

# Sri and Sedana and Sita and Rama : Myths of Fertility and Generation

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## INTRODUCTION\*

In the Indo-Malaysian archipelago, the area comprising the islands of Indonesia and Malaysia, including southern Thailand (BELLWOOD 1985, 1), two sets of mythologies are found that, while ostensibly dealing with rather different matters, have several important elements in common. These mythologies are the Rama-type state mythologies on the one hand and the Sri-oriented agricultural ones on the other. In this paper I will discuss these two mythologies, showing the common elements, followed by a discussion in which I will point out some wider patterns in which they may be placed.

The Rama-type mythologies relate the supernatural origin of royal lineages and may be seen as the supernatural legitimation of a royal house. In other words, they deal with the founding of a state. Many of these myths have been usefully compiled in RAS (1968), though many versions are scattered throughout the literature.

Various versions of the Sri myth have also been recorded and discussed in the literature (cf. RASSERS 1959; HIDDING 1929). A useful compilation of several of them is given by KATS (1916), which I will use as a guide, referring to more detailed treatments as necessary.

In essence the Dewi Sri myth details how this goddess in one or another of her manifestations is transformed into useful crops, among which rice is prominent. It also explains the supernatural, social, and natural relations, including the origin of settled life, that are attendant on this transformation.

## THE "RAMA" MYTHS

I have called this set of myths Rama-type myths because, as was observed by MAXWELL (1881) and HILL (1961, 174, n. 5) among others, they seem predominantly to be a variant on the *Hikayat Seri Rama*, the Malay version of the *Rāmāyana*, in which an ancestress of king Rama springs forth from a miraculous bamboo, or originates in some way either from water or foam. MAXWELL (1881, 511), however, feels that the bamboo and foam aspects are distinct and separate although they are often found together and may even be confused with each other. As will become apparent in this discussion, the two are actually closely related to each other. Finally, there are versions of this story that are clearly some form of adaptation, such as a beautiful princess who emerges from an aubergine (STEEL 1929, 92), a betel flower (MAXWELL 1881, 508; BROWN 1970, 101), or a fruit (EVANS 1937, 322). These will not concern us here.

The idea that bamboo may contain some magical essence or the seeds of life also has a wider distribution than just the Indo-Malaysian archipelago or the Rama myths. In Japan we find the story of wise men who retreat into a bamboo forest or whose souls turn into bamboo that eventually bring forth golden-hued saints (MAXWELL 1886, 358; DICKINS 1887, 42; AUSTIN and UEDA 1970, 20). Alternately there is the Japanese story of a poor woodcutter who finds a very tiny child in a miraculous bamboo from which a strange glow emanates. She is a moon child who in some versions brings him fortune but who eventually returns to the heavens or the moon (MAXWELL 1886, 357-358; DICKINS 1887, 1-30; AUSTIN and UEDA 1970, 20; MACKENZIE 1985, 150).

Further, bamboo is especially a symbol of fertility (LOEBER 1917, 131). In some places it is seen as the vehicle in which life was carried to earth (ALKEMA and BEZEMER 1927, 189, 551), and it is often used in life-cycle and other rituals (LOEBER 1917, 131; AUSTIN and UEDA 1970, 21). Finally, a substance found on the inside of the sections is said to be an antidote for poisons (AUSTIN and UEDA 1970, 21-22), while some forms seem to be natural reservoirs of pure water in the forests (MARJUNI 1988, 101-102).

The saga of Rama opens with the story of how king Dasaratha decided to build a new city (ZIESENISS 1963, 13). This was probably a new capital because ANONYMOUS (1953, 7) has him making a *negeri* (country or state), and the idea of state and capital are often synonymous here (compare OETOMO 1987, 39-41). During the clearing of a suitable area a "magnificent, beautifully fragrant bamboo clump is discovered" (ZIESENISS 1963, 13), which somehow resists all attempts

at cutting it down until king Dasaratha himself "cleaves it asunder and finds the exquisitely beautiful princess Mandu dari" (1963, 13), whom he takes home and marries. They have five children, one of whom is Rama.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to various machinations, the evil Ravana comes to have a claim upon Mandu dari, but she creates a clone of herself, Mandu daki, out of the dirt on her skin (*daki*=skin dirt), and the clone is sent to Ravana to be his wife. Dasaratha then has sexual relations with Mandu daki before Ravana has a chance to do so, and out of this union comes Sita, who is later to be Rama's wife. Since astrologers forecast that Sita's future husband will kill Ravana, he decides to prevent this by killing her. Mandu daki, however, convinces him to place the child in an iron box and commit it to the sea. Eventually it is found by king Maharisi Kali, whose wife nurses "the beautiful girl, the golden radiance of whose form sheds light . . ." (ZIESENISS 1963, 17).

After many more adventures Rama eventually marries Sita, but she is abducted by Ravana and held prisoner for some years. The war detailed in the *Rāmāyana* ensues and Sita is rescued, but now questions are raised about her purity and whether she is fit to be queen. Rama, at least in one version, reluctantly concedes and Sita is rejected (STUTLEY 1977, 278).

