

DEBRA LYNN MCGUIGAN, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

The Borobudur, Central Java ca. 732-910 A.D.

"I pay homage to the Cosmic Mountain of the Perfect Buddhas ... endowed with the awe inspiring power of wisdom, — whose profound caves are knowledge, whose rock is excellent tradition, whose brilliance is owing to its relic: The Good Word, whose streams are love, whose forests are meditation, — truly the mount of few desires, which is not shaken by the eight horrible winds: the worldly qualities."

(The Ratu Boko inscription, 782 A.D. Central Java; considered a blueprint for Borobudur).

I. The Temple

Borobudur rises from a small hill that was originally enlarged and terraced, apparently many years before the Buddhists appropriated it for their own use. The lower, terraced portion was utilized as the base for a giant stūpa, an architectural form consisting of a rectilinear base and a bell-shaped body topped by a spire. At the beginning of construction the east side of the monument was given slightly more prominence. Terraced hillsides called punden are still in existence throughout Indonesia today and are believed to be burial sites for important persons, such as the founders of villages. This foundation of a terraced hill does not resemble anything that can be found in later Hindu or Buddhist art on Java, and yet the architects of Borobudur utilized it to the fullest possible extent. As to who the original builders were, or why they abandoned their work, we may never know, but it occurred sometime between 760 and 770 A.D.

During the last fifty years of its construction, the monument was changed numerous times. As we have mentioned, the giant stūpa was added to the top of the terraced hill during the first modification. Unfortunately, all that remains of this first phase are the mouldings embedded at the level of the circular terraces. Secondly, the north wall suffered a collapse and two new galleries were destroyed. The next stage

consisted of modifying the base of the monument and covering the Mahākarmavibangga reliefs (ill.1). Scholars believe that this was done in an effort to prevent a further collapse. However, it is uncertain whether the purpose was simply to strengthen the structure; doctrinal considerations may also have played a part in the decision. The third stage of construction saw the reworking of the four levels of rectangular galleries which were surmounted by three circular terraces. The final stage saw the addition of the giant central stūpa, which remains to the present.

On the surface, the hierarchy of Javanese society during this time appears simple: peasant farmers, priests, monks, warriors and sovereigns. However, the farmers were also highly skilled artists, who plied their trade while waiting for the rice harvests. Art making was a commonality shared by all. Questions remain as to whether or not Borobudur was constructed by forced labour. Scholars believe that the artists, in an effort to gain merit and avoid future unhappy rebirths, would have participated willingly in the construction of such a monument. Furthermore, experts believe that it took approximately 75 years to complete the sanctuary. Considering the need of the farmers to harvest crops, it is doubtful that the work was continuous.

Many theories postulate that the Borobudur that greets the visitor today is vastly different from the original plan. One historian, Hoenig, has put forth the theory that Borobudur "was first intended to be a pyramid of nine stories, with a relatively small upper platform supporting not a stūpa but a temple, the existing design having been substituted for the original when in the course of building it became necessary to reduce the weight of the superincumbent masonry" (Coomaraswamy). However plausible this theory may be, it has yet to be adopted unanimously by scholars.

Perhaps the temple was originally coated in white plaster with the finer details molded and subsequently painted. It has been suggested by some scholars that

the 72 stūpas on the rūphadhātu level (the three circular terraces) were coated in gold leaf, as is still the case with some sanctuaries in southeast Asia. The temple shone as a beacon of colour surrounded by a sea of deep tropical green, reflecting the rays of the sun. The idea of reflection is paramount to Hindu-Buddhist cosmology and explains why we find so many temples located near water, which provides a natural mirror. Pure essence is analogous to the rays of the sun. Due to ignorance, we remain unaware of the light source of the rays, and instead concentrate on the image that the rays "project onto our screen of sangsaric illusion".

