

## TWO INTERNAL PEDIMENT SCENES FROM BANTEAY CHHMAR<sup>1</sup>

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This paper provides alternative identifications for two internal pediment scenes at the temple complex of Banteay Chhmar which is located in northwest Cambodia, and dates to the reign of Jayavarman VII (r.1182-c.1218).<sup>2</sup> The two internal pediments in question are both located above the southern doorway of the cruciform gallery located within the structure commonly referred to as the “Salle aux Danseuses.”<sup>3</sup> One pediment faces south; the other pediment faces north. I will argue that the south-facing internal pediment depicts a narrative from the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic in which Rāma slays the śūdra Śambūka by decapitating him with a sword. As for the north-facing internal pediment, I will demonstrate that the scene likely depicts another figure from the *Rāmāyaṇa*—the mighty Rāvaṇa.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper I often qualify the pediment as an “internal pediment” merely to highlight the fact that these particular pediments were located within a covered cruciform gallery. They would not have originally stood out in the open as they do today.

<sup>3</sup> This section of Banteay Chhmar is architecturally classified as BC.80. The phrase, “salle aux danseuses” was coined by Philippe Stern as an architectural structure common to several Bayon style monuments from the reign of Jayavarman VII. For example, there are similar structures at the temples of Preah Khan, Ta Prohm, and Banteay Kdei. The term, as used by Stern, does not imply a functional structure where performative arts such as dancing were conducted, but rather only indicates that these structures have numerous reliefs of dancing figures (often referred to as “apsaras”) decorating the structure. See Stern, *Les monuments Khmers du style du Bâyon et Jayavarman VII*, 52-53.

Due to factors such as the condition of the pediments, iconographic variety and limited supporting evidence other identifications are certainly possible; in fact, this paper will highlight many of the previous identifications put forth for these particular pediment scenes. I intend to demonstrate, however, that my conclusions regarding these two scenes provide stronger alternatives to any of the previous identifications thus far posited by scholars based on similar iconographic parallels in the Khmer art historical record, comparisons to relevant textual descriptions, and the predominant thematic context of the other internal pediment scenes located within the cruciform gallery. Nevertheless, all conclusions regarding these new identifications remain tentative and open to new evidence that may arise through future research.

## LOCATION

The temple complex of Banteay Chhmar is located in northwest Cambodia in the province of Banteay Mean Chey, near the Thai border and Dangrek mountain range. Being approximately 110 kilometers (sixty-eight miles) from Angkor, the temple holds special importance due to its relative isolation which prevented it from being subjected to a number of iconoclastic backlashes that occurred beginning in the thirteenth century. Because of this isolation from the heart of Angkor art historians, architects, and scholars in other related fields may gain glimpses of certain features of Bayon style art and architecture not seen elsewhere because of iconoclastic alteration. The Bayon style of art and architecture of Banteay Chhmar that dominated the late twelfth to mid-thirteenth centuries is only one of several temples adhering to this style constructed during the reign of Jayavarman VII. Other examples include, but are not limited to, the Bayon, Ta Prohm, Preah Khan, and Banteay Kdei.

The internal pediments at Banteay Chhmar that will be discussed are located in the cruciform gallery of structure BC.80, a structure now commonly referred to as the “Hall of Dancers.” The nominative label “Hall of Dancers” has no historical grounding and arose because of the numerous representations of female dancing figures depicted on the pillars within this and other similar structures.<sup>4</sup> BC.80 is a secondary and later structure built at Banteay Chhmar during Jayavarman’s reign, and is situated within the third enclosure of the temple complex.<sup>5</sup> The hall, now in a severe state of ruin,

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<sup>4</sup> See fn. 3 above.

<sup>5</sup> In his dissertation on the architecture of Bayon style monuments, Olivier Cunin has described structure BC.80 (the “Salle aux Danseuses”) as belonging to the third phase of construction at Banteay Chhmar (“De Ta Prohm au Bayon, Annexe I,” 280-281). He has furthered classified the structure as being constructed post-1191 C.E., unlike structures

is adjoined directly with the eastern complex along the second enclosure. The internal pediments are both still standing, and these pediments would have originally been covered by a wooden ceiling which has long since succumbed to the elements. As mentioned above, one internal pediment is south-facing; the other is north-facing. Both of these internal pediments are also flanked to the left and right by smaller scenes enclosed and demarcated by decorative frames. This paper, however, focuses on the two larger central scenes of the two pediments.

### **BC.80, SOUTHERN DOORWAY OF CRUCIFORM GALLERY, NORTH FACE**

The main north-facing pediment of the southern doorway depicts a scene with a multi-headed and multi-armed figure wielding bladed weaponry that has proved difficult to identify (Fig. 1). Scholars have posed various identifications for the central dominating figure on this pediment. In her doctoral dissertation, Christine Hawixbrock wrote that the pediment depicted the gods of the Trimūrti; in other words, the central figure was Śiva flanked by Brahmā (left of Śiva) and Viṣṇu (originally on Śiva's right, but presumably now missing).<sup>6</sup>

In *Images of the Gods*, Vittorio Roveda has suggested that the figure may represent a bodhisattva, but later in the same work he concludes that there is not enough information to provide a definitive identification for this pediment.<sup>7</sup> Most recently Peter Sharrock has asserted that the central figure in the pediment is none other than Hevajra, a tantric Buddhist enlightened being.<sup>8</sup>

In this section I will demonstrate that the previously posited identifications for this figure exhibit several iconographic discrepancies, and sometimes contextual discrepancies, which suggest the need for either modification of their arguments or an entirely new identification. Since the most recent and extensive attention to this pediment has been conducted by Sharrock, I will devote more space to his Hevajra identification. I will argue that identifications for the figure in this pediment as Śiva, Hevajra or a possible bodhisattva are doubtful, and the reasons for such doubt are based primarily on three points. First, some of the identifications ignore the overt thematic context of the other internal pediment scenes located within the cruciform gallery.

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BC. 1, 2 and 3 within the first enclosure, for example, which would have been constructed prior to 1191 ("De Ta Prohm au Bayon, Tome I," 362-363). For a brief and general overview of the site, along with helpful architectural plans, see Cunin, "The Face Towers at Banteay Chhmar." For a serious and in-depth architectural analysis of Bayon style monuments from the reign of Jayavarman VII, see his dissertation, "De Ta Prohm au Bayon."

<sup>6</sup> Hawixbrock, "Population Divine," 238.

<sup>7</sup> Roveda, *Images of the Gods*, 273-274, 442.

<sup>8</sup> Sharrock, "Hevajra at Bantéay Chmâr," 49 and ff.



Figure 1: BC.80 North-Facing Internal Pediment, Southern Doorway, Banteay Chhmar<sup>9</sup>

All other internal pediments with established identifications depict scenes drawn from, or inspired by, the Sanskrit story literature of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and, to a lesser extent, the *Mahābhārata* and various *purāṇas*.<sup>10</sup>

This fact undermines arguments for Buddhist figures like Hevajra and bodhisattvas, all of whom obviously play no role in sources like Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* or the *purāṇas*.

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, pictures used in this paper were taken by me during field research in 2010 and 2011. I would also like to again thank Olivier Cunin for lending me several photographs of sites prior to my own research visits. It should be noted for clarification that during all three of my visits to Banteay Chhmar between 2010-2011 this particular pediment had a wasp's nest on its face, right next to the decorative shooting star/comet (?) motif in the viewer's upper right corner.

<sup>10</sup> A bit of caution concerning the sources inspiring these particular pediments are in order. While I feel the primary source of inspiration for the majority of pediments in the cruciform gallery was some form of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it proves difficult to explain each pediment scene as being drawn solely from this epic since some of these scenes and figures are tangential in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. For example, the smaller lower-left south-facing pediment above the northern doorway in the cruciform gallery may depict (current identification is uncertain) Śiva, Pārvatī, and Kāma. While a reference to the narrative of Śiva incinerating Kāma is, in fact, found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.22.10-14), this narrative is also told in much longer form in other sources such as Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* and various *purāṇas* (e.g., the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, the *Rudrasaṃhitā*, the *Matsya Purāṇa*, the *Śiva Purāṇa*, etc.). Also, while Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Brahmā are certainly present in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the collective configuration known as the Trimūrti (see fn. 26) is a concept that finds much fuller expression in certain *purāṇas*. With that said, it still appears to be the tales and figures from the epics (primarily the *Rāmāyaṇa*) that the majority of internal pediments within the cruciform gallery at Banteay Chhmar share in common.

Secondly, previous identifications of the pediment figure conflict with a standard set of iconographic characteristics in both textual sources and localized Khmer artistic representations. Finally, and in relation to the second point, I will demonstrate that the central figure of this pediment displays a set of iconographic features that are firmly connected with another figure in early Cambodian art, the well known antagonist of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāvaṇa.

The dominant central figure on this internal pediment has twenty arms (ten on the right and ten on the left) and multiple heads consisting of three tiers. Minimally, the figure has either nine faces (3-3-3) or seven faces (3-3-1) showing. The bottom and middle tier clearly have three carved faces despite lengthy exposure to the elements. The number of depicted carved faces on the uppermost tier, however, remains inconclusive since this portion of the figure is heavily worn. The left and right sides of the uppermost tier have nearly worn smooth, making identification for three faces debatable. In all likelihood, however, the uppermost tier probably represents a single head with one forward face, a representation that is very common in figures such as Rāvaṇa and Kālanemi who are also depicted with the same three-tiered head structure (see below). On the other hand, the uppermost tier still bears a carved line in the stone between the front face and the two sides of the front face. Although inconclusive and debatable, one could argue that this represents an original line of demarcation between front and side faces. I, however, maintain the position that the figure has a single uppermost head and face. Regardless of whether the configuration is 3-3-3 or 3-3-1, it should be understood that this number is based solely on the number of visible carved faces. Additional heads/faces unseen due to the nature of stonework not fully in the round are likely implied; and this would increase the number of heads/faces beyond nine or seven.

The central figure's right arms wield nine bladed weapons—seven curved swords in the lower hands and two straight-bladed swords or daggers in the upper two hands. The hands of the two larger central arms have been lost; and thus, it is unknown what they would have held, if anything. Additionally, it remains unclear whether the held attributes of the left hands would have been symmetrically identical with the right. All nine of the smaller left arms are missing hands; and therefore, it remains unknown whether these hands also held the same type of bladed weaponry wielded by the right. At first glance there does not appear to be enough space to accommodate the length of swords on the left due to the presence of two smaller figures and a stick/staff/spear (?). On the other hand, the left hands may have simply held shorter bladed weapons, or even different weaponry. The remaining evidence is not conclusive in this regard.

Remains of a decorative seat, or a type of pedestal, are still clearly visible on the figure's left side (viewer's right), just below the figure's left thigh (Figs. 2 and 3). The seat seems to have been one with a lotus or other type of floral design. This iconographic detail, in combination with the straight and erect position of the figure's torso, indicates that the central figure is in a seated

position.<sup>11</sup> This common position—known in Sanskrit as *lalitāsana* (agreeable posture)—has one of the legs (in this case the figure’s left leg) dangle off to one side of a seat, while the other leg is situated on top of the seat and tucked in a half-lotus-like position. One example of a figure in this position from Khmer art is Śiva sitting upon Mount Kailāsa with Umā depicted on a pediment at Banteay Srei. Śiva sits in the *lalitāsana*, although it is reversed from the position in the Banteay Chhmar pediment (cf. Fig. 4). This is a crucial iconographic detail that will be returned to below when examining the argument for a Hevajra identification.