To summarize, Rama is the son of king Dasaratha and a magical maiden who sprang forth out of a bamboo, while Sita is the product of a union between this king and his wife's clone. Sita can furthermore be seen to have been born twice, since she was committed to the sea, from which she later reemerged. As HILL (1961, 174, n. 5) observes, this theme has become a common one in the folklore of the Indo-Malaysian archipelago. All, he says, are adaptations from the Malay *Rāmāyana*.

Thus, HILL (1961, 109) reports how Raja Muhammad was riding through the forest with his followers when they came upon a clump of extraordinarily thick bamboo. Precisely as in the Rama story, his followers were unable to cut it down and the king himself had to do it. Then, in the center of the clump he found a bamboo shoot "as thick as a man's body," from which emerged "a young girl of surpassing beauty," whom he named Princess Betong.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, HERVEY (1882, 193-194) tells of the Khatib (religious official) Malim Seleman who came over the hill carrying a machete, a hatchet, a chisel, and a *kachip* (betel-nut clippers), pursuing a beautiful princess. He slept near a very large bamboo, from which the princess emerged that night, cooking for him and sharing his bed. In the morning, however, she was gone. He tried all his tools on the large bamboo

in which he knew she was hiding, finally succeeding in opening it with the betel cutters. He and his many followers took her home and they married, after which they both disappeared.

A certain Brawijaya, who was of the royal lineage of Majapahit, as reported from West Borneo by MAXWELL (1881, 509–510), was even luckier. Suffering from an infectious disease, which seems not to have been uncommon (cf. JORDAAN and DE JOSSELIN DE JONG 1985), he lived on a raft, seeking a cure from the water. While hunting he came upon a thick bamboo in which he found Putri Betong, the beautiful princess from the bamboo. They repaired to his raft and sailed up and down the river, where they heard a voice coming from a flower. There they found the princess Lindong Buah (Lindung Buih=hidden in foam). The three of them lived together peacefully.

From Kutai, RAS (1968, 81–83) relates how Aji Batara Agung Dewa Sakti came down from the sky in a gold ball, while his future wife, Putri Karang Melenu or Putri Jundung Buih (carried on the foam; MAXWELL 1881, 308 says “lotus of the foam”), came out of a mass of foam created by a snake-woman who had appeared out of a [bamboo?] rafter of a house. The two had a son, Aji Batara Agung Paduka Nira, and then died, while the son married a girl found in a large yellow bamboo that split open one night. . . .

Finally, Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh descended from two brothers (JOHNS 1979, 52; ISKANDAR 1958, 50–51) who founded their lineages by marrying, respectively, a princess that came out of a clump of bamboo and one who descended from heaven to bathe in a pool. Both lose their wives after each has given birth to a son and a daughter. The grandfather of these children marries them to each other and from one of these marriages Iskandar Muda descended. This part of the story then concludes that the grandfather, Munawwar Syah, who had a heavenly nymph for a wife, was a descendant of Alexander the Great, and that thus Sultan Iskandar Muda was also a descendant of Alexander the Great and of the heavenly nymph, who was in turn a descendant of Vishnu, thus giving us, as TEEUW and WYATT (1970, 264) describe it, a retrospective origin of an old dynasty.

In these last three stories the element of water was added to that of bamboo. This is a very common pattern that we find again in Patani, with the marriage of a heavenly prince born from a bamboo with a princess of the foam, beginning the royal dynasty of Patani (TEEUW and WYATT 1970, 261), as well as in the story of king Phra Ong Mahapodisat (STURROCK 1916, 91–93; MAXWELL 1881, 499–501), in which during a hunt this king found the usual clump of bamboo, one stem of which was thin both at the top and the bottom, but in the middle it

suddenly became quite thick.<sup>3</sup> He took this stem home and placed it next to his bed, where it grew larger and larger and finally burst. A very handsome boy stepped out, and the king adopted him, naming him Raja Buloh Betong. Later it is told how the wife of king Besiong went to the river, where she spotted a small, very white mass of foam floating toward her. In it she found a very beautiful baby girl, which she took to the palace. The girl was called Putri Seluang. LOWE (1849, 468) adds that she resembled the children of Indra. Eventually she was married to Raja Buloh Betong. (See also MAXWELL 1881, 501-508; 1882: 90-91 for Perak, and 1881, 517-518 for Celebes.)

In all these latter versions, a male born of bamboo marries a female born from the foam or water, whereas in earlier versions a female was born from bamboo who then gave birth to a boy who married a girl coming from the foam. It is probable, however, that this modification is only a contraction of the original story.

In summary, when in these stories only a girl appears miraculously, she comes out of a bamboo (HILL 1961, 109; HERVEY 1882, 193-194; MAXWELL 1881, 509-510). When, on the other hand, characters appear out of both water or foam and bamboo, they may both be female, as in the Acehnese case (ISKANDAR 1958, 50-51), but more generally a female character then tends to originate in the water while the male character comes out of a bamboo (MAXWELL 1881, 501-507 and 517-518; SKEAT 1901, 59-61; TEEUW and WYATT 1970, 197; STURROCK 1916, 91-93) with a further addition from Kutai (RAS 1968, 81-83), where the son of such a couple marries a girl born from a bamboo.

