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Visual Epics

Representations in relief sculptures and friezes of the two Sanskrit epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, are the oldest evidence that we possess for these texts, since some of them are centuries earlier than the oldest extant manuscripts (the earliest manuscript used by either Critical Edition belongs to the 11th century and most are from the 16th century or later). The earliest certain examples are reliefs of various types on Gupta and Cālukya temples from the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries in North India and the Deccan, while the great Pallava relief sculpture carved on a granite outcrop at Māmallapuram in the middle of the 7th century is both the oldest and perhaps the best known example in South India.

The frequency of such representations of the epics is not only a demonstration of their influence on Indian culture as a whole, it is also a valuable testimony to the evolution of the texts under the influence of popular culture, while the scenes chosen for depiction can reveal which episodes were most favoured, either by the artists or by their patrons; in other words they can tell us something about the reception of the epics generally. Increasingly, over the centuries, the scenes depicted show versions of such episodes that depart from the form of the narrative occurring in the original Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* and approximate to those found in later vernacular adaptations, often providing our earliest evidence for such innovations, which may well have originated in oral tellings in any case, just as the Sanskrit epics themselves were originally oral. Comparison of such visual evidence with the textual sources is therefore a potentially significant means of refining our knowledge of the evolution of the epics over time.

The potential is not limited just to India but extends to Southeast Asia from quite an early period. For example, relief sculptures of almost the entire *Rāmāyaṇa* story are carved on the walls of the Candi Lara Jonggrang temple at Prambanan in Central Java, belonging to the middle of the 9th century, sculptures of *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes are found in the NW corner of the temple complex at Angkor Vat, built under Sūryavarman II (1112–1152 A.D.), and the

Baphuon temple (c. 1050–1066 A.D.) is also decorated with reliefs from the Rāma story. However, to broaden these enquiries beyond India is outside the scope of the present paper. What I intend to do in this paper is to present an overview of some of the evidence available and suggest lines along which it may fruitfully be explored. It is not so much a completed piece of work as a call for further research to be undertaken and a plea for greater co-operation between art historians and literature specialists — a plea already made more briefly elsewhere.¹ There have been several publications by art historians in the last decade or so but, while these have identified the scenes depicted with varying degrees of thoroughness, they have not usually addressed the issue of their relationship to oral or written forms of the narrative in any depth;² over a somewhat longer period, there have been studies by textual scholars of particular episodes or motifs, using visual examples drawn from selected traditions, but these have been rather narrowly focused; and Sheldon Pollock has drawn on some of the material in an assessment of the political dimensions of the Rāma cult.³ Admittedly, awareness of the issue does exist and, for example, Kapila Vatsyayan gave a paper at a *Rāmāyaṇa* workshop organised at the University of British Columbia in June 2000 which, according to its abstract, asked among other questions ‘What may have been the verbal text for the visual image as also the criterion of selection of the sub-themes and episodes and the elimination of the others?’ These and related questions are precisely those that, it seems to me, should be examined in greater depth than hitherto.

The earliest examples relate to one or other of the epics only. Sculptural representations of Saṃkarṣaṇa are found as early as the Śuṅga period, for example a well known Mathurā image from Jansuti, Mathurā district.⁴ Similarly, carvings at Udayagiri in Orissa (c. 1st century A.D.) and a terracotta panel from Bhīṭā (perhaps 2nd century B.C.) have been claimed as showing parts of the Śakuntalā story, and pillar reliefs from Mathurā as showing aspects of the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga story;⁵ however, not only are these identifications less than certain but their relevance to the main *Mahābhārata* narrative is limited. At best they indicate artistic interest in the epic at an earlier date than any other evidence.

¹ J.L. Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (*Handbuch der Orientalistik*, 2.12), Brill, Leiden 1998, pp. 496–499 and 523–524.

² The main exception to this is J. Williams, *The Two-Headed Deer: Illustrations of the Rāmāyaṇa in Orissa*, University of California Press, Berkeley etc., 1996.

³ S. Pollock, *Rāmāyaṇa and Political Imagination in India*, “Journal of Asian Studies”, vol. 52, 1993, pp. 261–297 (esp. pp. 264–269).

⁴ D.M. Srinivasan, *Vaiṣṇava Art and Iconography at Mathurā*, in: D.M. Srinivasan (ed.), *Mathurā: the Cultural Heritage*, American Institute of Indian Studies, New Delhi 1989, pp. 383–392.

⁵ R.A. Krishna, *The Depiction of the Mahābhārata Scenes in Indian Art*, in: R.N. Dandekar (ed.), *The Mahābhārata Revisited* (Papers presented at the International Seminar on the *Mahābhārata*, 1987), Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi 1990, pp. 201–214 (esp. p. 203).

More convincingly, Hawley has utilised sculptural evidence, including both Mathurā sculpture and early Pallava temples, to establish that two *Harivaṃśa* episodes, Kṛṣṇa's taming of Kāliya and his defying of Indra by lifting Mt Govardhana, were much the most popular motifs for representations of Kṛṣṇa between 500 and 1500 A.D.⁶ Gupta-period terracotta panels depicting the Nara-Nārāyaṇa theme presumably have at least some link with the *Mahābhārata* (there is an example in situ on the 5th-century Bhītārgāmv brick temple, as well as another in the Los Angeles Museum).⁷ More specifically, one of a pair of pillars at Rajaona in Bihar dated around 500 A.D. is carved with a sequence of scenes from Arjuna's combat with Śiva as a Kirāta, while the other has scenes from the life of Śiva and Parvatī (there are also two *Rāmāyaṇa* panels); at Gaḍhva, south of Ilāhābād, a poorly preserved 5th-century frieze or lintel is held by Joanna Williams to contain scenes from Bhīma's defeat of Jarāsaṃdha and two posts may show other scenes from the *Sabhāparvan*.⁸ In South India, the great carving of the scene identified either as Arjuna's Penance or as the Descent of the Gaṅgā at Māmallapuram provides clear evidence for the prestige of the *Mahābhārata* in the mid 7th century (carved in the reign of Narasiṃhavarman I Mahāmalla, c. 630–668 A.D.). Subsequently, isolated *Mahābhārata* scenes occur in ceiling panels on the Sūrya temple at Modherā (11th century), while single figures relating to the *Mahābhārata* appear in niches on the pillars.

For the *Rāmāyaṇa*, apart from some reliefs in rock-cut caves at Undavalli (near Vijayavādā, Andhra Pradesh) tentatively assigned to the Viṣṇukunḍins in the 4th–5th centuries by Rajendra Prasad,⁹ the Gupta period saw the first sculptural representations, the earliest being a terracotta panel apparently from the 5th-century Bhītārgāmv temple, showing Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa as forest dwellers, and *Rāmāyaṇa* themes for narrative reliefs seem to have been quite popular. Besides some terracotta plaques from Ahicchatrā, a set of *Rāmāyaṇa* terracotta panels was found at Nacharkherha in Haryana, with several panels having brief inscriptions and even one scene having part of a verse from the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* written above it.¹⁰ A set of six *Rāmāyaṇa* panels at

⁶ J.S. Hawley, *Krishna's Cosmic Victories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", vol. 47, 1979, pp. 201–221, cf. also his *Krishna, the Butter Thief*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1983, pp. 52–95.

