R. Jordaan

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ROY E. JORDAAN

SŪRYA AND NAIRṚTA ON THE ŚIVA TEMPLE OF PRAMBANAN¹

The problem

Recently, in connection with an attempt to identify four reliefs on the Śiva temple of the Loro Jonggrang temple complex at Prambanan, in Central Java, I touched upon an old difference of opinion between two Dutch specialists in Hindu-Javanese iconography concerning the position of the deities Nairṛta and Sūrya among the *lokapāla* (guardians of the sky) depicted at the Śiva temple (see Jordaan and Sedyawati 1990:22, note 9).

Tonnet (1908), who was the first to recognize that all the bas-reliefs on the central part of the temple building represented Hindu deities, and not a mixed assembly of Hindu and Buddhist deities as had been assumed previously (Groneman 1893), proposed the following identifications for the guardians of the quarters of the sky:

East	- Indra 2x
Southeast	- Agni 2x
South	- Yama 2x
Southwest	- Nairṛta and Sūrya
West	- Varuṇa 2x
Northwest	- Vāyu 2x
North	- Kuvera and Soma
Northeast	- Īśāna 2x

Many years later, Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1955) reviewed the matter and agreed with fourteen of the sixteen identifications listed above. As for the other two, she suggested substituting Sūrya and Kuvera for Tonnet's Nairṛta and Soma. Van Lohuizen rightly remarked that her corrections of the identifications 'improved the group as a whole for we now have a

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ROY E. JORDAAN is a private scholar who obtained his Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Leiden. His main field of interest at present is ancient Javanese society and culture, in particular Old Mataram and the Hindu-Javanese temple complex of Loro Jonggrang at Prambanan. His publications in this field include 'The Mystery of Nyai Lara Kidul' (1984) and 'A Holy Water Sanctuary at Prambanan' (1989). Dr. Jordaan may be contacted at Galileistraat 3, 2561 SX The Hague, The Netherlands.

regular system in which each of the eight cardinal points is represented by two panels depicting the same god' (Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1955:380). She went on to say that the eight gods represented were identical with the *aṣṭadīkṣpāla* (guardians of the eight quarters of the sky), 'apart from the common substitution of Sūrya for Nairṛta'.

It is the substitution of Sūrya for Nairṛta in ancient Central Java in respect of which the iconographer's shoe pinches, and which forms the subject of this paper. For the non-specialist reader this problem may perhaps look somewhat trivial. Yet, by giving it closer attention, I hope to show that the question really is quite interesting and significant, because it is ultimately connected with such issues as the cultural contacts between India and Java in ancient times and the selective adaptation by the Javanese of elements from diverse Indian religious traditions. My partial re-examination of the change-over in ancient Java from the *aṣṭadīkṣpāla* to other sets of guardian deities, as traced by Van Lohuizen, will bear out this point.

Aṣṭadīkṣpāla in ancient Java reconsidered

As is already indicated by their name, the *aṣṭadīkṣpāla* are a group of eight (*aṣṭa*) deities, each of which guards a particular direction (*diś*) or quarter of the sky. Inspection of Hindu iconographic dictionaries shows that the composition of the group is relatively fixed, although it allows of some regional and periodical variation. The standard list in the *Purāṇas* is Indra (E), Yama (S), Varuṇa (W), Kubera (N), Agni (SE), Nirṛti (SW), Vāyu (NW) and Īśāna (NE). The substitution of some gods by others occurs, but not arbitrarily. Occasionally, for instance, Īśāna may be substituted by Candra, Soma or Pṛthivī, Yama by Dharma, Nirṛti by Sūrya, and Vāyu by Marut (Rao 1914-1916; Banerjea 1956; Liebert 1976; Stutley 1985).

It should be noted that in later times, one or more *dīkṣpāla* were often added, for instance at the centre, zenith or nadir. The group of nine in particular became very popular during the late East Javanese period (c. 14th century A.D.); among specialists on ancient Java the group became generally known by its Balinese name *navasanga* or *navadevata*, 'the nine deities'.

To be able to identify a *dīkṣpāla*, one cannot rely solely on its position at the temple. In order to decide whether a relief (or a statue) fits a particular quarter of the sky, this information has to be combined with whatever other iconographic data are available, comprising the deity's most characteristic attributes, special hand poses (*mudrā*), vehicle or mount (*vāhana*), general appearance (e.g. colour, body shape, serene or demonic facial expression), and the like. Sometimes the identification is a straightforward affair, but usually it is not. The reliefs at the Śiva temple of Loro Jonggrang will serve as an illustration of some of the difficulties besetting iconographic research.

While one can safely assume that the relevant reliefs of the Śiva building

Plate 1 (compare Groneman 1893, plate XLIV)

are still in their original positions, they are all more or less damaged. In some cases, the damage is so serious that it has obliterated the deity's attributes. This is a major problem, given the paucity of other iconographic data. For instance, none of the *aṣṭadikpāla* is escorted or represented by its vehicle, which normally constitutes a fairly reliable mark for identification. The identificatory potential of other iconographic clues is either too general or too subjective and vague to be of much use. The reliefs of

Nairṛta and Sūrya are a case in point (see plates 1 and 2, corresponding to plates No. XLIV and No. XLIII in Groneman 1893).

