The Causeway Episode of the Prambanan *Rāmāyaṇa* Reexamined

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Introduction

The presence at the ninth-century Prambanan temple complex of bas-reliefs with scenes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is too well known to need much comment.¹ First recognized and partially identified by Isaac Groneman (1893), the reliefs have since been admired and studied by numerous visitors. After a long and arduous process of reconstruction of the main temples by colonial Dutch and independent Indonesian archaeologists, most of the Rāma reliefs are now believed to be installed in their original positions on the inner balustrade walls of the Śiva and Brahmā temples. Thanks to the efforts of dedicated art historians and scholars of ancient Java, almost all of the events depicted have been identified with reference to various literary renderings of the epic—both those more or less contemporaneous, such as the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa* (KR), commonly referred to as ‘the’ Old Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa*, and specimens several centuries older, like Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyaṇa* (VR), or several centuries younger, such as the *Hikayat Sēri Rama* (HSR).

1. The basis for this article is a paper with the title ‘The bridge of Rāma in Southeast Asia: The Causeway Reliefs of Prambanan and Phimai Reexamined’, which was presented at the Jakarta workshop on the Old Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa* (Jordaan 2009). This extensive paper has been deposited in the KITLV library in Leiden for public use. Regarding the present article, it was decided to focus the discussion solely on the *Rāmāyaṇa* causeway relief of Caṇḍi Prambanan, and to leave the full description and analysis of the causeway lintel at the Khmer temple of Phimai, in northeast Thailand, for another occasion.

While researching this fascinating yet complex subject I have on several occasions benefited from the help of friends and colleagues. For the revision of the original paper to make it more suitable for publication in the proceedings, I owe a debt of gratitude to the editors of this volume, John and Mary Brockington, and Siebolt Kok for their corrections, comments, references and other forms of support. Thanks are also due to the École française d’Extrême-Orient for the invitation to participate in the Jakarta workshop.

The discovery of the usefulness of the HSR for the interpretation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs of Caṇḍi Prambanan we owe to Willem Frederik Stutterheim, who demonstrated that some of the scenes depicted on the Śiva temple, which defied explanation in comparison with the 'classical' text of Vālmiki, became more intelligible with the help of the HSR (Stutterheim 1925, 1989). Among the large number of deviations from VR he had detected, thirteen episodic details in the sculpted rendering of the Rāma story on the Śiva temple of Prambanan were shared with the HSR. For the purpose of their discussion later in this paper, three examples from Stutterheim's enumeration (1989:146) deserve to be mentioned here, namely the absence of a scene in which Rāma shoots an arrow into the sea to vent his frustration and anger over the default of the God of the Sea; the swallowing of the stones by the fish during the construction of the causeway; the appearance of a daughter of Daśaratha.

The HSR's usefulness was (and still is) amazing as it is not a contemporaneous Old Javanese text, but a Malay narrative whose gestation period dates from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. Although Stutterheim's rather negative appraisal of the correspondence between the VR and the KR texts and the *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs has at times been contested, the heuristic value of the HSR was recently reconfirmed by Jan Fontein with respect to the bas-reliefs depicted on the Brahmā temple. To quote Fontein's conclusion (1997:198): 'The reliefs of Caṇḍi Brahmā are similar to those of Caṇḍi Śiva in that they follow the general flow of the narrative of Vālmiki's epic, with occasional deviations than can usually be satisfactorily explained by consulting the contents of the *Hikayat Seri Rama*'.

In this paper, I want to reexamine the closing reliefs of the series on the Śiva temple. They concern the construction and the crossing of the causeway by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and their monkey allies. Those who know my work on the Prambanan temple complex will understand that my interest in the causeway episode stems from my theory about the design of the temple's central courtyard as an artificial reservoir, that is to say a reservoir of sanctified or holy water (*amṛta*) (Jordaan 1989, 1991, 1995). It is my contention that the causeway relief fits perfectly within this overall design, marking as it does, appropriately with a scene of water, the transition of the Rāma story from the Śiva temple to the Brahmā temple. However, not wanting to repeat myself unduly, the theory itself will not be presented in detail here. If mentioned, it is primarily to adduce further evidence on the heuristic value of the HSR for art-historical research on Caṇḍi Prambanan.

XXXIX. Hanuman, van Langka teruggeskeerd, brengt aan Rama, Lakshmana en Sugriva verhaal uit noemens zijn bevindingen.
XXXIX. *Hanuman, back from Langka narrates his experience to Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva.*

XL. Rama, die verhoord is, omdat op zijn verzoek de zeegod niet verschijnt, ten einde hem raad te geven, verzoekt de zeegod om hem te verschijnen. De zeegod verschijnt en geeft hem den raad een brug te bouwen van het vasteland naar Langka.
XL. *Rama who is angry because at his request the god of the sea has not appeared to advise him as to the best manner of crossing the sea resolves to shoot the sea dry. The god of the sea becomes fearful and appears and advises Rama to build a bridge from the mainland, to Langka.*

XLI. Lakshmana, Rama en Sugriva volgen de moni die stenen en rotsblokken in zee werpen, om een dam aan te leggen. Viscchen en zeedieren trachten dit te verhinderen.
XLI. *Lakshmana, Rama and Sugriva follow the monkeys, who throw stones and rocks into the sea to make a dam. Fishes and sea animals try to prevent this.*

XLI. De brug is gereed. Rama, Lakshmana en Sugriva trekken met het apenleger er over naar Langka.
XLI. *The bridge is ready; Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva pass over it to Langka.*

Figure 1: The causeway episode of the Prambanan *Rāmāyana* (from Kats 1925)

Digitized pictures of the Rāma reliefs have recently been made available to the general public through the image archive of the Kern Institute, Leiden University.² As I will demonstrate, the description of the reliefs bearing on the causeway in this archive and in the current literature is not wholly satisfactory. My primary objective is to reexamine the causeway relief of Caṇḍi Prambanan and help find or reconstruct the text(s) that most likely served as a guide for the Javanese sculptors of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the main temples of Prambanan.

Current interpretations of the Prambanan causeway episode

Soon after their reinstallation on the Śiva temple, the *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs were photographed and briefly described by J. Kats in a Dutch-English language publication (1925). Although the reliefs were more fully discussed in Stutterheim's doctoral dissertation, I will here use Kats' photographs and accompanying plate numbers as well as descriptions as point of departure since the events directly related to the construction of the causeway are all found on the same page, thus allowing for their reproduction on a single page.

The three separate relief panels reproduced in Fig. 1 amply demonstrate what Cecelia Levin (1999:70) has said about the skills of the sculptors of Central Java, namely to present the story 'in a variety of narrative formats, ranging from mono-scenic to synoptic, and from multi-episodic to continuous'. Whereas the relief with the number xxxix is clearly mono-scenic, the last relief panel is multi-episodic and might have been designated as continuous, if it had included a representation of the causeway itself. However, precisely because of the absence of an image of this structure, it is difficult to tell whether the fish are assisting the monkeys in their building efforts or whether they are resisting the construction of the causeway. This problem has yet to be resolved.

It is fortunate that the mono-scenic relief panel with the number xxxix —'Hanuman, back from Langka narrates his experiences to Rāma, Lakṣmana and Sugrīwa'—is reproduced in Kats on the same page as the causeway episode proper. Without this scene it would have been more difficult, I think, to identify the damaged figure in the next relief, namely xl of the second relief panel,

2. See the Leiden University Library's 'Digitoal' service (accessed December 2008), where the Kern photos can now be consulted (<https://socrates.leidenuniv.nl>). Each digitized photograph has a special number and reference number of the original photograph made by the Archaeological Service in the Netherlands East Indies (OD). The original photographs used in this paper are registered as OD 3502 (*Rāmāyaṇa* relief [panel] 23: 'The sea god Sagara pays homage to Rāma'); OD 3503 (*Rāmāyaṇa* relief [panel] 24a: 'The monkey army throwing stones into the sea to build a dam'); OD 3504 (*Rāmāyaṇa* relief [panel] 24b: 'Fishes and sea monsters trying to prevent the monkeys to build a bridge'); OD 3505 (*Rāmāyaṇa* relief [panel] 24c: 'Arrival at Laṅkā').

as Sugrīva. Instead, the figure, who is wearing princely clothes, might easily have been mistaken for Vibhīṣaṇa, the brother of Rāvaṇa, who in VR and the KR defects to Rāma's camp some time before the sea-crossing. The identification of the figure as Sugrīva finds support not only in Vibhīṣaṇa's absence in the reliefs xxxix, xli, and xlii, but, as pointed out by Stutterheim, is confirmed by an old photograph by Kassian Cephas in Groneman's book in which the figure is still undamaged. At Prambanan Vibhīṣaṇa's defection takes place in the opening scene on the Brahmā temple. Regarding this deviation from Vālmiki's epic, Fontein opines that 'Although it is possible that the version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* followed by the sculptors of Prambanan related a different sequence of the events, it made eminent sense to postpone the introduction of this new character until the viewer had reached Caṇḍi Brahmā. In performances of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Malaysia the key role of Lakṣmaṇa as Rāma's confidant and advisor is at this point taken over by Vibhīṣaṇa. The sculptors of Prambanan, by placing such an emphasis on Vibhīṣaṇa's entry into the war, may have interpreted the story in a somewhat similar fashion' (Fontein 1997:195). I will return to Vibhīṣaṇa's defection later on.

