



Borobudur 婆罗浮屠

Synopsis of One of the World  
Heritage Sites in Indonesia –  
Borobudur Temple

印度尼西亚世界遗产遗址之一  
婆罗浮屠庙

October 2017

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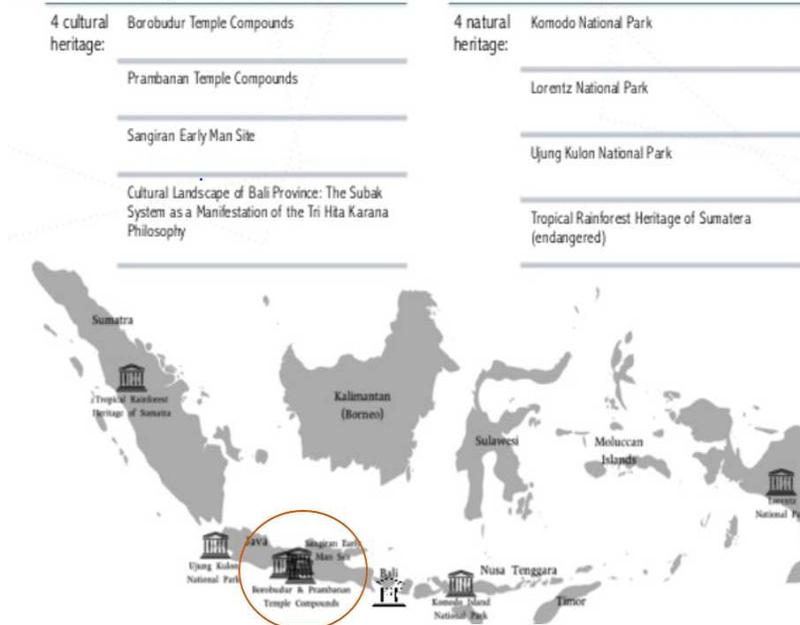
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# 1. Overview – Borobudur



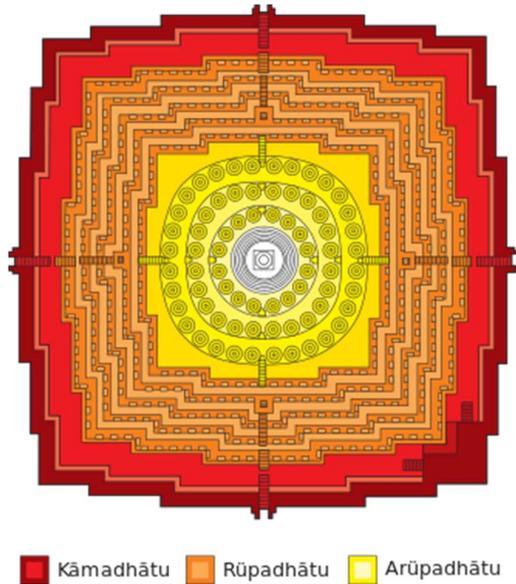
**Borobudur** is a 9th-century Mahayana Buddhist temple in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia, as well as the world's largest Buddhist temple, and also one of the greatest Buddhist monuments in the world. The temple consists of nine stacked platforms, six square and three circular, topped by a central dome. The temple is decorated with 2,672 relief panels and 504 Buddha statues. The central dome is surrounded by 72 Buddha statues, each seated inside a perforated stupa.

One of the World Heritage Sites in Indonesia:



Built in the 9th century during the reign of the Sailendra Dynasty, the temple was designed in Javanese Buddhist architecture, which blends the Indonesian indigenous cult of ancestor worship and the Buddhist concept of attaining Nirvana.

The monument is both a shrine to the **Lord Buddha** and a place for Buddhist pilgrimage. The journey for pilgrims begins at the base of the monument and follows a path around the monument and ascends to the top through three levels symbolic of Buddhist cosmology: **Kāmadhātu** (the world of desire), **Rūpadhātu** (the world of forms) and **Arupadhātu** (the world of formlessness).



### **Zone 1: Kamadhatu** (*The phenomenal world, the world inhabited by common people*)

Borobudur's hidden **Kamadhatu** level consists of 160 reliefs depicting scenes of Karmawibhanga Sutra, the law of cause and effect. Illustrating the human behaviour of desire, the reliefs depict robbing, killing, rape, torture and defamation.

A corner of the covering base has been permanently removed to allow visitors to see the hidden foot, and some of the reliefs. (*Photography of the entire collection of 160 reliefs is displayed at the Borobudur Museum which is within the Borobudur Archaeological Park*).

**Zone 2: Rapudhatu** (*The transitional sphere, humans are released from worldly matters*)

The four square levels of **Rapadhatu** contain galleries of carved stone reliefs, as well as a chain of niches containing statues of Buddha. In total there are 328 Buddha on these balustrade levels which also have a great deal of purely ornate reliefs.

The Sanskrit manuscripts that are depicted on this level over 1300 reliefs are Gandhawyuha, Lalitawistara, Jataka and Awadana. They stretch for 2.5km. In addition there are 1212 decorative panels.

**Zone 3: Arupadhatu** (*The highest sphere, the abode of the gods*)

The three circular terraces leading to a central dome or stupa represent the rising above the world, and these terraces are a great deal less ornate, the purity of form is paramount.

The terraces contain circles of perforated stupas, an inverted bell shape, containing sculptures of Buddha, who face outward from the temple. There are 72 of these stupas in total. The impressive central stupa is currently not as high as the original version, which rose 42m above ground level, the base is 9.9m in diameter. Unlike the stupas surrounding it, the central stupa is empty and conflicting reports suggest that the central void contained relics, and other reports suggest it has always been empty.