Clearly, also, these tales are connected with the origin of royal houses. This is explicitly stated in the case of Aceh, Patani, and Perak (ISKANDAR 1958, 50-51; SKEAT 1901, 59-61; TEEUW and WYATT 1970, 261; MAXWELL 1881, 501-507) while RAS (1968, 184) points out that Putri Jungjung Buih, the princess of the foam, is the mythical ancestress of a royal dynasty. In the other stories this is not directly stated, although in all but two (RAS 1968, 81-83 [Kutai]; MAXWELL 1881, 517-518 [Celebes]) the child is either found or adopted by a royal house or referred to as princess.

In transition to the set of myths relating to crops, I shall present a story from the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) (BROWN 1970, 13-15; compare DE JOSSELIN DE JONG 1965, 285-286). Here it is told how Raja Chulon, a descendant of Alexander the Great, descended to the bottom of the sea, where he married the daughter of the ruler. He returned to land, leaving his wife and children behind.

On the land near Palembang, in the meantime, a strange glow was seen over the rice fields at night, and the next morning the people saw

that their grain had turned to gold, while the plants were made of silver-and-gold alloy. Suddenly three handsome youths appeared on a white cow. They were Raja Chulon's children, who had changed the fields of rice. Then some white foam came out of the cow's mouth, out of which appeared a man who immediately pronounced one of the boys to be king.

The essence of this story is that youths born of a king and an underwater princess change rice into gold and silver. A man from the foam then pronounces one of them king, beginning the line of the Malay rulers (DE JOSSELIN DE JONG 1965, 285).

Before going on to analyze this further, we must first turn our attention to the other set of myths, the ones dealing with the origin of crops and settled life.

#### THE DEWI SRI MYTHS

One major version of the Sri myth is related in the story of Sri Mahapunggung (KATS 1916, 179-180; RASSERS 1959, 10-13). The ruler of Mendang Kamulan, Sri Mahapunggung, notes that his son, prince Sedana, has disappeared without a trace. Suddenly an embassy from King Pulagra, the ruler of Mendang Kumuwung, appears, asking for the hand of Dewi Sri, Sri Mahapunggung's daughter. Dewi Sri, however, only wants to marry someone who looks just like her brother Sedana. She flees the palace, pursued by the representatives of King Pulagra.

On her journey Dewi Sri arrives in Mendang Tamtu, where Ki Buyut Wangkeng and his wife are bringing in the rice harvest. When Sri approaches the wooden block in which rice is pounded, they invite her into the house. She requests, however, that the house first be cleaned. At this point her pursuers arrive and a battle ensues, during which Dewi Sri flees further, chased by Kaladru, one of the deputies.

In the meantime, Batara Guru has become aware of Dewi Sri's plight. He has her informed about Sedana's whereabouts in the forest Mendang Agung, and they are quickly reunited, after which Sedana defeats Kaladru. Sri and Sedana then decide to make a settlement in the forest. Sedana is sent to get seeds and young plants. He also brings in Ki Buyut Wangkeng. King Pulagra now attempts to acquire Sri by force but is defeated. After this Sri and Sedana are urged to marry, but they refuse and Sedana is separated from Sri.

In an alternate reading (KATS 1916, 180-183), Sri and Sedana run away from the palace together and refuse to return. When they lay sleeping, the gods change Sedana into a swallow and Sri into a large snake (*ular sawah*; snake of the rice fields). Alternately, when Sri

Mahapungung hears that his children have not returned, he sighs, "Oh Sri, will you change your skin like a snake, oh Sedana, will you nest in strange parts like a swallow?" Owing to his great spiritual powers, these things then really happen.

In any case, upon awakening, Sri and Sedana are afraid of each other and separate. Sri then enters a field of ripening rice. The farmer who owns this field dreams of her, catches her, and locks her in his rice shed. She then appears in his dreams and advises him on how to protect his unborn child from several forms of death.

Other versions of the Sri myth are somewhat different from the above one. In the story *Manikmaya* (KATS 1916, 177-179; RASSERS 1959, 14-19) it is told that the god Batara Guru wants to marry Tisnawati, who appears out of the jewel Retna Dumilah. Tisnawati, however, sets certain conditions before consenting and Kalagumarang is ordered to fulfill them. While attempting to do this, Kalagumarang happens upon Dewi Sri, who is bathing in the garden Banjaran Sari. She flees and asks protection from Sang Vishnu Murti, who advises her to incarnate as the queen of Mendang Kamulan. While she is on her way there, Kalagumarang continues to attempt to molest her and is changed into a pig. Dewi Sri arrives at Mendang Kamulan and incarnates as the queen, while Viṣṇu becomes the king, named Mengukuan.

After a while Batara Guru becomes impatient and attempts to rape Tisnawati, who dies as a consequence. She is buried in Mendang Kamulan, and from her head springs the coconut palm, from her hands the banana plant, and from her teeth the maize plant, while her pubic region gives rise to the rice.

Variants of this myth (KATS 1916, 186-187) relate that Sri, while fleeing from Kalagumarang, suddenly disappears. In the place where this happens, the same plants appear that came out of Tisnawati's body in the earlier version. Tisnawati's rice, however, grows on dry fields, while that originating from Sri needs irrigated fields.

