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The Kāthaka-upaniṣad (2.16) of the Yajurveda adds:

Yes, this syllable (Om) is Brahman  
This syllable is the Highest  
He who knoweth this syllable  
Receives, whatever he may wish.

## THE MIGRATION OF THE MAGIC SYLLABLE OM

by

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Om. This syllable is the universe.  
Māṇḍukya-upaniṣad, I, 1.1.

In the dazzling aspects, revealed by the ancient Brahmins in their philosophic speculations, they made use of expressions, coined phrases, words or symbols with the object of defining the results of their ever proceeding mental evolution, each of these representing a world of religious thoughts and far-reaching philosophic conceptions.

One of the milestones on the path of Hindu thought is the conception of Om, the importance of which, though quite meaningless in itself, can hardly be overestimated. The foundation of the knowledge of Om is laid down in the secret doctrines of the upaniṣads, which to the initiated reveal the sense of the mysterious Vedas. In the Rg- and Atharvaveda Om is not yet mentioned at all<sup>1)</sup>. The use of this syllable seems to commence in the vedic ritual, because the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (VII, 18) mentions that on the day of the ceremonial anointment of a king, chants from the Rg-veda shall be recited by the *hotṛ* priest, in reply to which the *adhvaryu* shall say Om. Said Brāhmaṇa states further that the word Om is of divine origin. The important development of the meaning of Om to a mystic doctrine is laid down in the upaniṣads and here in Hinduistic sense it obtains its definite interpretation as the universe, which is the very identification of the sacred principle of brahman. The Chāndogya-upaniṣad of the Sāmaveda (2.23) contains a description of the origin of Om: (2) Prajāpati, the Lord of all creatures, was brooding the wordly spaces, from them ... fled the triple science (the three Vedas); ... from them ... fled these sounds: bhūr, bhuvaḥ, svar (earth, atmosphere, heaven).

(3) These three were brooded by Him; from them ... fled the sound Om. Therefore, like all leaves pierced (samtrṇa) by one nail, the sound Om pierces the reason (ratio); the sound Om is the universe.

1) KEITH, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1917, vol. IX, p. 490.

In the philosophy of the Brahmins, the conception of the brahman is the highest obtainable object. The ātman or subjective perception shall unify itself with the brahman; absolute this mystic union can be obtained only by profound meditation upon the meaning of the sound Om. Like a spider climbing the thread of his web is the yogin, who ascending through meditation upon the sound Om obtains freedom in the union with brahman<sup>2)</sup>. The syllable Om is the symbol of the wordless brahman.

Further development of Om, in Sanskrit usually represented by the vowel O with Anusvāra (ṁ) is laid down in the Maitrāyaṇa-upaniṣad of the Yajurveda (6.3), in which it is said, that Om is the very essence of the brahman and that the sound Om made itself three-fold, for this sound contains the three morae A+U+M.

These three factors give opportunity to the boundless fantasy of Indian thought to raise the sound Om to a symbol for all sorts of trinities as:

1) feminine, masculine, neutral; 2) Fire, Wind, Sun; 3) Brahman, Rudra, Viṣṇu; later: Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Siva; 4) Gārhapatya, Dakṣiṇāgni, Ahavaniya (three sacrificial fires); 5) Bhūr, Bhuvaḥ, Svar (three worlds); 6) Prāṇa, Agni, Sūrya; 7) Food, Water, Moon; 8) Buddhi, Manas, Ahaṁkara (three elements of knowledge); 9) Prāṇa, Apāna, Vyāna (three elements of prāṇa). In later times also: 10) Moon, Sun, Fire; 11) Idā, Piṅgalā, Suṣumnā.

Therefore when the word Om is uttered, all mentioned categories are included and honoured at the same time<sup>3)</sup>. The motto of this paper has not promised too much. Said upaniṣad continues with the following equation: Om = bhūr, bhuvaḥ, svar = Prajāpati: the all pervading vedic God. Bhūr is his head, bhuvaḥ his navel and svar his feet; for this reason bhūr, bhuvaḥ, svar are to be honoured with this threefold sound, for Prajāpati will be honoured also<sup>4)</sup>.

Still further speculations are developed in the younger Brahnavidyā-upaniṣad containing the secret doctrine of the science of the brahman; the three vedas, sacrificial fires, worlds and gods are the body (śarīra) of the sound Om (I 4-7). Moreover as to the place (sthāna) of this syllable it is mentioned that in the centre of the conchshell (śāṅkha) the A shines as the Sun; and again in its middle (as we are to understand) is the U-sound, like the lustre of the moon. There is also the place of the M-sound, like the fire, without smell and like the lightning's flash. The lustre of the syllables A+U+M shines like the moon,

2) DEUSSEN, *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda*, 1938, p. 97-98.

3) *Maitrāyaṇa-upaniṣad*, (6.5).

4) *Maitrāyaṇa-upaniṣad*, (6.6).

the sun and the fire <sup>5)</sup>. A pointed flame is placed above, like the shine of a torch. Comparison is made with the last point of the sound Om̐, viz. the point (bindu) of the anusvāra (ṁ) which in Sanskrit is placed above the vowel O and which is likewise a pointed flame (śikha). Also the resound (laya) of Om̐ has a meaning; it is like the last sound of a bell and also in here the brahman is present, which leads to immortality <sup>6)</sup>.

Of later date even a special upaniṣad has been dedicated to the echo (nāda) of Om̐ and the bindu of the anusvāra, called Nādabindu-upaniṣad <sup>7)</sup>.

The Yoga-upaniṣad declares that meditation over the sound Om̐ with its three and later three and a half morae (together with complete disconnection of the conscious mind), contains the real fruit for the exertions of the Yogin, in consequence of which the ultimate goal, the union with the brahman shall be obtained. This doctrine is found also in the complete literature of the Yoga, to begin with Patañjali.

Considering that the mystic syllable Om̐ brings the bliss, the deliverance from the Samsāra, it is not surprising that also the Buddhists availed themselves of this holy and imperishable word. As in Hinduism the syllable Om̐ is the dominant factor in the magic prayers or spells, the mantras of tantric Buddhism. The most popular mantra, more correctly the most popular dhāraṇī or mystic power is the wellknown formula Om̐ mani padme hūm i.e. Om̐, holy jewel in the lotus, hum, which in Tibet is the invocation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara or Padmapāṇi.

In many cases this dhāraṇī when in print, is preceded by a symbol, placed horizontally and it looks like a curl with a loop. From earlier Sanskrit manuscripts we know that it stands for the magic syllable Om̐. We can observe this very clearly in a Tibetan woodcut published by Schlagintweit <sup>8)</sup>.