But first let us take a look at the preceding relief panels xl and xli–xlii on the Śiva temple, with an overview of the most authoritative descriptions and interpretations, namely by Stutterheim (1925, 1989), Levin (1999), and Saran and Khanna (2004). Relief xl serves as an introduction to the construction of the causeway proper. Stutterheim (1989:142) gives a rather detailed iconographic description:

- a. A monkey and a figure, which is badly damaged but which is decorated in a princely manner.
- b. Two princes, one of them is carrying an arrow and the other is sitting in a challenging position on a rock throne with a bow and arrow in his hand. The bow is unstrung.
- c. The sea and the rocky beach with birds. At a distance, there are buildings (a city?) and a ship (?). In the sea, there are wild fish of prey, among them a shark. From the water a king (god) is coming up, who is offering *puṣpāñjali*.
- d. Sea. Even as in the preceding scene there are hardly any difficulties here. Rāma who has still not shot from his unstrung bow, sees the God of the Sea [Sāgara], rising from the water, offering him worship. This depiction differs slightly from Vālmiki's where there is a mention of shooting, but completely conforms to the *Hikayats*. The person without the crown must be Sugrīva, who is talking to Hanumat. I do not, however, understand his gestures. It is surprising that on Groneman's photo ([1893:] plate xxxiii c 23) Sugrīva still has a head, although it appears to me that even at that time, it was no more to be seen on the relief.

Levin (1999:186) concurs with this interpretation, saying that relief xl 'represents another successful example of Stutterheim's application of the later HSR

in the decipherment of the reliefs of Loro Jonggrang.' Still, in her own analysis she quotes extensively from the KR to demonstrate the correspondence between the sculptural representation and the text of this Kakawin. Turning to the relief itself, she observes:

This mono-scenic episode features Rāma seated upon a throne of rocks in a posture reminiscent of contemporaneous South Indian temple deities. The Sea God Baruṇa rises from an ocean filled with fierce sea monsters. He offers *sēmbah* to Rāma while holding his head at a down turned angle. The *āṅgika* ['bodily position'] employed in this scene clearly tells of the supremacy of the hero over the deity. (Levin 1999:188)

Saran and Khanna (2004:58–9, 85) interpret the relief as follows:

Rama and his monkey army now proceed to Lanka to rescue Sita, but must face their first obstacle which appears in the form of a tumultuous ocean filled with threatening fish. On the sea shore Rama appears furious with Sagara, who joins his hands in a supplicating gesture, seeking to placate Rama by offering his co-operation in the construction of a causeway across the waters. This description of the episode conforms fairly closely to the Valmiki *Ramayana* and the *Ramayana* Kakawin where Rama prays unsuccessfully to Sagara, the God of the Seas, and is then provoked into threatening to destroy the ocean and all the creatures inhabiting its waters. [Appended note 19:] Unlike Stutterheim we see no reason to link the relief before us to the *Hikayat*. As in the Valmiki *Ramayana*, here we see Rama [...] incensed by the indifference of the Ocean God.

Stutterheim's description (1989:142–3) of the next relief panel (Kats' XLI–XLII) is as follows:

a. A prince carrying an arrow and *b.* another with a bow in his hand. A monkey king with a club, two monkeys carrying stones. Rocks. *c.* Five monkeys carrying stones to the seashore. Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma and Sugrīva are following the monkeys, who are throwing the stones into the sea for constructing the dam. *d.* Fish in the sea, which swallow the stones. *e.* Fish, a crab, *naga* with jewel on its head, duck, etc. Vālmiki mentions nothing about the swallowing of the stones. R [namely, the Roorda Van Eysinga version of the HSR] 142–143 speaks of the order given by Rāvaṇa to Ganga Mahasura to destroy the dam and he in turn passes this order to the fish. While this is being done, a crab carries out certain positive actions. *f.* Seashore with sea-gulls, snakes, etc. Four monkeys with clubs, three of them also have fruits in their paws, the fourth leads on a rope a tame *garaṇan* (*Herpestes* [a small Asian mongoose]). *g.* Two princes, armed with bows and *h.* monkey king with a sword. Finally, three happy looking monkeys with clubs and swords. The end of the series of reliefs on the Śiva temple: the crossing from the mainland to Laṅkā by Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sugrīva and his army of monkeys.

For reasons of space, I must present Levin's discussion (1999:188–9) in abridged form:

In the beginning of the subsequent episode of the Setu Nirmāna, the appearance of Rāma on the left, flanked by Sugrīwa and Lakṣmaṇa, suggests that he has acted upon Baruṇa's advice and ordered the monkeys to construct the causeway. The visual elements once again parallel the Kakawin at this point. [...] Whereas the first section of this sequence can be aligned with the Kakawin, the next two reliefs clearly share affinities with the later *Hikayat*. In this Malay redaction, the building of the causeway occurs simultaneous to Rāwaṇa's visit to Sitā in the Aśoka Garden. Rāwaṇa then orders Ganggā *mahā sūra* to destroy the causeway currently transversed [sic] by the monkey army. He, in turn, instructs the fishes as to how to defeat the monkey army. Subsequently Hanūmān protects the dam by whipping up the sea with his tail until the water become muddy. The fishes are successfully caught, but a large crab continues its course of destruction. Offering it his tail to bite, Hanūmān flings the crab into the air and it lands in a forest. There it is killed but it is so immense in size it can not be entirely consumed. Although a crab does appear in the scene, there is little to suggest that it was the specific one mentioned in the *Hikayat* and the creature is certainly not of the magnitude of the one described in the text. The relief at Loro Jonggrang depicts instead the uproar of the denizens of the sea, reflecting the incident that directly precedes the defeat of the giant crab in the *Hikayat*. At this point in the story it is related that the building stones thrown into sea were swallowed by whales in order to sabotage the causeway's construction. The incident depicted at Loro Jonggrang must have as its origins a version common to that of the *Hikayat*. Finally, in the concluding scene from this series, the protagonists and monkey army have successfully crossed the causeway to Lēnkā despite the attempts of hostile serpents to continue their pursuit of the monkeys.

Saran and Khanna (2004:59–60), finally, have this to say about the construction of the causeway:

Carrying boulders on their heads, the enthusiastic band of monkeys launch into action, observed by Rama. We see here some fish with rocks and boulders in their jaws. Tucked away in a corner is a crab. Are the fish assisting the monkeys in their task, or are they resisting the construction of the causeway? Apparently contradictory interpretations appear equally plausible, as the fish can look cheerful or sinister.

The authors say that in the next scene 'Rama and Lakshmana and the monkey army led by Sugriwa joyfully arrive in Lanka'.

Impartiality and open-mindedness towards extant Rāmāyaṇa texts

Before adducing the textual information that will shed new light on the subject, I must say a few words about the rather haphazard use of textual evidence in

current scholarship on the Rāma reliefs (and the Kṛṣṇa reliefs on the Viṣṇu temple, for that matter). To a certain degree this is unavoidable given the paucity of contemporary textual information, which calls for an open-minded and impartial attitude to the extant texts. Thus Fontein's (1997:194) statement: 'For no matter where it ultimately hailed from, any variant in any text can be of value to us as long as it contributes to the identification and interpretation of the events portrayed in the reliefs'. Seen in this perspective, we should be wary of favouring any one text over other versions, as Saran and Khanna appear to do when they say to see no reason to consult the *Hikayat* for the interpretation of the bas-relief about Rāma's anger over Sāgara's unresponsiveness, and the subsequent emergence of the Ocean God.