The earlier theme of Sri's association with a large snake is continued in the *Dampu Awang* version (KATS 1916, 186). Here the snake Antaboga hatches out two eggs, out of which appear Dewi Sri and Sedana. This is similar to the version of the *Manikmaya* story related by RASSERS (1959, 15-16), in which the Retna Dumilah slips out of Batara Guru's hand and falls down into the seventh earth, where it is swallowed by Antaboga. Antaboga is then brought to heaven and there produces (=gives birth to) the Retna Dumilah.

In the continuation of the *Dampu Awang* version, Batara Guru places Sri in the care of his wife, Dewi Uma, and Sedana is cared for

by Nerada. Both the children die, however, and Sedana's body is transformed into iron, silver, gold, diamonds, and the like, while Sri changes into all kinds of seeds, among which is the rice.

PRAWIRASUGANDA (1964, 143-144) gives a different, Sundanese (West Java) version of this story, in which Sanghyang (=Batara) Guru orders Nerada to tell the gods to gather the ingredients for a construction. All the gods busily set about doing this except for Dewa Anta (boga), who does not participate and cries because he has no arms in which to carry anything. Three of his tears turn into eggs, which Nerada then orders him to offer to Guru. Carrying the eggs in his mouth, Anta meets a bird, and it asks him where he is going. Because Anta does not answer, the bird becomes angry and attacks him, causing Anta to drop two of the eggs. These break and turn into a pig and a creature combining the features of a dog and a pig. These two set out to seek their mother.

The last egg is offered to Guru, and from it hatches a beautiful girl who is called Dewi Pohaci or Dewi Asri (=Dewi Sri). This child is nursed by Dewi Uma until her adolescence, making Dewi Uma her adopted mother and Guru her adopted father. To prevent Guru from marrying her and thus committing some form of incest, Dewa Sanghyang Wenang kills her (compare DE JOSSELIN DE JONG 1965, 284). She is buried, and from her body sprout all kinds of plants: the coconut tree, rice, bamboo, and so on.

Another Sundanese variant of the origin of cultivation story is reported by ASIAH (1964, 28-30) from the village of Walahir. Here it is told that a shaft of light was seen in the sky that slowly came to earth. There it assumed the shape of a boy and a girl. They were asked to return to the sky, but they refused and went on their way. They roamed aimlessly until they reached the shore. Here the boy said he wanted to go on alone, but if the girl needed him she should just call his name, Ki Bagus Sedana. The girl, whom he called Bagawan Sang Sri, went on alone until one day she met grandmother and grandfather Pangebunan. These were very happy to meet with such a beautiful girl and asked who she was and where she came from. Sri answered that she did not know her own origins but if they wanted to take care of her she was willing, as long as they fulfilled certain requirements, which she listed. Hearing those requirements the old couple became angry and frightened Sri to death. They buried her, and from her body there grew rice, bamboo, and a variety of other plants that the old couple tended.

In summary, in all the versions in which Sedana appears along with Sri, they end up separated from each other, through either death,



wandering, or a refusal to be married. In the version offered in Sri Mahapungung, rice and other crops already seem to exist, and so Sri is not transformed into them. She sends Sedana to gather them and settles down with the farming couple to a sedentary life. In all the other versions Sri herself is the source of the crops.

In three versions there is a close association between the goddess and a snake. Both she and snakes are sources of wealth (*rejek*) (KATS 1916, 189; compare JORDAAN 1984, 107–112; STEEL 1929, 178–184), and snakes are closely associated with water (CROOKE 1955, 415), as is Sri (see also JORDAAN 1987, 123). Sedana, however, may also represent wealth, although of a different kind (*dunya*) (KATS 1916, 189).

As is discussed elsewhere, Dewi Sri, Tisnawati, and Nyi Pohaci are practically interchangeable, differing only occasionally in regard to the ecological conditions under which the crops they represent may be grown (WESSING 1988b, 56–58). In two versions, Sri is placed in the care of Dewi Uma, who represents the dry field (*huma*) (VAN SETTEN VAN DER MEER 1979, 103–104) and who is the wife or *sakti* of Guru (Śiva) (CAREY and HOUBEN 1987, 16; BRINGGREVE 1987, 142). At base, all these forms of the goddess of agriculture or fertility are manifestations of Laksmi (STUTLEY 1977, 285), who was born out of the froth created by the churning of the ocean (DOWSON 1957, 176). While Laksmi is actually the *sakti* of Viṣṇu, Viṣṇu and Śiva are often represented as a union (DOWSON 1957, 117, 297; ELIOT 1954, vol. 2, 164). In any case, the connection between Sri and Viṣṇu is clear enough in the story Manikmaya, where she ends up as his wife as queen of Mendang Kamulan, although it is not clear whether they have sexual relations, since no offspring is mentioned. Since Sedana is a manifestation of Viṣṇu (KATS 1916, 189), a non-sexual relationship between Viṣṇu and Sri would be in keeping with the relationship between Sri and Sedana.

