

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

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The influx of Hinduism and Buddhism from India re-formed ancient Khmer society. These religions brought new concepts of cosmogony and philosophy, and complicated ritual practices. The interactions of foreign and local traditions resulted in the construction of temples, sculptures and other infrastructures. Social divisions are apparent in this early Indianized society. Only three classes, however, were clearly mentioned in ancient Cambodia, *brahman*, *kṣatriya* and servant. Along with religious orthodoxy, religious stories were introduced to elaborate the complicated philosophies. These also inspired a new constitution of social norms so as to make people behave in “proper” ways. The Rāmāyaṇa was one of these stories which infiltrated deeply into Khmer society. In the following I will attempt to explore how this epic served two important and interconnected functions: religious and socio-political. Religiously, the Rāmāyaṇa was believed to bring prosperity and to lead to liberation. At the same time, it was perceived as a model for kingship and social norms. Rāma was portrayed as a righteous powerful king, and an incarnation of a god. In Cambodia, Rāma was construed in order to elevate Khmer kings who were projected, in a sense, as the supreme gods of their people, the most righteous powerful kings.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a sequel to that published in *Udaya* 6. Both are based on my MA thesis, presented at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2003. As I will not review here the material covered in the first installment, readers unfamiliar with the Rāmāyaṇa in some detail are asked to read the two together.

## I. Rāmāyaṇa in the Religious Context

Unlike in India, in the strict religious context, the cult of Rāma was never apparently known in Cambodia. The worship of Rāma was instead associated with the cult of Viṣṇu, although a few sculptures of Rāma have been found. For example, the inscription of Preah Khan mentions Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa bearing honorific titles of gods.<sup>2</sup> Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa bore the divine title “kamrateṅ jagat (Lord of the World)” and Sītā bore the title “vraḥ bhagavatī (August Blessed One).”<sup>3</sup> Coedès suggested that statues of the figures were found also alongside the inscription (Coedès 1943: 289, n.3).

As illustrated in the first installment of the present study (see *Udaya* 6), besides these freestanding sculptures, bas-reliefs frequently represented the Rāmāyaṇa, most intensively in twelfth-century temples. It seems to me that a series of episodes may have become very popular due to the fact that they clearly convey the idea of liberation. For instance, Rāma is depicted as a “liberator” when he killed Virādha, who was previously a Gandhārva and was cursed to be born as a hideous *rākāsa*. Only after being killed by Rāma, could Virādha return to heaven. This made Rāma the “liberator.” Although this episode is not of particular importance in the general frame of the Rāmāyaṇa story, I believe that the idea of “liberation” inspired its popularity in Khmer art. As noted previously (in *Udaya* 6), we see this scene at a number of temples: Phnum Rung, Banteay Srei and Angkor Wat.

Another episode that further illustrates the idea of liberation is the killing of Kabandha. Kabandha’s role was more important than that of Virādha because before his death, he told Rāma to seek an alliance with Sugrīva. Like Virādha, after being killed by Rāma, Kabandha was liberated and went to heaven. This episode is also frequently represented at Angkor Wat.

This idea of liberation is also shown in the inscription of Prasat Chrung (cited in *Udaya* 6) which compares King Jayavarman VII to Rāma. The stanza praises the reigning King Jayavarman VII by comparing him, favorably, to Rāma, with reference to a series of episodes, including that of sending his enemies to heaven with his arrows.

Another important religious aspect of the epic in Cambodia is the power of its narration. It is said that the simple act of narrating and listening to this epic is a meritorious act and will bring prosperity to the people. The Yuddhakāṇḍa of the Vālmīki version gives precise detail of the merits received from the listening or narrating of the epic:

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<sup>2</sup> kamrateṅ jagat rāmadeva.

kamrateṅ jagat Lakṣmaṇa.

vraḥ bhagavatī sītā (Coedès 1947-50: , K. 637).

<sup>3</sup> This honorific title was very popular at the time. It simply referred to gods.

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This renowned and sacred epic, the foremost of all, granting long life and victory to kings, was composed by the Rishi Valmiki, and he who hears it constantly in this world is delivered from evil; if he desires sons he obtains them, if wealth he acquires it.

He, who, in this world, listens to the story of Rama's enthronement, if he be a king, will conquer the earth and overcome his enemies. Women will obtain sons as Sumitra and Kaushalya obtained Rama and Lakshmana and Kaikeyi, Bharata.

The hearing of the 'Ramayana' grants longevity and victory equal to Rama's, he of imperishable exploits. The one who, mastering his anger, listens with faith to this epic, formerly composed by Valmiki, overcomes all obstacles and those who hear this story set forth by Valmiki will return from their journeys in foreign lands and rejoice the hearts of their kinsfolk. They will obtain fulfillment of all the desires they conceive in this world from Raghava, and its recitation will bring delight to the Celestials; it pacifies the adverse forces in those houses where it is to be found.