Whatever version was followed, I think that Rāma's mood is sufficiently clear from his body language, which shows him seated in an assertive, if not aggressive, posture. He is holding a bow and arrow in his left hand, not a spear as Sri Sugianti states (Sugianti 1999:33). I see the last section of this relief panel as being synoptic in that it combines elements which in the literary texts and oral traditions are usually kept separate in time. Rāma and his retinue first face the obstacle of a tumultuous ocean filled with threatening fish, and the deity only appears after Rāma had shot one or more arrows into the sea to vent his anger over his unsuccessful prayers to the Ocean God. The deity's supplication gesture allows for the inference that Rāma had already shot one or more arrows into the sea and possibly also threatened to use a more deadly arrow. The unstrung bow, mentioned by Stutterheim, could represent this transition moment. As the submission of the deity must as a matter of course also hold for his subjects, we could interpret the next scene of the fish with rocks and boulders in their jaws as showing their assistance to the monkeys in the construction of the causeway. However, this latter interpretation must remain tentative as long as we do not know what version or versions of the epic was or were followed. Saran and Khanna support their decision to follow VR with the argument that the depiction of the episode conforms 'fairly closely' to VR and the KR, but this seems somewhat overstated. It does not hold, for instance, for Vibhīṣaṇa's defection to Rāma's camp after the construction of the causeway, in the opening relief of the Brahmā temple.

To avoid the suspicion of selectivity and arbitrariness, it is necessary to explicate and support one's decision of preferring one version over another with sound arguments and verifiable visible clues, if possible. The contradictory interpretations of the activity of the sea creatures in the closing relief—as hostile and destructive or as friendly and co-operative—serve to illustrate this point.

The fact that the different appraisals were made with due consideration of the representation of the causeway episode in the HSR shows that the relevance of this text cannot be taken for granted but has to be demonstrated anew with convincing arguments and visual evidence.

Before going more deeply into the seemingly poor correspondence with the closing relief, I will argue that the HSR does contain information that can be brought to bear on another part of the temple complex, namely the central courtyard. This information concerns the use of both the word *tambak* for the causeway, and a reference to ‘holy water’ in connection with problems encountered during the construction of the causeway. To explain this, we must take a closer look at these textual hints. Fortunately, the discussion is facilitated by the pioneering research of Ziesenis (1963) on the origin and development of the Rāma saga in Malaysia, which includes separate notes on the causeway episode.

Text and tambak

One of the things which, in 1989, gave me the idea that there might be more to the metaphoric comparison in the KR of a large temple complex, generally assumed to be a poetic description of the Prambanan temple complex, with Mount Mandara in the myth of the Churning of the Milky Ocean, was the word *tambak*. The same word occurs in the Śivagrha inscription—also believed to relate to the Prambanan temple complex—in connection with a *tīrtha* or ‘holy pool’, at or near the temple complex. Unlike De Casparis (1956:306), who had deemed the presence of a *tīrtha* within the temple complex ‘astonishing, if not impossible’, it seemed to me that the design of the central courtyard as an artificial water reservoir was not in conflict with the textual information, and would even help to explain the poor drainage of the courtyard and its occasional flooding after heavy rains.³ Hence, my rejection of De Casparis’ translation of *tam-*

3. The poor drainage of the central compound is already mentioned in colonial Dutch archaeological reports, but it was dramatically demonstrated anew in 1994 during an official visit of Hillary Clinton, as First Lady of the USA, when heavy rains flooded the central courtyard. The distinguished guest and her retinue could only gain access after the water had been pumped out by fire-brigade personnel who were called in from the city of Yogyakarta (personal communication by Mary-Louise Totton, who acted as a guide for the American visitors). Very likely this incident made the Indonesian Archaeological Service step up the implementation of a number of rather draconic measures to ‘improve’ the drainage of the site on the assumption of flaws in the design of the Hindu-Javanese architects (*Laporan pembenahan halaman pusat Candi Prambanan tanggal 15 Juni s/d 15 September 1993* [Bogem: Panitia Pemugaran Candi Wahana Candi Lorojonggrang Prambanan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, Dinas Purbakala]; personal communication by Drs. Bambang Prasetya Wahyuhono).

bak in the inscription as simply ‘brick wall’, and arguing instead to hold on to its usual meaning as ‘dam’ or ‘dike’ as far as the wall of the inner courtyard is concerned. Now, it appears that this alternative interpretation accords with the meaning of both the Sanskrit compound *setu-bandha*, and with the word *tambak* in the HSR. In Monier-Williams’ Sanskrit-English dictionary, the compound *setubandha* is glossed as ‘the building of a causeway, bridge or dam’, particularly the bridge-like geological formation linking India and Sri Langka, known in the West as ‘Adam’s Bridge’. *Setu* denotes ‘a ridge of earth, mound, bank, causeway, dike, dam, and bridge, any raised piece of ground separating fields (serving as a boundary or as a passage during inundations)’. The same holds for the word *tambak* in the Malay-Indonesian expression *pembinaan tambak*, ‘the construction of the causeway’, which dictionaries invariably gloss as ‘dam’, ‘dike’, and ‘embankment’.

‘Holy water’: *air Ma’ulhayat*, *amṛta*, and *tīrtha*

The HSR contains yet another designation that can be brought to bear on this idea: *air Ma’ulhayat*; it is the life-giving water which during the building of the causeway spouts from a deep gorge (*lubuk*) in the sea and hinders the completion of the causeway. As Ziesenis has pointed out long ago, we may see in this Malay-Arab compound *air Ma’ulhayat*, literally ‘water of life’, the equivalent of *amṛta*, the Sanskrit word for the elixir of life. As the HSR shows, the way to link *amṛta* with *air Ma’ulhayat* is by means of the Netherworld, called Bumi Petala (Sanskrit *Pātāla* or *Rasātala*), to which the gorge gives access. The Sanskrit elixir of life, *amṛta* was produced from the gums of various trees and herbs getting mixed with the milky water of ‘the agitated deep’ during the Churning of the Ocean by the gods and demons (Fausbøll 1903:23).⁴

There are still other textual allusions to the special character of the water on which the causeway was built. One example is from an episode of the

4. Although the notion of the Netherworld and holy water are found in a less developed form in VR, their connection is discernible in the episode about the magic arrow which Rāma, upon Sāgara’s suggestion, points at an alternative target. Basing himself on the Critical Edition, John Brockington translates the relevant passage thus: ‘Then, where the arrow, which resembled a blazing thunderbolt, fell to earth indeed at Mārūkāntara (the desert of Maru), the earth there roared, pained by the dart. From the mouth of that wound (*vraṇa*) water gushed out from Rasātala. This then became a well, famous as ‘the Wound’, and immediately it seemed that water, like that of the sea, was springing up; and a fearful sound of tearing arose. Thereupon it dried up the water in the cavities [of the earth] by the falling of the arrow. This Mārūkāntara is indeed renowned in the three worlds’. Professor Brockington generously provided me with this translation of the VR. See now also Goldman, Sutherland Goldman and Van Nooten 2009:614–5.

HSR in which, on Rāma's advice, Hanuman swims to the very depths of the sea (*pusat tasik*) to clean himself. As was noted by Achadiati Ikram (1980:59), this amounts to a magical purification as Hanuman not only emerges cleansed of dirt, but also has acquired a beautiful face, and henceforth becomes Rāma's first-ranking simian servant. In the Javanese *Sērat Kanda* it is said that his skin disease has disappeared and that he got a beautiful tail (Stutterheim 1989:62). In another Malay text, *Cerita Maharaja Wana*, we are told of Vibhīṣaṇa being restored to life by Rāma with water from this part of the sea after his dead body had been found adrift on a raft (Kam 2000:159). In VR, finally, Vibhīṣaṇa is anointed by Lakṣmaṇa on the order of Rāma with some water taken from the ocean (*Yuddhakāṇḍa*, 13.7–8; see Goldman, Sutherland Goldman and Van Nooten 2009:150, 598). A similar anointment of Rāma by the gods takes place right after the crossing of the causeway (*Yuddhakāṇḍa* 15.32; see p. 156).⁵

In an earlier discussion about the design of the central courtyard as a sacred pool or *tīrtha* (Jordaan 1996:92, note 68), I pointed out that both the opening and the closing relief-scenes on the Śiva temple relate to water. While the first relief panel shows Viṣṇu reclining on the world snake Ananta or Śeṣa floating on the Ocean of Milk (Vogel 1921), the final relief panel shows the causeway or rather the stretch of water in which it was built by the monkeys. As Fontein (1997:195) has noticed, '[b]y breaking off the story just as the army of the monkeys is crossing the causeway to Lengkā, the sculptors made the viewers cross over from one temple to the other, as if they were following in the monkeys' footsteps'. Commenting on this, I noted that this stratagem was so effective precisely because the design of the temple area as an artificial water reservoir may actually have separated the temples from each other with water (Jordaan 1996:91–2). What matters here is that the additional information provided by

