

Remarks on the Subject [of the Senbyú Pagoda at Mengún]

COL. HENRY YULE, C.B.

In a paper describing what I had seen of architectural remains of Hindu character in Java, which was read before the Asiatic Society of Bengal, in October, 1861, there occurred the following passage in reference to that magnificent monument of Buddhism, the Boro Bodor:—

“Mr. Fergusson, who gives a good account of the Boro Bodor in his Handbook of Architecture, considers it to be a kind of representation of the great Buddhist monasteries, which are described in the Ceylonese writings as having been many stories high, and as containing hundreds of cells for monks.



Sat-Mehal Prásáda

In Tennent's Ceylon (vol. ii. p. 588) there is a woodcut of a singular pyramidal building at Pollanarua, called the *Sat-mehal Prásáda*, or 'Seven Storied House,' which in a rough way is quite analogous to the Boro Bodor.

“But the structure nearest to it in general design, that I have seen or heard of, was one visited by Mr. Oldham and me in 1855, at Mengún, above Amarpúra. It was thus described from my journal:—

“ Further north there is an older Pagoda of very peculiar character. The basement which formed the bulk of the structure consisted of seven concentric circular terraces, each with a parapet of a curious serpentine form. These parapets rose one above and within the other like the (seven) walls of Ecbatana described by Herodotus. ... In the parapet of every terrace were at intervals niches looking outwards, in which were figures of *Náts*¹ and warders in white marble, of half life size. A great circular wall enclosed the whole at some distance from the base. It was difficult to ascertain the nature of the central structure, so shattered was it by the earthquake. The whole (though round instead of square in plan) had a great general resemblance to the large ancient pyramidal temple in Java called Boro Bodor, as described by Raffles and Crawford; but this Mengún structure was not, I think, very old, and I doubt if the resemblance was more than accidental. At the foot of the hills,

¹ “Burmese *Devatas* or genii.”

some hundred yards to the westward, there was another Pagoda of similar character, which we did not visit."²

I retract the notion that the resemblance was purely accidental. It is one of many analogies between Burma and Java in architecture, arts, and manners, of which the history is unknown, though some of them doubtless came from India with the religion which was once common to both. One idea struck me after seeing the Burmese edifice, which I will mention. This is, that both it and the Boro Bodor were meant, in a way, as symbols of the great World-system of the Buddhists, Mount Mahá-Meru surrounded by its seven concentric ranges of mountains. Nor is this inconsistent with Mr. Fergusson's theory of Boro Bodor. For these monasteries themselves were probably types of Mount Meru. In Tibet, we are told, "Every orthodoxly constructed Buddhist Convent Temple either *is* or *contains* a symbolic representation of the divine regions of Meru, and of the Heaven of the Gods, Saints, and Buddhas rising above it into the Empyrean of Nirwana."³

The above passage had attracted Mr. Fergusson's attention, and some two years ago he requested me to obtain more particulars about the terraced structure at Mengún. I accordingly applied to my old friend Colonel Albert Fytche, who had recently succeeded Sir Arthur Phayre in the government of our Burmese provinces, requesting him to obtain some further particulars of the building, and if possible a photograph. Colonel Fytche took up the matter with characteristic energy and goodwill, and obtained from the intelligent assistance of Captain Sladen the memorandum which precedes these remarks, and two photographs of the structure.⁴ The papers, owing to accidental circumstances, reached me only a few days ago.

It will be seen that Captain Sladen confirms the suggestion that the Burmese Monument was specifically designed to represent Mount Meru, but he finds some difficulty in reconciling the existence of *six* terraces with the supposed symbolization of Meru and its *five* zones. The fact is, however, that there are, as I noted in, 1855, and as Captain Sladen's own photographs very clearly show, not six but *seven* terraces. And it is seven that the subject which I imagine to be typified demands.

The details of the orthodox Buddhist Cosmography will be found in Mr. Spence Hardy's Manual (see pp. 3, 12 *seqq.*), but its essential features may be described in a few words.

The centre of the system is Mahá-Meru, encircled by seven concentric ranges of mountains, which are divided by as many seas, and gradually diminish in height from the centre outwards. Round these focal ranges the heavenly bodies revolve. Between the last and lowest of these ranges and an eighth external range (called by the Singhalese the *Sakwalagala*) extends the salt ocean, in which are situated the great islands, or continents rather, of the inhabited earth. The Sakwalagala is the ring-fence and hoop of the whole system.