⁷ Cf. P. Pal, *Indian Sculpture*, vols I–II, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles 1986–1987, vol. I, p. 245.

⁸ J.G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India, Empire and Province*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1982, pp. 151–152 and 153–154.

⁹ B.R. Prasad, *Art of South India — Andhra Pradesh*, Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi 1980, p. 72.

¹⁰ Pal, op. cit., vol. I, p. 232, and G. Bhattacharya, *Early Rāmāyaṇa Illustration from Bangladesh*, in: M. Taddei (ed.), *South Asian Archaeology 1987*, Is.M.E.O., Rome 1990, pp. 1043–1066; both citing Śrī Yogānanda, *Vālmīki ke ślok se ankīṭ iṣṭikāphalak*, "Bulletin of Museums and Archaeology in Uttar Pradesh", vol. 5–6, 1970, pp. 5–7. The text inscribed is *nnantarā raghunandanah āsasāda mahāgrddhaiḥ*, corresponding to CE 3.13.1bc.

Nācnā (U.P.) is assigned to the beginning of the 6th century.¹¹ The platform of the 6th-century Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh was originally carved with a continuous *Rāmāyaṇa* frieze, from which the eight detached panels still preserved include one which appears to show Rāvaṇa offering his heads to Śiva¹² — a variant on the *Uttarakāṇḍa* episode where he offers them to Brahmā (found also for example on the Kailāsanātha temple at Elūrā) — and one showing Rāma freeing Ahalyā from Gautama's curse, as well as a possibly unique representation of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa visiting Atri and Anasūyā.¹³ Further east, the probably 6th-century Aphsaḍ temple (Gayā dist., Bihar) has its plinth decorated with stucco reliefs drawn from the *Rāmāyaṇa*;¹⁴ in Bengal much the most striking find — at Palāsbāri, close to the famous site of Mahāsthāngarh — is a series of over thirty inscribed terracotta plaques depicting scenes from the *Bāla* to *Aranya kāṇḍas*, which probably belong to the late 7th century.¹⁵ To the south, in the territories of the Gupta allies, the Vākāṭakas, a series of larger reliefs from Pavnar has been claimed as showing scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*.¹⁶

Early temples at Bhuvaneśvar contain *Rāmāyaṇa* carvings, in particular a narrative frieze on the Svarṇajāleśvara temple (early 7th century; this also includes the *Mahābhārata* episode of Arjuna's encounter with the Kirāta) and scenes on the Paraśurāma temple (late 7th century), as well as narrative scenes from both epics on the eaves of the Śīsireśvara temple (c. 775 A.D.), including the combat between Arjuna and the Kirāta.¹⁷ Elsewhere in Orissa *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative reliefs are found on the Siṃhanātha temple (late 9th century, located on Siṃhanātha Island in the Mahānadī river), the Vārāhī temple at Caurāsī (perhaps first quarter of the 10th century) and the Pañcapāṇḍava temple at Gaṇeśvarpur (second quarter of the 10th century); at the latter two sites frieze fragments are preserved which probably formed the cornice of the *jagamohana* roof.¹⁸ The scenes most often shown are the killing of the golden deer, the abduction of Sītā, the meeting between Rāma and Sugrīva, Rāma piercing the *sāl* trees, the fight between Vālin and Sugrīva, and the building of the causeway. The

¹¹ Williams, op. cit., p. 113.

¹² P.K. Agrawala, *The Earliest Known Depiction of Rāvaṇa-Śirah-Kṛnttana in Indian Sculpture*, "Purāṇa", vol. 36, pp. 253–258.

¹³ C. Sivaramamurti, *The Rāmāyaṇa in Indian Sculpture*, in: V. Raghavan (ed.), *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi 1980, pp. 636–647 (esp. p. 637).

¹⁴ V. Dehejia, *Rama: Hero and Avatar*, in: V. Dehejia (ed.), *The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions*, Marg Publications, Bombay 1994, pp. 1–14 (esp. p. 9).

¹⁵ Bhattacharya, op. cit., pp. 1049–1052. Bhattacharya states (p. 1055) that 'it appears that only the *Bāla* and *Aranyakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were dealt with' but it is clear from his subsequent descriptions and illustrations (pp. 1055–1064) that *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* scenes are included.

¹⁶ Williams, op. cit., p. 135

¹⁷ T.E. Donaldson, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, 3 vols (Studies in South Asian Culture, 12), E.J. Brill, Leiden 1985–1987, III, 1169.

¹⁸ Ibid.

earliest carvings of all are a group of five carved blocks below an image niche on the Śatrughneśvara temple at Bhuvaneśvar (c. 600 A.D.), which carry scenes leading up to the death of Vālin and form an exception to the lack of narrative on other such blocks.¹⁹ The scenes on the Svarṇajāleśvara temple (carved on the *baraṇḍa* frieze at the top of the shrine wall) are in two sequences, that on the north wall read from right to left and that on the west wall from left to right, raising problematic questions about the direction of circumambulation; in the killing of the golden deer Mārīca emerges as a torso from the dying deer; just four trees are shown in Rāma's piercing of the *sāl* trees and they grow simply from the ground.²⁰ On the west face of the Simhanātha temple a band above the central niche again shows scenes relating to the death of Vālin and the *baraṇḍa* frieze at the top of the wall shows battle scenes from the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*.²¹ The Vārāhī temple on the lower frieze on its porch shows *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes from the encounter with Śūrpaṇakhā through the killing of the deer (again shown with Mārīca's body emerging from the deer's body) to the death of Vālin and perhaps some further scenes, in counterclockwise order, while on the upper frieze there seems to be the building of the causeway.²² All of these temples are Śaiva, apart from the Śākta Vārāhī temple.

At much the same period, in South India, a few *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes are found on the Kailāsanātha temple at Kāñcī and the Olakkaṇṇeśvara temple at Māmallapuram, both erected by Narasiṃhavarman II Rājasimha (c. 690–720 A.D.). Considerably later, in Rajasthan the Saciyā Mātā temple at Osiyān includes some *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes as part of the decoration of the dome of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* (renovated in 1177 A.D.), in somewhat similar fashion to the *Mahābhārata* scenes in the Sūrya temple at Modherā, while the plinth of Viṣṇu temple 5 (probably early 11th century) has a frieze with some *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes.²³ A g r a w a l a, while stating that *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes are rare in Rājasthān, notes a set of eight on the Nīlakaṇṭha Mahādeva temple (10–11th century) at Kekīnda and smaller numbers on the Someśvara temple and another Śaiva temple at Kirāḍu.²⁴

From the early 7th century, early Western Cālukya temples provide frequent instances of carved scenes taken from both epics, which occur for example on the Upper Śivālaya temple at Bādāmi (originally a Vaiṣṇava temple) and the Mahākūṭeśvara temple at Mahākūṭa, while some Kṛṣṇacarita scenes apparently

¹⁹ J. Williams, *The Two-Headed Deer: Illustrations of the Rāmāyaṇa in Orissa*, University of California Press, Berkeley etc., 1996, pp. 70–71.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 71–72 and figures 273–276; figure 275 top (cf. footnote 4); figure 276.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 72–73 and figures 277–279.