5. In *Yuddhakāṇḍa* 15.32, it is said that when the gods 'had witnessed that marvellous and seemingly impossible feat of Rāma Rāghava, they approached him in the company of great seers and anointed him, one after the other, with holy water'. Sanskritists are divided over the question of whether this water was drawn from the same ocean as in Vibhīṣaṇa's earlier provisional consecration by Lakṣmaṇa, or that the water used derives from such sacred bodies as the celestial Gaṅgā (see p. 623, note 32). Shastri's interpretation (1970:55) that the water was drawn from the sea is probably based on the statement that the gods at the sight of the causeway 'drew near' and anointed Rāma in secret 'there'. The sacredness of the site is also mentioned in the *Brahmakāṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa*, in the section called *Setumāhātmya* (Tagare 1995:342–4). John Brockington, however, has questioned this interpretation, saying that there is no mention of sea water in the passage, only of 'stainless' or 'auspicious' water. Sea water, in his opinion, would be most unlikely in the Indian tradition, which tends to regard the sea with suspicion (personal communication). In the HSR, as we have seen, the water was actually drawn from the deep gorge in the sea where the spring was found with the *air Ma'ulhayat*.

the HSR and VR on the construction of the causeway and the special character of the stretch of water upon which it was built makes the correspondence even more fitting.

In further support of this claim, I would like to elaborate on a finding by Cecelia Levin as presented in her paper for the Jakarta workshop on the Old Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa*. Her finding concerns the good chance that the sculptural representation of the Rāma story at Prambanan does not, as was hitherto assumed, end with the scene of a copious banquet in the closing relief of the Brahmā temple, but with the scene of the reunion of Rāma and Sītā in the first relief of the Viṣṇu temple. Levin rightly remarks that if the placing of the end of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic on the third shrine was intentional, it may have served as a way of linking these two *avatāras* of Viṣṇu and bound all three shrines in greater unity. Supporting evidence for the re-identification of the first relief of the Viṣṇu temple lies in the fact that the HSR and the late-seventh century Sanskrit drama *Uttararāmacarita* by Bhavabhūti also end with the reuniting of Rāma and Sītā. At the end of Bhavabhūti's play, as noted by Levin, Prthivī invites Sītā into the abode of Rasātala. This offer she accepts, claiming 'I can no longer endure the vicissitudes of this world of mortals'. Later the Earth Goddess rescinds the invitation and reminds Sītā that she should stay on earth until her twin sons are weaned. Reiterating my comments at the Jakarta workshop, the point I would like to make is that Sītā's temporary stay in the abode of Rasātala, which is not depicted, parallels the earlier transition of the story from the Śiva to the Brahmā temple. Here, as we have seen, the transition also involved a descent into the Netherworld and the abode called Bumi Petala, which was the source of the elixir of life. Apparently, the central courtyard of Prambanan was not conceived as a neutral space, but served a dual function in the sculptural layout of the Rāma story over the three main shrines: as a means to separate and re-connect the story at two critical junctures, and as a symbolic marker of the Netherworld which, thought of as being located in the sea, was physically represented as a pool.⁶

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the reliefs on the exterior of the Śiva temple, particularly to the dancing 'celestial damsels' (*vidyādhari*, *apsaras*) and heavenly musicians (*gandharva*) depicted on the outer side of the balus-

6. In the *Rāmakerti* II, the story ends with the *Uttarakāṇḍa* episode of the appeal to the Earth. Sītā calls on the Earth to take her to her bosom, where she is hospitably received by Biruṇ (that is Varuṇa, the God of the Sea) (Brockington 1985:294). Although the appearance of the God of the Sea in this context is not explained, the connection with the sea and water that is implied could be significant. Possibly the Cambodian and Prambanan Rāma stories were based on a common Indian source that is lost to us.

trade. These reliefs have usually been examined in the context of choreographic studies as depicting particular dance movements as laid down in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, an Indian treatise dealing with dance and music, but little significance has so far been accorded to the fact that *apsarases* are intimately connected with water. *Apsarases*, their name being popularly derived from the word waters (*āp*, *apas*), appear during the Churning of the Milky Ocean. As the *Rāmāyaṇa* says, ‘because of the churning in the water, out of that liquid, the excellent women appeared, therefore were they (called) *Apsaras*’ (quoted by Fausbøll 1903:52; see also Kramrisch 1976, II:340, note 133; Liebert 1976:20).⁷ It is worth noting that the *apsarases* are not the only figures emerging in the myth of the Churning of the Milky Ocean who are depicted at Caṇḍi Prambanan, but further discussion goes beyond the scope of the present article.⁸

The Prambanan reliefs reexamined

One could object that the textual information of the HSR on the causeway episode cannot be applied directly to Caṇḍi Prambanan, especially when the correspondence between this text and the reliefs in question has been found imperfect in a number of respects by previous scholars, who therefore mostly resorted to VR to explain the end reliefs on Caṇḍi Śiva. Saran and Khanna, as we have noted, saw no need to consult the HSR at all. Although their decision was premature and misguided, by focussing instead on particular elements in the HSR, I might well be blamed for a similar bias. To see whether such blame would be justified, let us take another look at the relevant reliefs, beginning with Rāma’s crucial meeting with the God of the Sea, who is designated either as Sāgara (by VR, Groneman, Stutterheim, Saran and Khanna) or as Varuṇa (by the KR, Kaelan, Levin).⁹

7. Goldman’s translation (1984:210) of *sarga* 44.18 of the *Bālakāṇḍa* runs as follows: ‘The first things to appear were the physician Dhanvantari and the resplendent *apsarases*. Since [...] these last, the most resplendent of women, were born of that churning in the waters (*apsu*) from the elixir (*rasa*), they came to be known as *apsarases*’ (see also Bedekar 1967:33).

8. In an earlier publication (Jordaan 1991), I drew attention to various animals (for example, hares and elephants) and trees of heaven (*pārijāta*, *kalpataru*) depicted in its carvings, as well as to the equation in the KR of *suwuk* with the huge Kāla heads over the lintel of the temple chambers, who are explicitly compared with Rāhu trying to steal *amṛta*. Additionally, I now venture to suggest that some of the unidentified divinities on the subsidiary temples represent the deities who appear during the Churning of the Milky Ocean, such as Dhanvantari and Lakṣmī.

9. In VR it is Sāgara, Ocean personified, also referred to as the Lord of Streams and Rivers, who is addressed by Rāma, whereas Varuṇa is said to have his abode in his waters: ‘Hear me, O Thou [Sāgara] who art the refuge of Varuṇa’ (Shastri 1970:52). The KR, on the other hand, mentions the obstruction posed by the sea (designated as *tasik* and *samudra*), but it is Baruṇa

First of all, however, I want to address Stutterheim's neglected question about the indistinct objects that are depicted over the head of the god, which he tentatively identified as 'buildings (a city?) and a ship (?)'. After a close inspection of the bas-relief as well as old photographs made by Kassian Cephas (see Fig. 2), I think we can identify the profiles of the two rectangular squares as the roofs of two adjacent houses. The buildings are surrounded by a wall, and the whole ensemble may indeed symbolize a city, either in or at the shore of the sea. This location could help to explain the direction in which the waves over the head of the deity seem to be flowing. None of the versions consulted mentions a ship, a compound of houses or a city.¹⁰

Superficially, my discussion of Stutterheim's question about the nature of the distant objects appears to serve no purpose at all but to introduce confusion in what in other respects seems a perfectly clear scene, namely Rāma's meeting with either Sāgara or Varuṇa. However, close inspection of the relief shows that the identification is problematic and susceptible to improvement. As was already noted by J.Ph. Vogel in 1921, the sea god Varuṇa had not been accorded a nimbus as befits a deity, whereas J.L. Brandes (1909:31) was struck by the figure's remarkable hair bun, saying 'The hairdo of Baruṇa is very unusual: the hair is pulled straight over the head and tied together at the back of the head in a big toupee, similar to those worn by various gods such as Batara Guru.'¹¹ When I had the opportunity to take a personal look at the relief in question (see Fig. 2), the possibility dawned on me that the hairdo of the figure in the relief actually might represent a female chignon or hair bun (*konde*), and that the fig-

who emerges from the waters and pays homage to Rāma (Santoso 1980a:380).

