, because there are examples in Khmer art of *keṣatriya*, especially those who were previously kings or princes, dressed as *brahmans*. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are, for example, sometimes depicted dressed as *keṣatriya* and sometimes as *brahmans*. The fact that the five Pandava brothers were disguised



Fig. 5. Bas-relief at the northwestern gallery pavilion at Angkor Wat, 12th century (Finot 1932).

as *brahmins* before the *Svayaṃvara* of Draupadī is also of importance. The lowest register of the panel could represent the journey of common people to see the *Svayaṃvara* of Draupadī, organized by the king as mentioned in the Mahābhārata. And, of course, the shooting at the target is only mentioned in the Mahābhārata.

In fact, epigraphy demonstrates that Rāma was well known in ancient Cambodia for having broken the bow, rather than shooting at a target, at Sītā's *Svayaṃvara*. Again, in these references, we see the reigning Khmer king compared favorably to Rāma. The inscription of Pre Rup temple relates:

Etant échue à Rāma qui avait renoncé à la royauté et dont l'arc faible s'était brisé en tremblant, la Fortune fut autrefois ravie par l'ennemi; mais si la fille de Janaka était échue à ce roi fermement établi sur le trône et dont l'arc solide n'était pas brisé, elle n'aurait pas pu être enlevée (Coedès 1937: 112, K. 806, st. LI).¹⁶

Similarly, the inscription of Prasat Chrung of Angkor Thom reads:

Il envoyait au ciel l'ennemi au moyen de sa flèche, brisait l'arc, était chéri des humains, victorieux de l'époux de Tārā et sans passion, tandis que le fils de Daśaratha fut cher aux singes et passionné (Coedès 1952: 227, K. 288, st. LXXX).¹⁷

Nonetheless, it is also quite possible that the Angkor Wat northwestern pavilion scene represents the *Svayaṃvara* of Sītā. The characters presented lend themselves to this interpretation in this particular location where other Rāmāyaṇa scenes are represented. While the presence of the target appears to come from the Mahābhārata, it is not surprising that artists might have been influenced by both the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa since they were both very popular in ancient Cambodia, especially at this very time and in this very temple. Furthermore, both of the epics could easily have been alluded to in one *Svayaṃvara* scene.

¹⁶ bhrāntāvarugnamṛdukārmukam etya rāmaṃ
rājyād apetaṃ arināpahṛtā purā śrīḥ
yañ jānakī kila dṛḍhākṣatkārmukan tu
rājyasthirasthitim aśakyata nāpharttum

¹⁷ nayan dviṣaṇ divyagatiṃ śareṇa
jyābhṛdvimarddhī bhuvanapriyo yaḥ
tārāpatin nirjitavān arāgaḥ
kapipriyo dāsarathis tu rāgī

Encounter of Rāma and Rāma Jāmadagnya

The episode of the encounter of Rāma and Rāma Jāmadagnya is clearly mentioned in two ancient inscriptions. The first one relates the meritorious act of Rāma Jāmadagnya, while the second one mentions his defeat. The ninth-century inscription of Loley compares the reigning king to Rāma Jāmadagnya in his meritorious generosity:

Rāma donna un jour la terre [fit un don de terres] à Kāśyapa:” c’est parce qu’il s’en souvenait, et pour le vaincre en libéralité, qu’il donnait sans cesse aux *brahmanes* une montagne d’or [le mont Meru] (Bergaigne 1893: 226, K. 323, st. XLVII)¹⁸

This text refers closely to the Vālmīki version, when Rāma Jāmadagnya tells Rāma Daśaratha that:

Having thus conquered the whole earth, Rāma, I gave it as a fee to great Kāśyapa, holy in his deeds, at the end of a sacrifice. Then, as I was dwelling on Mount Mahendra, armed only with the might of my austerities, I heard about the breaking of the bow and came here as swiftly as I could.

Rāma, here is Viṣṇu’s great bow, which belonged to my father and my grandfather before him. Now take it and follow the code of the kshatriya.

This arrow is a conqueror of enemy citadels. Affix it to this best of bows if you can, Kakustha. Then I shall challenge you to single combat (Goldman 1984: 226).

The twelfth-century inscription of Prasat Tor recounts the defeat of Rāma Jāmadagnya by Rāma in an elaborate comparison by which the reigning king is said to surpass even Rāma in valor:

Après avoir vaincu par son courage dans le combat [ou: par son pas à la course] le descendant de Bhṛgu, supérieur à Bali, dont la puissance avait été détruite—après avoir soudain rabaissé le roi [ou: le soleil] de l’ouest, en remplissant la totalité des points cardinaux, – ce (roi) qui, n’étant pas bossu et tenant dans ses mains la conque, l’épée et la flèche de l’époux de Śrī (Viṣṇu), et l’arc de celui qui a pour

¹⁸ dattavān ekadā rāmaḥ kaśyapāya mahīm iti
jigīshayeva yo nityaṃ hemādrim adīśad dvije

Śakti la Terre (Śiva), a pris la Terre tombée aux mains des ennemis, surpassa le dieu aux yeux de lotus (Coedès 1937: 246-47, K. 692, st. XLV).¹⁹

The Vālmīki version relates that:

When Dāśarathi had heard the words of Rāma Jāmadagnya, he replied, tempering his response out of respect for his father:

Bhārgava, I have heard about the feat you accomplished. We respect it, brahman, for you were only discharging your debt to your father.

But Bhārgava, you regard me as if I were some weakling, incapable of discharging the duty of a kshatriya. Now you shall witness my strength and valor for yourself.

Then Rāma addressed Rāma Jāmadagnya in wrath:

I owe you reverence both because you are a brahman and for the sake of Viśvāmitra. Therefore, Rāma, I cannot loose this deadly arrow upon you.

However, I shall destroy either your retreat or the incomparable worlds you have won through the power of your austerity. The choice is yours.

For the divine arrow of Viṣṇu, conquering enemy citadels and crushing with its power all pride in strength, never flies in vain. [...]

Then, as the world stood stunned and Rāma held the great bow, Rāma Jāmadagnya, robbed of his strength, stared at Rāma.

Jāmadagnya was stunned to feel his strength sapped by the power of lotus-eyed Rāma and spoke to him in a voice grown very faint:

Long ago, when I gave the earth to Kāśyapa, he told me, ‘You may not stay in my realm.’

Therefore, heroic Raghava, please do not destroy my retreat. I shall go there with the speed of thought, to Mahendra, best of mountains.

But with this great arrow, Rāma, you may destroy the incomparable worlds that I have won through my austerities. Let there be no delay (Goldman 1984: 266-67).

