



7 Vishnu as the tortoise, Kurma, from the Churning of the Ocean of Milk, Angkor Wat. (Photo: M. Foreman)

Other Hindu Cults It seems that in Cambodia Brahma and his spouse Sarasvati were adored together with other members of the Hindu trinity, but there are no proofs of a cult of Brahma himself (Bhattacharya, 1961).

Surya, the Lord Sun, is considered to represent Shiva, as well as Agni, God of Fire, seen as a symbol of the cosmic light of Shiva.

Ganesha enjoyed a certain popularity in Cambodia, although there were no sects dedicated entirely to his cult. In Khmer art he is portrayed with a human body, and not with elephantine limbs as in Javanese art. In Pre-Angkorean times he was known under the name of Ganapati, and was represented, according to the Indian tradition, in the process of eating with his trunk the *modaka* (sweetmeats) placed in one of his hands. In the Angkorean period he took several names (Ganesha, Vighnapati, Vighnesvara, Vighnesa, etc.) and is represented with his broken-off tusk in one of his hands. In general, his features became progressively more human.

Although Khmer syncretism assigned to Shiva and Vishnu a similar position, Shiva was regarded as pre-eminent and Vishnu, without having to admit his inferior rank, was defined as the Absolute. Both the gods are usually invoked in the inscriptions. In order to get the two gods closer, a new divinity was introduced, Harihara, of which the right side is constituted by Shiva and the left half by Vishnu. The cult was popular in Pre-Angkorean times, but faded in the Angkorean

period. Syncretism also affected Hinduism and Buddhism.

Certain features which are unknown in Indian mythology must have originated in local beliefs. The Vishnu of Prasat Kravan with a crocodile (or lizard), the *Nataraja* of Banteay Samre with two *asuras* (demons) holding his legs, the *Trivikrama* of the temple of Mangalartha, riding a quadruped, all seem to be deeply rooted in local folklore. Even more characteristic of this tendency is the transformation of the *naga* Ananta into a dragon, and the presence of a rhinoceros as the *vahana* (customary vehicle) of Agni. It is evident that local traditions persisted throughout the period and were progressively incorporated into Hinduism.

Buddhism Although Mahayana Buddhism had some followers in early Angkorean times, it reached its greatest popularity in the late 12th and 13th centuries under the rule of Jayavarman VII (1181 – c.1219). It coexisted with Hinduism in



8 Ganesha, from the battle of Krishna against the asura Bana, Angkor Wat.

to kill him when Shiva intervened, having previously promised immortality to Bana. Shiva said: "You, Krishna, are all-mighty in all nature; nobody can win against you. Be flexible, therefore. I have given my word to Bana and my word is not in vain". And Krishna answered: "Let him live, because you promised him safety! Because we are not distinct one from the other: what you are, I am."

This summarises the highest moral concepts of old Hindu religion: kingship, identity of all gods, all men and all beings. The battle ended with Aniruddha reunited with Usha.

• Angkor Wat, N Gallery

Garuda extinguishing the five fires (49)

Garuda, carrying Vishnu on his shoulder in the middle of the battle (54)

Agni, with six heads and four arms mounted on a rhinoceros (52)

Krishna, with 1,000 heads, paying respects to Shiva (50)

Krishna's victory over the asura Narantaka
(The *Harivamsa*) This scene refers to Krishna winning a battle against the asura Narantaka who wanted to capture the sacred mountain of Mahiparvata.

• Angkor Wat, NW corner pavilion

Krishna lifting Mount Govardhana
(The *Harivamsa*) The god is seen lifting the mountain above his head to protect the cowherds and their herds from the torrential rains caused by Indra's ire; he is accompanied by his brother Balarama. The god held the mountain above ground in one hand for seven days.