Hearing it, a king will conquer the earth; if he be a stranger he will fare well; women who hear this sacred epic in their pregnancy, will give birth to sons who are unsurpassed. He who recites it with reverence will be freed from all evil and live long. Warriors should listen to it recited by the Twice born with bowed heads in order to achieve prosperity and obtain sons.

Rama is ever pleased with the one who hears this epic or who recites it in its entirety and he who does so will obtain a felicity comparable to Rama's who is Vishnu, the eternal, the Primeval God, the Long-armed Hari, Narayana, the Lord. Such are the fruits produced by this ancient narrative. May prosperity attend thee! Recite it with love and may the power of Vishnu increase!

The celestial Beings rejoice in the understanding and hearing of 'Ramayana' and the Ancestors are gratified. Those who, in devotion, transcribe this history of Rama, composed by the Rishi Valmiki, attain to the region of Brahma.

The hearing of this rare and beautiful poem in this world brings prosperous families, wealth and grain in abundance, lovely wives, supreme felicity and complete success in all undertakings.

This narrative which promotes long life, health, renown, brotherly love, wisdom, happiness and power should be heard in reverence by virtuous men desirous of felicity (Shastri 1959: 371-372).

That these ways of obtaining merits were also known in ancient Cambodia is exemplified in a sixth-century inscription of Veal Kanteal, which mentions a *brahman* by the name of Śri Somaśarman, who erected an image of the god named Tribhuvaneśvara. Śri Somaśarman donated

the complete texts of the Rāmāyaṇa, Purāṇa and Bhārata<sup>4</sup> to the temple with an order that these texts should be recited daily without interruption:

With the Rāmāyaṇa and the Purāṇa, he gave the entire Bhārata and he instituted the recitation every day without interruption.<sup>5</sup>

Śri Somaśarman announced that he would like to transfer a portion of the merit acquired from this pious act of daily recitation to the author:

May a part of this pious deed return each time to the author of the excellent deed.<sup>6</sup>

(Whether the author that he mentioned is the author of the epics or the doer of the inscription is not certain.)

The act of narrating and listening to this epic were believed to cleanse all sins. Knowing this, King Suryavarman I desired to have the epics chanted:

By desiring the recitations of the Purāṇas, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Bhārata, the celestial river is issued from the peak which is that face of the king of the mountains to cleanse the sins of the world.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that many Cambodian inscriptions mentioned the other famous Indian epic by the name of the Bhārata instead of the Mahābhārata.

<sup>5</sup> English translations of the epigraphic passages cited throughout this article are my own. They are based on published French translations with reference to the original Sanskrit. Both French and Sanskrit are provided in notes.

“Avec le Rāmāyaṇa et le Purāṇa, il donna le Bhārata complète, et en institua la récitation journalière, sans interruption” (Barth 1885: 30-31, K. 359, st. IV).

rāmāyanapurāṇābhyā-                      m aśeṣaṃ bhāratan dadat  
akṛitānvaham acchedyāṃ                      sa ca tadvācanāsthim

<sup>6</sup> “Qu’une part (du fruit) de cette oeuvre pieuse revienne chaque fois à l’auteur de cet acte excellent...” (Barth 1885: 31, K. 359, St. VI).

dharmmāṅśas tasya tasya syā-                      n mahāsukṛitakāriṇaḥ

<sup>7</sup> “Le fleuve céleste est issu du sommet de ce roi des monts qu’est son visage, en lavant les péchés du monde, par désir de réciter les Purāṇa, le Rāmāyaṇa et le (Mahā)bhārata” (Coedès 1951: 51, K. 218, st. XI).

yadānanorvīdhararājaśrīṅgād  
vinissṛtā mṛṣṭajagatkalaṅkā  
purāṇarāmāyanabhāratādi-  
kathāvivakṣāmaradhāmasindhuḥ

Here, it is the king's desire for recitation which unleashes the purifying heavenly waters.

One can also consider the carvings of the epics on the temples as a form of perpetual devotion. When carved on the temple, these narrations, become, in a sense, permanent.

## II. Rāmāyaṇa in Political and Social Expression

The Rāmāyaṇa was among other religious stories which were extracted in order to express power and empower the Khmer kings. It was simultaneously used to express social norms and to recount actual historical events.

