

# THE INFLUENCE OF THE RAMAKIEN MURALS IN THE GRAND PALACE OF SIAM ON THE REAMKER MURALS IN THE ROYAL PALACE OF CAMBODIA<sup>1</sup>

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When the temple of the Emerald Buddha was built in the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh in 1895, the Cambodian version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, known in Khmer as the *Reamker*, was selected to be painted on the gallery walls of the temple. Interestingly, the *Reamker* mural paintings in the Royal Palace were to become the first complete version of the *Reamker* ever known to have been produced in Cambodia. The earliest extant *Reamker* manuscript texts, dating to the Post-Angkorian 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, are incomplete versions of the full epic tale (Pou 1979, 1982). Though the *Rāmāyaṇa* was abundantly represented in pre-Angkorian and Angkorian epigraphy and sculpture, no full version, in textual or sculptural form, is known from this ancient time.<sup>2</sup> An important question thus arises: what was the source of the Phnom Penh Palace mural paintings?

Although there exist a number of studies focusing on the *Reamker* mural paintings, this question has never caught the attention of scholars. Only two studies, by French scholars, have touched on the question. Madeleine Giteau, a specialist in Khmer art, mentioned briefly in her *Iconographie du Cambodge Post-Angkorien* that Cambodian court painting was influenced by Siamese painting in term of characters and architectural forms. Giteau noted:

[The *Rāmāyaṇa* of the temple of the Emerald Buddha] is represented along the cloister walls surrounding the sanctuary; the whole is divided by the axial doors into four quadrants. The story was painted following the example of the frescos of the cloisters of Wat Phra Keo of Bangkok [...] Clothing and ornaments are those worn by the dancers of the royal ballet. The influence of Thailand is very tangible, in the presentation of both characters and architecture [...] For the most

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my MA thesis (San 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For a presentation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Cambodian history, along with analyses of socio-political aspects of ancient representation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see Siyonn Sophearith's articles in *Udaya* 6 and 7.

part, palaces preserve stepped roofs and a finial spire, though some do adopt Angkorian-type pediments and are crowned with a prang-form comparable with what we see in Bangkok, at the Royal Palace and Wat Phra Keo (Giteau 1975: 290).

Around twenty years after the publication of Giteau's work, Jacqueline and Guy Nafilyan, who studied mural paintings in Cambodian Buddhist temples, confirmed Giteau's proposition of Siamese influence. They wrote:

The influence of Thai art on Cambodian painting takes several paths, essentially three.

- The first and the most obvious has to do with geographical location. The Battambang - Siem Reap region was under the authority of Bangkok from 1794 to 1907. This implies the presence of craftsmen, expertise and materials coming from Bangkok for more than one century. The painting of the monasteries of these areas is strongly marked by Thai art. [...]
- The second passes through the sending of Cambodian artists to further their training in Thailand, on the occasion of a commission. We have previously said how Okñā Tep Nimit Mak went to perfect his painting knowledge in Bangkok before fulfilling the Royal Palace commission and the frescoes of the walls of the enclosure-gallery of Vat Prah Keo Morokot.
- The third passes through reference to iconographical handbooks, canonical texts, and anthologies of models. This path was also followed by the other artistic disciplines of dance, theater, goldworking, weaving, etc... (Nafilyan 1997: 65-66).

Although Giteau's hypothesis sounds very convincing, little supporting evidence is provided, and she never actually discussed the story itself. The Nafilyans, on the other hand, provide very interesting information about the influence of Siamese art on Cambodian painting, but only concerning the causes of influence. So far, no in-depth study of the influence of the *Ramakien* murals in the Siamese Grand Palace on the *Reamker* murals in the Cambodian Royal Palace has been done and the question of the source of this complete version in the Cambodian Royal Palace remains unanswered.

This article attempts to answer this question through a detailed comparative analysis of the Cambodian and Siamese Palace mural paintings, considering storyline, compositional organization, and technique. The socio-cultural context of the creation of both paintings will also be examined in order to identify key factors responsible for the similarities and differences between the *Reamker* and *Ramakien* murals.

### **Siamese Influence on the Cambodian Royal Court in the Reigns of King Ang Duong and King Norodom**

The influence of the *Ramakien* murals on the *Reamker* murals was, in a most general manner, an outcome of Cambodia's historical relations with Siam. I will therefore briefly characterize the historical relations of the two kingdoms in the period in question.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was to see a sort of restoration of Cambodian political and cultural stability after centuries of instability, beginning with the fall of the capital at Angkor after Siamese attack in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. At least two Cambodian monarchs were responsible for this restoration: King Ang Duong and his son King Norodom. The two kings spent much of their lives in Siam, a fact which led to an important augmentation of Siamese influence. The Cambodian court came under direct influence of Siamese arts and culture in the reign of Ang Duong. Siamese influence is also easily detectable in Cambodian Buddhism of this and subsequent periods. Ang Duong is known for having instituted extensive legal reforms, developed infrastructures, and generally rehabilitated the court. This campaign to restore national unity was underpinned by an important reformation of Cambodian Buddhism. The King gave alms and built monasteries. He gathered around him scholars of Buddhism and literature, and encouraged them to write, to teach those who wanted to learn, and to revise and update texts. He personally trained monks and laymen as well (Jacob 1996: 65-66). Remarkably, in 1854 Ang Duong petitioned the Siamese king to send a complete version of the Tripitaka (Buddhist canon) in the pure form of Pali recently championed by the monastic reformers of that country, on the grounds that nothing of the sort existed in Cambodia. Led by Maha Pan (1824-1894), a Khmer monk based at Wat Bowonivet, Bangkok, a delegation of eight monks representing Siamese King Mongkut's rationalist and reformist Dhammayut sect subsequently arrived at the Cambodian royal court at Oudong, carrying bundles of some eighty sacred writings. Thus, under royal patronage the still powerful Dhammayutikanikāya was established in Cambodia, and Maha Pan became its first chief (Harris 2006: 106; Khing 2003: 13).

Siamese influence can be also seen in literature composed at the time. King Ang Duong was himself a distinguished scholar and poet. He knew Pali and the canonical texts well and wrote poetry. One of his well-known compositions is the narrative poem *Rīoen Nān Kākī*. This story resembles the *Kākāṭī Jātaka* as well as the *Sussonatī Jātaka*; some episodes differ from the Siamese version, *Kaki*. But the Cambodian story of *Kākī* was clearly adopted from the Siamese. Bearing witness to this at the end of the Cambodian story is the note of the royal author himself: "the story of Kakei was translated from the Siamese" (Khing 2003: 23-36). Moreover, according to Judith Jacob, it was during this time that the poetic meters of *pad pāky 7* (seven-syllable meter) and *pad pāky 9* (nine-syllable meter) were also borrowed from the Siamese. These meters were very popular with the court poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued to be used in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Jacob 1996: 45,54).

Likewise, the rebirth of Cambodian classical dance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century owes much to Siam. Toni Phim and Ashley Thompson point out that Khmer kings who had been raised in Siam, including King Ang Duong and his sons, brought many Siamese to the court, some of whom were apparently dancers (Phim and Thompson 1999: 40). When Ang Duong became king, he found classical dance to be on the verge of disappearance. The few dancers that remained at the court still preserved the classical tradition but had introduced some rather unorthodox changes. Ang Duong therefore undertook to return to the royal dances their original meaning and classical beauty, as well as to restore them to their level of dignity in votive ceremonies to the gods and solemn palace festivals. This renewal and reorganization was carried out

with care, and most of the changes introduced at that time have remained until today (Jeldres 1999: 97). After reforming and establishing the choreographic side of the ballet, the King turned his attention to the costumes. Until then, it is believed the dancers had worn Angkorian costume, almost unchanged from that of the stone figures in the great temples. It consisted mainly of a light sampot, often draped round the waist and leaving leg movements completely free (Jeldres 1999: 97). The reforms undertaken by Ang Duong introduced heavy pieces of silver and gold-braided silk, either because the semi-nudity of the dancers was no longer suited to the morals and beliefs of the time, or more probably in imitation of the Siamese. This changed the appearance of dancers and, by greatly limiting their freedom of movement, was to have a considerable effect on the future of Khmer choreography (Jeldres 1999: 97).

During Norodom's reign, no doubt, the Siamese influence on Buddhism and literature that had been transplanted to Cambodian soil since the reign of King Ang Duong remained intact, although French colonial powers attempted to prevent Siamese domination. In regard to court dance, Norodom always remained open to outside influence. In the early part of his reign he was eclectic in support of numerous Southeast Asian musical traditions, inviting performers from Laos, Burma, China, Vietnam, Malaysia and, of course, Siam to reside in the capital (Cravath 1985: 155). As noted earlier, King Norodom who had been brought up at the royal palace in Bangkok, was fond of the Siamese language, which therefore was used for performance (Leclère 1910: 257-59). Furthermore, according to the contemporary account of Moura, the repertoire included the Siamese *Ramakien*, not the Cambodian *Reamker* (Moura 1883: 414). In general, there were many more Siamese officials at Norodom's court than had been at that of Ang Duong. Like his father, Norodom maintained a great number of women, concubines or dancers, of Siamese origin in his court (Cravath 1985: 159).

This evidence demonstrates quite clearly that since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century every aspect of royal Cambodian arts and culture was heavily influenced by the Siamese. Therefore, it is of no surprise that King Norodom decorated his new Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha with reference to the murals in the Siamese Grand Palace. The resemblance between the two struck viewers from the very beginning, as we can see in the testimony of Frank Vincent, an American traveler who visited the Cambodian Royal Palace in 1872; Vincent declared the Cambodian "...Palace [to be] superior in every aspect, excepting size, to that at Bangkok..." (Vincent 1988: 278).

