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F. D. K. BOSCH

A REMARKABLE ANCIENT JAVANESE SCULPTURE

In this Felicitation Volume of *Artibus Asiae* dedicated by his colleagues to their mutual friend and mentor M. George Cœdès, it is hardly necessary to recall that, throughout the half century over which his scholarly activities have extended, he has concentrated his efforts on some of the most intricate and momentous problems pertaining to the history and art of Southeast Asia; and by solving them in a masterly way he has opened up avenues to new fields of research full of promise for the increase of our knowledge.

Taking this into account, I think it appropriate on this special occasion to present to him the inquiry into a fresh problem bearing upon his field of study and which, however simple as compared with the Gordian knots he has been able to disentangle, may be expected to arouse his interest.

I have in view the problem embodied in the sculpture which, at the end of last century, was discovered by R. D. M. Verbeek in the little village of Emboh close by the northeast coast of Java, about thirty miles to the northwest of Surabaya¹. As the place where it stood appeared to be holy ground (*punden*) and yearly offerings were made to it by the inhabitants of the village, it could not be transported to the Batavia museum so that in order to study it we have to rely on the yellowed prints from the rather mediocre photographs made of it on the spot some fifty years ago (Pl. 1).

To make matters worse, the piece itself is in a rather bad condition. It is somewhat weather-beaten; its upper left-hand corner with the human figure depicted on it is broken off; and the faces of the six other persons portrayed have been mutilated in what appears to be so thorough and methodical a way that there can be no doubt that it is due to an act of vandalism. In all probability, this act resulted from the circumstance that the northeast coast of Java was one of the regions where the influence of Islam made itself felt most vigorously, and in former times incited its devotees to make a drastic show of their contempt for all things relating to Hindu religion.

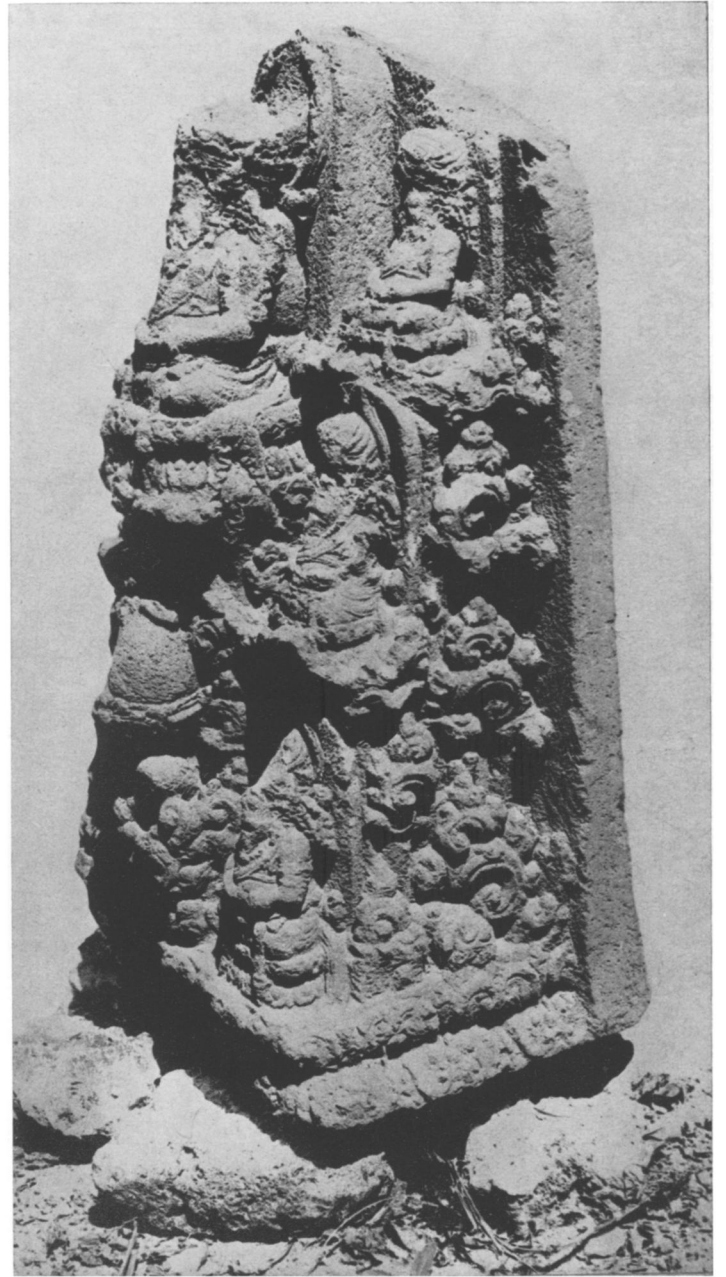
Fortunately, despite its mutilation, the sculpture is sufficiently clear to permit a description of its main elements.