While reflecting the rays of the sun, the temple would appear as the *Indrajāla*, the net of Indra. If it was surrounded by water as some scholars believe, it was reflected like several layers of jewels. The net of Indra is like a net with jewels at each interset, and within each jewel can be found the reflection of all other jewels. Furthermore, during the part of the year when the rice was not yet ready for harvest, the area surrounding the temple resembled a lake. "The simile is indeed so striking that one scholar, not surprisingly also a painter, saw Borobudur as a huge lotus seat for the future Buddha rising out of a lake" (J.G. de Casparis, in Gomez, 70).

That the sculptural program of Borobudur is closely related to the art of the Gupta period is not surprising, since (as we have seen) "the Sailendra Kings originally came from eastern India proper before they established their great empire which extended from Java and Sumatra to the Malay Peninsula" (Munsterberg, 204). In eastern India, the symbolic metaphor of Indra's net was well known. It should always be borne in mind, however, that the Javanese, as their art evolved, took the ideals of the Gupta period and raised them to an even higher plateau. One example can be found in the reliefs, where the Javanese succeeded in making the forms softer and gentler than the carvers of the Gupta period.

Archeological evidence shows that a mahāvihāra, or monastery was constructed towards the south west side of the monument. Borobudur was a great centre of learning, drawing monks from China, India, Japan and Tibet. Reliefs on the gallery walls show scholars in discourse.

After the 15th century, the monument fell into a state of disrepair. Hinduism reasserted its popularity

and Islam gained wide acceptance, leaving the temple to suffer neglect. It became a source of curiosity for the 18th century traveller and a repository of legends for the inhabitants, but remained for the most part ignored until the year 1815, when the monument was brought to the attention of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. In his book, *The History of Java*, published in 1817, Raffles mentions that the monuments of Java "excite our wonder that they were not earlier examined, sketched or described" (Gomez, 1). The fame of the temple ruins spread and a first unsuccessful attempt to photograph the monument was made by the Dutch in 1846. Shortly thereafter line drawings were made and monographs written, and when these were finally published in 1873, they paved the way for a detailed study of the monument.

In 1907, Dr. Van Erp began restoration, but inadequate funding due to the outbreak of the First World War would prevent him from doing much. He was further hampered in his efforts because the studies which would eventually assist scholars in outlining the meaning of the reliefs, had not yet been written, while many texts dating from the time of the construction of Borobudur had long since vanished, being written on such highly perishable material as palm leaves. Dr. Van Erp was confronted with 2,500 square meters of carved bas-relief in bad repair, with entire segments of the structure missing. (In the past, statues had been given to visiting dignitaries as a gesture of goodwill). The bas reliefs are of two distinct types: the narratives, consisting of 1,460 panels in 11 rows that encircle the entire base of the monument on each of the four lower (square) galleries and 600 panels of decorative reliefs on the upper (round) galleries. The narrative reliefs on the first level of the gallery are placed in four rows: two rows on each of the main walls and two on the balustrade, placed one above the other (ill. 2). These reliefs are derived from several sources with some narratives given more prominence than others. The Jātakas are stories concerning the previous incarnations of the Buddha, followed by the Avadāna, which centre on heroic deeds. Both series of reliefs are shown on the inside balustrade of the first gallery and begin on the east wall. The Lalitavistara cycle follows and concerns itself with the life of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, also known as Siddhartha Gautama, Sage of the Shākya tribe (ca. 556 - ca. 450 B.C.). The closing reliefs on the third and fourth gallery concern a young Javanese pilgrim called Sudhana in search of wisdom, or more specifically seeking an answer to the question, "How is one trained in the conduct of the Bodhisattvas?" (They are the beings who have set out

to achieve enlightenment.) The text here illustrated seems to be quite popular and is known as the *Gandavyūha*. It is derived from the *Avatamska-sūtra*, also known as the *Buddhavatamska-sūtra*, which is of pivotal importance to both the *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* forms of Buddhism and plays an important role at Borobudur. Comprising almost one third of all the reliefs in the lower galleries, it supports the belief that the human mind is itself the universe and can be identified with Buddha. The *Avatamska* is also the *sūtra* from whence the symbolism of "The Net of Indra" is derived. Unfortunately only a portion of this *sūtra* is extant in the original Sanskrit. This text also provides scholars with numerous clues to the meaning behind the architecture of the circular terraces. The fact that Dr. Van Erp could reconstruct such an incredibly large volume of work, with hardly any extant texts for reference, remains nothing less than astonishing.