### **Construction of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok and the *Ramakien* Mural Paintings**

On 6 April 1782, shortly after succeeding King Taksin to the throne, King Rama I, founder of the Chakri dynasty, moved the capital to the east bank of the Chao Praya River. The King named the capital "Ratanakosin" – the Jewel of Indra – often called "Krung Thep," meaning "the City of Gods" (Office of the National Environment Board 1991: 5). The city is also known as "Bangkok" and has remained the capital ever since. On 6 May 1782, the King began construction of his palace. The walls of the palace

measured 410 meters on the north, 510 meters on the east, 360 meters on the south and 360 meters on the west; these remain unchanged until the present day (Hangvivat 2004: 7). At that time, King Rama I had a Buddhist temple built in the northeast corner of the Grand Palace compound. The tradition of constructing a Buddhist temple in the precincts of the Royal Palace had existed in Siam since the Sukhothai period (Diskul 1982: 17). The temple's official name is Wat Phra Sri Ratanasasdam (Diskul 1982: 7) but it is called the Temple of the Emerald Buddha because the Ubosot (ordination hall) shelters the so-called Emerald Buddha<sup>3</sup> that King Rama I had obtained from the city of Vientiane in Laos in 1778 (Diskul 1982: 17-19). The construction of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha began in 1783 and was completed in 1785 (Hangvivat 2004: 7). The Temple and the Royal Palace itself were consecrated at the same time (Bureau of the Royal Household 2005: 20 ) (figure 1).



*Figure1: Plan of the Grand Palace of Siam. The Temple of the Emerald Buddha is situated at the northeast corner of the palace precinct. (The Bureau of the Royal Household 2005: 30-31)*

Unlike other Buddhist monasteries, no monks reside in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. The temple serves as a royal chapel where the monarch can perform charitable functions and ceremonies such as “Drinking the Water of Allegiance” (Bureau of the Royal Household 2005: 219).

<sup>3</sup> Though it is now known that the image is made of a single piece of jade, the name “Emerald” has stuck (Dhanivivat 1963: 17-18).



### *The Ubosot*

The Ubosot, or Ordination Hall, the largest and most important structure of the temple, was built for housing the Emerald Buddha which is regarded as the palladium of the Siamese Monarchy (Dhanivivat 1963: 17-18). The Ubosot faces east and is located in the southern part of the temple precinct.

Since construction in 1785, the chapel has never been allowed to fall into decay. According to Buddhist teachings regarding the virtue of gratitude and to show respect for tradition, every monarch must take upon himself the restoration of both the Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, and ensure their lasting embellishment (Bureau of the Royal Household 2005: 29). During previous renovations, the chapel was made to undergo many changes both to the interior and exterior, but during the present reign major renovations have been carried out with a view to leaving ancient characteristics undisturbed (Hangvivat 2004: 64).



*Figure 2: The Ubosot (view from the northeast)*

### *The Galleries*

The temple of the Emerald Buddha complex is surrounded by cloisters forming a covered gallery. This type of gallery enclosing a central sacred area is also frequent in Siamese monastic architecture. According to Rita Ringis, the concept was originally derived from ancient Khmer architecture, although the construction materials and methods differ (Ringis 1990: 37-38). The enclosed galleries can be accessed through seven gates: two on the east, one on the south, three on the west, and one on the north.

### *The Mural Paintings*

The paintings are mainly located in two places: the interior wall of the Ubosot and the galleries surrounding the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Although the mural painting inside the Ubosot is not included in this study, a brief description may be of some use.

The interior walls of the chapel are decorated with mural paintings depicting scenes from the Life of the Buddha, Buddhist Cosmology (or the Three Worlds) and the Jātaka, tales of the former births of the Buddha. The scenes from Buddhist Cosmology on the western wall and the Enlightenment of the Buddha on the eastern wall were painted during the reign of King Rama I. It is probable that the assembly of celestial beings on the upper part of the lateral walls, a feature typical of late Ayutthaya and early Bangkok painting styles, was also painted at that time. The walls between the windows were decorated with scenes from the Life of the Buddha. King Rama III had the lateral walls repainted. Above the windows on both the north and the south were depicted scenes from the Life of the Buddha, whereas between the windows various scenes from the Jātaka were shown. On the lower part of the northern wall a royal procession on land is depicted, and the southern side shows a riverine procession. These paintings still exist (Diskul 1982: 17-19).

The *Ramakien* was selected for representation on the walls of the galleries surrounding the Temple of the Emerald Buddha complex (figure 3). The paintings were executed in the reign of King Rama I and follow the Siamese version of the *Ramakien*, a text composed at the king's command (Diskul 1995: 1). Scholars have attempted to explain the king's command in political terms. Kittisak Kerdarunsuksri argues that King Rama I aimed to employ the story as a tool to legitimize his power, indeed naming his dynasty "Chakri." Kittisak sees this name as designating the King as the equivalent of the god Viṣṇu and his cakra (a weapon shaped like a disc) weapon. King Rama I was, in this interpretation, meant to be comparable to the god; he was a divine-king who reincarnated to relieve the people's suffering. Obviously, the setting of the story, elaborately described in the text, was the newly constructed capital, Bangkok. The glittering description of new buildings revealed the royal determination to compare the glory of Bangkok to that of Ayutthaya (Kerdarunsuksri 1999: 2). Charles Keyes argues that the concept of Rāma as the "ideal" king originated in Khmer thought, and that the Siamese mural paintings depicting the *Ramakien* have their prototype in the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat" (Keyes 2002: 216).

The mural paintings of King



*Figure 3: The Ramakien Mural Paintings along the galleries of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha*

Rama I did not last long due to the dampness of the walls caused by the humid climate. The paintings have been restored successively, in the reign of King Rama III for the fiftieth anniversary of Bangkok in 1832, in the reign of King Rama V for the centenary celebration in 1882, and in that of King Rama VII for the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Bangkok in 1932 (Diskul 1995: 1). The restoration between 1929-1931 was exquisitely carried out by well-known artists, but these paintings did not survive long. In 1970 there was another major restoration and experts in many fields were invited to investigate ways to prevent deterioration of these works of art. This restoration, which took place between 1970 to 1981, was ordered by the present king, Rama IX, to be completed for the bicentenary celebration of the foundation of Bangkok in 1982 (Diskul 1995: 1).

### **The Construction of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Phnom Penh and the Reamker Mural Painting**

In 1865, one year after ascending to the throne, King Norodom had the Khmer capital moved to Phnom Penh, about 35 kilometers to the south of Oudong. The city has remained the capital ever since. Phnom Penh was not a new capital. The founding of Phnom Penh dates to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the fall of Angkor when the Khmer King, Ponhea Yat, abandoned Angkor as the capital forever and sought a more peaceful location for his residence which would be safe from Siamese invaders (Igout 1993: 3). The permanent establishment of the capital in Phnom Penh did not however take place for several centuries as the kings frequently changed their place of residence. It was not until 1812 that King Ang Chan moved his palace from Oudong to Phnom Penh because the latter was more strategically situated close to his patron, Vietnam.

The king chose the site for the Royal Palace because of its location at the auspicious convergence of four waterways. Construction began in 1865, and the Palace was officially opened on 14 February 1870 (Igout 1993: 40). When Frank Vincent visited the Royal Palace in 1872, the buildings were very similar to the Grand Palace in Bangkok. However, both the Siamese and Cambodian palaces have been progressively renovated over time, and some buildings have been modified or demolished and new buildings have been added. Today, only the exterior walls remain the same. The Cambodian Royal Palace compound is 435 meters long by 421 meters wide (Ministry of the Royal Palace 2004: 22). It is smaller than the Siamese Grand Palace. The Royal Palace in Phnom Penh differs from the Grand Palace in Bangkok in its orientation which is to the East and not the North as in Bangkok.

During the Angkor period, the Khmer kings constructed royal temples in their palace grounds. This tradition was lost in Cambodia during the Post-Angkorian period.<sup>4</sup> However, the tradition may have been lost in Post-Angkorian times. The concept was apparently preserved on Siamese soil and then re-imported

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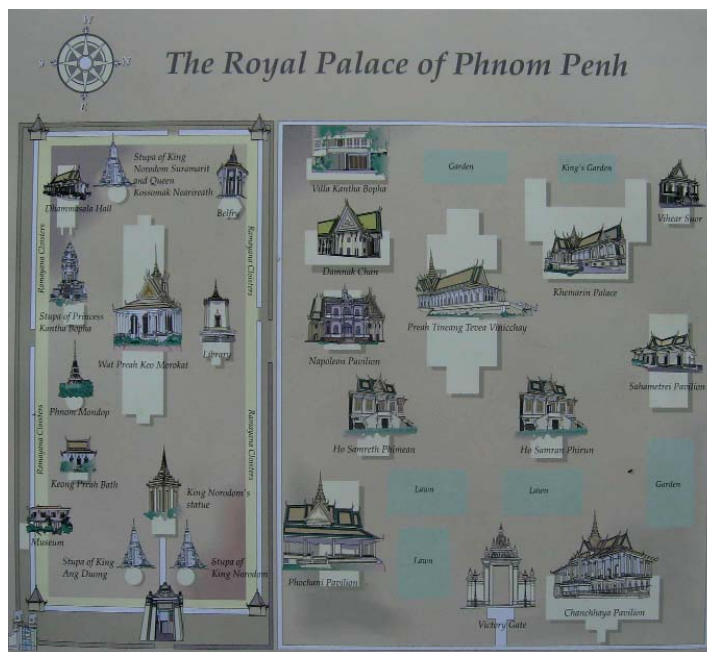
<sup>4</sup> The extant royal temple is known as the Phimeanakas; it is thought that a temple was first built here in the 9<sup>th</sup> century in the reign of king Yasovarman I (889-c. 915), but was modified or reconstructed by Suryavarman I (r. 1002-1049). See Coe 2003: 112.



into Cambodia by King Norodom when he built his Royal Palace in Phnom Penh in 1865. Although the king adapted the idea from Siamese tradition, the inclusion of a royal chapel in the palace complex was not simply the replication of Siamese architectural styles, but had roots in Khmer history. In Cambodia, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha and the Royal Palace were not built at the same time. The Royal Temple was started in 1895 – almost thirty years later than the Royal Palace – and inaugurated a few weeks before the death of King Norodom (April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1904) (Nepote 2000: 11). The Royal Temple was built to the south of the Royal Palace, but was originally not located in the palace precinct. It is thought to have originally only shared walls with the palace compound at the time of construction. Today we see the temple situated inside the palace enclosure (figure 4).