This scene appears in many middle period Khmer texts, including Lboek Nokor Vat, and Rāmakerti I. In these later texts, however, Rāma Jāmadagnya is known as Rāmaparamesur. The

¹⁹ utkr̥ttakṣatram ājau bhṛgujam ativaliṃ vikrameṇābhijitya
drāg yo dhaḥkr̥tya tejasvinam inam aparāṃ pūritāśāsamūhaḥ
śrībharttāśāṅkhacakrāsīsaravasumatīśakticāpāṅkapāṅir
dhātṛiṃ śatruṣv adhīnām aharad akutilo dhaścakārājjanetram

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Khmer texts describe that Rāmaparamesur clasps his hands, kneels down and begs Rāma to spare his life. He then tells Rāma to shoot his arrow to have that magic arrow retrieve Rāmaparamesur's own bows and arrows (Pou 1979 : 18-20). In the Vālmīki version, Rāma shoots his arrow to destroy the world that Rāma Jāmadagnya has conquered. Noticeably, both of these sources focus on the shooting.

A bas-relief at the eleventh-century Baphuon depicts a man in the dress of *keṣatriya* brandishing a bow with his left hand, and about to insert an arrow with his right hand (Fig. 6). He is looking upward to the top of a tree which is in front of him. A figure is flying above him. Roveda suggests that this bas-relief represents the *Svayaṃvara* like the one at Angkor Wat (Roveda 2002: 160). This relief closely resembles another bas-relief at twelfth-century Banteay Samre (Fig. 7). Here we see a man lifting a bow in his left hand; his right hand is holding an arrow; before him is a tree and under the tree a man kneels down with his hands joined in reverence. Rather than another *Svayaṃvara*, I would like to suggest that these bas-reliefs may represent the encounter of Rāma Jāmadagnya and Rāma. In this interpretation, the person clasping his hands would be Rāma Jāmadagnya, and the man shooting the bow would be Rāma.

Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa in the Forest

A bas-relief on the pediment of the building which scholars call a “library” at Thommanon temple at Angkor represents a man sitting between a woman and another man. Below these figures are animals (Fig. 8). The carving would seem to represent Rāma, Sītā and



Fig. 6. Pilaster of Baphuon, 11th century (Roveda 2002).



Fig. 7. Semi pediment of Banteay Samre temple, 12th century (Photo by author).



Fig. 8. Pediment of Thommanon, 12th century (Photo by author).

Lakṣmaṇa in the Daṇḍaka forest. Rāma holds a bow in his hand at the center of the carving. On his right is Sītā and on his left is Lakṣmaṇa. Below the threesome, there are wild animals and forest. This may indicate the scene prior to the abduction of Sītā, with the golden deer among other animals near Rāma’s hermitage in the Daṇḍaka forest.

The scene in the Daṇḍaka forest is mentioned in the inscription of Preah Ngok:

... comme les ennemis des dieux, á l’arrivée de ce (nouveau) fils de Raghu à l’immense splendeur, dans (cette autre) forêt de Daṇḍaka (Barth 1885: 164, K. 289, face C, st. VII)²⁰

Killing of Virādhā

The killing of Virādhā is one of the most frequently represented episodes in Cambodian iconography. Generally, the scene depicts a *raṅṅasa* carrying off a woman, and two men attacking him. In later Cambodian texts of the Rāmāyaṇa, “Virādhā” is known as “Birādhā.” This name change is a result of phonetic mutation, as the “v” in old Khmer typically shifted to “b” in middle and modern language. Although this scene is represented in later texts and in ancient iconography, it is not mentioned in ancient epigraphy. Virādhā was a *gandharva* Tumburu who was cursed by Vaiśravaṇa to be born as a *raṅṅasa*. When he saw Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa walking, he abducted Sītā. Finally, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa killed him (Goldman 1991: 89-92).

The scene appears in numerous temples including Banteay Srei, Phnom Rung in present day in Thailand and Angkor Wat. A bas-relief of Banteay Srei provides a good example of the scene (Fig. 9). It depicts a demon carrying a woman in one hand and a javelin in the other. Below, two men are attacking the demon.

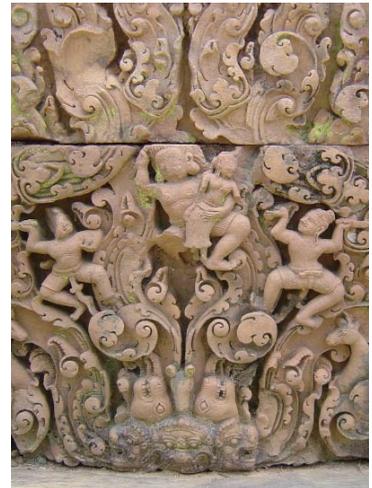


Fig. 9. Pediment of Banteay Srei, 10th century (Photo by author).

Humiliation of Sūrpaṅakhā

The episode of the humiliation of Sūrpaṅakhā is a critical scene in the epic which basically leads to the abduction of Sītā. Sūrpaṅakhā was a sister of Khara and Rāvaṇa. She lived in the Daṇḍaka forest. After seeing Rāma, she fell in love with him and asked him to marry her. Rāma refused her, but instead told her to seek to become the wife of Lakṣmaṇa who was still single. Again,

20 prayātemitatejasi
suradvīṣo yathā tasmī- n rāghave daṇḍakānanam

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Lakṣmaṇa refused her. Sūrpaṅakhā was angry and began to attack Sītā as she thought that Sītā was the reason behind these refusals. Rāma angrily ordered Lakṣmaṇa to mutilate Sūrpaṅakhā's ears and nose (Goldman 1991: 123-127).

No inscription directly mentions this scene. However, the stanza from the Preah Ngok inscription cited above suggests this scene, as the enemies of gods are frightened in the Daṇḍaka forest as they encounter Rāma after the Sūrpaṅakhā scene. In contrast, many middle and modern texts relate this scene.

Only one ancient bas-relief would seem to represent the scene. This is a lintel of Phimai temple in what is now Thailand, depicting a man holding a demon by the hair with one hand, and about to attack the demon with his other hand. Behind him, a man is sitting on a high platform, holding a woman on his lap (Fig. 10).

Researchers read this scene differently. Some believe the carving to represent the humiliation of Sūrpaṅakhā; others suggest that it might be a representation of Kṛṣṇa killing Kamsa, or the killing of Virādhā.

Siribhadra and Moore read it as a representation of a killing of Kamsa. They believe that the smaller figures seated are Kṛṣṇa's parents (Siribhadra and Moore 1992: 249). However, Uraisi suggested that this lintel represents the killing of Virādhā (Siribhadra and Moore 1992: 249).

It seems that perhaps Siribhadra and Moore developed their interpretation of this carving from Phimai based on a bas-relief at Banteay Srei temple at Angkor. The bas-relief at Banteay Srei is widely believed by scholars to depict Kṛṣṇa holding Kamsa by the hair, while kicking Kamsa, and town people watching the fight (Fig. 11).



Fig. 10. Lintel of Phimai temple, 12th century (Photo by Heng Than).



Fig. 11 Pediment of Banteay Srei, 10th century (Photo by author).