The monument guides pilgrims through an extensive system of stairways and corridors with 1,460 narrative relief panels on the walls and the balustrades. Borobudur has the largest and most complete ensemble of Buddhist reliefs in the world.

## 2. Etymology

In Indonesia, ancient temples are referred to as **Candi**; thus locals refer to "**Borobudur Temple**" as *Candi Borobudur*. The term *candi* also loosely describes ancient structures, for example gates and baths. The origins of the name *Borobudur*, however, are unclear, although the original names of most ancient Indonesian temples are no longer known. The name Borobudur was first written in Sir Thomas Raffles's book on Javan history. Raffles wrote about a monument called *Borobudur*, but there are no older documents suggesting the same name. The only old Javanese manuscript that hints the monument called *Budur* as a holy Buddhist sanctuary is *Nagarakretagama*, written by Mpu Prapanca, a Buddhist scholar of Majapahit court, in 1365.

Most *candi* are named after a nearby village. If it followed Javanese language conventions and was named after the nearby village of *Bore*, the monument should have been named "BudurBoro". Raffles thought that *Budur* might correspond to the modern Javanese word *Buda* ("ancient")—i.e., "ancient Boro". He also suggested that the name might derive from *boro*, meaning "great" or "honorable" and *Budur* for Buddha. However, another archaeologist suggests the second component of the name (*Budur*) comes from Javanese term *bhudhara* ("mountain").

Another possible etymology suggests that *Borobudur* is a corrupted simplified local Javanese pronunciation of *Biara Beduhur* written in Sanskrit as *Vihara Buddha Uhr*. The term *Buddha-Uhr* could mean "the city of Buddhas", while another possible term *Beduhur* is probably an Old Javanese term, still survived today in Balinese vocabulary, which means "a high place", constructed from the stem word *dhuhur* or *luhur* (high). This suggests that Borobudur means vihara of Buddha located on a high place or on a hill.

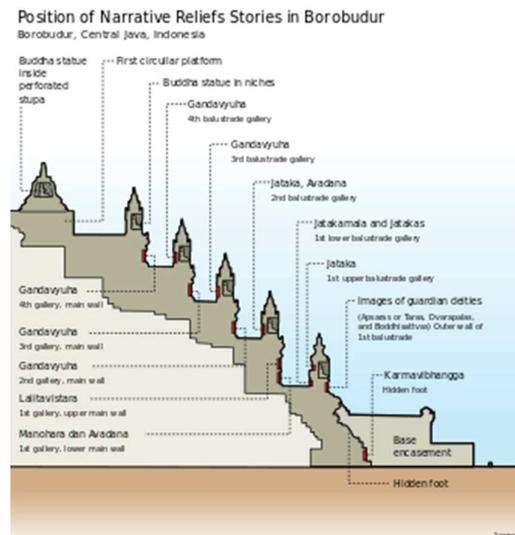
The construction and inauguration of a sacred Buddhist building—possibly a reference to Borobudur—was mentioned in two inscriptions, both discovered in Kedu, Temanggung Regency<sup>1</sup>. The Karangtengah<sup>2</sup> inscription, dated 824, mentioned a sacred building named *Jinalaya* (the realm of those who have conquered worldly desire and reached enlightenment), inaugurated by Pramodhawardhani, daughter of Samaratungga. The Tri Tepusan inscription, dated 842, is mentioned in the *sima*, the (tax-free) lands awarded by Çrī Kahulunnan (Pramodhawardhani) to ensure the funding and maintenance of a *Kamūlān* called *Bhūmisambhāra*. *Kamūlān* is from the word *mula*, which means "the place of origin", a sacred building to honor the ancestors, probably those of the Sailendras. Casparis suggested that *Bhūmi Sambhāra Bhudhāra*, which in Sanskrit means "the mountain of combined virtues of the ten stages of Bodhisattvahood", was the original name of Borobudur.

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<sup>1</sup> Central Java Province

<sup>2</sup> The inscription was written in ancient Javanese script in two languages; [Old Javanese](#) and [Sanskrit](#). The lines 1-24 was written in Sanskrit, the rest of the lines was written in old Javanese

### 3. Bas-Reliefs



The position of narrative bas-reliefs stories on Borobudur wall.

Borobudur is constructed in such a way that it reveals various levels of terraces, showing intricate architecture that goes from being heavily ornamented with bas-reliefs to being plain in *Arupadhatu*<sup>3</sup> circular terraces. The first four terrace walls are showcases for bas-relief sculptures. These are exquisite, considered to be the most elegant and graceful in the ancient Buddhist world.

The bas-reliefs in Borobudur depicted many scenes of daily life in 8th-century ancient Java, from the courtly palace life, hermit in the forest, to those of commoners in the village. It also depicted temple, marketplace, various flora and fauna, and also native vernacular architecture. People depicted here are the images of king, queen, princes, noblemen, courtier, soldier, servant, commoners, priest and hermit. The reliefs also depicted mythical spiritual beings in Buddhist beliefs such as asuras, gods, bodhisattvas, kinnaras, gandharvas and apsaras. The images depicted on bas-relief often served as reference for historians to research for certain subjects, such as the study of architecture, weaponry, economy, fashion, and also mode of transportation of 8th-century Maritime Southeast Asia. One of the famous renderings of an 8th-century Southeast Asian double outrigger ship is Borobudur Ship. Today, the actual-size replica of Borobudur Ship that had sailed from Indonesia to Africa in 2004 is displayed in the Samudra Raksa Museum, located a few hundred meters north of Borobudur.

