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## Stories in Stone: Sculptural Representations of the Rāma Narrative

Visual representations of the Rāma story take many forms. My concern here is with narrative representations of the Rāma story contained in programmes of sculptural reliefs on temple walls, mostly in stone but some in terracotta.<sup>1</sup> Although the earliest examples are single items, I will exclude them unless they clearly illustrate or name a specific episode; in particular, I disregard representations of Rāvaṇa shaking Kailāsa, the so-called *Rāvaṇānugrahamūrti* (Śiva showing favour to Rāvaṇa),<sup>2</sup> which develops a largely separate distribution from any other episode linked to the Rāma story and is found on many Śaiva temples. My aim is to examine the relative popularity over time and in different regions of the various components of the narrative.

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1 This study forms part of an ongoing project, in which Mary Brockington and I have been engaged for over a decade, to survey presentations of the Rama story as it has developed from its origin in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, through its various transformations in all genres, media, languages, religions and geographical areas, up to approximately the end of the eighteenth century. We have deposited this material (in which fuller details of items mentioned here may be found) in the Oxford Research Archive, to make it available for others to consult even in its present, unfinished state, and we update it from time to time.

In this article, I deal only with reliefs (not murals or ceiling paintings) in stone, stucco and terracotta, since wooden reliefs are rare and relatively late. Possibly the earliest wooden reliefs are on the Markulādevī temple, Markulā-Udaipur from the second half of the sixteenth century, followed by a wooden panel on the Rāma *koyil*, Padmanābhapuram (1744 AD). The temple car of the Rāmaśvāmī temple, Kumbakonam, is exceptional in having an extensive Rāma narrative in around 150 carved panels, probably from the early twentieth century, although the car of the Kodaṇḍarāma temple at Vaduvūr shows some 40 episodes and a few others have individual scenes.

As far as place names are concerned, the general policy in this article has been to use anglicized spellings for modern place names (so e.g. Kumbakonam, Bihar, etc.) but exact transcriptions for temples and ancient place names (including names of sites of ancient temples).

2 On this form, see Thomas Eugene Donaldson, *Śiva-Pārvaī and Allied Images: Their Iconography and Body Language*, 2 vols, New Delhi: DK Printworld, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 171–195.

Whereas *Bālakāṇḍa* episodes are very well represented among the instances I have collected, *Uttarakāṇḍa* scenes are virtually unknown before the Vijayanagara period and even then are not frequent; one limited exception is the episode of Vālin seizing Rāvaṇa (*VR* 7.34), found occasionally on Pallava, Cōḷa and W. Cālukya temples.<sup>3</sup> Scenes from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* are relatively under-represented, as are those from the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, apart from the extremely popular *saptatālabhedana* (‘splitting of the seven *tāla* trees’) and the combat between Vālin and Sugrīva. On the other hand, the martial scenes in particular of the *Aranya* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas* are well represented, from Rāma defeating Khara’s army and Jaṭāyus vainly attacking Rāvaṇa to multiple scenes of the battle for Laṅkā and the final contest between Rāma and Rāvaṇa.

The popularity of different episodes and how they are represented also varies at different periods. Several episodes occur only in the period up to the tenth century AD: Bharata on his way to Cītrakūṭa with his entourage (but the actual meeting with Rāma is common at all periods), the death of Triśiras, Lakṣmaṇa garlanding Sugrīva before his second fight with Vālin, Sugrīva instructing the search parties, and Hanumān searching Rāvaṇa’s *antaḥpura*. In addition, during this early period several scenes are uniquely represented: Kausalyā nursing an infant Rāma (elsewhere all three mothers with their four sons are shown), Rāma shooting an arrow at Sītā’s *svayaṃvara* rather than bending or

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3 This episode is found on various Cōḷa temples (Valérie Gillet, ‘Entre démon et dévot: la figure de Rāvaṇa dans les représentations pallava’, *Arts Asiatiques*, vol. 62, 2007, pp. 29–45), the Nandanagollu group, Prātakoṭa (Bruno Dagens, *Entre Alampur et Śrīśaīlam: recherches archéologiques en Andhra Pradesh*, 2 vols, Pondichéry: Institut Française d’Indologie, 1984, vol. 1, p. 228) and probably on the Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcī. Some *Uttarakāṇḍa* scenes claimed by Sarkar (H. Sarkar, *The Kampaharesvara Temple at Tribhuvanam*, Madras: Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1974, p. 39) for the Kampahareśvara temple at Tribhuvanam built around 1212 AD are doubted by Loizeau; Rachel Loizeau, *Traditions narratives dans la sculpture du Karnataka: les représentations épiques, l’enfance de Kṛṣṇa et autres mythes puraniques dans les temples hoysala, XI<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris: Presses de l’université Paris-Sorbonne, 2017, p. 203.