10. The only object mentioned in the KR is Baruṇa's bejeweled throne, which rocked and swayed in the midst of the ocean as a consequence of the arrow shot into the Netherworld by Rāma, but it seems impossible to see a throne in the object(s) depicted in the relief. If the ensemble of houses indeed represents a distant city, it cannot relate to Rāvaṇa's capital, Trikuṭa, which was located near or on top of a mountain.

11. Except for Stutterheim, who made some inconclusive observations on the shape and ornamentation of crowns and hairdos (for example, Stutterheim 1989:232, note 531), these early remarks by Brandes were ignored as they are not mentioned again in the later literature. This was perhaps partly due to the fact that examination of his remarks is precluded for want of further information about the said Bhaṭāra Guru ('Divine Teacher') and his whereabouts at Prambanan—be it in the form of a statue or depicted in the reliefs. Moreover, it soon became clear that the designation Bhaṭāra Guru itself was too wide and imprecise. Not only had it been used indiscriminately for statues of Śiva displaying a teaching hand pose or seated in meditation posture, but also for the pot-bellied and bearded saint Agastya. As there is no obvious reason for associating either Śiva or Agastya with the causeway episode, Brandes' remarks about the unusual hairdo of the deity were ignored and thus could the orthodox identification of the figure as Varuṇa be maintained.

ure was not meant to represent Varuṇa at all, but a female figure. I will suggest a possible identification of this figure depicted in the relief in the next section.

Kats was wrong to say that 'the bridge is ready' for no bridge is visible in the middle section of the last relief panel. Why the causeway was not depicted can only be speculated upon. Was it because this scene was difficult to imagine for the Javanese of Old Mataram, most of whom were no doubt familiar with the Java Sea and the seemingly boundless Indian Ocean? It is perhaps for this reason that the causeway in a Balinese painting was depicted as a rope (!) stretching across a river between two trees.¹²

As was already stated above, the scene of the party's landing on the shore of Laṅkā should be interpreted as a means to make the story's breaking off less abrupt as well as to prepare the viewer for the continuation elsewhere (see Stutterheim 1928:123). As far as the continuation of the story on the Brahmā temple is concerned, it may be added that the causeway relief itself hints at this by showing the forefingers of Rāma and one of the leading monkeys pointing in the direction of this temple. Some of the monkeys are now armed with clubs and daggers, showing their readiness for the coming battle against Rāvaṇa.

On the identity of the female figure rising from the sea

Detailed comparative research on male/female hair-dresses in ancient Javanese art to validate the claim that the figure rising from the sea is not Varuṇa but a woman is not available. As this kind of research goes beyond the scope of this paper, I will render the alternative interpretation plausible by pointing out the similarities in the shape and decoration of the hair bun in question with those worn by unmistakably female figures in other Rāma reliefs of Prambanan.¹³

The first example is shown in Fig. 3. In the relief panel no. xvi of the Brahmā temple the woman sitting next to Rāma wears a bun. That she is a woman has never been questioned, but her identity is not yet firmly established.

12. See the *gambar wayang* picture in Kam (2000:164). In some Javanese Lakons, a 'living bridge' of monkeys is used to make the crossing to Laṅkā. In the Lao version *Gvay Dvorahbi*, rafts are constructed to cross the sea. In the Lao narration, the protagonists encounter problems in crossing rivers that are similar to those of the causeway episode proper.

13. A small number of male figures in the *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs of Prambanan are wearing hairdos corresponding to Brandes' description. These figures cannot be identified as Bhaṭṭāra Guru or any other male deity, but seem to represent ascetics or disciples of saints. For instance, in relief no. 3 of the Śiva temple, where they are in the retinue of the sage Viśvāmitra. What distinguishes their hairdos from those worn by women is the absence of ornaments in their piles of hair. As far as I can see, all female chignons have a string of pearls dangling at the top end of the bun, which is also shown in the hairdo of the figure in the causeway relief.

Figure 2: The girl rising from the sea (photo R. Jordaan)

Figure 3: Relief panel xvi of the Brahmā temple (photo OD 11348, LUB)

Most researchers are agreed that the relief links up with the immediately preceding relief that shows the reunion of Rāma and Sītā, and their holding court in Ayodhyā. Fontein (1997:196) posits that Sītā is no longer depicted in relief xvi and that her position has been taken over by her sister-in-law who in the HSR whispers malicious gossip about Sītā's fidelity and pregnancy into Rāma's ear. Levin, however, claims that Rāma and Sītā are still shown holding court in Ayodhyā in this relief. Perceiving a literary parallel with VR (vii.42), she wants the current identification to be amended as 'Sītā requests to visit the retreats of the *rsis* on the Ganges' (Levin 1999:336). In their analysis, Saran and Khanna (2004:70) revert to Fontein's suggestion that the relief panel depicts the slanderous gossip concerning Sītā, saying 'We see Rama in audience with his subjects who express their doubts about Sita's chastity. A mischievous court lady whispers slanderous comments about Sita in Rama's ear. In the *Hikayat Seri Rama* it is Rama's sister Kikewi Dewi who creates suspicion about Sita's chastity'. This interpretation has much to recommend itself. That the lady in question cannot be identified as Sītā is borne out precisely by the hair bun that contrasts sharply with the crown and nimbus accorded to Sītā in the preceding relief (xv) and in other Rāma reliefs as well. As noted earlier by Saran and Khanna, in many Indian *Rāmāyaṇas*, King Daśaratha, Rāma's father, did have a daughter. For this reason they suggested that the figure should be identified as a female figure in the background of the second relief panel of the Śiva temple. This figure wears a hair bun that is very similar to that of the palace lady in relief xvi. According to Saran and Khanna (2004:39), 'a reference to a daughter called Shanta is found in some of the early [unspecified] manuscripts of the Valmiki *Ramayana*. She later appears in Chandrawati's Bengali *Ramayana* as Kakua and in the *Hikayat Seri Rama* as Kikewi'.¹⁴ The reason why the woman cannot be an ordinary court

14. Saran and Khanna do not refer to Stutterheim (1925:100, 240 note 126; 1989:81, 201 note 126) where the identification of the girl in the second relief panel of the Śiva temple as Kikewi/Kukuā was first advanced, along with the reference to Candravatī's East Bengal *Rāmāyaṇa*. The name Śāntā is found, among others, in Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*, where she is represented as Daśaratha's first child. She was married to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, who officiated as head-priest at the sacrifice that Daśaratha had offered for the birth of male progeny. Belvalkar, the translator of Bhavabhūti's work, notes that the epic does not say who Śāntā's mother was (Belvalkar 1915:xlvi, note 1). I am not aware of the origin of the name Kikewi, but going by the resemblance of their names, it might be conjectured that it is a pun and that the unknown poet who coined the name had the intention to suggest that she is the daughter of Kaikeyī. Kaikeyī herself was the daughter of the king of the Kekaya people, King Aśvapati. If the conjecture of this post-Vālmikian parentage proves correct, it would imply that both the father (Daśaratha) and his son (Rāma) were victims to machinations of a mother (Kaikeya) and her daughter (Kikewi). Such a literary parallel is not unattractive from a narrative point of view. For more information

lady, in my opinion, is her sitting tenderly close to Rāma, with one of her hands on his hip. No woman would be allowed such intimacy, except for Sītā or a close relative, such as a mother or sister; the latter being the most likely in this case. This furnishes another example of the usefulness of the HSR.

The second example of identical female hair buns is found in the second relief panel on the Viṣṇu temple. Accepting Levin's amended identification of the first relief as the true closing scene of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the second relief starts the series of reliefs dealing with the birth and the adventures of Kṛṣṇa. This relief shows a king in the company of three palace ladies, all of them wearing hair buns with a string of pearls dangling from the top end, and a string of pearls or a flat crown on the top of their heads.¹⁵ Whoever they are, the hair buns of the ladies are very similar to that of the figure emerging from the sea in the causeway relief.

If it is granted that these examples furnish sufficient evidence for the identification of the bun as a female hair-dress and that the figure in the causeway relief indeed represents a woman, her identity nevertheless remains a mystery. Who is she? How can we explain her prominent position at Prambanan? Was she modelled on another mythological figure and/or did she herself serve as a role model for other mythical figures?