### 1. Rāmāyaṇa in Expression of Power

In general, ancient Khmer kings were projected as having surpassed all others, including the gods. O. Wolters explained this notion as “the man of prowess”: kings were righteous, powerful and generous—they merited as much as inherited their power (Wolters 1999). Episodes of the Rāmāyaṇa were used to express this notion. For example, the episode of the meeting between Mārīca and Rāvaṇa was invoked in describing King Rajendravarman II's power over his enemies. King Rajendravarman II whose name begins with the letter “Ra,” like Rāma, gave his enemy fear. The Pre Rup inscription relates:

Hearing the first syllable of his name (Rājendravarman II), the enemy king, despite his valor, conceived a fear caused by no other syllable, like Mārīca (hearing the first syllable of the name) of Rāma.<sup>8</sup>

Another passage in this same inscription notes that, although King Rajendravarman II bore the name of Indra, he rejected the similarity between himself and Indra. Rajendravarman II insisted that he was different from Indra, who was conquered by Indrajit:

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<sup>8</sup> “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).

mārīca iva rāmasya      nāmādyekākṣaraśravā  
yasyārirājo vīro pi      jagāmānanyajāṃ bhiyam

Rejecting in a sense the bad reputation of Indra, caused by Indrajit, after conquering the earth, his victorious glory reached heaven.<sup>9</sup>

The expression of the king's power can be categorized in terms of prowess, generosity, and government.

### *Prowess*

#### **a. Archery**

In the Cambodian context archery was clearly a valued skill, given the popularity of its artistic representations as, for instance, in the shooting of the boar by Arjuna, the shooting of the golden deer by Rāma, etc. Arjuna and Rāma were known as the best archers in the stories of the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa respectively. Like them, Cambodian kings were also praised to be the best archers. When King Rajendravarman II went into battle with the kings of Campa and Rāma/ya he was said to be like Rāma, shooting arrows from both hands. The inscription of Prasat Beng Vien reads:

Victorious in battle with the powerful and malicious Rāmaṇya and Campa, shooting arrows to the right and to the left, he was like another Rāma.<sup>10</sup>

King Jayavarman VII was portrayed as the best archer in battle, relative to Rāma and Arjuna who were famous because of their special weapons. Arjuna possessed an inexhaustible quiver. Rāma possessed an arrow that returned by itself. Unlike these, King Jayavarman VII did not possess special weapons; he killed his enemy with just one arrow. The inscription of Prasat Tor reads:

Arjuna, by good fortune, possesses an inexhaustible quiver, and Rāma, alas! an arrow that

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<sup>9</sup> “Rejetant en quelque sorte la mauvaise réputation d’Indra causée par Indrajit, sa renommée victorieuse, après avoir conquis la terre, s’empara du ciel” (Coedès 1937: 126 ,K. 806, st. CLXI).

pratyādiśantivākīrttim	aindrīm indrajitā kṛtām
yasya vajayikī kīrttir	vyāpyorvvīm vyaśnute divam

<sup>10</sup> “Victorieux dans le combat des puissants et méchants Rāmaṇya et Campa, lançant ses flèches à droite et à gauche, il était comme un autre Rāma” (Coedès 1953: 101, K. 872, st. VII).

jetā rāmaṇyacampādī-	janye puṇyajanorjjitān
yo vāmadakṣiṇakṣipta-	vāno rāma ivāparaḥ

returned by itself; while in battle that (king) killed his enemy with only one arrow. Why did he need, I ask myself, many arrows?<sup>11</sup>

### **b. Battle**

The battle at Laṅkā was by far the preferred scene, both in epigraphy and artistic representations. Texts surviving today, along with some oral traditions similarly focus on the battle. The scene of the battle was compared to the historical context of Cambodia. The battle was the ultimate goal of the Rāmāyaṇa and it was an excellent scene by which to compare and understand real situations in society. Historically, Cambodia had internal wars and external wars with neighboring countries such as Campa, Rāmaṇya, Java and Yavana. The episodes of the Rāmāyaṇa were then used to correlate the enemy kings to the demons, particularly to Rāvaṇa, whereas Khmer kings were compared to Rāma. The inscription of Prasat Preah Einkosei reads:

This ocean of many battles which is hard to cross, due to its waves [represented by] the rubbing of the brilliant tusks of elephants, its streams of soldiers whose clash of arms [represented] the roar of the storm, he crossed it, mounted on the boat [or the monkey] of force, just like Rāma himself.<sup>12</sup>

In the second half of the twelfth century there were great battles between Cambodia and Campa. These were represented on the bas-reliefs of two main temples—the Bayon and Banteay Chmar. The inscription of Prasat Chrung compared them to the battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa.

