

NOTES AND QUERIES

A MYSTERY TEMPLE IN SURAT PROVINCE.

A Danish gentleman, Mr. O. A. Ascanius, formerly for a number of years in the service of the East Asiatic Co. Ltd, working in their Forest Department in Surat Province, South Thailand, has published some of his recollections in two books, *Seven Years in the Jungles of Siam* and *My River, My World*. These books are quite readable, not only because of the author's many thrilling experiences with crocodiles, pythons, king cobras, black panthers, wild boars, kating ox (gaur), elephants, and dacoits, but also by reason of his friendly and sympathetic relations with the Surat Thai and several venerable Buddhist abbots in that region. The purpose of this note is, however, not so much to draw attention to the above, all the more since these books are written in Danish, a language read by only few non-Danes out here, as to seek for further information as regards a very interesting old temple situated in a very eerie place far away in the hinterland of Monam Luang (the Bandon river), to which a visit by the author is described in his book, *Seven Years in the Jungles of Siam*. Unfortunately, Mr. Ascanius' indications of the exact geographical position of this temple is so very vague that it is not possible to find it on any map. It seems to be situated somewhere in that almost circular chain of hills which surround the uppermost course of the Luang river. To reach the temple, one has furthermore to cross a lake.

The following is the abbreviated narrative of the author:—The path to the temple at first led over flat country through high forest; thereafter the country became hilly and mountainous, becoming steeper and steeper, suddenly rising up to a height of more than one thousand feet. Next the path turned into a deep cleft to the bottom of which the rays of the sun did not penetrate even at noon time.

Having walked for some time through this sombre rocky cleft, the author and his Thai companions were suddenly stopped by a queer sound

rising from some depression in front of them. This sound started as a feeble whimpering, rising by and by, higher and higher, to an awful heart-sickening wailing ending in a fortissimo of unholy shrieks and groans, finally to die away in a tuneless plaint.

The author says it needed all his will-power to induce his companions to continue their wandering. They were, of course, convinced, (and who shall blame them!), that these unearthly shrieks came from some hell-doomed evil spirit. Still it was more than difficult to get them to go on as the shrieking and wailing sounds came back time after time. Finally the little expedition got out of the eerie cleft out into the sunshine and clear daylight. After having passed through a fruit garden and another patch of dark jungle they arrived at a place where the mountains rose almost vertically. At the foot of a granite cliff, a thousand feet high, lay the temple. A natural door, about a hundred metres high and forty metres broad, led inside this mountain.

Here the party met two Buddhist monks who were in charge of this peculiar temple (1). And here the author discovered that the weird sound heard by him and his party in the cleft issued from a rift in the cliff near the natural door described above, and in fact it was the echo of this sound they had heard. After much entreating, one of the monks finally consented to show Mr. Ascanius round the place with its curiosities. To begin with they had to crawl on all fours through a narrow and low passage, after which they came into a vast cave the ceiling of which was lost in dense darkness. This cave was full of sounds, wailing and howling sounds besides the ceaseless drip, drip of water falling from above. In this cave were seen a row of slender shining columns, stalactites no doubt, on which were seen seated big toads whose cold eyes were staring out in the darkness. Further on the darkness became less dense, and now they saw in the ceiling of the cave a funnel-shaped aperture running upwards perhaps for a couple of thousand feet. High, high above they saw a patch of blue sky and the waving branches of trees. So the wind passing through the cave and this funnel produced these howling sounds which grew louder or became fainter according to the pressure of the wind! Again further on, on shelves cut into the vertical walls of the cliff, they saw a collection of the finest images of Buddha, shining as if they were

(1) Facing page 145 in Mr. Ascanius' book is the photograph of a temple in a curious mixed Javanese-Burmese style. But is this the temple in question? We doubt it, as there are no mountains to be seen in the background.

made of gold and silver. The monk explained that these images had been brought here to be in safety from the invading enemies several hundreds of years ago. (The Burmese invasion 1767 A. D. ?). On the opposite wall was a large dark hole leading downwards. By lighting it up with a carbide lamp, it was seen that this hole led into a large subterranean lake. This lake was full of fish, big and small, all with disproportionally large heads. The lake seemed to be bottomless. The return voyage from the temple was made without any difficulties.