The use of this symbol representing the auspicious Om̐ in inscriptions and MSS. in India is quite in accordance with the old Brahmanic principle that it is necessary to pronounce Om̐ at the beginning of the instruction of the Veda in order to preserve the holy script as otherwise it will not stay in the memory of the pupil. The law of Manu (II, 74) says: "Let him always pronounce the syllable Om̐ at the beginning and at the end of (a lesson in) the Veda; (for) unless the syllable Om̐ precedes (the lesson) will slip away (from him), and unless it follows it will fade away." Moreover the use of this symbol in inscriptions and MSS. means a good omen, a maṅgala and when this auspicious syllable is represented as in this case by a symbol it is called a maṅgala-symbol by the epigraphists. Besides Om̐ there exist various other maṅgala-symbols such as the svastika, the triśula and the triratna-symbol

5) In *Maitr. up.* (6) the sun is equal to Om̐. DEUSSEN, *loc cit.*, p. 332: "Führwahr, die Sonne ist dieses Om̐." COOMARASWAMY, *A new approach to the Vedas*, 1933, p. 49: "Beholding that the Supernal Sun is Om̐, unify therewith thyself." In the same prapāthaka (6.4) is also said "the Fiery Energy, the tejas that is the Supernal Sun and it is likewise of the Om̐." We shall refer to this later on.

6) *Brahmavidyā-up.* II and III.

7) Cf. *Brahmabindu*, *Aṁṣṭabindu*, *Dhyanabindu*, *Tejobindu* and *Yogakikha up.*; DEUSSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 643 etc.

8) SCHLAGINTWEIT, *Le Bouddhisme au Tibet*, pl. XIV.

with the wheel of the law or dharmacakra. In MSS, grants etc. where they appear in the beginning middle and the end, these maṅgalas are purposely placed there in order to accompany these documents with auspicious signs and to promote the preservation of the contents <sup>9)</sup>. Therefore these figures are meant as maṅgala-symbols with auspicious and doubtless also with magical significance. In epigraphical records the sacred Om̐ is either written in full or represented by a symbol sometimes both types are met with. The symbol is drawn like a curl or spiral, sometimes turning to the right and in other cases turning to the left and it is quite likely that we must understand this symbol as a conventional representation of the sacred conch shell or śaṅkha. As early as the fifth century of our era the symbol Om̐ is used in MSS. and we find various forms in the famous Bower manuscript, which is written in a mixed sanskrit with nāgarī characters as used in the Gupta-period. (300-600 A.D.). The manuscript, a medical compendium, was brought to light by the British lieutenant H. Bower in Kachgar, one of the principal settlements in Eastern Turkestan on the great caravan route to China, which skirts the foot of the Tian Shan Range of mountains on the Northern edge of Takla Makan desert <sup>10)</sup>. The discovery of this document was the immediate cause of a number of expeditions to Innermost Asia, the startling results of which were brought within the reach of Western Science by such famous explorers like Sir Aurel Stein and A. von Lecoq.

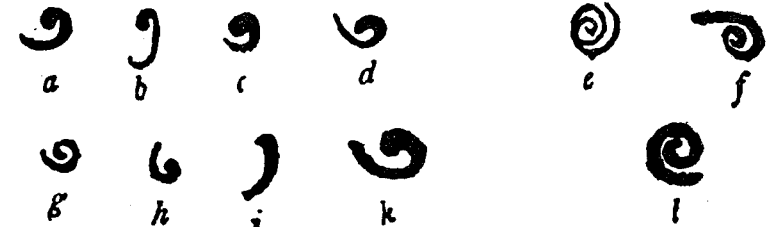


Figure I.

The earliest specimens of the maṅgala Om̐ are taken from fig. 8 of Hoernle's edition of this MS. and shown on our fig. I. The author observes: "The dextrorse form may be seen on the first leaf of the Bower MSS. Part I (our fig. Ia), Part II (fig. Ib and c), and Part III (fig. Id), while the sinistrorse form appears on the first leaf of Part IV (fig. Ie) and Part VI (fig. If) .... In all the Parts, except the second, the symbol occupies the usual position facing the first line of the text of the manuscript; but in Part II it appears in the more unusual position, exactly as it is seen in the two copper-plate grants of Ananta Varman, dateable probably in the sixth century A.D. (our fig. Ig and h) shown in Dr. Fleet's Gupta Inscriptions pp. 220 and 226, Plates XXXB and XXXI A. Among the dated northern Indian

9) BÜHLER, *Indische Palaeographie*; Grundriss der indo-arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde, 1896, p. 85.

10) HOERNLE, *The Bower Manuscript*, Calcutta, 1893-1912.

epigraphical records of the Gupta period, the earliest known examples of the dextrorse form of the symbol Om̐ are those of the year 448-449 A.D. in the stone inscription of Kumāra Gupta I (fig. I i; See *ibid.*, p. 45, Plate VI a) and of the year 493-494 A.D. in a copper-plate grant of Jayanātha (our fig. I k; see *ibid.*, p. 120, Plate XVI). The earliest known example of the sinistrorse form occurs in a copper-plate grant of Mahā-Sadevarāja, of an unknown though early date (our fig I l; *ibid.*, p. 198, Plate XXVI), and apparently though mutilated, also in the Bodhgayā inscriptions of 558 A.D. (*Ibid.*, Plate XLI A and B) of course, these dates are not sufficiently numerous to settle the exact beginning and end of the period of the use of the two forms, but on the whole the sinistrorse form seems to be somewhat later in origin<sup>11)</sup>.

We must presume that the curious curl on which the Om̐ maṅgala is based must have been derived from the old vowel O, known from Bühler's alphabets. This is demonstrated in the inscription of Aphaṣad in Bengal of abt. 675 A.D. written in a sanskrit alphabet from Northern India (fig. IIa)<sup>12)</sup>. The resemblance of this vowel with the Om̐ symbol of fig. II b as used in the Harṣa inscription of the Cakrāmana-king Vighraha II of 973 A.D., written in a North-Indian sanskrit alphabet of later date is striking<sup>13)</sup>. This specimen takes the shape of a question mark. Another form of Om̐ which we only mention here for completeness' sake, is found in the Deval-prāśasti of 993 A.D. in which also a North-Indian Sanskrit alphabet has been used. In this case Om̐ is composed of the vocal O with the anusvāra (ṁ)<sup>14)</sup> (fig. II c). We observe that till the present day the common type of Om̐ symbol used in Indian palaeography is the pure curl, since the Bower manuscript designed in a simple curve. A later specimen is met with in the Achyutapuram

copper-plate of Indravarman I, king of Kāliṅga (Orissa); fig. II d. The curve is turning to the right just like the curls of the Buddha Śākyamuni's hair and which marks one of his lakṣanas or auspicious signs. The interesting feature about these copper plates is the symbol Om̐ at the end of the inscription, which is represented by a curl with a drawn out spiral tail (our fig. II e). It seems a younger variety of the Om̐ symbol. The specimens of the mystic syllable in our fig. I and II show the best known varieties of this auspicious sign in India. They are not limited to the use in inscriptions or in MSS. dedicated to one type of Indian religion; on the contrary they are part of the cultural assets of the Indian peoples; whether they are or were Brahmins, Buddhists or Jainists. Furthermore, we hope to prove that those countries, which have kept direct cultural relations with India, have adopted also the use of the maṅgala Om̐ together with the various religious thoughts and other Hindu institutions. Also outside India the influence of the magical power of the syllable Om̐ was felt and we shall try to pursue the migration of this auspicious sign.

11) *Op. cit.*, p. XXIII.

12) BÜHLER, *op. cit.*, T. IV, 6, XVIII, XIX.

13) BÜHLER, *op. cit.*, Tafel, V, 47, IX.

14) BÜHLER, *op. cit.*, Tafel, V, 9, VIII.