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<sup>11</sup> “Arjuna, par bonheur, possède un carquois inépuisable, et Rāma, Ô merveille! une flèche qui revient d’elle-même; puisque, dans la bataille ce (roi) tuait son ennemi d’une seule flèche, quel besoin, je me le demande, eût-il eu de plusieurs flèches?” (Coedès 1937: 242, K. 691, st. XVIII).

diṣṭyārjunaś cākṣayavāṇatūno  
rāmaś ca hanta svayam āgateṣuḥ  
yasyāhatāre raṇa ekavāṇa-  
gatyaiiva kiṃ bhūriśareṇa śaṅke

<sup>12</sup> “Cet océan de maintes batailles difficiles à traverser, avec le battement de ses vagues (représenté) par le frottement des défenses étincelantes des éléphants, avec ses flots de guerriers où le choc des armes (reproduisait) le fracas de la tempête, il l’a traversé, monté sur le vaisseau [ou: le singe] de la force, comme Rāma lui-même” (Coedès 1952: 134, K. 263, st. XVII).

dviddantidantakaṣaṇasphuritormmipātam  
astrābhighātaghaṇagarjjetavīranīram  
yo nekadurgaraṇasāgaram ātatāra  
śaktiplavaṃ samabhīruhya yathaiva rāmaḥ

The king of Cāmpa, Srī Jaya Indravarman, was considered to be Rāvaṇa, and the Khmer king, King Jayavarman VII was, indeed, Rāma. The stanza LXVIII reads:

Śrī Jaya Indravarman, the king of the Cham, arrogant like Rāvaṇa, transporting his army on chariots, went to fight with the country of Kambu which was equal to heaven.<sup>13</sup>

The inscription of Prast Sangah relates the prowess of King Suryavarman I in battle:

Hari, with the help of the king of the birds, killed a person of low birth; and Rāma, with the help of the king of the monkeys, killed his enemies; but it was alone, with the help of only his own hand, that, in an uneven battle, that passionless hero killed a person of high birth.<sup>14</sup>

This king surpassed the gods in battle. He, without outside assistance, easily won battles, unlike Hari who had the help of Garuda, and Rāma who had the help of the monkeys, to kill his enemies.

The inscription of Prasat Chrung of Angkor Thom likewise praises King Jayavarman VII for his valor in battle. The text boasts that this king, even without help and without being an incarnation of a god like Rāma, killed all his enemies, the commanders of the king of the Yavanas. And, most importantly, he wins without effort. Stanza XXXIX reads:

Rāma departed in order to kill his enemies in person; the Ocean, pierced [with his arrows],

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<sup>13</sup> “Śrī Jaya Indravarman, roi des Cāmpa, présomptueux comme Rāvaṇa... transportant son armée sur des chars, alla combattre le pays de Kambu pareil au ciel” (Coedès 1942: 177, K. 485, st. LXVIII).

- - va sa śrījayaindravarmmā  
cāmpēśvaro rāvaṇavat pramattaḥ  
- - bhānau rathanītasainyo  
yoddhuṅ gato dyosamakamvudeśam

<sup>14</sup> “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).

vijātim āśritya hariḥ khagendraṃ  
rāmaḥ kapṇdra- ca ripūn mamardda  
svavāhum ājau viśame sujātim  
ajātaroṣas tu ya ekavīraḥ

gave him passage; but the king did not have even have to move as (the Ocean) destroyed the chiefs of Yavana's king, eager for combat along with their soldiers.<sup>15</sup>

### **c. The Kings' Achievements**

The king's achievements were frequently measured against those of Rāma. For example, the inscription of Prasat Me Bon, stanza XXIX states:

Exercising his great energy in drawing the bow, eminent hero among young people,  
he possessed the Fortune of a crown prince, not issuing from a matrix, but conferred  
upon him by his father, like Rāma possessed the noble Sītā.<sup>16</sup>

King Rajendravarman II inherited the land from his father just like motherless Sītā was offered by her father. The Khmer kings were often projected as being better than Rāma. This king was offered a wife while he was ascending the throne; this act surpassed Rāma, whose wife left him and entered the subterranean world:

Having seen that king installed on the lion throne, the great Earth brought  
Fortune to him happily; while she [the Earth], herself on the lion throne, took

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<sup>15</sup> “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.287, st. XXXIX).

rāme svayaṃ vairivadhāya yāte  
viddho diḥat paddhatim amvurāśiḥ  
yasyācalasyāpi sa sa-jahāra  
sāinyair yuyutsūn yavanendravrīrān

<sup>16</sup> “Déployant sa force puissante pour tendre l’arc, héros éminent parmi les jeunes gens, il posséda la fortune de prince héritier, non issue d’une matrice, mais conférée par son père, comme Rāma la noble Sītā” (Finot 1925: 335, K.528, st. XXIX).

dhanurvīkarāpratoruāktir  
yuvapravīro yuvarājalakṣmīm/  
ayonijāṃ yo janakopanītāṃ  
sītāṃ satīṃ rāma ivoduvāha//

from Rāma Sītā, who was his Fortune, even though he was already king.<sup>17</sup>

King Suryavarman I is likewise shown to have surpassed Rāma. The inscription of Prasat Tuk Chaa states:

