BARABUDUR HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF A BUDDHIST MONUMENT

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NOTES ON THE JĀṬAKAS

19. Von Le Coq, *Die Buddhistiche Spätantike*, VI, 58, fig. 188 (from the Devil's Cave, Qyzil).
20. A version of the Śāśā-jātaka featuring the transformation of the fire into a lotus pond as well as the downpour of rain appears in an unpublished ms. of the Avadānasārasamuccaya in the Cambridge University Library. This collection of avadānas and jātakas is of interest for the study of the Barabudur reliefs as it appears to be the only known text which gives this version of the Śāśā-jātaka as well as a version of the Mayāra-jātaka which closely resembles that of the Barabudur jātaka of the peacock Suvargabhāsa, illustrated in reliefs IIB62-66; cf. Ratna Handurukande, "The Avadānasārasamuccaya," *Studies in Indo-Asian Art and Culture*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1972), pp. 79-89.
22. See, for example, the arrangement in the Choir Cave at Qyzil, described by Albert Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kunststätten in Chinesisch-Turkestan* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912), pp. 65-75.
24. T. 24, pp. 61a-64c (Manohara); p. 51c (Māndhātāp).

Barabudur: A Buddhist Mystery in Stone

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THE MAIN IDEAS OF THIS PAPER were worked out in certain chapters of a book I published some time ago in Dutch—*Barobudur: Mysteriegebeuven in Steen*—and appear in a somewhat different form in the enlarged English version, *Ageless Borobudur*.¹ The title of my paper is taken from the subtitle, "a Mystery in Stone." I did not choose this formulation merely because Barabudur is more mysterious than many other monuments, although it certainly is that; nor because there hovers over Barabudur something like the *mysterium tremendum ac fascinosum*, to borrow from Rudolf Otto's famous book on the Holy²—fascinating though Barabudur may be. A mystery—*mysterium*—in the sense in which I use it, is the actual meeting of Man and the Holy, resulting, in a general way, in an *Unio mystica*. It is a problem which in some way or other has occupied the minds of most religious people all over the world, different though their ideas and formulations may be. Instead of the general term "the Holy" I frequently use in connection with Barabudur other words such as Reality (as opposed to the phenomenal world, the "real" world of non-religious people), Ultimate Reality, Absolute Reality, Totality, or again personifications like the Buddha, the Ultimate Buddha, the Ādi-buddha. We are, for that matter, talking about values which cannot actually be talked about, since they are "entirely different" (ganz 109..."
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anders)—to use once more the terminology of Rudolf Otto—from human reasoning and identifications.

In our discussion of Barabuṣuṣ, particular connections should be established with certain Buddhist schools and systems. Yet we should also recognize the architect's right to have ideas and a system of his own. The architect of Barabuṣuṣ we speak of might not have been an individual man but rather a team, consisting at least of an architect and a theologian-philosopher. As to the Holy's partner in this Mystery, we should distinguish between the believers or worshippers, individually or in groups and communities—a sanctuary's visitors—on the one hand, and Mankind in general on the other.

Every religion values that specific type of sanctuary—alternatively, ritual or drama—which most clearly expresses the profound thoughts of the people who created and developed it. In its layout and decoration, this sanctuary contains in a tangible form a specific vision concerning the great problems which at any time have occupied the human mind, first among them the relation between Mankind and the world of the Holy. To the highest order of such sanctuaries belongs the Buddhist stūpa. In the most important specimens of each type of stūpa—for instance, in Barabuṣuṣ—this vision is partly determined by the conceptual genius of the creators and partly through a complicated interaction of the religious philosophy with the architecture and technics of former generations. In monuments like Barabuṣuṣ specific Buddhist notions, testifying to a high religious and artistic development, are combined with general conceptions which might apply to other sanctuaries as well, anywhere in the world. The final concept, however, was created by the "architect."