A mere 15 years after the restoration, the monument began to crumble again. The volcanic ash which had blanketed it for centuries had also served to provide support for the collapsing walls. The following decades saw many attempts at conservation "at one point taking more than 200 men six weeks to simply clear the surrounding debris and forest" (Miksic, 17). Finally, in 1973, the Indonesian government with the assistance of UNESCO reopened the completely restored Borobudur to the public.

What greets the present day visitor is a gigantic edifice comprising over two million cubic feet of andesite, a type of volcanic rock which is reserved for buildings of a religious nature and is easily obtained in the vicinity of Borobudur. Each stone weighs more than 100 kilograms. Borobudur has no roofs, vaults, chambers or accessible cellas. The entire structure remains exposed to the sky although many scholars agree that due to its overall design, it in fact gives the pilgrim a feeling of enclosed space. The masonry is laid entirely without mortar and the temple supports a total of 1,555 stupas. The hill upon which the sanctuary rests is now a mere 15 meters high, the lowest terracing which once provided a more vertical effect having long since vanished. The centuries have seen a combination of volcanic ash and millions of tons of lava raise the level of the surrounding plain until it is almost level with the base of the monument. "There have been fifteen volcanic eruptions since 1587, the latest in 1973. Benign eruptions occur every three or four years. Some believe that underneath 65 feet of volcanic debris a royal city lies buried." (St. Albans, 153).

When Borobudur is approached from ground level, its intricacies are not immediately visible. At the base, Borobudur appears as simply a large rectilinear monument, measuring 370 feet of side. Pilgrims saw two flights of stairs, climbing twelve feet above ground level to a processional pathway which encloses the entire base of the monument. This and the high balustraded wall of the first gallery hide the upper levels.

Visitors' descriptions upon first sight of the monument vary from "low, squat and dumpy, brooding over the plain like some huge porcupine with all its prickles standing straight up in the air", (St. Albans, 151) to a totally different perception that imagines pilgrims standing before the monument, completely awed and "somewhat daunted by its looming mass. Borobudur has a purposeful air, as though it is prepared to do something for us, should we venture into its maze of stairways, galleries, terraces and sculptures" (Miksic, 39). This variety of reactions may be what the builders intended to provoke. The ancient adepts knew that an individual's observations would be entirely dependent on his position within the monument. Every impression has value for the observer's spiritual development, whether he sees a giant lumbering porcupine or a temple with a purposeful air; Borobudur leaves an indelible mark on the memory. The sanctuary still instructs its pilgrims and visitors by posing new questions and alternative realities.

The exact date when Borobudur was constructed presently eludes scholars. The relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism was so completely syncretic that the architectural elements of both are highly integrated. In Java, from the ninth century onwards, Hindu and Buddhist temples existed side by side. Religious tolerance would last until the decline of the Sailendra Dynasty, when under the Kings of Matara, including the house of Sañjaya, Hinduism would reassert its popularity. This ushered in the Eastern Javanese Period and a new phase in architectural design. Borobudur incorporates the architecture of the Eastern Javanese Period, to a small degree, on the base which covers the *Mahākarmavibangga* reliefs.

Both eras, the Central and Eastern Javanese periods, were centred on a royal religious art and were closely affiliated with the ruling power. Although in the Central Javanese period, the relationship between the sovereign and the deity is not clearly delineated, by the 10th century when power had shifted to Eastern Java "the identification of the

ruler god was more specific. ... Propanca's poem refers to Kertanagara (1268-1292, King of Kediri, Eastern Java) both as the Hindu God Siva and the Buddha Akshobhya" (Jessup, 50). Earlier, in Sumatra during the 7th and 8th centuries, the Kings were connected with beliefs in mountain spirits as well as the Buddha. Thus the construction of Borobudur may be in some fashion closely affiliated with the ruling power.