<sup>3</sup> In Buddhism, the *arūpajhānas* or "formless meditations" are four successive levels of meditation on non-material objects. These levels are higher than the *rūpajhānas*, and harder to attain. In themselves, they are believed to lead to rebirth as gods belonging to the realm of the same name.

The Borobudur reliefs also pay close attention to Indian aesthetic discipline, such as pose and gesture that contain certain meanings and aesthetic value. The reliefs of noblemen, and noble women, kings, or divine beings such as apsaras, taras and bodhisattvas are usually portrayed in tribhanga pose, the three-bend pose on neck, hips, and knee, with one leg resting and one upholding the body weight. This position is considered as the most graceful pose, such as the figure of Surasundari holding a lotus.

During Borobudur excavation, archeologists discovered color pigments of blue, red, green, black, as well as bits of gold foil, and concluded that the monument that we see today — a dark gray mass of volcanic stone, lacking in colour — was probably once coated with *varjalepa* white plaster and then painted with bright colors, serving perhaps as a beacon of Buddhist teaching. The same *vajralepa* plaster can also be found in Sari, Kalasan and

Sewu temples. It is likely that the bas-reliefs of Borobudur was originally quite colorful, before centuries of torrential tropical rainfalls peeled-off the colour pigments.

Narrative Panels Distribution			
Section	Location	Story	#Panels
Hidden foot	Wall	Karmavibhanga	160
First gallery	Main wall	Lalitavistara	120
		Jataka/Avadana	120
	Balustrade	Jataka/Avadana	372
		Jataka/Avadana	128
Second gallery	Balustrade	Jataka/Avadana	100
	Main wall	Gandavyuha	128
Third gallery	Main wall	Gandavyuha	88
	Balustrade	Gandavyuha	88
Fourth gallery	Main wall	Gandavyuha	84
	Balustrade	Gandavyuha	72
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,460</b>

Borobudur contains approximately 2,670 individual bas reliefs (1,460 narrative and 1,212 decorative panels), which cover the façades and balustrades. The total relief surface is 2,500 square metres (27,000 sq ft), and they are distributed at the hidden foot (*Kāmadhātu*) and the five square platforms (*Rupadhatu*).

The narrative panels, which tell the story of Sudhana and Manohara, are grouped into 11 series that encircle the monument with a total length of 3,000 metres (9,800 ft). The hidden foot contains the first series with 160 narrative panels, and the remaining 10 series are distributed throughout walls and balustrades in four galleries starting from the eastern entrance stairway to the left. Narrative panels on the wall read from right to left, while those on the balustrade read from left to right. This conforms with *pradaksina*, the ritual of circumambulation performed by pilgrims who move in a clockwise direction while keeping the sanctuary to their right.

The hidden foot depicts the workings of karmic law. The walls of the first gallery have two superimposed series of reliefs; each consists of 120 panels. The upper part depicts the biography of the Buddha, while the lower part of the wall and also the balustrades in the first and the second galleries tell the story of the Buddha's former lives. The remaining panels are devoted to Sudhana's further wandering about his search, terminated by his attainment of the Perfect Wisdom.

## 4. Buddhist Teachings in the Reliefs



Great Departure of Shakyamuni from his palace  
at Kapilavastu



Close up of a relief

The total of **504 Buddha** are in **meditative pose**, and the **6 different hand positions** represented throughout the temple, often according to the direction the Buddha faces.

**The reliefs found at the foot of the Borobudur Temple are related to the core of Buddhism. The reliefs that adorn the feet of the temple depict the doctrine of the cause of human suffering and the result of human actions in the next life. By comparing the relief sculptures with Buddhist or Sutra scriptures, it can be seen that temple reliefs are connected to each other to tell a story that represents the Mahakarmavibhanga Sutra, or the law of suffering and the result of deeds.**

The 160 panels that contain scenes in relief tell about everyday life, deeds that produce good and evil, the consequences that exist on the act, as well as heaven and hell. 23 of the entire panel is a quote from the Mahakarmavibhanga Sutra. As indicated by the word karma, this relief describes the various human actions and their effects. Some scenes can be interpreted as a pretitya samutpada symbol, which refers to the mandala Bhacavakra from Tibet.

In this mandala: **(1) avidya** (indifference) is symbolized by a blind woman, **(2) samskara** (basic impulse) symbolized by pottery being made by artisans, **(3) vijnana** (consciousness) is depicted by monkeys picking fruit, **(4) namarupa** (personality) is described as a boat in a journey, **(5) sadayatana** (the six sense organs) is a house with many windows, **(6) sparsa** (relationship) is described by kiss, **(7) vedana** (feeling) is depicted through a man With the arrow in his eye, **(8) trsna** (desire) is illustrated by the drinking scene, **(9) upadana** (derma) is illustrated by the activity of picking fruit from the tree, **(10) bhava** (process of occurrence) is described with the pregnant woman, **(11) Birth** is depicted by a scene of birth, and **(12) jaramaranam** (old age and death) is depicted with a corpse brought to the place of extermination.