Before going on to show the links between the two sets of myths, I will present one more story relating to rice (FUCHS 1960, 422). It comes from India and relates that Jaki *mata*, who is also known as Sita, had grain, while men did not. Jaki *mata* had six fingers on one hand. One day she cut one off and planted it in the ground, and after a while bamboo grew out of it. The sections of this bamboo contained all kinds of seeds. (The bamboo's flower growing out of the interstice between the sections indeed looks like a stalk of rice. Cf. *Tempo* 1990, 71). One day a pig bit into the bamboo and some of the grain fell out, which the pig then ate. His owner found this grain in the pig's feces and followed the pig when it returned to the bamboo. The man split the bamboo open and gathered the grain, and there was enough to

feed the village.

In this story, rice is brought not by Sri but by Sita, whom we last saw as Rama's disappointed wife. Sita, however, is also a manifestation of Laksmi (STUTLEY 1977, 278), and thus the connection is not so remote. Note, however, that here the bamboo comes out of Sita's body, only then giving rise to the other crops.

With these final details we can now draw some parallels between these sets of myths. First of all, it should be noted that neither Sri and Sedana nor Sita and Rama manage to be married to each other. In the various Rama-type stories, the *rāja* (kings) often seem to lose their magical wives, although here they at least manage to have offspring (ISKANDAR 1958, 50–51; ZIESENISS 1963; STUTLEY 1977, 278; MAXWELL 1881, 501; RAS 1968, 81–83).

In the Rama stories, bamboo clearly is the origin of the ruler's wife, although she may emerge from foam, in which case a mythical ancestor who marries her comes from a bamboo. This ancestress is obviously equated with Sita, although RAS (1968, 184) feels that this identification may be a late one. In the Sri mythology, bamboo and other crops come forth out of Sri, while DE JOSSELIN DE JONG (1965, 286) cites Skeat's *Malay Magic* for the interesting observation of a man ritually sowing a rice field by stuffing rice seeds into his mouth and spitting or vomiting them out, imitating nausea. We may relate this to the cow's vomit that gave rise to the Malay ruling house.

The Rama stories I used only mention a snake once, where one emerged from a bamboo, to then create foam from which a girl appeared. SKEAT (1972, 8, n. 1) mentions a Golden Dragon (*nāga*, snake), who claims "I have no land, nor country, I have neither father nor mother, but I was incarnated from the hollow part of a bamboo!" Sri and snakes are closely associated, as was mentioned earlier, while snakes also guard the mineral wealth of the earth (STUTLEY 1977, 198) (reminding us of Sedana's transformation), as well as being a favored animal of Viṣṇu's (STUTLEY 1977, 198), of whom Sedana is a manifestation.

Additionally, we have the detail of the *kachip* (betel cutters) being used to open a bamboo (HERVEY 1882, 193–194). Betel, and by extension the betel cutter, is symbolic of Sri and is a required ingredient in offerings to her (WESSING 1978, 119, 141–142; compare CLAUS 1975). In the other direction we have Sita giving forth bamboo, from which grains then came.

In closing this section, a final look should be given to the character of Sita. While ultimately rejected by Rama, Sita is the image of marital fidelity, having remained pure throughout her imprisonment by Ra-

vana (HACKIN 1932, 141; STUTLEY 1977, 278). She is said to have been born when king Janaka plowed a ritual furrow and is thus also a daughter of the earth (HACKIN 1932, 141; DOWSON 1957, 132; compare PRAWIRASUGANDA 1964, 129). The name Sita means "a furrow" or "she who has been plowed" (DOWSON 1957, 294–295; GATWOOD 1985, 114), while ZIMMER (1962, 138) observes that the furrow represents the vulva, a detail to which we shall return later.

The emphasis in all these stories clearly lies on bamboo and foam. While rice is most often mentioned as the crop that emerged from Sri, not surprising in largely agricultural communities, it is clear that bamboo also takes an important, if not primary, symbolic place. Foam and water and the associated snakes are also closely connected with Sri, and thus with Sita and Laksmi as well.

Last, there is the notion of the royal house, the context in which this all takes place, since both Rama and Sita as well as Sri and Sedana are portrayed as the offspring of royalty. I shall now go on, therefore, to look at the position of rulers and their relation to snakes and bamboo.

#### THE RULER AS A COSMIC CENTER

As HEINE-GELDERN (1942) has made clear, the way in which a Southeast Asian state is organized should closely reflect the perceived organization of the cosmos, if the affairs of the state are to prosper. The state should be an image or reflection of the cosmos. The center of this cosmos is Mount Meru, the place where Indra's heaven is located (DOWSON 1957, 208). Parallel to this, or actually continuous with Mount Meru (WESSING n.d., 14), the state should have a cosmic center as well, located as close as possible to its center of worldly power and authority. This center often had the form of an actual or symbolic mountain (WESSING 1988a) but might also be represented by a tree, usually a banyan, located near the palace (WESSING n.d.; ZIMMERMAN 1919; 308). Such places were the cosmic centers of states, where the intersection of the sky and the underworld creates the universe and by extension the state itself (cf. WESSING 1988a).

The ruler of the state occupies its center, and thus by extension he is located at the center of the cosmos as well. Thus rulers were said to be incarnations or reflections of deities such as Śiva or Viṣṇu. Their centrality was indicated by titles like Spike of the Universe or King of the Mountain, reflecting their association with the cosmic center.