### Tibet.

Nowhere in the world is the use of the dhāraṇī Om̐ maṅi padme hūm as popular as in Tibet. According to the Lamaistic scholastici, the syllables contain the quintessence of the maḥāyāna and at the same time are its revelation, and this dogma gives them opportunity to ascribe a variety of thoughts to this dhāraṇī<sup>15)</sup>. One of their sacred books, the Māni-kah bum, states that this formula is the very essence of all happiness, prosperity and knowledge and the great means of deliverance (of the saṃsāra). Om̐ classes rebirth amongst the gods, ma amongst the Tibetans, ṇi as a man, pad as a beast, me as a tantalus, and hūm as an inhabitant of hell. This shows again the divine origin of the syllable Om̐. With the object of increasing the magic power of these mystic spells, they are sometimes concentrated into a symbolic monogram and very often its picture is seen on the wall of sacred monuments. One of them is the magic monogram rNam-bcu-dlan-ldan or the all powerful ten syllables. This monogram is framed by the outlines of a leaf of the sacred bodhi tree (*ficus religiosa*). Grünwedel seems to be the only reliable source that gives a complete explanation of the all powerful ten, which actually represents the relation between microsmos and macrosmos<sup>16)</sup>. On top of the monogram as we see it, is placed a symbol consisting of moon, sun and fire, which according to the Brahmavidyā upāṇiṣad stands for Om̐. According to Grünwedel it stands for a new trinity, kāya, vāc and citta<sup>17)</sup>. These conceptions are very important for the understanding of Kālacakra Buddhism.

### Further India

It is not very likely that the symbol Om̐ was brought to Further India together with the Buddhist religion from India; in our opinion the introduction must have taken place later at a time when the Buddhism of the prae-Angkorean period was already overwhelmed by the religion of the Brahmins. It is certainly not a coincidence that when discussing Cambodia, the central part of the old Khmer Empire, we find in the Sanskrit inscription of the large stèle of the temple Praḥ Ko dated 877 A.D. and erected during the reign of the Cambodian King Indravarman I (877-899), the same use and representation of our Om̐ symbol as shown in our fig. II d and II e of the inscription on the copper plate from Achyutapuram and in which also Indravarman's name is mentioned as a king of Kāliṅga.

Indravarman I, King of Cambodia, took a pride in his alleged descent from the Indian ṛṣi Agastya, which would point to a relation of Cambodia and Southern India<sup>18)</sup>.

During Indravarman's reign a great number of Cambodian temples were erected and

15) KOEPPEN, *Die Lamaistische Hierarchie und Kirche*, 1859, p. 59.

16) GRÜNWEDEL, *Der Weg nach Sambhala. Abb. kgl. Bayr. Ak. der Wiss. phil.-hist. Kl. Band 29. München 1918*. We owe this deeply buried treasure to POTT, *Yoga en Yantra*, 1946, pp. 61 sq.

17) A very clear woodcut of the All powerful ten is also to be found in: SCHLAGINTWERT, *Le Bouddhisme au Tibet, Annales de Musée Guimet*, 1881; pl. XV. The interpretation given however is not correct.

18) COOMARASWAMY, *Geschichte der indischen und indonesischen Kunst*, 1927, p. 211.

Parmentier has dedicated a monograph to the art of Indravarman<sup>19)</sup>. Since that time we meet a widespread application of the Om̐ syllable in Cambodian inscriptions both of the single curl-type and in the shape of an inverted question mark with spiral tail. For this purpose a simple perusal of the volumes of the "Inscriptions du Cambodge" is sufficient<sup>20)</sup>. The Cambodian artist deserves however merit for having raised the magic maṅgala Om̐ to a symbol, that is applied to sculpture both of Sivaitic and Buddhistic nature in a harmonious and ever varying way. As to Siva we see this god with the Om̐ symbol in his "chignon", the cylindrical hairdress on his head, whilst the Buddha on his uṣṇīṣa wears a flame symbol in the shape of an inverted question mark with spiral tail, as shown in type e of fig. II. The Om̐ symbol applied to statues of Siva and the Buddha are entirely different and confusion is hardly possible. In this respect we may rely on the Om̐ symbol as a specific iconographic feature of the art of Further India; Burma included<sup>21)</sup>.

We do not know with certainty which religion was first to provide their holy images with the sign of the auspicious symbol. No such statues however are found before the reign of Indravarman, i.e. not before the second half of the 9th century. As in Indravarman's time Buddhism was certainly not the principal religion there is reason to believe, that the Lord Siva was the oldest wearer of this magical sign. We do not know any specific images of Viṣṇu or Brahmā with the symbol Om̐ in their hairdress. Still Groslier in *Ars Asiatica* XVI, pl. XXXVII 1, shows us a bronze statue with four arms, that judging from the attributes represent Viṣṇu but the cylindrical hairdress shows on the front side and without doubt the symbol Om̐, in a way which so far we have only met in Tibet. It is that symbol consisting of the crescent moon and the sun with rising flame, of which, as we have seen, the Brahma-vidyā upaniṣad says: the lustre of the syllables A+U+M shines like the moon, the sun and the fire. The Om̐ sign is a special attribute of Siva and for this reason Groslier designates the statue as Harihara, i.e. Viṣṇu and Siva united in one god<sup>22)</sup>. Further varieties of the Om̐ symbols are shown by Groslier, *op. cit.*, in fig. 1, pl. XXXVIII where the head of Siva as guru or of a Brahman priest (with beard) is reproduced; also Coomaraswamy, *loc. cit.*, fig. 337 showing Siva with a short beard or perhaps a Saiva king.

In later times, the Cambodian Mahāyāna Buddhism as in Tibet has taken possession of the Om̐ symbol and this religion by raising this sign to a mighty symbol of the eternal Buddha has given it a very important signification. In the Buddhist art of the Bayon period (12-13th century) we observe in many cases the Buddha represented by his statue with the flaming Om̐ symbol of the type of the inverted question mark with spiral tail placed on the uṣṇīṣa, in which sign the French scholars did not fail to recognize the holy symbol Om̐. (See Groslier, *Ars Asiatica* XVI, pl. X. 1). The application of this symbol in the Buddhistic art

19) BEFEO, Vol. XIX, p. I etc. For the correct chronology of the monuments see: de CORAL RÉMUSAT, *l'Art Khmer*, 1940, p. 128-130.

20) Vol. VI, Pl. cc XLVIII, cc XLVII, cc XVII, Vol. IV. Pl. cc XXVI, (Loléi).

21) The Om̐ symbol is found in the inscriptions of Burma, and also in the later Buddhistic art of that country, as ūṛṇā.

22) GROSLIER, *Les collections du Musée Albert Saraut, Ars Asiatica* XVI, 1931, Pl. XXXVII, no. 1.

of Further India is quite a new conception and as far as we know, unknown in India and Tibet. Nevertheless we should not forget that the threefold symbol Om̐ actually is part of the design of the all powerful ten which according to Csoma de Körös (*J.A.S.B.* II, 1833, p. 57-58) was very well known in Nālandā, though probably not before the 10th century, the period during which the Kālacakra system seems to have been introduced in India. Grünwedel justly asserts that this latest phase of Buddhism cannot properly be understood without knowledge of the meaning of the all powerful ten formula.