My comments on frequency are made on the basis of an extensive, but undoubtedly incomplete, collection of data on *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs throughout India and to that extent must therefore be regarded as provisional (this listing will be mounted on the Oxford Research Archive in due course). In addition, some secondary sources note the presence of *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs at various sites without giving any details of what is shown and these sites have had to be disregarded.

breaking the bow,<sup>4</sup> Sītā then garlanding Rāma,<sup>5</sup> Bharata and Śatrughna comforting Daśaratha (after the departure of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with Viśvāmitra),<sup>6</sup> his queens mourning Daśaratha, Daśaratha's corpse being placed in a vat of oil (with caption *rājā daśaratha tailya dronek*), the exiles crossing the Yamunā by raft, the crow attacking Sītā, Hanumān searching Rāvaṇa's *antaḥpura*, and Hanumān announcing Rāma's victory to Sītā.

The earliest certain representations are reliefs on Gupta-period temples from the fourth to seventh centuries.<sup>7</sup> From then onwards a significant number of clearly identifiable representations survive, mostly relief sculptures in stone but also several terracottas, which are among the earliest representations. At the end of this period—in the late seventh or eighth century, in the territories of the later Guptas of Magadha—come a set of eight stucco relief panels on a brick temple at Aphaṣṭ in Bihar which illustrate the story from the crossing of the Gaṅgā up to the meeting with Bharata in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*.

A considerable proportion of these terracottas have identifying captions or labels; this is a feature of this early period but for reasons that are unclear to me is then not common again until the Vijayanagara period.<sup>8</sup> A perhaps fourth-

4 A verbal form of this is found in the very late Kāśmīrī version (Shanti Lal Nagar (tr.), *Rāmāvatāracarita, composed in Kashmiri by Śrī Prakāśa Rāma Kuryagrāmī*, Rāmāyaṇa in Regional Languages Series 2, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001, p. 7). It is also represented visually at Prambanan in Java (mid 9th century).

5 However, in many Hoysāla reliefs and on the *prākāra* wall of the Rāmācandra temple at Vijayanagara, Sītā stands nearby as Rāma breaks the bow, ready to garland him; Loizeau, *Traditions narratives*, pp. 230–233. Also on the Hoysāla temples at Basarālu and Somnāthpur (and the Rāmācandra temple at Vijayanagara) Rāvaṇa is present at the breaking of the bow, as in several of the classical Sanskrit dramas and in the Kannaḍa *Torave Rāmāyaṇa* (15th century).

6 We have not found any verbal version of this somewhat puzzling scene, identified as occurring on the ninth-century Kāmākṣyamma temple at Dharmapuri; Andrew L. Cohen, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of the Nolambas (Ninth-Tenth Centuries)*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1998, p. 88—5e.f.g.

7 A Kauśāmbī terracotta plaque assigned to the second-first century BC and now in the Allahabad Museum (no. 5108) has been identified as Rāvaṇa carrying off Sītā; U.P. Shah, 'rāmvanvāsanī bhūgol ane laṅkā', *Svādhyāya*, vol. 10, no. 1, vs 2028 (1972 AD), pp. 1–23. Fragments of early figurines that may show a similar scene have also been found at Kauśāmbī and elsewhere.

8 Limited exceptions are in the Virūpākṣa temple at Paṭṭadakal (c. 740 AD, where the pillars in the *gūḍhamanḍapa* are carved in broad bands with scenes from both epics and on one pillar the figures are named above in vernacular forms, and at a Vaiṣṇava temple—later converted into mosque—of perhaps the twelfth-thirteenth century in the Trivenī-Sap-tagrāma region with 'descriptive labels' alone surviving of presumed relief panels.

century terracotta panel from Jind of Hanumān destroying the *aśokavana* is captioned *hanumān aśokavāṭīkāhantā*.<sup>9</sup> Several panels most probably originating from a fifth-century temple at Katingara all feature Hanumān, on one of which the two figures shown are labelled in Brāhmī script as Siṃghikā (i.e. Siṃhikā) and Hanumān.<sup>10</sup> Several in a set of terracotta panels from Nacārkherā include brief Brāhmī identifications of characters and one even has part of a relevant verse from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* written above it. A group of about forty terracotta plaques found at Palāsabāri (near Mahasthangarh) mostly include brief captions identifying the scenes shown (from the first three *kāṇḍas*) in an eastern Prakrit, written in a Brāhmī script typical of the seventh century, although the artistic style of the plaques seems a century or more earlier. A similar group of 17 plaques from the nearby village of Saralpur are the same size, also have identificatory labels and probably came from the same temple.<sup>11</sup>