The temple's formal name is Wat Ubosoth Ratanaram, but it is called the “Temple of the Emerald Buddha” due to the fact that the main Buddha image<sup>5</sup> housed inside is made of emerald. The temple is also called the “Silver Pagoda,” a name given by the French because of the temple's silver-tiled floor.

In the temple Cambodian royals listen to sermons offered by Buddhist monks who are invited from other monasteries. It is also a site where the royal family and mandarins perform royal ceremonies throughout the year according to Buddhist traditions (Chum 1996: 1). The temple differs from other Buddhist pagodas insofar as monks do not reside within its premises.<sup>6</sup>



*Figure 4: Plan of the Royal Palace of Cambodia. The Temple of the Emerald Buddha is located to the south of the palace. Originally, the temple did not sit in the palace compound; its walls were perhaps connected with the palace walls at the time of construction of the temple. (Jeldres 1999: 21)*

<sup>5</sup> The Emerald Buddha image was fashioned during the reign of King Norodom for display in the chapel (Eng 1969: 1204).

<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, King Norodom Sihanouk resided at the temple for three months during his royal ordination which began on 31 July 1947 (Jeldres 1999: 39).

*Vihear*

The *Vihear* or worship hall, the principle building of the temple, was built between the years 1892 and 1902. However, weather and age contributed to its gradual deterioration, to the point of near collapse. Thus, in 1962, a new concrete chapel was built in the same place as the old wood and brick one, employing the same architectural style (Jeldres 1999: 39). The *Vihear* faces east and is situated at the center of a north/south and east/west door axis. The foundation floor was laid with marble, while the interior floor was covered with silver tiles individually handcrafted by Khmer silversmiths (figure 5).



*Figure 5: The new vihhear of the Cambodian Royal Palace was built in 1962 (view from the southeast).*

*The Galleries*

The Temple of the Emerald Buddha of Cambodia is enclosed by galleries much like the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Siam. This type of monastic architecture – although it had appeared in ancient Khmer architecture – is unusual for contemporary Cambodian Buddhist monasteries. It is likely that this represents another recycling of an idea: the architecture style, no doubt, was adopted from Khmer ancient architecture *via* the Siamese Royal Temple. However, difference can be distinguished in the disposition of the cloister doors. The cloisters of the Cambodian Royal Temple are divided into four quadrants by four axial doors. The eastern door is the main entrance, which is most common in Cambodian religious sites.

### *The Mural Paintings*

The old *Vihear* was decorated with mural paintings depicting scenes from the Life of the Buddha and the Jātakas, stories about the last ten lives of the Buddha before he entered Nirvana. Regrettably, these paintings disappeared when the building was reconstructed in 1895. There is no painting in the new *vihear*.

The walls of the galleries are covered with mural paintings depicting the *Reamker* (figure 6). Scholars agree that King Norodom's decision to commission the *Reamker* paintings for the galleries was influenced by the *Ramakien* murals of the Grand Palace in Bangkok.<sup>7</sup> Jacques Nepote and Marie-Henryane Gamonet additionally suggest political motives were behind the King's decision. Firstly, they see Norodom seeking to legitimize his power. In this context they note that when the Siamese dynasty was fragile, King Rama I composed the *Ramakien* and had it executed in his temple. This concurs with J. M. Cadet who claims that "throughout Southeast Asia, wherever the struggle for power was fiercest the Rāmayaṇa was most in demand" (Cadet 1970: 31). Secondly, for Nepote and Gamonet, Norodom intentionally used the *Reamker* painting as a tool to convey a precise cultural message to teach future generations (Nepote and Gamonet 2000: 12-13). I question these hypotheses for two reasons. First, if King Norodom sought to legitimize his power, why did he not have the *Reamker* painted in his palace at the beginning of his reign, after the model of King Rama? Secondly, King Norodom was a legitimately crowned king, not a usurper. Thus, he did not have a strong need to legitimize his power. I am more inclined to believe that the main purpose of Norodom in constructing the temple and having the *Reamker* murals painted was to make merit for himself in view of ensuring prosperity in the next life. Furthermore, I believe Norodom selected the *Reamker* in imitation of the Grand Palace of Siam.

The mural paintings along the galleries stretch around 604 meters of the wall, reaching a height of 3.56 meters, and thus occupy a surface of 2,000 square meters (Jeldres 1999: 47). The paintings were painted between 1903 and 1904 under the supervision of well-known artist and architect, Okñā Tep Nimit Mak. In fact, the entire temple



*Figure 6: The Reamker mural paintings along the galleries of the Cambodian Temple of the Emerald Buddha*

<sup>7</sup> Giteau 1975: 290; David Henley, *Cambodia's Cultural Arts*, available at [www.cpamedia.com](http://www.cpamedia.com); Harris 2006: 90.

construction was also co-supervised by the Supreme Patriarch, Venerable Nil Teang (Groslier 2003: 6; Nepote and Gamonet 2000: 13; Giteau 2002: 39). Both men were educated in Bangkok, and were surely key to introducing Siamese influence.

Unfortunately, weather and micro-organisms have gradually eroded the paintings. In October 1985 the Cambodian government signed an agreement with the Directorate of State Enterprise of Poland, enabling Polish specialists to set up a project to preserve and restore the damaged frescos. From 1985 to 1992, these Polish specialists worked on repairing and renovating the paintings (Jeldres 1999: 49).

### **General Compositional Organization of the *Ramakien* and *Reamker* Mural Paintings**

The *Ramakien* mural paintings along the galleries of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in the Grand Palace of Siam are divided into 178 panels, referred to as “rooms” in Siamese. The story commences, with panel 1, from the right side of the northern gate then continuously proceeds in a clock-wise direction, and ends at the left of the same gate, in panel 178. These 178 panels, understood as the main murals, are preceded by another 80 paintings comprising the stories of Nārāyaṇa’s incarnation before his descent to earth as Rāma, and the origins of various other principal characters from the *Ramakien* painted on pillars and corridors leading in from the entrances (Suksri 1998: 28). Among them are a few stories that are difficult to identify.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the early parts of the story, which describe King Daśaratha’s consort giving birth to Rāma as well as Rāvaṇa’s wife delivering Sītā and her adoption by the hermit Janaka, are not illustrated in the main murals but on side panels.<sup>9</sup>

Although the paintings are separated into panels, the panels follow the narrative sequentially, from the beginning to the end of the story. Different episodes are separated visually from one another by devices like painted vegetation, boulders or water, a technique first used by Siamese painters in the late Ayutthayan period.

The *Reamker* mural paintings along the galleries of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in the Royal Palace of Cambodia are not divided into panels as are the Siamese Palace murals. The story starts from the right side of the eastern gate and continues around in a clock-wise direction finishing at the left side of the same gate. Similar compositions can also be seen in contemporary Cambodian Buddhist monasteries. The narrative is continuously depicted within a single panel from the beginning to the end, and like the Siamese Palace murals, main scenes are separated from one another by vegetation and boulders, or occasionally a river.

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<sup>8</sup> These stories were painted on the corner corridor of the east gallery opposite the northern Golden Chedi. I have not been able to locate any documentation on them.

<sup>9</sup> “Side panels” refers to all paintings on the pillars and corridors leading in from gallery entrances. “Main panels” referred to those on gallery walls.



One might wonder why the Siamese Palace murals start from the northern gate, a gate of lesser importance than the eastern gate. As noted earlier, the mural paintings followed the *Ramakien* version composed by King Rama I. Although the murals were repainted in King Rama III's reign and have been many times restored, most episodes, if not all, probably replicate the original. In this light, we might consider that the story does actually start from the main eastern gate, not from the northern gate. According to the *Ramakien* version by Rama I, the story begins with the episode of Nārāyaṇa's incarnation as a boar to kill a demon called Hiran.<sup>10</sup> This episode is depicted on the upper side panel of the eastern gate and is followed by subsequent stories of Nārāyaṇa's incarnations and the births of various principal characters found in the Rama I version, on subsequent side panels (figure 7). The story on the side panels ends at the northern gate, with the births of Rāma and Sītā. The next episode, depicting the hermit Janaka plowing the field to find Sītā, appears on the following main panel. I believe that the decision to have these episodes painted on the side panels does not reflect the relative importance of the episodes in question, but is instead related to notions of the earthly and the heavenly. The lives of heavenly beings are illustrated at the higher level of the upper side panels which represents the heavenly realm.