The flame-symbol Om̐ on the uṣṇīṣa of the Buddha i.e. without the crescent moon and sun, has remained in favour among Buddhist clergy to such an extent that even after the renewed rise of Hīnayāna in Further India in the 14th century we find that the best known types of statues of the Maṇuṣi Buddha are provided with an uṣṇīṣa on top of which is placed the flame symbol Om̐, representing the magic energy the tejas of the Lord. The fact as shown in the upaniṣads that this fiery energy, the *tejas* is identical with Om̐, enabled the Buddhists to recognize in this flaming emblem a Buddhistic trinity i.e. the triratna, which stands for the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṅgha to which every Buddhist takes his refuge when entering monkhood.

When the power of the Khmer sovereigns in the neighbouring Siam declined, as a result of which in the latter country Hīnayāna during the reign of the Thai kings of the Sukhodaya dynasty (13th and 14th century) became the religion of the people, we find the flame symbol applied everywhere on top of the Lord's uṣṇīṣa, this conception in our opinion being derived however from Cambodia<sup>23)</sup>. Since that time this symbol was maintained in almost all styles of Buddhistic Art in Further India; in later date also in Burma. Plate a shows a very beautiful specimen with the tejas-Om̐-flame symbol of the Uthong school in Siam. To-day the Buddhist people in Siam no longer understand the significance of said symbol emerging from the Buddha's head<sup>24)</sup>. Still the later rulers of Siam were quite aware of the importance of this symbol and even the late king of Siam still carried the mark of this auspicious sign, the maṅgala Om̐, in His coat-of-arms in the form of the inverted question mark. Still the anointed King's command is called Om̐kāra, as we were informed by H.R.H. Prince Dhani.

In the epigraphical documents of Siam we find that the palm leaf manuscripts show often at the end of the text a symbol for the sacred Om̐ in the same way as seen in the inscription of Indravarman of Kaliṅga. In this connection we like to show in plate b a remarkable vase with beautiful light green glazing, which is reproduced here thanks to the courtesy of the Museum of Asiatic Art in Amsterdam. This vase is of Chinese origin and though the colour of its glazing shows Sung influence, it was probably manufactured

23) Images of the Buddha from Ceylon are also known to have a flame uṣṇīṣa. This emblem however does not represent the Om̐ symbol, but it looks more like a lyre-like emblem, as Dr. le May calls it. As this Ceylonese variety is not known in Further India, we are not convinced that the flame uṣṇīṣa as found in Siam is derived from Ceylon.

24) LE MAY, *Buddhist Art in Siam*, 1938. The author of this indispensable treatise is the inventor of the expression "inverted question mark with spiral tail."

during the Ming period (1368-1644). The neck of this vase which seems to have been sawn off, is rather interesting; on three sides and within a triangle (*trikona*) we see the figure of an unmistakable Om symbol. As this variety of the inverted question mark belongs typically to Further India and during the Ming period specially in favour in Siam, whilst the shape of this symbol according to experts is unknown in Chinese ceramics, it is quite likely that this vase was ordered from China by Thai or Khmer; an example of "porcelaine de commande". Judging from the shape and glazing we do not think that this vase should belong to the Savankaloke-ware made in Siam during the Sukhotai period. We have recently seen a similar vase in the Museum at Batavia.

Another development in the Buddhistic art of Further India is the representation of the sign of the magical Om on the forehead of Buddhistic gods and which replaces the traditional *urnā*. The sculptor Miestchaninoff discovered near the Ta Prohm temple, built during the Bayon period (12th-13th century), a stone head of a Buddhistic god. On the forehead we see the Om symbol instead of the traditional *urnā*<sup>25</sup>). Also saints of Bodhisattva rank seem to have been adorned by the Om type of *urnā*. The art of Northern Indochina, the Lao states and that of Northern Siam produced many images of the Buddha with the flame-symbol Om on the *uṣṇiṣa*, and at the same time also with the Om symbol on the forehead thus replacing the *urnā*<sup>26</sup>). Our conclusion is that the *uṣṇiṣa* with flame-symbol always indicates the Lord Śākyamuni but the replacement of the *urnā* by said symbol is applied to Bodhisattvas also.

Images of the Buddha specially from Northern Siam and Laos are very often seen with an *urnā* in the shape of the well-known inverted question mark type, as in our fig. II e, in Siamese called *uṇṇālom*, deriving from the Siamese Pratama Saṃbodhi (19th century) which says "uṇṇāloṃa bhamukantare". Loma = fine hair. The pāli (and Siamese) *lakkhaṇa sutta* of the Dīgha-nikāya says: *uṇṇā bhamukantare* etc. (Burnouf, *Le Lotus de la bonne Loi*, tome II, p. 563). The flame *uṣṇiṣa* is called in Siamese *ketumāla* = garland of hair or *praḥ ketu*).

#### *The Maṅgala Om in the Indian Archipelago.*

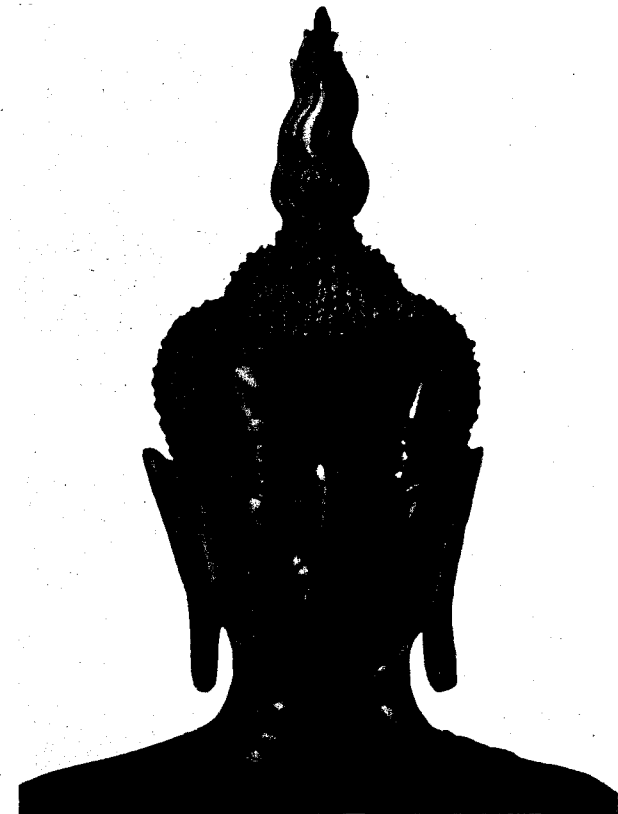
As the inscriptions show that the maṅgala Om was generally used in the epigraphical records of India it will be evident that also in the inscriptions of the East Indies, which as regards its contents, language and characters show such close connection with the Indian documents, the magical symbol Om is encountered very frequently.

The Om symbol serving as a maṅgala is seen again at the beginning and end of the inscriptions in both varieties known in India, i.e. the simple curve of fig. II type a, dextrorse or sinistrorse and in the shape of the inverted question mark with spiral tail of fig. II type e.