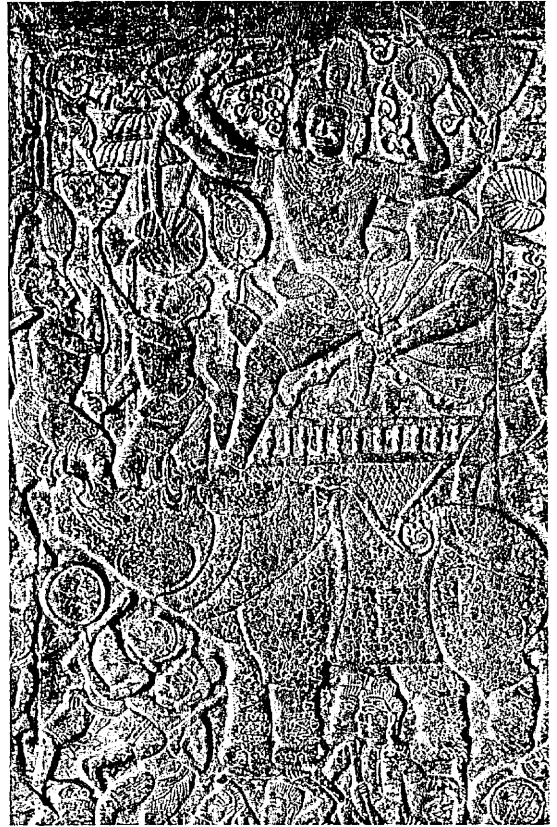
• Angkor Wat, SW corner pavilion.

• Preah Khan

• Banteay Samre (53)

54 Opposite: *Garuda, carrying Vishnu on his shoulder in the middle of the battle. (Photo: J. Poncar)*

53 *Krishna lifting Mount Govardhana Banteay Samre. (Photo: M. Freeman)*



52 Agni, with six heads and four arms mounted on a rhinoceros. Angkor Wat, N gallery, W wing. (Photo: J. Poncar)



5. Eastern gallery, North wing

The Victory of Vishnu over the asuras (c.50 m).

This is the story of the battle of Vishnu, mounted – as usual – on Garuda, alone against hordes of *asuras*, attacking him from both sides. Some *asuras* are riding on large birds; their chariots pulled by dragons or mythical horses. Thanks to Garuda struggling with the elephants of the *asura* generals, and to Vishnu's courage, the god's victory is assured.

The quality of this relief, as well as of the following one on the victory of Vishnu over Bana, is notably inferior to that of the others examined so far. They were sculpted during the 16th century, probably copied by local and hired foreign artists from earlier designs, using stencils (Le Bonheur, 1995). According to 16th Khmer inscriptions, the work to complete these two reliefs, left unfinished in the 12th century, started under the rule of King Ang Chan, and probably ended during the reign of his son Paramaraja I, in 1563-64.

6. Northern gallery, East wing

Victory of Krishna over the asura Bana (c.60 m).

This story is taken from the *Harivamsha* text. It concerns the adventures of Aniruddha when he was captured and made prisoner by the *asura* Bana, after the latter heard that he wanted to marry his daughter. On learning this, Krishna, together with Balarama and Pradyumna, hastened immediately to the city of Shonitapura to rescue Aniruddha. Before entering the city, with the help of Garuda he extinguished the legendary 'five fires', and then annihilated the army of the *asuras*, in a battle culminating with the beheading of Bana.

In the relief, the scene starts with *Garuda*, carrying *Vishnu* on his shoulders (54, page 47), appearing in the middle of a great army of *devas* recognisable by their conical *mukuta*, marching in battle order, led by musicians. Vishnu is represented here with eight arms, brandishing the traditional attributes: arrow, javelin, discus, conch, club, thunderbolt, bow and shield. It is impossible to count his faces; the texts say they

number 1.000. He is accompanied by two heroes on the wings of Garuda, one being his brother Balarama and the other possibly his son Pradyumna.

When they arrive in front of the city where the enemy is ready to do battle, the three heroes are stopped by a wall of fire. However, according to the text, *Garuda* extinguishes it (49, page 45) with water taken from the Ganges that he transforms into rain. In fact, the relief only shows Garuda clearing the wall of flames. Once on the other side of the blaze, besides Garuda, is *Agni*, represented as a giant with six heads and four arms mounted on a rhinoceros (52, page 46), and preparing to fight Krishna's army, advancing swiftly, enters the city and attacks Bana's soldiers, to annihilate them. A furious melee follows, with the combatants inextricably locked together. Krishna appears again on Garuda; this time the god only has four arms and fights with the bow, disc, and club. Then he reappears with a thousand faces and eight arms, accompanied by his acolytes. As he progresses he finds himself face-to-face with Bana, his chariot pulled by two mythical lions (looking rather grotesque).