*Figure 7: Nārāyaṇa's incarnation as a boar killing the demon Hiran, depicted on the upper panel of the eastern gate, Siamese Royal Palace Murals*

From this perspective, the composition of the Siamese Palace murals can be seen to agree with the Cambodian Palace murals, with the story starting from the eastern gate of the galleries. However, a slight difference should be noted at the last point of the painted story. The Siamese narrative ends at the northern gate, while the Cambodian narrative finishes at the eastern gate.

### **Comparison of the Painted Episodes of the *Ramakien* Mural Painting and the *Reamker* Mural Painting**

As mentioned above, the Cambodian *Reamker* Text<sup>11</sup> is incomplete. The first segment, *Reamker* I

<sup>10</sup> This demon name does not exist in *Reamker* mural captions.

<sup>11</sup> In 1937, the Buddhist Institute of Phnom Penh collected the scattered *Reamker* manuscripts consisting in two compositions, with episodes numbered 1-10 and 75-80 respectively, and published them in 16 booklets. See Jacob 1986: xii.) I have chosen to use the version published by the Buddhist Institute since Khmer readers are more familiar with it than with Saveros Pou's later critical editions of these same texts. (See Pou 1979, 1982). Thus, whenever I use the term "*Reamker* text," I refer to the Buddhist Institute publication.



Text numbered 1-10, begins with Rāma<sup>12</sup> killing the ogre Kākanāsūra, who, in the form of a crow, has destroyed Viśvāmitra's sacrifice, and ends with Rāvaṇa sending messengers to ask his friend, Mūlabalaṃ, to bring reinforcements. The second segment, *Reamker* II Text, numbered 75-80, begins with the ogress Ātulay/Atura Piśāch, Rāvaṇa's relative, coming to trick Sītā to draw a portrait of Rāvaṇa, and ends with Sītā descending to the subterranean realm. Rāma then writes a message and sends it to Bibhek at the city of Laṅkā. In order to facilitate comprehension, my comparison of the Palace painted episodes is divided into three parts, following the *Reamker* Text: the first part is conducted from the starting point of the painted story to the presentation of Rāvaṇa sending messengers to ask his friend Mūlabalaṃ to bring reinforcements. The next starts from where Mūlabalaṃ comes to Laṅkā, to end with the ogress Ātulay/Atura Piśāch asking Sītā to draw a portrait of Rāvaṇa. The last part begins from this point to that where Bharata, Śatrughna, Rāmalakṣm(ṇ)/Makuṭ, Japalakṣm(ṇ)/Lava and the King of Kaikēya go with their troops to pay homage to Rāma in the city of Ayodhyā.

Presentation of the first part of the Cambodian Palace murals are a bit complicated insofar as multiple sources appear to have been used. We see episodes from the *Ramakien* Text<sup>13</sup>, the Siamese Palace murals, the *Reamker* I Text, the segment of the *Reamker* text which itself constitutes a manuscript text called "Kāl Vaiyarāb(ṇ) Saṅtaṃ Yak Braḥ Rāma Pān (Vaiyarāb(ṇ) magically puts Rāma to sleep)," as well as Khmer oral versions, including those of Ta Chak and Ta Soy, both recorded by scholars in the modern period, and other anonymous oral versions. Of these, the episodes from the Siamese Palace murals are by far the most influential.

At a cursory glance, many episodes appear to be derived from the *Reamker* Text. However, a thorough examination counters this initial expectation. Important distinctions can be located in the numerous components of the incidents related, and plot organization. One example of this is the episode of Janaka discovering Sītā. In the *Reamker* Text, Janaka is a king of the city of Mithilā. He finds Sītā adrift in a river while he holds the royal plowing ceremony. He then brings her to his palace. The *Reamker* Text does not tell us why Sītā is adrift here. Yet, in the Cambodian Palace murals we find the narrative as recounted in the Siamese Palace murals, based on the *Ramakien*. Janaka takes leave of the throne for a hermit life in the forest. He finds Sītā floating, but as a hermit, he can not care for her. Thus, he buries her under the ground. After burying the baby for sixteen years, Janaka decides to go and find it. Since he has forgotten where he has buried her, Janaka takes Usabbharāja, the holy bull of Śiva, to plow the ground and look for it. When he finds her, he discovers that the girl has grown into an extremely beautiful young woman. The Cambodian Palace murals also show the origin of Sītā, born to Mandodarī, Rāvaṇa's consort. After Sītā's

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<sup>12</sup> In this article, the Sanskrit form of names will be used for some main characters and places. However, in the absence of a Sanskrit name, both Khmer and Thai names will be provided. The Khmer name will be put before the Thai name and they are separated by a backslash (/). For the Cambodian side I will follow Thiounn's version, written in conjunction with the painted composition (Reyum 2002: 8-46). As for the Thai side I will follow the names in the list of characters established by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) in his article entitled "Notes on the Siamese Theatre" because this source is more precise than others (Vajiravudh 1975).

<sup>13</sup> Throughout this essay the term "Ramakien Text" refers to King Rama I's version (Olsson 1968).

birth, it was predicted that she would be the cause of the destruction of the town of Laṅkā. Therefore, she was placed in a bowl and set adrift in the ocean.

Another example is the episode of Rāvaṇa abducting Sītā. In the *Reamker* Text, the episode is described prior to the episode of the monkey king Vālin killing the water buffalo, Dundūbhī. By contrast, like the Siamese Palace murals, the Cambodian paintings sets the episode of Rāvaṇa abducting Sītā after that of Vālin killing Dundūbhī. Thus, we can safely assume that these episodes were adopted from the Siamese Palace murals.

Nevertheless, there exist some episodes that are harmonized with or possibly taken from the *Reamker* Text. This is the case of the episodes of Kaikēyī, the second Queen of King Daśaratha, who asks the king to give his kingdom to Bharata; Dundūbhī killing his father, Darabhā; Vālin killing Dundūbhī; Hanumān and Aṅgada being sent to invite Mahājambū to be Rāma's ally; Mahājambū putting Hanumān and Aṅgada in an iron cage. The details of this last episode replicate particularly clearly those in the *Reamker* text. During the night, Hanumān and Aṅgada tear apart the cage and fly up to break the tower off of Mahājambū's palace. The two monkeys lift up the bed on which Mahājambū is sleeping, and fly with it to pay homage to Rāma; when Bibhek is curing Lakṣmaṇa who is wounded by Kumbhakarṇa's lance, Hanumān flies to stop the sun from rising. He hits the Sun God's horses since the Sun God continues in his chariot.

Besides the Siamese Palace murals, the *Ramakien* Text and the *Reamker* Text, this first part of the Cambodian murals draws from other sources, both oral and written. Firstly, the depiction of Rāma's army building the causeway to Laṅkā shows Hanumān playing chess with another monkey. This scene does not appear in the Siamese Palace murals, nor is it mentioned in the *Ramakien* Text. By contrast, in the Siamese Palace murals, other different episodes are found merged in the causeway construction scene. The source of the Cambodian depiction of Hanumān playing chess would appear to be based on oral versions of the *Reamker*. The scene is included, for example, in Ta Chak's version (see Bizot 1973: 96-97). Another episode, called "Vaiyarāb(ṅ) magically putting Rāma to sleep" is the amalgamation of at least two sources: the treatise called "Kāl Vaiyarāb(ṅ) Saṅṅaṅ Yak Braḥ Rāma Pān" (Vaiyarāb(ṅ) magically putting Rāma to sleep) and an oral version similar to Ta Chak's (See Khing 2004: 13; Bizot 1973: 171-173). A third instance of such combined heritage is the presentation of Sugrīva being caught by Kumbhakarṇa. Hanumān and Aṅgada are sent to rescue him. Similar episodes can be found in the oral versions recited by Ta Chak (see Bizot 1973: 136-38) and Ta Soy (see Pi 2000: 36-35). Another such example is the illustration of Kumbhakarṇa going to perform a magical ritual to render his lance more powerful. In the Cambodian Palace murals, Hanumān alone is sent to destroy Kumbhakarṇa's ritual by transforming himself into an eagle. This episode is comparable to that found in Ta Soy's recension, which recounts that "Hanumān and Aṅgada are sent to disturb Kumbhakarṇa's ritual by transforming themselves into a bear and an eagle" (Pi 2000: 38-40). Yet another example is the episode of Kumbhakarṇa using his body to stop the river water from reaching Rāma's army. Aṅgada and Hanumān manage to disturb Kumbhakarṇa and free the waters by transforming themselves into a crow and the rotting corpse of a dog. This is the most popular episode performed in the

Lkhon Khol (Masked Dance Drama) based in Svay Andet village. The episode is performed when the village is facing drought. Interestingly, the episode is also narrated in a version composed by Thiounn, a Cambodian Palace Minister, just after the Palace murals were themselves completed (Reyum 2002: 22). We can further presume the existence of this episode in Ta Soy's version, as Ta Soy was a narrator of the Vat Svay Andet Lkhon Khol performance, which so frequently performed this very scene. However, as Ta Soy passed away before finishing a recording of his recitation, we do not have his particular version of this passage (Pi 2000: gh). A last example of an unknown source, and so presumably an oral version, is the depiction of Hanumān transforming himself into a heavenly divinity dancing in front of Kumbhakarṇa to disturb the latter's meditation. The incident does not appear in either the Siamese Palace murals or other Cambodian written sources.

Although the majority of the episodes in this first part were taken from the Siamese murals, some principal protagonists are named in accordance with the *Reamker* Text. The Thiounn version provides an interesting comparison on this point. As mentioned above, Thiounn composed his *Reamker* in conjunction with the Cambodian Palace murals. The Thiounn version transformed the Siamese character names used in the Cambodian Palace murals into the Cambodian versions of the names found in the *Reamker* text (Reyum 2002: 8-46). This proves that although Siamese influence dominated the Cambodian muralist, the *Reamker* Text was still appreciated by Khmer people during that time.