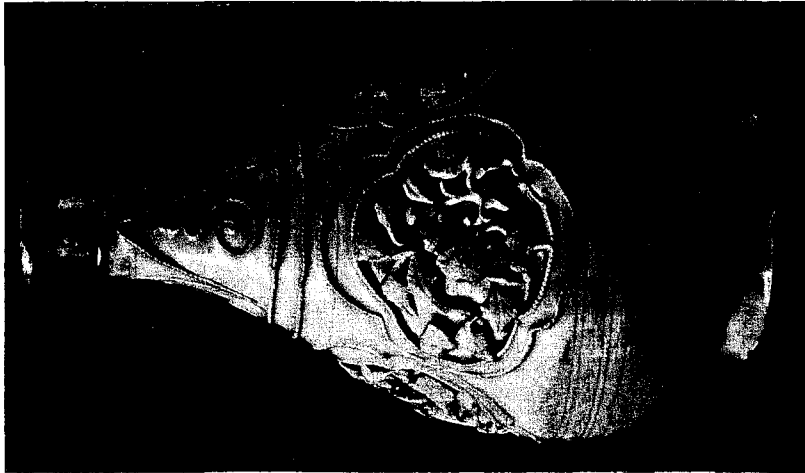
25) MARCHAL et MIESTCHANINOFF, *Sculptures Khmères*, Pl. VII, VIII. We must admit that the rather cruel features are not very typical for the "softer" Bayon school.

26) A bronze standing statue of Śākyamuni from Laos, with the Om sign as *uṇṇālom* is to be found in the Ethnographical Museum in Leyden. (Property H. van Meurs) about 18th century.

#### THE MIGRATION OF THE MAGIC SYLLABLE OM



a. ŚĀKYAMUNI (UTHONG), SIAM  
Photo Pestonji, Bangkok



1. SUNG OR MING VASE WITH OM SYMBOL  
 2. and 3. GOLDEN FINGER-RINGS FROM HINDU-JAVA (from *Dyṅgand* VII)  
 4. RĀMĀVAṆA RELIEF FROM CANDI PANATARAN

Our investigation shows that the first and dated record of the Indian Archipelago on which at the end the Om symbol has been engraved is that important inscription in stone of Kota Kapur on the isle of Bangka, dated Saka 608 (686 A.D.) and written in ancient Malay language. Its contents brings us back to the powerful kingdom of Srivijaya extending its sway over parts of Sumatra, Bangka and the Malay Peninsula<sup>27)</sup>. The maṅgala Om shows the type of the inverted question mark with spiral tail from our type e as seen in fig. III type a. The resemblance with the maṅgala Om at the end of the inscription b of Indravarman of Kalinga of the 8th or 9th century (fig. II type e) is striking. The Bangka inscription seems to be of an earlier date than that of Indravarman, but both have the name maṅgala in common, though there is no reason to believe that this type e from Bangka was not introduced from India, the country of origin of all Hinduistic and Buddhistic institutions.

When tracing the track of the Maṅgala Om in the other dated inscriptions we shall be able to follow this symbol in Indonesia till the beginning of the 14th century. When the reader has followed the description of the Om symbol in its various shapes in India, he will have no difficulty in recognizing the maṅgala Om exactly in the middle of the leafwork above the large inscription of Canggal of Saka 654 (732 A.D.) from Kedu in Central Java (fig. III b). The auspicious sign of this important and oldest dated edict from Java has the simple curl turning to the right of fig. II type d.

Furthermore, we mention two Old-Javanese grants dated about 878 and 881, at the end of these inscriptions we see Om symbols of the Indian type from fig. II a, but in reversed position and showing a crude variety of the elegant type II e with spiral tail (fig. III c and d)<sup>28)</sup>. An interesting specimen is met in the Old-Javanese jayapattra of Saka 844 (922 A.D.) published by the late Stutterheim<sup>29)</sup>. At the end of this grant we find the maṅgala Om behind a curious figure, in which we recognise the emblem of the engraver called Sang Yidi, at the right side of which is placed the Om symbol designed in fig. III e and to be compared with fig. II type d.

The large inscriptions en haut-relief of the monument of Jalatuṅḍa, on the Western slopes of mount Penanggungan in Eastern-Java are in this respect of particular interest. One of these states the Saka Year 899 (977 A.D.) in large and beautifully designed

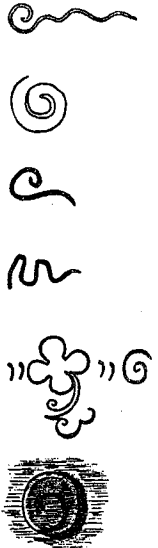


Figure III.

27) G. GOEDÈS, *Les inscriptions Malaises de Srivijaya*, BEFEO XXX, p. 27 etc. With facsimiles. KERN'S facsimiles in *Verspreide Geschriften (V.G.)*, VII, 1917 p. 209 are not clear enough in this respect.

28) COHEN STUART, *Kawi Oorkonden*, 1875. Inscriptions XII and XIV b. Introduction p. X and XI.

29) *Oudheidkundig Verslag (O.V.)* 1925, p. 59-60. STUTTERHEIM, *Epigraphica; Tijdschrift Bataviaasch Genootschap* 75, p. 444, etc.

characters. On both sides of this date a large Om symbol is placed, designed in the simple shape of curl which turns to the right as shown in type of figure II<sup>30</sup>). Precisely the same bold Om symbols are to be found on the pendant of this inscription on both sides of the Old-Javanese word "Gempeng", of which its meaning is all but clear. See fig. III f<sup>31</sup>). The latest inscription of this dated range bears the year Saka 924 (1002 A.D.) and can be seen also hewn in large character en haut relief on a stone from Tulis of the desa Puh-Sarang, district Maparata (Kediri)<sup>32</sup>. Behind the very large paten (virāma) or sound killer at the end of the inscription, a curl is shown which turns to the right, serving as a closing maṅgala Om in the same way as the Om symbol of Jalatuṅḍa<sup>33</sup>). (See fig. III type g).

#### Inscriptions of King Ādityavarman of Sumatra

The most interesting collection of Om symbols in the Indian archipelago are to be found on Sumatra some 350 years later, in the inscriptions that are known as belonging to the reign of King Ādityavarman. For our purpose we have chosen five of the most characteristic examples which are brought together in fig. IV. Here we see again the maṅgala Om in the shape of a horizontally placed inverted question mark with spiral tail of type e, which about seven centuries ago was last seen in Bangka on the inscription of Kota Kapur; provided we do not count the poor specimen of fig. III d. The first of these series of inscriptions from Sumatra is engraved on the back side of the celebrated image of Amoghapāśa at Rambahan near Lubuk Bulan in the districts of Bantang-Hari in Central-

Sumatra; it is dated Saka 1269 (1347 A.D.)<sup>34</sup>). The end of the inscription shows a

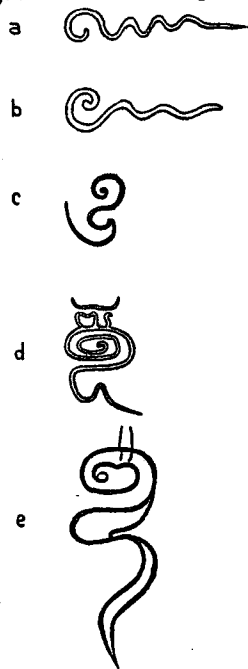


Figure IV.