Figures 2 & 3: Highlighted Seat

To the central figure’s left are two smaller figures. The higher of the two figures is flying or hovering just below a decorative shooting star/comet (?). This smaller figure is exactly like numerous Khmer representations of generic garland-bearing celestial beings often depicted around the main figures of a decorative pediment or lintel scene.<sup>12</sup> This flying figure is likely an *apasara* or a *gandharva*—minor celestial beings associated with heavenly music that are often depicted hovering above an important figure or event. The other smaller figure appears to be in a position of propitiation or worship. The figure has five heads (a 3-1 tier of faces with an unseen bottom face likely implied)

<sup>11</sup> Hiram Woodward must be given credit for bringing this important iconographical detail to my attention in a personal email correspondence, 9/1/2010.

<sup>12</sup> Roveda writes that this figure “seems to be handling a bow or flying while holding a garland,” (*Images of the Gods*, 442). I side with Roveda’s latter observation which is a very common decorative motif in early Cambodian art. The suggestion that this item may be a bow seems very doubtful given the frequency of garland-bearing celestial beings in Khmer art. Additionally, if the item was a bow its shape would be odd in comparison to other examples of figures carrying bows in Khmer art. Bows in Khmer art tend to be in the shape of the simple and standard longbow (basic half-moon shape) or the occasional recurve bow (bows in which the tips curve away from the archer).

and two arms.<sup>13</sup> Whether this figure is simply a generic celestial being with multiple heads worshipping the central figure or a specific deity worshipping a more exalted central figure remains uncertain. Any identification of this figure by scholars must remain tentative until further evidence is discovered.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 4: Śiva sitting with Umā atop Mount Kailāsa which is being shaken by Rāvaṇa, Banteay Srei

## ŚIVA AND THE TRIMŪRTI

In her 1994 doctoral work, Hawixbrock systematically analyzed the iconography of the temple complexes belonging to the Bayon period, the majority of which belong to the reign of Jayavarman

<sup>13</sup> The top head of this figure is heavily worn. Nevertheless, it appears that this is a head, and not merely a type of miter, since there appears to be extremely faint facial characteristics and an earring on the figure's left.

<sup>14</sup> A representation of a very similar figure is depicted propitiating Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā on another internal pediment scene within the cruciform gallery at Banteay Chhmar (see Fig. 5). The figure is situated in the lower-left corner below Brahmā. In both pediments, these smaller multi-headed figures have the same exact attire, and both are depicted worshipping one or more figures occupying a more exalted position in the center of a pediment. Roveda provided two possible identifications for the propitiating figure in the so-called Trimūrti pediment: 1) he suggested that the figure may be Rāvaṇa (?) propitiating Brahmā, the god who granted Rāvaṇa the boon that made him invincible to all beings but man (*Images of the Gods*, 150); and 2) he later matter-of-factly asserts that the figure is Brahmā's consort, Sarasvatī. He also suggests that this figure may parallel the unfinished/damaged propitiating figure on the lower-right side of the same pediment, a figure he suggests may be Lakṣmī (*Ibid.*, 442). I will briefly discuss this figure again later in the paper when arguing that the central figure of the pediment is Rāvaṇa.

VII. In her descriptions concerning Banteay Chhmar she writes the following with regard to the internal pediment in question:<sup>15</sup>

La Trimūrti. Śiva à neuf têtes et dix-huit bras est assis encadré par Viṣṇu à droite Brahmā à gauche, tous deux à quatre bras, les mains principales en añjalī [sic].<sup>16</sup>

This remark is as interesting as it is confusing. The central figure does not have eighteen arms; instead, as mentioned above, the figure has twenty arms. Additionally, the current state of this pediment (see Fig. 1) does not depict a three-figured Trimūrti configuration, an example of which is only a few yards away depicted on the pediment situated above the eastern doorway of the cruciform gallery (Fig. 5). In fact, there is no figure whatsoever to the central figure's right side. In other words, the pediment only depicts two main figures, not three. Despite the damage to the pediment, it does not appear that there was ever enough space to adequately depict a hypothetical figure on the central figure's right side, even in an undamaged state. Further, I am unaware of any archive photos of this pediment that differ in any significant way from its current condition today.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 5: Trimūrti, BC.80 West-Facing Internal Pediment, Eastern Doorway, Banteay Chhmar<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Hawixbrock labels this area of BC. 80, “Pavillon d’entrée Sud” and numbers the pediment as “12-fronton Nord.” Hawixbrock, “Population Divine,” 238.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> For example, EFEO archive photos 14437-1 and 00127-2.

<sup>18</sup> See EFEO archive photo 14451-4 for a decent quality image of this pediment before the faces were mutilated by vandals.



In addition to these concerns, the multi-headed figure to the central figure's left does not have four arms, as indicated by Hawixbrock. This figure only has two arms. Although two-armed representations of Brahmā are not unheard of in Khmer Art, one cannot overlook that this figure probably has five-heads (a 3-1 tier of faces with an unseen bottom face likely implied), not four heads which is how Brahmā is usually depicted. Also, in so-called Trimūrti representations the flanking figures are depicted facing forward, not toward the central figure (cf. Fig. 5). Lastly, Hawixbrock's reference to a Viṣṇu figure should be ignored since no such figure is depicted on the pediment. An argument could be put forth that a Viṣṇu (?) figure was originally located to the central figure's right side, but now such a figure has been lost because of damage to the pediment over time. This hypothesis, however, should be set aside until supporting archaeological evidence is discovered.

With that said, while this pediment is clearly not a depiction of the Trimūrti, it is possible that the central figure is a Khmer depiction of Śiva unfamiliar to us today. Such speculation, however, is weakened by the fact that the Khmer material record contains numerous depictions of Śiva and I am not aware of any that depict him with twenty arms all wielding bladed weapons.<sup>19</sup>

## AN UNKNOWN BODHISATTVA

Addressing Roveda's tentative suggestion that the central figure may represent some unknown bodhisattva is included here merely for completeness sake.<sup>20</sup> Roveda is certainly clear that he was unsure about the scene in this particular pediment. He writes, "Due to the incomplete state of the relief, it is impossible to decode given our current knowledge of Jayavarman's VII's Mahayana Buddhism."<sup>21</sup>

Still, I maintain that even such a tentative claim that suggests this scene is in some manner depicting a Buddhist figure or narrative conflicts with the overall thematic context of the other pediment scenes located within the cruciform gallery. All of the other cruciform gallery pediments at Banteay Chhmar that have been identified depict scenes that draw upon the Sanskrit story literature of the epics and the *purāṇas*. This important point will be addressed in more detail below when discussing the claim for a Hevajra identification.

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<sup>19</sup> This again assumes that the figure would have wielded symmetrically identical (or similar) weaponry. As noted earlier, all the central figure's left arms are broken and end in stumps.

<sup>20</sup> Roveda, *Images of the Gods*, 274. He writes in a caption, "Bodhisattva with seven heads & twenty arms, pediment, eastern complex, Banteay Chmar."

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 442.

## HEVAJRA

Most recently in his doctoral dissertation, as well as later published articles based on his dissertation, Peter Sharrock has repeatedly asserted that the main figure in this pediment is none other than Hevajra.<sup>22</sup> In the opening of his article, “Hevajra at Bantéay Chmàr,” Sharrock describes the pediment in question as follows:

But on this dry season trip, which came after months of research into the Khmer bronzes of the late Tantric Buddhist deity Hevajra, the lintel gripped my attention. First I marveled that the 70 x 75 cm icon was still standing over a three-meter-high door amid such devastation. Then it sank in that I was looking at an eight-headed, twenty armed, dancing figure bearing swords in its right hands—Hevajra! At last, I thought in a flash, we have an icon of this wrathful manifestation of the supreme Buddha of the Tantric cosmos “showcased” in a central lintel on the wall of a Khmer temple, which can be securely dated to the end of King Jayavarman VII’s reign (1181-ca. 1220).<sup>23</sup>

Before even discussing the iconographic features that led Sharrock to identify the figure in this pediment as Hevajra, it should be noted that Sharrock never discusses the scenes depicted on the other internal pediments of the cruciform gallery. By failing to discuss the other pediments, Sharrock ignores much of the surrounding decorative context in this section of the Banteay Chhmar temple complex.<sup>24</sup>

The other internal pediment scenes still remaining in BC.80’s cruciform gallery are as follows:<sup>25</sup>

### Eastern Doorway

East-Facing/Outer Pediment: Vālmīki receives the *Rāmāyaṇa* from Brahmā

<sup>22</sup> See Sharrock, “The Buddhist Pantheon of the Bāyon” and “Hevajra at Bantéay Chmàr.”

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 49-50. Sharrock encases the word showcase in quotation marks because, as stated in his first endnote, he is indirectly referencing the fact that Bruno Dagens has previously rejected seeing identification for Buddhist figures such as Vajrasattva and Vajrapāṇi (which can be linked with Hevajra) with the face towers of the Bayon because they were never “showcased” elsewhere in any lintels or pediments (see endnote 1, p. 62). The importance of this for Sharrock lies in his argument regarding the identification of face towers of the Bayon as Vajrasattva. See Sharrock, “The Mystery of Face Towers” for the details of his argument, as well as a good overview of previous arguments regarding the face towers of the Bayon.

<sup>24</sup> Sharrock ignores much of the decorative context, but not all. He does mention the so-called unique yoginīs that are, according to him, found in and around BC.80. For brief remarks regarding this claim see my own fn. 30 below.

<sup>25</sup> For recent descriptions and images of these pediments see Roveda, *Images of the Gods*, esp. 439-443. For the east-facing pediment of the gallery’s eastern doorway (Vālmīki identification) also see Roveda, “The Rāmāyaṇa and Khmer Reliefs,” and *Images of the Gods*, 116.

West-Facing/Inner Pediment: Trimūrti<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 5)

## Northern Doorway

South-Facing/Inner Pediment (Central Scene): Rāma killing Rāvaṇa

South-Facing/Inner Pediment (Lower Right Scene): This scene depicts a woman, perhaps Sītā or a goddess (?), standing between a man and what appears to be a deer-like animal.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> All three gods are present throughout both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, although the concept of the Trimūrti would receive its full development in the *purāṇas*. The earliest reference to the Trimūrti occurs in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Maitryupaniṣad* (Bailey, “Trimūrti”). Book nine of the *Mahābhārata* explicitly indicates that the Trimūrti gods are responsible for sanctioning the sending of warriors who die in battle at Kurukṣetra straight to heaven (Skt. *svarga*). It additionally indicates that yogis who practice *tapas* should also be rewarded by being sent straight to heaven.