The second part of the Cambodian Palace murals consists of a nearly exact replication of the episodes represented in the Siamese Palace murals. Only a very few distinctions are discernible. We see, for instance, an innovation in the representation of Rāvaṇa inviting his friends, Mūlabalaṃ/Sahasṭejaḥ.<sup>14</sup> and Sahasṭejaḥ/Mūlabalaṃ. Sahasṭejaḥ/Mūlabalaṃ then sends his commander Dasrāksmī into battle. Rāma sends Aṅgada to fight and the latter kills Dasrāksmī. The presentation of Aṅgada slaying the demon Dasrāksmī appears neither in the Siamese Palace murals nor in the *Ramakien* Text. I can not account for the source of this episode. Another distinction can be seen where the Cambodian Palace murals show a demon Panlaicakra/Pralayachakra capturing Śatrughna with his hands, while the Siamese Palace murals show Panlaicakra/Pralayachakra shooting an arrow which turns into a Makara (crocodile with elephant trunk). The Makara carries Śatrughna up to the sky. Bharata orders Sugrīva, Hanumān, Aṅgada and Nilaphāta to look for Śatrughna. Hanumān changes himself into an eagle and destroys the Makara, so that Sugrīva can take Śatrughna back. A last minor difference is found in the Cambodian presentation of Cakravīt fighting against Bharata and Śatrughna while his commanders battle: Mahāmegha fights with Nilaphāta, Nantubhakkh fights with Nila-eka, Cakrasūra fights with Nilananda/Nilanala, and Mahākāla fights with Hanumān. This presentation is found neither in the Siamese Palace murals nor the *Ramakien* Text. Again, I can not identify a source.

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<sup>14</sup> Cambodian muralists illustrated the demon called Mūlabalaṃ in the Siamese Palace Mural as Sahasṭejaḥ; accordingly, Sahasṭejaḥ in the Siamese Palace Mural became Mūlabalaṃ in the Cambodian Palace Mural. For details see San 2007: 192-194.

The third part of the Cambodian Palace murals, on the other hand, precisely follows the *Reamker* II text, with one major exception. In the *Reamker* II text, Rāma and Sītā are not ultimately reconciled. It is likely that the inauspicious nature of this conclusion was deemed problematic. The last episodes of the Siamese Palace murals are used to complete the story of the Cambodian Palace murals, offering thus a portentous outcome, the re-marriage of Rāma and Sītā.

### **Comparison of Characters in the *Ramakien* and *Reamker* Mural Paintings**

Both the *Reamker* and the *Ramakien* consist of three main types of protagonists: humans-divinities, demons, and monkeys. The humans can be mainly classified into two types, high ranking persons and commoners. The demons and the monkeys can be also divided into two types: demon and monkey kings (or commanders), and demon and monkey soldiers. A few main protagonists will be selected for study below.

#### **A. Humans**

For people of high rank, both the Siamese and Cambodian murals share characteristics combining reference to royal ballet<sup>15</sup> and monarchic manners.

#### ***Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa***

Rāma is the son of King Daśaratha and his Queen Kauśalyā while his younger brother, Lakṣmaṇa, is the son of King Daśaratha and another Queen, Sumitrā. Rāma is an epic hero and well known for his selflessness in allowing his father, at the request of his stepmother, to disinherit him in favor of his stepbrother. Rāma remains faithful to his wife and loves all his brothers and followers equally, while Lakṣmaṇa is a symbol of self-sacrifice and loyalty.

In the Cambodian Palace murals, Rāma's complexion is green while Lakṣmaṇa has flesh-colored skin, just as in the Siamese Palace murals. This might be originally inherited from Indian representation, but it is also possible that the Cambodians adopted the tradition from the Siamese Palace murals. The traits and adornments, as well as the attributes of these two protagonists –Rāma holding a bow and Lakṣmaṇa possessing a sword– are also identical with the Siamese Palace murals.

Nonetheless, there are some notable differences. In the Siamese Palace murals, Rāma is depicted with four arms, like Viṣṇu, in the scene of Rāma defeating the demons called Rāma-isūra/Rāma-Sura on the way back from Mithilā to Ayodhyā (figures 8-9) and that of Rāma killing Kumbhakarṇa. In these two scenes, the Cambodian Palace murals present Rāma with only two arms. Both the Siamese and Cambodian

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<sup>15</sup> We should bear in mind that royal ballet dress was adopted from royal dress.

Palace murals depict Rāma with four arms in the scene of Rāma killing Vālin and the scene of Hanumān taking Mahājambū to meet Rāma. Another distinction between the two traditions can be seen in depictions of Rāma being exiled to the forest through his step-mother's intrigue. In the Siamese Palace murals, before leaving the palace, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa change their princely clothes to dress as hermits in tiger skin cloth and with fish tail-like headdresses, while in the Cambodian Palace murals, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa remain in their princely attire when wandering in the forest. Lastly, in the Siamese paintings Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are sometimes depicted with bare torsos, a trait never seen in the Cambodian Palace murals.



Figures 8-9: In the scene of Rāma defeating Rāma-isūra/Rāma-Sura, the Siamese Palace murals depict Rāma in the form of Nārāyaṇa (left), while the Cambodian Palace murals illustrate Rāma in his proper appearance (right).

### ***Rāmalākṣm(n)/Makut and Japalākṣm(n)/Lava***

Rāmalākṣm(n)/Makut is the son to whom Sītā gives birth after she has been cast out of Ayodhyā, while Japalākṣm(n)/Lava is the son conjured up by the hermit.

Although in the Cambodian and Siamese episodes Rāmalākṣm(n)/Makut and Japalākṣm(n)/Lava are identical with each other, the depictions of the characteristics of the two royal children differ on various points. The Siamese Palace murals depict the two royal children with green complexions and bare torsos. The depiction of these two princes with green complexions can be found in Indian murals as well. The two also have their head shaved but the topknot is kept. In the Cambodian Palace murals, Rāmalākṣm(n)/Makut and Japalākṣm(n)/Lava are depicted with flesh-colored skin. They wear shirts but have a topknot as the Siamese Palace murals. Traditionally, in both Cambodian and Siamese societies, a topknot signified childhood. The sacrality of hair stemmed both from the Indic reverence for the head as the supreme locus of power, and animist beliefs of hair as a lair of evil spirits. To ward off such bad spirits, Khmer and Siamese traditionally kept their children's heads shaved from birth to puberty, allowing only a topknot to grow (Edwards 2001: 394; Ang 2007: 11-21). This tradition can be seen in both Cambodian and Siamese societies even today (figures 10-13). Both paintings also depict Rāmalākṣm(n)/Makut and Japalākṣm(n)/Lava with bows as attributes.





*(Left) Figure 10: The two princes with the topknot, reflecting local socio-cultural attributes. (Siamese Palace murals)*



*(Right) Figure 11: A Siamese prince during the reign of King Rama V, dressed for the tonsure ceremony which marked the official coming of age (Warren and Tettoni 1994: 16)*



*(Left) Figure 12: The two royal children with the topknot. (Cambodian Palace murals)*



*(Right) Figure 13: A royal princess, daughter of King Ang Duong, with a topknot decorated with a small pointed headdress (Jeldres 1999: 123)*

### *Sītā*

Sītā was born to Mandodarī and Rāvaṇa; she was however set adrift in a river after a prediction that she would cause the destruction of the demon's clan. The girl was adopted by the hermit king, Janaka, ruler of the city of Mithilā. Sītā is a royal lady endowed with all virtue who is steadfast in honesty and loyalty. Her courage led her to accompany her husband in his forest exile.

In the Siamese Palace murals, Sītā is depicted with a flesh-colored complexion. She is adorned with a pointed headdress and golden jewelry, such as a collar, sash, armlets, bangles and anklets, yet she is shown with a nude torso. This characteristic can be seen in painting of the ancient period of the School of Ayutthaya up until the early part of the School of Ratanakosin (Leksukhum 2000: 190). Interestingly, while low-ranking court ladies are depicted with a conventional short hairstyle, Sītā is shown wearing long hair (figure 14). This hairstyle was not normal fashion in Siamese society at the time of painting. It would seem

rather to indicate new Western influence in the Siamese court. Throughout the Siamese Palace murals, princesses and queens are depicted in the same manner as Sītā, but low-ranking court ladies, as mentioned above, retained the short hairstyle (figure 15). Furthermore, when in the forest the Siamese Palace murals depict Sītā wearing hermit's clothes, like Rāma.

*Figure 14:  
Sītā's hair  
fashion. (Siamese Palace  
mural)*



*Figure 15: The  
low-ranking  
court ladies'  
hairstyle.  
(Siamese  
Palace mural)*



In the Cambodian Palace murals, Sītā is depicted with flesh-colored skin. She is adorned with a sharp-pointed tiara and golden jewelry as in the Siamese Palace murals. However, her torso is obliquely covered with embroidered cloth. Even though, she wears a headdress, we can see that her head has been shaved or the hair clipped short, with only a tuft of hair kept like a topknot. This hairstyle, according to Penny Edwards, was probably adopted from Siam and had become firmly implanted in Khmer culture by the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Edwards 2001: 394). It was seen on women as well as men. During that time, some people not only shaved or clipped their hair short but also pulled out their hair. As Touc Chhoung notes:

Both male and female were fond of the short hairstyle called “Phkā Thkūv” hairstyle .... During the time of Kathathon Nhunh [the lord governor of Battambang in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century], the female dancers had to pull their hair around the topknot and applied elephant grease to prevent it from growing forever (Touch 1994: 58).

