

FROM LAṄKĀ EASTWARDS

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From Lānkā Eastwards

The Rāmāyaṇa in the Literature
and Visual Arts of Indonesia

Edited by

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Introduction

THE Australia-Netherlands Research Collaboration (ANRC) announced in 2008 a call for applications for funding of workshops which must feature collaboration between Australian and Dutch scholars, and must actively involve scholars / experts from Southeast Asia, and had to take place in the Netherlands, Australia or Southeast Asia. The announcement of this call coincided with the latest round of cost-cutting measures in the humanities at Leiden University, one of whose results was the abandonment of the last vestiges of the academic tradition, dating back to deep in the nineteenth century, of teaching and research in Old Javanese. In Australia, Old Javanese studies as such had already disappeared from all the Universities in which they were previously established. In Indonesia, enrolments were continuing to decline at Universitas Indonesia in Jakarta and Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, while Universitas Udayana on Bali seemed to be the one positive exception in this regard.

It seemed that the call for applications announced by the ANRC would constitute an excellent opportunity to do something positive for the field of Old Javanese studies, by bringing together a number of international and Indonesian scholars—either affirmed academics, independent researchers or enthusiastic recent arrivals in the field, including myself—from a range of disciplinary fields to hold an academic workshop, which would also provide a context for exploring new ways of structuring teaching and research in Old Javanese philology and related fields, and have a significant impact on capacity building. This is why I proposed to three senior academics in the Netherlands (Arlo Griffiths, my PhD supervisor, now at EFEO Jakarta), Australia (Helen Creese) and Indonesia (Titik Pudjiastuti) the idea to submit an application, in the hope that our joint collaboration would stand a good chance in a competitive selection process. We were indeed able to find the ANRC willing to act as main sponsor of a workshop, which was held at the premises of the KITLV branch in Jakarta on May 26th–28th 2009, and which was made possible by substantial extra contributions from the EFEO and the Stichting J. Gonda Fonds of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences. The theme of the workshop was *The Old Javanese Rāmāyana: Text, History, Culture*.

I proposed this theme inspired by something Prof. Andries Teeuw had recently told me during one of our reading sessions of Old Javanese texts, namely that the time was ripe for a conference on the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa*—the first to be ever organized. Indeed it seemed to me only natural to devote our workshop to the Old Javanese Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa*, for the text holds a unique position in the literary heritage of Indonesia. This fascinating Kakawin, now generally regarded as the earliest Old Javanese work of poetry (commonly assumed to date from the ninth century AD), has played a special role as a catalyst in various domains of the cultural history of the Archipelago. The poem has retained a remarkable vitality through the centuries, inspiring many forms of artistic expression not only in the domain of literature but also of the visual and performing arts, from the reliefs of the majestic Central Javanese temples to modern puppet-show performances.

The Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa*, which has survived to us through a number of palm-leaf manuscripts from Java and Bali, displays several unique features. These features, including a virtuoso array of Sanskrit-derived metrical patterns and an idiosyncratic use of the Old Javanese language, set the poem apart from other Old Javanese belletristic works, which mostly originated in East Java in the period from the eleventh to the sixteenth century AD. Furthermore, the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa* is among the very few Old Javanese texts for which a specific Sanskrit prototype could be found, namely the difficult Sanskrit poetic work *Bhaṭṭikāvya* (circa seventh century AD), itself a version of the great *Rāmāyaṇa* epic, whose oldest extant version is ascribed to Vālmīki (circa sixth–first century BC). The Old Javanese poem, far from being a mere translation, shows the features of an original and skillful work of re-elaboration. The text, documenting a fascinating interaction between linguistic and cultural elements of the Sanskritic tradition with those indigenous to the Javanese setting, constitutes a paradigmatic example of the phenomenon of ancient translocal cultural exchange referred to since colonial times with the problematic but nonetheless convenient concept of ‘Indianization’. It also poses interesting problems for concepts that have come into academic vogue more recently, most importantly Sheldon Pollock’s idea of a ‘Sanskrit Cosmopolis’ and a ‘Vernacular Millenium’.