Stone temples of the Gupta period were also decorated with panels showing the Rāma story. Best known are the ten panels which once ornamented the plinth of the Daśavatāra temple at Deogarh/Devgarh, a clearly Vaiṣṇava temple and probably of fifth-century date.<sup>12</sup> At Nācnā-Kuṭhārā six *Rāmāyaṇa* panels have been identified, probably dating to the fifth century or a little later. From a ruined temple at Rajaona come several finds of the fifth or sixth century, including a pair of relief panels that perhaps flanked its entrance stairway, one showing a scene at Sugrīva's court and the other one at Rāvaṇa's court. In the territories of the Gupta allies, the Vākātakas, stray finds of a series of larger reliefs from Pav-

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9 Another panel from Jind appears to show the fight between Vālin and Sugrīva. The caption on a probably fifth-century but unprovenanced panel identifies the scene shown as Rāma killing Triśiras; Donald M. Stadtner, 'An Inscribed Gupta Terracotta Panel in the Linden-Museum', *Tribus: Jahrbuch des Linden-Museums*, vol. 64, 2014, pp. 206–218.

10 Laxshmi Rose Greaves, 'Locating the Lost Gupta Period Rāmāyaṇa Panels from Katingara, Uttar Pradesh', *Religions of South Asia*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2018, pp. 117–153.

11 Other groups of terracottas showing *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes have been discovered at Barehat, Bhītā, Bhītargāṅv, Bilsad, Candraketuḡarh, Causā, Kauśāmbī, Neval, Pahārpur, Saheṭ-Mahet, Sandhaya, Śṅgaverapura, Sirsa and Sugh, to which can be added fragments probably of *Rāmāyaṇa* themes from a brick temple at Pavāyā and possibly on the Vākātakaperiod Pravareśvara temple at Mānsar. Despite occasional statements to the contrary, there seem not to be any Rāma-related terracottas from Ahicchatrā.

12 Most of these panels have now been removed to the National Museum, New Delhi. They include Rāma's transformation of Ahalyā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā crossing the river, the visit to Atri's *āśrama*, Lakṣmaṇa mutilating Śūrpaṅakhā, Rāma killing *rākṣasas*, the abduction of Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa garlanding Sugrīva, Tārā with the dying Vālin, Rāvaṇa threatening Sītā in the *aśokavana*, and one which seems to show Rāvaṇa offering his heads to Śiva; Prithvi Kumar Agrawala, 'The Earliest Known Depiction of Rāvaṇa-Śiraḥ-Kṛttana in Indian Sculpture', *Purāṇa*, vol. 36, 1994, pp. 253–258.

nār, thought to come from a temple built by Prabhāvatīguptā, show *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes;<sup>13</sup> this temple, which most probably enshrined Viṣṇu's or Rāma's footprints, is datable to the very beginning of the fifth century. At Nālandā, a Hindu temple designated temple 2 has on its dado a series of 211 stone panels, five of which show *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes; the panels seem to have been carved in the seventh century, although the temple itself is probably later.

Outside the territories controlled by the imperial Guptas and their subordinates or allies, evidence for the popularity of the Rāma story is mostly rather later. However, some reliefs on pillars in the second storey of the rock-cut Anantaśayanagudi cave at Uṇḍavalli have been tentatively assigned to the Viṣṇukunḍins—the dynasty which superseded the Vākātakas in this area—and the fourth to fifth centuries.<sup>14</sup>

In Orissa, a number of temples constructed between the seventh and tenth centuries carry *Rāmāyaṇa* friezes.<sup>15</sup> At Bhubaneśvar, on the Śatrughneśvara temple (c. 600 AD) a group of five carved blocks carries scenes leading up to the death of Vālin; the Svarṇajāleśvara temple has two sequences, one on the north wall reading from right to left and one on the west wall reading from left to right, which raises questions about the direction of circumambulation; and there are also scenes on the Paraśurāma temple (late 7th century) and the Śiśireśvara temple (c. 775 AD). Elsewhere in Orissa, *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative reliefs are found on the Siṃhanātha temple (late 9th century), the Vārāhī temple at Caurāsi (perhaps first quarter of the 10th century) and the Pañcapāṇḍava temple at Ganeśvarpur (second quarter of the 10th century), as well as a few detached panels from Śukleśvara. Significantly, all these Orissan temples are Śaiva, apart from the Śākta Vārāhī temple, and none is Vaiṣṇava.<sup>16</sup>

13 A grant issued in her name by Prabhāvatīguptā's second son, Pravarasena II, in his 19th regnal year records that it was issued from the feet of Rāmagirisvāmin (i.e., Rāma on Rāmagiri hill, the modern Rāmṭek). Significantly, he is also the reputed author of the *Setubandha*. Similarly an inscription dated 467–468 AD on the pavement of the Daśavatāra temple at Gaḍhvā mentions the divine Citrakūṭasvāmin (*bhaga<va>cchitra<k>ūtasvāmi*), by which Rāma must be intended.

14 They include Hanumān's meeting with Sītā; the same scene is apparently also carved on a pillar in one of the Mogalrajapuram caves also ascribable to the Viṣṇukunḍins in the sixth century; Calambur Sivaramamurti, *The Art of India*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977, p. 177.