Thus, Sītā's characteristics in the Cambodian Palace murals were inspired by local Khmer fashions, even if the fashions originated in Siam, and she serves as a model for the princesses and queens depicted in the Cambodian mural painting (figures 16-18). Moreover, when Sītā follows Rāma to the forest, she remains in royal garb.



(Left to right) Figure 16: *Sītā with her head shaved and only a topknot kept.* (Cambodian Palace Mural); Figure 17: *One of the royal consorts of King Ang Duong (r. 1845-1860)* (Jeldres 1999: 123)



Figure 18: *Court ladies' hair fashion.* (Cambodian Palace Mural)

headdress or rich skin color. In addition, demon's faces are depicted with eyes wide open, a broad smirk and curvy fangs.

### *Rāvaṇa*

Rāvaṇa is the King of the Demons. He rules over the town of Laṅkā. He is a dictatorial ruler who regards his own interests as greater than the public's. His behavior reveals an obsession with power, scheming, and indulging himself in sexual escapades. After hearing of Sītā's beauty, he decides to abduct her. This

### **B. Demons**

With the exception of the head, the characteristic of the demons are nearly identical to those of human beings or divinities. However, certain characters are immediately recognizable due to special physical attributes often described in the text of the story. For example, it is hard to misidentify Vaiyobhakkha/Aśura Vāyubaktra, whose body is half-demon and half-bird. Rāvaṇa is also unmistakable since he is depicted with a headdress and many faces, while his body has many arms. Since the demons' headdress style is ornate and their skin color rich, those demons who are not marked by other special features are often identifiable as demons because of ornate



leads to the destruction of his clan, his subjects and his city.

Although Rāvaṇa is described as having ten heads and twenty arms, the paintings do not follow the textual rule. In the Siamese Palace murals, Rāvaṇa is depicted with green skin, with only seven heads,<sup>16</sup> and twenty arms, or sometimes sixteen arms, fourteen arms, ten arms, eight arms, four arms, or only two arms. The way that the muralist depicted the heads of Rāvaṇa should be noted. Traditionally, in Indian bas-reliefs or painting Rāvaṇa's ten heads are typically depicted lined up horizontally; one main head connects to the body, while the other nine heads subsequently link to the main head one after another, five heads to the left and four heads to the right or vice versa (figure 19). Nonetheless, the bas-reliefs of ancient Khmer temples – particularly the Rāmāyaṇa bas-reliefs of the pediment of Banteay Srei temple (second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century) and the northwest of the third cloister of Angkor Wat temple (first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century) – depict Rāvaṇa's ten heads through a composition of three tiers receding vertically: the top consisting of two faces and the middle as well as the lower bearing four faces respectively (figure 20). A similar composition can be seen in the Siamese Palace murals. It might be that the compositional style of the Khmer bas-reliefs influenced the Siamese Palace murals. Though Rāvaṇa in the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat



*Figure 19: Rāvaṇa's ten heads as depicted by an Indian artist. Contemporary carving on a stone mortar, Crafts Museum collection (Delhi, India) (Kam 2000: 5)*



*Figure 20: Ten headed Ravana depicted in the pediment of Banteay Srei temple, Siem Reap, second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.*

and Banteay Srei has ten heads while the Rāvaṇa in the Siamese Palace murals is comprised of only seven heads – two human faces on the top, four demon faces in the middle and a large demon face for the lower part. Scholars believe that since the second half of the Ayutthaya period, Siamese mural paintings have been influenced by the mask dance drama (Krug 1979: 176-77); from this perspective it is possible that the characteristic of Rāvaṇa in the Siamese mural paintings were indirectly influenced by the bas-reliefs of

<sup>16</sup> In the painting we can see only five heads; the other two heads are at the back.

Khmer temples through the masked dance drama. In this context we should note the crowned mask of Rāvaṇa used in performance. This mask consists of three tiers bearing ten heads or faces; the lower tier consists of a large demon face and the other three small demon faces, two seen from both sides and one from the back; the middle tier bears four demon faces and the top tier is comprised of two human faces (figure 21). However, when translated into painting, the three small demon faces on the lower tier disappeared and only seven heads remained (figure 22).

The Cambodian Palace murals depict Rāvaṇa with a green complexion, with seven heads, and six arms, or sometimes four or only two arms. The characteristics of Rāvaṇa are identical with the Siamese Palace murals. The Cambodian depiction of Rāvaṇa's head was perhaps influenced by the Siamese Palace murals rather than by the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat directly (figure 23), as Rāvaṇa is depicted with only seven heads. It is known that Okñā Tep Nimit Mak taught his students in the School of Cambodian Arts using diagrams copied from the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat; in these exercises Rāvaṇa was depicted with ten heads<sup>17</sup> (figure 24). However, the Cambodian Palace murals seem to have been influenced by the Siamese Palace murals rather than by the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat directly (figure 23), as Rāvaṇa is depicted with only seven heads. It is also possible that the Cambodian Palace murals were inspired by Cambodian masked dance.



*Figure 21: Rāvaṇa mask for Siamese masked dance. (Crown Property Bureau 2006: 76) (left) (Left to right)*

*Figure 22: Rāvaṇa with seven heads and twenty arms. (Siamese Palace murals)*

*Figure 23: Rāvaṇa depicted with seven heads and two arms. (Cambodian Palace murals)*

*Figure 24: A diagram model of Rāvaṇa created by Tep Nimit Mak and his colleague (Groslier 2003: 26)*

During the ultimate combat between Rāvaṇa and Rāma, Rāvaṇa is killed by the latter. The Siamese Palace murals show Rāvaṇa's funeral being held in great splendor and magnificence, in a fashion similar to cremation ritual for Siamese monarchs. Here, we can see the ceremonial procession of Rāvaṇa's corpse moving to the crematorium. Various art performances are staged at the funeral site; these include Siamese

<sup>17</sup> See Groslier 2003: 26.



traditional boxing, shadow theater, classical dance, puppet shows, folk dance, circus, and Chinese theater (figure 25).

By contrast, Rāvaṇa's funeral rite in the Cambodian Palace murals are quiet. There is no performance and the urn containing Rāvaṇa's corpse is left alone in the crematorium with only two guardians. This aspect appears to reflect Cambodian sentiment towards the treatment of unrighteous people such as Rāvaṇa: nobody mourns his loss. Rāvaṇa is nonetheless considered to be a monarch. His corpse, folded up in the fetal position, is placed in a brass or golden urn which is housed in an open crematorium facing towards the four directions, symbol of the ideal capacity of the "Cakravartin" king, or "Universal Monarch." This tradition is seen in the funeral rites of sovereigns in many Southeast Asian traditions (Giteau 2003: 105) (figures 26-27).



Figure 25: Rāvaṇa's funeral rite depicted very ceremoniously. (Siamese Palace murals)

Figure 26: Rāvaṇa's urn is put in a magnificent four-faced crematorium sheltered by roofs with a sharp spire representing Mount Meru.

However, there are only two people guarding his pyre and only a few people walk past. (Cambodian Palace Mural)



Figure 27: The funeral pyre of King Norodom Suramarit, Phnom Penh, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1960 (Giteau 2003: 106)

### Bibhek

Bibhek is Rāvaṇa's younger brother. He is very smart and well versed in astrology. When Rāvaṇa abducted Sītā from Rāma, it was he who suggested that the Demon King return her to her husband for fear of war. The angry Rāvaṇa banished his brother from Laṅkā. Bibhek thus submitted himself to Rāma.

Both the Cambodian and the Siamese Palace murals depict Bibhek in the same manner, with green colored skin and holding a slate and club (figures 28-29). In the Cambodian painting he is nonetheless shown using a different weapon when he goes into battle. The Siamese Palace murals show him using a bow in the battle, while Bibhek employs his club in the Cambodian murals.



*Figure 28: Bibhek in the Siamese Palace murals*



*Figure 29: Bibhek in the Cambodian Palace murals*

### **C. Monkeys**

Common soldier monkeys are all depicted identically, and are rendered in a naturalistic manner. The bodies of the monkey kings and commanders on the other hand take a more human form while their faces show a stylized monkey undoubtedly taken from masked dance drama. In both the Siamese and the Cambodian Palace murals, the individual monkey kings and commanders are recognizable by the color of their skin as well as by their headdresses. For instance, the two brothers, Vālin and Sugrīva, can be distinguished from each other by their different skin colors, although they wear the same type of headdress. On the other hand, Vālin and Aṅgad are shown with identical green-colored skin, yet their different headdresses allow them to be distinguished from each other.

#### ***Hanumān***

Hanumān is recognized by his white-colored skin with diamond body hair. He possesses the magic power to transform himself and can vanish at will. His yawns will yield stars, the sun and moon. Blessed with immortality, he can be brought back to life by a current of wind. As Rāma's general, he was intelligent and loyal to Rāma. His courage and his sense of judgment benefit his work. He volunteered to carry out difficult tasks others would not dare attempt. He is also known as a gallant lover. Hanumān represents the ideal soldier skilled both on the battlefield and in the game of love. His virtues are in his undying sense of gratitude and honesty to his superiors (Crown Property Bureau 2006: 51).