As MABBETT (1983, 80) has pointed out, in some way the ruler was identical to Meru. He was the immovable reference point for everything. It stands to reason then that the relocation of the capital

or the founding of a new state represented a total realignment of the cosmos, not an event to be undertaken lightly or without the proper cosmic indicators such as a magical clump of bamboo or a ride on a mysterious tiger (cf. WESSING 1986).

The center, and thus also the ruler, was the summation of all the realm. In the center all ambiguities and oppositions were resolved into the cosmic unity (ANDERSON 1972, 13). The ruler should ideally be married, because, as DUFF-COOPER (1986, 23) points out, a married couple replicates *ardhanārīśvara*, the androgynous half-male and half-female image. Yet this same image also expresses the ruler's own vitality, centrality, and one-ness. The ruler is at once male and female; within his person he contains the opposites and holds them "in a tense, electric balance" (ANDERSON 1972, 14). The god whom the ruler represents on earth, does the same thing. Śiva and his *sakti* or divine energy are separate but yet united; they are two aspects of a unity, a combination that is the essence of fertility and life (DUFF-COOPER 1986, 15–16; ZIMMER 1984, 30, 61–62, n. 26; BRINKGREVE 1987, 141–142).<sup>4</sup>

The appropriate ruler was the one who was able to gather the god's divine energy and utilize it for the benefit of his realm. He acted, as it were, as a central distribution point for this energy, great amounts of which were concentrated in his person—logically so, since he occupied the identical place in the cosmos as did the god himself.

An indication that the ruler indeed had this *sakti* or cosmic energy that was essential for the welfare of his realm and his ability to rule (cf. ANDERSON 1972), was a glow (*wahyu*) that emanated from his person (BERG 1938, 16; DE VRIES ROBBÉ 1984; COOMARASWAMY 1965, 22, 185), reminiscent both of the golden glow reported to come from the miraculous clumps of bamboo and from the mysteriously transformed rice fields described earlier.

When the ruler was an appropriate one, with proper access to cosmic energy used for the benefit of his realm, prosperity would ensue. Fields would be fertile, harvests plentiful, and commerce profitable. FOLEY's (1987, 68–69) translation of the *Wahyu Makuta Rama* (The *Wahyu* (glow) of Rama's Throne) is illustrative:

This is a kingdom with mountains behind, wet rice fields to the right, dry fields to the left, and a great port in front. [I.e. properly aligned with the cosmos.] It is fertile and all its prices are inexpensive. Peaceful are the journeys of its merchants, who enter the port increasingly day and night, experiencing no difficulties on their voyages. Many people have moved here and neighboring houses are so close that their roofs touch. A place which is

broad seems narrow because of the wealth of the kingdom. . . .

#### FERTILITY

One indicator then of the appropriateness of a ruler is the welfare of the realm, which is a direct consequence of the ruler's cosmic energy. This is probably what Sedana's (=Viṣṇu's=Rama's) transformation into mineral wealth was in reference to.

Fertility of the soil is also a function of the ruler's cosmic potential. In order to harness this energy within his realm, the ruler would, as part of his coronation, often circumambulate his capital or plow a furrow around it. Since the center encompasses the whole, this was equivalent to encircling his realm with this furrow (PARANAVITANA 1970, 31-32; HEINE-GELDERN 1942, 17). The sexual aspect of plowing, in which the ruler in effect surrounds his realm with a vulva (cf. ZIMMER 1962, 168; STUTLEY 1977, 278),<sup>5</sup> is brought out clearly in DANASASMITA et al. (1977, II, 203-205), in which the *alun-alun*, the square in front of the palace, representing the cosmic center (cf. WESSING n.d.), is plowed up using someone's penis as a plowshare. One of the duties of a ruler was to inaugurate the agricultural season by plowing the first few furrows himself (ZAINUDDIN 1958, 63; compare TAMBIAH 1985, 323, STUTLEY 1977, 278), thereby infusing the soil with his (sexual?) energy and hoping to ensure a good harvest.

Another aspect of this concern with fertility was the ruler's connection with snakes, who are the guardians of mineral wealth and also closely connected with the agricultural process (cf. JORDAAN 1987; WESSING 1988b). So close was the ruler's connection with snakes that he was at times said to cohabit nightly with one in order to ensure the welfare of his realm (BOSCH 1960, 92-93; HEINE-GELDERN 1942, 26; see also JORDAAN 1984, 113, n. 8). On Java this took the form of cohabitation with Nyi Loro Kidul, the goddess of the Southern Ocean. This goddess, however, may well be the original Indonesian serpent goddess (WESSING 1988b, 56).<sup>6</sup>

The king, the palace, and the capital then stand at the center of the cosmos and are in some sense identical with it; the ruler, in this sense, is Meru (MABBETT 1983, 80; compare WESSING n.d.). This center, as BOSCH (1960, 154, 230-231) observes, is the point of creation, the *padmamūla* or lotus rhizome, and stands equivalent to the cosmic tree.