The key to dating the construction of Borobudur may lie in the surrounding candis (temples). Mendut and Pawon lie on a direct west-east axis with Borobudur and an old road joined all three temples. A glance at the mouldings and finials show a remarkable similarity and they were in all probability under construction during the same time. "Borobudur adds prominent round mouldings to the previously square and reverse curve elements found in earlier temples" (Joanna Williams in Gomez, 26); the mouldings and the reverse curve elements are in keeping with the Central Javanese period, but the covering of the very bottom reliefs, the Mahākarmavibangga, which led to an entire new base for the monument, demonstrates the much later design principles belonging to the Eastern Javanese Period. This leads us to believe that the base of the monument was added at a much later date than earlier believed, perhaps as late as 900-910 A.D.

When considering the moldings and the finials of all three temples, we arrive at the conclusion that the "great stupa of the Borobudur was begun towards the middle of the Central Javanese period or earlier in the 9th century" (Williams in Gomez, 30).

Another way of approaching the date of the structure is an examination of small statues of temple guardians known as dvārapālas. One dvārapāla was situated near the base of Borobudur and may have marked the original location of the monastery. Furthermore, there is a strong possibility that the monastery or vīhāra may have been built before Borobudur, providing the monks with a location from which to organize and supervise construction. The dvārapāla of Borobudur is not ornately decorated. "The Barabudur figure is extremely simple in every respect; jewelry, hairstyle and facial expression. He has a moustache, raised eyebrows and seems to have tiny fangs in the corners of his mouth, ... He holds a dagger in the right hand, while the left which possibly once grasped a snake, lies on the raised left knee" (van Lohuizen-de Leeuw in Gomez, 17). Dvārapālas from temples constructed at a later date depict a club

instead of a dagger and tend to have much more ornate jewelry. Given this chronology, J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw agrees with Dr. Van Erp's interpretation that the monastery was built a little before A.D. 778. Van Erp suggested the possibility that the "Barabudur should be dated as near the year 732 as possible" (*ibid.*, 18). Considering the two dates, 732 A.D. as the commencement and 910 A.D. as completion of the alternate base of the monument, we are given a time frame of 178 years. This coincides with the time frame other scholars believe it may have taken to build the monument. Another scholar, A. Snodgrass, in his work on the symbolism of the stupa, believes the construction to have taken exactly 72 years in keeping with the stellar symbolism so prevalent in Tantrism (see below).

II. History

In the past it was a common mistake to lump together the Hindu-Buddhist art of Indonesia with the art and architecture of the Indian subcontinent. However, although expansion of overseas trade routes would lead to many small bronzes, texts, drawings and other items reaching the shores of Java, these would provide only the foundation for what would eventually evolve into a purely unique Javanese art form. The Buddhist sanctuary of Borobudur is an extraordinary achievement of the combination of certain aspects of art and architecture of the Indian subcontinent with the indigenous Javanese art, which had been evolving since neolithic times.

Records show that both Java and Sumatra were major centres of Buddhist scholarship in ca. 775 A.D. Buddhist pilgrims voyaged from China to the Indonesian islands as early as the 7th century, before continuing their journey to the Holy Land: India. Scholars believe that the highly esteemed University of Nālandā, located in northern India, added several buildings to accommodate the pilgrims journeying from Indonesia. Mention of a special tax levied on the citizens for its maintenance also occurs in ancient records. "Among the inscriptions found at Nālandā is a recording of a declaration by a certain ruler of Sumatra and Java in 860, a clear indication of the intimate relations between this last stronghold of Indian Buddhism and the Sailendra empire" (Rowland, 153).

In Java, from 775 A.D. to approximately 1000 A.D., buildings of a monumental religious nature became extremely important. This era, known as the Central Javanese Period, saw an amazing proliferation

of art and architecture. There were two great dynasties during this time; the Sailendras (meaning Lord of the Mountain) who supported Buddhism, and the Sañjaya, who were Hindu in orientation. Inter-marriage between these two families was not uncommon.