In the Siamese Palace murals, Hanumān is depicted with white-colored skin and uses a trident or

sword as his attribute. Normally, he has two arms but he enlarges himself into a gigantic form with four faces and eight arms when he shows his strength: in front of Rāma and Bibhek before constructing the causeway to Laṅkā; when he fights against Vaiyarāb(ṅ)/Mayarāva; once he kills Trīmegha (figure 30); when he destroys the commander who defends the town of Mullivān/Malivan. Hanumān is also depicted with four arms when he fights against Mūlabalaṃ/Sahassatejaḥ. The Cambodian Palace murals present Hanumān with a white complexion, one head and two arms throughout the painting (figure 31). Both murals show Hanumān possessing a sword as his attribute.

Moreover, the Siamese Palace murals depict Hanumān wearing a shirt and crown when he pretends to stay at Rāvaṇa's side to steal Rāvaṇa's heart and once he becomes the king of Nibgīrī/Nop Burī City; while the Cambodian Palace murals show him with bare torso but wearing a crown.



*Figure 30: Hanumān, with four faces and eight arms, kills Trīmegha. (Siamese Palace murals)*



*Figure 31: Hanumān depicted with one head and two arms when killing Trīmegha. (Cambodian Palace murals)*

### *Nilaphāta and Nila-eka*

Nilaphāta is the son of the god Kālī,<sup>18</sup> but adopted as a nephew by King Mahājambū. He started out with Rāma's force, but quarreled with Hanumān during the causeway construction, whereupon Rāma made him regent of Kiṣkindhya, with orders to send constant supplies to the front. Nila-eka on the other hand is the incarnation of the god Bināya<sup>19</sup> (Vajiravudh 1975: 24).

<sup>18</sup> This name is not found in either the Cambodian Palace murals captions or Thiounn's text.

<sup>19</sup> This name is not found in either the Cambodian Palace murals captions or Thiounn's text.



The Siamese and Cambodian Palace murals depict these two monkeys' colored skin in contrast to each other. The Siamese Palace murals illustrate Nilaphāta with black-colored skin and Nila-eka with a reddish-brown complexion, while the Cambodian Palace murals show Nilaphāta as a reddish-brown monkey and Nila-eka with black-colored skin. Both the Siamese and Cambodian murals depict the two monkeys as uncrowned.

### **Comparison of Architecture in the *Ramakien* and *Reamker* Mural Paintings**

There are a range of building types depicted in the murals. Yet, the principal and most delicate architecture is those of palaces and encampments. The palaces serve as the residence of the monarchs and their royal households, while the camps provide temporary habitation for Rāma's army during the battle in Laṅkā. Here only the palace will be examined.

#### ***Palaces***

In the Siamese murals, the entire city is represented by the palace complex, shown in three-dimensional perspective, and enclosed by irregularly shaped masonry walls with fortifications that are remarkably similar to those in the present Grand Palace. The palace complex mainly consists of a principal building, two or more subsidiary edifices – closed or directly connected to the main building – and open pavilions, which are mostly erected on a single terrace. The buildings are sometimes presented from the front side but are sometimes shown from a three-quarter angle. The lower structure of the buildings is in masonry, while the upper structure is composed of wood and terracotta tiles, but rarely do whole structures seem to be made of stone (figure 32).



*Figure 32: The Siamese palace complex. A principal building surrounded by subsidiary pavilions. The buildings, palace wall, gates and fortifications are inspired by architecture in the existent Grand Palace. This provides a good example of the use of three-dimensional perspective. (Siamese Palace murals)*

Almost all main buildings are depicted in a cruciform plan composed by a square sanctuary and four porch-like antechambers extending from the four sides of the cell. The buildings are covered by glittering tile roofs with a lofty corncob-shaped tower (figures 33-34), a slim, tiered, and tapering spire (figures 35-36), or a four-faced Brahma tower (figures 37). Each front porch is crowned with a triangular gable-board embellished with gilt ornaments framing mythical animals or various Hindu gods. At the apex of the



Figure 33: A cruciform-structure Prasat covered by tile roofs with the lofty corncob-shaped, tower (Siamese Palace murals)



Figure 34: Prasat Phra Thep Bidon (the Royal Pantheon) the Grand Palace of Bangkok



Figure 35: A Greek-cross-planned palace sheltered by glittering telescoped roofs with tapering spire. (Siamese Palace murals)



Figure 36: Dusit Maha Prasat, Grand Palace of Bangkok

triangular gable, springing skywards from each of the triple roof ridges is a *Chofa*<sup>20</sup> or “sky tassel.” This curved and gently tapering structure is said by some to resemble the profile of a stylized bird, perhaps Garuḍa, vehicle of the Hindu god Viṣṇu, perhaps Haṃsa, the celestial goose, vehicle of the Hindu god Brahma. Either interpretation suggests the presence of the protective powers of these gods (Ringis 1990:

<sup>20</sup> In Khmer this is also called “Jahvā.” This term was likely adopted from Thai.



79). Undulating downwards from the *Chofā* at the apex, forming both sides of the gable, are the sinuous bodies of Nāga, or mythical serpents, surmounted by multiple leaf-like shapes called *Bai Raka*.<sup>21</sup> According to Rita Ringis, this type of roof and gable decoration, typical of monastic and royal architecture, is pervaded with an ancient symbolism. The *Chofā*, if it is Garuda, the divine bird, represents the solar elements. The Nāga are guardians of the waters, symbols of the rainbow, and thus represent the aquatic elements. On royal and monastic architecture, the harmonious balance of these solar and aquatic elements frames carvings of gods (divine force), and of lush and prolific vegetation, invoking through the magic potency of this symbolism harmony and abundance in nature. But both of these symbols, the bird and the serpents, bear additional symbolism as protectors. Undoubtedly the typical Siamese gable-boards, with their protective Hindu elements, are derived from the architectural symbolism of the Khmer (Ringis 1990: 79). The doorways and window shutters are decorated with gilt ornament and framed with a crown-like shape. Columns are also embellished with gilt carving.



*Figure 37: A cruciform-structure edifice covered by tile roofs with the four-faced Brahma tower reflects the influence of the Bayon temple. (Siamese Palace Mural)*

The principle buildings depicted in the mural are identical to those of the Royal Pantheon (Prasat Phra Thep Bidon) and Dusit Maha Prasat in the Grand Palace. Silpa Bhirasri and Rita Ringis believe that these Greek-cross-planned Prasat with their telescoped roofs as well as domical towers, are possibly derived from ancient Khmer temple structure (Bhirasri 1963: 7-22; Ringis 1990: 42-48). The palace roof in the Siamese Palace murals, which is decorated with a four-faced Brahma tower appears to have been inspired by Cambodia's Bayon temple.

Like the Siamese Palace murals, the Cambodian murals depict the whole city through a miniature palace complex, but the depiction here is two-dimensional. The palace complexes are always enclosed by irregularly shaped masonry walls with fortifications like the Siamese Palace murals. In the precinct of the palace, there are a principal building and one or two subsidiary buildings close to or flanking the main building. These buildings, including the main one, sometimes have walls, and most are presented from the front side, with the exception of only a few that are viewed from a three-quarter angle. The entire structures of the buildings are made from wood and covered by terra cotta tiles, with the exception of the foundations, which seem to be made from stonework (figure 38).

<sup>21</sup> Cambodians also call this "Pai Rakā."

Although, we do not see the rear view of the main building, it is probably erected in a cruciform plan or at least with a cruciform roof set atop a square or rectangular base. The upper structure of the building is more complex than in the Siamese Palace murals. The palace structure is covered with multiple roofs surmounted by one or three or five tall spires. This concept was undoubtedly inspired by ancient Khmer sanctuaries, always built in one or three or five towers representing Mount Meru.<sup>22</sup> The spires of palaces are mainly illustrated in four types: the first is composed of three receding pediments, found in Angkorian temples, with a finial top (figure 39). In another type the spire rises up from only one pediment



*Figure 38: A Palace Complex. The principal open building is flanked by two subsidiary pavilions. The palace is enclosed by a masonry wall with fortifications. Three-dimensional perspective was not yet used in Cambodian painting at this time. (Cambodian Palace murals)*



*Figure 39: A palace surmounted by five-spire roofs with each spire composed of three receding pediments and a pointed finial top, a pediment style found also in Angkorian temples. (Cambodian Palace murals)*

or gable (figures 40-44). In the third style, two pediments are alternately surmounted by two four-faced Brahmans topped by a finial (figure 45). In the last type, the crown is depicted in the shape of an ancient Khmer tower (figure 46). Madeleine Giteau notes that the latter type is comparable to those that one can see in Bangkok's Grand Palace and Wat Phra Keo (Giteau 1975: 290). I do not dispute this due to the fact that the palace with the Prang on top in the Cambodian Palace murals do resemble architecture found in the Siamese Grand Palace or the Siamese Palace murals; but a morphological comparison shows the palace spire in the Cambodian Palace murals resembles the ancient Khmer tower more than those found in the Siamese Grand Palace or in the Siamese Palace murals. This suggests that the tower in the Cambodian Palace murals was directly adopted from the ancient Khmer Prang rather than from Siamese renditions thereof.

<sup>22</sup> In Hindu metaphysical geography, Mount Meru, the home of the gods and guardians, is enclosed by four concentric ranges of continents that diminish progressively in size, and are separated by seas. Beyond these mountain ranges is the great cosmic ocean on which four major continents face the four cardinal points of Mount Meru. Beyond the continents is the boundary wall of rocky mountains enclosing the universe.