15 One instance is even earlier: a damaged relief panel discovered at the Liṅgarāja temple, Bhubaneśvar, datable to the fifth or sixth century AD and in the Gupta style, whereas reliefs from the seventh century onwards are in the Orissan style.

16 The Anantavāsudeva temple is the only major Vaiṣṇava temple still standing at Bhubaneśvar and its Rāma-related sculpture is limited to the balusters of the north window of

In the Deccan, during the seventh and eighth centuries, a number of the temples erected in Karnataka by the Western Cālukyas of Bādāmi and in Andhra Pradesh by the Eastern Cālukyas of Veṅgi provide frequent instances of carved *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes. At the Western Cālukya capital of Bādāmi there are such scenes on the Upper Śivālaya temple (originally a Vaiṣṇava temple; early 7th century), as well as a relief of Rāvaṇa abducting Sītā on the Mālegitti Śivālaya temple (built around 600 AD). At the nearby Aihole in the inner porch and veranda of the Durgā temple (c. 725–730 AD) there are narrative reliefs of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with scenes from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* on the north through to scenes from the *Sundarakāṇḍa* on the south, up to Hanumān's exploration of Rāvaṇa's harem.<sup>17</sup>

Some Śaiva temples in the territory of the Nolamba dynasty, ruling in Andhra and northern Tamilnad during the ninth and tenth centuries, are carved with reliefs from the epics. At Hemāvati the Doḍḍēśvara temple and the dilapidated Virūpākṣa temple both have epic scenes on their *maṇḍapa* pillars. At Dharmapuri the Kāmākṣyamma temple, also called the Mallikārjuna temple, has *Rāmāyaṇa* panels carved all round its basement, with the narration starting on the rear wall to the west and proceeding counter-clockwise from the *Bālakāṇḍa* through to the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*.

Among temples with *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs erected under the Cōlas between the tenth and twelfth centuries the majority are Śaiva; the adoption of the title Kodaṇḍarāma by Āditya I (871–907 AD), the main architect of Cōla independence from the Pallavas, may have influenced this frequency of representation. Most of the twelfth-century Hoysāla temples with *Rāmāyaṇa* friezes are Śaiva, as well as the Mallikārjuna temple at Basarālu (1234 AD).<sup>18</sup> We may suspect that in many instances the aim was implicitly to equate the local ruler with the universal sovereign, Rāma. Certainly, it has been strongly argued in the case of the

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the *jaḡamohana* with figures of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā, Hanumān and a monkey-attendant.

<sup>17</sup> The Mahākūṭeśvara temple at Mahākūṭa has *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes carved on its *vedikā*, between the uprights and the crossbar; Carol Radcliffe Bolon, 'The Mahākūṭa Pillar and Its Temples', *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 41, 1979, pp. 253–268, see p. 258. Two images of demonic figures, which in local tradition (recorded in the *Mahākūṭamāhātmya*) are identified as Vātāpi and Ilvala, are now installed in a gateway at the SE corner of the compound, but one is female and so they may be Tātakā and Mārīca; Carol Radcliffe Bolon, 'The Pārvaṭi Temple, Sandur and Early Images of Agastya', *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 42, 1980, pp. 303–326.

<sup>18</sup> Besides its later date, the Mallikārjuna temple also differs in its sculptural programme from the main group of Hoysāla temples at Haḷebīḍ; Loizeau, *Traditions narratives*, p. 101.





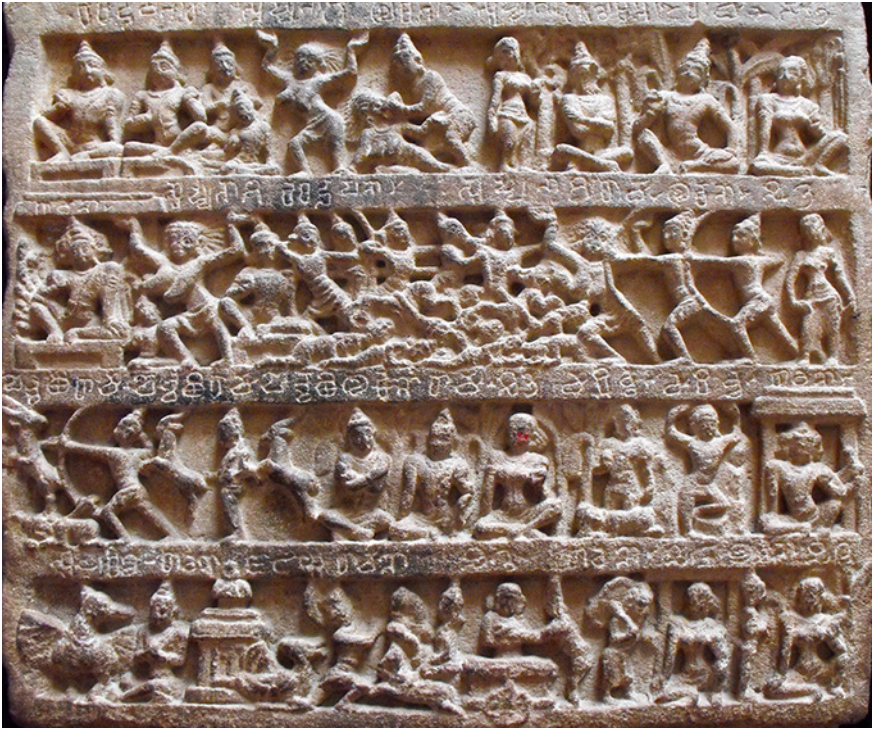
**Figure 1.** Rāvaṇa enthroned, relief on exterior of Pāpanātha temple, Paṭṭadakal (Cālukyas of Bādāmi, 1st half, 8th century).