Although the attacking position of the figure at Phimai does resemble the bas-relief at Banteay Srei, I am not convinced that both images from Banteay Srei and Phimai represent the same scene. According to the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* the killing of Kaṃsa is described as taking place at a wrestling arena in Mathura (Wilson 1980: 774-75). The lintel of Phimai is clearly set in the forest, as is the attack on the *rakṣasas*. Additionally Kaṃsa is a demon incarnation; his physical body is not in demonic form. The image at Phimai is clearly of a demon.

Uraisi suggests that the bas-relief is the attack of Virādha. But in Khmer art, this episode is usually represented by a demon carrying a woman and attacked by two men. The *Vālmiki* version in fact mentions that Virādha carries Sītā while traveling; the “couple” is not settled as in the Phimai relief.

The last possibility is the humiliation of Sūrpaṅakhā. In this interpretation, the man who is holding a sword in his hand would be Lakṣmaṇa, and the couple Rāma and Sītā. The *rakṣasas* would be Sūrpaṅakhā. The depiction of the figure of Sītā shows fear of Sūrpaṅakhā’s attack. Such expressions of fear are known in Khmer art. We see, for example, before the shaking of the Mountain by Rāvaṇa depicted at Banteay Srei (Fig. 44) and Angkor Wat, Uma clings to Śiva’s neck in a like manner to the figure I see here as Sītā clinging to Rāma.

Attack of Khara

After being humiliated, Sūrpaṅakhā went to inform Khara, her brother. Khara, in anger, sent his armies to kill Rāma, but all those *rakṣasas* armies, including Khara, were killed in the battle (Goldman 1991: 127-150). Again there is no clear epigraphic reference to the attack of Khara but the same inscription, the inscription of Preah Ngok, implies that Rāma killed *rakṣasas* in the Daṇḍaka. Khmer texts in middle and modern times do, however, mention the scene.

I believe that a number of bas-reliefs may represent the scene. First, a pediment of Preah Khan (located at Angkor), a twelfth-thirteenth-century temple, depicts a man carrying a bow, and a woman, both sitting inside a pavilion. Below the couple, *rakṣasas* are attacking a horse (Fig. 12). There is a similar illustration

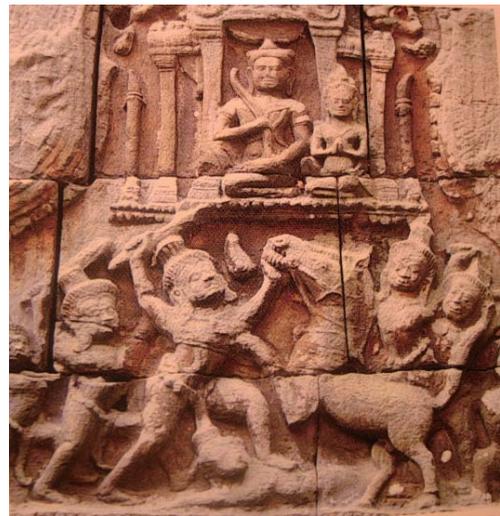


Fig. 12. Pediment of Preah Khan (Roveda 1997).

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on a pediment of Banteay Kdei which shows a man with a bow in his hand accompanied by a woman who is holding his left arm, both of them standing in a pavilion surrounded by *rakṣasas*. Above them, a horse is attacked by *rakṣasas* (Fig. 13). Roveda suggests that the pediment of Banteay Kdei represents an episode of Rāma and Sītā at Ayodhyā and he sees those *rakṣasas* as Rāma and Sītā's retainues (Roveda 1997: 155). In another pediment at Thommanon temple, a woman is holding a man's arm, standing in front of a tree. There are two demons attacking them (Fig. 14). Lan Sunnary reads this image as the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī (Lan Sunnary 1972: 175-76); Roveda suggests that it is the reunion of Rāma and Sītā (Roveda 1997: 162).



Fig. 13. Pediment of the entrance of Banteay Kdei, 12th-13th century (Photo by author).



Fig. 14. Pediment of Thommanon, 12th century (Photo by author).

I find none of these interpretations compelling. Roveda's interpretation of the second image fails to account for why the *rakṣasas*, which he sees as people in Ayodhyā, are attacking Rāma and Sītā. Sunnary's interpretation also seems unlikely because Śiva is usually depicted in an ascetic headdress and wearing snakes, not wearing a crown, and, again, if the image is depicting either the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī – or the reunion of Rāma and Sītā, why are they being attacked by Demons?

I would like to propose that these pediments represent the attack of Khara on Rāma and Sītā in the forest. The man is Rāma and the woman is Sītā. Those demons are Khara's soldiers. The pediment of Thommanon is easier to understand as the attack of Khara. Those of Banteay Kdei and Preah Khan are more problematic, because they show a horse that is attacked by Asuras or *rakṣasas*. My interpretation remains provisional due to the absence of Lakṣmaṇa and the presence of the horse.

Killing of the Golden Deer and the Abduction of Sītā

After Sūrpaṅakhā told Rāvaṇa about the death of Khara, Dūṣaṇa, and other demons, and about the beauty of Sītā, Rāvaṇa secretly left Laṅkā. He came to Mārīca's place and asked help from Mārīca to abduct Sītā. Mārīca, who long ago was injured by Rāma, first refused Rāvaṇa's request. The Pre Rup inscription refers to this episode in a manner demonstrating intimate knowledge of the encounter as recounted in Vālmīki:

A l'audition de la première syllabe de son nom, le roi des ennemis, malgré sa vaillance, conçut une crainte que ne lui causait nulle autre (syllabe), comme Mārīca (entendant la première syllabe du nom) de Rāma (Coedès 1937: 131, K. 806, st. CCVII).²¹

The Vālmīki version reads:

But the moment great Mārīca heard talk of Rāma, his mouth went dry and he was seized with utter terror.

Acquainted as he was with Rāma's prowess in great battles, he grew terrified, and his heart sank in despair. Cupping his hands in reverence, he made a forthright reply for both Rāvaṇa's good and his own (Goldman 1991: 159-60).

At Rāvaṇa's threats, Mārīca, however, finally agreed to assist in Rāvaṇa's plot. Mārīca disguised himself as a golden deer, and walked close to the hermitage so that Sītā could see him. When Sītā caught sight of the deer, she said to Rāma:

Dear husband, what an exquisite deer! He has stolen my heart away. Please catch him for me, my great-armed husband. He shall be our plaything (Goldman 1991: 172).

Rāma agreed and followed the deer but the deer went deeper and deeper in the forest. Rāma shot the deer. The deer was mortally injured and he started screaming in the voice of Rāma asking for Lakṣmaṇa's help. On hearing the sound of Rāma asking for help, Sītā sent Lakṣmaṇa to find Rāma. After Lakṣmaṇa left, Rāvaṇa came to the hermitage and abducted Sītā. This episode of killing Mārīca is very well known in middle and modern Cambodian texts, though the name "Mārīca" has been transformed to "Mahārīk."