So far Mr. Ascanius. Is his tale true or a dream or pure invention? We do not believe the latter, and we think that a thorough exploration of this most interesting, yes!, fascinating place ought to be undertaken. Here is a task waiting for a few of our young scientists of the Chulalongkorn University. The trip could easily be done during one of the university vacations. Cameras, compasses, electric torches, mapping and sketching materials and a gun or two, should be taken along in order to obtain a good result.

Meanwhile, if any of the members of the Thailand Research Society should happen to know or hear anything relating to this mystery temple and its extraordinary surroundings, the writer would only be too glad to receive further information.

ERIK SEIDENFADEN.

Bangkok, 6th February 1943.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL GLEANINGS.

In L. Sabatier's and D. Antomarchi's *Recueil des Coutumes Rhariées du Durlac*, it is mentioned that these people believe that they came out of a hole in the earth. This hole is called Bang Adreñ and is guarded by the Hdrue family (1). We are, however, not told exactly where this hole is situated.

The same myth is found among the Sema, Tangkhul and Murring Nagas (2), though to be more precise the Tangkhul Nagas say it was a cave. They also say that their ancestors formerly lived in the bosom of the earth.

Some of the Melanesians (3) have the same myth. Do these myths not represent a vague remembrance of the times when all these people were troglodytes, or cave dwellers, like we all have been at some period in our evolution towards a higher stage?

It is well known that some of our Karen people (the men only) arrange their hair into a *horn* projecting in front. The same custom is found among the Lollo or Nozu. The Murring Nagas say that, when their ancestors came out of the hole in the earth, men and women wore the same kind of clothing. In order to differentiate between the two sexes the men therefore made up their hair in a *horn* in front, while the women arranged their hair in a knot on the back of their head. This tale sounds unreal, and is probably an attempt to explain something, the true origin of which has now been lost. This *horn* is also found in Kaffa, a former kingdom with a divine ruler, now a province of Abyssinia, and formerly among the Abyssinians themselves (4). What is the idea of this *horn*? Has it some connection with the Phrygian cap which may have its origin in this queer form of coiffure? The placing of a large boar's tusk in the hair of the Khā or Moi Katu, which is also a custom among the Melanesians of the New Hebrides, may have some connection with the *horn* custom too (5). It has been suggested that the *horn* is a

(1) *vide* the writer's review in JTRS. Vol. XXXIII, Part 2, p. 195.

(2) *vide* Dr. J. H. Hutton: *The Sema Nagas*.

(3) *vide* Dr. H. Ian Hogbin: *Tribal Ceremonies at Ongtong, Java (Solomon Islands)*, in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. LXI, 1931.

(4) *vide* *Journal Asiatique*, Vol. CCXXIII, No. 2, p. 185, review of P. Azar and R. Chambard's *Cinq années de recherches archéologiques en Ethiopie*.

(5) *vide* *Cahiers de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, in the writer's review in JTRS. Vol. XXXIII, Part 1, p. 44.

remnant of a former phallic cult but so far too little is known about its real origin to accept such a theory. This custom may, however, have a common origin, and perhaps it also reached Eastern Asia and Melanesia by diffusion from the west.

ERIK SEIDENFADEN.

Bangkok, 3rd April 1942,

ON COMMON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

In Mr. P. G. Harris' interesting paper *Notes on the Dakarkari People of Sokoto Province, Nigeria* (1), it is told that the Dakarkari people hold a great ceremony, called *Uhula*, when the Guinea corn is ready for reaping, in either December or January every year. The supreme god of this people is Magirro, who has a house (temple) in the capital town. On the eve of the festival there is much drumming, and a kind of "night watch" is held by the elders at the house of Magirro. At midnight Magirro is said to come down to earth to bless the festival. The next day, after feasting and drinking, the men go out to the east of the town to give thanks to Magirro for the good harvest.

In our *Triyamphawai* ceremony there are two distinct elements; one is the swinging which no doubt is part of a solar cult, diffused eastwards from ancient Egypt, the other consists properly of the invocations and prayers of the Brahmanic priests carried out in the *Ból Prahm* near the Swinging place—*Si Kak Sao Ching Cha*—which includes the nightly visit of the great god Siva, who comes down to earth in order to bless the harvest (2). Is not here a clear case of diffusion from some common centre? We think so. The Dakarkari people, who have received other cultural traits from the East, probably also got this belief of a god visiting the earth from some northeastern country, either Meroë or ancient Egypt.

ERIK SEIDENFADEN.