*The influence of the Ramakien murals in the Grand Palace of Siam...*

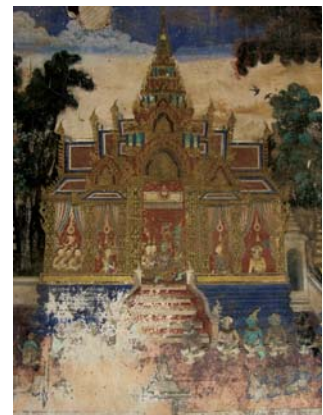
*Figure 40: A Prasat covered by three-spire roofs. Each spire rises up from a pediment. (Cambodian Palace Mural)*



*Figure 41: Preah Tineang Tevea Vinichay, the Throne Hall, Royal Palace of Phnom Penh*



*(Left) Figure 42: A building sheltered by telescope roofs with a short tower rising up from a pediment, Cambodia's Bayon temple, Siem Reap, late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> century. (Right) Figure 43: Phochani Pavilion, Royal Palace of Phnom Penh*



*(Left) Figure 44: A building covered by two overlapping roofs with a tapering spire (Cambodian Palace Mural) (Middle) Figure 45: A palace with three-spire roofs. Each spire is composed of two pediments alternately surmounted by two four-faced Brahmans with finial on top (Cambodian Palace Mural) (Right) Figure 46: A palace covered by multiple roofs with an ancient Khmer tower (Cambodian Palace Mural) .*

Some *prasat* are adorned with sky tassels and triangular gable-boards and have both sides framed by the undulating form of the Nāgas with *Bai Raka* on their backs just as in the Siamese Palace murals. Interestingly, some palaces are decorated with a crowned Garuda head or Nāgas instead of sky tassels, something not present in the Siamese Palace murals. The doorways and windows are framed by a gilt crown-like shape, while occasionally the whole column and basement are embellished with gilt carving. The interiors of the palaces are decorated with Western objects such as mirrors in gilt frames or chandeliers. Such decorative motifs, according to Madeleine Giteau, were popular in Europe around 1900 (Giteau1975: 290).

It is therefore clear that the *prasats* depicted in the Cambodian Palace murals were not directly borrowed from the Siamese Palace murals, but were rather inspired by architectural elements current in Cambodia at that time. Examples of this referencing of the Angkorian past can be seen in other contemporary buildings such as the chapel of the Emerald Buddha, the Preah Tineang Tevea Vinichay (the Throne Hall), the Chanchhaya Pavilion (the Moonlight Pavilion), and the Phochani Pavilion. However, even these Angkorian-influenced structures show traces of Siamese architectural elements. For example, the cruciform and rectangular structures with telescoped roofs are built in the traditional Khmer style, while their tall shaped-pointed spires were probably adopted from Siamese architecture.

## Conclusion

Given the historical circumstances, the predominance of Siamese influence on the *Reamker* mural paintings along the galleries of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in the Cambodian Royal Palace should come as no surprise. This influence has indeed often been suggested by scholars with relatively vague reference to style. Through careful comparative study of narrative, character and architectural composition in the Siamese Grand Palace *Ramakien* murals and the Cambodian Royal Palace *Reamker* murals, this study has attempted, in the first instance, to provide substance to these suggestions. Accordingly, a first important finding demonstrates the dominant source of Siamese influence to be the Siamese Palace *Ramakien* murals themselves, along with the Siamese *Ramakien* text, both originally composed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A second finding, serving to complicate the first, is that the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Cambodian murals were not slavish imitations of a singular Siamese model. If there is a predominant source to be found in Siam, the Cambodian murals draw from multiple other traditions long established in Cambodia, from reliefs dating from Angkorian times to the Cambodian 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century *Reamker* text, to oral *Reamker* traditions.

A last key finding is the effect of local contemporary culture on each national painterly representation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Models for architecture and hairstyles were, for example, drawn from contemporary trends in Bangkok for the Siamese paintings and Phnom Penh for the Cambodian ones. European influence is also apparent, yet is different in each cultural realm. In Cambodia we can certainly detect a European cultural presence, for example, through the objects adorning palace interiors in the painting. In the Siamese paintings, on the other hand, European influence is most keenly felt in painting technique itself. The

introduction of three dimensions, perspective and modeling of figures through play of light and shadow to the Siamese paintings in renovations carried out since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century brought about dramatic change in the Siamese Palace murals themselves, and represent a very clear distinction between the extant Siamese and Cambodian Palace murals. The Siamese play with light and shading on characters creates an effect of roundness, while the Cambodian two-dimensional portrayal of figures creates an effect of flatness. This Western influence injected a degree of realism into traditional idealist conceptions of architecture and landscape, again in the Siamese paintings only, with the exception of a very few Cambodian landscape depictions. And even for these few examples of Western influence on Cambodian technique, we should note that we may in fact be seeing an adoption of Western influence *through* the Siamese model.

Recycling of the Siamese model was indeed a major cultural process at the time. It should be said that much of the “Siamese” influence documented here consists, in fact, of a Cambodian reinterpretation of a Siamese interpretation of Angkorian tradition.



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*The influence of the Ramakien murals in the Grand Palace of Siam on the Reamker murals in the Royal Palace of Cambodia*

កាលដែលគេកសាងព្រះខុបោសថព្រះកែវមរកតនៅព្រះរាជវាំងក្រុងភ្នំពេញនៅឆ្នាំ១៨៩៥នោះ គេបានជ្រើសរើសយករឿងរាមាយណ៍ ដែលខ្មែរហៅថារាមកេរ្តិ៍ មកគូរលើជញ្ជាំងថែវ។ ថ្វីបើខ្មែរស្គាល់រឿងរាមាយណ៍តាំងពីមុនសម័យអង្គរម៉្លេះក៏ដោយ គំនូររាមកេរ្តិ៍ថែវនេះ ជាលើកទីមួយហើយនៅប្រទេសកម្ពុជា ដែលបង្ហាញសាច់រឿងពីដើមដល់ចុង។ ប្រការនេះ ចោទជាសំនួរថា គំនូរនៅចុងសត្យវត្សទី១៩នេះ មានប្រភពមកពីណាខ្លះ?

ក្នុងការសិក្សាផ្សេងៗអំពីសិល្បៈ គេតែងនិយាយថាមានឥទ្ធិពលរឿងរាមកេរ្តិ៍សៀម ដែលគូរនៅព្រះរាជវាំងក្រុងបាងកកមកលើគំនូរនៅព្រះរាជវាំងខ្មែរ ប៉ុន្តែមកទល់ពេលនេះ ពុំទាន់មានការសិក្សាអ្វីមួយហ្មត់ចត់អំពីចំណុចនេះនៅឡើយ។ អត្ថបទនេះជាការរុករក ដើម្បីដឹងថាការអះអាងនោះខុសឬត្រូវត្រឹមណា ដោយព្យាយាមយកសាច់រឿងទាំងមូល, របៀបរៀបចំបង្ហាញមួយផ្ទាំងៗ និងបច្ចេកទេសប្រើប្រាស់មកពិនិត្យ។ បរិបទសង្គមនិងវប្បធម៌ទូទៅក្នុងពេលដែលគំនូរទាំងពីរកើតឡើង ក៏អ្នកនិពន្ធយកមកពិនិត្យដែរ ដើម្បីឃើញថាកត្តាអ្វីខ្លះដែលនាំឱ្យមានការដូចគ្នានិងការខុសគ្នារវាងគំនូរទាំងពីរកន្លែង។

**Abstract**

*The influence of the Ramakien murals in the Grand Palace of Siam on the Reamker murals in the Royal Palace of Cambodia*

When the temple of the Emerald Buddha was built in the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh in 1895, the Cambodian version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, known in Khmer as the *Reamker*, was selected to be painted on the gallery walls of the temple. Though the *Rāmāyaṇa* had been well known in Cambodia since pre-Angkorian times, these *Reamker* mural paintings were to become the first complete version of the epic tale ever known to have been produced in Cambodia. This situation raises the question of the source(s) used to compose the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century painted narrative.

Reference is often made in art historical work to the influence of the *Ramakien* murals in the Siamese Grand Palace on the *Reamker* murals in the Cambodian Royal Palace, yet no sustained research has ever been carried out on the subject. This article explores this assumption of influence, and attempts to identify sources for the painted work, through a detailed comparative analysis of the Cambodian and Siamese Palace mural paintings, considering storyline, compositional organization, and technique. The socio-cultural context of the creation of both paintings will also be examined in order to identify key factors responsible for the similarities and differences between the *Reamker* and *Ramakien* murals.



## **Résumé**

*The influence of the Ramakien murals in the Grand Palace of Siam on the Reamker murals in the Royal Palace of Cambodia*

Lorsque le temple du Buddha d'Émeraude fut construit en 1895, la version cambodgienne du *Rāmāyaṇa*, connue en khmer sous le nom de *Reamker*, fut choisie pour être peinte sur les murs de ses galeries. Certes le *Rāmāyaṇa* était chose bien connue dès l'époque pré-anglorienne, mais ces fresques du *Reamker* allaient être la première version complète de l'épopée connue jusque-là au Cambodge. Dès lors se pose la question de la (ou des) sources qui ont présidé, en cette fin du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle, à la composition du récit peint.

Mention a souvent été faite de l'influence des fresques du *Ramakien* du Grand Palais du Siam sur celles du Palais Royal du Cambodge, alors qu'aucune étude approfondie n'avait été entreprise. Le présent article cherche à vérifier le bien-fondé de cette présomption, explorant toutes les sources d'inspiration possibles, à travers une analyse comparative détaillée des deux peintures murales, considérant la trame générale, la composition interne des panneaux ainsi que les techniques utilisées. Sont aussi examinés les contextes socio-culturels de la création des deux peintures, en vue d'identifier les facteurs clefs expliquant les similarités et les différences entre les fresques du *Reamker* et du *Ramakien*.