scenes from both epics which cover the outer walls of the Pāpanātha temple at Paṭṭadakal, built by the Western Cālukyas in the first half of the eighth century, that they were designed to bolster the dynasty's legitimacy shortly before its fall to the Rāṣṭrakūṭas (figures 1 and 2)<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, at Vijayanagara it was not until the early fifteenth century that the first Rāma temple was built, so the Rāma cult here is not a direct reaction to the Muslim presence in the Deccan, as sometimes suggested; indeed, various local sites have been popularly associated with *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes from at least the eleventh century. Nevertheless, the shift in placement of the reliefs from basement friezes to the main walls gives them greater prominence and suggests that they are intended to celebrate royal power. Eight temples in total are

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<sup>19</sup> Helen J. Wechsler, 'Royal Legitimation: Ramayana Reliefs on the Papanatha Temple at Pattadakal', in Vidya Dehejia (ed.), *The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions*, Bombay: Marg Publications, 1994, pp. 27–42. However, Schmid has cast doubt on this for the Cōla period, accepting that there is a strong connection between Rāma and the royal function but asserting that Rāma is primarily an *avatāra* at this period; Charlotte Schmid, 'Of Gods and Mortals: Liḷā Cōla', in *South Asian Archaeology 2001: Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of EASAA*, ed. Catherine Jarrige and Vincent Lefèvre, 2 vols, Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2005, vol. 2, pp. 623–636.



**Figure 2.** Relief panel in interior of Virūpākṣa temple, Paṭṭadakal (Cālukyas of Bādāmi, c. 740 AD), showing scenes from Lakṣmaṇa’s mutilation of Śūrpaṅakhā through to Rāvaṇa’s killing of Jaṭāyus.

dedicated to Rāma at Vijayanagara itself, all built in the sixteenth century. In many cases their sculptural decoration includes Śrīvaiṣṇava insignia, reflecting the impact of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas within the increasing sway of Vaiṣṇavism, while the influence of the Mādhva tradition no doubt prompts the substantial number of reliefs of Hanumān.

Particularly interesting is the relationship between visual and verbal representations of some episodes. An obvious problem for visual representations is how to show invisibility.<sup>20</sup> In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (1.47.11–48.22), followed

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<sup>20</sup> Mary Brockington has commented on this problem elsewhere in relation to the painter Mānaku’s failure to show Indrajit becoming invisible (Mary Brockington and John Brockington, ‘Mānaku’s *Siege of Laṅkā* series: Words and Pictures, *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2013, pp. 231–258, esp. p. 242)—a problem that is sidestepped in the rare reliefs of the *nāgapāśa* episode (only in a Gupta period terracotta from Sandhaya and on the tenth-century Dadhimatīmātā temple at Māṅglod).