Bangkok, 15th March 1942.

(1) *vide* J. R. A. I. of G. B. & I. Vol. LXVIII, 1938, January-June.

(2) *vide* Dr. Quaritch Wales: *Siamese State Ceremonies*.

THE SVAYAMVARA OF SITA.

Under the title of *En marge du Ramayana cambodgien*, Monsieur F. Martini contributed a note, in the *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, Tome XXXVIII, fasc. 2., dealing with a *bas-relief* on the walls of Āṅkor-Vat. The subject represented on this *bas-relief* has been in controversy for some time past, some savants identifying it with the *svayamvara* of Sita from the *Ramayana*, others with the *svayamvara* of Draupadi from the *Mahabharata*. Monsieur Martini has taken us a step further in the discussion by drawing upon the evidence of the Cambodian version of the story of Rama, the *Ram-kerti*.

In order to be the better able to follow the discussion with intelligence, it would seem not altogether out of place if a short *resumé* of it be reproduced in English from M. Martini's note. Monsieur Martini quotes the original description in French of the picture from Monsieur Coedès' *Les bas-reliefs d'Āṅkor-Vat*, B. C. A. I., 1911, p. 187, which, translated into English, runs something like this: "In the midst of a great assemblage, a young man, brandishing a big bow, is getting ready to shoot an arrow at a mark, represented here by a bird perched on a wheel; in front of him a richly dressed princess is seated on a throne, behind him sits a brahman recognisable by his chignon and beard: Rāma, Sitā and Viśvāmitra are easily identified. The scene represents the trial of the bow at Janaka's court: the latter is probably the royal figure seated immediately behind Viśvāmitra, and the archers ranged below these are the ousted competitors."

M. Coedès goes on to dismiss the hypothesis that the subject is possible of being interpreted as the *svayamvara* of Draupadi, on the ground that only one *brahman* is here depicted whilst according to the legend all five brothers were disguised as such. Besides, one hardly finds any figure which might correspond to Karṇa, Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna and others indispensable to the story of the *svayamvara* of Draupadi. There is however a serious objection to the conclusion in favour of the story of Rama according to the classical version of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The young prince in this *bas-relief* shoots the bow, whilst Valmiki said that he broke it in the act of bending. On this account, therefore, Monsieur Finot dismissed Monsieur Coedès' interpretation, B. C. A. I., 1912, pp. 191-193; and takes the scene to represent the *svayamvara* of Draupadi. His main argument was that "Rama did not see an objective: he bent the bow and broke it; it is a proof of strength. Arjuna saw his objective and got it; it is

"a proof of skill". In M. Finot's objection, it is to be observed, he argued from the classical text of the *Ramayana*.

In bringing forward the evidence of the Cambodian *Ram-kerti*, M. Martini produces the text and translation of three passages, the gist being as follows :

(a) During the trial, the Prince *lifted and bent* the arrow and then shot it, thereby revealing his strength.

(b) After the trial, the messenger, sent by King Janaka to announce the glad tidings to Rama's father, related that Rama *lifted* the bow, *bent* it and *shot* it.

(c) King Daśaratha, relating the glad tidings of his son's prowess to his Court, said that Rama *lifted* up the bow, *shot* it and *broke* it.

It is to be noted that whilst in (a) and (b) Rama lifted the bow, bent it and shot it, in (c) however he also broke it. The Cambodian version, therefore, whilst differing substantially from the classical *Ramayana* in the statement that Rama shot his arrow, yet contains a somewhat weak confirmation of it in King Daśaratha's relation that he also broke it. M. Martini does not quite accept this last little point and feels that perhaps it was meant to be merely a father's exaggerated exultation over his son's success. He bases therefore, his opinion on the dictum of M. Przyluski, who, in the article entitled *La légende de Rama dans les bas-reliefs d'Ankor-Vat* in the periodical *Art et archéologie khmers*, 1924, p. 324-5, wrote that the story of Rama current in mediaeval Cambodia was, as in the Insulinde, sensibly different from the original *Ramayana*, i. e. the classical version of Valmiki. It was from such a version, he concludes, that the sculptors of Ankor-Vat based their work.

Monsieur van Stein Callenfels, opposing the hypothesis of the *svayamvāri* of Sita, admits that the Malay version, the *Rama Kling*, relates that Rama also shot, the mark being however forty palm trees. Such objectives do not exist in the *bas-reliefs* at Ankor, although the fact of the shooting coincides with the Cambodian version.