In front of an undecorated back slab, 2' 6" high, standing at right angles to the rectangular lotus cushion which serves as a base for the whole sculpture, five — originally six — human fig-

¹ R. D. M. Verbeek, *Oudbeden van Java, Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*, XLVI, 1891, p. 219. Cp. J. Knebel, *Rapporten van de Commissie in Nederlandsch-Indië voor Oudheidkundig Onderzoek in Java en Madoera*, 1907, p. 262; N. J. Krom, *Oudheidkundig Verslag*, 1912, p. 22; and the present writer, *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, LVII, 1916, p. 437.



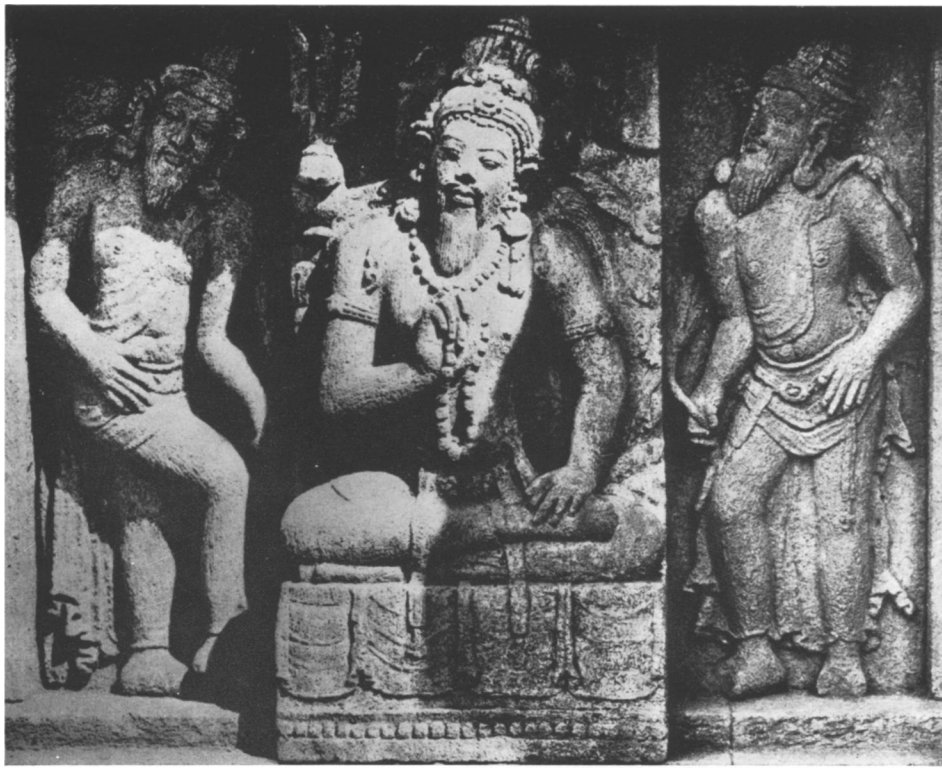
a



b

Pl. 1 The Emboh sculpture

Courtesy Arch. Survey of Indonesia



a



b



d



c

Courtesy *a-c* Arch. Survey of Indonesia; *d* National Museum of Ethn., Leiden

Pl. 2 Rṣi figures in ancient Javanese art

a From the Brahmā-Temple, Chaṇḍi Prambanan, Central Java (first quarter 10th century);