²² Ibid., pp. 73–74 and figures 280–283.

²³ D. H a n d a, *Osian: History, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi 1984, pp. 54, 69 and 91.

²⁴ R.C. A g r a w a l a, *Rāmāyaṇa Scenes in Rājasthāna Sculptures*, "Indian Historical Quarterly", vol. 30, 1954, pp. 154–159.

from the Lower Śivālaya temple are preserved in the Bādāmi Museum;²⁵ several scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* are also carved on pillars in the Navabrahmā group of temples at Ālampur (7–8th century) which, despite their name, are Śaiva. In the porch and verandah of the Durgā temple at Aihole — dated by C o h e n to around 725–730 A.D.²⁶ — there are, as S i v a r a m a m u r t i was the first to notice, narrative reliefs of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with scenes from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* on the north through to scenes from the *Sundarakāṇḍa* on the south, including Hanumān's exploration of Rāvaṇa's harem.²⁷ Reliefs of Rāvaṇa abducting Sītā, of Bhīṣma lying on his bed of arrows and of Arjuna fighting Śiva disguised as a Kirāta, as well as many other *Mahābhārata* scenes, are found on both the Mālegitti Śivālaya temple at Bādāmi and the Virūpākṣa temple at Paṭṭadakal (c. 740 A.D.); the pillars in the *gūḍhamanḍapa* of the Virūpākṣa temple are carved in broad bands round the shafts with scenes from both epics.²⁸ Among them is Aṅgada sitting on his coiled tail in order to outdo Rāvaṇa when he goes as Rāma's envoy.²⁹ This is particularly interesting, since this representation is centuries earlier than the earliest textual occurrences of the motif of which I am aware — in the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* (probably 15th century) and in vernacular texts such as the *Aṅgader rāybār* of Nityānanda Ācārya's *Adbhut Rāmāyaṇ* in Bengali (probably late 17th century) — and the motif is a popular one for sculpture.

²⁵ Two of these panels in the Bādāmi Museum are illustrated in: M. Meister, and M.A. Dhaky (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture: South India, Upper Drāviḍadēśa, early phase, A.D. 550–1075*, American Institute of Indian Studies, Delhi/University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1986, plates 48–49.

²⁶ A.L. C o h e n, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of the Nolambas (Ninth-Tenth Centuries)*, Manohar, New Delhi 1998, p. 95.

²⁷ C. S i v a r a m a m u r t i, *Some Recent Sculptural Acquisitions in the National Museum*, "Lalit Kalā" 1, 1956, pp. 113–115, and C o h e n, op. cit., p. 88.

²⁸ A partial list of the *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes can be found on p. 639 of C. S i v a r a m a m u r t i, *The Rāmāyaṇa in Indian Sculpture*, in: R. R a g h a v a n (ed.), *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi 1980, pp. 636–647.

²⁹ From the order in which S i v a r a m a m u r t i lists the scenes it appears that the Vānara depicted should be Aṅgada on his embassy to Rāvaṇa but he is identified by S i v a r a m a m u r t i as Hanumān — presumably just a slip of the pen, since he was extremely well versed in the Rāma story, although it is possible that it is a reminiscence of a different version in which this motif has been transferred to Hanumān, such as that found in the reliefs on the enclosure wall of the Rāmacandra temple at Vijayanagara, where the sequence of episodes establishes that the Vānara shown with the coiled tail must be Hanumān during his reconnoitring of Laṅkā (cf. Anna Dallapiccola and others, *The Ramachandra Temple at Vijayanagara*, Manohar, New Delhi 1992, p. 90); this transfer of motif may be due to the particular importance of Hanumān at Vijayanagara. Very interestingly, this same transfer occurs in Orissa, where in the versions by Śāraḷadāsa and Upendra Bhaṇja it is Aṅgada who by coiling his tail raises himself above Rāvaṇa but in the *Jagamohana Rāmāyaṇa* (6.57–60) Hanumān follows Aṅgada as envoy and the incident is transferred to him (William s, op. cit., p. 100).

The scenes from both epics which cover the outer walls of the Pāpanātha temple at Paṭṭadakal, built in the first half of the 8th century, were designed to bolster the dynasty's legitimacy shortly before its fall to the Rāṣṭrakūṭas.³⁰ They are also the earliest narrative sequences to be preserved in a good enough state to permit reasonable inferences about the sculptor's or patron's intentions. The starting point for both narrative sequences is nearer the *garbhagrha*, so that the triumphant conclusion can be depicted on the façade, which means that the 28 *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes, starting in the middle of the south wall of the western *maṇḍapa*, are in reverse order for viewing when worshippers were circumambulating the temple; Wechsler notes that this is exceptional among Western Cālukya monuments,³¹ although it is in fact also found at the Hoysala Amṛteśvara temple and the Nolamba Kāmākṣamma temple, as noted below. These scenes on the Pāpanātha temple are perhaps the earliest to show Rāvaṇa's ten heads as a circle (artistically more effective than the row common in miniature paintings). The eight *Mahābhārata* scenes begin on the north side of the eastern *maṇḍapa* and run in the usual order; they include the ubiquitous Rāvaṇa shaking Kailāsa, Śiva as a Kirāta and the contest over the boar, Arjuna's penance and his receiving the *pāśupatāstra*, three scenes of battles or warriors, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna together, and Arjuna victorious.

On the Kṛṣṇeśvara or Kailāsanātha temple at Elūrā (mid 8th century), built by the most notable of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa rulers Kṛṣṇa, which is (as its popular name suggests) a Śaiva temple, there are tiers of friezes on the exterior of the stairways depicting episodes from both epics in a style quite similar to those of the interior pillars of the Virūpākṣa temple at Paṭṭadakal. The 23 *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes begin with the crossing of the Gaṅgā and Bharata's journey to recall Rāma from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* and end with Rāma's fight with Kumbhakarna from the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. The fact that no scenes from the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are included was used by Gail to reinforce a late dating for both books;³² however, not only are there the Deogaṛh panels of the Ahalyā episode and of Rāvaṇa offering his heads as counter-examples but also, as later instances will show, it is normal for narrative friezes to omit the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, as of course so do a number of vernacular adaptations — and no doubt for the same reasons.

In the territory of the Nolamba dynasty, in the border area between Karnataka and Tamilnadu, there are a number of temples with reliefs drawn from the epics. At the Nolamba capital Hemāvatī (former Heñjeru), the Doḍḍēśvara temple, a granite temple datable to the early part of the 10th

³⁰ H.J. Wechsler, *Royal Legitimation: Rāmāyaṇa Reliefs on the Papanatha Temple at Pattadakal*, in: V. Dehejia (ed.), *The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions*, Marg Publications, Bombay 1994, pp. 27–42.

³¹ Ibid., p. 30.