M. Martini then goes on to discuss the objections raised by M. van Stein Callenfels. The late Dutch savant did not see why, pictorially, in spite of differences from the classical version of the *Mahabharata*, the picture should not be taken to represent Draupadi's *svayamvara*. He admitted nevertheless that in order to find a solution to our problem it would be advisable to study the modern Indochinese versions of the Indian epics. "Unfortunately," he said, "I have no access either to the Siamese

or Cambodian versions; from the little that I know of them, I think that I can affirm that, where they differ from the classical texts, they conform even to the minutest details to the modern stories of the Malays and Javanese".

From examining his quotations of the modern Malay and Javanese versions, M. Martini has proved that so far as the Cambodian version is concerned such conformations are not the rule. What about the Thai versions? We may here dismiss the problem of the *Mahabharata*, for the epic is practically unknown in this country, save in quite early times since when it has been forgotten. Present-day adaptations certainly exist but they draw their inspiration from English translations which have no bearing on the problem from its historical standpoint. The story of Rama, however, has been well-known in this country for many hundreds of years. In the 14th century, voluminous references to it are to be found in the *Fuan Pai*, a contemporary heroic poem. Though the story as such has not been found as dating from the days of Ayudhya, references make it clear enough that it did exist. Fragments at least of two versions of the *Ramakien* of later Ayudhya and some pieces from the pen of the King of Thonburi are extant. It was not, however till the first reign of the present Chakri dynasty that the story as a whole was written down and preserved to the present day. This version of the *Ramakien* was commenced by King Rama I in 1798. It was written on 117 folded volumes of blackened paper in the form which is known as a *samud*. Volume 16 of this version contains the trial episode corresponding to items (a) and (b) of the Cambodian *Ram-kerti*; but has not (c), i. e. the news being repeated to his Court by King Daśaratha. The style of the written piece is long. As it is not practicable to reproduce the original texts, the following translations will be sufficient for our present purpose.

(a) The trial of the arrow :

With his hand, resplendent with the mark of the discus, with a contour well rounded as an elephant's trunk, (the incarnation of the) Four-armed took up the arrow of victory which weighed not at all upon his grip. He lifted it up swiftly and brandished it, thereby displaying his might.

Drawing then the arrow, he shot it. Thereupon the earth and sky reverberated so much that the tremour was felt even so far up as the heaven of Dusit and as far down below as the nether worlds. The noise

was tremendous. The sky became overcast until the sun disappeared from sight. The whole phenomenon was then changed and it cleared up all the world over.

(b) King Janaka's message :

Instead of an envoy delivering an oral message as in the Cambodian version, the Thai *Ramakien* formulates the message as a royal autograph from King Janaka to King Daśaratha in the following terms.

Janaka, King of Great Mithilā, to the illustrious Monarch of Ayudhyā whose majesty is as it were a precious canopy giving protection to all that dwelleth in this world, greetings !

Whereas We have a daughter whose beauty is a divine creation, We have therefore assembled by invitation royalties from every state to participate in a trial of strength by lifting up the great arrow of victory belonging to the Lord of the trident.

Since Rama, in that great assemblage of gods and seers, presided over by Indra in person, has succeeded in lifting the arrow, We beg to invite Your Majesty to come to our court in order to be present at the nuptial rite to be celebrated in consequence, so that the couple may perpetuate their dynastic line and uphold the world thereby for ever after.

Upon the receipt of the letter, it may be added, Daśaratha expressed his gratification to the envoy of Janaka and at once gave directions summoning his other sons, Bharata and Śatrughna, from their maternal grandfather's court in order to accompany him to assist at the marriage of Rama. No other reference is made to the feat of strength on the part of King Daśaratha.

From the evidence, therefore, of the Thai *Ramakien*, it may be concluded that, while extending the dictum of M. Przyluski as to the story of Rama prevailing in Cambodia and the Insulinde to Thailand, the *Ramakien* does not necessarily agree in every detail with the Malay and Javanese versions as suspected by M. van Stein Callenfels. There are besides numerous other instances in which the *Ramakien* differs from them. On the other hand it has a greater affinity with the Cambodian *Ram-kerti* in very many respects. The similarity of their names is a clear proof of it.

D.

Bangkok, 1st July 1942.