The Meeting of Reality and Man is a mystery recognized by various religions in multifarious yet essentially identical shapes. The statement that in Barabuṣuṣ this mystery is expressed is consequently not very revealing. Yet this function of Barabuṣuṣ was of the utmost importance to the contemporary believer, worshipper, pilgrim, initiate, since for him Barabuṣuṣ, being the expression of this meeting of Reality and Man, opened the possibility of partaking in the meeting. To a student of Barabuṣuṣ, on the other hand, to connect Barabuṣuṣ with the mystery is to provide the spiritual background for the greater part of Barabuṣuṣ's construction, iconography, and symbolism.

The Meeting of Reality and Man is a central element in many religions, in which, consequently, the most essential sanctuaries provide a meeting place for the Holy and the worshipper. Such sanctuaries may be shaped neutrally and may function only as a meeting place when a ritual is being enacted. If there is no ritual, there is no meeting of "God and His flock"; the church is closed, the temple compound is uncarved and deserted, the altar is in its normal place, seats for the gods are at the back of the courtyard, but God and the gods enter only when the believers are present, waiting for the mystery to happen as a consequence of a ritual or a mystery play. The sanctuary in this case is a stage on which the mystery is performed as a ritual, officiated on behalf of either the Holy or the worshippers, or on behalf of both. This incidental mystery, important though it may be to the individual believer, might be called a minor or micro-mystery.

There is, however, also a major or macro-mystery. Rather than a simple meeting place, the sanctuary may be a symbol representing the mystery in action. Both aspects may be combined, for that matter, as they are at Barabuṣuṣ. A symbol represents a religious truth of major value. A sanctuary likewise is a symbol, a highly complicated one, certainly, in the case of Barabuṣuṣ. Its symbolism is expressed in its form and general arrangement. In addition to this primary symbolism there may be various secondary symbols, such as ornamental motifs, reliefs, and so forth, supporting and elucidating the sanctuary's meaning. In that case the mystery is not merely enacted in the meeting place provided by the sanctuary. Rather the sanctuary itself represents the mystery, which is no longer incidentally enacted in the course of rituals referring to it but enacted continually because it enacts itself in and through the sanctuary. The mystery is represented, and in religiosis this means that it is present. The sanctuary establishes as a fact that there is—always—a relation between the world we live in and an Ultimate Reality which introduces meaning and certainty into our existence.
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rated. The sanctuary may be waiting for the worshipper and still proclaim whatever message or function it may possess. I take it that as many simple-minded pilgrims came to Barabuṣṇa as to any other sacred place, to worship and offer their flowers and clay stūpas. Most probably, processions and rituals were held, if only in the courtyard and on the broad processional walk enclosing the first gallery below its balustrade. Individual pilgrims, believers and initiates, must have entered the maze-like galleries, partaking in the meeting of the Holy, which is descending, with Man, who is ascending. Ultimately, however, Barabuṣṇa was the expression in stone of this mystery: a permanent expression, establishing the fact of the happening of the mystery. Both minor and major mysteries apparently were combined in one sanctuary, Barabuṣṇa itself, in the same way as they are in many other temples and churches of major importance.

The major mystery expressed in Barabuṣṇa—both in its general layout, construction, and symbolism, and in its additional decoration and reliefs—is the meeting of the Holy and Mankind, enacted by the descent of the Holy—of Ultimate Reality, Totality—and the ascent of Man. It is acted out in the Universe, which is being gradually pervaded by the Holy in its various emanations and is partly inhabited by Man and his fellow creatures. Thus Barabuṣṇa represents the Holy, its descent into the Universe, the Universe being pervaded, and the ascent of Man. The last, Man’s ascent, is represented both permanently, by the life and former births of the Buddha, and incidentally, by the pilgrim-initiate following Sudhana’s guidance.

Let us review the several aspects of the mystery referred to just now. We shall, however, soon observe that it is not feasible to keep them clearly apart.