Skt. *ity uvāca svayaṃ śakraḥ saha brahmādibhis tathā / tac cānumoditaṃ sarvaṃ brahmaviṣṇumaheśvaraḥ //* “All that was said by Śakra along with Brahmā and other (gods) was again sanctioned by Maheśvara (i.e., Śiva), Viṣṇu, and Brahmā” (*Mahābhārata* IX.52.021).

This section of the *Mahābhārata* holds additional interest in that the promise of heaven for warriors who have died in battle, as sanctioned by the Trimūrti, may have been of interest to Jayavarman VII. This is of course speculation. However, much like the Bayon, large sections of the enclosure walls at Banteay Chhmar are devoted to depicting military processions and battles (most sources indicate that the scenes are against the Cambs), and it may have been important to reassure loyal warriors and generals that their actions would be rewarded by the gods who have promised them an immediate place in heaven.

References to the gods of the Trimūrti are also found in the inscriptions of Jayavarman VII. A Phimanakas bilingual inscription, for example, praises an Aśvattha tree (also called Mahābodhi in the Khmer portion of the inscription) whose roots, trunk, and branches are identified with Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu, respectively (Cœdès, “Études cambodgiennes,” *BEFEO* XVIII, 9-12). One of the Prasat Crung steles (K.288) devotes a large amount of space to the gods of the Trimūrti while eulogizing Jayavarman VII. One stanza (LXIV) demonstrates the greatness of Jayavarman by indicating that he was responsible for creation, preservation and destruction; and furthermore, the gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva—worthy of veneration throughout the three worlds—must be ashamed that these same three duties were allocated separately among themselves (Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, IV, 209-231). This stele from Prasat Crung is also interesting in that the same array of sources from Sanskrit narrative literature inspiring the pediments at Banteay Chhmar are employed to help illustrate the qualities and life of Jayavarman. Besides the gods of the Trimūrti, the inscription alludes to, for example, the Śiva and Kāma narrative (st. XXI) and other scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, such as Rāvaṇa shaking mount Kailāsa (st. XXX).

The concept of the Trimūrti during the reign of Jayavarman VII certainly deserves additional research. For now, one should note that the gods of the Trimūrti are also depicted, for example, at the Bayon and Wat Pu.

<sup>27</sup> Roveda has written that it “is tempting to see this as Rama, to the left, begging Sita not to be infatuated with the beautiful gazelle who attracts her so much, but this is pure speculation” (*Images of the Gods*, 443). The scene Roveda is calling to mind is an incident in the *Rāmāyaṇa* in which Rāvaṇa instructs the *rākṣasa* Mārīca to take the form of a beautiful golden-colored deer in order to lure Rāma away from Sītā’s side so that Rāvaṇa can abduct her. As Roveda

South-Facing/Inner Pediment (Lower Left Scene): Śiva, Pārvatī and Kāma (?)<sup>28</sup>

### Southern Doorway

South-Facing/Outer Pediment: The slaying of Śambūka (argument presented later in paper)

**North-Facing/Inner Pediment (Central Scene): The pediment in question—(Sharrock = Hevajra; Hawixbrock = Trimūrti; Roveda = Unknown, perhaps a bodhisattva).**

North-Facing/Inner Pediment (Lower Left Scene): This scene depicts a figure holding a smaller figure, perhaps a child or consort (?), sitting atop a lotus seemingly held by a multi-headed figure kneeling to the left. The lotus, in turn, sits atop a three-headed nāga (snake-like being). Standing nearby are two armed men, one of which is clearly armed with a bow. These two are probably Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (?).

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makes clear, this remains speculation; but, until further evidence arises to the contrary, I find Roveda's suggestion a definite possibility. Roveda also notes the somewhat problematic and strange depiction of the deer-like animal by highlighting that it has an usually long neck and even appears to have arms. This is, indeed, strange. However, book III, chapter 43, of Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* describes at great length not only the beauty of the deer, but also its strangeness (something Lakṣmaṇa picks up on immediately, but Rāma fails to take heed). Perhaps the strange representation in the pediment is a Khmer attempt to highlight that the deer is not really a deer at all, but the devious Mārīca in disguise? Or, perhaps, the deer-like figure is depicted over-elongated in order emphasize the emergence of Mārīca from the deer. An art historical example of the dying Mārīca emerging from a deer after being shot by Rāma can be seen sculpted on the balustrade of the Candi Siwa temple of Lara Jonggrang in Central Java. See Saran and Khanna, *The Ramayana in Indonesia*, 48.

<sup>28</sup> The narrative involving Śiva and Kāma continued to be a favorite during the reign of Jayavarman VII based on its frequent inclusion in the epigraphic record. The narrative is referenced, for example, in the Stele of Prasat Tor (K.692, st. XI) and the steles of Prasat Crung (K.287, st. XXVII; K. 288, st. XXI). For the Prasat Tor inscription, see Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. I, 227-249. For stele K. 287 and K. 288, see Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. IV, 209-250.

As with the presence of the Trimūrti, the tentative identifications of Śiva, Pārvatī and Kāma by previous scholarship may be perceived as being counter to my claims that the sources of inspiration for many of the internal pediments in the cruciform gallery are primarily drawn from the epics. While not the sole source, narratives surrounding these figures are, indeed, referenced in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for example. Book one of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for instance, relates the story of Śiva incinerating Kāma (*Rāmāyaṇa* I.22.10-14). Book one also includes the marriage of Śiva to Umā/Pārvatī and the concerted effort to contain Śiva's powerful semen (*Rāmāyaṇa* I.35.6-19). For a detailed account on the various versions of the narrative on Kāmadeva in Sanskrit literature, see Benton, *God of Desire*.

Additionally, Śiva's presence in the pediments is not that surprising among other pediment scenes depicting the *Rāmāyaṇa*. His importance in the *Rāmāyaṇa* tends to vacillate between being relatively unimportant to hints of being much more influential. With regard to the latter, note some of the following: it is Śiva's bow that is lifted by

What is apparent from the other surrounding pediment scenes in BC.80 is that none of them (even where identification remains uncertain) depicts anything that may be construed as tantric—in any of its multifaceted understandings—and none of them are remotely connected with the Buddhist figure known as Hevajra, or any other Buddhist figure. Again, all of the pediment scenes that have established identifications are connected with scenes or figures found in the narrative literature of the epics and/or *purāṇas*, and even pediment scenes with uncertain identifications appear to allude to, if only marginally, these sources. If the pediment above the southern doorway of the cruciform gallery were Hevajra, it would be the only Buddhist figure depicted on the internal pediments of the cruciform gallery at Banteay Chhmar.<sup>29</sup> To accept such an identification would mean that this Hevajra depiction would, quite literally, be a lone and haphazardly placed tantric Buddhist figure situated amidst a sea of unrelated scenes drawn from the epics and *purāṇas*.<sup>30</sup>

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Rāma; Rāvaṇa was a disciple of Śiva; Śiva granted a boon to Viśvāmitra; Śiva pushes Mount Kailāsa back down upon Rāvaṇa; Śiva gives Rāvaṇa the sword called Candrahāsa; Śiva is praised by Rāma who erects a *liṅga* before embarking on his quest to retrieve Sītā; and Śiva is even propitiated by all the gods in one section of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (see *Rāmāyaṇa* VI.83.34 for this last reference). It may also be worthwhile to consider the well-known episode in book two of the *Rāmāyaṇa* detailing Rāma's so-called madness over the loss of his wife and how Rāma becomes analogous to Rudra-Śiva during this period (see chapter five of Pollock's Introduction to the *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*, III *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, 53-67, esp. 65-67). In discussing this specific episode from the *Rāmāyaṇa* Pollock observed, "Much of the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* seems to be enacted under the very banner of Rudra" (*Ibid.* 66).

With all that said, however, we should also keep in mind that the identification for this particular pediment remains uncertain. I am merely indicating that if the current tentative identification set forth by scholars proves correct, such an identification does not affect my own conclusions regarding other pediments, nor should the presence of Śiva be construed as strange.

<sup>29</sup> It should be clear that I am only referring to the internal pediment scenes in the cruciform gallery, and not other sections of the Banteay Chhmar temple complex. As a whole, Banteay Chhmar of course has plenty of Buddhist iconography, especially scenes of Lokeśvara (i.e., Avalokiteśvara) and the Buddha.

<sup>30</sup> Sharrock's argument that Banteay Chhmar displays numerous "unique" yoginīs (dancing female figures associated with Hevajra and other tantric figures) in the "Hall of Dancers" is unconvincing to me; and therefore, I feel it cannot be used to provide a Buddhist context for his Hevajra argument in this part of Banteay Chhmar. He writes in his dissertation, "The Yoginīs of Bantéay Chmâr are unique. They have third vajra eyes and hold flowers with outstretched, feathered, arms and stand astride on Garuda legs" ("The Buddhist Pantheon of the Bâyon," 194). These so-called unique yoginīs are nothing more than typical *kinnarīs* (the female equivalent of *kinnara*). There are various ways to understand what a *kinnara/kinnarī* is depending on the context, but it is commonly described as yet another type of celestial musician alongside other such beings like the *gandharvas*. Throughout Southeast Asia it is common practice to artistically depict *kinnarīs* as having the upper bodies of beautiful women and the lower body of a bird (for numerous examples see Roveda, *Images of the Gods*, 204). Even today in countries like Cambodia and Thailand one doesn't have to look far to see such figures adorning contemporary Buddhist monasteries alongside celestial *gandharvas* (compare Figs. A1 and A2 in the Appendix). Additionally, the *kinnara/kinnarī* are sometimes described as having the head of a horse (or vice versa), and at Banteay Chhmar we have at least two three-headed horse figures located at the corner of structures with these very same *kinnarī* friezes. In short, these *kinnarīs* cannot be used as contextual evidence

In addition to thematic incongruity, an argument for Hevajra is weakened in several other areas. The major problems all revolve around Hevajra's known iconography. According to textual sources such as the *Hevajra Tantra*, the *Niṣpannayogāvalī* and the *Saṃpuṭa Tantra*, Hevajra manifests in several different forms.<sup>31</sup> According to textual sources, for example, there are two-armed, four-armed, six-armed, and sixteen-armed manifestations of Hevajra. The textual sources never describe a twenty-armed form, which is the number of arms the figure has in the Banteay Chhmar pediment.

The principle form in the textual sources, and the one depicted in art by the Khmers (albeit, somewhat altered through localization), is the sixteen-armed form. The *Hevajra Tantra* describes the sixteen-armed form of Hevajra as follows:

He has sixteen arms and eight faces and four legs, and is terrible in appearance with his garland of skulls and he wears the five symbolic adornments. Nairātmyā, clinging round the neck of this hero and god, addresses him thus: [*Hevajra Tantra* II. V. 3]

There at its centre am I, O Fair One, together with you. The Joy Innate I am in essence, and impassioned with great passion. I have eight faces, four legs, and sixteen arms, and trample the four Māras under foot. Fearful am I to fear itself. [*Hevajra Tantra* II. V. 7-8]

The skulls in his right hands contain these things in this order: an elephant, a horse, an ass, an ox, a camel, a man, a lion, and a cat. Those of left are: Earth, Water, Air, Fire, Moon, Sun, Yama, and Vaiśravana.