In the past, with great effort Rāma constructed a dyke in only one ocean, but it was without effort that this king constructed dykes in four oceans with the decapitated heads of his enemies.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, King Jayavarman VII surpassed Rāma, for he constructed a bridge made of gold. This bridge is allegorically used as the means to cross this *samsāra*. Jayavarman VII is, through the metaphor, presented as a bodhisattva who saves all living beings from this existing world, the *samsāra*. The inscription of Prasat Preah Khan states:

Rāma and that King accomplished work for the gods and humans (respectively). Both were entirely devoted to their fathers; both conquered the descendent of Bhṛgu; but the first constructed a road of stones for the powerful monkeys to cross, while the second constructed [a road] of gold for humans to cross the

<sup>17</sup> “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).

siṃhāsanastham avalokya mahībhṛtaṃ yaṃ  
hṛṣṭā mahī sumahatī śriyam ānināya  
siṃhāsane sthitavatī svayam eva rāmāt  
sītāṃ śriyam tv apajahāra mahībhṛto pi

<sup>18</sup> “Autrefois, Rāma a construit à grand peine un digue dans un unique ocean, 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).

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

<sup>19</sup> “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 Bhṛgu; mais le premier construisit 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, K. 908, st. XXIX).

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

Ocean of existences.<sup>19</sup>

#### **d. Rāma, Kings, and the Supreme God**

Thus, Kings were often said to behave better than Rāma who was the incarnation of Viṣṇu. In ancient Cambodia, the kings ambiguously functioned in two important roles, as “the lord on earth (kamrateñ phdai krom)” and “the lord of the gods (kamrateñ jagat).” Researchers have debated this issue for many years. This discussion comes along with the interpretation of another set of terms used in Sanskrit and Khmer. Those terms are “devarāja” in Sanskrit, and “kamrateñ jagat ta rāja” in Khmer. These two terms have puzzled researchers and have been interpreted differently. “Devarāja” has been translated as “the god-king” or “the king of the gods.” The Khmer term, “kamrateñ jagat ta rāja” is translated as “the lord of the world who is the king,” or “the god (lord of the world) of the king.” Together, these interpretations suggest that the king was perceived as being at once lord on earth and lord of gods.

On earth, the king was the king of the kings, a Cakravartin. He was “the man of prowess.” This is shown in the inscription of Sdok Kak Thom. In the inscription it is said that King Jayavarman II had a special ritual performed on mount Mahendra in celebration of the country’s independence from Java, which also served as a way for him to become a Cakravartin. After his death, he was associated with the God Śiva; he was named Parameśvara. At the same time, the king was also considered to be a supreme god. The inscription of Preah Ko relates:

By his incomparable heroism, he surpassed the heroism of Rāma; by his incomparable science, he surpassed the Omniscient [the Buddha]; by his incomparable glory, he surpassed the glory of Śakra; by his incomparable beauty, he surpassed the beauty of Kāma.<sup>20</sup>

This inscription infers that the king was a supreme god. We see similar understandings in the inscription of Pre Rup temple, where it claims that the earth is better than heaven:

There was once in heaven Parameśvara who had married a daughter of the

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<sup>20</sup> “Par son héroïsme incomparable, il a surpassé héroïsme de Rāma; par sa science incomparable, il a surpassé l’Omniscient; par sa gloire incomparable, il a surpassé la gloire de Śakra; par sa beauté incomparable, il a surpassé la beauté de Kāma” (Coedès 1937: 193, K. 717, st. III).

atulyavīryo jitarāmvīryyo  
yo tulyavidyo jitasarvavidvān  
atulyakīrttir jitaḥakrakīrti  
atulyakāntir jitaḥakamakāntiḥ

mountain, but now that this king, endowed with supreme Fortune, has come to earth and married one hundred virgins, the earth is superior to heaven.<sup>21</sup>

In this stanza, King Rajendravarman II claims that the earth, while under his reign is better than heaven under the reign of Parameśvara (Śiva). The stanza also implies that this king was the supreme god who reigned on earth.

In short, kings were almost always better than Rāma who was also the incarnation of a god, making the kings surpass the gods, or, in other words, the equivalent of the supreme god.