³² A. Gail, *Rāmāyaṇa-relief am Kailāsa in Ellora*, "Berliner Indologische Studien", vol. 1, 1985, pp. 177–185.

century, includes scenes from both epics on the *caturasra* section of the pillars in its *maṇḍapas*; these include the mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā, the shooting of the golden deer, Jaṭāyus attacking a three-headed Rāvaṇa and Sītā in the *aśokavana* from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Arjuna wrestling with the Kirāta, the battle between Arjuna and Vṛṣasena and Bhīṣma on his bed of arrows from the *Mahābhārata*.³³ The dilapidated Virūpākṣa temple at the same site and belonging probably to the middle of the 10th century similarly has epic scenes on the *caturasra* sections of its *maṇḍapa* pillars, including Rāvaṇa abducting Sītā in his chariot and the battle between Arjuna and Karna.³⁴ At the nearby village of Śivarām, the Raṅganāthasvāmī temple on Pelubaṇḍā hill preserves four Nolamba pillars in a basically Vijayanagara-period structure; these closely resemble those in the Virūpākṣa temple at Hemāvatī (and probably also belong to the middle of the 10th century) and one of them shows *Mahābhārata* battle scenes.³⁵ At Dharmapurī (in Tamilnad) the Kāmākṣamma temple is built on an *upapīṭha* which has *Rāmāyaṇa* panels in a set of continuous friezes carved all round it; it is noteworthy that the narration actually starts on the rear wall to the west and proceeds in a counter-clockwise (*apradakṣiṇa*) order from the *Bālakāṇḍa* through to the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*; a brief listing of the scenes is provided by Cohen, including successive scenes of Rāma shooting Mārīca in the form of the golden deer and in his Rākṣasa form (panel 13b and 13c).³⁶

On early Cōla temples (9–10th centuries) epic narratives ornament the *mekhalā* ('girdle') section of the temples' basements. The adoption by Āditya I (871–907 A.D.) of the title Kodaṇḍarāma may have influenced the choice of episodes depicted at Kumbakonam and Pullamaṅgai. The Nāgeśvara temple at Kumbakonam contains a series of figures in its secondary niches, which David Sanford with some cogency identifies as *Rāmāyaṇa* characters — and with less cogency assigns to the Pāṇḍya Śrīmāra Śrīvallabha (815–862 A.D.) or his successor Varaguṇa II — thus supplementing the miniature relief panels (c. 10 × 15 cm) of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on its base, which provide a continuous narration from the birth of Rāma through to the battles for Laṅkā;³⁷ one of the most unusual is a representation of the pillaging of the Madhuvana (this episode gains in importance later, for example in the Nāyak period, as Anna Dallapiccola has pointed out to me) but there is also a depiction of the Ahalyā episode (found earlier at Deogarh and later also shown on the main shrine of the Rāmacandra temple, Vijayanagara). Similar series of *Rāmāyaṇa* relief panels are found on the Brahmapurīśvara temple at Pullamaṅgai (c. 910 A.D.)

³³ Cohen, op. cit., p. 38–42.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 46–47.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 88–89.

³⁷ D.T. Sanford, *Early Temples Bearing Ramayana Relief Cycles in the Chola Area: A Comparative Study*, University of California, Los Angeles, 1974, and *Ramayana Portraits: The Nageshvara Temple at Kumbakonam*, in: Dehejia, op. cit., pp. 43–60.

among the 60 small panels below the pilasters of the walls, on the Caḍaiyar kōvil at Tiruccennampunḍi (c. 915–920 A.D.) and on the Naḷtinai Īśvara temple at Puñjai (c. 940 A.D.), although the last are not continuous but are interspersed with others and on occasion in reverse order. Their depiction of the first meeting between Rāma and Sugrīva seems closer to Vālmīki than to Kampaṇ, since Hanumān carries Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa on his shoulders to Sugrīva;³⁸ similarly, it has been claimed that the *Rāmāyaṇa* panels on the Kampahareśvara temple at Tribhuvanam, built by Kolottuṅga III (1178–1216 A.D.), follow a version closer to Vālmīki than to Kampaṇ, with some local variants.³⁹ At the Arkeśvara temple at Hale-Alur (Maisūr District), which may belong to Rājendra Cōla's reign around 1020 A.D. (an alternative dating assigns them to the Gaṅga Būtuga II and the middle of the 10th century), the pillars in the Nandi *maṇḍapa* are carved with *Mahābhārata* scenes.⁴⁰

A 10th-century Cālukya temple, the Mahāliṅgeśvara at Varuṇā (7 miles E of Maisūr) has a *Rāmāyaṇa* frieze carved just below the eaves on the *valabhī* in low relief; the scenes shown include Rāvaṇa in *darbār*, the death of Rāvaṇa and Rāvaṇa's soul being carried by two birds, and end with the *Rāmapaṭṭābhiṣeka*.⁴¹ Several Yādava temples in Maharashtra from the 11th century onwards show episodes from both epics; examples are carved on the Vārāha temple at Loni-Bhapkar, the Bhairavanātha at Kikli, the Goṇḍeśvara at Sinnar and the Bhuleśvara at Yavat and frequently depicted scenes are the Ahalyā episode, the meeting of Bharata and Rāma, and the fight between Vālin and Sugrīva from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Arjuna's hitting of the fish target and Bhīṣma's lying on the bed of arrows from the *Mahābhārata*.⁴² The Gaṅgeśvara and Brahmeśvara temples at Asandi in Karnataka, linked by a common *maṇḍapa* and built in 1191 by a local Gaṅga chief, have ceilings which show *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes.⁴³

Three Telugu Cōla temples contain *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes carved on the *vājana* moulding of the *prastara*;⁴⁴ these are the Aḷaharanātha temple at Gūḍūr (probably built 1160–1195; the earliest inscription is dated 1195 A.D.), the Veṇugopāla temple at Kṛṣṇapatnam (probably early 13th century) and the Aḷaharanātha temple at Ātmakūr (earliest inscription on site dated 1276 but

³⁸ R. Nagaswamy, *Śrī Rāmāyaṇa in Tamilnadu in Art, Thought and Literature*, in: V. Raghavan (ed.), *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi 1980, pp. 409–429 (esp. pp. 416–417).

³⁹ Nagaswamy, op. cit., pp. 418–419; Sivaramamurti 1980, op. cit., p. 642.

⁴⁰ Cohen, op. cit., p. 92.

⁴¹ Mysore Archaeological Department, *Annual Report for the year 1940*, Government Press, Mysore 1941 (esp. pp. 19–23).

⁴² S.R. Deshpande, *Yadava Sculpture (Western Maharashtra: 1000 A.D. to 1400 A.D.)*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi 1985, p. 70.

⁴³ Mysore Archaeological Department, *Annual Report for the year 1942*, Government Press, Mysore 1943, pp. 66–67.