He is possessed of the nine emotions of dancing: passion, heroism, loathsomeness, horror, mirth, frightfulness, compassion, wonderment, and tranquility. [*Hevajra Tantra* II. V. 24-26]<sup>32</sup>

Of course, one-to-one correspondence between textual and archaeological or art historical sources is far from guaranteed. In fact, there are often many discrepancies between such sources

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to bolster Sharrock's argument for Hevajra's presence in this pediment at Banteay Chhmar. To be fair, Sharrock's yoginī argument extends far beyond Banteay Chhmar, and encompasses far more than only these half-female half-bird figures, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to write more on the topic. Readers should consult his dissertation for a detailed overview of his arguments. For a recent critique of his yoginī argument in connection with the Bayon, see Vickery, "Bayon: New Perspectives Reconsidered," 143-157. As a final side note, it may be interesting to note the constant presence of such celestial beings in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, especially in connection with Rāma's victory. Therefore, the ubiquitous presence of such celestial figures in a section of the temple depicting scenes drawn primarily from the *Rāmāyaṇa* makes perfect sense. Perhaps in the future more in-depth parallels can also be drawn with Rāma's victories and Jayavarman's own victories.

<sup>31</sup> The *Saṃpuṭa Tantra* is one of several abbreviated titles for this tantric text. Another common abbreviated title is *Saṃputodbhava*. There are long and short versions of the title depending on the manuscript being referenced. For additional details on this text see Skorupski, "The *Saṃpuṭa Tantra*: Sanskrit and Tibetan Versions of Chapter One;" and Elder, "The *Saṃpuṭa Tantra*: Edition and Translation Chapters I-IV."

<sup>32</sup> Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra*, Vol. I, 110-111. For an alternative translation of the *Hevajra Tantra* see Farrow and Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra*.

due to processes of active localization and artistic creativity. With that said, however, representations of Hevajra in early Cambodia are not only fairly consistent, but such representations also reflect many of the characteristics described in texts like the *Hevajra Tantra*. For example, all Khmer Hevajras have eight heads (3-4-1) and sixteen arms.<sup>33</sup> At first glance, the Khmer Hevajras appear to have only two legs, but they often have an incised groove along the thigh to indicate the leg is to be doubled (hence, four legs).<sup>34</sup> Additionally, almost all Khmer Hevajras are dancing; and there are no known depictions of a Khmer Hevajra sitting.<sup>35</sup>

Unlike their textual counterparts, however, Khmer Hevajras are very rarely depicted dancing in embrace with a consort as described in the *Hevajra Tantra* and commonly depicted in later Tibetan *maṅḍalas*.<sup>36</sup> While more wrathful depictions of Hevajra with fangs, skulls and so forth are not unheard of, they are rarer than their Tibetan counterparts.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, the attributes carried by Khmer Hevajras vary from being almost identical to those mentioned in the *Hevajra Tantra* (as described above) to resembling the so-called *śaśtradhara* Hevajra (“arms or weapons bearing” Hevajra) which holds *vajras*, *ghaṅṭās*, and sometimes an assortment of various weapons depending on the particular manifested form.<sup>38</sup> Other Khmer Hevajras possess no attributes at all and simply have empty palms facing upwards. Whether these empty hands held small removable attributes remains debatable.

Despite these Khmer variations, multiple repetitions of swords, or other forms of bladed weaponry, are not typical attributes of Hevajra in textual sources, and such representations are completely unknown in actual Khmer artistic representations. In fact, if one were to accept that the figure in the Banteay Chhmar pediment represents Hevajra, one would also have to accept that this is the only such iconographic depiction of this tantric figure in the entire world.

Sharrock recognizes this problem and attempts to explain such apparent uniqueness as a novel Khmer invention that is in line both with Hevajra’s known wrathful and militaristic qualities and Jayavarman VII’s own militaristic reign; and thus, not really that strange at all.<sup>39</sup> Sharrock is correct that Hevajra has a more militaristic form, the so-called *śaśtradhara* Hevajra (“arms or weapons bearing” Hevajra) of the *Samṃpūṭa Tantra* and *Niṣpannayogāvalī* briefly mentioned above. However, a Hevajra figure wielding one sword (or some other type of weapon) while simultaneously wielding various

<sup>33</sup> Lobo, “Reflections on the Tantric Buddhist Deity Hevajra in Cambodia,” 113 and 117. Also see Boeles, “Two Yoginīs of Hevajra from Thailand,” 26.

<sup>34</sup> Lobo, “Reflections on the Tantric Buddhist Deity Hevajra in Cambodia,” 118.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* The exceptions to dancing Khmer Hevajras mentioned by Lobo are Khmer Hevajras that are standing. See, for example, fn. 4: 17 and 21 on page 114.

<sup>36</sup> For a Khmer Hevajra with his consort, see Prachum Kānèhanawat, *Nangsū phāp Phraphuttharūp (Buddha Images)*, 128–9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 117.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* See Lobo’s comments on the Berlin Hevajra.

<sup>39</sup> Sharrock, “Hevajra at Bantéay Chmâr,” 52.

other attributes is far different than a figure wielding nothing but swords, or perhaps swords and daggers/shorter swords.<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, there are no “weapon-bearing” forms of Hevajra that have twenty arms, and of the forms that have a textual reference only the sixteen-armed form wields a single sword. There are also no known Khmer Hevajras that wield a single sword, or multiple swords. It seems all too clear that attempts to make references to these more militaristic forms of Hevajra as a possible source in which the details had been altered due to localization and artistic creativity is a speculative stretch that fails to provide a satisfying explanation as to why the Khmers would drastically depart from a standard and consistent iconographic representation of Hevajra that was both well known and frequently reproduced during the reign of Jayavarman VII.

Casting even more doubt on a Hevajra identification is the bodily position of the central figure in the pediment. In the above quote from Sharrock’s article he writes that the pediment depicts a “dancing figure.” In the same article he writes,

The lower part of the Bantéay Chmâr Hevajra lintel, where the feet were carved, has fallen into the rubble of the unrestored temple ruin, and the top parts of the legs are abraded. But the dancing posture is unmistakably that of Hevajra in late Bâyon-style bronzes. [. . .] The details include the lift of the left knee, the poised frontal posture, some of the facial features . . .<sup>41</sup>.

This assertion that the central figure is dancing is not as clear-cut as Sharrock would have his readers believe. In fact, his observation that the figure is dancing is incorrect. As mentioned earlier, the remains of a seat are still visible on the pediment (see Figs. 2 and 3). The central figure, therefore, is not in the dancing position known as the *ardhaparyāṅkāśana* (dancing half-sitting posture), but

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<sup>40</sup> An overview of the attributes wielded by the more militaristic forms of Hevajra should indicate just how different the forms are from the figure in the pediment:

*Śastradhara* Hevajras

**Two-Armed Form:** the right hand wields a five-pointed *vajra* club and the left hand holds a skullcap.

**Four-Armed Form:** this form is identical to the two-armed form except the additional two primary arms now embrace Vajravarahī, one of his consorts.

**Six-Armed Form:** the primary pair of hands hold a *vajra* and *ghaṇṭā*, while the other two right hands hold an arrow and a trident, and the other two left hands hold a bow and skull.

**Sixteen-Armed Form:** the right hands hold a *vajra*, sword, arrow, discus, skull, club, trident, and hook, and the left hands hold a bell, lotus, bow, *khaṭvāṅga*, skullcap, jewel, and noose which concludes with a threatening gesture of the forefinger of the remaining left hand.

The following summary descriptions for the so-called “weapon bearing Hevajras” are taken from Bangdel and Huntington, *The Circle of Bliss*, 456.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 51.



is, instead, sitting atop a seat or pedestal in *lalitāsana* (agreeable posture), a posture characterized by sitting on a pedestal with one leg bent and tucked as in the *siddhāsana* (perfected posture) and the other leg hanging down.<sup>42</sup> In the Banteay Chhmar pediment the right leg is now missing, but the pediment still clearly shows the left leg hanging off to the side of a seat which the figure sits atop in an erect position. The erect position, too, is an important detail in that figures depicted in the *ardhaparyāṅka* position often (but not always) have a curve or tilt in the waist indicative of a dancing motion.<sup>43</sup>

This is not the case in this pediment. The fact that the figure in the Banteay Chhmar pediment is seated, not dancing, poses a serious iconographical problem to anyone wishing to argue that this figure is Hevajra. Not once in any of the many surviving depictions of Hevajra from early Cambodia is Hevajra ever seated. Hevajra was almost always depicted without his consort and in the *ardhaparyāṅka* position in early Cambodia. When not in this position, Hevajra was depicted as standing. Whether in locations such as India, China, Japan, Indonesia, Cambodia or some other place in which Hevajra has made an appearance, there have not been any representations of this figure—in either textual or art historical sources—in a seated position. In the *Hevajra Tantra*, Hevajra is not described as sitting in his principle sixteen-armed form. The only so-called *śāstradhara* form of Hevajra wielding a single sword, the sixteen-armed form, is also specifically described as dancing.

In summary, one would have to ignore or explain away all of the following facts to accept a Hevajra identification:

- 1) Hevajra would be the only Buddhist and tantric pediment in the cruciform gallery (BC.80) at Banteay Chhmar found to date. All other identified internal pediments in the cruciform gallery depict scenes or figures drawn from the Sanskrit narrative literature of the epics and/or *purāṇas*.
- 2) This Hevajra would break all known textual and Khmer artistic conventions by having twenty arms.
- 3) This Hevajra would break all known textual and Khmer artistic conventions by wielding at least nine bladed weapons (i.e., the nine intact swords/daggers in nine of the left hands).
- 4) This Hevajra would break all known textual and Khmer artistic conventions by being in a sitting position.

At this point it seems safe to conclude that the central figure on this internal pediment is

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<sup>42</sup> If both legs were hanging off the seat, like a person sitting in a chair, then it would be called *pīṭhāsana* (seat/stool posture), *bhadrāsana* (auspicious/splendid posture) or *pralambapādāsana* (hanging feet posture). For a short overview of various *āsanas* (postures) see Garg, *Encyclopaedia of the Hindu World*, Vol 1., 676-678.

<sup>43</sup> As noted in fn. 11, Hiram Woodward must be given credit for bringing these particular iconographic details to my attention.

unlikely to be Hevajra. Instead of concocting a long and specious line of argumentation to explain away all the peculiarities in order to arrive at a certain preferred identification, why not simply ask ourselves if the central figure, as is, displays any iconographic characteristics that coincide with other figures in the Khmer art historical record from the Angkorian period? The paper now turns to this task.

## THE MIGHTY RĀVAṆA

The most distinctive features about the central figure in this pediment are its multiple heads consisting of three tiers, twenty arms and multiple swords. One figure in the Khmer art historical record that conforms to all these characteristics is Rāvaṇa, the main antagonist in the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic who is repeatedly described in textual sources as having ten heads and twenty arms. In addition to being represented with three tiers of multiple heads, twenty arms and wielding swords, Rāvaṇa is also depicted in early Cambodian art in both standing (sometimes in a chariot) and in sitting positions.

