

*In Praise of Prambanan: Dutch Essays on the Loro Jonggrang Temple Complex.* Edited by Roy E. Jordaan. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1996. 259 pp.

This collection of essays deals with the monumental complex of Candi Prambanan, located in Central Java. The book is made up of two major parts, of approximately equal lengths, the first entirely written by Roy Jordaan, while the second has eight essays, all translated from Dutch. Whether regarding the discovery, excavation, restoration, or description and analysis of this Hindu-Javanese complex, formally called Loro Jonggrang, the contribution of Dutch scholars has indeed been pre-eminent and Jordaan aims at gaining their writings a broader diffusion. In his own preliminary and original essay (pp. 3–115), Jordaan introduces the 250-odd temples. He deals with several key issues such as the historical and religious context of Prambanan's construction, the dating of the monuments, the artistic motifs and styles and the spatial layout of the temples, whether architectural, sculptural, or pictorial (the bas-reliefs). As his own analysis gradually unfolds, Jordaan refers to a rich corpus of sources, primarily Dutch, some well-known, others much less so, and some nearly forgotten.

Jordaan's central hypothesis, which he has presented elsewhere (1993), regarding a Buddhist background to the Prambanan temple complex, undergirds most of the issues dealt with in his long essay. According to him, the role of the Sailendra Buddhist dynasty (beginning in the middle of the eighth century) was a determinant in the construction of the monument (p. 43). This interpretation diverges from the current scholarly knowledge of the historical, religious, and artistic contexts of this great Hindu monument, erected in the middle of the ninth century, under the conquering Sanjaya dynasty. One must admit that in defending his ambitious hypothesis, Jordaan is not entirely convincing.

Jordaan's idea of a Buddhist background leads him to assume that, in Central Java, as in Bengal under the Pala dynasty, the two great religions became merged (pp. 42–43). He uses as a model the Paharpur sanctuary, the architectural layout of which was reproduced in South-

east Asia, as is well known. The discovery on that Buddhist site of Hindu statues whose origin has remained unexplained does not suffice to attest to the fusion of the two religions nor to its supposed corollary in Prambanan. Jordaan himself admits:

Unfortunately, we cannot determine, at the present stage of our knowledge, how far this fusion actually went, how it was experienced by those involved, and by whom and where these teachings were stimulated most, in India or in Southeast Asia. (p. 42)

This sheds little light on the purported relationship between the experiences of Paharpur and Prambanan.

The reunification of Central Java in 832 by the Sanjaya, who then began to reign over a largely Buddhist population, was accompanied by the construction of large monuments in the region. Hindu temples, including Prambanan, were built amidst Buddhist temples and vice versa. Rather than seeing in this the illustration of religious fusion, Jacques Dumarçay sees a political phenomena (1986, p. 5) and refers to the idea of a competition between the two religions. Somewhat similarly, John Miksic (1994) sees in this an “architectural confrontation”.

In dealing with the narrative and iconographic reliefs (pp. 88–112), Jordaan centres on their arrangement and meaning, particularly the textual sources and their location in the overall architectural layout. He focuses on series, and examines the transitions (“breaking-off”), recurrent numbers, symmetrical relations, and so forth. As for the search for the sources of the Krishna narrative reliefs, he suggests an enquiry into the Buddhist versions of the Krishna story, which might have been used in Paharpur, as well as into Indian Buddhist sculptural art (pp. 100–1). Jordaan’s persistence in referring to Pahapur, which also displays Krishna reliefs, leaves one sceptical. As he himself concedes (p. 42), the exact origin of these scenes, which date back to various periods, remains unknown. In addition, the represented scenes are different, with some of the more famous episodes being even absent from Prambanan (pp. 100–1).

The treatment of sacrificial deposits appears interesting (pp. 70–74). The reference to often neglected Dutch sources is indeed essential. Ben-

efiting from first-hand knowledge, the authors of these texts were particularly careful with this sensitive topic, about which not enough is known in the cultural context of Central Java.