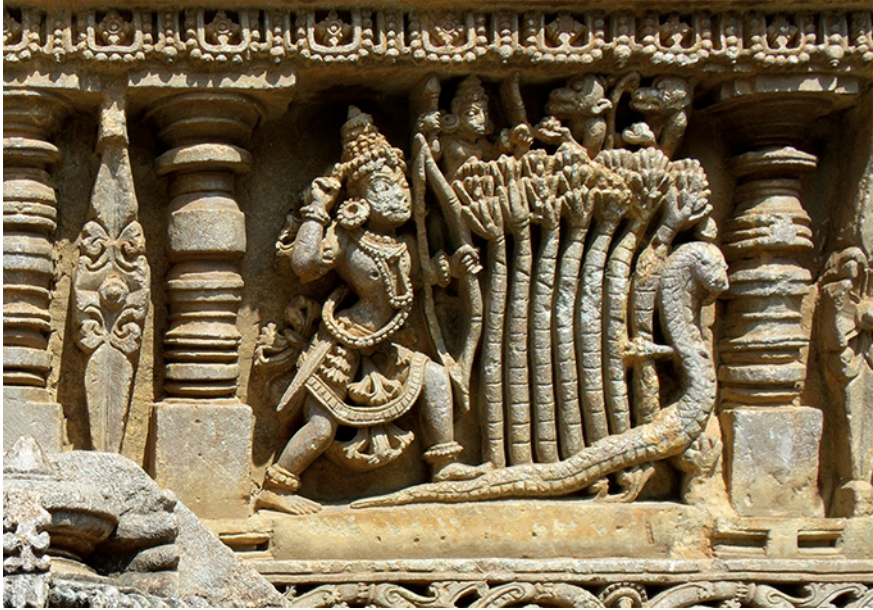


in this by Kṣemendra and Bhoja, Ahalyā is cursed to remain in the *āśrama* invisible but in most other versions from Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa* (11.34) onwards she is cursed to become a stone until released by Rāma.<sup>21</sup> Ahalyā turned to stone is universal in visual representations but the earliest examples, a terracotta from Sahet-Mahet and a stone relief from Devgaṛh, are roughly contemporary with Kālidāsa. So did visual requirements prompt this innovation, as logic perhaps suggests? But would it have been intelligible to viewers without some basis in a verbal narration? Again, a fifth-century relief from somewhere in Uttar Pradesh, now in the National Museum, New Delhi, shows Rāvaṇa with an ass's head; this motif is found sporadically in reliefs from now on (for example at Elūrā) and later very frequently in miniature paintings but the earliest verbal reference that we are aware of is to a horse's head, in the possibly ninth-century Khotanese version. Another motif is recorded almost simultaneously in verbal and visual versions; this is the ascetic boy who is killed by Daśaratha carrying his parents in panniers (*bahāgī* or *kāvar*), which is first shown on the Sun temple at Modherā (1026–1027 AD), the Mallikārjuna temple at Basarāḷu (1234 AD) and the Vēṇugopāla temple at Kṛṣṇapaṭanam (probably early 13th century) and which is implied in the *Gautamīmāhātmya* (123.4—he places them in a tree), added in its final redaction to the *Brahma Purāna*, and also found in the Telugu *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa* (probably 13th or 14th century).<sup>22</sup> One more example is that of Rāma piercing the seven *śālas*,<sup>23</sup> where the innovation that the trees are growing on the back of a huge *nāga* is first found in visual form on the Pāpavināśeśvara temple, Pāpanāśī, erected by the Cālukyas of Kalyāṇa in the eleventh century and then

21 In South India, Ahalyā as a stone is found already in Kampan; H.V. Hande (tr.), *Kamba Rāmāyanam, an English prose rendering*, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1996, pp. 40, 53 and 76. The motif is also found in several relatively late Purāṇas.

22 The most elaborate portrayal of this episode is found on four panels carved on the east face of the north gateway of the Rāmacandra temple, Vijayanagara. Much the earliest representation, however, is that based on the parallel narrative in the *Sāma Jātaka* painted in cave 17 at Ajantā (late 5th century AD); cf. Mary Brockington, 'Daśaratha, Śyāma, a *brāhman* Hunter, and Śrāvaṇa: The Tale of Four Tales (with pictures)', in *From Turfan to Ajanta: Festschrift for Dieter Schlingloff on the occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, 2 vols, ed. Eli Franco and Monika Zin, Rupandehi, Nepal: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2010, vol. 1, pp. 89–116.

23 The basic episode is one of the most frequently represented episodes of any (and obligatory in vernacular versions from Kampan onwards); by contrast, the immediately preceding episode of Rāma kicking Dundubhi's corpse features on only three Vijayanagara-period temples.



**Figure 3.** Relief panel from Amṛteśvara temple, Amṛtapura (Hoysaḷa, c. 1200–1206 AD), showing Rāma shooting through 7 *śāla* trees and the snake on whose back the trees rest.

very commonly on Hoysaḷa and Vijayanagara-period temples;<sup>24</sup> the verbal instances of this innovation are found in a fifth-stage addition to the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (4 App.6), and in the *Mahānāṭaka* (in an elaborate form), the *Narasimha Purāna* and the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*—none of which is any earlier than, if as early as, the Cālukya temple—and also for example in the Kannāḍa *Torave Rāmāyaṇa*. Further visual developments of this episode are Rāma stamping on the snake’s tail to bring the trees into line and his arrow then also piercing the snake’s neck or Vālin (figure 3). Are these in some sense a visual equivalent for the arrow piercing the top of Mountain Ṛṣyamūka and the earth before returning to Rāma’s quiver (*VR* 4.12.3–4)?

Representations both of the ascetic boy carrying his parents in panniers and of the *saptaśālabhedana* episode belong to the period after the tenth century, to which I now turn more fully. There are many more representations extant from this later period and a correspondingly longer list of episodes first found then.