²¹mārīca iva rāmasya nāmādyekākṣaraśravā
yasyārīrajo viro pi jagāmānanyajāṃ bhīyam

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This scene is abundantly represented in Khmer art, especially at Banteay Samre and Angkor Wat. A bas-relief at Angkor Wat provides a good example, as it beautifully depicts Rāma with a bow and arrows in hand shooting a deer. There are sages raising hands in reverence to him (Fig. 15). Another pediment of Phnom Rung illustrates the entire process of the abduction of Sītā (Fig. 16). Rāma is shown shooting the deer. Sītā is abducted and carried off in Rāvaṇa's chariot. Rāvaṇa is attacked by Jaṭāyus. Jaṭāyus is mortally injured and falls down. Two monkeys are depicted on the tree. Siribhadra believes that the two monkeys represent erotic elements (Siribhadra and Moore 1992: 249). According to the Vālmīki version, while Rāvaṇa flies above the mountain Ṛṣyamūka, monkeys observe him. Those monkeys are the companions of Sugrīva who were abandoned by Vālin and lived on that mountain.



Fig. 15. Pediment of Thommanon, 12th century
(Photo by author).



Fig. 16. Pediment of Phnom Rung, 12th century
(Photo by Kim Samnang).

Killing of Kabandha

After Sītā was abducted by Rāvaṇa, grieving Rāma searched for her. Then Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa came across Kabandha who wanted to eat them. This *rakṣasa* has no neck or head. His face is on his belly. Finally Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa killed him. After being killed by Rāma, he went to heaven. (Goldman 1991: 230-236).

Though I know of no direct reference in epigraphy, the episode of the killing of Kabandha was very popular in ancient Cambodian iconography. However, the depiction of Kabandha can be confused with Rāhu or Kāla. Kabandha is usually represented by a demonic

face, without a body. He has two hands sometimes attacked by two men – Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa –, and sometimes holds animals (Fig. 17).



Fig. 17. Pediment of the northwestern pavilion of the bas-relief gallery at Angkor Wat, 12th century (Photo by author).

Alliance of Rāma and Sugrīva

Before his death, Kabandha told Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to go to mount Ṛśyamūka to seek an alliance with Sugrīva who was staying with four other monkeys. Among those monkeys we know one of them is Hanuman.

There are several bas-reliefs that depict Sugrīva with four other companions. For instance a bas-relief at Thommanon depicts Sugrīva sitting in grief above four other monkeys (Fig. 18). At Angkor Wat, a relief depicts four other monkeys at the time of a meeting between Rāma and Sugrīva (Fig. 19). The description of the Vālmīki texts and the bas-reliefs here are quite closely matched.

There is no direct mention of the alliance in the inscriptions. However, the inscription of Prasat Sangah does mention



Fig. 18. Semi-pediment of Thommanon, 12th century (Photo by author).



Fig.19. Pediment of the southern gallery pavilion at Angkor Wat, 12th century (Photo by author).

that the help of Sugrīva allowed Rāma to defeat Rāvaṇa:

Hari, avec l'aide du roi des oiseaux, a tué un individu de basse extraction, et Rāma avec l'aide du roi des singes, a tué ses ennemis; mais c'est tout seul, avec l'aide de son seul bras, que dans une bataille inégale ce héros sans passion a tué un personnage de haute naissance (Coedès 1951: 51, K. 218, st. IX).²²

Killing of Dundubhi or Māyāvin

The Vālmīki text mentions that Māyāvin is a son of the buffalo demon Dundubhi. Both Dundubhi and Māyāvin were killed by Vālin. Māyāvin quarreled with Vālin over a woman. He came to Kiṣkindha to challenge Vālin. Frightened of Vālin and Sugrīva, Māyāvin escaped into the mountain cave. Vālin told Sugrīva not to go into the cave. After waiting outside of the cave for a very long time, Sugrīva heard the roaring sound of the Demon and the crying of his brother. Having understood his brother to have been killed, he blocked up the cave. Sugrīva returned to the palace, where he was consecrated as king in place of his brother. Vālin was, however, alive. He kicked aside the rock and returned to Kiṣkindha. He was furious with Sugrīva and banished him.

²² vijātim āsṛitya hariḥ khagendram
rāmaḥ kapīndraṅ ca ripūn mamardda
svavāhum ājau viāame sujātim
ajātarōṣas tu ya ekavīraḥ//

Sugrīva escaped from the palace and stayed on Mt. Ṛṣyamūka, where Vālin could not enter as a result of a curse (Goldman 1994: 71-74). Dundubhi, the buffalo demon, and father of Māyāvin, came to Kiṣkindha to challenge Vālin. Finally, Vālin killed Dundubhi and he hurled the body of Dundubhi over the hermitage of the sage Mataṅga and dropped the blood from Dundubhi's mouth over the Aśram. The sage was angry and cursed Vālin, warning that his head would burst into one thousand pieces if he dared enter the Ṛṣyamūka (Goldman 1994: 75).

Māyāvin's and Dundubhi's stories were blended in later Cambodian tradition. The two demons are known by only one name: Dūbhī. Furthermore, the story of Dūbhī is also very interesting as it developed in a noticeable way. The story relates that Dūbhī is a son of Mahimsa, the great buffalo. Mahimsa had always killed his sons. When the mother of Dūbhī realized that she carried a baby, she therefore escaped from the flock and hid in the forest. Finally, Dūbhī killed his father.

I know of no epigraphic representations of this scene. However, there are several iconographic representations of this episode at Banteay Samre temple. One of them is on a lintel, showing a monkey killing a buffalo (Fig. 20).



Fig. 20. Southern lintel of the central tower of Banteay Samre, 12th century (Photo by author).

Killing of Vālin

The killing of Vālin is a critical episode in the Rāmāyaṇa. The Vālmīki version describes the process of killing in two stages. Rāma and Sugrīva have formed an alliance, in which Rāma promises to assist Sugrīva in killing Vālin. Sugrīva lures his brother into a duel, but Rāma is hiding in the forest behind Vālin, ready to kill him by surprise. The first stage is the fight between Vālin and Sugrīva, but Rāma cannot manage to kill Vālin because the two monkeys look alike. Sugrīva is disappointed with Rāma. In the second fight, Rāma successfully killed Vālin. The inscription of Prasat Chrung at Angkor Thom mentions the killing of Vālin:

Il envoyait au ciel l'ennemi au moyen de sa flèche, brisait l'arc, était chéri des humains, victorieux de l'époux de Tārā et sans passion, tandis que le fils de

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Daśaratha fut cher aux singes et passionné (Coedès 1952: 227, K. 288, st. LXXX).²³

A large sculpture of the fight between these two monkeys was found at tenth-century Koh Ker temple. Many bas-reliefs also represent the episode, for example at Banteay Srei, the Baphuon, Banteay Samre and Angkor Wat. A bas-relief at the southwest pavilion of the Angkor Wat bas-relief gallery is a prime example, depicting these two stages of the episode. It first seems to illustrate a scene in which Sugrīva complains to Rāma for not killing Vālin (Fig. 21a). In the second stage, located to the above right of the previously mentioned scene, Rāma shoots an arrow at Vālin from behind his back (Fig. 21b). Vālin's death is the main theme in this composite relief. It is shown at the center, that is, to the right of the first episode mentioned above (Sugrīva complaining to Rāma), and below the second (Rāma shooting Vālin). Vālin is embraced by his wives and ministers. Monkeys are mourning for his death (Fig. 21c). In later Cambodian contexts, there are many representations of the scene. A manuscript text is in fact entirely devoted to the story of Vālin, called “Baṇḍāṃ Bālī.”