The *asura* Bana whirls his thousand arms, but Krishna reduces them to two. When he is dealing Bana the final blow, Shiva intervenes to ask for mercy, having previously promised immortality to Bana. Eventually, after much fighting, Krishna, by the power of his sacred and magic weapons, manages to win the battle.

The conclusion of the story is represented at the right extremity of the panel. Shiva can be seen, depicted in Chinese aspect, on a high pedestal (probably symbolic of a mountain) receiving the respects of *Krishna*, with a thousand heads (167). He had won the battle against Bana, and kneels before Shiva, on a lower pedestal, his hands joined on his chest. In between the two, on the lowest pedestal, are Ganesha and Parvati, Krishna's wife (or maybe Skanda); ascetics and bird-maidens (*kinari*) fill the flanks of the mountain.

Shiva (168), as mentioned above, is not depicted in a Khmer manner but in a Chinese

Each god is fighting an *asura* from whom he differs only by the shape of his helmet; this series of epic duels takes place in the middle of a confused melee involving all the personages. Note the realistic portrayal of some of the animals, as well as the emphatic pose of the generals.

Towards the centre of the panel, one can identify: Kubera, the god of wealth, on the shoulders of an *asura* with outstretched legs; Agni, the god of fire, on his chariot pulled by rhinoceroses; *Skanda* (25, page 35), the god of war, with six faces, on the shoulders of his peacock, whose legs keep the monsters harnessed to chariots at bay; *Indra* (24, page 35) on Airavata, his elephant, who holds an enemy in his four tusks. This sight and the noise of the bells make the lions rear up as a chariot is overturned. Vishnu occupies a prominent central position, opposing the terrible *asura Kalanemi* (26, page 37), with many heads (of which seven are visible), holding a bow while brandishing clubs and swords with his many arms.

Yama (27, page 37), the god of justice, follows on a chariot harnessed to buffaloes; *Shiva* (28, page 37) on a chariot pulled by bulls with two humps; *Brahma* (23, page 35) on his usual mount, the *hamsa*, holding the magic weapon *brahmastra*; *Surya* (21, page 35), the Sun god, on a chariot drawn by four horses; *Varuna* (22, page 35), the god of water, appears on a *naga* bridled like a horse. Finally, 10 not clearly identifiable gods follow.

The crises of the battle continue; one can see bodies distorted in agony. A five-headed *naga* entwined with the combatants spreads terror. Vishnu, on his intrepid Garuda, himself balanced on the bodies of two horses, dominates the scene and gives order to his soldiers. The *melee* continues (171) with warriors fighting in all manner of acrobatic positions, with individual combats multiplying in intensity; and the topmost register of the relief is furrowed by clouds of arrows. But at the end the *devas*, representing goodness and harmony, defeat the *asuras*, representing evil and disorder.

8. Western gallery, North wing

The Battle of Lanka (c.50 m long).

This somewhat confusing hand-to-hand battle scene, covering every inch of available space, is represented in great detail, with an animated multitude of beings fighting with incomparable rage and appropriate attitudes and expressions.

According to Delaporte (1880), the poem of Valmiki, so often represented in India, has never been illustrated in a more powerful way. The monkeys do not ever suffer heavy casualties; they look overcome by fatigue, but, as the battle turns to their advantage, they resume their marvellous feats with renewed energy. Some are wounded by magic arrows; others, who have used the right spell to deprive the magic arrows of their power, stand up again and resume their fighting position. But a few, struck by feathered arrows, are lying dead on the ground. Warriors pause to recite the incantations which will render their weapons more lethal. The foot soldiers of the giant's army carry sabres with chiselled hilts, spears, javelins and clubs, and some are protected by shields. The monkeys carry only stones or branches, or more often no weapons at all: they bite their enemies wherever they can and arm themselves with the weapons they remove from the wounded or the dead. With their paws and teeth, they tear apart the fabric of the flags and parasols which decorate the chariots of the enemy kings and generals, pulled by fantastic animals. The way the sculptors render the bodies of the monkeys is the only attempt to define muscles in Angkorean sculpture; showing the monkey's muscles in circles to emphasise their strength, they also portray the swelling of bicep forearms, thighs and calves in a way which is closer to that of humans than of monkeys covered in fur.