Barabuṣṇa represents, besides other things, the Universe. To achieve this effect the architect used a well-established device: the stūpa. It is evident that Barabuṣṇa is a stūpa, albeit a very complicated one. In the course of its evolution the stūpa has had various shapes and various functions. Many can be recognized in Barabuṣṇa. Some of the most striking aspects of the earlier stūpas are their hemispherical body and circular or square base. The hemi-
spherical body is suggested by Barabuṣṇa’s silhouette; the quadrangular base has developed into the terraced substructure. The former is not distinctly raised above the latter. Base and body are actually made into a whole; the hemispherical body is slipped over the terraced base. Barabuṣṇa, in short, appears to be an accumulation of terraces, terraces that provide a “naked” structure. The suggestion of a hemisphere is created by strewing ornaments all over the horizontal elements, thus changing the “naked” structure into a “clothed” structure. Or, there is an exterior Barabuṣṇa consisting of a hemisphere and an interior Barabuṣṇa shaped underneath by an accumulation of terraces. Similar combinations of two shapes slipped one over the other may be found elsewhere, most specifically in the superstructure of Prambanan’s Śiva temple.

Besides the base and the body there are also other features of earlier stūpas: the Buddhist railing and the torana gateways. They have been moved into the quadrangular substructure in the shapes of balustrades and of monumental gateways over flights of steps. The earlier Buddhas in niches are also found in the balustrades, raised to the higher rank of cosmic Dhyāni Buddhas.

In Barabuṣṇa’s symbolism there are assembled several highly important features of a stūpa’s various functions. Some can be associated with the highest values of Buddhism and would fall under the heading “the Holy”; a stūpa recalls the life and previous existences of the historical Buddha and other saintly persons, and so does Barabuṣṇa, in the reliefs of the first gallery and the second gallery’s balustrade. A stūpa professes the Buddhist doctrine, and so again does Barabuṣṇa, in its symbols and reliefs which stamp it as a “Shining Tower of the Law.” A stūpa for that matter is the highest and essentially most abstract and therefore most exact symbol of the Holy itself. This certainly applies to the main stūpa on top of Barabuṣṇa. But a stūpa also is a replica of the Universe, and so—in part—is Barabuṣṇa.

The terraced construction of Barabuṣṇa recalls the fact that an important element of the Universe is Mount Meru, a terraced cosmic mountain, enclosed by a dome-shaped firmament. These we recognize in the inner and outer Barabuṣṇa. The architect apparently had a predilection for horizontal divisions, inherited
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from both his Indian and Indonesian predecessors. He then introduced a hemispherical body for the profile of the external Baraḥūḍur—the well-shaped silhouette. Simultaneously he adhered to the idea that a hemispherical body be placed on top of a stūpa’s base. The superstructure, however, is not one enormous stūpa or hemisphere, but a great number of stūpas: one main stūpa and seventy-two minor stūpas, spread over and held together by four circular terraces. We may add 1472 more stūpas or stūpa-shaped ornaments spread over the balustrades lower down.

In connection with Baraḥūḍur’s function as a replica of the Universe, the system of cosmic Dhyānī Buddhas should be mentioned as well as that of the three dhātus, which correspond to the major horizontal sections of the building’s structure. This division is highly important for both the cosmological layout and the stages in the Holy’s descent into the Universe. Whenever we speak of horizontal partitions we should be aware, however, of the architect’s aversion to any clear-cut dividing lines. Whatever he separates with one hand, he simultaneously connects again with the other.

The principal personage in the Mystery which enacts itself in Baraḥūḍur is the Holy, to use once more this vague and general term. Holiness is expressed in Baraḥūḍur in various ways. There is a Momentum of Mass, dominating the massive shape of the monument. Besides this there is a Momentum of Multitude, revealed in the multitudinous sculptures both decorative and narrative, the stūpas, niches, and Buddhas characteristic of the Sphere of Forms. The Momenta of Mass and Multitude are highly expressive of the formidable power of the Holy. Commentaries on the relation between art and religion by modern scholars refer to both of these prodigious expressions of the idea of Holiness. More often than not the exact meaning of these concepts of Mass and Multitude is demonstrated by photographs of Baraḥūḍur. In its expression of the Holy, however, Baraḥūḍur reaches heights much greater than those achieved merely by its imposing width and its multitudinous sculptures. After the demonstrative force of its substructure, the complete tranquillity and silence of its upper terraces mark not an anticlimax but the utmost manifestation of

Holiness. The Momentum of Silence, the utter Stillness, is much more striking than any outward manifestation of power can be. As a negation of all (for religious Man) “unreal” phenomena, Silence represents the final and only expression of the true essence of the Holy. It is highly characteristic of Baraḥūḍur, however, that even in the deliberate abundance of detail and symbolic decoration all over the square terraces there is continence and order in the sculptural riches, overwhelming though they may be. Even in the Sphere of Forms we are consequently aware of the well-controlled power of the Holy.