Fig. 21a. Southwest pavilion of the bas-relief gallery at Angkor Wat, 12th century (Photo by Ang Choulean).



Fig. 21b. Southwest pavilion of the bas-relief gallery at Angkor Wat, 12th century (Photo by Ang Choulean).



Fig. 21c. Southwest pavilion of the bas-relief gallery at Angkor Wat, 12th century (Photo by Ang Choulean).

²³nayan dviṣan divyagatiṃ śareṇa
jyābhṛdvimaraddhī bhuvanapriyo yaḥ
tārāpatin nirjitavān arāgaḥ
kapipriyo dāśarathis tu rāgī

Story of Saṃpāti

Once the monkey alliance with Rāma was formed and Sugrīva was enthroned, groups of monkeys set out in search of Sītā. One group led by Aṅgada and Hanuman met Saṃpāti, a bird, the brother of Jaṭāyus. Saṃpāti told them the following story. While Saṃpāti and Jaṭāyus were flying in the path of the sun, Saṃpāti was burned as he protected his brother from being burned. He fell on the peak of mount Vindhya. Then Saṃpāti crept to the hermitage of Niśākara for help. Instead of helping him, the sage told him that he should wait until a group of monkeys came to the place, and then tell them where Rāvaṇa lived. Then he would be restored to good health (Goldman 1994: 181-82).

This relatively minor episode is mentioned in a ninth-century inscription, from the north-east corner of Thnal Baray:

Si fort qu'il fût, Viraj [un roi], quand il rencontra son rayon [sa main] irrésistible,
tombait comme Saṃpāti quand il eut reconstré le rayon brûlant du soleil
(Bergaigne 1893: 291, K. 281, Face D, st. X).²⁴

Meeting of Hanuman and Sītā in the Aśoka Garden

Though I know of no epigraphic reference to this scene, this episode of the meeting of Hanuman and Sītā in the Aśoka garden is abundantly represented on bas-reliefs. This is a great feat of Hanuman who, according to the Vālmīki version, jumped across the ocean in search of Sītā. He makes his way to the Aśoka garden, where Sītā is being held captive. The scene is usually depicted with Sītā accompanied by a small monkey and some *rakṣasas* women. Hanuman presents Sītā with Rāma's ring.

The representation has appeared in Cambodia since pre-Angkorian times. One of the medallions on the outer enclosure of the southern group of Sambor Prei Kuk temples depicts a small figure kneeling and presenting an object to a girl. Behind her is another woman (Fig. 22). The small figure is Hanuman and the girl is Sītā. The other lady behind Sītā is a *rakṣasas* woman. This bas-relief is a bit ruined. Another clearer bas-relief is at Chau Say Tevoda. This shows Sītā sitting on a platform, surrounded by *rakṣasas* women. Hanuman is depicted as a small monkey kneeling in front of Sītā and presenting to her Rāma's ring (Fig. 23).

²⁴karaṃ prāpyāprativalam virāṭ suvalavān api
yasya saṃpātir apata- d ghrīṇiṅ gharmmaghrīṇer iva



Fig.22. Medallion on the wall of the enclosure of the southern group of Sambor Prei Kuk, 7th century (Photo by author).



Fig.23. Pediment of Chau Say Tevoda, 12th century (Photo by author).

Defection of Vibhīṣaṇa

In this episode, key to turning the tide of the war, Vibhīṣaṇa defects to Rāma after his brother Rāvaṇa banished him. The scene is very widely recognized in both ancient and modern tradition. An interpretation of the situation is given in the inscription of Prasat Chrung of Angkor Thom, with reference to contemporary politics in which a Cham prince, in alliance with the Khmer king, was said to have rebelled against his brother.

Il n'y a rien d'extraordinaire à ce que Vibhīṣaṇa, exilé par son frère, ait cherché refuge auprès de Rāma; ce qui est extraordinaire, c'est que le frère cadet, soumis à la puissance de ce roi, ait tué (son aîné) le roi des Cāmpa qu'il chérissait²⁵
(Coedès 1952: 246, K. 288, st. XLVI).

A good iconographic example of the scene can be seen on a bas-relief of a pediment at the northwestern corner pavilion of Angkor Wat. This depicts Vibhīṣaṇa meeting with Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and monkeys (Fig. 24).

²⁵vibhīṣaṇo bhrātṛvahiṣkrto yad rāmāsrito nādbhutam adbhatan tat
jaghāna yaś cāmpapatim yaviyān nighnikṛto yattarasānuraktam



Fig.24. Pediment at the northwestern corner pavilion at Angkor Wat, 12th century (Photo by author).

Construction of the Bridge to Lañkā

According to the Vālmīki version, Rāma threatens to dry up the ocean in order to reach Rāvaṇa's kingdom of Lañkā but he was asked to stop doing so. Then the ocean gave him passage across the ocean, asking Rāma to construct a bridge. Rāma agreed and ordered Nala, who was a son of Viśvakarma, to take charge of this construction (Shastri 1959: 48-55).

The Prasat Chrung inscription relates that Rāma pierced the Ocean with his arrows, so that the Ocean gave him passage:

Rāma était parti en personne pour tuer ses ennemis, l'Océan percé (par ses flèches) lui livra passage; mais sans que ce roi eût à bouger, (l'Océan) détruisit les chefs du roi des Yavana, avides de combattre, avec leurs guerriers (Coedès 1952: 245, K. 288, st. XXXIX).²⁶

The inscription of Tuk Chaa, dated to the eleventh century, mentions clearly the construction of the bridge:

Autrefois, Rāma a construit à grand peine un digue dans un unique océan, mais c'est sans effort que (ce roi) en a construit dans quatre océans avec les têtes coupées de ses ennemis (Coedès 1953: 227, K. 702, st. XI).²⁷

²⁶ rāme svayaṃ vairivadhāya yāte viddho viśat paddhatim amvurāśiḥ
yasyācalasyāpi sa sañjahāra sainyair yuyutsūn yavanendravīrān

²⁷ vavandha setum ekāvudhau purā rāmaḥ prayatnavān
bhinnadviṣadvarāṅgas tv a- yatno yaś caturamvudhau

The inscription of Preah Khan directly mentions this construction. Stanza XXIX reads:

Rāma et ce roi accomplirent des travaux (respectivement) pour les dieux et pour les hommes: tous deux avaient le coeur entièrement dévoué à leurs pères; tous deux vainquirent un descendant de Bhṛṅgu; mais le premier construit une chaussée avec des pierres pour que les singes puissent franchir l'Océan, tandis que le second en construisit une avec de l'or pour faire franchir aux hommes l'Océan des existences. (Coedès 1942: 287) ²⁸

The lintel at Phimai depicts this episode (Fig. 25). However, Boeles, who closely studied the scene, questioned the lintel in its accuracy in relation to the Vālmīki text. He writes:

In this depiction of the entire episode of the construction of Nala's causeway there is one major deviation from the text of Vālmīki. In the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa no mention is made of damage to the causeway caused by the removal of boulders by aquatic creatures (Boeles 1969: 165).