Although Rāvaṇa adheres to the iconographic features displayed on the Banteay Chhmar pediment, like many figures in Khmer art, his representations are varied.<sup>44</sup> For example, he is not always depicted with swords, as is often the case when he is in scenes showing him shaking Mount Kailāsa (cf. Figs. 4 and 9, but also note that he still has twenty-arms and the same three tiers of multiple heads). Or, he may wield an assortment of weapons instead of just swords, like in the famous Battle of Lanka scene in the western gallery at Angkor Wat (Fig. 6).<sup>45</sup> Additionally, while he is often depicted with twenty arms, this iconographic characteristic also varies in some of his Khmer representations.

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<sup>44</sup> Rāvaṇa taking on multiple forms, however, is in line with textual sources which often highlight the fact that Rāvaṇa possesses the ability to assume any desired form at will. For example, the following verse from the *Rāmopākhyāna* of the *Mahābhārata* (III.259.39) states: *daśagrīvastu daityānām devānām ca balotkaṭaḥ / ākramya ratnānyaharatkāmarūpī vihaṅgamaḥ* // “But the ten-necked (Rāvaṇa), abounding in strength, assuming any form at will, traversing the sky, attacked and took the riches of the Daityas and of the gods.” Trans. Scharf, *Rāmopākhyāna*, 157.

<sup>45</sup> This also coincides with many descriptions of the Rāvaṇa in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Sometimes he wields a mighty sword (VI.80.32-34), a javelin (VI.88.21-25), bow and arrows (VI.83.40-42), divine discuses or other magic weapons (VI.88.4-8) and so forth. These are but a very few examples, among many, of Rāvaṇa wielding a various assortment of weapons. Rāvaṇa is also sometimes referred to as the “great-armed one” (*mahābāha*). cf. VI.7.11 when Rāvaṇa’s advisors in an attempt to bolster his confidence exclaim, “Moreover, great-armed warrior (*mahābāha*), you defeated in battle the heroic and mighty sons of Varuṇa, who were accompanied by the four divisions of their army.” Trans. Goldman, Goldman, and A. van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, VI Yuddhakāṇḍa*, 137.



Figure 6: *Rāvaṇa in the Battle of Lanka, Western Gallery, Angkor Wat*

Two good examples in which Rāvaṇa only has ten arms come from Banteay Samre and the northwest corner pavilion at Angkor Wat. While Rāvaṇa only has ten arms in these depictions, he still has the same three-tiered structure of heads, he is sitting, and he wields swords in both scenes very similar to those at Banteay Chhmar. At Angkor Wat (Fig. 7) he wields eight swords (four left, four right). In his remaining right hand he holds a spear, while his remaining left hand rests on his thigh. Although he is not sitting in the *lalitāsana*, he is sitting in the *mahārajālīāsana* (great king at ease posture). In this sitting position, both feet are on a pedestal, one folded and tucked, while the other is bent and raised with the knee near the chin.

At Banteay Samre (Fig. 8) the pediment is more damaged; nevertheless, the two primary arms are in *añjali* with seven other arms clearly wielding swords very similar to the ones at Banteay Chhmar. One left arm is badly damaged and ends in a stump, but in all likelihood this hand would have remained symmetrical with the others and also wielded a sword. This Rāvaṇa also has the same three-tiered head structure. Rāvaṇa is also sitting, but because of damage it is unclear as to the exact position, although he appears to be sitting in a lotus-like position. Here, and in the pediment at Angkor Wat described above, there are worshippers and flying celestial beings present in the scene, just like the scene in the pediment at Banteay Chhmar.

At Phnom Rung there is a heavily worn scene of Rāvaṇa kidnapping Sītā.<sup>46</sup> In this scene he

<sup>46</sup> Roveda, *Images of the Gods*, 199 (image 5.13).



Figure 7: Rāvaṇa Half Pediment, Eastern Gallery III, Angkor Wat (Olivier Cunin 2010)



Figure 8: Rāvaṇa, Upper Southern Pediment, South Gate I, Banteay Samre (Olivier Cunin, 2010)

is depicted standing atop a chariot and has the three-tiered head structure, a multitude of arms that, with the exception of one primary arm wielding a spear, are all holding swords.<sup>47</sup>

As the above examples make clear, swords are a commonly held attribute of Rāvaṇa. His might and prowess with weapons is often described in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. He can darken the sky with volleys of arrows, pummel an opponent with his bare hands or hack an enemy to pieces with a sword. One of his most famous battles was with the giant vulture-king, Jaṭāyus, who bravely tried to stop Rāvaṇa from abducting Sītā. In this epic battle, after Jaṭāyus had destroyed Rāvaṇa's bow, chariot and chariot team, Rāvaṇa brings the irritating interruption to an end with his sword.

For a short while the two of them grappled, the chief of *rākṣasas* and the foremost of birds, both incomparable in strength.

But as the bird persevered in his struggle on Rāma's behalf, Rāvaṇa drew his sword and cut off his wings, feet, and flanks.

The moment the savage *rākṣasa* cut off his wings, the vulture fell stricken to the ground, barely alive. [*Rāmāyaṇa* III.49.35-37]<sup>48</sup>

Another narrative from the *Rāmāyaṇa* that was a favorite in Khmer art is the so-called shaking of Mount Kailāsa (Fig. 4).<sup>49</sup> The story is found in chapter sixteen of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* and involves Rāvaṇa acquiring the famous sword Candrahāsa. After Śiva pushed the mountain back down upon Rāvaṇa with his toe the humbled Rāvaṇa sang hymns praising Śiva for the next thousand years. Pleased, Śiva granted Rāvaṇa a boon. Since Rāvaṇa already had a boon from Brahmā that made him invincible to all but man, Rāvaṇa asked for a weapon; and thus, Śiva bestowed upon him the sword called Candrahāsa. Besides the famous pediment at Banteay Srei (Fig. 4), another well-known depiction of Rāvaṇa shaking Mount Kailāsa is located at Angkor Wat (Fig. 9). Here again, Rāvaṇa has twenty arms and the same three-tiered head structure.

Unlike the late-tenth to early-twelfth centuries at sites like Banteay Srei, Angkor Wat and Banteay Samre when depictions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (and Rāvaṇa in general) are rather ubiquitous, examples from the late-twelfth century are not nearly as common. Nevertheless, similar configurations for Rāvaṇa can be seen in other Jayavarman VII temples besides Banteay Chhmar.<sup>50</sup> At Preah Khan,

<sup>47</sup> This Rāvaṇa probably had twenty arms, but exposure has taken a toll so I cannot be absolutely certain.

<sup>48</sup> Trans. Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*, III *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, 195.

<sup>49</sup> This episode is also referenced in inscriptions from the time of Jayavarman VII. For example, see stanzas XXX and XXXVII of one of the Prasat Crung steles (K. 288) (Coëdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. IV, 209-231).

<sup>50</sup> Preah Khan and Banteay Chhmar appear to have the most *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes from temples belonging to the reign of Jayavarman VII. Although, Roveda has drawn attention to miniature reliefs of scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* carved at the Bayon (*Images of the Gods*, 432). Besides the art historical record, however, allusions to the *Rāmāyaṇa* are also present in the inscriptions of Jayavarman VII. For example, the stele inscription of Preah Khan explicitly likens Jayavarman to Rāma (st. A:57-58), and makes other allusions to the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well (st. A: 59-62). For a full English



Figure 9: Rāvaṇa Shaking Mount Kailāsa, Southwest Corner Pavilion, Angkor Wat

for example, the western side of *gopura* III west depicts a scene from the battle of Lanka in which Rāma and Rāvaṇa clash while standing atop opposing chariots (Fig. 10). Again, Rāvaṇa is depicted with the three-tiered head configuration. In this example he only has ten arms. His two main arms are holding a bow and drawing back an arrow. It is unclear if Rāvaṇa's other four right arms held anything since a monkey is attacking him right above those hands. Rāvaṇa's other four left hands, however, all depict swords very similar to other depictions at Angkor Wat, Banteay Samre, and the pediment at Banteay Chhmar.

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translation of this inscription with copious commentary, see Maxwell, "The Stele Inscription of Preah Khan." For more on the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Jayavarman's inscriptions, see the concluding remarks of this paper.

As for other Rāvaṇa depictions during the time of Jayavarman VII, according to Roveda (*Images of the Gods*, 443) the western face pediment on structure 45 at Banteay Chhmar depicts Rāvaṇa shaking Mount Kailāsa. Śiva, who is normally depicted atop the mountain, is supposedly not depicted because the upper portion of the tympanum is now missing. Recently, however, Maxwell has critiqued this identification and claims that the figure is not Rāvaṇa; instead, the figure depicted is a multi-head Agni who is alluded to in an inscription located at the very same structure of Banteay Chhmar (Maxwell, "The A.I.S. Annual Report Maxwell" and "A New Khmer and Sanskrit Inscription at Banteay Chhmar," 175, fn. 33). While certainly open to debate, I nevertheless find Maxwell's argument compelling.

A stronger case for another Rāvaṇa depiction during the reign of Jayavarman VII actually comes from the same cruciform gallery at Banteay Chhmar. As mentioned earlier in a listing of the pediment scenes within the cruciform gallery, the south-facing pediment above the northern doorway probably depicts Rāma killing Rāvaṇa with a bow and arrow (see Roveda, *Images of the Gods*, 442). While I currently side with Roveda's identification of this pediment scene (mainly because the figure with the bow does, indeed, appear to be Rāma) this pediment contains a number of



Figure 10: Rāvaṇa in the Battle of Lanka, Western Gopura III, Preah Khan

An important point to make is that early Khmer depictions of *rākṣasas* (so-called demons like Rāvaṇa) and *asuras* (often translated as titans or demigods) often conform to a stylistic pattern consisting of three tiers of heads (3-3-1) and multiple arms.<sup>51</sup> For example, Rāvaṇa's uncle, the *rākṣasa* Kālanemi, is prominently depicted at Angkor Wat's northern gallery in a battle with Viṣṇu (Fig. 11).

Like many Rāvaṇa examples, Kālanemi is depicted with multiple heads in the three-tiered style, has many arms (thirty-two to be exact) which predominantly wield swords. Elsewhere in the northern section of Angkor Wat's so-called cruciform gallery is a carved scene depicting Viṣṇu battling what has been described by Roveda as two royal *asuras* (Fig. 12).<sup>52</sup> Roveda confesses that the scene is difficult to interpret owing to the lack of any known textual source referencing such a battle. He speculates that the two monstrous figures may be Kālanemi (?) and Bāṇa (?), although this is far

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interesting iconographic details that are in need of additional research. The structure of Rāvaṇa's head, for example, appears to consist of two tiers topped with some kind of miter (although perhaps this appearance may be the result of erosion to the exposed pediment). Other interesting details include the presence of three large flowers situated atop the scene with females emerging from them (Roveda claims they are *apsaras*) and Rāma riding a war elephant. If the identification holds, however, it is interesting that this south-facing pediment above the northern doorway and the north-facing pediment above the southern doorway being discussed in this paper directly face each other at opposite ends along a corridor of the cruciform gallery. At one end to the south in Lanka sits Rāvaṇa at the height of his might; at the opposite end of the gallery Rāvaṇa is depicted being defeated.