The significance of the whole series of reliefs shows that ***the concept of karma here is placed in the context of the samutpada pratitya consisting of 12 links that describe the cause of human suffering.*** Now, the series of reliefs have been covered and form in the foot of the temple. Thus, ***the foot of the Borobudur Temple contains a core of Buddhism emphasizing the first two Truths; Life is suffering, and suffering has a cause.***

#### **4a. The Law of Karma (Karmavibhangga)**

The Karmavibangga scene on Borobudur's hidden foot, on the right depicting sinful act of killing and cooking turtles and fishes, on the left those who make living by killing animals will be tortured in hell, by being cooked alive, being cut, or being thrown into burning house.

The 160 hidden panels do not form a continuous story, but each panel provides one complete illustration of cause and effect. There are depictions of blameworthy activities, from gossip to murder, with their corresponding punishments. There are also praiseworthy activities, which include charity and pilgrimage to sanctuaries, and their subsequent rewards. The pains of hell and the pleasure of heaven are also illustrated. There are scenes of daily life, complete with the full panorama of *samsara* (the endless cycle of birth and death). The encasement base of the Borobudur temple was disassembled to reveal the hidden foot, and the reliefs were photographed by Casijan Chepas in 1890. It is these photographs that are displayed in Borobudur Museum (Karmawibhangga Museum), located just several hundred meters north of the temple. During the restoration, the foot encasement was reinstalled, covering the Karmawibhangga reliefs. Today, only the southeast corner of the hidden foot is revealed and visible for visitors.

#### **4b. The Story of Prince Siddhartha and the Birth of Buddha**



*Prince Siddhartha Gautama became an ascetic hermit.*



*Queen Maya riding horse carriage retreating to Lumbini to give birth to Prince Siddhartha Gautama.*

The story starts with the descent of the Lord Buddha from the Tushita heaven and ends with his first sermon in the Deer Park near Benares. The relief shows the birth of the Buddha as Prince Siddhartha, son of King Suddhodana and Queen Maya of Kapilavastu (in present-day Nepal).

The story is preceded by 27 panels showing various preparations, in the heavens and on the earth, to welcome the final incarnation of the Bodhisattva. Before descending from Tushita heaven, the Bodhisattva entrusted his crown to his successor, the future Buddha Maitreya. He descended on earth in the shape of white elephants with six tusks, penetrated to Queen Maya's right womb. Queen Maya had a dream of this event, which was interpreted that his son would become either a sovereign or a Buddha.

While Queen Maya felt that it was the time to give birth, she went to the Lumbini park outside the Kapilavastu city. She stood under a plaksa tree, holding one branch with her right hand, and she gave birth to a son, Prince Siddhartha. The story on the panels continues until the prince becomes the Buddha.

#### **4c. The Stories of Buddha's Previous Life (Jataka) and Other Legendary Persons (Avadana)**

Jatakas<sup>4</sup> are stories about the Buddha before he was born as Prince Siddhartha. They are the stories that tell about the previous lives of the Buddha, in both human and animal form. The future Buddha may appear in them as a king, an outcast, a god, an elephant—but, in whatever form, he exhibits some virtue that the tale thereby inculcates. Avadanas are similar to jatakas, but the main figure is not the Bodhisattva himself. The saintly deeds in avadanas are attributed to other legendary persons. Jatakas and avadanas are treated in one and the same series in the reliefs of Borobudur.

The first twenty lower panels in the first gallery on the wall depict the *Sudhanakumaravadana*, or the saintly deeds of Sudhana. The first 135 upper panels in the same gallery on the balustrades are devoted to the 34 legends of the *Jatakamala*. The remaining 237 panels depict stories from other sources, as do the lower series and panels in the second gallery. Some jatakas are depicted twice, for example the story of King Sibhi (Rama's forefather).

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<sup>4</sup> *The Jātaka tales are a voluminous body of literature native to India concerning the previous births of Gautama Buddha in both human and animal form. The future Buddha may appear as a king, an outcast, a god, an elephant—but, in whatever form, he exhibits some virtue that the tale thereby inculcates.*

#### 4d. Sudhana's search for the ultimate truth (Gandavyuha)

Gandavyuha is the story told in the final chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* about Sudhana's tireless wandering in search of the Highest Perfect Wisdom. It covers two galleries (third and fourth) and also half of the second gallery, comprising in total of 460 panels. The principal figure of the story, the youth Sudhana, son of an extremely rich merchant, appears on the 16th panel. The preceding 15 panels form a prologue to the story of the miracles during Buddha's *Samadhi* in the Garden of Jeta at Sravasti.

During his search, Sudhana visited no fewer than thirty teachers, but none of them had satisfied him completely. He was then instructed by Manjusri to meet the monk Megasri, where he was given the first doctrine. As his journey continues, Sudhana meets (in the following order) Supratisthita, the physician Megha (Spirit of Knowledge), the banker Muktaka, the monk Saradhvaja, the upasika Asa (Spirit of Supreme Enlightenment), Bhismottaranirghosa, the Brahmin Jayosmayatna, Princess Maitrayani, the monk Sudarsana, a boy called Indriyesvara, the upasika Prabhuta, the banker Ratnachuda, King Anala, the god Siva Mahadeva, Queen Maya, Bodhisattva Maitreya and then back to Manjusri. Each meeting has given Sudhana a specific doctrine, knowledge and wisdom. These meetings are shown in the third gallery.

After the last meeting with Manjusri, Sudhana went to the residence of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, depicted in the fourth gallery. The entire series of the fourth gallery is devoted to the teaching of Samantabhadra. The narrative panels finally end with Sudhana's achievement of the Supreme Knowledge and the Ultimate Truth.