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<sup>24</sup> See Desai, Devangana, ‘Narration of the Ramayana episode—Vali-vadha—in Indian sculpture (upto A.D. 1300)’, in *Indian Studies: Essays Presented in Memory of Prof. Niharranjan Ray*, ed. Amita Ray and H. Sanyal, S.C. Ray, Delhi: Caxton, 1984, pp. 79–89 and Loizeau, *Traditions narratives*, pp. 258–262.

The motivating factor for several is the enhancement of Rāma's status and secondarily that of Hanumān. Reliefs of the gods imploring Viṣṇu to descend to earth, though not common, are an obvious example.<sup>25</sup> Rāma shooting Mārīca and Subāhu serves to emphasize his youthful valour and is linked with greater frequency in this later period of his killing their mother, Tātakā, despite reservations expressed elsewhere about killing a female. The enthronement of Rāma's *pādukās* by Bharata stresses his growing divinity, as does the rise in frequency of reliefs of his encounter with Rāma Jāmadagnya, and at the other end of the narrative his *abhiṣeka* underlines his sovereignty. Surprisingly, Rāma's worshipping a *liṅga* at Rāmeśvaram is shown just twice, once on a twelfth-century Vaiṣṇava temple at Jāñjgīr and, less surprisingly, once on an eighteenth-century Śaiva temple, the Nīlakaṅtheśvara temple at Jambitige Agrahāra.

Reliefs centred on Hanumān first found after the tenth century are his carrying Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa across the ocean on his shoulders and his encounter with Kālanemi, while Rāma giving his ring to Hanumān and his burning of Laṅkā both become markedly more frequent and Rāma himself sending Hanumān to search for Sītā occurs uniquely on one Vijayanagara-period temple.<sup>26</sup> Other episodes only occurring in post-tenth-century reliefs include: Daśaratha and Vasiṣṭha conferring; Daśaratha conferring with Sumantra; Kaikeyī demanding the boons (although reliefs of her plotting Rāma's exile do occur earlier); Rāma meeting Śarabhaṅga; the *vānaras* bringing to Sugrīva the clothes dropped by Sītā and also their showing Sītā's jewellery to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa; Tārā warning Vālin against opposing Rāma; Lakṣmaṇa rebuking Sugrīva for inaction; the *vānaras* meeting Sampāti; *vānaras* carrying Sītā in a palanquin to Rāma, and the return to Ayodhyā.<sup>27</sup> While several of these are quite well known in the verbal tradition, they are not central to the main narrative, on which visual representations must concentrate, being limited usually to depiction of a small number of episodes.

Episodes of which I have so far found only one example cluster mainly in the early period, largely because of the wide variety illustrated on terracotta reliefs, and in the Vijayanagara period (around fifty), for which there are proba-

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<sup>25</sup> A single earlier representation on the Brahmapurīśvara temple, Puḷḷamaṅgai (Cōla, c. 910 AD) hardly alters this pattern.

<sup>26</sup> Rāma entrusting his ring to Hanumān is shown on all the Hoysala temples except that at Belūr and on several Vijayanagara-period ones but earlier only on the Kāmākṣyamma temple, Dharmapuri (Noḷamba, 9th century),

<sup>27</sup> With the limited exception of one on the Sāsabahu temple, Nāgdā (Pratīhāra, late 10th century), the small number of representations of Sītā entering the fire all belong to the later period.

bly multiple reasons in the greater number of episodes carved at any one site (and especially the inclusion of episodes from the *Uttarakāṇḍa*), the better survival rate of more recent material and the increasing influence from vernacular verbal versions, whether written or oral. An interesting sidelight on this is that the first relief in the series on the outer walls of the main shrine of the Rāmacandra temple at Vijayanagara, showing two figures seated on thrones, is identified by local people as the poet Pampa reciting the story to king Devarāya.<sup>28</sup> But we also find, for example, only one instance of the crow attacking Sītā (as already noted), on a fifth-century terracotta relief from Bhītārgāṅṅ; yet the episode is widespread in verbal form. Similarly, the episode of the returning *vānaras* ravaging the *madhuvana* is rare in visual form but frequent in verbal form.<sup>29</sup>

An episode occurring very frequently on Hoysaḷa temples is that of Lakṣmaṇa slashing bamboos and accidentally decapitating Śāmbūka, Śūrpaṇakhā's son; this episode is characteristic of the Jain verbal narratives from Vimalasūri onwards, including the Kannaḍa *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa* by Nāgacandra (late 11th to 12th century), which follows the standard Jain version (specifically subverting the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*) and is probably the immediate source for these visual representations.<sup>30</sup> The occasional representations on Hoysaḷa temples of Rāvaṇa sacrificing (rather than Indrajit) have analogues in the broadly contemporary *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa* by Nāgacandra and *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa* ascribed to Gōna Buddhā Redḍi (also in the *Adhyātma*, *Ānanda* and *Mollā Rāmāyaṇas*<sup>31</sup>). It is also on some Hoysaḷa temples that we first find the motif of Sītā being lifted still in the hut as Rāvaṇa abducts her, either in his chariot or more often on the palm of his hand; this renders more precise still the motif found in the *Uttarapurāṇa* of the Jain Guṇabhadra (second half of the 9th century) that Rāvaṇa dare not touch a woman against her will, already made more concrete in Kampaṇ's *Irāmavatāram* (probably 12th century) where Rāvaṇa lifts Sītā on a huge ball of earth and places it on his chariot.