Fig.25. Lintel of Phimai, 12th century (Photo by Kim Samnang).

The point Boeles makes here is, I believe, based on modern Thai Rāmāyaṇa tradition, and comparison to the bas-reliefs at Prambanan temple in Indonesia. At Prambanan monkeys are depicted throwing stones in the sea while fish carry them away. This is also related in the Thai *Ramakien* and the middle Khmer *Reamker*. In the Phimai relief it is not clear whether those aquatic animals are taking away the stones, or are simply meant to symbolize water.

²⁸ rāmaś ca yaś ca vihitāmaramartyakāryau
pitrarthataparahṛdau jitabhārgavau dvau
pūrvo śmanā vyadhita caṅkramam avdhim ṛkṣair
hemnā paras tu manujais taritum bhavāvdhim

War

Episodes of the war between the *rakṣasas* and Rāma's army are abundantly represented in ancient Khmer arts. It is in fact the preferred theme for carving. Nonetheless, for researchers, it is very hard to identify the precise characters of the different scenes due to damage. Some characters are more frequently presented than others. Coedès presents convincing identifications of a number of specific combat scenes on the famous "Battle of Laṅkā" reliefs on the north-western portion of the western gallery of Angkor Wat:

1. The first is the combat between Mahodara and Aṅgada. Mahodara is mounted on an elephant while Aṅgada is jumping over the elephant (Coedès 1911: 183) (Fig. 26). The fight between Aṅgada and Vajradamṣṭra (Fig. 27). The fight between Aṅgada and Narāntaka (Fig. 28). The fight between Sugrīva and Kumbha (Fig. 29).



Fig.26.



Fig. 27.



Fig.28.



Fig. 29.

Bas-relief of western gallery of Angkor Wat (Photos by author).

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Besides these, we know five other characters in these long bas-reliefs: Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa, Rāvaṇa and Sugrīva or Hanuman.

Other scenes, such as the injury of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa by Indrajit, are clearly depicted for example at the Baphuon, Angkor Wat and Phimai. The bas-relief at the Baphuon shows great detail. On the lower register of the relief, snakes in the form of arrows wrap around two men. The men are surrounded by monkeys. Right above their heads sits Sugrīva. On the upper panel, a figure is flying shooting a bow and on the other side of the figure is a bird, Garuḍa, swooping down. This depiction narrates the shooting of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa by Indrajit, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa falling unconscious, and then finally the arrival of Garuḍa to help (Fig. 30). The depiction of these two panels is not organized in the sequence of the story but rather by spatial position. Indrajit and Garuḍa are depicted in the upper panel because they both are mentioned as flying in the sky. Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and monkeys are shown on the lower panels. A similar representation of this episode is at Phimai. The episode takes up both the pediment and the lintel of the western door of the Mandapa (Saribhadra 1992: 247) (Fig. 31). Another representation which is slightly different from those two bas-reliefs, is a pediment of Thommanon temple, which depicts Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and monkeys sitting. Above them, Garuḍa is swooping down. On the left is a figure preparing to shoot an arrow (Fig. 32). Coedès suggests in a footnote



*Fig.30. Bas-relief of the Baphuon, 11th century
(Photo by author).*



*Fig. 31. Lintel and pediment of Phimai, 12th century
(Photo by Kim Samnang).*



*Fig. 32. Pediment of the Thommanon, 12th century
(Photo by author).*

of the inscription of Prasat Chrung that stanza XXVI alludes to this scene:

Il perçait les serpents avec les tiges de ses flèches [ou: il faisait sortir les serpents des flèches-liens], il protégeait ses amis [ou: le soleil], il savait donner à autrui des aumônes sans être prié [ou: donner l'ambroisie], il accomplissait le labeur d'un roi [ou: portait le fardeau de l'époux de Lakṣmī (Viṣṇu)], il était rapide, souverain et avait une rangée de troupes [ou: d'ailes] puissantes (Coedès 1952: 243, K. 288, st. XXVI).²⁹

Another inscription from Preah Khan (Angkor) makes reference to this scene:

Les deux Seigneurs de la danse, en or, placés par ce roi devant le Serpent d'or, ressemblaient aux descendants de Raghu venant d'être délivrés des serpents qui les enserraient à la suite du jet des flèches par le vainqueur d'Indra (Coedès 1942: 287, K. 908, st.XXX).³⁰

Another war episode, of Sītā on the Puṣpaka, is perhaps seen at Phnom Rung (Fig. 33). According to the Vālmiki version, while Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are injured, Rāvaṇa thinks that both of them have died. He sent Sītā on his Puṣpaka to observe the incident. The bas-relief at Phnum Rung shows a lady sitting in grief at the center of a flying palace. On her side, there are two other women. Around the flying palace, a monkey is following a bird. On the lower right of the pediment, a man comes out from camouflage shooting the bow. Below the flying palaces two heads are shown. A person is depicted holding one of the heads. I cannot clearly account for these details in this episode identification.

Kumbhakarṇa is also one of the most frequently



Fig. 33. Pediment of Phnom Rung, 12th century (Photo by Kim Samnang).

²⁹ bhujāṅgabhedī śaravandhanebhyo
yo guptamittro mṛtadānadakṣaḥ
pareṣu lakṣmīpatibhārabhārī
javī virāḍ ūrjitapakṣapaṅktaḥ

³⁰ nāṭyeśvarau svarṇamayau purasād
yenārppitau svarṇabhujāṅgamasya
sadyo vimuktāv iva rāghavau dvau
bhujāṅgavandhād vihatendrapāte

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presented figures. Sculptors depicted him as a big figure attacked by monkeys (Fig. 34). One of the most interesting bas-reliefs of Kumbhakarṇa is from the Baphuon temple (Fig. 35). The bas-relief depicts an elephant and a few *rakṣasas* waking up a sleeping Kumbhakarṇa in order for him to go to fight. In the Yuddhakāṇḍa, Rāvaṇa orders “Let the titans go to the summit of the Charyapura Mountain and awaken Kumbhakarṇa on whom the curse of Brahmā rests...” (Shastri 1959: 1956).