The first twenty lower panels in the first gallery on the wall depict the *Sudhanakumaravadana*, or the saintly deeds of Sudhana. The first 135 upper panels in the same gallery on the balustrades are devoted to the 34 legends of the *Jatakamala*. The remaining 237 panels depict stories from other sources, as do the lower series and panels in the second gallery. Some jatakas are depicted twice, for example the story of King Sibhi (Rama's forefather).

## 5. Buddha Status and Six Mudras



Besides decorated with beautiful reliefs, Borobudur Temple also has 504 statues of Buddha sitting all of which are carved on a round stone sabongkah. All the statues illustrating the Dhyani Buddha or meditating Buddhist are spread to different levels, from the lower to the top, Rupadhatu and Arupadhatu.

The Buddha Dhyani is different from the Buddha in history. They are not enlightened earthly beings, but they are transcendental savers who sit on their lotuses in eternal reverence, peace, and meditation with half-closed eyes.

The most striking feature of this Buddha is his simplicity. He is illustrated with a Buddha dressed in a monk's suit in a suit with folds that fall down or almost tightly covering the body like "wet clothes". His cloak showed only his wrists, neck, and ankles. Another physical feature is a point on his forehead, right between his eyebrows. This simplicity in Buddhist portrayal is a combination of loyalty and tenderness that produces the beauty of this statue.

Although there are similarities between them, each statue has its own personality. And in addition to his obvious personality, each statue reveals the same thing.

Sculptures at the box level are placed in a niche equipped with various ornaments. The statue is arranged in the line at the top of the outer side of the ledge. Because the higher the level has the smaller the size, the first ledge has space for 104 niches, the second is also 104 niches, the third 88 niches, the fourth 72 niches, and the fifth 64 niches. So there are 432 niches in the Rupadhatu section. Statues that are in the level of a circle placed in a hollow stupa arranged in three levels of concentric circles. The first level of the circle has 32 stupas, the second has 24 stupas, and the third has 16 stupas. Thus, there are 72 stupas which correspond to the Javanese tradition which says "72 guarded principles in a cage" in Borobudur.

Research shows significant position differences at the hands of Buddha statues in Borobudur. The left hand of the Buddha statue is generally placed in the lap with the palm facing upward, while the right-hand shows a certain gesture (mudra) associated with certain historical events of the Buddha's life.



*A Buddha statue with the hand position of dharmachakra mudra*

The Buddhas of the first 4 balustrades have different mudras, each of which has distinctive features on each side of Borobudur. The east-facing sculpture has the same mudra, and so is the patent facing west, north, and south. The Buddha at the very top, or the fifth balustrade, has the same mudra regardless of which direction they are facing. It is also the same as 72 Buddhist at the level of the circle, they all show the same hand position but are different from the mudra at the lower levels.

Of the original 504 Buddha statues, over 300 are damaged (mostly headless), and 43 are missing. Since the monument's discovery, heads have been acquired as collector's items, mostly by Western museums. Some of these Buddha heads are now displayed in numbers of museums, such as the Trope museum in Amsterdam and The British Museum in London.

There are six mudras in the statue in Borobudur. The six mudras include **Bhumisparcamudra** (calling the earth to witness), **Abhayamudra** (frightening the fear), **Varamudra** (charity), **Vitarkamudra** (gesture of judgment), and **Dharmacakramudra** (law wheel movement).



Head from a Borobudur Buddha statue in Trope Museum, Amsterdam.



Headless Buddha statue in Borobudur, since its discovery numbers of Buddha's head has been stolen and ended up in museums abroad.



Lion gate guardian

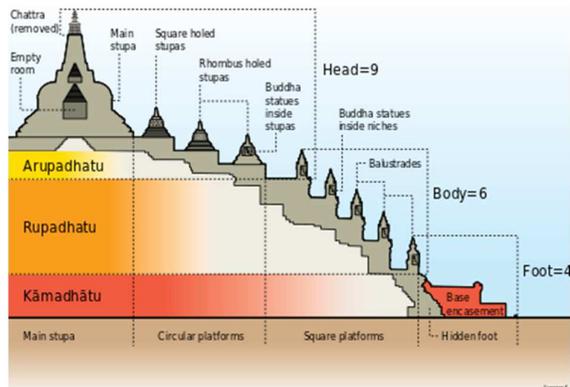
At first glance, all the Buddha statues appear similar, but there is a subtle difference between them in the *mudras*, or the position of the hands. **There are five groups of *mudra*: North, East, South, West and Zenith, which represent the five cardinal compass points according to Mahayana. The first four balustrades have the first four *mudras*: North, East, South and West, of which the Buddha statues that face one compass direction have the corresponding *mudra*. Buddha statues at the fifth balustrades and inside the 72 stupas on the top platform have the same *mudra*: Zenith. Each *mudra* represents one of the Five Dhyani Buddhas; each has its own symbolism.**

Following the order of *Pradakshina* (clockwise circumambulation) starting from the East, the *Mudras* of the Borobudur Buddha statues are:

Statue	Mudra	Symbolic meaning	Dhyani Buddha	Cardinal Point	Location of the Statue
	<i>Bhumisparsha Mudra</i>	Calling the Earth to witness	Aksobhya	East	<i>Rupadhatu</i> niches on the first four eastern balustrades
	<i>Vara Mudra</i>	Benevolence, alms giving	Ratnasambhava	South	<i>Rupadhatu</i> niches on the first four southern balustrades
	<i>Dhyana Mudra</i>	Concentration and meditation	Amitabha	West	<i>Rupadhatu</i> niches on the first four western balustrades
	<i>Abhaya Mudra</i>	Courage, fearlessness	Amoghasiddhi	North	<i>Rupadhatu</i> niches on the first four northern balustrades
	<i>Vitarka Mudra</i>	Reasoning and virtue	Vairochana	Zenith	<i>Rupadhatu</i> niches in all directions on the fifth (uppermost) balustrade
	<i>Dharmachakra Mudra</i>	Turning the Wheel of <i>dharma</i> (law)	Vairochana	Zenith	<i>Arupadhatu</i> in 72 perforated stupas on three rounded platforms

## 6. Building Structure

Borobudur Cross Section and Building Ratio  
Borobudur, Central Java, Indonesia



Half cross-section with 4:6:9 height ratio for foot, body and head, respectively

Approximately **55,000 cubic metres** (72,000 cu yd) of andesite stones were taken from neighboring stone quarries to build the monument. The stone was cut to size, transported to the site and laid without mortar. Knobs, indentations and dovetails were used to form joints between stones. The roof of stupas, niches and arched gateways were constructed in corbelling method. Reliefs were created *in situ* after the building had been completed.

The monument is equipped with a good drainage system to cater to the area's high storm water run-off. To prevent flooding, 100 spouts are installed at each corner, each with a unique carved gargoyle in the shape of a giant or makara.



Stairs of Borobudur through arches of Kala



*A narrow corridor with reliefs on the wall*

Borobudur differs markedly from the general design of other structures built for this purpose. Instead of being built on a flat surface, Borobudur is built on a natural hill. However, construction technique is similar to other temples in Java. Without the inner spaces seen in other temples, and with a general design similar to the shape of pyramid, Borobudur was first thought more likely to have served as a *stupa*, instead of a temple. A *stupa* is intended as a shrine for the Buddha. Sometimes stupas were built only as devotional symbols of Buddhism. A temple, on the other hand, is used as a house of worship. The meticulous complexity of the monument's design suggests that Borobudur is in fact a temple.

Little is known about Gunadharm<sup>5</sup>, the architect of the complex. His name is recounted from Javanese folk tales rather than from written inscriptions.

The basic unit of measurement used during construction was the *tala*, defined as the length of a human face from the forehead's hairline to the tip of the chin or the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the middle finger when both fingers are stretched at their maximum distance. The unit is thus relative from one individual to the next, but the monument has exact measurements. A survey conducted in 1977 revealed frequent findings of a ratio of 4:6:9 around the monument. The architect had used the formula to lay out the precise dimensions of the fractal and self-similar geometry in Borobudur's design. This ratio is also found in the designs of Pawon and Mendut, nearby Buddhist temples. Archeologists have conjectured that the 4:6:9 ratio and the *tala* have calendrical, astronomical and cosmological significance, as is the case with the temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

The main structure can be divided into three components: base, body, and top. The base is 123 m × 123 m (404 ft × 404 ft) in size with 4 metres (13 ft) walls. The body is composed of five square platforms, each of diminishing height. The first terrace is set back 7 metres (23 ft) from the edge of the base. Each subsequent terrace is set back 2 metres (6.6 ft), leaving a narrow corridor at each stage. The top consists of three circular platforms, with each stage supporting a row of perforated stupas, arranged in concentric circles. There is

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<sup>5</sup> Gunadharm<sup>a</sup> or Gunadarm<sup>a</sup> is claimed as the name of the architect of Borobudur, the ninth-century Buddhist monument in Central Java, Indonesia.

one main dome at the center, the top of which is the highest point of the monument, 35 metres (115 ft) above ground level. Stairways at the center of each of the four sides give access to the top, with a number of arched gates overlooked by 32 lion statues. The gates are adorned with Kala's head carved on top of each and Makaras projecting from each side. This Kala-Makara motif is commonly found on the gates of Javanese temples. The main entrance is on the eastern side, the location of the first narrative reliefs. Stairways on the slopes of the hill also link the monument to the low-lying plain.

## 7. History

### 7a. Abandonment



Borobudur stupas overlooking a mountain. For centuries, it was deserted.

Borobudur lay hidden for centuries under layers of volcanic ash and jungle growth. The facts behind its abandonment remain a mystery. It is not known when active use of the monument and Buddhist pilgrimage to it ceased. Sometime between 928 and 1006, King Mud Sindok moved the capital of the Medang Kingdom to the region of East Java after a series of volcanic eruptions; it is not certain whether this influenced the abandonment, but several sources mention this as the most likely period of abandonment. The monument is mentioned vaguely as late as approximately 1365, in Mpu Prapanca's *Nagarakretagama*, written during the Majapahit era and mentioning "the vihara in Budur". Soekmono<sup>6</sup> (1976) also mentions the 15th century.

The monument was not forgotten completely, though folk stories gradually shifted from its past glory into more superstitious beliefs associated with bad luck and misery. Two old Javanese chronicles (*babad*) from the 18th century mention cases of bad luck associated with the monument. According to the *Babad Tanah Jawi* (or the *History of Java*), the monument was a fatal factor for Mas Dana, a rebel who revolted against Pakubuwono I, the king of Mataram in 1709. It was mentioned that the "Redi Borobudur" hill was besieged and the insurgents were defeated and sentenced to death by the king. In the *Babad Mataram* (or the *History of the Mataram Kingdom*), the monument was associated with the

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<sup>6</sup> Soekmono (14 July 1922 – 9 July 1997) was an Indonesian archaeologist and historian.

misfortune of Prince Monconagoro, the crown prince of the Yogyakarta Sultanate in 1757. In spite of a taboo against visiting the monument, "he took what is written as *the knight who was captured in a cage* (a statue in one of the perforated stupas)". Upon returning to his palace, he fell ill and died one day later.