Originally the Sailendra Kings lived in Kalinga, adjacent to Orissa in India, which contains some of the most beautiful masterpieces of Gupta art. "The Gupta period, 320 - 647 A.D., may be described as classic in the sense of the word describing a norm or degree of perfection never achieved before or since, and in perfect balance and harmony of all elements, stylistic and iconographic — elements inseparable in importance" (Rowland, 130).

The Sailendra Kings, being in such close proximity to these works, may have transplanted some of the ideals expressed in the Gupta art to central Java. The Buddhas that adorn Borobodur are constructed with great mathematical precision, "from one of those regular systems of proportions for sacred images followed in the Indian world" (Rowland, 267).

The ideals of the Gupta art and architecture were blended with the Sivaite art (dedicated to the Hindu God Siva) and the Buddhism of Java. This blending is most prevalent in the "candis".

It is difficult to determine when Hinduism lost official favour and Buddhism rose in prominence, since the architecture combines elements of both. We see evidence of integration as opposed to subordination. Religious tolerance brought with it new social and political concepts, as well as a new sacred language: Sanskrit. Many Buddhists travelled to Java to learn this language, bringing with them different concepts and ideologies. Yet it is not solely the pilgrims and merchants entering into Java that led to the assimilation of new ideas, but also the Javanese themselves who played an important role in this cultural diffusion. Borobodur contains bas-reliefs depicting a "perahu bertjadik", an outrigger boat with sails (ill. 3). "Such a craft would have enhanced trade, transport and the spread, as well as influx of various cultures" (Kempers, 9).

Research into the arts of Indonesia's outer islands show that ceremonial textiles, especially those in Lampung in southeast Sumatra with their ship motif, are used to symbolize a general life cycle transition. Borobodur is a place of transition.

There has been a long tradition of continuous contact between the coastal peoples of Lampung and the Indian and Chinese-influenced kingdoms of Java and Sumatra. In all areas of life, Indonesians emphasize the importance of reciprocity and exchange in maintaining harmony in relationships as well as the cosmos. This extends to relations with ancestors or spirits [and is] based on the concepts of complementarity and reciprocity that are reflected in Indonesian art (Taylor, 41).

What also must be remembered is the close associations had with royalty.

Lewis Lancaster, who has traced the routes of many pilgrims, states that "From this evidence of the life and travels of the great masters of the Chinese and Buddhist sangha [communities of believers] of the 8th and 9th centuries, we see that the Chinese Tantric literature often had direct connections with the Buddhist communities on the islands of Sumatra and Java" (in Gomez, 197). With the assimilation of so many new ideas, Javanese Buddhism would experience many doctrinal shifts. The original school of Buddhism, the Theravada (known in India as the Hīnayāna, or Way of the Elders), would evolve into the Mahāyāna, which contains numerous texts that remain pivotal to our understanding of the great temple-mountain called Meru. Subsequently Mahāyāna would evolve into Tantra, an even more esoteric school. It was Tantra that emerged as the dominant school of thought on the island of Java "where it enjoyed the patronage of the Sailendra dynasty [with] Borobodur becoming one of its artistic creations" (Snelling, 115).

Scholars with Tantric instructions constantly left the shores of Java for other countries. One Tantric text, the Mahāvairocana-sūtra (The Great Radiant Rule) left Java in the hands of two prominent Buddhist scholars; Amoghavajra and Shubhākarasimha. Amoghavajra (705 - 744) "originally collected the texts on Java" (Miksic, 27). This sūtra contained instruction for the use of mandalas, which could be thought of as geometric cosmic diagrams of the universes both outside and within the self, mūdras (hand positions) and mantras (chants). The supreme or Adi Buddha referred to in the Mahāvairocana-sūtra is Vairocana; this is the same

Adi Buddha who resides in the stūpas of Borobudur. An Adi Buddha can be regarded as the primal source of reality, the pure light of emptiness.