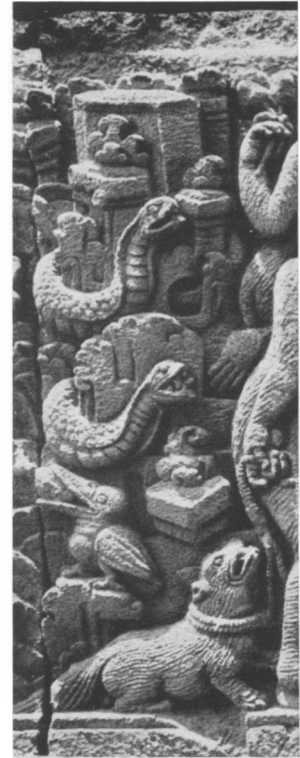
b From Chaṇḍi Banon, Central Java (c. 800 A.D.);

c Image of 1351 A.D., from Chaṇḍi Singasari, East Java. The nāgarī inscription on the back slab reads: *bbagavān Triṇavindu* (for *Tṛṇa*^o) *maharṣi*;

d Bronze statuette from Central Java (c. 800 A.D.; exact find-spot unknown; now in the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden).



a



b



c



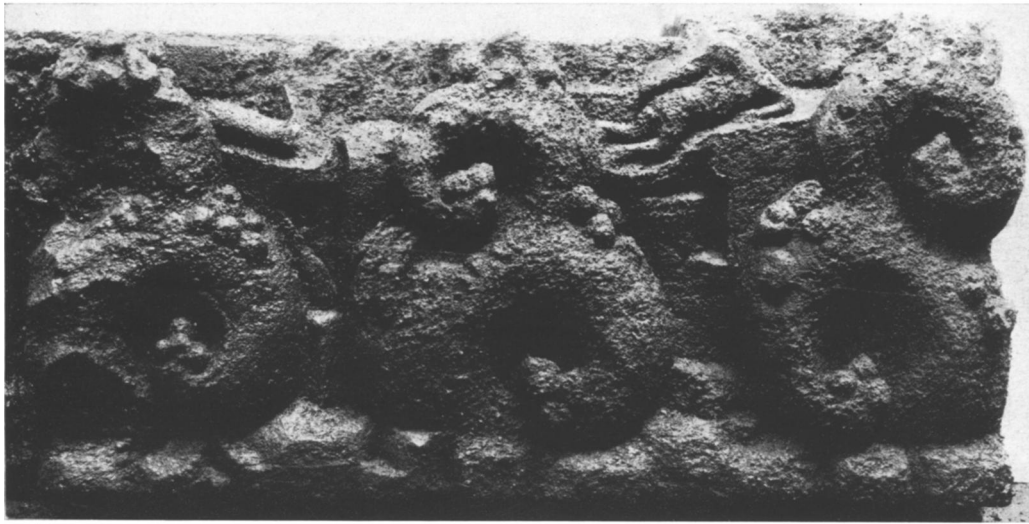
d



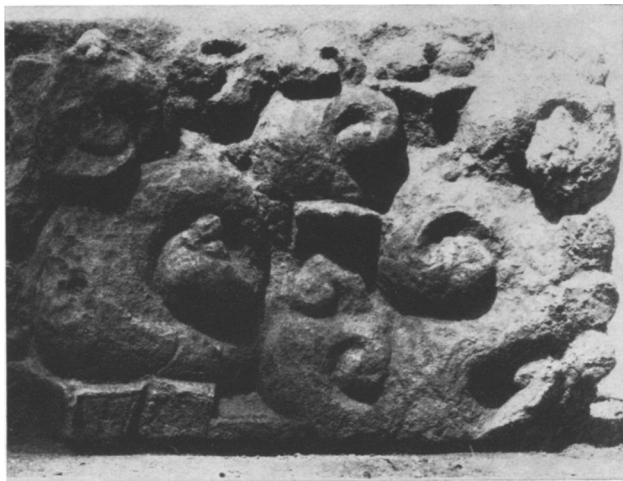
e

Courtesy Arch. Survey of Indonesia

Pl. 3 The rock motif in Central-Javanese art
a-e From the reliefs of the Śiva temple, Chaṇḍi Prambanan



a



b



c



d



e

Courtesy Arch. Survey of Indonesia

Pl. 4 The rock motif in East-Javanese art

a-c From the reliefs of the bathing-place at Jalatuṅḡa (977 A.D.);

d From a relief at Chaṅḡi Panataran (c. 1350 A.D.);

e From a relief at Chaṅḡi Jago (c. 1270 A.D.)

ures are placed amphitheatrically in two vertical rows, while a seventh person, almost twice as big as his companions, occupies the place of honour in the centre of the upper part of the sculpture (Pl. 1).

These figures are all alike, each of them sitting in *vajrāsana* on his own lotus cushion, in front of his own back slab, hands resting in the lap, and exhibiting the same features and attire. They are characterized physically by a round protruding belly (see especially the main figure in Pl. 1*b*), a pointed beard, and a voluminous *jaṭāmakuṭa* from the back of which two ribbons stick out in the shape of a bull's horns². In addition, they wear an *upavīta* and the ordinary personal ornaments such as a necklace, bracelets and wristlets.

Finally, in the space left open by the images, there is a huge nondescript figure in the shape of a reversed letter S, divided into symmetrical halves by a jewel-incrusted girdle. It is placed on a roughly hewn lotus cushion and is surrounded by greater and smaller formations consisting of spirals, volutes and arabesques of an apparently vegetal nature, these being the same formations which, in a larger size, appear on both sides of the sculpture, beneath and behind the sitting figures (Pl. 1*b*).