The episode in which Lakṣmaṇa is injured by Rāvaṇa’s javelin is depicted on at least two temples—Angkor Wat and Banteay Samre (Fig. 36). Roveda gives a convincing interpretation of this relief in his study of Angkor Wat (Roveda 2002: 206).

The combat between Rāma and Rāvaṇa is also depicted in many places. Sometimes there are multiple



Fig. 34. Semi-pediment of the Southern “library” of Angkor Wat: Kumbhakarṇa (Photo by author).



Fig. 35. Bas-relief of the Baphuon (Photo by author).



Fig. 36. Pediment at Banteay Samre, 12th century (Photo by author).

representations of the episode at a single temple. The most prominent representation is at Angkor Wat on the bas-relief of the Battle of Laṅkā. Rāma and Rāvaṇa’s fight is shown at the center of the bas-reliefs. Another good example of this fight is from the northern gate of Bateay Samre temple. It shows Rāvaṇa on his chariot preparing to shoot at Rāma, and on the other side of the pediment, Rāma who is preparing to shoot at Rāvaṇa. Surrounding both of them are monkeys

and *rakṣasas* who are fighting one another (Fig. 37). This scene is also found in inscriptions. The inscription of Prah Ngok, for example, compares two combatants to Rāma and Rāvaṇa:

S'étant aperçu l'un l'autre, pleins de joie et impatients de s'arracher la splendeur de la victoire, ces deux héros coururent, l'un contre l'autre semblables à Rāma et à Rāvaṇa (Barth 1885: 166, K. 289. st. XXXIV).³¹



Fig. 37. Pediment of the northern entrance of Banteay Samre, 12th century (Photo By author).

Ordeal of Sītā

To my knowledge, the ordeal of Sītā is depicted in two ancient temples, Angkor Wat and Banteay Samre. At Angkor Wat, it is depicted in many places. Many of these representations illustrate Agni, the God of the Fire, presenting Sītā to Rāma. The bas-reliefs and the description of Vālmīki's text are very similar. The bas-relief at Angkor Wat is a bit damaged, but we can still identify this panel (Figs. 38, 39). Rāma is sitting on a raised platform. Lakṣmaṇa, Sugrīva and



Fig.38. Bas-relief of the northwestern corner pavilion at Angkor Wat (Photo by author).



Fig. 39. Pediment of Banteay Samre, 12th century (Photo by author).

³¹ ḍṛṣṭvā parasparam hṛṣṭau jihīṛṣū vijayaśriyam
abhidudr(uva)tur vīrau tau yathā rāmarāvaṇau

Vibhīṣaṇa are sitting on lower platforms. In the middle of the scene, the fire is flaming. Sītā stands in the middle of the fire. On the right of the fire is a figure of a man pointing at the fire. He seems to be Agni the god of Fire who comes out and tells Rāma about Sītā's chastity. Similarly, a bas-relief of Banteay Samre clearly depicts Agni coming out of the fire, holding Sītā in both his hands and presenting her to Rāma.

I know of no epigraphic reference to this scene.

Gods and Sages Ask Help from Viṣṇu

Rāma's story begins when the Gods ask Viṣṇu to descend to the earth in the form of Rāma in order to defeat Rāvaṇa. In the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa this scene is revealed briefly in the Bālakāṇḍa and in detail in the Yuddhakāṇḍa at the time of the ordeal of Sītā. In the Yuddhakāṇḍa, the God Brahmā revealed the true nature of Rāma as the incarnation of Viṣṇu. Rāma was unaware that he was the incarnation of Viṣṇu. Brahmā said:

Thou didst cover the Three Worlds in three strides; Thou didst bind the terrible Bali and establish Mahendra as King. Sītā is Lakshmi and Thou, the God Vishnu, Krishna and Prajapati. It was in order to slay Rāvaṇa that Thou didst enter a human body, O Thou the foremost of those who observe their duty (Shastri 1959: 340).

While the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa does not explicitly say that the Gods asked Viṣṇu to descend to the earth, in later Cambodian texts, for example the Rāmakerti I, the notion that Viṣṇu descended to the earth in order to subdue Rāvaṇa at the request of the gods is very clear. In the Reamker, the conversation between Rāma and Rāmaparamesur reveals that Rāma knows by himself that he is the incarnation of Viṣṇu. Rāma tells Rāmaparamesur:

As for myself, in the beginning, in the second age of the world, I lived as Naray(n). All the gods and hermits saw that all kinds of the godless creatures were attacking the religion and therefore the gods invited me to come and be born as Ram, the strong and mighty, to suppress those evil, godless creatures who were being wickedly oppressive and destructive (Jacob 1986: 8-9).

I know of no specific references to the circumstances of Viṣṇu's incarnation as Rāma in Khmer epigraphy. But there are some references in iconography. One of the bas-reliefs at the northwestern pavilion of the gallery of bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat depicts a scene in which Viṣṇu

is sleeping on the Nāga Ananta (Fig. 40). At his feet are Lakṣmī or Śrī holding or massaging his feet. He is surrounded by hosts of sages and gods. A four-headed god who is obviously Brahmā is sitting near his head. There is a group of the Lokapālas, mounted on different vehicles. Two other important gods, Candra and Sūrya, are at the scene. I would like to propose that the presence of the Lokapālas, Candra and Sūrya suggests the meeting of all the gods everywhere in the universe. The sleeping Viṣṇu was frequently represented in ancient art. Bénisti describes the Khmer sleeping Viṣṇu as it typically represents two stages of the myth: the sleeping of Viṣṇu and the birth of Brahmā to create the universe (Bénisti 1965: 91). In this bas-relief from Angkor Wat, we see a slightly different creation scene. Brahmā is not shown as he is typically on the lotus that sprouts out of Viṣṇu's navel, but rather sits near the head of Viṣṇu. Przulski identified this bas-relief, through a comparison with bas-reliefs at Prambanam, as a scene prior to Viṣṇu descending to earth to be born as Rāma (Przulski 1921-23: 319-30).



Fig. 40. Bas-relief of the northwestern corner pavilion at Angkor Wat (Roveda 2002).

Another bas-relief, in the cruciform gallery at Angkor Wat, depicts Viṣṇu sleeping, and Śrī or Lakṣmī holding his feet. Sages are joining their hands in reverence to Viṣṇu (Fig. 41). Another similar representation, a pediment at Preah Khan temple at Angkor, depicts Viṣṇu sleeping on a



Fig. 41. Pediment of cruciform building at Angkor Wat (Photo by author).

dragon, an apparently Khmer invention (Benisti 1965: 104-105) (Fig. 42). Śrī is again holding his feet; there are three lotus buds behind Viṣṇu's back, but these lotuses do not grow out of Viṣṇu's navel. Sages are paying homage to Viṣṇu. These two images have been interpreted as representing sleeping Viṣṇu while waiting for creation. Bénesti thinks that the pediment of Preah Khan is a sleeping Viṣṇu on Ananta in the middle of the milky ocean before creation. Roveda thinks that the pediment at Angkor Wat is a representation of Viṣṇu sleeping (Roveda 2002: 178-79). Both of these interpretations are questionable. If the image represents Viṣṇu sleeping, why are there hosts of sages around Viṣṇu? Because the myth recounts that while Viṣṇu is sleeping the whole world is absorbed into his body.