No such female figure is mentioned in VR and the KR. The HSR, on the other hand, relates how during the building of the causeway the monkeys are unable to subdue a certain area of the sea from which water is spurting high into the air in spite of all their efforts to control it. Enraged over this, Rāma prepares to shoot his arrow Gandiwati into the sea. At that moment a young woman (a virgin girl, according to Zieseniss) emerges from the water, informing Rāma of the presence of the deep chasm in the ocean that gives access to the Netherworld. The spring which is located there is the source of the earlier mentioned elixir of life, *air Ma'ulhayat*. The girl advises Rāma to have his monkey-warriors drink from it and thus become invulnerable. She then disappears.

In the HSR another female figure appears after Rāma has shot an arrow into the sea to vent his anger over the disappearance of a section of the causeway. She remains anonymous. The girl informs Rāma of Dewata Mulia Raya's objection to the construction of the causeway, and, subsequently, at the command of Maharaja Bisnu, directs him to the gorge with the spring of rejuvenating water.

on the elder sister of Rāma, see Sahai (1996, 1:3, 25–31).

15. Both Moertjipto and Bambang Prasetya (1997:23) and Fontein (1997:199) believe that the relief represents King Vasudeva and his Queens Rohiṇi and Devakī, but they fail to mention the third palace lady.

She tells Rāma that he is a descendant of Maharaja Bisnu, calling the latter his (fore)father (*nenenda*), and then disappears.

It is not clear whether Dewata Mulia Raya ('The Supreme God') and Bisnu ('Viṣṇu') should be seen as identical or two distinct deities. In any case, after Rāma has prayed to Dewata Mulia Raya, the causeway rises up from the sea and its construction by the monkeys is resumed.

The information provided by the HSR is too fragmentary and confusing for us to be able to identify the mysterious young woman in the sea, but comparison with variant myths in Southeast Asia will show that she has much in common with the 'Golden Mermaid' (Suvarṇamatsyā, Supanna Matcha) or 'Serpent Princess' (Massa) or 'Fish Princess' (Tuan Puteri Ikan) figuring in the Thai, Cambodian, Laotian and other Malay versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* dealing with the construction of the causeway.¹⁶ Very briefly summarized, in the *Ramakien*, the Thai version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the construction of the causeway is halted by the disappearance of the boulders beneath the waves of the sea. Hanuman discovers that sea creatures are carrying away the rocks. They are led by a mermaid, Supanna Matcha ('Golden Fish Maiden'). After being caught by him, Supanna Matcha surrenders to Hanuman's romantic overtures. She informs Hanuman that she is the daughter of Totsagan (Rāvaṇa) with the Queen of the Ocean. She promises to assist in the completion of the causeway by having her sea minions replace the rocks they had carried away. In the *Phra Lak Phra Lam* of the Lao, the four daughters of the serpent king of the Netherworld (Pattahlum), led by Massa, destroy the part of the causeway that they were unable to pass. As the repair work is also destroyed, Hanuman and three monkey-brothers dive down and meet the four sisters to whom they make love. The causeway is completed and crossed over by Rāma and his army. In the Malay *Cerita Maharaja Wana*, the destructive creatures of the sea are led by the turtle king and the Fish Princess Suvarṇamatsyā. She surrenders to Hanuman after his killing of a giant crab and the turtle king. Hanuman and Suvarṇamatsyā make love in her submarine abode. She informs him about the spring of the water of life. With this water Rāma will revive Vibhīṣaṇa whose dead body is found drifting on a raft. The monkeys cross the causeway, with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa riding on Hanuman as lion-mount. In the so-called *wayang kulit Siam* of the Malays, the serpent king churns the sea to create a great whirlpool that sucks Hanuman down. He captures Suvarṇamatsyā, who takes him to her father, the serpent king. Hanuman marries Suvarṇamatsyā. The construction work is resumed

16. See, for instance, the discussion in Raghavan (1975), Sahai (1972), Kam (2000), and Singaravelu (2004).

and various problems are overcome. In the Javanese *Sĕrat Kanda*, Rāvaṇa has a son, Sogasura, by a fish princess (*putri mina*), named Gaṅgavatī (Stutterheim 1989:54). In the Patani version excerpted by Winstedt (1929:431), her name is Linggang Kiamit.

Figure 4: Hanuman and Supanna Matcha in amorous embrace (paper rubbing from a bas-relief of Wat Phra Jetubon, Bangkok; adapted from Cadet 1971:157)

From the above-mentioned comparative research, but also from my previous investigations into kindred mythological figures in Indonesia, it can be concluded that the golden-bodied 'Fish Princess' and 'Serpent Princess' are identical creatures, who are more generally known in the literature as Nāgī or Nāginī, 'snake-goddesses' represented as 'mermaids' with a human body and a serpen-

tine tail (Liebert 1976:188; Jordaan 1984).¹⁷ On this ground, the descriptions of the abode of the Nāga(devas) in folk tales and the epics can be invoked to confirm the identification of the above-mentioned distant objects as buildings in the Netherworld. According to the *Mahābhārata*, for instance, the Serpent-world (known as Nāgaloka or Pātāla) is crowded with hundreds of different kinds of palaces, houses, towers and pinnacles, and strewn with wonderful large and small pleasure-grounds (Fausbøll 1903:29; Van Buitenen 1978:387–9).

Now, can the HSR and kindred Southeast Asian stories provide us with a clue about the identity of the girl who is depicted in the Prambanan relief? Although it is difficult to say whether the girl is the daughter of the God of the Sea or the God of the Netherworld, it is interesting to note that some of the above-mentioned Southeast Asian ideas on mermaids are implicitly present in Vālmīki's description of Varuṇa's authority: 'The rivers, whose lord he was, rose around him: Ganga, Yamuna, and the others, luminous Goddesses. His people, sea serpents with flashing jewels on their heads, and his nereids and mermaid queens, all rose around that scintillating Deva. They stood treading the crest of waves' (Menon 2001:379).¹⁸ But how could such a powerful deity as Varuṇa yield pride of place to one of his mermaid queens, a Nāgī? Could this be an example of so-called localization, by which is meant the adaptation of cultural elements to local beliefs and practices?¹⁹ So far, my search for Indian parallels has yielded rather poorly documented examples, such as the South Indian Sea Goddess, Maṇimekhalā (see, for example, Coedès 1911; Lévi 1931; Lokesh Chandra 1995; Hildebeitel 1988:202–11, 225). Is it possible to see in the girl the archetype of Nyai Lara Kidul, whom the Javanese still venerate as the Goddess of the Southern Ocean and who, as a matter of mythological fact, is a Serpent Queen? This suggestion may seem far-fetched, but Java scholars will agree that Rāma's attempt to solicit the help of the God of the Sea strongly reminds of the stories about the activities of seventeenth-century Javanese noblemen aspiring

17. The transformation of the serpent maiden into a fish-like creature, and the distinction between the Indian concept of the Nāga and the Chinese dragon deserves further investigation, but goes beyond the scope of this article. On the fish-like maiden, see Przyluski (1925); on the Chinese dragon design in mainland Southeast Asian art, see Boisselier (1966:320).

18. This is a free rendering, but it does illustrate the interpretative possibilities of Vālmīki's seminal ideas.

19. As for the phenomenon of localization, it deserves mention that John Brockington, in his comments on the earlier workshop paper, has noted that 'This material on Nyai Lara Kidul strongly suggests that in Java (and elsewhere in Southeast Asia?) the sea was regularly thought of as feminine (in sharp contrast to North India, but perhaps similarly to South India with Maṇimekhalā/Maṇimekhalai). Is this the primary motivation of Sāgara/Varuṇa being replaced by a female figure?' (personal communication).

to become king over Java, such as Panembahan Senapati and scores of other figures in Javanese history. As did Rāma before him, Senapati meditates on the shore of the great Ocean to establish contact with the Ruler of the Sea. According to the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, Senapati's prayers are so fervent as to cause great turmoil in nature (*gara-gara*) that comes close to the effects of Rāma's arrows (Olthof 1943:78–82). As with Varuṇa, the unrest among the denizens of the sea prompts the Goddess of the Southern Ocean to emerge from the waters for investigation. On seeing Senapati in meditation on the beach the Serpent Queen implores him to stop this and submissively invites him into her subterranean abode, which closely parallels Hanuman's amorous stay with Suvarṇamatsyā. Although representing a venerable old mythological figure, Nyai Lara Kidul is assumed to be able to rejuvenate herself periodically, much like a real snake casting off its old skin. The goddess tells Senapati that his wishes to become the supreme ruler of Java will be fulfilled. She promises support to his cause. The myth of the marital alliance between Senapati and the Queen of the Southern Ocean is still enacted and perpetuated by some of the present rulers of Central Java.²⁰