⁴⁴ V.K. Mohan, *Art and Architecture of the Telugu Cōla Temples*, Kaveri Books, New Delhi 1996, pp. 174–177.

referred to in an inscription of 1246 from elsewhere). All three show Rāma piercing the seven *sāl* trees mounted on the body of the snake and stamping on the snake's tail (found also on the Śaiva temple at Nidikoṇḍa dated 1219 A.D.). The Veṇugopāla temple also shows the episode of the ascetic youth accidentally killed by Daśaratha, popularly called Śravaṇakumāra, carrying his aged parents in a *kāvaḍi*, which is also carved on one of the pillars of the *dvāramanḍapa* of another temple at Kṛṣṇapatnam, the Manumasiddheśvara, and on the enclosure wall of the Rāmacandra temple at Vijayanagara (see below); Mary Brockington discusses this further in her article in this volume. Both the Veṇugopāla temple at Kṛṣṇapatnam and the Aḷaharanātha temple at Ātmakūr show the fight between Vālin and Sugrīva.

The popularity of both epics and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (no doubt in vernacular versions rather than the Sanskrit versions) for the friezes which decorate Hoysaḷa temples is well known.⁴⁵ These are typical of the developed Hoysaḷa temple style, which suddenly emerged around 1125 A.D. in the Hoysaḷeśvara temple at Halebīḍ; such temples have six friezes at the base of their wall decoration, which have fixed decorations consisting — from top to bottom — of *haṃsas*, *makaras*, epic scenes, a floral scroll, horses and elephants.⁴⁶ The usual arrangement is for episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* to be located on the south side of the temple and *Mahābhārata* episodes on the north, with *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* episodes on the eastern face of the *navaraṅga* (main hall). Among the *Mahābhārata* episodes, those particularly favoured are Bhīma shaking the young Kauravas from a tree (found in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* at 1.119 but developed in the mid-10th-century *Pampa Bhārata*),⁴⁷ Arjuna's hitting the fish target (*matsyayantrabhedana*, again more elaborately depicted in a similar

⁴⁵ G. Foekema, *Hoysaḷa Architecture: Medieval Temples of Southern Karnāṭaka Built during Hoysaḷa Rule*, 2 vols, Books and Books, New Delhi 1994, and K. Evans, *Epic Narrative in the Hoysaḷa Temple: The Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata and Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Halebīḍ, Belūr and Amṛtapura*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1997.

⁴⁶ Foekema, op. cit., pp. 22–23.

⁴⁷ Though not, it seems, occurring on the temples in Halebīḍ itself (to which the qualifications noted in the text are relevant), this episode is shown on all the other Hoysaḷa temples for which I have information (Cennakeśava at Belūr, Amṛteśvara at Amṛtapura, Keśava at Somnāthpur, Mallikārjuna at Basarāḷu, Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa at Hosahoḷalu, and Someśvara at Bandalike); it is indeed one of the most frequently represented after the dice game, occurring as often as the Indrakīla episode and Bhīma's killing of Duḥśāsana.

The episode is even further developed in folk versions of the *Mahābhārata*. For example, in a Rajasthani telling discussed by John Smith it has turned into a game which the Kauravas are using to humiliate and starve Nakula until Bhīma turns the tables on them, this then providing the motivation for the Pāṇḍavas' exile (*Worlds Apart: Orality, Literacy, and the Folk-Mahābhārata*, "Oral Tradition", vol. 5, no. 1, 1990, pp. 3–19, esp. pp. 9–10); this gives the episode much greater prominence and the motif of the game may even be present in such reliefs as that on the Amṛteśvara temple (where it might explain the otherwise unidentified figure, apparently a Pāṇḍava, standing beside the tree). I am grateful to Mary Brockington for drawing my attention to this Rajasthani parallel.

manner to the description in the *Pampa Bhārata*), the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest, the Indrakīla episode (based on the *Pampa Bhārata*), the Saindhava episode, the cattle raid from the *Virāṭaparvan*, and the fulfilment of Draupadī's vow, when she dresses her hair with the blood from Duḥśāsana's entrails (actually shown twice on the Hoysaleśvara temple). Several of these emphasise the vigorous, even brutal aspects of the narrative in a way that accords with popular tellings, while Hiltebeitel emphasises that 'it is in Hoysala art that one finds the earliest sculptures of several of the <Draupadī> cult's central themes: most notably the depiction of Arjuna winning Draupadī as his bride by shooting an arrow at a fish, and of Draupadī fulfilling her vow to dress her hair on the battlefield with the blood of Duḥśāsana.'⁴⁸ Many representations of Arjuna's fight with Śiva as the Kirāta (including those on the Hoysaleśvara, Kedāreśvara and Hūcheśvara temples at Halebīḍ, the Amṛteśvara temple at Amṛtapura and the Lakṣmīnarasimha temple at Jāvagal) include Pārvatī shown with a raised hand, apparently confirming the presence of an auspicious 'fish-mark' on Arjuna's back, a motif found in Telugu and Kannada folk traditions.⁴⁹

At Halebīḍ, the Hoysaleśvara temple contains an exceptionally fine epic frieze, all the scenes of which have been individually identified.⁵⁰ The limited number of *Rāmāyaṇa* representations are drawn mainly from the *Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa* (with a repeat of the *saptatālabhañjana* episode of Rāma piercing the seven *sāl* trees, shown as elsewhere on the back of the king of snakes), while the *Mahābhārata* scenes include a number of duplicates — for example, the Indrakīla episode carved by two named sculptors, Balāṇa and Ketāṇa — and relate mainly to the battle books, where one notable representation is that of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa bathing in the Samantapañcaka lake as Kṛṣṇa breaks the news of Abhimanyu's death;⁵¹ the disruptions in the sequence for both epics are problematic and may suggest that the large external niches (which are held to be later) conceal some episodes, rendering it unwise to draw inferences from what is or is not shown. The Kedāreśvara temple (1219 A.D.) — like the Hoysaleśvara a Śaiva temple — also has significant epic friezes, the *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes covering basically the *Sundara* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas* and the *Mahābhārata* scenes drawn from the *Āraṇyaka* to *Droṇa parvans*; unique among the Hoysāla

⁴⁸ A. Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadī I. Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1988, p. 21; his footnote to this includes a list of occurrences of the first theme compiled from the photographic archives of the French Institute of Indology, Pondicherry; cf. also pp. 200–201 for current representation of the episode by Pāratiyār performers.

⁴⁹ M.S. Nagaraja Rao, *Kirātārjunīyam in Indian Art, with special reference to Karnataka*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi 1979, Hiltebeitel, op. cit., pp. 208–209; Evans, op. cit., pp. 159–160.

⁵⁰ Mysore Archaeological Department, *Annual Report for the year 1930*, Government Press, Bangalore 1934, pp. 34–49.

⁵¹ This is an apparently localised version of the event; cf. Evans, op. cit., pp. 207–208.

temples is a relief of Bhīṣma lying on his bed of arrows (a highly visual scene which in abstract one might expect to be represented more often). However, restoration work on the temple early in the 20th century incorporated fragments from other ruined temples around Halebīḍ, again making conjectures about the scheme as a whole more difficult, while some sculptures from this temple are now in the National Museum, Copenhagen.