It is not, therefore, I apprehend, Mahá-Meru alone, distinguished into five zones, which is typified by this Burmese monument; but the whole system to its utmost bound. The Central Dagoba is Mahá-Meru; the seven terraces with their mountainous outline of parapet are the seven rocky ranges; the jungle-grown plain below is the circumambient ocean, wherein lie Jambudwipa and the other great

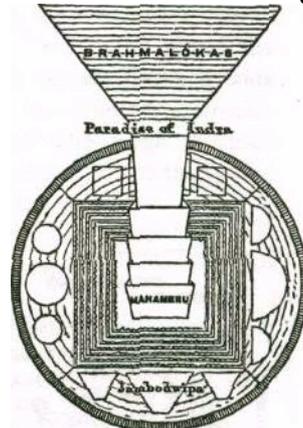
² *Mission to Ava in 1855*, p. 172.

³ *Koepfen, Die Religion des Buddha*, ii. 262.

⁴ I desire here to express my obligation to both these officers for this interesting communication.

islands; and Captain Sladen would perhaps have felt more confidence in the stability of his camera, had he perceived that instead of balancing it uneasily, “*with fixed tripod in the scaly rind*” of “the whale Ananda’s back,” he and it were planted on the Sakwalagala, the adamantine girdle of the Cosmos!

No better illustration of the subject can be given than the Tibetan representation of the Mundane system, which appears in Giorgi’s *Alphabetum Tibetanum* (Pl. I. p. 472), and from which I have made the accompanying reduction of the essential features. The text informs us that the original was done



Tibetan Mundane System

G

in colours by Yondé Lahuri, a Tibetan painter, in the Shaprang monastery at Lhassa.

What a strange parallel, one may observe in passing, is afforded by Mahá-Meru with its Terraces, the Paradise of Indra, that crowns it, and the many heavens rising in clime over clime far above it to culminate in the “Empyrean of Nirwana,” to Dante’s Mountain of Purgatory with its Seven Zones, surmounted by the Table Land of the Terrestrial Paradise, whence he ascends through the nine Celestial Spheres to the Vision of the Candida Rosa and the ineffable glory!⁵

Though no other similar monument has become known to us in Burmah, it is probable that analogous symbols exist there in some form or other.

⁵ Nay, how near to Dante’s wonderful Image of the Great Rose even come the Visions of a Chinese Buddhist monk in the fourth century: “In the seventh month of the nineteenth year, at eventide, he again had a vision of the Holy ones. The form of Amita filled the span of Heaven; *all the saints looked forth from the Halo that encompassed him. Moreover Yuanfasé beheld a stream of water bright as light which fell from above, and parted into fourteen branches,*” etc. (*Schott, über den Buddhismus in Hoch-Asien und in China*, p. 99).

“E vidi lume in forma di riviera
Fulvido di fulgore intra duo rive
Dipinte di mirabil primavera
.....
E sì come di lei bevve la gronda
Delle palpebre mie, così mi parve
Di sua lunghezza divenuta tonda
.....
Sì soprastando al lume intorno intorno
Vidi specchiarsi in più di mille soglie
Quanta di noi lassù tatto ha ritorno.”

—PARADISO XIX.

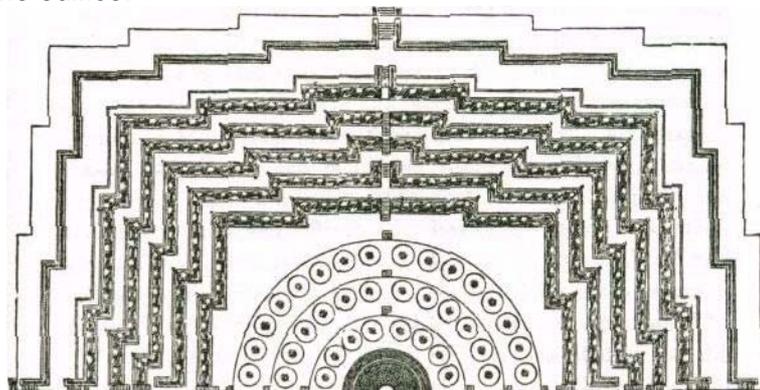
As regards Java, Buddhism, I believe, has left no record except in architecture and sculpture; it is unknown to surviving literature or tradition. But in the Island of Bali we find a curious transcript preserved, though blurred indeed and corrupted, of Javanese religion before the Mahomedan conversion; and there both Buddhism, of a sort, and Brahminism still exist. Now, it is curious with regard to the Meru symbolism, of which Boro Bodor is such a splendid instance, to find that a particular vestige of this symbolism still lingers abundantly in Bali. Mr. Friederich in his "*Preliminary account of Bali*," after speaking of sundry kinds of temples in the Island, proceeds:

"Finally, in every house there is a multitude of miniature temples called *Sanggar* (*Sangga* of Crawford). Among these you find a MERU, a temple with a succession of roofs rising pyramidally one over the other, which is dedicated to Siva..... The apex of the Merus, as well as of the other little temples, is usually crowned with an inverted pot, or even with a tumbler, a circumstance that at first seemed to me strongly suggestive of Buddhism, for it looked like an adumbration of the cupola (or waterbubble), which is the distinctive mark of all Buddhist temples. The Sivaites will not, however, allow this, though they can give no explanation of such an ornament."⁶

As accident has brought me to speak of Boro Bodor, I should like to recall attention to the very interesting observations of W. von Humboldt on the symbolism of that wonderful structure, with the view of eliciting information which I have not been able to obtain from any source accessible to me.

The construction of Boro Bodor is clearly shown in the woodcut at p. 535 of Vol. II. of *Fergusson's History of Architecture*. It is, omitting minutiae, a pyramidal structure rising in seven successive terraces from a square base.

The first of these terraces is low, narrow, and without parapet, and is now covered with soil. The second terrace is higher and of considerable width, forming a basement for the highly decorated structure which rises out of it. This consists of five successive terraces, each surrounded by an elaborate architectural screen, so that between every two of these screens there is formed a corridor running round the four sides of the building. The fifth terrace forms a wide platform, from which again rise three low concentric circular terraces, bordered by as many concentric rings of small dagobas. In the centre, a larger dagoba of about thirty feet diameter forms the apex and crown of the edifice.



Plan of Temple of Boro Bodor. Scale, 100 feet to 1 inch.

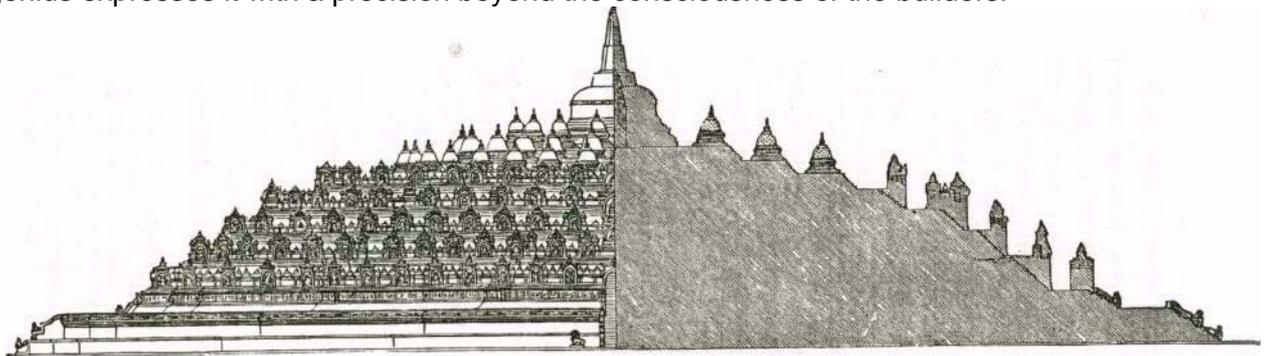
⁶ In the *Transactions of the Batavian Soc. of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. xxii. p. 33. Captain Joseph Cunningham also alludes to the "*Jain Models of Meru*" (in *Journ. As. Soc. Bengal*, xvi. 755).

In the outer face of each of the principal terraces are numerous niches crowned by miniature dagobas; and these niches have all been occupied by cross-legged Buddhas, whilst both sides of the corridors are carved in an astonishing series of sculptures.⁷

The construction of the small dagobas, 72 in number, which form the three concentric rings, is very peculiar. They are hollow cages or latticed bells of stone, each of which contains a meditative Buddha immured, and visible through the diamond openings of the lattice.

In the Mengun pagoda we see that all seven terraces and parapets are alike in character. But in Boro Bodor only the five principal terraces and parapets are of homogeneous character; the two lower terraces or steps seem only to form a plinth or platform for the monument. Probably, therefore, the type of the pyramidal structure here is that which Captain Sladen supposes to be represented at Mengun, viz., Maha-Meru alone with its five zones; whilst the circular steps above represent what a former quotation terms "the Heaven of the Gods, saints, and Buddhas, rising above it into the Empyrean of Nirwana."

I will quote here the general remarks of W. von Humboldt on the types of Boro Bodor, which undoubtedly set forth the spirit of its symbolism, though probably his genius expresses it with a precision beyond the consciousness of the builders:



Elevation and Section of Temple of Boro Bodor.

From an unpublished Plate intended for Sir Stamford Raffles' "History of Java."

