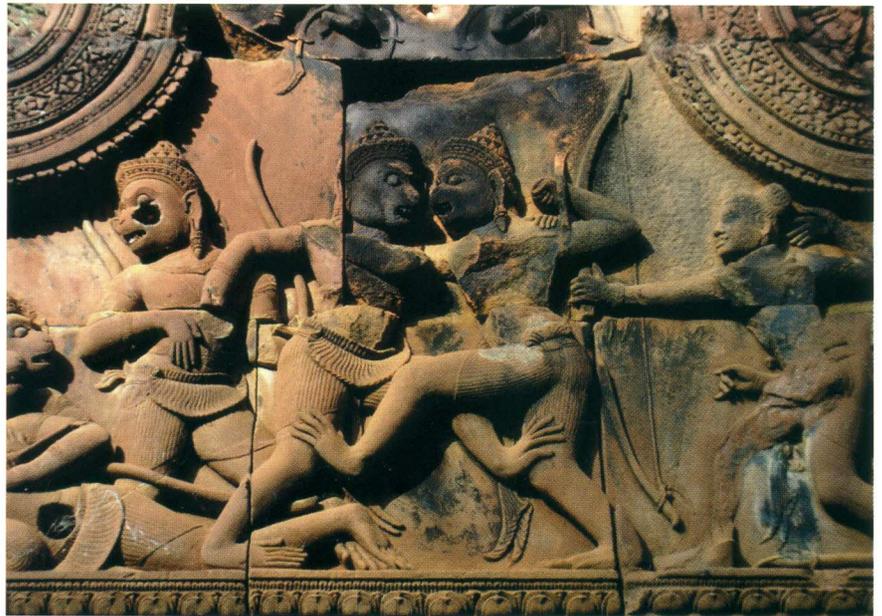




**Fig. 1** *Sugrīva and Vālin.*  
National Museum of Phnom Penh,  
Cambodia. [Ka.1664]  
(courtesy Sok Soda).



**Fig. 2** *Relief of Sugrīva and Vālin*  
*fighting a tympanum at Banteay*  
*Srei, Cambodia. (Photo NHHD)*

diadem adorned with spear-shaped fleurons the right fighter is wearing. The left fighter has a turban wrapped around his head. Their knee-length sampots have pieces of material loosely tucked under the belts.<sup>4</sup> Without any stylistic affinities with sculptures of the same period, this kind of garment probably speaks to either a regional variation or an innovation of the artist.

Wrestling is very rarely represented in Cham sculptural art. One may ask whether the relief of wrestlers depicts a local martial art enjoyed by the Cham people or its content illustrates an Indic legend. The first interpretation would need further substantiation; however, the latter interpretation is supported by the prevalence of sculptures associated with Vaiṣṇavism at Khương Mỹ. Narratives of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic are said to have embellished the temple foundations as evidenced by various scenes of animated monkeys carved on *in situ* stone slabs.<sup>5</sup> This allows us to surmise that the relief of wrestlers is a representation of the battle between Prince Rāma and the demon-king Rāvaṇa, in which Rāma is characterized by the right personage with a calm face (though damaged) whereas the left-hand one, with a ferocious look, has fangs that protrude from his mouth and could be a demon.

Interestingly, the wrestlers also evoke the fighting between the monkey kings Sugrīva and Vālin in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which is known in the contemporary Khmer masterpieces of the Koh Ker style presently on display at the National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh and even more strikingly in the tympanum of Banteay Srei temple (fig. 1). The Khmer monkey-headed humans locked in a mortal combat are surely inspired by the *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>6</sup>

It remains uncertain how the Cham wrestlers relate to the figurative or literal battle between the good and the evil, Devā and asura, Rāma and Rāvaṇa, Sugrīva and Vālin. While this subject may trigger further scholarly debate, one can find clearly that the Cham artists, like their Khmer contemporaries of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, showed an acute sense of movement and exquisite workmanship in treating such a theme.

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4 Parmentier, 64; Emmanuel Guillon, *Cham Art: Treasures from the Da Nang Museum, Vietnam* (Bangkok: River Books, 2001), 110.

5 Mr Hồ Xuân Tịnh published recent findings at Khương Mỹ temples in an article posted on The DaNang eNewspaper. See this link: <http://www.baodanangvn/channel/6061/201507/trang-tri-tai-chan-thap-cham-khuong-my-2430756/>

6 Helen Ibbitson Jessup and Thierry Zephir, ed., *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 188, 214; Michael Brand, *The age of Angkor: Treasures from the National Museum of Cambodia* (Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1992), 52-53.