30) KROM, *Inleiding tot de Hindoe-Javaansche Kunst* (1923) II, plate 46.

31) KROM, *H. J. G.*, p. 234; *O.V.* 1921, p. 78, fig. 1.

32) KERN, *V.G.* VII, p. 80 etc. with facsimile.

33) Though not a dated inscription, we wish to draw attention to the inscribed brick as per No. 52 of Groeneveldts catalogue of the Batavia Museum p. 391. The inscription "Si ka" is preceded by a curl, according to Dr. Crucq a symbolic sign. Indeed and we are inclined to call it an Om symbol. Various Om maṅgalas are also to be found in the well-known book on Indonesian alphabets of Holle under the heading "Zintekens". See CRUCQ, *Epigrafische aantekeningen*, *O.V.*, 1929, p. 262 and HOLLE, *Tabel van Oud- en Nieuw-Indische Alphabetten*, 1882, p. 33-35. The very fine Om symbols of copperplate II of ç 762 (?) are taken from the "Spurious inscription" No. II of COHEN STUART's *Kawi-Oorkonden*.

34) KERN, *V.G.* VII, 1917, p. 163-175.

maṅgala in the shape of a horizontally placed Om symbol (fig. IV a). As already observed this auspicious sign very much resembles type e of the copper-grant of King Indravarman of Kalinga. The maṅgala Om is shown even more conspicuously at the end of Ādityavarman's undated inscription of ten lines hewn in the rocks at Bandar Batu Bapahat near Suruaso likewise in Sumatra<sup>35</sup>). The inscription, hardly to be deciphered, shows at the end a beautiful Om symbol measuring 9 cm as shown in fig. IV type b.

Curious varieties of the maṅgala Om are found in the inscriptions of Ādityavarman of Saka 1278 (1356 A.D.) and Saka 1300 (1378 A.D.), now to be seen at Pagarrujung, subdivision Fort Van der Capellen in Sumatra (fig. IV c)<sup>36</sup>). On top of the memorial stone slab we see in the centre a figure, the lower side of which is formed by an Om symbol in horizontal position. On the left side before the first lines is placed the curious variety of the maṅgala Om as already discussed (fig. IV c) whilst the inscription ends with an Om symbol of the type in use during Ādityavarman's reign and which resembles the Indian type e of fig. II. Perhaps the purpose of these auspicious signs is no other than to strengthen and protect the power of the edict.

Another variety is seen at the beginning of an inscription of Ādityavarman at Kubur Raja (Mēnangkabau)<sup>37</sup>). Here the Om emblem is shown as the first syllable of the text, which otherwise has been written in "barbarous sanskrit"<sup>38</sup>) (Fig. IV type d).

When again the patient reader has followed the various varieties of our magical symbol Om, he will not find it difficult to recognize also this auspicious sign in this last of the maṅgalas shown in our table drawn from the epigraphical records of Ādityavarman (fig. IV e). It is to be found on the right side of the first lines of the undated inscription in South-Indian Grantha characters, that was already mentioned in connection with Bandar Batu Bapahat<sup>39</sup>). It is the finest representation of the magical symbol Om so far met with in Indian records. At the end of our remarks about the Om maṅgala used in Ādityavarman's time (14th century) we like to observe that the shape of the symbol, of which the engravers of this Sumatran king knew to make such fine varieties, show hardly any resemblance with that sign in the Old-Javanese epigraphy and as we shall see this also will be the case as regards Bali.

We may trust that the examples mentioned above have proved that also in the Indian archipelago the magical syllable Om was used as a maṅgala in its inscriptions. Certainly this will be no news to epigraphists of profession but it might be of value to group the different varieties together. This labour is required when we want to show that also Hindu Javanese and Balinese art made an ample use of said symbols.

35) *O.V.* 1912, p. 46; Inventaris nr. 39a.

36) *O.V.* 1912, p. 51; Inventaris nr. 23. Photo O.D. no. 1639, 1640; KERN, *V.G.* VI, p. 267 etc.

37) *O.V.* 1912, p. 41; Inventaris nr. 20.

38) KERN, *V.G.* VII, p. 215. Also Kern read the first syllable as Om.

39) *O.V.* 1912, p. 46; Inventaris nr. 39b. Photo O.D. nr. 1646. KROM, *H.J.G.*, p. 414.



*The Magical Syllable Om in the Art of Central and Eastern Java*

It is a happy circumstance that the finger rings from the Hindu-Javanese period may be considered a link between the epigraphical records and the actual products of art of that period. We avail ourselves of that opportunity to show that at least the shape of our maṅgala Om was used in the art of Central and Eastern Java. This is possible only thanks to the monograph on the subject of those golden finger rings by Professor Bosch of Leyden. Many of those rings show an engraved figure which finds its origin in the design of the syllable *çrī* as known in the old Javanese manuscripts<sup>40</sup>). It is a well known fact that the syllable *çrī* used in this sense, means an auspicious symbol that protects its bearer from evil. On close inspection however it becomes clear that several of these rings also show unmistakably an Om symbol placed above the syllable *çrī*, just as we have encountered it on the flame uṣṇīṣa of Buddhist images from Further India, i.e. in fig. I b, d, II b, VI c, VII d, VIII a, b<sup>41</sup>). One of these specimens from Professor Bosch's study is reproduced in plate c. Also on both sides of the elephant hooks or aṅkuṣa of ring XII a and b we notice the same Om symbols. Therefore they should not be taken for mere playful curls without meaning; on the contrary, their presence is required to strengthen the magical power of the rings. The central figure here is represented by the auspicious *çrī*. Reluctantly we proceed to those rings where the nāgarī script is said to be used. Their surfaces are formed by nailhead type of character as known in India; they consist of triangles whether or not with dots placed in them. Below these, verticle lines are engraved and between those lines several varieties of small curls are placed that look like question marks in ordinary position (see fig. XIII b, XIV a and B of the study mentioned).

These characters cannot be deciphered and even Brandes was led astray, whilst Professor Bosch recognizes in them a derivation of the *çrī*-syllable<sup>42</sup>). Based on our preceding investigations we are of opinion, however, that with more certainty we can accept those curls as representations of the maṅgala Om, especially when ring XIII b is taken into consideration, where the familiar Om sign is shown together with the drawn curls of the question mark type in unreversed position (plate d). When the reader has no objections against the above conclusion, we dare to take one step further by assuming to recognize on the backside of the stone image of Blitar (Eastern Java), a huge variety of that question mark. We use the word reluctantly in this respect because we are aware of being in conflict with men of international fame like Brandes and Bosch, as both Orientalists declare to recognize the pattern of this stone to be a variety of the *çrī*-emblem. This is true with the exception of the large stylised curls—the main feature of the figure—which in our opinion represents the auspicious maṅgala Om. Nevertheless we have to admit that also in the

40) BOSCH, *Gouden vingerringen uit het Hindoe-Javaansche tijdperk*, Djāvā, VII, 1927, p. 305 etc. We follow here the usual transcription of the Old-Javanese language.

41) It seems to us that ring XII is to be reversed.