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28 See Dallapiccola, Anna Libera, J.M. Fritz, G. Michell and S. Rajasekhara, *The Ramachandra Temple at Vijayanagara*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1992, p. 93.

29 So far I have only found instances on a pillar from a seventh-century Ālampur temple and on the Cintāla Venkaṭaramana temple, Tāḍapatri, from the first half of the sixteenth century.

30 The decapitation of Śāmbūka is also found in the fourteenth-century *Bhāskara Rāmāyaṇa* ascribed to Huḷḷakki Bhāskara and in the fifteenth-century Kannaḍa *Torave Rāmāyaṇa* of Narahari. Before the Hoysaḷa period the episode is shown on the wall of well no. 1 at Sirival (Rāṣṭrakūṭa, c. 940 AD) and later on the Vijayanagara-period Cennakeśava temple complex at Puṣpagiri but it is absent from Cāḷukya and Cōḷa monuments; Loizeau, *Traditions narratives*, p. 241.

31 Cf. Loizeau, *Traditions narratives*, pp. 266–267.

Around 150 episodes are spread over 205 panels on the Vijayanagara-period Cintāla Veṅkaṭaramana temple at Tāḍapatri which are clearly in part inspired by the Telugu *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*,<sup>32</sup> they include unique representations of Sītā dropping her ornaments as she is abducted, an episode which is quite elaborately treated in the *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*, of the leaders of the search parties, named in the Telugu captions as in the *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*, and of the dying Vālin addressing Sugrīva. However, I have not yet found a verbal parallel for two unique scenes, both occurring on Vijayanagara-period temples: one of Rāma removing a thorn or something similar from Sītā's leg, found on the Kōḍaṅḍarāma temple, Penukoṅḍa, and one of Rāma presenting Lakṣmaṇa with a bow following his mutilation of Śūrpaṅakhā, found on the Cintāla Veṅkaṭaramana temple, Tāḍapatri. Somewhat similar is the relief on the Nīlakaṅṭheśvara temple, Jambitiḅe Agraḥāra (dated 1733 AD), of Daśaratha looking in a mirror (and presumably seeing grey hairs, one of the traditional signals for retirement in the *dharmaśāstras*) which amplifies his realization of increasing old age which prompts his thoughts of abdication from the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* onwards and which has been claimed rather unnecessarily to have a folk story origin.<sup>33</sup>

To sum up, the popularity of different episodes and how they are represented varies at different periods. Terracotta relief panels from the Gupta period are numerous. Then, after an early but minor peak on Orissan temples in the seventh to tenth centuries, followed by another from the period of Cōḷa dominance of South India between the tenth and twelfth centuries, the largest number of *Rāmāyaṇa* friezes or series of panels are found on Hoysaḷa and Vijayanagara temples. In many instances, especially when they are carved on Śaiva temples, the aim seems to have been implicitly to equate the local ruler with the universal sovereign, Rāma.

*Bālakāṅḍa* episodes are very well represented; the martial scenes of the *Aranyakāṅḍa* and *Yuddhakāṅḍa* are also well represented but the *Ayodhyākāṅḍa* is relatively under-represented, as is the *Kiṣkindhākāṅḍa*, apart from the extremely popular *saptatālabhedana* and the combat between Vālin and Sugrīva; *Uttarakāṅḍa* scenes are virtually unknown before the Vijayanagara period.

<sup>32</sup> See Anna L. Dallapiccola, 'Rāmāyaṇa Reliefs of the Cintāla Veṅkaṭaramana, Tāḍapatri', in *Temple Architecture and Imagery of South and Southeast Asia: Prāsādanidhi, Papers Presented to Professor M.A. Dhaky*, ed. Parul Pandya Dhar and Gerd J.R. Mevissen, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2016, pp. 221–235, esp. pp. 225–226.

<sup>33</sup> Anila Verghese, 'Nīlakaṅṭheśvara Temple at Jambitiḅe: A Preliminary Study', *Indica*, vol.48, no. 1, 2011, pp. 47–68.



Particularly interesting is the relationship between visual and verbal representations of some episodes, including the effects of practical restraints imposed by the visual medium. Also, whereas many earlier series appear basically to follow the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, later ones represent episodes in ways that either reflect the influence of vernacular retellings or may even have generated them.

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