From Java, this sūtra reached China and eventually Japan, where it provided the foundation for the Shingon or "True Word Sect". Central to this sūtra are the "Three Secrets", which are known as Body, Speech and Mind. These secrets, in conjunction with other concepts of Buddhism demonstrating a three-fold division, are reflected throughout the Borobudur sanctuary. Parallels between the ancient Javanese Buddhism and the present day Japanese Shingon school are numerous; "both derive the basis of their Buddhist system from north-east India" (Kempers, 11). Today many scholars turn to the Shingon school when unraveling the riddles of Borobudur. It must be noted that doctrinal shifts between the three different Buddhist schools coupled with the Tantric pantheon of deities, in conjunction with Java's own indigenous mythologies, makes it hard to draw a clear line of demarcation between these different orientations.

III Tantra

The form of tantra that reached Java is known as the Vajrayāna. The name is often translated as "thunderbolt", but scholars believe this to be an erroneous term. Vajrayāna is considered the complete teaching of the Buddha, as demonstrated by the third turning of the Wheel of Dharma. "Tantric practices and yogic exercises leading to quick liberation appear in the Mahāyāna texts as early as the fourth century A.D. ... it appears that Tantra was established on Java before the building of Borobudur" (Miksic, 22). However, there are other scholars of note who believe Tantra played no part in the art or architecture of Borobudur. J. J. Boeles, in his book, *The Secret of Borobudur*, states, "If we ask ourselves whether there [are] any questions of Tantric developments in a structure such as Borobudur, then we can confidently assert that there is still no sign of it: i.e. that there is no trace of the influence of the feminine principle, nor a demonization of particular categories of deities" (Boeles, 1). There is indeed an obvious absence of the vajra, a Tantric symbol which is held in the hands. Vajra, "diamond," carries the following semantic load: "It stands for true reality, emptiness (shunyata), the being or essence of everything existing. This emptiness is indestructible, like a diamond, it is

imperishable, unborn or uncreated. The spotless purity and translucency of the diamond symbolizes the perfect spotlessness of emptiness, unstained by all appearances that arise out of it" (Fischer-Schreiber, 241).

Although the vajra symbol itself is absent from Borobudur, there may be in fact four different ways in which it is demonstrated. Firstly, since it is uncreated and resembles emptiness, the adepts may have chosen not to display it in either sculptural or relief form. They may have decided to depict the diamond's perfect emptiness by perforations of the stupas on the first two terraces (ill. 4). These perforations could be considered to form an empty "diamond" space through which the Buddha can be seen on the inside. In this instance, unborn uncreated spotless space is given shape by having interlocking masonry delineating the space, thus providing a "frame" for the diamond. Secondly, Gomez has stated that the formless cannot be demonstrated by form. The advanced students may have had no need to actually see the vajra.

Thirdly, the Tibetan word for vajra is dorje, that is, "Lord of the Stones". Additional research might reveal a correlation between the ancient Javanese equivalent for this term and the name of the ruling dynasty which is translated to mean "Lord of the Mountain". Could certain personages from the ruling dynasty possibly represent "diamond nature"? Affiliation of the ruling dynasty with the Hindu god Siva, or a manifestation of the Buddha, was emerging in the 8th century. Finally, when we look more closely at the stūpa system, the emanation of the states of existence arising from the centre (the terminal stūpa) is reflected in the phenomenal world as "diamond shaped". In this instance Borobudur, being itself a mountain of stone reflected into the phenomenal world from the principal unity, could be considered the diamond proper. There is also the possibility that the Javanese chose not to adopt the vajra and instead substituted another symbol from their own history.

With regard to the female deities not being present, perhaps they are represented by archetypes instead. Questions such as these remain to be solved by historians and linguists. This discussion, however, will assume that Tantra does play a role in the architectural design of the monument, especially with

regard to the psycho-cosmic symbolism which underlies the concept of the mandala.