Having put on record that the Emboh sculpture thus described stands out as a unique specimen among all other works of Javanese art, we shall now have to inquire in the first place what the sitting figures represent, and, secondly, what can be the meaning of the S-shaped figure, which apparently in some way or other is closely associated with the human figures surrounding it.

The former of these queries is not difficult to answer. The beard, the *jaṭāmakuṭa*, and the big belly all point to the figures being representations of the *ṛṣi*-type which was current in Javanese art from the earliest times until far into the fourteenth century. In the course of this period, it is true, slight modifications of the type have been effected — the seer may be sitting or standing, his beard may show a more rounded form, and the bigness of the belly may be emphasized more or less — but its main characteristics are always the same (Pl. 2)³.

The fact that there are seven persons depicted tends to strengthen the above identification since, as is well known, the various groups of Brahmarṣis, Devarṣis, Rājarṣis and Maharṣis, enumerated in post-Vedic literature, all show the same tendency to make heptads⁴.

Among these groups, however, there is one that comes into special prominence in Indian mythology and cosmology: that of the Seven Ṛṣis who, already in the Ṛgveda (X 82,2), and afterwards in the Brāhmaṇas, the Purāṇas and the epics, are identified regularly with the constellation Great Bear. The names of the members of this group vary in different lists, but all sources agree that the group is headed by the sage Vasiṣṭha who, often in the company of his rival Viśvāmitra, is the protagonist in many a well-known myth and legend.