More recently, excavations in the 1980s revealed the lower levels of two temple complexes near the palace area at Halebīḍ. Only the platforms of the three largest temples in the Nāgareśvara complex remain but the narrative layers with episodes from the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are well preserved on the southern temple, with only individual episodes surviving on the middle and northern temples;⁵² on the southern temple, after a lost first section, the *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes are drawn from the *Kiṣkindhā*, *Sundara* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas* and the *Mahābhārata* scenes from the *Āraṇyaka* to *Droṇa parvans*. The ruined Hūcheśvara temple (earlier known as the Viraktamaṭha),⁵³ probably belonging to the reign of Vīra Ballāḷa II (1173–1220), still shows extensive episodes from both epics on its basement,⁵⁴ with the *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes drawn mainly from the *Kiṣkindhā* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas* (a pattern similar to that on the Nāgeśvara temple).

The Amṛteśvara temple at Amṛtapura (10 km from Tarikere, renovated by the Archaeological Survey of India in the 1980s) is a Śaiva temple dedicated in 1196 A.D., which has extensive reliefs from both epics and from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* on its large open *maṇḍapa*.⁵⁵ The decoration of this open *maṇḍapa* is unique in Hoysaḷa architecture in showing these reliefs on its slanting seat-back, with unusual stellate *śikhara*s below. About 140 panels, separated by pairs of small round pilasters, are located in both the open *maṇḍapa* and the *aṅkana* connecting the open and closed *maṇḍapas*. On the southern side is a *Rāmāyaṇa* narration in 76 panels; the story runs from left to right, against the natural sequence for *pradakṣiṇā*, and covers the *Bāla* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*; neither here nor on any other of the Hoysaḷa temples for which I have information is any episode from the *Uttarakāṇḍa* represented. On the northern side, starting from the connecting *aṅkana*, there are first 24 panels with Kṛṣṇa stories and then 36 panels depicting episodes from the *Ādi* to *Āraṇyaka parvans* of the *Mahābhārata*, ending with the Indrakīla episode. The *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs concentrate heavily on the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (46 panels) and *Bālakāṇḍa* (11 panels), while the *Mahābhārata* reliefs concentrate on the *Ādiparvan* (23 panels), with particular emphasis on the Pāṇḍavas' childhood (a feature found also

⁵² Ibid., pp. 221–231.

⁵³ Mysore Archaeological Department, *Annual Report for the year 1930*, Government Press, Bangalore 1934, p. 59.

⁵⁴ Evans, op. cit., pp. 213–220.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 23–192.

at the Keśava temple at Somnāthpur), in marked contrast to the emphasis on the battle scenes in the reliefs on the Hoysalesvara temple. In the relief of Śiva bestowing the Pāsupata weapon on Arjuna, Umā stands to the left, which may perhaps be linked to Arjuna receiving the *añjalikāstra* from her in the *Pampa Bhārata*.⁵⁶ Although most panels are clearly intended to relate to some specific episode, there are some which equally obviously serve merely to set the scene in general and are only incidental to the story line — a warning, perhaps, not to push efforts at identification too far, especially since another possibility is that they are later replacements, as Anna Dallapiccola notes for some broadly similar panels on the enclosure wall of the Rāmacandra temple at Vijayanagara.⁵⁷

On the Keśava temple at Somnāthpur (25 km east of Maisūr, dated 1258 A.D.), a complete developed *trikūṭa* (triple-shrined temple) on a platform, the epic frieze shows first *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes (*Bāla* to *Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍas*) on the southern shrine, then Kṛṣṇa scenes from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* on the western shrine and finally *Mahābhārata* scenes on the northern shrine and *navaraṅga* (main hall).⁵⁸ Unusual episodes for such representations are Daśaratha fighting Indra's enemies (1b), a series on the childhood of Rāma and his brothers (3abc, 4a) and the display of Sītā's ornaments (6e) among the *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes and the birth of Ghaṭotkaca (15d) and the Pāṇḍavas staying in the potter's hut (16a) among the *Mahābhārata* scenes.

As a contribution to an inventory of the available material, let me simply list some other Hoysala temples which do contain or could be expected to contain epic friezes. At Aralaguppe (15 km E of Tiptūr) the Cennakeśava temple is of the developed type; the epic frieze, starting clockwise from the entrance, first shows scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* — mainly from the *Bāla* to *Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍas* — and then, after the northern side of the *śukanāsī* ('parrot's beak', antefix to the main shrine), Kṛṣṇa stories from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.⁵⁹ At Bandalike the Someśvara or Ānekal Sōmayya temple, built in 1274 A.D., carries bands of epic narratives on the sculptured screens of its porch, with *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes on the south and *Mahābhārata* episodes on the north.⁶⁰ At Basarālu (about 25 km N of Mandya) the Mallikārjuna temple, built in 1234 A.D., is a small developed *trikūṭa* on a platform; the six friezes give a more similar impression than in other developed Hoysala temples and both the epics, as well as other mythological

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 160–161.

⁵⁷ Dallapiccola et al., op. cit., p. 89.

⁵⁸ Mysore Archaeological Department, *Annual Report for the year 1932*, Government Press, Bangalore 1935, pp. 16–39.

⁵⁹ Mysore Archaeological Department, *Annual Report for the year 1935*, Government Press, Bangalore 1936, pp. 3–10.

⁶⁰ Mysore Archaeological Department, *Annual Report for the year 1941*, Government Press, Mysore 1942, pp. 86–94.

scenes, are shown.⁶¹ The Tripurāntakeśvara temple at Belgami, probably belonging to the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana, has basement friezes which include *Rāmāyaṇa* themes but many have been destroyed; among those remaining are Rāma piercing the seven *sāl* trees and Rāma killing Vālin. On the Cennakeśava temple at Bēlūr (1117 A.D., with additions c. 1133–1142 A.D.) there are 22 *Mahābhārata* panels on railings on the southeastern face of the *navaraṅga* depicting events up to the *Śalyaparvan*, while the perennially popular episode of Arjuna aiming at the fish target is carved on the north face of the *navaraṅga*; *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes are carved on one layer of the basement friezes, while a later 17th-century open *maṇḍapa* contains *Rāmāyaṇa* relief panels.⁶² At Hosaholalu (2 km S of Kṛṣṇarājpet), the mid-13th-century Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa temple is a developed *trikūṭa* on a platform; the epic frieze shows the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the southern side of the temple and the *Mahābhārata* on the northern side.⁶³ The Lakṣmīnarasimha temple at Jāvagallu (35 km N of Hāssan, mid 13th century) is a developed *trikūṭa* on a platform; the epic frieze — much worn and obscured by lime plaster — shows episodes from both epics, including the Indrakīla episode. Although both the Kedāreśvara and the Cennakeśava temples at Nāgalāpura (10 km S of Turuvekere) are developed *ekakūṭas* with a full star *vimāna*, the epic frieze has been left empty on both, despite the fact that the other friezes are fully carved. On the Lakṣmīnarasimha temple at Nuggihalḷi (15 km NE of Channarayāpatna, dated 1246 A.D.), an ornate developed *trikūṭa*, the epic frieze is particularly full of life but shows only Kṛṣṇa scenes, drawn from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Such epic narrative carvings are not limited in Karnataka to the Hoysala period. In addition to the earlier or contemporary Cālukya and Gaṅga examples noted above, a later example occurs at Jambitige Agrahāra (about 1 mile from Hariharapura) which contains a small granite temple to Nīlakaṇṭheśvara built in 1733, for this has epic scenes carved on its wall panels (a *Śeṣāyin* up to the *Sundarakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the western panel of the south wall, *Mahābhārata* scenes from the *Virāṭaparvan* onwards on the eastern panel,

⁶¹ Mysore Archaeological Department, *Annual Report for the year 1934*, Government Press, Bangalore 1936, pp. 36–47.