We may ask why, contrary to these authors, indigenous beliefs are left aside so easily? Would it not be preferable to look for possible relationships between traditional Javanese beliefs and classic religions (which French scholars call *religions savantes*) rather than between the latter and their Indian examples (p. 72)? It would also be useful to find out who was the officiant in these rituals: a religious official? a king? Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, these questions on occasion have been shown to be essential (Bhattacharya 1961, pp. 22–23; Mus 1934, pp. 8–9).

The idea of a representation of the myth of the Churning of the Ocean integrated into the architectural design is discussed elaborately by Jordaan (pp. 45–60). The argument for the link between this particular myth and the architectural design is essentially based on three elements: (a) the nature of the ritual deposits; (b) the passage of the *Ramayana Kakawin* in which a temple is described through a Vishnavistic myth; and (c) an examination of the hydraulic components of the central temple area. Concerning the reliefs, Jordaan points to the interesting disposition on the temples of scenes containing references to water. (Of course, the *silpasastra* behind the codification of the monumental complex are missing.)

Do the above arguments really allow for an identification of the myth of the Churning of the Ocean? In the temples' iconography, one would seek in vain for elements of this Vishnavistic myth. Nor are there, in Prambanan, any traces of statues of the characters mentioned in the epic's description such as armed *deva* and *asura* fighting over the *amrta*. One cannot but think of the less-ancient monument of C. Kidul (thirteenth century), where architecture and sculpture are associated in referring to the Churning of the Ocean (Dumarçay 1993, p. 40). In Prambanan's central tower and within its first gallery, where Jordaan sees the representation of elements of the Churning of the Ocean (Mount Mandara and the Milk Ocean), would it not be more adequate to identify, instead, the two essential elements of the sacred landscape, the

mountain and the sea, so frequently displayed in Indianized Southeast Asian temples?

The eight contributions assembled in the book's second part, originally published between 1891 and 1954, testify to the more important episodes of the discovery, scientific investigation, and finally reconstruction of the Siva temple at Prambanan. Jordaan highlights the specific interests these reprinted articles and notes hold. These concern the discovery of the Sivaistic nature of the temple and of the ritual deposits (J.W. Ijzerman, 1891); work on literary texts as possible sources of the Rama bas-reliefs (J. Ph. Vogel, 1921) and on the statues (N.J. Krom, 1923); the relevance of Puranic texts for the analysis of the reliefs (F.D.K. Bosch, 1922); "the interesting systematic differences in the construction and ornamentation of temples in the central temple area" (p. 157) (B. de Haan, 1927); the correlation between the course of the sun and Rama's life, as it is depicted in the reliefs (W.F. Stutterheim, 1929); and, finally, the reconstruction of the Siva temple (V.R. van Romondt, 1940; A.J. Bernet Kemper, 1955).

These scholarly Dutch writings evidence a consistent recognition of the systematic organization not only of the temples' architectural layout, but also and even more so of the sculpture. The sculptor's knowledge of and compliance with the ritual codes are never questioned. Rather than blame the sculptor for his unexplained deviations, the researchers reprove their own limitations. In fact, Dutch scholars recognized, quite early and clearly, the link between the very disposition of the sculptural elements and the signification of the temple.

Overall, one must acknowledge the elaborate treatment of the existing scholarly literature on Prambanan, the quality of the book's illustrations, as well as its rich bibliography, the latter containing references in five languages. However, it is sometimes difficult to agree with Jordaan's attempts to use dated arguments. While recognizing India's cultural impetus at the time of Prambanan's construction, as well as Central Java's historical and cultural complexity, it is not possible to agree with Jordaan's arguments on the pre-eminence of external influences on Prambanan, whether they concern a hypothetical Buddhist

role, the origin of the temples' plan, the textual sources of the Krishna reliefs or the religious background of the sacrifice.

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