It is no exaggeration to observe that crucial, and often controversial, issues within various academic fields relating to Indonesia involve the interpretation of facts drawn from the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa*. The Old Javanese poem indeed constitutes a source of primary importance for the historical study of ancient Central Java. But the poem itself was clearly not the only version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story that circulated in Indonesia at that time. The story as a whole, as well

as specific episodes, have continued to inspire new literary production through the ages. Moreover, beyond the domain of literature, the story has inspired some of the most exquisite examples of relief sculpture on Javanese temples, and continues to inspire Indonesian artists even into the twenty-first century. In due recognition of these facts, the workshop allotted time to discussion of the relationship between the Kakawin as well as others texts and the monumental archaeological remains of Central and East Java, especially sculptural reliefs displaying scenes of the Rāma story. We further discussed the general problems connected with the dating and geographical setting of the text in relation to the archaeological remains, as well as with the political figures allegorically mentioned in *sargas* 24–25, whose historical existence is only known from ancient inscriptions in Sanskrit and Old Javanese. And we also took into consideration Balinese literary and artistic production of more recent centuries inspired by the Rāma saga.

Far from being a mere display of old-fashioned bookish scholarship, the study of the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa* turns out to be highly relevant for achieving a better historically informed understanding of a variety of cultural, artistic and religious discourses of contemporary Indonesia. The text is very much alive in contemporary Bali, where it takes a position of great relevance as literature, as performance, as moral and religious handbook, et cetera. It was our hope that a new impulse to the research on the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa*, and on the study of the rich Old Javanese textual heritage in general, would therefore throw new light on the fascinating transcultural intellectual dynamics that contributed to shaping the cultural heritage of Indonesia up to the present.

* * *

This volume includes a selection of nine of the twenty-one papers presented during the workshop, which saw participation from four scholars affiliated with Dutch academic institutions, five with Australian, seven with Indonesian, two with American institutions, and one with a French University, as well as two Dutch independent scholars. Nationalities represented were Indonesian, Australian, Dutch, American, Italian, Singaporean and German. An Indonesia-based scholar from the USA, Thomas Hunter, could not attend the workshop but submitted a paper for publication, which we were glad to accept in the volume as tenth contribution. One of the explicit conditions of the workshop funding received from the ANRC was the participation of Southeast Asian scholars, and the workshop indeed saw participation of seven Indonesian scholars, plus one Singaporean. One of the purposes of the ANRC workshop grants is capacity building, and so we were glad to count among these eight participants three

Southeast Asian students at graduate level. We regret that none of the five senior Indonesian scholars submitted a paper for publication.

During our workshop we confronted a noteworthy academic divide between what we may call the 'indonesianizing' and the 'indianizing' approaches to the study of ancient Indonesian culture. Indeed we had hoped that the workshop would contribute to overcoming contrasting viewpoints, emphasizing either indigenous or Indic elements and points of view, which have thus far characterized the study of ancient Indonesian cultural expressions, and try to revive the close interconnection once characterizing the fields of Sanskrit and Old Javanese studies, which has long since disappeared as a result of the increasing academic separation that the two have progressively undergone since the 1950s. In a way, one might consider some of the papers in this volume signs of such a revival, but one could also emphasize the fact that those studies that engage with Sanskrit and Sanskritic aspects of the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa* are indeed made by scholars whose academic background lies in Indian studies, while scholars who have been trained only in Indonesian studies still steer clear from engaging with such aspects. To the extent that this is more than a simple reflection of differing linguistic competences, we hope that this volume may contribute to placing a critical but open engagement with Indological knowledge (back) at the heart of Old Javanese studies.

Besides such programmatic concerns, we had to face the practical consequences of differing scholarly practices in dealing with matters of transliteration, transcription and spelling. We have decided to give virtually free rein to the authors' individual preferences, the resulting variability of usage being an eloquent reflection of the diversity of perspectives and scholarly backgrounds which it has been the purpose of this volume to give open forum.

Before we move on to briefly characterize the contents of the papers and to explain how we have tried to give coherence to the whole by the specific order in which we have presented the individual contributions, we may note here that we have unified the individual bibliographies to yield one general bibliography standing at the end of the volume. A list of abbreviations is to be found there too. We need mention here only the very frequently used abbreviation KR to denote the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa*.

We have presented the papers in two parts, the first entitled *Old Javanese Kakawin and the Kakawin Rāmāyaṇa*, the second *The Rāmāyaṇa at Caṅḍi Prambanan and Caṅḍi Panataran*. Part One starts with two papers giving general perspectives on Kakawin as a genre. STUART ROBSON starts from a perspective internal to the genre, identifying a specific formal feature that might be

characteristic of this type of literature: the hymn of praise inserted at a critical juncture in the plot, which is indeed found in a majority of known Kakawins, including the *Rāmāyaṇa*. WESLEY MICHEL, on the other hand, approaches the specificity of the Kakawin genre from the comparative perspective of Indian Kāvya literature and poeology (*alaṃkāraśāstra*), focusing in his comparison on poetic conventions, that is *topoi*, rather than on formal components such as figures of speech and prosody which have thus far dominated comparative Kakawin/Kāvya studies.