² As W. F. Stutterheim has pointed out (*Tijdschrift voor Ind. Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, LXXVI, 1936, p. 252), these 'ribbons' probably are not meant as such, but are to be regarded as ornaments cut out in gold-foil and standing upright, in much the same way as the *alang-alang*-leaves, in modern Balinese dance performances, which are stuck on both sides of the crown of the dancer impersonating a king, and which quiver gracefully in time with all his movements.

³ The Indian type of *ṛṣi* from which the Javanese one is derived must be left out of consideration here.

⁴ E. W. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, p. 177. — It is noteworthy that the association of the number seven with the word *ṛṣi* has become so fixed an idea in Java and Bali that up to the present day in the so-called *candra sengkalas* — these are chronograms (also known in India) in which dates are expressed by words with a definite cipher value instead of numerals (e. g. 'sun' for 1, 'wing' for 2, 'paṇḍawa' for 5, etc.) — the word *ṛṣi* and its many synonyms regularly stand for the number 7.

Now, in their cosmic aspect, these Seven Seers appear in a special light: it is said of them that they are the highest fixed stars in heaven, nearest to Dhruva, the North Star⁵, and that as such they revolve round the top of Mount Meru, the axis of the world system, or, expressed more graphically, that 'they are sitting round that top' (MBh. 12, 127, 6f.).

In view of this, the supposition is forced upon us that the queer S-shaped figure of the Emboh sculpture, which like Mount Meru is surrounded by the Seven Seers, may represent the most famous and holy of mountains.

It goes without saying that this supposition stands or falls with the possibility of demonstrating that in ancient Javanese art mountainous formations used to be rendered in the same way as the S-shaped figure, a demonstration which, if carried out thoroughly, would involve the study of a part of Indian and Javanese art history of a much wider scope than I can go into here. In the circumstances, I only point out that in the reliefs of the Prambanan Śiva-temple in Central Java, dating from the first quarter of the tenth century, rocks generally appear as stout, polygonal pillars beset with a luxuriant growth of mosses, herbs and shrubs stylized into tortuous and twisting patterns (Pl. 3)⁶.

About half a century later, in the reliefs of the East-Javanese bathing-place Jalatuṅḍa, dating from 977 A. D., the rock motif has undergone a remarkable metamorphosis. Here, of the two elements we noticed just now — the rocks fashioned as pillars and the vegetation overgrowing them — the former have dwindled into a kind of low, inconspicuous pedestals, whereas the latter has outgrown all natural bounds and shows up in the shape of large spirally-wound figures, mostly surmounted by contrarily-winding spirals and volutes (Pl. 4*a-c*).

Actually, what has taken place is that the task of depicting rocks, formerly fulfilled by the pillars, has been taken over by the vegetal formations. The former tend to disappear altogether, and the latter, freely displaying their capricious windings and contorsions, contrive to become the rock-depicting elements par excellence in all later periods of Javanese art (Pl. 4*d-e*).

This being established, a comparison of the figures filling the sides of the Emboh sculpture with those in the Jalatuṅḍa reliefs will make it clear not only that in both of them rocks are depicted, but also that such figures are at the base of the S-shaped figure of our inquiry. As a matter of fact, it is easy to imagine that the Emboh sculptor, when faced with the task of representing Mount Meru, would conceive it as a huge rock and, mindful of the Indian conception of the world mountain consisting of an upper part above and a lower part beneath the surface of the earth, would mould this conception into form as best he could. Consequently, he created a figure which, in its general outline, resembled as closely as possible the rock-motif as it had taken shape in his time, while, on the other hand, he took care to provide it half way up with a richly bejeweled girdle so as to emphasize its division into two parts.

Considering that so far Javanese art had produced no other specimens of the world moun-



Jalatuṅḍa
Rock on pedestal

⁵ W. Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie der Inder*, 1920, p. 128.

⁶ The rocks depicted in the Barabuḍur reliefs (c. 800 A. D.) are rendered in a way differing considerably from the Prambanan specimens of our Pl. 3. This Barabuḍur type is found again in only a few Prambanan reliefs, and is totally absent in all later periods of Javanese art.

tain's physical appearance which could have guided the sculptor in his work, it must be admitted that he has discharged his task most ingeniously and satisfactorily.