42) *Rapporten van de Commissie in Nederlandsch-Indië voor Oudheidkundig Onderzoek op Java en Madœra*, (R.O.C.), 1903, p. 18, pl. 30, fig. 6; BOSCH; *op. cit.*, p. 314, pl. B.

Indian archipelago we find the Om symbol of type e of fig. II as a rule in the position of the inverted question mark. Exceptions to this rule as seen in those rings of the nāgarī type and the stone of Blitar may occur.

We are again on firm ground when we inspect the ceremonial bell or gaṅṭhā with the upper part formed by a vajra with four points from London's collection of Hindu-Javanese bronzes<sup>43</sup>). On the facing points of the vajra we recognize at once the familiar Om symbol, represented by the type of the inverted question mark of type e, fig. B. On the island of Bali where the gaṅṭhā is the principal attribute in the intricate ritual of the priests the invocational mantra of the gaṅṭhā is Omkāra Sadāçīwa<sup>44</sup>).

A new chapter in the history of the magical Om begins when we discuss—we admit not quite systematically—the famous posthumous statue (abt. 1309) of Kṛtarāja, ruler of Eastern-Java, an early specimen of the period of art of Majapahit. Judging from the iconographical side, some scholars recognize Siwa with Vaiṣṇava features, others Viṣṇu with Saiva features, or Harihara in which both Lords are combined; Siwa being hara and Viṣṇu stands for hari. This statue found at Simping and which is now in the museum in Batavia, combines the attributes of both gods and it carries in the first right hand and second left hand respectively the rosary and a threefold flame-symbol that resembles the triśūla. They are both specific emblems of Siwa. In the first left hand and second right hand is carried the club and the conch shell of Viṣṇu, the latter attribute with the snail, which according to Moens represents the symbol of deliverance, very characteristic of posthumous statues of delivered mortal beings. Our attention is concentrated on the emblem that is carried by this god in the second left hand i.e. the threefold flame-symbol that resembles the triśūla, in which we recognize very clearly three Om symbols of type e of fig. II viz. the inverted question mark with spiral tail. With our knowledge of this symbol acquired, we must object to the mere acceptance of a simple flame emblem without deeper symbolical sense. We admit that the question mark with spiral tail resembles ordinary flames like those from incense burners as pictured on the reliefs of Bārābuḍur, but still there is a difference in shape and this contains a fundamental difference from ordinary flames. We are indebted to Professor Vogel for his penetrating study on *tejas* in the sense of magical power, that gives us the solution for these curious flame symbols used in various circumstances where ordinary flames would be quite out of place<sup>45</sup>). The author proves that the occurrence of flames emanating from the shoulders or in general round the figure of statues of kings and the Buddha as shown a.o. in specimens from Graeco-Buddhist art represents nothing but their magical power, in sanskrit literature known as *tejas*. As a rule this magical power is reproduced as ordinary flames. Under these circumstances we feel entitled to recognize in those curious small flames issuing from the halo behind

43) Cf. STUTTERHEIM, *Cultuurgeschiedenis van Java in beeld*, (1926), fig. 55.

44) GORIS, *Bijdrage tot de kennis der Oud-Javaansche en Balineesche theologie*, 1926, p. 13.

45) VOGEL, *Het Sanskrit woord tejas (= gloed, vuur) in de beteekenis van magische kracht*, *Med. Kon. Ak. v. Wetensch.*; Afd. Letterkunde, dl. 70, Series B, no. 4; 1930.

Buddhistic statues of the Hindu-Javanese period also a representation of that magical tejas. The same curious flames are found also on the back slabs of stone statues from Eastern Java. The remarkable feature of these flames is the fact that in almost all cases they are not pictured as ordinary flames but in the shape of the figure of the magical symbol Om̐ of the type of the inverted question mark with spiral tail. Therefore it stands to reason that we must look for some connection between the conception of tejas as magical power or energy and the syllable Om̐. And there is a connection available in the old literature of India which conception has found its way through many ages to Java. Going all the way back to the Maitrāyaṇa-upaniṣad of the Yajurveda we think we have found the answer in the seventh prapāthaka (11) where is said: "This, verily is the intrinsic-form (Svarūpa) of the firmament (nabha) in the vacance of the innerman (antarbhūtasya khe) that is the Supreme Fiery-Energy (tejas), determined (abhihita) as the trinity (tredhā) of Fire, Supernal-Sun and Spirit. The intrinsic-aspect of space (nabha-akāśa) in the vacance of the inner man (antarbhūtasya khe) is indeed the Imperishable-Word Om̐"<sup>46</sup>.

As we have seen before, the trinity mentioned here stands for agni, sūrya and prāṇa that is likewise Om̐. Deussen's translation (p. 369) adds that this unlimited power (tejas) shall be honoured by the sound Om̐. The equation of tejas and Om̐ seems acquired and we may understand now why the supernal energy of gods or of deified kings as in Eastern Java, is represented by the Om̐ symbol of special flame design. The tejas or fiery energy emanating from Kṛtarājasa has been very well represented by the threefold flame like emblem, each of which symbolizing at the same time Om̐ and therefore the whole universe. It was a very deep thought to have the equation tejas = Om̐ designed as a flame of special design and equal to our auspicious maṅgala. It stands to reason that the flaming Om̐ symbol on the uṣṇiṣa of the Buddha in Siam represents in the first place the magical power or tejas of the Lord Śākyamuni, exactly as pointed out by Professor Vogel with regard to the Graeco-Buddhist art.

If we now direct our attention to the panel reliefs of the temples or caṅḍis Jago and Panataran of Eastern Java, we encounter a new and puzzling aspect of the Om̐ problem. On close inspection of the figures on several of these reliefs it appears that the sculptor made ample use and as it seems in various instances without special purpose, of large Om̐ symbols of type e of fig. II<sup>47</sup>). But they are not auspicious emblems in the first place and following up Professor Vogel's explanation of the tejas represented by flames we do now understand Stutterheim, who in an earlier study has recognized in those magical flames a representation of that extraordinary magical power or *sēkti* (śakti) that has the same meaning as the powerful tejas. It is exactly the same issue that Professor Vogel developed with regard to India. We have only to add that those sculptors availed themselves of the shape of the maṅgala Om̐ of the type of the inverted question mark with

46) COOMARAWAMY, *A new approach to the Vedas*, 1933, p. 50; Cf. DEUSSEN, *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda*, 1938, p. 368.

47) STUTTERHEIM, *Cultuurgeschiedenis van Java in Beeld*, 1926, fig. 124; Caṅḍi Soerawana. We see here Siva surrounded by magic flames emerging from him during the battle.

spiral tail and that it represents the presence of the magical *sēkti* which has the same power as the Old-Indian tejas, the supernatural power or fiery energy. In his *Rāma Legend* Stutterheim already compared the *Sēkti*-flames with the Siamese "ulalom", though without explanation.

It is a typical feature of the Indonesian art of Eastern-Java to place the magical symbol next to gods or mortal beings in order to express the presence of their magical power or *sēkti* and though this power, as we saw, is well known in India, we shall not find a representation as shown in Eastern-Java, on the reliefs of holy monuments in the mother country.

To quote an example: a photograph No. 35 from Brandes' monograph on Caṅḍi Jago we see one of the first episodes of that Buddhistic story called Kuṅjarakarṇa, recognized as such by Van Stein Callenfels.

