

Note [on the Senbyú Pagoda at Mengún]

J. FERGUSSON, F.E.S.

I have not the least wish or intention to dispute the theory put forward by Capt. Sladen and Col. Yule in their remarks, that the Senbyú Pagoda is intended to represent the mythical Mount Meru. I would, nevertheless, like to be allowed to explain that I think its peculiarities may be accounted for on much more mundane and less recondite grounds. The absence of any plan or section makes it a little difficult to speak with any certainty on the subject, but the photographs, with Capt. Sladen's descriptions, are probably sufficient to enable us to avoid any material error.

The central object at Senbyu will be easily recognized as one of those buildings to which we are accustomed to apply the names of Dagoba or Tope. If it contained a relic, the former designation would be correct; if it marked a sacred spot, or commemorated some sacred event, the latter would be the correct term. We do not in this instance know that it was erected for either the one purpose or the other, and it may therefore be designed to represent Mount Meru. If it does so, however, this is the first instance that has come under my notice of a Dagoba being so applied. There is certainly nothing in its external appearance that would lead any one to suppose that any difference existed between this one and the other Topes found so frequently in either Burmah or India.

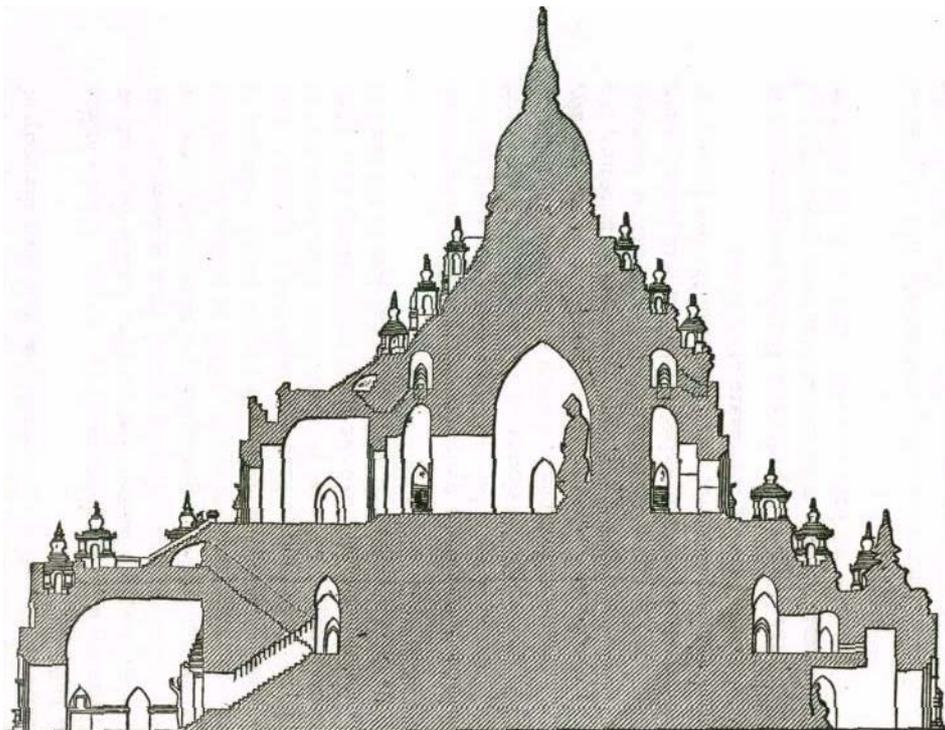
Since the publication of General Cunningham's book on the Bhilsa Topes in 1854, we have become perfectly familiar with the form of Topes surrounded by detached rails. All that group are, or were, so enclosed; and from this and other examples, we may infer that the enclosing rail was an essential adjunct to the Tope. At Amravati the Tope was enclosed by two concentric rails, which still remain. My conviction is that there was a third, or inner rail, which has perished with the central building, but this is not important. In Ceylon, many of the Topes are surrounded by three concentric circles of pillars, which I do not doubt were the analogues of the continental rails. The temple at Boro Buddor, in Java, consists of a central group of Topes surrounded by five enclosures, which though square, or at least rectangular in plan, are in reality nothing but sculptured screens similar in purpose to those that surrounded the Amravati Tope. At Senbyú we have six, and in spite of the evidence of my senses, I believe that only six terraces were intended, though the photograph seems to show seven. The priests, however, may therefore have been right when they assured Capt. Sladen that the lower storey did not count. If this is so, then the Dagoba formed the seventh storey of the temple. For myself, I am quite content with the fact that we have here a Tope with six enclosing rails, without seeking for any further symbolism at present.

There is, however, another series through which we arrive at a similar conclusion, though by a different road. There are in Babylonia and Assyria a large group of temples of pyramidal form, consisting of terraces placed one above and within the other, and rising through three or seven stories.

The temple at Mugheyr is the typical example at present I know of the three-storeyed temples; that called the Birs Nimroud, of the seven-storeyed. But there are others at Nimroud in Assyria, and at Khorsabad which have similar arrangements, and the seven walls of Ecbatana, alluded to by Col. Yule were no doubt

reminiscences of the same forms. In my "History of Architecture" (ii. 518), I pointed out the connexion between the buildings on the banks of the Euphrates with those on the Irawaddy, long before I was so familiar with the subject as I now am, and every subsequent discovery has only seemed to confirm me in this conviction.

The Sat Mehal Prásáda at Pollanarua was a seven-storeyed Pagoda in every respect analogous to these. The Maha Lowa Paya at Anuradhapura one with nine storeys. So was the temple at Boro Buddor which was also of nine storeys. But the temples most in point are those at Pagan. All the larger temples there, the Ananda, the Thapinyu, the Gaudapalen are seven-storeyed,¹—six terraces and a ziggurat, or cell, with a spire at the top. These, it is true, are all square, or at least rectangular. This one at Mengun is circular, but that distinction is really of little importance, and to my mind the difference between the two is only what we should expect from



Section of Thapinya Pagoda at Pagan. Scale, 50 feet to 1 inch.

the six or seven centuries which have elapsed between the dates of their erection. One other point in these Senbyú enclosures deserves notice. It is their wavy or serpentine form. It may sound fanciful, but my impression is, that it is really intended to recall the form of a serpent. At least, at Nakon Vat in Cambodia, all the ridges of the roofs and all the borderings of the pathways, were -wavy serpents, generally seven-headed, but with the bodies of real snakes. Here it is so conventional that without the knowledge of what happened further east we should not dare even to suggest such a theory.

To my mind the most interesting peculiarity of the Mengun Pagoda is that it forms a connecting link—which has hitherto been missing—between the square and circular forms of these seven-storeyed Pagodas. With the assistance it affords I now see—dimly it must be confessed—the outline of the whole series, from the temple at Mugheyr to the present day. Many of the links in this series are still wanting to our knowledge; but I have no doubt that they exist, and I feel confident that as photography spreads we shall soon be furnished with the required information. When

¹ Yule's "Mission to Ava," p. 35 *et seqq.* See also my "History of Architecture," II. 516 *et seqq.*

this is obtained we shall be enabled to write one of the most curious and interesting chapters which remain to complete our knowledge of the history of the ancient architectural forms of Southern Asia.