Meanwhile, it is unlikely that the sole purpose of our sculptor was to give expression to the cosmic concept of Mount Meru being surrounded by stars personified as seers, a concept which, however imposing, would have been meaningless and useless with regard to the religious demands which all images of divine beings belonging to the Indian sphere of culture were necessarily designed to meet.

As to this consideration, it should be recalled that in the various systems of Indian yoga Mount Meru pre-eminently serves as an object of meditation, *yantra*⁷. In this capacity, it is known under two principal forms, in both of which it is either an object of meditation and of worship itself, or is coextensive with the highest god who sits enthroned on, or is absconded in its top.

In the first of these, it especially plays an important part in the spiritual exercises of the Haṭhayoga when manifesting itself microcosmically as the vertebral column, called *meru*, through which the principal vein (*nāḍī*) of the human body leads upwards from bottom to crown, thus forming the conduit for the *jīvātman* on its way to and its identification with the supreme god residing on the meru's top.

Secondly, in its cosmic aspect, it manifests itself in the manifold *maṇḍalas* and *cakras* which — whether conceived as linear diagrams or three-dimensionally, whether composed of elements borrowed from iconography or finding expression architecturally in the loftiest of sanctuaries (Barabudur!) — invariably, in some form or other, represent the universe.

Heterogenous as these manifestations may be, in all of them it is the aim of the yogin, after meditating successively on the divine beings or objects surrounding the central figure, to concentrate his meditation on, and to identify himself with this holy of holies.

With this in mind, we may be confident that the Emboh sculpture served the same purpose as that of the *yantra* in its cosmic aspect. In this special case we may presume that the devotee started his spiritual exercises by meditating on the figure of the ṛṣi in the right-hand upper corner of the sculpture, and from there proceeded *pradakṣiṇā*-wise by meditating on the five other members of the group, to make a first halt at the top of the sculpture where, as a result of his identifying himself with Vasiṣṭha, the head of the heptad, he gained for himself all the superhuman qualities and supernatural powers this sage was thought to possess. From there he had to proceed once again in order to reach the ultimate goal of his meditation: his becoming united with Mount Meru, the soul and centre of the universe, and thus having bestowed upon him eternal bliss as the well-deserved fruit of his exertions.

To conclude, a few words must be said on the dating of the sculpture.

As the characteristics of the pitifully mutilated ṛṣi-figures are too few in number and too indistinct to be of much help, the only criterion available for a stylistic comparison with other works of East-Javanese art is provided by the rock formations in the centre and on the sides of the sculpture.

If we confront these formations with those of the Jalatuṅḍa reliefs of 977 A.D., there can be no doubt about their resembling each other most closely, although the low pedestals sup-

⁷ On these yantras see P. H. Pott, *Yoga en Yantra in hunne betekenis voor de Indische archaeologie* [Y. and Y. in their significance for Indian archaeology], 1946, *passim*. — An English translation of this important work will be published before long.

porting the spirals and volutes, which are still sporadically found at Jalatuṅḍa, have completely disappeared at Emboh — a particular which points to a more advanced form of stylization and a somewhat later date as well.

This provisional conclusion happens to be corroborated by a fact borrowed from history.

As far as can be ascertained the northeast coast of Java was never part of the kingdom which had its capital at Keḍiri and flourished from 1104 to 1222 A.D., but it did fall within the dominions of King Erlangga (1019-1024 A.D.), several of whose inscriptions originate from the neighbourhood of Lamongan, situated about sixteen miles southwest of Emboh.

Consequently, on the basis of the scanty stylistic and historical evidence available, it seems not unlikely that our sculpture should be assigned to the reign of King Erlangga, and thus may be regarded as one of the few works of art which preserve the memory of that great ruler.