Hanuman, the Flying Monkey
The symbolism of the Rāmāyaṇa Reliefs at the Main Temple of Caṇḍi Panataran

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Introduction: Caṇḍi Panataran and the Rāmāyaṇa reliefs

This paper investigates the relief depictions of the KR on the walls of the Main Temple of Caṇḍi Panataran in East Java. The selection of the episodes and scenes of the narrative and the spatial arrangement of the depictions was intended to convey a specific symbolic meaning. The visual medium allowed this to deviate from the literary text and put the focus on a specific topic: on Hanuman’s mystic and magic power śakti in the confrontation with the world destroyer Rāwaṇa. I argue that the reliefs form part of a Tantric concept which underlies the symbolism of the whole temple complex, and that within this theme Hanuman plays a role as an intermediary. The paper continues Stutterheim’s (1925, 1989) analysis of the Rāmāyaṇa reliefs, Klokke’s study (2006) on Hanuman’s outstanding role in the art of the East Javanese period, and my own recent investigation of the Pañji stories at Caṇḍi Panataran (Kieven 2009, particularly pp. 151–219).

The Rāmāyaṇa reliefs on the walls of the lower terrace of the Main Temple of Caṇḍi Panataran are known as the major East Javanese pendant to the Central Javanese Rāmāyaṇa reliefs at Caṇḍi Loro Jonggrang. The description of the two relief series, their identification, and their comparison are the major concern of Stutterheim’s 1925 German monograph, made more generally accessible in English translation as Rāma legends and Rāma-reliefs in Indonesia in 1989. Through his description of the 106 panels at Caṇḍi Panataran he proved convincingly that the KR is the underlying narrative.

27. I am grateful for Danny Yee’s edit of the English language of my paper.
Caṇḍi Panataran is located in the southern part of East Java near the town of Blitar. It is a temple complex with an oblong layout consisting of three courts stretching from west to east, the ground levels of the three courtyards sloping gently upwards. The length of the whole temple compound measures about 180 meters, and it is 60 meters wide (Krom 1923, II:273).

Map 1: Caṇḍi Panataran, from Satyawati Suleiman 1978