### ***Generosity***

Generosity is also an expression of power. Many episodes of the Ramayana were alluded to in ancient epigraphy in order to show the kings' generosity. The inscription of Loley, stanza XLVII, states:

“Once, Rāma gave land to Kaśyapa.” In remembering that and to beat him in liberality, he perpetually gave a golden mountain to brahmans.<sup>22</sup>

This inscription praises the merits of King Yasovarman I for his generous donations to *brahmans*, through comparison with Rāma Jamadagnya who just gives a plot of land to Kāśyapa. Yasovarman I gave not a plot of land, but a golden mountain to *brahmans*. Furthermore, this king was not like Rāma who in giving expected return. The same inscription states:

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<sup>21</sup> “Il y eut bien autrefois au ciel Parameśvara qui avait épousé une fille du mont, mais maintenant que ce roi, doué d'une Fortune suprême, est venu sur terre et qu'il a épousé cent vierges, la terre est supérieure au ciel” (Coedès 1937: 112, K.806, st. L).

na bhūbhṛto bhūt pariṇīya kanyām  
ekān nu nāke parameśvaraḥ prāk  
bhūtvā tu bhūyo bhuvī yo dhikaśrīḥ  
kanyāśataṃ bhūr adhiketi nākāt

<sup>22</sup> “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 brāhmanes une montagne d'or [le mont Meru]” (Bergaigne 1893: 226, K.323, st. XLVII).

dattavān ekadā rāmaḥ                      kaśyapāya mahīm iti  
jigīṣayeva yo nityaṃ                      hemādrim adīśad dvije

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In helping people, he demanded nothing in return, shaming Rāghava [Rāma] who demanded recognition even from a monkey.<sup>23</sup>

Another king who was considered better than Rama was King Jayavarman VII, a Buddhist king who performed perfect generosity. The inscription of Prasat Chrung states:

It is after having heard his own praises that Rāma desired the return of his beloved wife whom he had abandoned; while after hearing the praises of the Dharmarāja, that king wanted to give away the Fortune that he possessed.<sup>24</sup>

This inscription strongly implies the influence of the Vessantara Jataka tale, in which King Vessantara gives away all his property; including his children and wife. After having heard praise for the Dharmarāja, King Jayavarman VII wanted to do the same.

### ***Government***

Although there is no clear indication that the ancient Khmer kingdom followed the model of Rāma's kingdom in any precise or formal manner, there are a few stanzas that imply awareness of that model. The inscription from the southwestern corner of Thnal Baray mentions:

He protected Kambupurī (which is) magnificent and protected, terrifying, with well advising friends and fortune for an ornament, like the descendant of Raghu [Rāma, who reigned at Ayodhyā with Sumantra as friend, Sītā as ornament and

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<sup>23</sup> “En sauvant les gens, il ne leur demandait rien en échange, faisant honte à Rāghava, qui demandait de la reconnaissance même à un singe” (Barth 1893: 283, K.281, st. 10).

yo jahāt pratyupakṛiti-            n trātaiva plavagā api  
pratīkṣmāṇaṃ laghaya-            n rāghavaṃ pratyupakriyām

<sup>24</sup> “C'est après avoir entendu son propre éloge que Rāma désira reprendre l'épouse (Śrī) 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).

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

<sup>25</sup> “Il protégea Kambupurī (qu'il avait rendue) imprenable, terrifiante, avec des amis de bon conseil et la fortune pour parure, comme le descendant de Raghu [a régné sur Ayodhyā avec Sumantra pour ami, Sītā pour parure et Vibhīṣaṇa pour hôte]” (Bergaigne 1893: 332, K.283, st. 21).

sumantrasuhṛidaṃ sītā-            bhūṣaṇā suvibhīṣaṇaṃ  
jugopa yaḥ kambupurī-            m ayodhyām iva rāghavaḥ

Vibhīṣaṇa as host].<sup>25</sup>

King Yasovarman I is mentioned here as having good counselors so that he could protect Kambupuri (Cambodia) like Rāma for Ayodhyā. At the same time, this king has a minister who was like Sumantra, a minister of Rāma.

Other inscriptions mention kings' ministers and priests being like Rāma's ministers and priests. For instance, Śaṅkarapaṇḍita was a priest who prepared the coronation of King Udayādityavarman II. At the time of the coronation ceremony, Śaṅkarapaṇḍita was praised for acting like Vaśiṣṭha at the coronation of Rāma.

And it was Śaṅkarapaṇḍita, in the role of Guru, who, with the ministers, consecrated him and installed him on the throne, just like Vaśiṣṭha consecrated the descendant of Raghu [Rāma].<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, Vāgīśa, a minister of King Udayādityavarman II, was compared to Sumantra, the minister of Rāma. The inscription of Prasat Khna mentions:

The named Vāgīś, chief of the village of Chok Trakvān, was the mandarin of king Udayāditya just like Sumantra (was the mandarin) of Rāma.<sup>27</sup>

It was also mentioned that King Jayavarman VII protected those who were in need of protection, as in the following:

Rāma, descended from the solar lineage, tied by the serpent, had to be delivered...;

<sup>26</sup> “Et ce fut Śaṅkarapaṇḍita, en qualité de guru, qui le sacra et l'établit sur ce trône, de concert avec les ministres, comme Vaśiṣṭha (sacra) le descendant de Raghu” (Barth 1885: 139, K. 136, st. 28).