20. Considering the striking semi-historical and mythological 'parallels', I do not want to exclude the possibility that the lost narrative followed at Prambanan had Rāma, not Hanuman, having an affair with the mermaid. Relief xL, in which their encounter is depicted, shows that Rāma is positioned much closer to the mermaid than Hanuman, who seems to look rather shyly in her direction from behind Sugrīva's back. I have so far been unable to find any reference in the *Rāmāyaṇa* literature to support this bold hypothesis, but a few non-Vālmiki examples can be offered to support my idea. The information provided by the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, assumed to date from the thirteenth century, on Viṣṇu's incarnation as a golden-coloured fish (*Matsyavatāra*) in order to retrieve from Pātāloka the Veda books stolen from Brahmā would seem to make such an adventure underground by Rāma less inconceivable (Jouveau-Dubreuil 1914:74–6). This holds also for the episode in the Shellabear version of the HSR in which envoys of Pātāla Maharāyan discover that Rāma is to spend the night on a *gēta nāga*; their report prompts Pātāla Maharāyan to abduct Rāma personally. Regrettably, it remains unclear what a *gēta nāga* is. Zieseniss tentatively suggested that it could be a couch in the shape of a serpent, which is not very helpful (Zieseniss 1963:75, note 2). Perhaps a faint echo of the lost episode can be heard in a modern Indian retelling in which Hanuman fulfills his promise to Candrasena, a captive serpent princess, to bring Rāma to her bedchamber in return for her help against Mahirāvaṇa. However, to prevent their union Hanuman takes the form of a bee and hollows out the leg of the bed on which the Nāga princess had hoped to seduce Rāma. The bed collapses when Rāma sits on it, signalling the impossibility of their union. But Rāma comforts the maiden with the promise that he will wed her in his next incarnation (Lutgendorf 2007:329). Finally, I would like to remind readers of Arjuna's marriage with Ulūpī, daughter of the serpent king, mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* (1.206, see Van Buitenen 1973:400–1; compare Zoetmulder 1974:384; Creese 1998:167–83). Future research may confirm that it was Rāma who served as a model for the Central Javanese royalty in their dealings with the Queen of the Southern Ocean, irrespective of whether they were aware of these ancient, ninth-century roots or not.

In search of the lost text

The identification of the figure in the relief as the girl from the HSR has its problems, and also raises all kinds of new questions. One problem to resolve concerns the conflicting interpretations of the scene of the fishes swallowing the stones thrown into the sea by the monkeys. Regrettably, the identification of the girl as an Nāgī does not help in deciding whether in the next relief the fishes are assisting or obstructing the monkeys in their construction of the causeway. However, considering that the supplication gesture of the Serpent Princess in the previous relief-scene indicates her total submission to Rāma, it is reasonable to assume that this also holds for the fishes, her subjects. In the *Ramakien*, this is what actually happens: after surrendering to Hanuman, the mermaid Supanna Matcha orders her 'sea minions' to replace the stones they had taken away (Cadet 1971:154–5; Olsson 1968:169). This is also what happens in a Patani version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Winstedt 1929:431). Besides, to propose that the fishes are resisting the causeway, at this late stage, amounts to a 'narrative inconsistency'. It is one of several types of textual flaws that J. Brockington and M. Brockington (2006) took into account in their reconstruction of the original VR text. Still, to be able to settle this matter conclusively we need to know more about the lost text(s) followed at Prambanan, which for use by semi-literate artisans and sculptors presumably was condensed into a sort of relief scenario, offering an outline of the story in the form of drawings with notes specifying the exact contents and sequential arrangement of the Rāma reliefs.²¹

Unlike Levin, I do not think we have to follow the scenario of the HSR in this, and assume that the fishes are resisting the construction of the causeway. Indeed, to admit that the HSR proves useful in interpreting scenes which are at variance with VR does not necessarily imply that the HSR should always be resorted to in such cases. As Fontein stated, 'any variant in any text' can be of value to us, and the *Ramakien* and the Patani narration offer an apt example of

21. I have called such a manual or series of scripted instructions a relief scenario in analogy with a film scenario. We could in this connection think of *lontar* picture books similar to those offered for sale in many Balinese tourist resorts. These (newly-made) picture books usually consist of a small number of carved or painted leaves illustrating a well-known episode of the *Rāmāyaṇa* such as the deer hunt by Rāma and the subsequent abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa. To my knowledge, such fragile picture books have not survived the ages but some ancient Javanese manuscripts with illustrations and diagrams have been found in the Merapi-Merbabu collection (personal communication Willem van der Molen, May 2009). Also relevant is that picture-scroll narration was a well-known medium in Gupta and post-Gupta India (Levin 1999:303, note 9). Stutterheim (1989:18) mentions the possible use of stencils (*Schablonen*) in the design of the reliefs.

this. If the HSR has failed us in this case, we should keep in mind the fact that it is a fourteenth to seventeenth-century Malay text containing numerous other divergences from VR, which are not found at Caṇḍi Prambanan either. For instance, the representation in the HSR of Hanuman as the son of Rāma, who, on the latter's express wishes, is recognizable by his human face and earrings. At Prambanan, as we have seen, Hanuman is unmistakably a monkey with a tail and does not wear clothes or ear-rings. In some HSR versions Rāma is either carried on Hanuman's shoulders or Hanuman acts as his mount in the form of an enormous lion, none of which is visible in the causeway relief either.

The successive appearance in the Prambanan reliefs of the submissive Serpent Princess and the stone-swallowing fishes suggests that the narrative followed by the Javanese sculptors had no place for Rāvaṇa's son Gaṅgā Mahā Sūra. Possibly he was not even known in this role during the late eighth to early ninth century when the Prambanan temple complex was built.²² From a narrative point of view, Gaṅgā Mahā Sūra's appearance in the HSR is so unsatisfactory as to arouse suspicion of being an interpolation dating from the period when parts of the Indo-Malay archipelago witnessed the conversion to Islam, during the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. That the narration of the causeway episode was not altogether clear to the redactors of the HSR is demonstrated by the exempting endnote that says 'and Allah knows best (whether) this story ... (is true)' (as quoted by Ziesenis 1963:68, note 5). All in all, I think that we can now safely state that the fishes depicted in the causeway relief are indeed collaborating in the construction work.

Considering that some of the earlier mentioned mainland Southeast Asian variants of the causeway episode come from as far as inland Cambodia and Laos, some readers may feel that the links with Prambanan have become increasingly distant and tenuous. Paradoxically, the opposite is the case: these distant parallels may well bring us closer to the original lost text. As was first understood by François Bizot (1983:265), the wide regional distribution of Rāma stories with fishes involved in the construction of the causeway implies 'the existence of a tradition of the epic that is very ancient in south-east (sic) Asia, common notably to Indonesia and Cambodia, going beyond the poem of Vālmiki and the setting of Angkor—but not the Indian sources—and of which at least part of the modern versions in the Khmer, Thai and Malay languages have retained a trace'.

22. According to Lutgendorf (2004:153), the oldest literary versions of the Rāma story that depict Rāvaṇa's son do not appear until the late-medieval period, that is, the twelfth to fourteenth centuries AD.

So far, my search for ancient Indian antecedents of the episode with fishes involved in the construction of the causeway has yielded only few leads. For instance, in Pravarasena's *Rāvaṇavaha*, better known as *Setubandha*, a Prakrit text dating from the sixth century, the mountains flung in the ocean by the monkeys 'vanished, even though so lofty, in the mouth of a whale-devouring monster, like a blade of grass' (Canto VII, verse 8). Commenting upon this verse, Saran and Khanna (2004:86, note 20) state that 'it is generally assumed that many later retellings of the Rama tale in India and Southeast Asia built upon this briefest of hints', by which they seem to suggest that Pravarasena's text could have served as an early prototype for the HSR and Prambanan reliefs, at least for the causeway episode. This suggestion deserves further investigation as we know that Pravarasena's work was read in ancient Southeast Asia. For instance, in the *Harṣacarita* of Bāṇa (seventh century AD) it is said that the fame of Pravarasena 'went to the other shore of the ocean, namely to many foreign countries, just as did the army of the monkeys cross over to the other end (Laṅkā) of the ocean by means of a bridge' (Basak 1959:v). This statement finds confirmation in a Cambodian inscription of the time of King Yaśovarman I (probably 889–900 AD) in which Pravarasena's *Setubandha* is explicitly referred to and which led Sarkar (1980:118) to remark that it might well have been current in Java too during that period.