"One sees that the idea of the structure develops gradually from below upwards. In the six four-square terraces are set forth the innumerable Buddhas in living contact with the world and with men. Even that quadrangular form which presents the images of the Holy Ones respectively to the four quarters of the heavens is not without significance. With the introduction of the circle begins the reference to Heaven, and here also the symbolism recedes more and more from the corporeal. The bas-reliefs, with their groups and countless figures, disappear; the Holy Ones remain in their loneliness, severed from contact with the earthly, and in a position of the deepest abstraction. Access to them is closed; to the eye only it is open through the latticework. In the crowning Dome the Holy One himself has also vanished; all imagery ceases, and that which is hidden there even the eye cannot

⁷ The number of these niches is stated on the face of Raffles's plate as 136, a mistake for 436, which last number is that stated by Mr. Fergusson. But 436 would give an uneven number to each side (109), a circumstance inconsistent with the design. I make the niches by the plan to be 440, or 110 to the *side*. But it seems probable that the real number of niches, or at any rate of images, was 108 to the side, that being a number in high and sacred esteem among the Buddhists as well as the Hindus. It will be seen that the number of figures in the concentric circles above is $72 = \frac{2}{3}$ of 108.

approach. Such a process of ascent from multiplicity and division to unity and indivisibility lies in all Buddhist symbolism. The highest of the Three Worlds is styled the World without form or colour. And the incarnated Buddhas, supreme in all Three Worlds, lose in the highest even their names."⁸

The Buddhas of the Boro Bodor are represented in five different attitudes. Thus the immured ones all exhibit one peculiar action, and the images on each of the four sides of the pyramid respectively exhibit one peculiar action. The five attitudes are as follows :—

1. On the EAST side—The left hand rests, with the palm up, on the sole of the foot turned upward. The right hand hangs with the palm turned in, and in contact with the right knee (*viz.*, *the usual attitude of Gautama Buddha*).
2. On the SOUTH side—The left hand as before. The right hand also hangs in contact with the right knee, but with the palm turned out.
3. On the WEST side—Both hands rest in the lap with the palms upwards.
4. On the NORTH side—Left hand as in 1 and 2; the right hand raised from the wrist with the palm open and outward.
5. The IMMURED FIGURES—Both hands raised opposite the breast, as in an attitude of teaching.

Humboldt comes to the conclusion that these five classes of figures represent the Five Celestial or Dhyáni Buddhas, belonging to a system which became known to Europe through Mr. Hodgson's memorable researches.

The attitudes in all cases, and the quarters of the heaven in the case of the four Boro Bodor figures which face those quarters, correspond to those assigned to the Dhyáni Buddhas by the Northern Buddhists.

The attitude of the Buddhas on the East corresponds to that of Akshobhya, who, in the Northern system, is the Regent of the East; the Southern attitude is that of Ratna Sainbhava, the Regent of the South; the Western, that of Amitabha, Regent of the West; the Northern, that of Amogha Siddha, Regent of the North.

The attitude of the Immured Buddhas is that of Vairochana. This Dhyáni Buddha, according to Mr. Hodgson, is seldom seen, but when he is represented he is placed on the East, close on the right of Akshobhya. Pallas also assigns both of these personages to the East.⁹

Those who have become acquainted with Buddhism in Burmah and Ceylon, where the books contain no trace of the Dhyáni Buddhas, will be slow to believe that those are the beings represented here, or that they were ever known in Java. And yet this last conclusion would be quite erroneous; for Mr. Friederich found the names of several of the personages of that system in a Sanskrit inscription from the temple of

⁸ *Kawi Spracht* I., 126.

⁹ *Sammlungen*, ii. 86. Pallas knows the names of these as "the Five Beneficent Burkhans." but not their character, apparently, as distinguished from the Earthly Buddhas, or their relation to these.

Tumpang in Java,¹⁰ and apparently executed about the twelfth or thirteenth century. He has also seen reason, in the alphabetic character used, to believe that the influence under which these remains were produced came from Gangetic India. Still the key of the symbolism of Boro Bodor must surely be that very singular device of the Caged Buddhas, so costly to execute, and yet repeated seventy-two times. And why should Vairochana occupy so distinctive a position?

Would not that be a more satisfactory and striking interpretation which Humboldt rejected, viz., that the four Buddhas, throned in their open niches and dominating the four sides of the cosmical pyramid, are the four Past Buddhas of this Kalpa, Krakuchanda, Konagamani, Kasyapa, and Sakya; while he of the upper dagobas is Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future, patiently abiding his development hidden in the heaven *Tusita*? To determine this, light is wanted on several points, which I have not been able to obtain. The chief of these points regards the characteristic attitudes assigned to the whole of the five human Buddhas.