tasmin rājyebhiṣektā yaṃ      guruś śaṅkarapaṇḍitaḥ  
mantribhis sthāpayām āsa      vaśiṣṭho rāghavaṃ yathā

<sup>27</sup> “Le nommé Vāgīśa, chef de la ville de Chok Trakvān, fut mandarin du roi Udayāditya (varman), comme Sumantra (l'avait été) de Rāma” (Coedès 1937: 219 K, 661, st.CXX.)

mantrī vāgīśanāmāsa      choktrakvānpnuavān vaśī  
sumantra iva rāmasyo      dayādityamahībṛtaḥ

<sup>28</sup> “Rāma, issu de la race solaire, lié par le serpent, a dû être délivré.... tandis que ce roi, doué d'une force plus grande, délivrait celui qui était sans protection” (Coedès 1952: 234, K. 597, st. F).

tīkṣṇāmsuvaṃśabhū rāmo      dviṣadam sadvijihvakaḥ  
....d mocyo vināthasya      draḍhīyān yas tu mocakaḥ

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while that king, endowed with greater force, delivered those without protection.<sup>28</sup>

This king did not violate the law, unlike Viśvāmitra who knew the rules and abused the law in favor of legendary Triśaṅku. Triśaṅku was able to go to heaven because of Viśvāmitra's help. King Jayavarman VII, however, did not allow such transgressions to happen. He punished those who did wrong and awarded those who did good:

It was without being forced by others that he punished the guilty and rewarded the deserving; while it was at the son of Gādhī's instigation that Vṛṣaṇ accepted Triśaṅku in heaven, and at Brahmā's instigation that he created this obstacle of Love for Siva [practicing austerities].<sup>29</sup>

Of King Yasovarman I, it was said that:

His pure fame beat out the shell [in its whiteness (purity)] and it was his authority which his subjects feared. Thus it is surprising that during the reign of Rāma the Brahman feared the shell itself.<sup>30</sup>

I do not recognize the specific episode alluded to here. But it is clear again, that the king is better than Rāma. Similarly, in the Preah Khan inscription cited above, King Jayavarman VII was not like Rāma who constructed the bridge because he would like to help gods in order to kill *rakṣasas*. Instead, the king constructed a bridge in gold in order to save all the people from this world. He

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<sup>29</sup> “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 Gādhī que Vṛṣaṇ 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).

daṇḍyapratikṣyeṣv aparayukto  
yo yuñkta daṇḍāpacitī vṛṣā tu  
gāṇ gādhīputrasya girā triśaṅkau  
pratyūham īśe smaram avjayoneḥ

<sup>30</sup> “Sa gloire pure avait vaincu le coquillage (était plus blanche) et c'était son autorité que redoutaient ses sujets: il y a donc lieu de s'étonner que, sous le règne de Rāma, le brahmane ait redouté le coquillage lui-même [Śambuka]” (Bergaigne 1893: 334, K. 280, st. VI).

jītaśaṅkhe śucau yasya                      prajā yaśasi śāsanāt  
rāmarājye pi śamvūkā                      t trasto dvija iti smayah

played a role as a savior of the world like Rāma, but was considered better because he wanted to help bring his people from this worldly existence into the supreme world.

Such expressions of the king's power were clearly meant to empower the king. The king was the best among others, therefore weaker kings would be better off giving in to this king than waging war against him. He was the supreme god; all living beings had to worship him and respect his orders.

## 2. Social Norms

### a. The Episode of Triśaṅku Going to Heaven

As mentioned above, the inscription of Prasat Chrung sharply critiques Viśvāmitra for using his ascetic power to help Triśaṅku go to heaven. At the same time, it praises king Jayavarman VII who claimed to be Yama as the incarnation of justice. This king was said to punish those who did wrong and reward those who deserved it. Simultaneously, it passed the message to the people that they should not commit wrongs. The just nature of the king is thus established *while* establishing social norms.

### b. The Killing of Vālin

The episode of the killing of Vālin expressed perhaps the most notable of Rāma's acts. The inscription of Prasat Chrung praises Rāma for killing Vālin. At the same time, however, the episode seems to express a tragedy. A bas-relief at Angkor Wat depicts monkeys despairing over the death of their husband and king. The inscription of Prasat Chrung bring this social role of the episode to bear:

He sent the enemy to heaven by means of his arrow, broke the bow, beloved of humans, victorious over the husband of Tārā [Vālin] and without passion, while

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<sup>31</sup> “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).

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

the son of Daśaratha [Rāma ] was beloved only to the monkeys and passionate. <sup>31</sup>

When Rāma kills Vālin, who has his back turned, he is less of a perfect model for the Khmer than a backdrop for society against which to measure the King's greater character. While Rāma was loved only by monkeys, this King was loved by humans. Rāma was characterized by unkingly passion, while this model King was without passion, proving that his character was greater than that of Rāma.