However, a close scrutiny of the relevant parts of the text shows that a direct link between the *Setubandha* and Prambanan is improbable. Except for the actions of the fish, on the whole Pravarasena's representation of the causeway episode follows Vālmīki faithfully.²³ For instance, Vibhīṣaṇa's defection and coronation take place in Canto v, well before the construction and crossing of the causeway in Cantos VII–VIII. Further, no mention is made of a girl in the sea, only of the God of the Sea or Ocean God, who gives Rāma the advice to build a bridge. It is Sugrīva, however, who urged Nala to complete the bridge to overcome initial difficulties during the construction. The fishes that first swallow the stones and later assist in the completion of the bridge do this of their own accord, without any further explanation. Nevertheless, while it is evident that the *Setubandha* did not serve as the model for the HSR and Prambanan, we cannot exclude the possibility that the text had inspired another Indian or perhaps a Hindu-Javanese poet to recast certain elements in a new and somewhat

23. Saran and Khanna refer to the action of only one 'whale-devouring monster', but in the *Setubandha* text that I consulted it concerns a number of sea-whales (*timi*) of enormous size (Basak 1959:xxxiv, xxxvii). In the *Jānakiharāṇa* by Kumāradāsa, whose work was also known in maritime Southeast Asia, mention is made of groups of such huge fishes, *timīṅgalas* (see Paranavitana and Godakumbura 1967:xlvi, 349).

differently arranged overall story that was subsequently adopted as the prototype for both the HSR and Prambanan. Particularly relevant for the present discussion is the deliberate linking by Pravarasena of the construction of the causeway with the legend of the Churning of the Ocean. For instance, where he refers to the exposure of the nether regions of Pātāla during the construction work and simultaneously also alludes to the Churning myth. Thus, '[t]he waters of the ocean were raised upwards in the horizon along with their brilliant gems which previously lay hidden in its bottom. [...] Even mountains with high summits sank into the ocean when hurled by the monkeys. The ocean roared being split by mountains thrown into it, as if it was being churned a second time without, however, producing nectar' (Basak 1959:xxxiv). Clearly, for an imaginative later poet, this association could easily have been developed into the opposite direction wherein the construction of the causeway either gave access to Pātāla and the nectar of immortality (as in the HSR) or yielded the nectar itself (as in the lost text that served as the model for the architects of Prambanan).

Conclusion

Reexamination of the closing Rāma reliefs on the Śiva temple has revealed a number of flaws in current descriptions of the causeway episode of Caṇḍi Prambanan. A major revision is the identification of the figure in the sea as an Nāgī instead of a male sea-god. The analysis shows that the HSR offers even more possibilities to explain discrepancies between the reliefs and VR than Stutterheim and Fontein suspected. Very likely this also holds for the defection of Vibhīṣaṇa, an event which in the HSR occurs after the crossing of the causeway, as at Prambanan. Earlier I had quoted Fontein to the effect that the sculptors might for dramaturgic reasons have postponed his introduction until the viewer had reached Caṇḍi Brahmā, where the exploits of Vibhīṣaṇa were to be shown. His suggestion was supported by a reference to present-day performances of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Malaysia, but it could very well be that the performances are simply following the HSR in this regard.

It is an interesting question why the HSR is so terse on the girl in the sea and proves less useful for the interpretation of the Prambanan causeway episode than the still much later *Ramakien*. To attribute this fact to its greater distortion, though true, is facile if we do not attempt to find the cause that goes beyond the wear and tear inherent in the passage of time. Such 'normal' distortion includes accidental changes resulting from the loss of prototypes, damage of texts, copying and translation errors by redactors and copyists, and the like. A major cause of textual change was the introduction of Islam in the Indo-Malay archipelago

and the conversion of the majority of its peoples to the new religion, in contrast to Cambodia and Thailand where Buddhism remained the dominant creed. As is known, Islam rejects notions such as polytheism and reincarnation, which are central ideas in Hinduism and Buddhism, and part and parcel of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.²⁴ Regarding the non-accidental changes, we must proceed from the assumption that just as the insertion of new elements did not occur in a haphazard way and was not without consequences for the textual fabric as a whole, so is the case with deletions, and they too deserve to be studied for their systemic effects.

To determine the origins and the sequence of the interweaving of narrative elements in the extant Southeast Asian Rāma stories is a notoriously difficult undertaking, but is nevertheless very important for the reconstruction of the cultural history of the region. Some dating indicators are relatively straightforward, such as the simultaneous occurrence of Hindu and Muslim names and concepts, like the designations for the Almighty, Dewata Mulia Raya and Allah ta'alah; the absence of any references to firearms (allowing for a dating before the eighties of the fourteenth century); the use of Tamil, Old Javanese, Persian or other non-Malay terms and expressions, et cetera.²⁵ However, one of the recognized weaknesses of research using such indicators is their narrow focus and fragmentary nature, making one run the risk of losing sight of the text as a possibly coherent and meaningful whole. This certainly holds for comparative textual research yielding enumerations of all kinds of correspondences ('parallels') and differences ('divergences'). Sometimes it looks as if the listing of mutual differences has become an end in itself, instead of laying the foundations for research that will reveal how some of these differences correlate and delve deeper into the reasons for this covariance and patterning, and thus help to find meaningful textual changes. Moreover, the chances of findings such

24. Gerth Van Wijk (1891) claimed that the notion of reincarnation had become something meaningless for the Malay and, consequently, that Rāma had developed into a sort of folk hero rather than a deity, a view contested by Stutterheim. I think, however, that a gradual change in Rāma's stature is noticeable in Islamic regions of Southeast Asia that contrasts with the increasing theological elevation of Rāma in South Asia, to the point of his becoming 'otiose'. The latter development, according to Lutgendorf, calls for a mediator or intercessor, which could help to explain why people are now turning to Sitā and Hanuman for this. The status elevation of Hanuman and his increasing humanization as reflected in his use of clothes and earrings support Lutgendorf's interpretation. Apparently, Hanuman being imputed with 'human' traits and follies was less offensive to orthodox Muslims than Rāma's divinization.

25. The argument of the absence of references to firearms is from Brakel (1979:7). Brakel's article, however, is primarily based on linguistic and textual evidence, such as the use of Persian loan-words and literary models.

patterns are slim if the research is limited to only a small number of Southeast Asian and Indian texts. Small samples obviously do not allow for reliable statements about the origins of a particular innovation. Hence the often premature claims about the Malay or Javanese origins of particular innovations and adaptations. Time and again the divergences proved to be known in India itself.²⁶ As is demonstrated by studies of this kind, it would seem more fruitful to focus on one theme, episode or character only and simultaneously to broaden the geographical range so as to include as many Southeast Asian and Indian narratives as possible.

What the lost *Rāmāyaṇa* text followed at Prambanan looked like exactly we cannot tell, but the chances of a theoretical reconstruction on the basis of its constituent elements with the aid of advanced computer programs such as ATLAS have definitely improved. To further increase the chances of success, more elements need to be salvaged by the collaborative efforts of art historians and other scholars of ancient Java.

Postscript

Trying to find the Indian non-Vālmiki prototype of the Prambanan causeway episode is like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. Apart from the philological research in the vast *Rāmāyaṇa* literature and numerous unedited manuscripts, it seems warranted for comparative and dating purposes to look for Indian sculptural representations of the causeway episode in which the fishes and the Nāgī appear. One pertinent example is found on the Amṛteśvara Temple in Amṛtapura, a Hoysaḷa temple, which has a relief showing monkeys engaged in the construction of a causeway with an unidentified female figure, possibly a Nāgī, in the lower right corner of the relief (see Fig. 5, Gerard M.M. Foekema; see also Evans 1997:68–9, Fig. 30 and 31). Interestingly, at Amṛteśvara the defection of Vibhiṣaṇa to Rāma's camp takes place after the crossing, which corresponds to the non-Vālmikian sequence followed at Prambanan and in the HSR.

26. See, for instance, studies by Bulcke (1953) on Hanuman's birth, and by Sahai (1972) and Brockington (2007) on Sītā's birth.

Figure 5: Monkey army building the bridge and Vibhīṣaṇa seeking Rāma's protection (photo Gerard M.M. Foekema, P-021260, Leiden University Library, Kern Institute)

Figure 5a: Detail of Figure 5