BOSCH has especially discussed this lotus symbolism of the center (see also MABBETT 1983). He points out that in effect the whole universe is symbolized by the lotus plant, a "lotus with cosmic dimensions"; floating on the primeval waters and identical with them, it is one with life and gives rise to all that is (1960, 52-53, 57, 63, 81;



FIG. 1. Śiva liṅgodbhara. IONS (1967, 38), reproduced with kind permission from The British Museum.

compare ZIMMER 1962, 51, see illustration in SNELLING 1983, 27).

Through its essential identity with the waters, the lotus is also closely connected with Sri (COOMARASWAMY 1972, 22) and thus with the *nāga* or snake as well. In fact, BOSCH (1960, 135) points out the identity of the *nāga*'s body with the lotus stalk, as both are depicted with nodes at regular intervals, linking the lotus with bamboo as well; "only objects and living beings with a naturally elongated and thin shape are used for replacing the stem [of the *padmamūla*]. . . ." (BOSCH 1960, 100 and 155).

Meru is also equated with a phallus, generally Śiva's (cf. WESSING 1988a, 182–183). The cosmic pillar is called *vetasam hiranyayam*, a golden reed, but *vetasa* can mean both reed and phallus, and thus the column is identical to the phallus, the cosmic tree, the lotus, and the bamboo (compare ZIMMER 1962, 138).

Interestingly, all of them are said to contain things as well. Meru is said to contain the mystical essence of life (MABBETT 1983, 73–74), as does water, with which the lotus is one (BOSCH 1960, 60). The

lotus, of course, contains the essence of everything (BOSCH 1960, 123).

We have already seen the bamboo containing the essence of life, Sita, and a golden dragon (SKEAT 1972, 8, n. 1), while in Bali Sri is portrayed inside or in the shape of a *tumpal*, the representation of a bamboo shoot (LANGEWIS and WAGNER 1964, 23, 37; WAGNER 1959, 42).

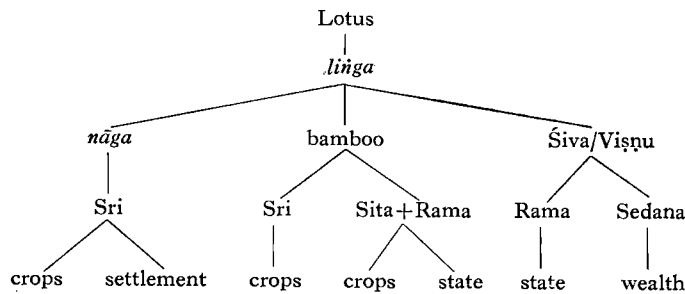
Finally we have Śiva himself, emerging from his own *liṅga* (SIVARAMAMURTI 1984, 184; see Fig. 1), while Viṣṇu in the form of a boar (*varāha*) descends to the primeval waters and Brahma ascends to the heavens at the top of the *liṅga*. The vulva-like opening from which Śiva emer-

ges emphasizes at once the bi-sexual nature of the god and reminds us of Sita and Laksmi, who as Uma may also be found in a *līṅga* (BOSCH 1960, 188–189), although more typically we find her as Sita, emerging from a bamboo, which (like Śiva’s phallus and Śiva) is again herself.

CONCLUSION

In these final sections we have seen how the symbolic elements that prominently emerged from the myths may be placed in the context of, and are actually identical with, the elements through which the cosmos is defined. As BOSCH (1960, 152) writes, all these things, the mountain, the tree, the pillar, and even the human body, continually change into one another; they are essentially one.

Sri is found in the bamboo, as Uma and Śiva are in the *līṅga*, but the bamboo emerges from Sri and Śiva gives birth to himself. If we, with Bosch, see all this as emerging from the primeval lotus, the following diagram may be drawn:



In this diagram the feedback loops, such as Sri-bamboo-Sri, have been left out in order to keep things simple. They should not be forgotten, however, as, interestingly, in some ways the myths are inverses of each other, while in other, minor, ways, they run parallel.

Thus in the story Sri Mahapungung, Sri and Sedana leave the palace and go into the wild forest, where Sri in particular finds a settlement, i.e. an enclosure in the wild. In the Rama stories, however, either Sita or Rama emerges from an enclosure in the wild, the bamboo, and proceeds to the palace.

RASSERS (1959, 20–29) has discussed Sri’s sojourn in the forest in terms of her initiation into a proposed phratry system into which Javanese society at one time is supposed to have been organized. This is not too likely an explanation, however. While these societies exhibit a certain basic duality, this is nowhere expressed as a phratry system, but rather as a complementary opposition between male and female

principles in the organization of the cosmos and society.

For the idea of an enclosure in the wild, however, several other examples can be shown. States are often said to have been started as a clearing in the forest, and this is also how they are supposed to expand; from the original settlement daughter clearings or colonies are set up and populated (cf. MOEDJANTO 1986, 52, 139 n. 133; DE GRAAF and PIGEAUD 1974, 221). The establishment of a new social unit through marriage is often associated with the idea of a clearing in the forest as well (WESSING 1978, 144), though this may at times approach the idea of a Garden of Paradise (LEIGH 1988). What may be expressed here, therefore, is the opposition between the female-focussed sphere of the village household, in which the male is often an outsider (WESSING 1978) and the male-oriented domain of politics and the state —yet even there emphasizing the importance of the ancestress (cf. JORDAAN 1987).