<sup>51</sup> The terms *rākṣasa* and *asura* are often conflated and used interchangeably. It should be noted, however, that the iconography for *rākṣasas* and *asuras* in Khmer art is not fixed or static. Therefore, sometimes *asuras*, like Bāṇa who is also represented at Angkor Wat's northern gallery, are only depicted with a single head (although in the case of Bāṇa he still has a multitude of arms wielding swords). Conversely, while many of the *asuras* in the churning of the ocean milk scenes have three tiers of heads, they only have two arms.

<sup>52</sup> Roveda, *Images of the Gods*, 384.



Figure 11: *Kālanemi*, Northern Gallery, Angkor Wat



Figure 12: *Asura or rākṣasa Battling Viṣṇu*, Northern End of Cruciform Gallery, Angkor Wat (Olivier Cunin 2010)



from certain. Regardless of which specific *rākṣasas* or *asuras* are being depicted in this scene, the point to remember is that the features of these figures coincides with a common (if somewhat loose) iconographical template used by Khmer artisans to depict *rākṣasas* and *asuras*.<sup>53</sup>

The pediment at Banteay Chhmar depicts the same *rākṣasa/asura* style figure that coincides with examples of figures such as Kālanemi and Rāvaṇa depicted elsewhere. In addition to what has been previously discussed above, what makes Rāvaṇa the likely candidate as opposed to another *rākṣasa* like Kālanemi, or just some faceless *rākṣasa*, is the central dominance of the figure at Banteay Chhmar. Again, this figure is seated prominently in the center of the pediment in a position to receive veneration. Strikingly similar scenes are on the two pediments of a centrally seated Rāvaṇa at both Angkor Wat and Banteay Samre mentioned above (Figs. 7 & 8). These scenes represent Rāvaṇa, in all his glory, seated at his court in Lanka. In some pediments, like the one from Angkor Wat (Fig. 7), the scene is specifically calling to mind the escape of Rāma's trusted companion, Hanumān, from the clutches of Rāvaṇa.<sup>54</sup>

Like the pediments of Rāvaṇa sitting at his palace in Lanka at Angkor Wat and Banteay Samre, the Banteay Chhmar pediment appears to represent another example of Rāvaṇa sitting in his palace. The *Rāmāyaṇa* devotes a fair amount of space to describing Rāvaṇa seated at court through the eyes of characters like Śurpaṇakhā, Hanumān and his advisors. In the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* section of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for instance, Śurpaṇakhā who is returning to Lanka to report how Rāma killed fourteen thousand *rākṣasas* describes Rāvaṇa as follows:

She found Rāvaṇa in his splendid palace, radiant in his power, his advisors sitting beside him like the Maruts next to Vāsava.

He was seated upon a golden throne radiant as the sun, and he looked like a fire on a golden altar blazing with rich oblations.

A hero invincible in combat with gods, *gandharavas*, spirits, or great seers, he looked like Death himself with jaws agape.

He carried lightning-bolt wounds received in clashes with gods and *asuras*. His chest was seamed with scars where Airāvata's pointed tusks had gored him.

He had twenty arms and ten necks. His regalia was a wonder to behold. A broad-chested, mighty king, he was marked with all the marks of royalty.

He sparkled with earrings of burnished gold and the glossy beryl he wore. His arms were

<sup>53</sup> The scene may not even be representing two specific *rākṣasas* or *asuras*. Instead, the scene may simply be illustrating a generic scene of Viṣṇu battling the “demon” hordes or raging “demi-gods.”

<sup>54</sup> This is a fairly common scene. Another somewhat stylized example comes from a pediment scene of the central tower at Angkor Wat which depicts Hanumān standing atop a sitting multi-armed and multi-headed Rāvaṇa while holding two *rākṣasas* upside-down in each hand. See Roveda, *Images of the Gods*, 136 (4.4.99) for an image.

handsome, his teeth bright white, his mouth huge, and he was as tall as a mountain.  
[*Rāmāyaṇa* III.30.4-9]<sup>55</sup>

To suggest that the Banteay Chhmar pediment, like similar Rāvaṇa pediments elsewhere, is depicting Rāvaṇa seated in Lanka seems very plausible based on the current evidence. Additional specificity regarding what else the Banteay Chhmar pediment may be recalling, however, remains entirely unclear. In other words, many may wonder if there is a specific narrative scene being alluded to in the Banteay Chhmar pediment. This raises a problematic issue that perhaps explains why a Rāvaṇa identification has not been previously explored. What narrative scene, if any, does this pediment depict besides Rāvaṇa merely sitting at court in Lanka? While not all lintels and pediments are narrative (many are not), many inspired by either the *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Mahābhārata* obviously do reflect a narrative grounding.

For example, what does one make of the multi-headed figure on Rāvaṇa's left who is kneeling in a position of propitiation? Is this a specific figure with a name, some generic multi-headed advisor or a minor worshipping celestial being? It's tempting to speculate that this figure could be the god Brahmā, thereby bringing to mind the famous narrative in which Brahmā grants Rāvaṇa the boon which made him invulnerable to all types of beings but humans. While interesting, this line of thought remains problematic because the figure appears to have five heads/faces not four, thereby making Brahmā an unlikely candidate.

With this iconographic detail in mind, Śiva may then be a stronger candidate because of the attested five-faced manifestation known as Sadāśiva.<sup>56</sup> A Śiva identification would perhaps mean that the pediment is alluding to the narrative following the so-called shaking of Mount Kailāsa by Rāvaṇa (see Figs. 4 and 9). As mentioned earlier, Śiva proved his superiority by crushing Mount Kailāsa back down upon the arrogant Rāvaṇa. The humbled Rāvaṇa then proceeded to dance and sing in praise of Śiva and Pārvatī for a thousand years. After a thousand years the impressed Śiva bestowed upon Rāvaṇa the mighty sword called Candrahāsa. Perhaps this explains the emphasis on depicting Rāvaṇa wielding so many swords? Such a suggested identification, however, is not without its own problems. For example, one would expect to have Rāvaṇa depicted in propitiation and Śiva displayed in a more dominant position. In other words, the exact opposite of how the pediment is depicting the two figures. Merely swapping the identification of the two figures (i.e., Śiva as the more dominant figure wielding swords and Rāvaṇa as the smaller kneeling figure) does not seem plausible given the iconographic standards for these two figures in Khmer art. As mentioned previously,

<sup>55</sup> Trans. Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki*, III *Aranyakāṇḍa*, 150. Also compare Hanumān's fantastic and detailed description of Rāvaṇa in the *Sundara* section of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (V.47.1-14).

<sup>56</sup> A Sadāśiva identification was also proposed by Sharrock, but for obviously different reasons and in an entirely different context (Sharrock, "Hevajra at Bantéay Chmàr," 52).

there are no known depictions of Śiva with the three-tiered head configuration and twenty-arms as depicted in this pediment scene. Additionally, Rāvaṇa is always depicted with more than five heads.

So, on the other hand, perhaps this secondary figure is a representation of Rāvaṇa's sister, Śūrpaṅkhā, throwing herself at his feet after her humiliation at the hands of Rāma? Another suggestion is that the figure is one of Rāvaṇa's many counselors and/or ministers such as Nikumbha who constantly accompany him at his court in Lanka. This type of speculation could continue, but ultimately leads nowhere without stronger evidence. The other pediments of Rāvaṇa at Angkor Wat and Banteay Samre, for example, also have a number of unnamed and generic figures such as celestial beings, counselors, ministers and other courtiers present with Rāvaṇa (again, see Figs. 7 and 8); and therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the Banteay Chhmar pediment depicts something along the same lines.<sup>57</sup>

While I have not yet come across an exact one-to-one correspondence between the pediment at Banteay Chhmar and elsewhere, the examples noted above illustrate striking similarities to other Rāvaṇa scenes, the majority of which share the same iconographic characteristics of the Banteay Chhmar pediment. This important point alleviates the need to construct a line of argumentation that seeks to explain away iconographic discrepancies in order to arrive at other preferred identifications. This alone should make Rāvaṇa a more attractive consideration for the pediment at Banteay Chhmar. Lastly, the presence of another Rāvaṇa scene in the cruciform gallery at Banteay Chhmar coincides well thematically with the other internal pediment scenes that are drawing upon Sanskrit story literature found in the epics and elsewhere.

## BC.80, SOUTHERN DOORWAY OF CRUCIFORM GALLERY, SOUTH FACE

The second internal pediment is located above the same southern doorway in the cruciform gallery, but situated on the south face. This scene depicts five figures (Fig.13). The center figure is a seated sage-like male holding a rosary (Skt. *akṣamālā*) in his right hand while lifting his other hand up towards the figure to his left. The figure to this sage's left wears a three-pointed crown and holds

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<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the same seemingly generic worshipper-type figure with multiple heads is present in another pediment scene within the cruciform gallery at Banteay Chhmar (see Fig. 5 and fn. 14 of this paper). In the so-called Trimūrti pediment, to the lower-left of Brahmā, is what appears to be the same style figure in a position of worship. Roveda's two possible identifications for this figure as either Brahmā's consort Sarasvastī or as Rāvaṇa worshipping the boon-granting Brahmā do not make sense for this other pediment, either contextually or iconographically. Again, Rāvaṇa is always displayed with more than five heads, and the central figure is clearly not Brahmā. If we consider the figure to be another consort, in this context perhaps Umā beside Śiva, we still are faced with accepting unattested, and somewhat peculiar, iconography used for depicting Śiva.

a circular object in his right hand. This crowned figure's left hand wields a sword, and he is depicted chopping off the head of another sage-like figure to his left who is seated and making the *añjali* gesture. To the central figure's far right side sits a harp player and another sage-like figure holding the body of a child in his lap.



Figure 13: BC.80 South-Facing Internal Pediment, Southern Doorway, Banteay Chhmar

## THE SLAYING OF ŚÍŚUPĀLA

Vittorio Roveda argues that this pediment depicts the narrative of Kṛṣṇa's slaying of ŚÍśupāla found in the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>58</sup> While certainly possible, there are, however, a couple of iconographic problems that arise with such an identification. The most obvious is that according to the narrative in the *Mahābhārata* Kṛṣṇa cut off ŚÍśupāla's head with his discus, not a sword as depicted in the pediment scene from Banteay Chhmar. Roveda does tentatively identify the circular object in the sword-wielding figure's other hand as possibly being a discus; however, even if this were the case (which I do not think it is), the pediment clearly depicts a sword being used to behead the figure

<sup>58</sup> Roveda, *Images of the Gods*, 108 and 442. The narrative is located in book II of the *Mahābhārata*. Roveda provides a summary of the narrative in his book.

depicted in this scene from Banteay Chhmar. The circular object does not appear to be a weapon (see below).