In Tantra, the body is no longer seen as something which must be subdued, as was the case in Theravada. Pivotal to Tantra is the belief that inherent within everyone is a purity, even if it is somewhat obscured. The combination of mind and body represent the possibilities for enlightenment. When this amalgamation has been achieved, certain iconographic representations occur, namely; "A pliant body showing that ignorance has been purified, a well toned body as a sign desire has been purified, and a delicate body as the sign that pride has been purified" (Norbu, 80). Of the 92 Dhyani Buddhas that populate each cardinal direction of the temple, facing outwards, scholars have remarked how transcendent in appearance these images become as one moves higher within the sanctuary. "There is scarcely any longer the suggestion of real flesh but these figures seem to be made of an imperishable and pure spiritual substance — the incorruptible and radiant adamantine nature of the Diamond of the Buddha's eternal body" (Rowland, 267). Perhaps this "transcendence" is directly tied to the conventions of the Vajrayāna. Dualities between mind and body are resolved as the aspirant climbs higher through the temple, and the iconography had to reflect this psychological transformation. Resolution of dualities means purification and perfection.

Tantra contains the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna schools. In the Hīnayāna emphasis is placed upon the moral teachings in an effort to break the cycle of samsara, the endless rounds of rebirth. The essence of the Mahāyāna is the arising of the Bodhicitta and the subsequent vows (to become a Bodhisattva, i.e. one who seeks enlightenment). The essence of the Vajrayāna (Tantra) is to see everything as a manifestation of the deities. The ideal in Hīnayāna was the arhat, an enlightened individual who led the monastic life; in Mahāyāna the ideal was the Bodhisattva; in Tantra the ideal is the teacher as an embodiment of the Bodhisattva, in short the personification of the Three Jewels (the teacher, the teaching, and the community of believers). The aspirant's living teacher is to be seen in the following manner, "his mind as the Buddha, his speech as the dharma and the body as the sangha" (Tenzin, *Path to Bliss*, 51).

As the aspirant travels further down the path, his own mind becomes inseparable from his teacher's. In taking vows from the guru, the aspirant recognizes the guru as the same as the principal deity that resides in the centre of the cosmic diagram, the mandala. The principal deity at Borobodur is Vairocana. The practice of seeing the teacher as inseparable from the Adi Buddha, Vairocana, becomes extremely important in the practice of Tantra.

One can undertake the practice of Bodhicitta, the arising of Bodhi Heart and the development of an altruistic attitude from representations, statues, sculptures, reliefs and architecture, but Tantric vows can only be received from a living person (Tenzin, *Path to Bliss*, 51).

There are four categories within Tantra, the first two being directed towards the novice. Within the last two, aimed at the more advanced student, we find the Adi Buddha Vairocana accompanied by the same four Dhyāni Buddhas which inhabit the walls of Borobodur. Vairocana was originally another name for the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni. The name Vairocana could mean "Universal Light" as well as "Great Radiant One". Later Buddhists believed that the historical Buddha "was merely Vairocana's manifestation in physical form, for the benefit of those who had low powers of understanding" (Miksic, 23). The practices of Tantra centre upon meditation. Unfortunately, in the west Tantric practices are thought to contain secret magic spells of great power leading to quick liberation. Actually the converse is true. "If you speak to [Westerners] of profound truths, they yawn, and if they dare, they walk away, but if you speak to them of absurd fables, they are all eyes and ears" (David-Neel, 1).

Aside from meditation, Tantric practices are highly dependent upon the relationship between teacher and student, which encourages the simple approach of questions and answers. In fact, the last series of reliefs on the galleries of Borobodur, comprising 460 panels — the largest number of panels dedicated to one subject — deals exclusively with the relationship of a student, Sudhana, to his numerous teachers, who came from all walks of life, including children. His relationship to these teachers assists him on the path to liberation. Only after much

instruction can a student perceive the sublime in what was previously considered mundane.