⁶² One of these relief panels shows Mārīca, when he is being killed by Rāma, with a demonic head replacing the deer's head, quite similar to the reliefs on the Svarṇajāleśvara temple at Bhuvaneśvar and the Vārāhī temple at Caurāsī (Williams 1996, op. cit., figures 275 top and 282); this intermediate state is the means by which its sculptor seeks to represent Mārīca's reversion to a Rākṣasa form as he dies (cf. *Vālmīkī Rāmāyaṇa* 3.42.15–16). Another solution is that adopted on the Amṛteśvara temple where the relevant panel 16 shows both the deer form at which Rāma is aiming his arrow and a recumbent Rākṣasa form beneath Rāma's feet (Evans, op. cit., pp. 56–57), while on the Nolamba Kāmākṣamma temple at Dharmapuri the deer and Rākṣasa forms are shown in successive scenes (Cohen, op. cit., p. 88). A verbal narrative can state the change directly but a visual one has to adopt indirect means to indicate the process.

⁶³ Mysore Archaeological Department, *Annual Report for the year 1933*, Government Press, Bangalore 1936, pp. 3–13.

Rāmāyaṇa episodes from the *Sītākalyāṇa* to the death of Rāvaṇa on the west wall, and on the north wall *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* scenes and the birth of the Pāṇḍavas from the *Mahābhārata*). In some ways even more interesting is an inscription at Bāgūr village which records a grant made in 1543 A.D., during the reign of the Vijayanagara ruler Sadāśiva, by one of the ruler's officials for the enactment of a puppet performance of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story;⁶⁴ this establishes that such popular performances have a considerable past history.

In the Vijayanagara period, the *Rāmāyaṇa* in particular was favoured for such relief representations, partly as a result of the traditional association of Ānegondi, across the Tuṅgabhadra river from the city of Vijayanagara, with the site of the Vānara capital, Kiṣkindhā, but also as part of the self-image of the rulers as champions of Hindu tradition. The birthplace of Hanumān is traditionally located on Añjanādri hill, where a temple dedicated to him is still visited by pilgrims, while an inscription of 1379 A.D. already compares Harihara residing at Vijayanagara with Rāma at Ayodhyā. The reliefs on the royal Rāmacandra temple, which was established no later than the first half of the 15th century, are particularly notable.⁶⁵ These comprise a narrative frieze on the inner face of the enclosure walls, running from the inner east face of the north gateway round to the east gateway, and separate panels arranged in a clockwise sequence in three ascending tiers on the outer walls of the *maṇḍapa* of the main shrine, containing a total of exactly 108 panels and requiring a triple *pradakṣiṇā* to view the narrative properly (this is continued by two rows of panels on the *vimāna* of the minor shrine to Sītā, drawn exceptionally — but appropriately perhaps to its dedication — from the *Uttarakāṇḍa*).⁶⁶ Dallapiccola asserts that the enclosure wall panels are based on South Indian tradition, probably Telugu, whereas those on the main shrine follow the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* closely, and suggests that the panels on the minor shrine reflect the influence of folk tradition;⁶⁷ however, the distinction is far from absolute, since the principal shrine panels for example include the seven *sāl* trees on the back of a snake (panel 32). Most interestingly, as Anna Dallapiccola has pointed out to us, although the dying Vālin cradled by Tārā is shown in sequence (middle row,

⁶⁴ Mysore Archaeological Department, *Annual Report for the year 1941*, Government Press, Mysore 1942, pp. 136–137.

⁶⁵ Dallapiccola et al., op. cit., pp. 81–130; A. Dallapiccola, *The City of Vijayanagara: Kiṣkindha, the monkey-kingdom*, in: Dehejia, op. cit., pp. 61–72.

⁶⁶ There is also another, less complete series in the *mahāmaṇḍapa* of the Viṭṭhala temple, on the recessed beams above the pillars in the northern part (A.L. Dallapiccola and A. Verghese, *Sculpture at Vijayanagara: Iconography and Style*, Manohar, New Delhi 1998, pp. 24–25 and 120). *Uttarakāṇḍa* scenes are also shown on the early Cōla temple at Pullamaṅgai, according to D. Sanford, *Miniature Relief Sculptures at the Pullamangai Siva Temple, with Special Reference to the Ramayana Sequence*, in: M.S. Nagaraja Rao (ed.), *Kusumāñjali: New Interpretation of Indian Art and Culture*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi 1987, pp. 277–287.

⁶⁷ Dallapiccola, op. cit., p. 67, and Dallapiccola et al., op. cit., p. 97; cf. Dallapiccola and Verghese, op. cit., pp. 111–114 for a listing of the panels.

south wall, 33), the morally dubious aspect of Rāma aiming his arrow at Vālin as he is wrestling with his brother Sugrīva is obscurely tucked away on two tiny panels at the foot of the pilasters, as if the sculptor were ashamed of its implications.

The scenes on the enclosure wall begin on the side of the north porch with the visually effective Śravaṇakumāra episode, transferred from its position in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* to its chronologically accurate position preceding the main narrative, as is also done in local puppet plays; similarly, they include Lakṣmaṇa killing the ascetic son of Śūrpaṇakhā but before her appearance, which figures prominently in local puppet plays, as well as many vernacular versions, though absent from the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* (personal communication from Anna Dallapiccola to Mary Brockington). Other episodes absent from the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* but found in later versions that are shown on the enclosure wall include Lakṣmaṇa drawing a magic line round Sītā before leaving and Rāvaṇa carrying Sītā in a chariot (panel 30) and Hanumān sitting on his coiled tail to match Rāvaṇa in elevation just before his tail is set alight (panel 48). A third complete *Rāmāyaṇa* series is carved on the walls of the southern *gopuram* of the 'Old Śiva' or Rāmānuja temple (end of the 15th century or beginning of the 16th), consisting of 131 panels in four rows all round the gateway and its entrance chambers (with one panel on the north wall missing). The narrative sequence, which again follows the Telugu version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, begins with the sacrifice conducted by R̥śyaśṛṅga and ends with the battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa; it too includes a relief of Hanumān sitting on his coiled tail (panel 98) and unusually shows the meeting of Rāma and Śabarī (panel 60).⁶⁸ In addition to these three complete series, there are two partial series, one on two pillars in the north porch of the Viṭṭhala temple and another on the east *gopuram* of the Tiruveṅkaṭanātha temple (which also has twelve *Rāmāyaṇa* panels on its inner north *gopuram*).⁶⁹ By contrast with the great popularity of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* is very rarely represented in sculpture at Vijayanagara.⁷⁰

However, the appeal of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was not limited to the capital city. The Rāma temple at Penukoṇḍa (Andhra Pradesh, 15th century, in the early Vijayanagara style, located in a single compound with the Śiva temple) has *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* scenes carved on its walls. The ornate pillared *maṇḍapa* added in the 16th century to the Varadarāja temple at Kāñcī has various *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes carved on its pillars and base.⁷¹ The

⁶⁸ Dallapiccola and Verghese, op. cit., pp. 23–24 and 115–118.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 24 and 119–121.