There are actually few instances where the two sets of myths run parallel, and relatively little emphasis is placed upon them in the stories. Thus we have one instance where Sri and Sedana appear out of the sky (ASIAH 1964); this may be matched with the one nymph appearing from the sky to bathe in a pool in Aceh (ISKANDAR 1958), and a male figure in Kutai (RAS 1968, 81–83). These male figures then both disappear, and the usual sequence of Sri changing into crops and the wet nymph changing into Sita occurs. The only other parallel is an implied one: Sedana's transformation into wealth is parallel to King Rama's responsibility for the welfare of the realm.

The other combinations mostly run parallel within each set of myths and are again inverses of each other between the sets. Thus, Sri changing into bamboo and crops is paralleled by Sita changing into bamboo and then into grain, but contrasted with bamboo changing into Sita and/or Rama. Similarly, Sri's change into a snake (water) is opposed to foam (water) changing into Sita and Rama, but this latter sequence runs parallel to Antaboga's giving birth to Sri.

We could attempt a Lévi-Straussian transformational analysis on these oppositions and parallels, but I do not think that this would be either profitable or necessary (WESSING 1978, 161–167). It would be simpler to consider each sequence of elements as a set of basic elements, used as necessary and in such sequence as required by the local myth maker in the context of the large set of cosmological symbols (such as the lotus, Meru, and the like) in order to account for the existence of the state or crops and the farming community and place them in their proper cosmological contexts, so as to either legitimize it (in the case of the state) or define the relationship between the crops and the com-



munity. These latter two contexts, the state and the community, by the nature of their own focus and interests, dictate the "direction" in which the relevant symbols must move. Yet the "flow" of the symbols between them perhaps illustrates the interdependence of the state and the agricultural community, creating in these myths a metaphor of and a cosmological justification for the socio-political realities.

Thus, the death or sacrifice of Sri makes possible the creation of agricultural society and consequently the fading of the hunting and gathering culture that preceded it. "The food that is . . . a symbolic transformation of living flesh is an actual cultural transformation of a crude raw substance into a sophisticated food that is taken as symbolic of the culture itself. Rice thus functions as a ritual expression of the triumph of agriculture over hunting" (O'FLAHERTY 1988, 116). This triumph is expressed by the disappearance of Sedana, who, as we know, spent his time in the forest (RASSERS 1959, 10-13). Both return, however, in the state that was made possible by this economic shift: Sri as the queen Sita via her manifestation as bamboo, and Sedana as Rama, "the ideal of an educated and cultured man" (STUTLEY 1977, 246), who yet as king must still embody some of the qualities of the old hunter (cf. WESSING n.d.), which is perhaps why he does not undergo a vegetable stage symbolic of "the triumph of culture over nature" (O'FLAHERTY 1988, 115), and we find a continued association of rulers with the forest (ZIESENIS 1963, 13).

Finally, there is the question of whether the Rama stories are really derived from the Malay Ramayan or if, as RAS suspects (1968, 184) this association is quite late. While this question is difficult to answer with certainty, I am inclined to agree with Ras, and see the basic elements of bamboo and snakes as added to the Indian *Rāmāyaṇa* story in order to give a good tale both immediacy and additional relevance in the Indo-Malaysian context, in which ruling houses were linked with snakes, bamboo, and foam.

The agricultural mythology may also have undergone such adaptations, although the association between grain and bamboo exists in India as well, as we have seen. In any case, what is basic and common to the two sets of myths are these elements of bamboo and water, and out of their combination, as from the lotus, arises a locally satisfactory explanation of reality.

#### NOTES

\* I have tended to follow the Indonesian custom of leaving diacritic marks out, except for a few clearly Indian-derived terms.

1. Such wondrous events are often associated with the founding of a capital and seem to be an indication of the supernatural fitness of the site. Compare OETOMO (1987, 39–41), in which the ruler is guided to the proper location riding on the back of a mystical tiger.

2. Bambu Betong is a well-known variety of bamboo (*Dendracalamus flagellifer*) that can grow to giant size. Cf. LOEBER 1917, 130.

3. This is possibly a reference to a rarity mentioned by VELTMAN (1919, 82 n. 1), known in Aceh as *trieng sungsang*. This is a bamboo in which, owing to a rare accident of nature, some sections run in the wrong direction. According to Acehnese belief, a person owning such a bamboo will have good fortune and be invulnerable (*keubay*).

4. FOLEY (1985, 40) catches this in the Sundanese (West Java) dance performances when she writes that “The great heroes in each epic—Arjuna in the Mahabarata and Rama in the Ramayana—dance in the refined male style that is close to the female style. . . . Since femaleness is next to godliness, the ideal male is female!”

5. MOEDJANTO (1986, 82) refers to a “lady with a glowing vulva,” i.e. a vagina with *wahyu*, of whom it is said that, “though a man is socially inferior, if he can take her as his wife, he will become a great king.”

6. This is in fact a living tradition. It was reported that during the inauguration ceremonies of Sultan Hamengku Buwono X of Yogyakarta on 8 March 1989, Nyi Roro Kidul appeared and had a voice in some of the proceedings (D. ABROR 1989; FARID GABAD et al. 1989).

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