### **c. Sītā and Fidelity**

The scene of the meeting between Hanuman and Stā was also important in society. This scene seems to express the fidelity of Stā toward her husband. Queen Indradev, Jayavarman VII's wife, is said in the Phimeanakas inscription cited above to have behaved like Stā while her husband was away:

Walking... the 9<sup>th</sup> day in the month of āṣṭvayuja, she followed the path... asceticism  
...manifesting the conduct of faithful wives.<sup>32</sup>

This implied to women that although they may be in desperate circumstances they should act like Stā.

The scene of the ordeal of Stā depicted the fidelity of a virtuous wife. Yet, the episode also expresses the wrong-doing of Rāma. In iconographic representations, monkeys are depicted expressing disagreement with what Rāma did, implying an indirect critique of this act, and so serving as a warning to those in power.

### **d. Descent of Sītā**

This scene is recounted under the reign of two different kings, one Śaivaite and the other Buddhist. In the passage cited above, the Pre Rup inscription does not present this episode as the last stage of life of the incarnation of Rāma; rather, it critiques Rāma for losing something he wanted. In so doing, it praises the king who is given a wife when ascending the throne. On the

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<sup>32</sup> “Marchant.....le neuvième jour (du mois d'āṣṭvayuja), elle suivit le chemin...l'ascétisme ...manifestant la conduite des épouses fidèles” (Coedès 1942: 176, K.485, st. LIV).

vra.....imā caranti  
mahānavamyāṃ pathi sā cacāra  
tapah.....yātā  
sandarśayanti caritaṃ satīnām

other hand, in the Buddhist inscription of Prasat Chrung cited above King Jayavarman VII critiques Rāma for wanting something which is impermanent and causes desire.

### 3. Story and Actual Events

Epic episodes were used intentionally to compare actual situations to events in the Rāmāyaṇa. Sometimes the episodes were metaphorically compared to actual events, for example, the battle of Laṅkā. The battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa was often compared to the battle between Khmer kings and neighboring kings. Noticeably, during the reign of King Jayavarman VII, the selected episodes were obviously matched to particular events and people. Coedès noted points of comparison between the story and actual events many times in his work. Later, Groslier, who was probably inspired by Coedès, precisely mentioned this in his short study dedicated to Rāmāyaṇa in ancient Cambodia (Coedès 1952: 246, n. 1).

I would like to focus further on a few examples which were mentioned only in a general manner by Coedès and Groslier. The first example is from the inscription of Phimeanakas, where Queen Indradevī compared her own life to Sītā's. When abducted by Rāvaṇa, Sītā was separated from Rāma. After having been taken from the house of Rāvaṇa, she was again separated from Rāma. However, this queen, Indradevī, was separated from her husband, King Jayavarman VII, because her husband went to war with the kings of Champa. She wished to live with her husband forever, and was always waiting for him, unlike Sītā who rejected her husband's proposal of reunion. (See the Phimeanakas inscription, stanza LI cited in the first installment of the present article, *Udaya* 6.)

The inscription of Prasat Chrung, stanza XLLVII, also cited in *Udaya* 6, relates an episode of the defection of Vibhīṣaṇa to Rāma. Coedès notes the connection between the epic and the actual event (Coedès 1952: 246, n. 1). The actual event concerned Vidyānandana, a younger brother of the king of Champa who defected from his brother's side to take refuge with the Khmer King Jayavarman VII. The Cham prince ultimately killed his own brother and became a satellite king in Champa, unlike Vibhīṣaṇa who simply joined Rāma's side, but did not kill his brother.

There is nothing extraordinary in that Vibhīṣaṇa, exiled by his brother, sought refuge in Rāma; what is extraordinary is that the younger brother, having submitted

<sup>33</sup> “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 chérissait” (Coedès 1952: 246, K. 288, st. XLVI).

vibhīṣaṇo bhrāṭṛvahiṣkṛto yad  
ṛṇmṛśrito nādbhutam adbhutan tat  
jaghāna yac cāmpapatiṃ yavīyān  
nighnikṛto yattarasānuraktam

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to the power of this King, killed his older brother, the king of Cāmpa, whom he loved.<sup>33</sup>

Ironically for a Buddhist king, the way in which King Jayavarman VII manipulated Vidyānandana to kill his own brother was admired as a deed greater than that of Rāma.

The categories I have tried to tease out here intersect in important ways: the religious, and the socio-political are interconnected. And it is the Rāmāyaṇa which, perhaps more than anything else (ritual, narrative, doctrinal texts...) manages to weave together these different aspects of life forming and constantly re-forming Khmer society.

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