## 7b. Construction of Borobudur

There is no written record of who built the Borobudur or of its intended purpose. The construction time has been estimated by comparison between carved reliefs on the temple's hidden foot and the inscriptions commonly used in royal charters during the 8th and 9th centuries. Borobudur was likely founded around 800 CE. This corresponds to the period between 760 and 830 CE, the peak of the Sailendra dynasty rule of Mataram kingdom in central Java, when it was under the influence of the Srivijayan Empire. The construction has been estimated to have taken 75 years and was completed during the reign of Samaratungga<sup>7</sup> in 825.

There is confusion between Hindu and Buddhist rulers in Java around that time. The Sailendras were known as ardent followers of Buddhism, though stone inscriptions found at Sojomerto suggest they may have been Hindus. It was during this time that many Hindu and Buddhist monuments were built on the plains and mountains around the Kedu Plain. The Buddhist monuments, including Borobudur, were erected around the same period as the Hindu Shiva Prambanan temple compound. In 732 CE, the Shivaite King Sanjaya commissioned a Shivalinga sanctuary to be built on the Wukir hill, only 10 km (6.2 mi) east of Borobudur.

Construction of Buddhist temples, including Borobudur, at that time was possible because Sanjaya's immediate successor, Rakai Panangkaran, granted his permission to the Buddhist followers to build such temples. In fact, to show his respect, Panangkaran gave the village of Kalasan to the Buddhist community, as is written in the Kalasan Charter dated 778 CE. This has led some archaeologists to believe that there was never serious conflict concerning religion in Java as it was possible for a Hindu king to patronize the establishment of a Buddhist monument; or for a Buddhist king to act likewise. However, it is likely that there were two rival royal dynasties in Java at the time—the Buddhist Sailendra and the Saivite Sanjaya—in which the latter triumphed over their rival in the 856 battle on the Ratubaka plateau. This confusion also exists regarding the Lara Jonggrang temple at the Prambanan complex, which was believed to have been erected by the victor Rakai Pikatan as the Sanjaya dynasty's reply to Borobudur, but others suggest that there was a climate of peaceful coexistence where Sailendra involvement exists in Lara Jonggrang.

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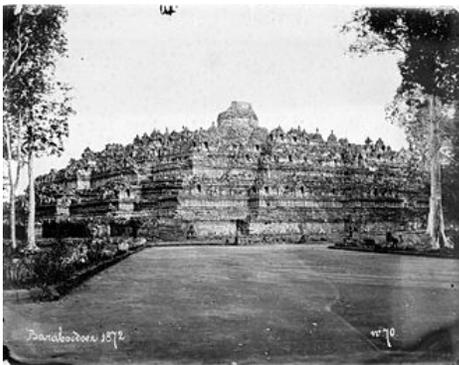
<sup>7</sup> **Samaratungga** was the head of the Sailendra dynasty who ruled Central Java and Srivijaya in the 8th and the 9th century.



*Borobudur's main stupa in mid-19th-century, a wooden deck had been installed above the main stupa.*

Following its capture, Java was under British administration from 1811 to 1816. The appointed governor was Lieutenant Governor-General Thomas Stamford Raffles, who took great interest in the history of Java. He collected Javanese antiques and made notes through contacts with local inhabitants during his tour throughout the island. On an inspection tour to Semarang in 1814, he was informed about a big monument deep in a jungle near the village of Bumisegoro. He was not able to make the discovery himself and sent H.C. Cornelius, a Dutch engineer, to investigate. In two months, Cornelius and his 200 men cut down trees, burned down vegetation and dug away the earth to reveal the monument. Due to the danger of collapse, he could not unearth all galleries. He reported his findings to Raffles, including various drawings. Although the discovery is only mentioned by a few sentences, Raffles has been credited with the monument's recovery, as one who had brought it to the world's attention.

Hartmann, a Dutch administrator of the Kedu region, continued Cornelius's work, and in 1835, the whole complex was finally unearthed. His interest in Borobudur was more personal than official. Hartmann did not write any reports of his activities, in particular, the alleged story that he discovered the large statue of Buddha in the main stupa. In 1842, Hartmann investigated the main dome, although what he discovered is unknown and the main stupa remains empty.



*Borobudur in 1872.*

The Dutch East Indies government then commissioned F.C. Wilsen, a Dutch engineering official, who studied the monument and drew hundreds of relief sketches. J.F.G. Brumund was also appointed to make a detailed study of the monument, which was completed in 1859.

### **7c. Conservation**

UNESCO identified three specific areas of concern under the present state of conservation: (i) vandalism by visitors; (ii) soil erosion in the south-eastern part of the site; and (iii) analysis and restoration of missing elements. The soft soil, the numerous earthquakes and heavy rains lead to the destabilization of the structure. Earthquakes are by far the most important contributing factors, since not only do stones fall down and arches crumble, but the earth itself can move in waves, further destroying the structure. The increasing popularity of the stupa brings in many visitors, most of whom are from Indonesia. Despite warning signs on all levels not to touch anything, the regular transmission of warnings over loudspeakers and the presence of guards, vandalism on reliefs and statues is a common occurrence and problem, leading to further deterioration. As of 2009, there is no system in place to limit the number of visitors allowed per day or to introduce mandatory guided tours only.