The utter silence of the circular terraces, representing the Sphere of Formlessness, arūpadhātu, is essentially different from the riches in the galleries. But here once more there is no clear-cut separation: the plateau marks a transition which is the top of the substructure as well as the bottom of the upper region. As for the circular terraces, they are characterized by geometric elements, not by any overtly natural forms. On the other hand, there still appear the stūpas, symbols and spiritual forms, abstract though they may be. Moreover, inside the perforated stūpas Buddhas are vaguely seen. In this way the circular terraces are not entirely formless: they only foreshadow absolute formlessness. The main stūpa certainly is a more severe expression of abstract symbolism. Yet it still retains the form of a stūpa. This highly abstract symbol—and more especially its pinnacle—in itself might have been a full expression of Ultimate Reality. It seems to be a fact, however, that inside the main stūpa’s walls was placed the so-called “unfinished” Buddha. This statue was hidden from view and was still vaguely shaped: the habit, the top of the head and the hands are roughly carved. The face, however, though damaged when excavated, is quite normal. We may interpret this statue as representing the Ultimate Buddha at the very beginning of his emanation into a world of gradually improving forms. The main stūpa represents—it not in the most abstract way, which is reserved for the atmospheric void above it—the Buddha’s dharmakāya in the silent and formless sphere of the arūpadhātu. Within its walls shapelessness is given shape in the form of the second traditional symbol, the Buddha image, which is invisible from outside and is
not yet fully grown. The next stage, partly hidden, partly disclosed, appears in the perforated stūpas. The mudrā of the Buddhas inside—dharma-cakra—points to a (Mahā-) Vairocana who has risen far above his previous location in the zenith of Dhyāni Buddha systems, far beyond the rank of the Dhyāni Buddhas in the lower dhātu, who represent the next kāya.

The Holy descends from the Sphere of Oneness into the Universe in a tangible form most clearly demonstrated by the main stūpa, and demonstrated subsequently by means of more stūpas and Buddhas, the major symbols of Buddhism, made into one in the perforated stūpas and on top of the balustrades, where the Buddhas are clearly seen by initiates, and the stūpas are strewn in between. There are five Dhyāni Buddhas and, perhaps, on the first balustrade, Mānuṣi Buddha, belonging to the lower sphere or kāmadhātu. In this lower sphere the Holy for the first time is met by Man, in the shape of the believer, devotee, and potential initiate.

The believer enters the scene, that is to say the sanctuary, from the outside world by way of the broad processional walk created by the encasement of the original base. I take it that there was first of all a technical reason for this encasement. Barabuḍur’s architect was forced by the sagging of the galleries’ main walls to reenforce the base of the monument by building a heavy encasement around it. He availed himself of this opportunity to create a broad processional walk. By adding more gateways, moreover, he embellished the monument’s entrances. By heightening the first gallery’s balustrade he created a more “intimate” atmosphere in the sanctuary’s first stage. Simultaneously he provided wall-space for 500 more reliefs depicting jatakas. Carving reliefs was considered a meritorious act, corresponding to a continuous recital and testimony in agreement with a stūpa’s function as a Shining Tower of the Law. The 160 reliefs covering the lower part of the original base were hidden from view as a result of the encasement. A great loss . . . to us! Apparently not to Barabuḍur’s iconography and symbolism. The Karmavibhaṅga reliefs, essential to this symbolism, actually existed and played their role in the whole. There was no need to remove them or to replace them by similar carvings elsewhere on the monument. Their existence as such was more important than their visibility, or so it seems.