⁷⁰ Dallapiccola and Verghese (op. cit., p. 25) note just two panels on 'Bhīma's gate' showing Bhīma tearing open Duḥśāsana and Draupadī dressing her hair with his blood, two other panels from different parts of the site, and a post-Vijayanagara ceiling painting in the Virūpākṣa temple of Arjuna winning the contest for Draupadī's hand.

⁷¹ Sivaramamurti 1980, op. cit., p. 643.

Veṅkaṭaramana temple at Tāḍapatri (Andhra Pradesh, mid 16th century) has reliefs of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* episodes between the pilasters of its walls — the panels have Telugu captions and the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* is under-represented — and there are further *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes on the lintels over the doorways of its enclosed *maṇḍapa* (including Sītā entering the fire).⁷² The Vīrabhadra temple at Lepākṣi (Andhra Pradesh, mid 16th century) is well known for its ceiling paintings, which include scenes from both epics and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, while the Cennakeśava temple at Somapalem (Andhra Pradesh, 16th century) preserves traces of paintings of *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes on the ceiling of its *maṇḍapa*.

Similarly, in the succeeding Nāyak period, the Pārthasārathi temple at Chengam has ceiling paintings, which once told the entire story, although now only *Yuddhakāṇḍa* episodes survive on the central square; of particular interest here is the depiction (confirmed by labels in Telugu) of Rāvaṇa performing *pātālahoma* in order to be able to fight Rāma and of the *vānaras* disrupting the *homa*, since this occurs, not in *Vālmīki* or *Kaṃpaṇ*, but in *Raṅga-nātha*'s 14th-century Telugu version.⁷³ The sculptures of the Rāmasvāmi temple at Kumbakonam built by Raghunātha Nāyak (c. 1600–1633 A.D.) give a particular emphasis to Rāma as teacher and Hanumān as a musician.⁷⁴ The paintings in the Chengam temple, and similar ones in the Viṣṇu temple at Tiruvellarai, in one of the *maṇḍapas* of the Śrīraṅgam temple and at Śrīvilliputtūr, are still largely independent of a written text (although the provision of captions at Chengam and Śrīvilliputtūr may be indicative of change) but miniature painting, which becomes so common in North India from this period onward, is too closely tied to the illustration of written text to have much value for our purposes, fascinating as many of them are as works of art.

For the motif of the seven *sāl* trees pierced by Rāma being supported by the king of snakes, which is a common theme in *Rāmāyaṇa* relief sculpture from Hoysala and Vijayanagara temples (but not found in early Orissan representations of the scene, though represented in more modern Oriya paintings),⁷⁵ the earliest certain textual occurrence that I have yet located is in the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* which belongs somewhere in the 15th to 17th centuries.⁷⁶ If so, this

⁷² I am most grateful to Anna D all a p i c c o l a for drawing my attention to the Penukoṇḍa and Tāḍapatri temples, as well as for other helpful comments separately noted.

⁷³ N a g a s w a m y, op. cit., pp. 421–422.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 422–424.

⁷⁵ W i l l i a m s, op. cit., esp. pp. 91–95.

⁷⁶ According to W i l l i a m s (op. cit., p. 92 + fn.), K. B u l k e (*Rāmkaṭhā: utpatti aur vikās*, 3rd revised edn, Hindī Pariṣad Prakāśan, Prayāg 1971, p. 471) indicates that the snake appears in the *Mahānātaka* (of rather uncertain date but perhaps 11th century) but it does not occur in Jīvanand V i d y ā s ā g a r's edition at the relevant point, 4.62. I have not been able to check the other version, the *Hanumannātaka*.

is perhaps the most striking instance of a carved representation long preceding the earliest textual attestation but there are several others noted in this paper and no doubt many more are waiting to be identified. For other motifs the information readily available is less than one would wish; for example, the Ahalyā episode, though not particularly frequent, has a wide temporal and spatial distribution and it would be very interesting to know whether these representations show the distinctive features of some vernacular textual versions.

While we must always bear in mind that one factor influencing the scenes illustrated must have been their suitability for visual representation, it is nonetheless possible to see in many of these narrative sequences, which long pre-date extant vernacular versions, the same trends found later in these textual versions. In instances such as the motif of Aṅgada sitting on his coiled tail, where visual representations are so much earlier than textual sources, we may even wonder whether the innovation is owed to the sculptor's imagination rather than the storyteller's, while the transfer of the motif to Hanumān raises further issues about narrative intentions and about the growth in status of Hanumān.

The popularity of such narrative friezes based on the epics or related texts — in many respects the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* needs to be taken into account alongside the two epics — over so wide an area is noteworthy, for my rather random collection of material shows clearly that this is by no means a feature only or mainly of the Karnatak region, despite their popularity on Cālukya, Hoysala and Vijayanagara temples. Moreover, the reasons for their popularity can scarcely be exclusively religious. Their frequency not just on Vaiṣṇava temples, where their presence could be ascribed simply to religious motives, but equally on Śaiva temples, where such a motivation is less easy to maintain (though possible for individual episodes with a Śaiva orientation, such as Arjuna's fight with Śiva as a Kirāta), must be taken into account in this connection. The view that the prevalence of epic reliefs is linked with royal patronage has a good deal to commend it; the battle scenes may well be intended to express the rulers' martial aspirations, while the preference for the *Rāmāyaṇa* could equally reflect the understanding of the king as <another> Rāma which is seen in various rulers' titles.

Another issue that deserves further investigation is the extent of the narratives regarded as significant for the sculptors or their patrons, with the light that this can shed on popular attitudes towards the stories. The rarity of depiction of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has already been commented on, along with the way that visual representation anticipates or echoes vernacular adaptations of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is also noteworthy that among the many *Mahābhārata* relief narratives there is never any depiction of any episode occurring after the end of the battle. There is nothing corresponding to the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans* (the rare depiction of Bhīṣma on his bed of arrows belongs in reality to the battle scenes rather than being an allusion to this post-battle teaching) — which is perhaps not surprising — but also nothing

corresponding to the visually more promising *Aśvamedha* or *Mahāprasthānika parvans*. Some relief sequences concentrate on the earlier parts of the narrative, while others show mainly scenes from the battle books; the factors influencing this probably vary and deserve further investigation.

As I remarked at the beginning of this paper, comparison of such visual evidence with the textual sources is a potentially significant means of refining our knowledge of the evolution of the epics over time.

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