Besides the sword, Roveda has other iconographic problems which are not addressed. For example, he indicates that Kṛṣṇa is depicted twice in the pediment. First he is depicted as a sage-like figure holding a boy whom Roveda identifies as the young Śiśupāla. This supposedly would refer to the part of the narrative in which the young Śiśupāla was placed in the lap of Kṛṣṇa. According to the narrative, after sitting in Kṛṣṇa's lap the two extra arms and extra eye Śiśupāla was born with miraculously disappear; thus, foretelling a prophecy that Śiśupāla's death would later come about by the person who restored him by causing his extra limbs and eye to fall away. Kṛṣṇa is secondly depicted, according to Roveda, in the pediment as the crowned figure wielding the sword and killing Śiśupāla. Unfortunately, the iconography of Kṛṣṇa in this pediment scene does not follow the narrative in the *Mahābhārata* very well since Kṛṣṇa would be depicted as a sage holding the young Śiśupāla (again, according to Roveda). The *Mahābhārata*, however, is clear in describing that Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma arrived in the capital of the Cedis as impressive and mighty heroes wishing to see their father's sister, the queen of Cedi. When they arrived, the child Śiśupāla was placed in the heroic Kṛṣṇa's lap. According to this narrative Kṛṣṇa was a mighty warrior of the *kṣatriya* class. There is no indication that he was wandering around as a "simple travelling sage" in this particular story, despite that this is exactly how Roveda claims Kṛṣṇa is being depicted in this pediment scene.<sup>59</sup>

Lastly, while a scene depicted on this pediment connected with the *Mahābhārata* would not be out of place, it may be preferable to connect the scene to the *Rāmāyaṇa* since this epic receives much more emphasis in the cruciform gallery (cf. the scenes listed earlier in the paper that include Vālmiki receiving the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma slaying Rāvaṇa, two male archers who are likely Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, my own new Rāvaṇa identification discussed above).

## THE SLAYING OF ŚAMBŪKA

The *Rāmāyaṇa* contains a narrative that better coincides with the iconography of this internal pediment scene. The *Uttarakāṇḍa*, the last book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, tells the story of the śūdra Śambūka, an event that takes place after the successful return of Rāma to the city Ayodhya.<sup>60</sup> Paula Richman summarizes the narrative as follows:

It relates how a Brahman comes to the court of Rāma carrying the body of his dead son, who expired without any apparent cause. The father protests that such an inauspicious event

<sup>59</sup> Roveda, *Images of the Gods*, 108.

<sup>60</sup> The narrative begins in chapter sixty-four of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, and the slaying of Śambūka takes place in chapter sixty-seven.

would even never happen in a land where the king insures that each citizen performs *varṇāśramadharmā* (duty enjoined according to one's social rank and stage of life). When Rāma consults his ministers about the matter, they identify a deviation from dharma: a shudra named Śambūka has been practicing *tapas*, a form of religious austerity reserved for members of the upper three *varṇas*. Immediately, Rāma mounts his celestial chariot, rushes to the forest where Śambūka dwells, and questions him. Upon learning that he is a shudra, Rāma draws his gleaming, stainless sword and cuts off his head. "Well done!" shout the gods in praise. The brahman's son returns to life, and fragrant flowers rain down in celebration, a sign of celestial approbation.<sup>61</sup>

After reading the above passage it may be obvious how this Śambūka narrative from the *Rāmāyaṇa* provides a stronger alternative to the Śiśupāla narrative from the *Mahābhārata*. If we read the pediment from left to right (when looking at the pediment), the scene depicts a similar progression of the story found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The first harp player would simply represent a figure at the court of Rāma in Ayodhya. Iconographically speaking, the presence of this figure may "set the scene" by letting the viewer know the pediment scene takes place in a court or royal setting. This harpist could also be alluding to the chorus-like celebration described in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that occurs at the conclusion of the narrative. The second figure holding the child clearly would represent the visiting brahman carrying his recently deceased son. Skipping the center sage-like figure for the moment, we then come to the kingly crowned figure wielding the sword. This figure represents Rāma slaying the ascetic śūdra Śambūka (who is the final figure in the scene) by decapitating him with a sword. Again, unlike the narrative from the *Mahābhārata* in which Kṛṣṇa decapitates Śiśupāla with a discus, the narrative from the *Rāmāyaṇa* explicitly describes Rāma decapitating Śambūka with his sword, thus conforming to what is iconographically depicted on this pediment from Banteay Chhmar.<sup>62</sup>

The central figure in the pediment is a bit trickier to explain, just as it was for Roveda. I believe

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<sup>61</sup> Richman, "Why Can't a Shudra Perform Asceticism?" 125-126.

<sup>62</sup> I must note here that while the use of the sword to decapitate the figure in the pediment conforms to the scene in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the pediment scene differs somewhat in that, according to the Valmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, Śambūka is depicted as meditating while standing on his head when confronted and slayed by Rāmā. The pediment does not depict the figure I identify as Śambūka as standing on his head in meditation. This difference, however, does not pose a problem since not all versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* include this particular detail, and the Khmers may have been drawing upon a different version (or versions) of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or simply decided to ignore this detail. For example, the *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the so-called Indonesian *Rāmāyaṇa*—composed sometime between the late tenth to eleventh century—does not describe Śambūka as standing on his head; instead, it merely indicates that he was performing austerities (chapter XLII; Phalgunadi, trans., *Indonesian Rāmāyaṇa*, 182-185). For some additional examples of Khmer depictions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* differing from accounts in Valmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, see Roveda, "The Rāmāyaṇa and Khmer Reliefs," 55.

there are two possible explanations. The first, and less desirable explanation, is that this center sage-like figure is merely another generic courtier figure being depicted at Rāma's court. This would be similar to Roveda's argument which suggests that this figure may simply represent another minister at Yudhiṣṭhira's court in the Śiśupāla narrative. The second more preferable explanation is to identify this figure as the famous sage Agastya who is considered in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as foremost among ascetics.

The sage Agastya is often depicted in art historical sources as bearded and holding a rosary (Skt. *akṣamālā*) in the right hand, and this matches the iconography of the central figure in the Banteay Chhmar pediment.<sup>63</sup> Agastya also plays a role in the Śambūka narrative. Soon after Rāma slays Śambūka, and thus sets aright the dharmic tranquility of his realm, Rāma visits the hermitage of the sage Agastya who bestows upon him a brilliant ornament (Skt. *ābharaṇa*) crafted by the great celestial architect, Viśvakarman.<sup>64</sup>

As Rāma's visit to Agastya and his receiving of the ornament take place immediately after the slaying Śambūka (in fact, the two narratives are directly related), I suggest that the figure in the pediment depicts the sage Agastya bestowing the ornament to Rāma. The center figure is clearly a seated ascetic; as mentioned earlier the figure also fits other iconographic depictions of Agastya, such as the possession of a rosary attribute. Additionally, identifying this central figure as Agastya explains the presence of the circular object being held by the figure wielding the sword whom I identify as Rāma. In this case, the circular object represents the ornament being bestowed on Rāma by the sage Agastya according to the narrative in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Looking back at the pediment it is clear that the central figure's damaged left arm is lifted up toward Rāma and the ornament being held in his hand. Unfortunately, the pediment is badly split in this section; and so, the exact placement of the central figure's left hand cannot be determined.

Nevertheless, when all the above observations are taken together, this internal pediment scene in the cruciform gallery matches much better with the Śambūka narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa* than with the Śiśupāla narrative of the *Mahābhārata*. Based on my identification there is no need to explain away iconographic discrepancies such as the Kṛṣṇa wielding a sword instead of a discus,

<sup>63</sup> Cf. the twelfth-century stone sculpture of Agastya from Bihar, India now located in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Inventory Number: M.2005.30. See Mevissen, G., Banerji, A.Prajnadhara, *Essays on Asian Art, History, Epigraphy and Culture*, Vol. 2, Plate 27.2 and 27.3.

<sup>64</sup> *Rāmāyaṇa* VII.067.12-15: *idaṃ cābharaṇaṃ saumya nirmitaṃ viśvakarmaṇā / divyaṃ divyena vapuṣā dīpyamānaṃ svatejasā / pratigrhṇiṣva kākutstha matpriyaṃ kuru rāghava // dattasya hi punar dānaṃ sumahat phalam ucyate / tasmāt pradāsyē vidhivat tat pratīccha naraṣabha // tad rāmaḥ pratijagrāha munes tasya mahātmanaḥ / divyaṃ ābharaṇaṃ citracitraṃ pradīptaṃ iva bhāskaram // pratigrhya tato rāmas tad ābharaṇaṃ uttamam / āgamaṃ tasya divyasya praṣṭum evopacakrame //*

This is but a small excerpt of the text describing when Rāma is first offered the ornament. The text continues and includes details such as the explanation of why Rāma can accept such a gift and the origin of how Agastya, himself, first received such a jewel.

or Kṛṣṇa being garbed in sage/ascetic attire instead of the attire of a princely *kṣatriya*. The Śambūka narrative also provides a more satisfying explanation for the circular object being held by the figure wielding a sword.

Lastly, the Śambūka narrative may provide a nice explanation for the actual physical location of this particular pediment scene within the cruciform gallery of Banteay Chhmar. Again, the internal pediment depicting this scene is situated above the southern doorway of Banteay Chhmar and is facing the south. According to the narrative, when Rāma departs Ayodhyā in search of Śambūka he first travels to the west. Failing to locate Śambūka in the west, Rāma then searches to the north. Again he fails to find Śambūka. Rāma then searches the entire eastern region; again, he does not find Śambūka and there is no sign of wrong-doings in any of the cardinal regions he has thus far searched. Finally Rāma turns to the south. There, to the south of his kingdom, Rāma finally locates the *sūdra* Śambūka performing austerities.<sup>65</sup>

The fact that the narrative explicitly indicates that Śambūka was performing his austerities in south—and that it was in the south that Rāma decapitates him—may have been taken into account when the designers and/or artisans of the cruciform gallery at Banteay Chhmar were deciding where the Śambūka narrative would be placed. Of course this connection could be a coincidence; however, explaining this detail away as mere coincidence would perhaps be doing a disservice to the Khmers by failing to respect the amount of planning that went into these temple complexes.<sup>66</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The two internal pediments above the southern doorway of the cruciform gallery at Banteay Chhmar depict two more *Rāmāyaṇa*-related scenes, thus conforming to what appears to be a thematic emphasis among the internal pediment scenes located within this section of Banteay Chhmar. The

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<sup>65</sup> *Rāmāyaṇa* VII.066.10-13: *prāyāt praticīṃ sa marūn vicinvaṃś ca samantataḥ / uttarām agamac chrīmān diśaṃ himavadāvṛtam // apaśyamānas tatrāpi svalpam apy atha duṣkṛtam / pūrvām api diśaṃsarvām athāpaśyan narādhipaḥ // dakṣiṇām diśam ākrāmat tato rājarṣinandanaḥ / śaivalasyottare pārsve dadarśa sumahat saraḥ // tasmin sarasi tapyantaṃ tāpasaṃ sumahat tapaḥ / dadarśa rāghavaḥ śrīmāṃl lambamānam adho mukham //*

<sup>66</sup> I am not implying that such neat directional correlations with the art and architecture can be observed in all the internal pediment scenes within the cruciform gallery. Perhaps there are more directional correlations; perhaps there are not. Looking into the possibility has proved difficult, but whether that is because no such correlations were intended with the other pediment scenes or whether it is due to a failure on my part to uncover such a connection will require continuing research. I do, however, find it striking that when one enters the front of the cruciform gallery (i.e., from the eastern side) the very first internal pediment scene depicts Valmīki receiving inspiration from Brahmā to compose the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is as if this pediment scene anticipates the other scenes contained within gallery by signaling the beginning of the epic in stone.



north-facing pediment depicts Rāvaṇa sitting atop a throne or pedestal, perhaps representing him at his court in Lanka. The south-facing pediment depicts Rāma decapitating the śūdra Śambūka with a sword. These two alternative identifications indicate that the scenes depicted in the cruciform gallery of Banteay Chhmar may have far more cohesive sources of inspiration than previously imagined. Perhaps, such insight may assist researchers in identifying the few remaining scenes still undeciphered in this section of the temple.