In the first gallery the believer is introduced to the more spiritual aspects of the kāmadhātu (and to the beginning of the pilgrim’s progress) by the reliefs depicting the historical Buddha’s appearance in the world and the former existences leading to his eventual Buddhahood. Reliefs depicting both are well-known features in the outer decoration of earlier stūpas.

The galleries and stairs are arranged to form a māṇḍala, a Path which leads the pilgrim-initiate through a maze-like pattern upwards and to the center. The kāla-makara ornaments express his initiation into the successive stages of spiritual evolution or—for the Mahāyānist—of a Bodhisattva’s career.

In his progress through the upper galleries the initiate is conducted by the exemplary young Sudhana, whose multitudinous visits to sages are described in the Gāndavyūha. Most important, besides the roles played by the Bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī and Maityra, is the dominating position of Samantabhadra, highlighted on the fourth gallery’s main wall by the Bhadracari. It is Samantabhadra who ultimately introduces the initiate to the sphere of arūpadhātu, which is entered by way of the last gateway leading to the plateau and the circular terraces.

As I said in the beginning there is a micro- and a macro-mystery. Regarding the first, which is the meeting with the Holy experienced by the believer-initiate, Barabuḍur is a spiritual tool, a yantra, that provides a path as a means to the Holy. In his recent doctor’s thesis on the function and meaning of the caṇḍī, Soekmono states, “It has become evident that the caṇḍī as the meeting place of the worshipper and the worshipped is essentially a yantra.” These words are another way of expressing the thoughts just presented regarding Barabuḍur. More important still than this general statement is the specific method used by the various architects to express the “meeting” which I have referred to as a mystery. The caṇḍī’s and Barabuḍur’s function as a yantra, however, refers only to the micro-mystery. There is also, still more important, the macro-mystery. Besides, to worshipper and worshipped, the meeting of the Holy and Man happens hic et nunc and always. Even when—or rather the more so when—there is no one
present to act as a worshipper, to adore or be initiated, this Mystery, which is both the descent of the Holy into the Universe and the absorption into itself of the Holy from the Universe, happens continually. In Barabudur it is visibly and tangibly expressed by the permanent descent of the various stūpas from the main stūpa, via the circular terraces, deep into the several spheres of the Universe. Just like the stūpas, the various Buddhas, too, refer to the descent of Reality in the Universe. Their downward movement follows that of the stūpas; they radiate from the main stūpa, via the figures in the perforated stūpas, to those in the niches on the balustrades. The downward movement of the stūpas can be reversed into an upward movement of the same stūpas, ending with their contraction into the one main stūpa. When visualizing this alternatively expanding (descending) and contracting (ascending) movement, the result can be experienced as a tangible reality, a pulsating movement. The multitudinous stūpas strewn all over Barabudur’s body, moreover, have a more static but equally permanent function. It certainly is no accident that when tracing the position of the stūpa-like ornaments we are reminded of Indra’s net, indrajala, the wonderful fabric of threads and jewels hanging all over Indra’s palace. Each of the jewels reflects the net and the net in its entirety reflects each of the jewels. It is a simile used to illustrate the coherence of everything in the Universe. In a similar way the multitudinous stūpas on Barabudur represent the totality of the stūpa conception, while at the same time all the stūpas elements spread over the building’s surface are gathered up in the all-embracing outer shape of the monument as well as in the main stūpa.

The mystery of the Holy meeting Man in the Universe, as presented by Barabudur, for the Buddhist must have been a fact: Barabudur by representing the Universe is the Universe; by representing the Holy in stūpas and images Barabudur simultaneously is the Holy; by representing the descent of the Holy and the progress both of the historical Buddha in a long series of incarnations and of an exemplary pilgrim, the mystery of the meeting of the Holy and Man is a continuous event. Thus Barabudur is the statement and confirmation of the Mystery of the ultimate relation of the unreal and illusive world in which mankind operates to the Ultimate Reality behind it all.

Notes
6. I take the disc which supports the main stūpa to be a circular terrace of its own.