Fig. 42. Pediment of Preah Khan, 12th-13th Century (Photo by author).

Do these two bas-reliefs represent the same episode of the Rāmāyaṇa as that described at the northwestern corner pavilion of Angkor Wat? My first thought is that they show a blending of Viṣṇu sleeping in the cosmic ocean and the representation of the Sages and gods asking Viṣṇu to come down to earth. My second thought would be that the sages are worshipping the image of a sleeping Viṣṇu.

Flying back from Laṅkā

After the ordeal of Sītā, the young couple is reunited and returns to Ayodhyā in their flying chariot, Puṣpaka.

To my knowledge, there is only one depiction of this scene in ancient Khmer art: at the

northwestern pavilion of the bas-relief gallery at Angkor Wat (Fig. 43). Rāma is represented sitting in the middle of the Puṣpaka. The area around the bas-relief is ruined, so that we cannot tell who is who. On the same panel we see monkeys carrying fruit, and some dancing.

Rāvaṇa Shaking the Mountain

After having returned to Ayodhyā, Rāma asked the sage Kumbhayoni about all the *rakṣasas*. Among other stories, the sage tells Rāma the story of Rāvaṇa shaking Mt. Kailāsa. Rāvaṇa was known for having shaken the mountain on which Śiva was meditating. Śiva punished him harshly for this.



Fig. 43. Bas-relief of the northwestern corner pavilion at Angkor Wat (Photo by author).

The episode of Rāvaṇa shaking the mountain is very popular in ancient Cambodia. The inscription of Phnom Bayang relates:

Que (Śiva) au lourd chignon protège votre fortune, lui dont le pied a, comme conséquence de la souffrance causée par son poids, fait pousser à (Rāvaṇa) aux dix visages des cris emplissant tout l'espace d'un bruit assourdissant (Coedès 1937: 258, K.853, st. I).³²

This epigraphic description is clearly derived from the epic. The scene in the Uttarakāṇḍa reads:

Speaking thus, O Rāma, he seized the mountain in his arms and shook it violently so that the rocky mass vibrated. In the consequence of the mountain quaking, the attendants of the God were troubled and Parvati herself, terrified, clung to the neck of Mahesvara [...]

Then, O Rāma, Mahadeva, the foremost of the Gods, as if in sport, pressed the mountain with his great toe and, at the same time, he crushed Ravana's arms, that resembled pillars of granite, to the great consternation of all the counselors of that Rakshasa. And he, in pain and fury, suddenly let forth a terrible cry, causing the Three Worlds to tremble, so that his ministers thought it to be the crash of thunder at the dissolution of the worlds (Sastri 1959: 419).

³² śiyam vo dhūjjaṭiḥ pātu yasyāṅghreḥ bhā pādayā
vdhirīkṛtasarvvāṣān daśāsyo vyakṛta svarān

One of the most beautiful pediments at Banteay Srei illustrates this scene. Śiva is shown sitting on a platform with Parvatī clinging to his neck in panic. Sages, semi-animal beings and animals are showing panic. At the bottom center of the pediment we see Rāvaṇa, with his many arms, shaking the mountain (Fig. 44).



*Fig. 44. Pediment at Banteay Srei, 10th century
(Photo by author).*

Abandonment of Sītā

The abandonment of Sītā is a crucial episode. When the couple is apparently happily resettled in Ayodhyā, rumors break out that Sītā had been unfaithful to Rāma while in Laṅkā. In the Vālmīki version, Rāma banishes Sītā because of rumors in the kingdom. In later Khmer texts, especially Rāmakerti II, Rāma orders that she be taken to be slaughtered by Lakṣmaṇa. This order is given after Rāma discovers a portrait of Rāvaṇa drawn by Sītā.

In ancient times, as far as I know, only the inscription of Phimeanakas mentions this incident:
 “...Sītā ayant retrouvé son époux, puis séparée de lui...Puissé-je être comme
 Umā ... allant vers son époux tel fut (son voeu)(Coedès 1942: 176, K.485, st.
 LI).”³³

However, we are not sure whether this verse refers to the descent of Sītā to the subterranean world, or to her earlier abandonment by Rāma. I know of no iconographic reference to this scene.

Narration of the Rāmāyaṇa by Rāma’s son(s)

Sītā is thus abandoned, and continues her life in the refuge of the forest, at the hermitage of a sage, Vālmīki himself. (In the middle Khmer version, this also happens, as Lakṣmaṇa does

³³rāmapra...r[e]ṇa rāmam
 prāptam viyuktān ca sa ... sītam
 priyapra..... yathomā
 priyaṅgatā syām it... ssthā

not succeed in killing Sītā.) During her stay at the hermitage of Vālmīki, Sītā gives birth to two sons, namely, Lava and Kuśa. Both of the boys are raised and cared for by the sage. The sage teaches them the story of Rāma. At the time that Rāma is preparing for an Aśvamedha ceremony, Vālmīki sends the two boys to chant the story of the Rāmāyaṇa.

This episode is referenced in the ninth-century inscription from the northeast corner of Thnal Baray, cited above.

Descent of Sītā into the Earth

In the Vālmīki version, after the boys recited the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma understands who they are, and requests to meet their mother. Vālmīki brings Sītā to Ayodhyā, and presents her to Rāma. Sītā refuses to reunite with Rāma, and calls upon the earth to take her into the subterranean world. This scene is widely known in Khmer texts and tradition. As for ancient times, I know of two inscriptions which refer to this scene. Prasat Chrung reads:

C'est après avoir entendu son propre éloge que Rāma désira reprendre l'épouse (Śri) chérie qu'il avait abandonnée; tandis qu'après avoir entendu celui de Dharmarāja, ce roi désira donner la Fortune (Śrī) qu'il possédait (Coedès 1952: 234, K. 597, st. E)³⁴

Pre Rup recounts the ultimate tragedy:

Voyant ce roi installé sur le trône aux lions, la vaste Terre, joyeuse, lui amena la Fortune, alors que se tenant elle-même sur le trône aux lions, elle avait enlevé à Rāma, bien qu'il fut roi, Sītā qui était sa Fortune (Coedès 1937: 111, K. 806, st. XLIII).³⁵

³⁴ rāmaś śriyaṃ priyāṃ tyaktām āditsur svastave śrute
dharmmarājastave yas tu ditsur hastagatām api

³⁵ simhāsanaṣṭham avalokya mahābhṛtaṃ yaṃ
hṛṣṭā mahī sumahatī śriyam ānināya
simhāsane sthitavatī svayam eva rāmāt
sītāṃ śriyan tv apajahāra mahībhṛto pi.

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