On this relief we see the Yakṣa Kuṅjarakarṇa visiting the Supreme Being Vairocana— not pictured as a Dhyāni-Buddha—and who instructs this Yakṣa to pay a visit to the hell in the first place, before he will reveal the true Law<sup>48</sup>). Round the persons of this relief at least eight *sēkti*-symbols—as we shall call them here—have been placed; they all seem to represent the magical power that is emanating from them. On other reliefs of the same temple we notice the same appearance; mystical symbols round the principal characters. Of bolder shape are these symbols seen on the reliefs of caṅḍi Panataran of 1323 A.D., of which our plate e shows a clear example. Here we see an episode from the Old-Javanese version of the Rāmāyaṇa of which Brandes says: "Now that was done what he wished that should be done, Hanuman with a war-cry breaks the serpent into pieces and greatly to the alarm of the Rakṣasa that has caught him. Flames are flaring up. All this gives no. 49."<sup>49</sup>) Indeed, we see the tail of the very popular leader of the army of apes afire. The bold figures above the head of Hanumān are magical Om̐ symbols representing his *sēkti* or tejas that protects him and allows his acts of miracle. From the story we know with certainty that on plate 13 photograph 52 of Brandes' "Woltentooneelen" are pictured real flames; it is the episode that Hanumān with his flaming tail sets the roof of Rāvaṇa's palace ablaze. These flames, where amongst others the (Om̐) curl is lacking, show a distinct difference from the *sēkti*-symbol of the Om̐ type and we should not forget this has certainly been the intention of the sculptor.

Furthermore, we have to draw attention to the metal *kēntongans* or *tong-tongs* where we find in various cases large curls placed on both sides of the slotted opening, in which curls some people recognized stylised eyes, but which much more show a likeness with Om̐ symbols of the simple curl design<sup>50</sup>). Also the ornamental border in many cases is composed of Om̐ symbols that seem flattened out. Even Javanese krisses show representations of the Om̐ symbol and that is not surprising in view of the magic character of these weapons<sup>51</sup>).

48) KROM, *Inleiding H.J.K. II*, p. 116.

49) BRANDES, *Beschrijving van Tjandi Singasari en de Wolkentooneelen van Panataran*, 1909, p. 24.

50) O.V. 1929, pl. 35a. 51) Cf. *Nederlandsch-Indië, Oud- en Nieuw*, 1917, nr. 12, p. 547.

*The Magic Syllable Om in Bali*

In Weck's penetrating study on magical practices still performed by the inhabitants of Bali (East of Java), we find very interesting material on the use of the magic syllable Om in the chapter "Die magischen Schriftzeichen" <sup>52</sup>).

For the Balinese, just as for all Asiatic people, the written language contains a meaning, which is far more important than the actual significance of that language. Written characters are magic symbols.

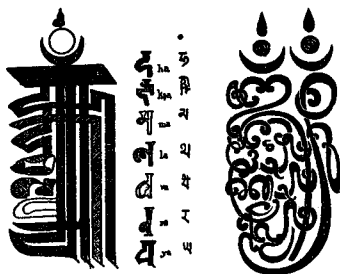


Figure V.

Still greater power than the written characters or symbols is contained in a symbolic monogram. A well known example is the magic dasabayu as seen in fig. V, and which is undoubtedly close akin to the Tibetan monogram of "the all powerful ten", as seen on the left side of the figure. Dasabayu has the same meaning as "powerful ten".

Above this Balinese monogram we recognize again the crescent moon or ardhacandra and above this the sun and the flame, in this case designed as a cone. This threefold symbol is called ulucandra by the Balinese pedanda, who, at the same time, sees it as the akṣaras a + u + m, i.e. the magic syllable Om, in Bali called Ong. The syllable Ong is called Ongkāra (Om + Aksara). The three signs of the ulucandra constitute the tryakṣara—the three syllables—but also in accordance with the ancient Indian tradition of the upaniṣad, the lords Brahmā - Viṣṇu - Īśvara (Śiva); moon, sun, fire etc.

The pedanda does not realize any more the connection of the ulucandra with the Indian and Tibetan equivalent Om symbol; neither does he as a rule understand the significance of his magic mantras beginning with Aum or Ong <sup>53</sup>). When the pedanda makes a proper use of the dasabayu and ulucandra, illness can be stopped and healing obtained. The ardhacandra has his seat in the eyes, the vindu in the forehead and nāda on the top of the head. This is only one side of the magic powers of these symbols.

The striking resemblance of the dasabayu monogram with the Tibetan all powerful ten is of course not coincidental. This monogram is clearly of Indian origin and there is reason to believe that the direct source of influence was Bengal and it reached Bali possibly through Java, as we have found the Om syllable also on that island.

And here, in Bali, we end our investigations into the migration of the magic syllable Om which we have followed—not very thoroughly—through India and South East Asia.

52) WECK, *Heilkunde und Volkstum auf Bali*, 1937, p. 67, etc.

53) De KAT ANGELINO, *Mudra's op Bali*, 1922, p. 61.

## THE BHĪMASTAVA

by

F. D. K. BOSCH

Leyden

It is a well known fact that several conceptions of purely Indian origin underwent a remarkable evolution and extension after having been introduced on Hindu-Javanese soil. A clear instance of this is the personality of the second of the Pāṇḍava brothers, Bhīma. While in the Indian epic tradition his rôle is confined to that of being the strongest of men, the intrepid hero and valorous warrior, in Java another side of his character becomes manifest.

So in the very popular old-Javanese legend of Devaruci <sup>1</sup>) Bhīma is sent on an errand to find the water of immortality and, after many adventures, arrives at an uninhabited island where by a dwarf, who is no other than Brahman, he is initiated in the highest wisdom.

A reflection of the same representation is met with in the *rĕrĕnggan* of the wayang <sup>2</sup>). Here Bhīma, besides being extolled as the superhumanly strong and valiant hero, is represented as the omniscient scholar and guru, the possessor of supernatural mystical knowledge, though he has never read any books.

Lastly, as Stutterheim has pointed out <sup>3</sup>), there was in Java and Bali, in the afterdays of the Majapahit empire, a regular cult of Bhīma, as appears from the statues of that hero set up on various mountain tops and slopes.

It is with regard to this metaphysical side of Bhīma's character that I wish to draw the attention to a Sanskrit document of Balinese origin, known by the name of Bhīmastava. It belongs to the large group of stotras (or stavas or stutis) of which M. Sylvain Lévi, in his

1) See POERBATJARAKA, *Dewa-roetji*, *Djāvā* XX, 1940, p. 7-55, and the literature quoted there.—Of this legend no Indian original has been traced so far.

2) GORIS, *Storm-kind en Geesteszoon* (Child of the Storm and son of the Spirit), *Djāvā* VII, 1927, p. 110-113.—*Rĕrĕnggan*, lit. "ornament", designs the recital of the leader of the puppetplay (*dalang*) embellishing and elucidating certain parts of the performance, and containing i.a. the description of the heroes of the play when entering the scene.

3) *Een oud-Javaansche Bhīma-cultus*, *Djāvā* XV, 1935, p. 37-64.