Part One then continues with two papers focusing directly on the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa*. THOMAS HUNTER, with another comparative paper, continues in the footsteps of important earlier work by Christiaan Hooykaas in the analysis precisely of some of the formal components we have just alluded to: specifically the figure of speech called *yamaka* in *alaṃkāraśāstra*. The demonstration that this formal feature predominates in both the *Rāmāyaṇa* Kakawin and the Old Javanese Śiwagrha inscription of 856 AD provides significant new evidence in support of the hypothesis that the Kakawin is contemporary with the inscription, an hypothesis originally developed by Walther Aichele on the basis of a study of the contents of both. The present writer, ANDREA ACRI, continues this line of content analysis, specifically the identification of allegorical meanings, whose use by the poet(s) had already been demonstrated by Aichele as a very important feature of the Kakawin. He focuses on two notoriously difficult passages from *sargas* 24 and 25, and shows how these satirical passages bring into play such birds as the *kuvōṅ*, the *vidu* and the *pikatan* as allegorical alter egos of real-world figures, explaining that the poetical casting of birds in allegorical roles is a feature likely to have been adapted from Indian literature.

The following two papers move us away from the *Rāmāyaṇa* Kakawin, to the textual reception of the *Rāmāyaṇa* cycle in Bali from the sixteenth century to the present. HELEN CREESE offers an overview of the locally composed Kakawins inspired by the *Rāmāyaṇa* story. Despite the persistent popularity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Kakawin itself in Bali, the Old Javanese prose version of the *Ut-tarakāṇḍa* turns out to have been much more influential in Balinese Kakawin production, both as a source of themes and as a point of reference for themes left unexplored in that text but made the topic of a long stream of poetic compositions. These local Balinese Kakawins remain almost entirely unstudied, and the available manuscript sources are therefore presented in detail. ADRIAN VICKERS takes up a Balinese painting to show how also locally produced prose (*parwa*) works, in this case the thus far unstudied *Kapiparwa*, were composed in Bali under inspiration from the *Rāmāyaṇa* cycle, and have themselves come to in-

fluence artistic production in the visual arts down to the present. Such Balinese works of literature and painting give expression to the local associations with the concept of *sakti*, that is ‘spiritual power’, which will provide the conceptual framework for LYDIA KIEVEN’s paper in part Two.

This second part opens with a paper by ARLO GRIFFITHS, who presents a hypothesis which links the fact that Lanġa is (evidently) a dominant theme in the *Rāmāyaṇa* Kakawin with the occurrence of the same toponym in contemporary inscriptions, to support the previously proposed idea that the reference to Lanġa in the *Rāmāyaṇa* Kakawin allude specifically to the Śaiva temple complex of Prambanan. He proposes the new hypothesis that this complex was indeed known as Lanġapura in contemporary Java.

The following two papers then concentrate on the interpretation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs on Caṇḍi Śiwa and Caṇḍi Brahmā at Prambanan, and the question as to which texts may have influenced the specific features of the sculptural composition. CECELIA LEVIN focuses on the episodes that display no influence from the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa*, but whose source material can rather be identified in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. ROY JORDAAN focuses on the interpretation of one specific episode, where the new identification of a ‘girl from the sea’ provides extra support for the heuristic value of the classical Malay *Hikayat Seri Rama* in the interpretation of the Prambanan reliefs. Both studies tend to show that other versions of the Rāma story rather than the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa* are likely to have been of influence in the Prambanan case. The reverse is true at Caṇḍi Panataran, where it is precisely this text which provides the most important ‘script’ for the visual narrative. LYDIA KIEVEN analyses how and why Hanuman here came to assume the dominant role in the narrative, at the expense of Rāma, using the concept of *sakti* in a manner that seems to me, frankly, rather more local than this contributor’s references to Indian sources might suggest.

All in all, we believe we have been able to present here a fair representation of the state of the art in the study of Kakawin in general and the Kakawin *Rāmāyaṇa* in particular, as also in the study of the role of the *Rāmāyaṇa* cycle in literary and sculptural production over the centuries, from its earliest manifestations in Java eastwards to present-day Bali.