Evolution into Tantra did not happen swiftly. The first series of reliefs — the Mahākarmavibangga on the hidden foot, and the Jātakas, the Avadānas and the Lalitavistara on the first and second galleries — tell stories that were not yet incorporated into Tantrism. The story of the student Sudhana, however, forms a part of the Avatamska-sūtra which some consider to be a fundamental text of a third level Tantra. Also, the statues from Candi Mendut must be considered. The representation of Vairocana, Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāni forms a "trinity from the Vajradhātu-mandala, yet another device belonging to a third level Tantra" (Miksic, 27).

The absence of the wrathful deities have led other scholars to believe that no Tantric accretions can be found. These wrathful deities are the inverse manifestation of the peaceful Dhyāni Buddhas that occupy the walls of Borobudur. Any form of violence, however, even when contained in the sūtras from which the artists drew their subjects for the narrative reliefs, is extremely subdued. Perhaps the wrathful deities are not depicted in the temple because it would be extremely dangerous for a beginner who does not yet possess a disciplined mind. In Buddhist practice, aspirants visualize a "merit field", a field of Buddhas. This is in fact what each wall of the temple addresses. When visualizing such a merit field, it is required that the student have a statue of Buddha Śākyamuni. Meditating on the wrathful deities and remaining governed by worldly concerns is in direct contradiction to the practice of dharma, and any teacher would be extremely displeased.

The architects of Borobudur realized that there would be many students coming to it. They also understood that many who entered the stream would be unable to finish their training. Wrathful deities would be disastrous for the meditative practices of beginners. Having the 504 peaceful Buddhas adorn the walls, facing outwards, would encourage pilgrims to enter the temple and offer courage to stay on the path. Simply because the deities are not physically portrayed does not necessarily mean they did not exist at Borobudur. By the time an aspirant might visualize these wrathful deities, he was no longer a novice.

Numerous questions still remain as to the meaning of Borobudur. Many reliefs remain to be deciphered. Other questions concern changes in the

decorative motifs. Why for instance, are the niches which apotheosize the Buddha images on the first level surmounted with a jewel motif instead of the stūpa? Research into the symbolism of the stūpa reveals that the jewel is identified with illumination and the wish-granting tree: "It signifies the ability of the Bodhisattva to give birth to qualities of Buddhahood" (Snodgrass, 349). This jewel is carried by the three Bodhisattvas, Samantabhadra, Avolokiteśvara and Ratnasambha, all of whom play an important role at Borobudur. A further consideration may be that this jewel is carried into hell where "The radiance of the jewel illuminates the darkness and eases the sufferings of those that dwell there" (Snodgrass, 349). It may be coincidental that the jewel is placed at the top of the niches on the first gallery instead of a stūpa, signifying the arising of Bodhichitta while entering the temple; the Bodhisattva is beginning his evolution into Buddhahood. Furthermore, it is placed directly above the Mahākarmavibangga reliefs depicting in part the infernal realms, which the jewel is capable of illuminating. Furthermore, "the jewel, being the light of dharma, is to be identified with the diamond vajra" (Snodgrass, 350).

Scholars also still speculate on why the Central Javanese period came to an abrupt end. One reason, suggested by Jan Fontein, cites a combination of political unrest and a catastrophic eruption of Merapi, a volcano that remains intermittently active.

Such a huge eruption would not have only made the rice fields unworkable for several years, it may have cast doubts on the whole temple building process. Long before Hinduism or Buddhism were introduced into Java ... the Javanese peasant had worshipped the "gods of the mountain". Perhaps the eruption was regarded by the farmers as revenge of the old gods and fearing retributions, they refused to work any longer for the current rulers (Allen, 151).

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Ill. 1, pg. 15: A. J. Bernet Kempers, *Ancient Indonesian Art*, Amsterdam: C. P. J. van Der Peet, 1959, Plate 69, Barabudur. Reliefs from the original base

Ill. 2, pg. 16: *Ibid*, Plate 75. Barabudur. Main wall of the first gallery.

Ill. 3, pg. 17: *Ibid*, Plate 78. Barabudur. A ship on the high seas.

Ill. 4, pg. 18: *Ibid*, Plate 96. Barabudur. A Buddha in dharmachakramudrā from one of the perforated dagobs.