A general view of the relief is impossible. One can only marvel at the virtuosity and imagination of the sculptors who managed to vary the details of the episodes, and the postures of the fighters so as to avoid any monotony or repetition. The *melee* is so dense that the combatants are completely entangled with each other. The

decorated chariot, pulled by *hansas*, that had been previously stolen by Ravana from Kubera. A vertical panel shows some damaged figures of jubilant monkeys, some dancing, others blowing trumpets. According to the legend, Rama was accompanied by Vibhishana, Lakshmana, Sugriva and Sita.

19. Northern arm, West wall (above the window). The famous episode of the ordeal of Sita is represented here. The surface of the relief has been degraded by water infiltration to the point that the figure of Sita has completely disappeared. Sita was subjected to ordeal by fire soon after she was freed, in order to prove her purity. All that can now be seen, over several registers, is a group of monkeys humorously represented, the pyre, and traces of the figures of Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva and Hanuman.

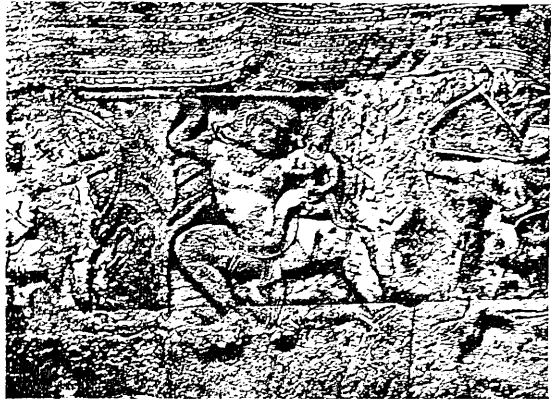
20. Over the Northern door

A *Ramayana* scene in which the giant *Viradha* attempts to abduct Sita in the forest, carrying her on his shoulders. Rama and Lakshmana attack him with flights of arrows (186).

21. Northern arm, East wall (over the window). Possibly Krishna is seated in a palace receiving homage and allegiance from a few seated men, in particular from a royal figure. The scene cannot be identified and it is all the more curious for what appears to be the bodies of two men stretched out under Krishna and his visitors (dead or drowned), probably referring to a local Khmer legend.

22. Eastern arm, North wall (over a window). More stories of Rama are sculpted in this arm, starting with the Introduction to the descent of Rama.

This episode was probably taken from the *Bhagavad Purana* "Introduction to the descent of Krishna" (Przyluski, 1921), but here relating to Rama, due to the great popularity of the *Ramayana* at that time. In fact, of the 12 reliefs in this pavilion, eight are scenes from the *Ramayana*.



186 *Viradha attempting to abduct Sita.*
NW corner pavilion, over the Northern door. (Photo: EFFE0)

The event represented here has taken place before the birth of Rama, who also appears elsewhere in the same pavilion.

Vishnu is represented sleeping beneath a flight of *apsaras*, and lying on the *naga* Ananta, with his feet held by his spouse Lakshmi. In the register below, there is the parade of the nine living gods who wanted to beg him to become incarnate on earth (as Krishna). They are, from right to left: Ketu ('comet') on a lion, Agni on his rhinoceros, Yama, riding on his buffalo, Indra on his three-headed elephant, Kubera mounted on a horse, Skanda on a peacock, Varuna, riding on his *hansa* and Nirrti on the shoulders of a *yaksha*. Below, on the wall flanking the window, are the moon (top) and the sun (bottom), represented as large discs behind chariots pulled by two horses, unusually represented frontally. The story should be read starting with the sun and the moon, and proceeding through the eight divinities, ending with Ketu, before reaching Vishnu, the destination of the caravan procession.