I cannot find certain information in respect to any but Sakya and Maitreya. And it is remarkable that, in their cases, when we compare the characteristic attitudes of the Earthly Buddhas with that of these Dhyáni Buddhas, which are supposed to be the celestial reflexion of each, these do not correspond as we should expect.¹¹ The earthly and heavenly couples are supposed to run as follows:—

<i>Earthly</i> —	1. Krakuchanda.	2. Konagamani.	3. Kasyapa.
<i>Heavenly</i> —	1. Vairochana.	2. Akshobhya.	3. Ratna Sambhava.

<i>Earthly</i> —	4. Sakya.	5. Maitreya.
<i>Heavenly</i> —	4. Amitábha.	5. Amogha Siddha.

Now the well-known attitude of Sakya is that which belongs not to Amitábha, but to Akshobhya; and the attitude of Maitreya¹² is that which belongs not to Amogha Siddha, but to Vairochana. I may add that there seems reason to suppose the attitude assigned to Kasyapa to be that which pertains to Amogha Siddha.¹³

These characteristics would identify the Caged Buddha with Maitreya, which quite answers to the hypothesis; whilst the eastern figure would be Sakya and the northern one Kasyapa.

But in the only precedents I can refer to, viz., the Ananda temple at Pagan, and General Cunningham's description of the great Sanchi Tope, Sakya looks to the

¹⁰ In the province of Surabaya and district of Malang. There are various finely sculptured images also at this temple, which, from the descriptions given, appear to represent peiaons, male and female, of the Dhyáni Buddha system (see *Batavian Transactions*, xxvi. 84-5).

¹¹ This is noticed by Humboldt, u.s.

¹² See Pallas, *Sammlungen*, Vol. ii, Plate iii., Fig. 1; and Plate ii., Fig. 2.

¹³ For Pallas assigns this attitude to *Divongarra* (Dipankara), "the Ruler of the preceding World-period," who, along with Sakya and Maitreya, forms the triad, called by the Tibetans *Dissum Sanji*, "The Three Lordly ones;" and in Mongol *Gurban Tsagan Burchan*, "The Three White Gods" (*Sammlungen* ii., 86). But, according to Schott, the third member of the group receiving these titles is not Dipankara, but the immediate predecessor of Sakya, or as Pallas himself says, "the Ruler of the preceding World-period," *i.e.* Kasyapa. So I suppose Kasyapa to have the attitude of Amogha Siddha, or of the northern figures of Boro Bodor (See *Schott, Ueber den Buddhismus*, p. 40).

North and, Kasyapa to the West.¹⁴ Is there then any precedent for the arrangement which would place Sakya to the eastward and Kasyapa to the North?

A third question will be as to the existence, on the Buddhas of Boro Bodor, of those distinctive symbols which Mr. Hodgson has brought prominently to notice. It would appear, from an allusion in his paper in vol. xviii. of the Society's Journal, as if he had identified some of these symbols on drawings of the Boro Bodor images ; but I am not quite clear that this is meant, and I have no access to the former papers therein referred to. Indeed, I should not have presumed to touch these questions, in a position where I have so little access to necessary books, had not the receipt of Captain Sladen's memorandum given me so fair an occasion to bring forward the subject.¹⁵

A splendid work in illustration of Boro Bodor was in preparation eight or ten years ago at the expense of the Dutch Government, but I have never heard of its completion. If the figures of Boro Bodor should really prove to belong to the Dhyáni Buddha system, it is probable also that those figures sculptured on the exterior of the adjoining very remarkable Temple of Mundot, which I took for Brahminical divinities, really belong to the same system.

HENRY YULE.

Palermo, April 17th, 1869.

¹⁴ I have not the "*Bhilsa Topes*," and do not know whether General Cunningham gives the characters by which he distinguished the different Buddhas. And unfortunately I made no note of the distinctive positions in the Ananda.

¹⁵ I have not the Journal nor the Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society accessible, but I have a copy of Mr. Hodgson's paper from vol. xviii., which he kindly sent me some years ago, accompanied by tracings of the Dhyáni Buddhas and Bodhisatwas. It is well known, and indeed apparent from that paper, that he does not acknowledge the distinction so often made between Northern and Southern Buddhism. Even if the Java buildings proved to belong to the Dhyáni system, however, it would not settle that question, as Friedrich's researches seemed, to point to a movement from Bengal towards Java in the middle ages, which might have introduced the Dhyáni system into the island without at all affecting the Indo-Chinese countries which received their Buddhism from Ceylon at an Earlier date.