Tonnet thought that Sūrya was the main deity portrayed in relief No. XLIV. Apparently, her identification was based mainly on the lotus with the jewel which the deity carries in his left hand, although she had said before that this attribute was 'hardly distinctive'. Tonnet further argued that the forehead of the figure, wrinkled in the aspect of a 'frown' or scowl, might be interpreted as constituting an aesthetic representation of the deity's third eye, because to her it seemed that the Prambanan sculptors had tried to avoid physical absurdities as much as possible. As for the other relief, No. XLIII, Tonnet declared it the most puzzling of all. Again, the lotus topped by a jewel reminded her of Sūrya, but still she opted for Nairṛta because of the deity's demonic appearance. Furthermore, she believed that the deity's crown resembled the one worn by the demon king Rāvaṇa in other reliefs.

Van Lohuizen rejected Tonnet's identification of Nairṛta, because the god carried neither a *daṇḍa* (rod) nor a *khadga* (sword), which are Nairṛta's common attributes. To her 'it seemed safer [...] to identify [the deities on] both panels as Sūrya as they are identical and there is nothing in favour of an identification of the left-hand one as Nairṛta' (Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1955:379). Rather than as a third eye, Van Lohuizen took the 'frown' as a normal indication of a form of *krodha* ('wrath'), which fitted in with the inauspicious region of the Southwest. Attributing to the left-hand Sūrya (= No. XLIV) a far more pronounced form of *krodha* than the right-hand Sūrya, she then posed the question whether all the left-hand panels of all the pairs portray the *krodha* aspects and the right-hand panels the benevolent aspects of the eight gods.

To my knowledge, Van Lohuizen's corrections and suggestions have never been contested. The substitution of Sūrya for Nairṛta in any case did not attract much critical attention. My own interest in the matter was only aroused when my tentative identifications of four other bas-reliefs located at a higher level (viz., above the lintels of the *cellas*) of the same temple appeared to conflict with some of the conclusions reached by Van Lohuizen.² In my opinion, the deities represented in the four higher-level reliefs are Śiva (East), Sūrya (South), Pārvatī (West), and Candra (North) respect-

² It would be unfair to expatiate on my differences of opinion with Tonnet, because at the time of her writing nothing was known about the existence of the other reliefs. Van Lohuizen's article was published one year after the restoration of the Śiva temple had been completed. By that time the existence of the four reliefs had long since been reported by the Archeological Service (O.D.) of the Netherlands Indies (e.g. *Oudheidkundig Verslag* 1920), as well as documented by photographs (O.D. nos. 5230, 6716 and 6717). By coincidence, Van Lohuizen's article appeared in the same volume of *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* in which Bernet Kempers commemorated the restoration of the Śiva temple with a detailed description of the building, including the four unidentified reliefs. It seems likely that Van Lohuizen, for whatever reason, deliberately restricted her analysis to the bas-reliefs of the *aṣṭadikpāla* proper.

Plate 2 (compare Groneman 1893, plate XLIII)

ively. In proposing these identifications, I took account not only of the iconographic details of each of the reliefs concerned, but also of their more elevated position – which I interpreted as a symbolic indication of the higher status of the four deities vis-à-vis the *aṣṭadikpāla*. Obviously, the double presence of Sūrya is not compatible with this interpretation and provided the immediate occasion for my raising doubts about Van Lohuizen's disagreement with Tonnet over Nairṛta and Sūrya. Because of the

implications of the issue, it is worthwhile reconsidering all the arguments.

First, let us consider the weight of Van Lohuizen's argument about the absence of Nairṛta's common attributes, i.e. the sword, rod and shield. Though correct, I do not consider this observation decisive, because the absence of a deity's attributes is a recurrent phenomenon in iconographic research. As regards the lotus with the jewel, on the other hand, Van Lohuizen created the impression that it is a distinctive attribute of Sūrya, which it is not. The most distinctive feature of Sūrya are his high boots, at least in the North Indian tradition. A lotus (with or without objects) can be carried by a host of other Hindu gods and goddesses. When the lotus is used as a sign of Sūrya, the deity invariably holds two full-blown flowers (*vikasitapadma*), with one stalk in each hand. Preferably he should stand in an upright position with the lotuses projecting above the shoulder (Gupta 1980:52). The elevated relief meets this condition much better: it features a deity with two full-blown lotuses reaching up to his shoulders. One can only guess why our Sūrya (if it is him) is not depicted standing erect. The most plausible reason seems to be that none of the reliefs depicts a standing deity. A standing Sūrya would not have been in keeping with the sitting posture of the other deities, some of whom, such as Śiva and Pārvatī, have a superior status.