We can only speculate as to why such scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* would be depicted at a temple of Jayavarman VII during a period when depictions of *Rāmāyaṇa* were not as common as they were in the beginning of the twelfth century and earlier. Correlating the decrease in artistic depictions with a decrease in the appeal and popularity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* would, however, be a mistake since measuring such appeal and popularity must take into account not just the surviving art historical record, but the surviving epigraphical record as well.<sup>67</sup> While the art historical record of Jayavarman VII does not contain many depictions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Jayavarman's own inscriptions do frequently include references to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>68</sup>

These references often employ analogies to describe Jayavarman's own superior qualities, or events that took place during his reign. The stele of Preah Khan (K.908), for example, directly compares the construction works of Jayavarman with the works of Rāma.<sup>69</sup> Both Rāma and Arjuna of the *Mahābhārata* are employed in a comparative manner in the stele of Prasat Tor (K.692) to illustrate

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<sup>67</sup> Stressing the disparity between the number of *Rāmāyaṇa* depictions in, for example, the early twelfth century and those during the reign of Jayavarman VII during the late twelfth and early thirtieth centuries as somehow representative of a shift in the appeal of the epic is to some extent merely introducing a red-herring into the discourse. For one, a narrow focus on the art historical record blinds one to the rather ubiquitous number of references to the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Jayavarman's own inscriptions. Furthermore, the time separating Jayavarman VII, and the earlier era of Sūryavarman II and the great bas-relief panels of Angkor Wat was not so great as to have significantly dampened the popularity enjoyed by the epic; and thus, it is difficult to imagine these scenes in a Jayavarman temple as being odd. Between the end of Sūryavarman II's reign around 1150 C.E. and the beginning of Jayavarman's reign around 1181 C.E. only a little more than thirty years had elapsed. The continuing popularity of the Reamker (a Cambodian version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*) in present-day Cambodia attests to the enduring presence of the epic throughout Cambodia's different eras since the seventh century (for a short overview of the development of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Cambodia, see Roveda "The *Rāmāyaṇa* and Khmer Reliefs").

Similarly, to suggest that such *Rāmāyaṇa* depictions appear incompatible with Jayavarman's affiliation with, and sympathy for, Buddhist traditions ignores Jayavarman's own inscriptions that contain evidence to the contrary. The epigraphical record demonstrates that the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and epics in general, enjoyed support and popularity regardless of any particular sectarian affiliation (although certain traditions may have indeed interpreted and altered the *Rāmāyaṇa* to better conform to their own positions). Seeing depictions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the walls of a Jayavarman temple as somehow in contrast with his support for Buddhist traditions is tantamount to wondering why the *Rāmāyaṇa* continues to be widely popular in Cambodia, a country in which the majority of the population is Buddhist.

<sup>68</sup> There are, of course, numerous references to the *Mahābhārata* and other sources of Sanskrit narrative literature as well.

<sup>69</sup> St. LVII-LVIII. On the Preah Khan inscription, see footnote 50.

Jayavarman's own skill with the bow in battle.<sup>70</sup>

The steles of Prasat Crung of Angkor Thom include numerous references to both figures and events in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Stele K.287, for instance, includes the following: a reference to an episode from the *Rāmāyaṇa* involving Rāma's preceptor Viśvāmitra; an allusion to Rāma's and Lakṣmaṇa's battle with Indrajit; and an interesting reference to Rāvaṇa's younger half-brother Vibhīṣaṇa seeking refuge with Rāma—a reference which was intended to be analogous to events transpiring between the Khmers and Cams during Jayavarman's reign.<sup>71</sup> Stele K.597 includes two more references to Rāma, and stele K.288 (among several references to the *Rāmāyaṇa*) references the popular narrative of Rāvaṇa shaking mount Kailāsa twice.<sup>72</sup>

Such usage signals not only that the *Rāmāyaṇa* continued to be popular as both a narrative and a vehicle for spotlighting a high level of literary acumen and cleverness via the inscriptions, but that it also constituted an important oral and literary resource so internalized after centuries of localization that it represented a valid display of the Khmer's own cultural knowledge irrespective of particular sectarian affiliations. Furthermore, the manner in which *Rāmāyaṇa* references were used in the epigraphy demonstrates that the authors of the inscriptions often employed the *Rāmāyaṇa* to draw parallels with the life of Jayavarman as part of a constructive process that contributed to the development of Jayavarman's biography (or hagiography).

Again, as Cœdès and others have highlighted, the reference in stele K.287 to Rāvaṇa's younger half-brother Vibhīṣaṇa seeking refuge with Rāma was intended to be analogous to events transpiring between the Khmers and Cams during Jayavarman's reign.<sup>73</sup> Such usage was not isolated. The Phimanakas stele (K.485), another inscription from the time of Jayavarman VII, also includes a reference to a king of Campā by the name of Śrī Jaya Indravarman. This king supposedly brought an army with chariots to battle the Khmers, and the inscription describes him as presumptuous as Rāvaṇa.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> St. XVIII. For the Prasat Tor inscription, see Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. I, 227-249.

<sup>71</sup> St. XXV-XXVI and XLVI. For stele K. 287, see Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. IV, 235-250.

<sup>72</sup> St. E and F (K. 597) and St. XXX and XXXVII (K. 288). For steles K. 597 and K. 288 see Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. IV, 209-235.

<sup>73</sup> The events primarily involved battles between the Khmers and Cams. The details surrounding these events, as well as the scholarly interpretations, are complicated and beyond both the scope and space of this one article. I should note, however, that while Cœdès highlights such correlations in both his *Inscriptions du Cambodge* and *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* his interpretations of the events are dated and relied predominantly on the work Georges Maspéro's *Le royaume de Campa*, a work which is also dated and now heavily critiqued. For a recent analysis of the events being referred to between the Khmers and Cams during the time of Jayavarman VII, as well as an overview of the history of the discourse on these events by scholars, see Vickery, "Champa Revised." For the purpose of this paper, it is sufficient to note that some of these references to the *Rāmāyaṇa* are intended to draw parallels with—according to the epigraphy—actual events during the life of Jayavarman.

<sup>74</sup> St. LXVIII. For K. 485 see Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. II, 161-181.

Thus, including depictions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* within the cruciform gallery at Banteay Chhmar may not have only been done because the *Rāmāyaṇa* continued to be, quite simply, a good story popular with the Khmers, but also, perhaps, because certain episodes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were believed to also parallel, or call to mind, the qualities, deeds and adventures of Jayavarman. Like Rāma, Jayavarman was purported to be a righteous king who possessed excellent qualities and tremendous skill in battle. He, too, eventually came to rule a great city, and during his time he faced and conquered his own Rāvaṇas. And finally like Rāma, Jayavarman was expected to maintain the dharmic tranquility of his realm by ensuring social order.

APPENDIX ONE



*Figure A1: Banteay Chhmar Kinnarīs*



*Figure A2: Kinnarīs and Kinnaras/Gandharvas Decorating a Modern Cambodian Vihāra*

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សង្ខេប

ហោជាងខាងក្នុងពីរនៅបន្ទាយឆ្មារ

Phillip Scott Ellis Green

ក្នុងអត្ថបទនេះ ខ្ញុំស្នើធ្វើការបកស្រាយមួយបែបទៀតលើឈុតពីរ ធ្លាក់នៅលើហោជាងខាងក្នុងពីរកន្លែងនៃប្រាសាទបន្ទាយឆ្មារ ដែលស្ថិតនៅតំបន់ពាយព្យនៃប្រទេសកម្ពុជា ហើយដែលសាងនៅរាជ្យព្រះបាទជ័យវរ្ម័នទី៧ (១១៨២ - រវាង១២១៨)។ ហោជាងទាំងពីរនោះស្ថិតនៅលើច្រកដើរថែរវាងខ្វែងជើងក្អែកនៃអាគារម្យ៉ាងដែលគេនិយមហៅថា "សាលស្រីរាំ"។ មួយបែរទៅខាងត្បូង ឯមួយទៀតបែរទៅខាងជើង។ ខ្ញុំបង្ហាញថាហោជាងដែលបែរទៅត្បូងស្រង់ពីរឿងរាមកេរ្តិ៍ ត្រង់ឈុតដែលព្រះរាមសម្លាប់ កម្ពុកា ដោយកាត់កន្ទីងដាវ។ នៅហោជាងដែលបែរទៅជើងវិញ ក៏ជាសម្រង់រឿងរាមកេរ្តិ៍ដែរ ព្រោះតួអង្គសំខាន់នោះប្រហែលជាក្រុង រាពល័ណ្ណ ដែលមានអនុភាពខ្លាំង។

Abstract

*Two Internal Pediment Scenes from Banteay Chhmar*

Phillip Scott Ellis Green

This paper provides alternative identifications for two internal pediment scenes at the temple complex of Banteay Chhmar which is located in northwest Cambodia, and dates to the reign of Jayavarman VII (1182-c.1218). The two internal pediments in question are both located above the southern doorway of the cruciform gallery located within the structure commonly referred to as the “Salle aux Danseuses.” One pediment faces south; the other pediment faces north. I argue that the south-facing internal pediment depicts a narrative from the Rāmāyaṇa epic in which Rāma slays the śūdra Śambūka by decapitating him with a sword. As for the north-facing internal pediment, I demonstrate that the scene likely depicts another figure from the Rāmāyaṇa—the mighty Rāvaṇa.

Résumé

*Deux frontons intérieurs à scènes de Banteay Chhmar*

Phillip Scott Ellis Green

Cet article propose des identifications alternatives de deux scènes figurées sur deux frontons intérieurs du temple de Banteay Chhmar situé au nord-est du Cambodge, qui date du règne de



*Two Internal Pediment Scenes from Banteay Chhmar*

Jayavarman VII (1182-c. 1218). Les deux frontons en question se trouvent tous deux au-dessus de la chaussée de la galerie cruciforme située à l'intérieur d'un bâtiment communément appelé « Salle aux Danseuses ». Un des frontons fait face au sud, l'autre au nord. Je soutiendrai que celui regardant le sud représente une scène du Rāmāyaṇa, où Rāma met à mort le śūdra Śambūka, le décapitant d'un coup d'épée. Pour le fronton regardant le nord, je démontrerai que la scène dépeint probablement le puissant Rāvaṇa, l'autre figure du Rāmāyaṇa.