As for the *krodha* argument, it is difficult to say what came first. Whereas Van Lohuizen attributed the *krodha* aspect of the god to the inauspicious character of the southwestern region, Tonnet emphasized the demonic nature of Nairṛta. Van Lohuizen's additional remark about the equation of Sūrya and Kāla 'even nowadays in Bali' seems of little value as long as the antiquity or origin of the equation is not established. Furthermore, the visual aspect of the *krodha* feature is still a complicated problem, as was noted by Van Lohuizen herself (1955:381). In my opinion, the *aṣṭadikpāla* in question does not look significantly more *krodha* than some of his counterparts in the other corners. Considering the serious facial damage of the deity occupying panel no. XLIII, I do not understand either how Van Lohuizen could have said that the left-hand Sūrya has a far more pronounced *krodha* aspect than the right-hand Sūrya.³ In point of fact, the scowl or 'frown' is one of the few distinctive elements which the two reliefs have in common. A closer scrutiny of the relief will reveal no fewer than five differences, for example, on the point of body shape and posture, the crown, ear ornaments, direction of the glance, and the waist band. All

³ Who can say whether the deity on panel no. XLIII may not have displayed 'a gaping mouth, exposing teeth and side tusks', as is stipulated for Nairṛta in some iconographic manuals (see, e.g., Rao 1916:528).

As evidence that the allegedly far more pronounced *krodha* character of the deity on panel XLIV is not as obvious as suggested, I would point to the fact of his having been identified as Rama by the authors of the book *Candi in Central Java* (Bondan et al. 1982:114). This identification itself is nonsensical, but it does serve to illustrate the subjective character of the iconographic observation in question.

things considered, I feel that the deep 'frown' in the deity's forehead is best accounted for by the demonic character of Nairṛta. Indeed, several iconographic manuals stipulate that Nairṛta should be depicted as a terrifying god of a dark or black complexion (Rao 1916:528; De Mallmann 1963:130). It is not known if the panel of Nairṛta was ever painted, but the scowl seems a useful alternative way of indicating the aspect concerned.

What amazes me about Van Lohuizen's analysis is her failure to adduce external evidence for the substitution of Sūrya for Nairṛta. From my reading of the iconographic literature it is evident that this substitution was less common than was suggested (which only increases its iconographic significance, of course). Unfortunately, the few Indian parallels which have been found are rather poorly documented (see, e.g., Liebert 1976:288; Basham 1954:314). In a situation like this, Van Lohuizen should have taken recourse to the Old Javanese textual material, which she hardly did, according to Teeuw and Robson (1981:23). The name of the deity of the Southwest mentioned in the Old Javanese texts discussed by Teeuw and Robson is invariably Nairṛta (spelled Nairita or Nirṛti in Old Javanese), not Sūrya.⁴

Finally, and perhaps decisively, there is the fact that Van Lohuizen's own data on the change-over from the *aṣṭadikpāla* to the *navasanga* during the late East Javanese period all point to the lingering influences of Nairṛta. Van Lohuizen herself demonstrated that the *navasanga* is not an Indo-Javanese invention, but probably derived from India. Nevertheless, the Javanese were not slavish imitators. While the names and vehicles (*vāhana*) of the *navasanga* correspond to those of their Indian prototypes, things seem to have gone 'wrong' with their attributes. Van Lohuizen assumes that during the process of replacement of the *aṣṭadikpāla* by the *navasanga* the attributes of the former were conferred upon the latter. This explains why only a few of these attributes fitted their new owners more or less. This is evidenced by, for instance, the attributes of the *navasanga* who became the guardian of the Southwest (i.e., Rudra) (see Van Lohuizen 1955:373, chart VI). Rather than showing one or another attribute of Sūrya, this deity is carrying Nairṛta's *khadga* (sword). A similar thing happened with the names of the regions of the sky. Here, too, the Southwest was indicated by the name of the *aṣṭadikpāla* formerly presiding over the region, i.e., Nairṛta (Van Lohuizen 1955:381). According to Teeuw and Robson (1981:25), 'the direction of Nirṛti' is a common term for Southwest in Old Javanese literature.

A more solid piece of evidence of Nairṛta's presence in ancient Central

⁴ It should be noted that Teeuw and Robson (1981:25-26) are inconsistent with respect to Nairṛta's gender. Though referring to Monier-Williams' dictionary, which also mentions Nairṛta as a masculine genius of death, they state that their text twice refers to 'her' as a *rākṣasapati*. On the next page, however, the authors speak of this *rākṣasapati* as a male ('his') opponent of Īśāna.

Java is the statue in the British Museum mentioned by Van Lohuizen, which carries a sword and shield. To explain this anomalous phenomenon, Van Lohuizen seems to have found no better solution than to suggest that another set of images of *aṣṭadīkṣpāla* may have existed in Central Java (Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1955:381).

Conclusion

Contrary to Van Lohuizen, I am not sure that different sets of *aṣṭadīkṣpāla* existed during the Central Javanese period, or that the substitution of Sūrya for Nairṛta is to be regarded as a 'slight deviation'. The *aṣṭadīkṣpāla* depicted on the Śiva temple of Prambanan are in accordance with the standard list of the *Purāṇas*, in which Nairṛta is still the guardian of the Southwest. Sūrya was also present in ancient Central Java (cf. Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1954:238), but, as our analysis of the reliefs on the Śiva temple of Prambanan has shown, he was more than a stand-in for an *aṣṭadīkṣpāla*, occupying a position rather among the higher-level gods.

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