In August 2014, the Conservation Authority of Borobudur reported some severe abrasion of the stone stairs caused by the scraping of visitors' footwear. The conservation authority planned to install wooden stairs to cover and protect the original stone stairs, just like those installed in Angkor Wat.

## 8. Annual Events

Following the major 1973 renovation funded by UNESCO, Borobudur is once again used as a place of worship and pilgrimage. Once a year, during the full moon in May or June, Buddhists in Indonesia observe Vesak (Indonesian: *Waisak*) day commemorating the birth, death, and the time when Siddhartha Gautama attained the highest wisdom to become the Buddha Shakyamuni. Vesak is an official National holiday in Indonesia, and the ceremony is centered at the three Buddhist temples by walking from Mendut to Pawon and ending at Borobudur.



Straight-line arrangement of Borobudur, Pawon, and Mendut

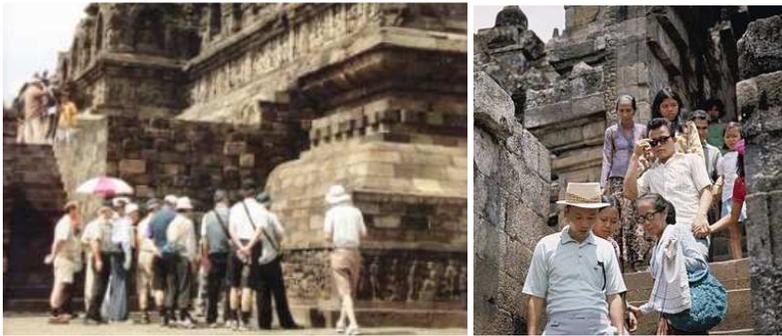


Month	Annual Events @ Borobudur	
May	Vesak Day	Celebrates the Birth, Enlightenment and Death of Buddha Siddhartha Gautama.
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sounds of Borobudur Cultural &amp; Music Camp</li> <li>Borobudur International Festival</li> </ul>	
September	Masterpieces of Borobudur: Hair Style & Fashion	
October	Borobudur Culture Festival	Celebration of Cultural Wealth of the people around Borobudur
November	Borobudur International 10K	Running Event
December	Borobudur Night	Celebrate New Year Eve with Music Performances and Lighting Lanterns

## 9. Tourism

The monument is the single most visited tourist attraction in Indonesia. In 1974, 260,000 tourists, of whom 36,000 were foreigners, visited the monument. The figure climbed to 2.5 million visitors annually (80% were domestic tourists) in the mid-1990s, before the country's economic crisis. Tourism development, however, has been criticized for not including the local community, giving rise to occasional conflicts. In 2003, residents and small businesses around Borobudur organized several meetings and poetry protests, objecting to a provincial government plan to build a three-storey mall complex, dubbed the "Java World".

International tourism awards were given to Borobudur archaeological park, such as PATA Grand Pacific Award 2004, PATA Gold Award Winner 2011, and PATA Gold Award Winner 2012. In June 2012, Borobudur was recorded in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the world's largest Buddhist archaeological site.



### 9a. Visitor Overload Problem

The high volume of visitors ascending the Borobudur's narrow stairs, has caused a severe wear out on the stone of the stairs, eroding the stones surface and made them thinner and smoother. Overall, Borobudur has 2,033 surfaces of stone stairs, spread over four cardinal directions; including the west side, the east, south and north. There are around 1,028 surfaces of them, or about 49.15 percent are severely worn out.

To avoid further wear of stairs' stones, since November 2014, two main sections of Borobudur stairs — the eastern (ascending route) and northern (descending route) sides — are covered with wooden structures. The similar technique has been applied in Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Egyptian Pyramids. In March 2015, Borobudur Conservation Center proposed further to seal the stairs with rubber cover. Proposals have also been made that visitors be issued special sandals.

## 10. Security Threats

On 21 January 1985, nine stupas were badly damaged by nine bombs. In 1991, a blind Muslim preacher, Hussein Ali Al Habsyie, was sentenced to life imprisonment for masterminding a series of bombings in the mid-1980s, including the temple attack. Two other members of the Islamic extremist group that carried out the bombings were each sentenced to 20 years in 1986, and another man received a 13-year prison term.

On 27 May 2006, an earthquake of 6.2 magnitude struck the south coast of Central Java. The event caused severe damage around the region and casualties to the nearby city of Yogyakarta, but Borobudur remained intact.

In August 2014, Indonesian police and security forces tightened the security in and around Borobudur temple compound, as a precaution to a threat posted on social media by a self-proclaimed Indonesian branch of ISIS, citing that the terrorists planned to destroy Borobudur and other statues in Indonesia. The security improvements included the repair and increased deployment of CCTV monitors and the implementation of a night patrol in and around the temple compound. The jihadist group follows a strict interpretation of Islam that condemns any anthropomorphic representations such as sculptures as idolatry.

## 11. Legacy

The aesthetic and technical mastery of Borobudur, and also its sheer size, has evoked the sense of grandeur and pride for Indonesians. Just like Angkor Wat for Cambodian, Borobudur has become a powerful symbol for Indonesia — to testify for its past greatness. Sukarno made a point of showing the site to foreign dignitaries. The Suharto regime — realized its important symbolic and economic meanings — diligently embarked on a massive project to restore the monument with the help from UNESCO. Many museums in Indonesia contain a scale model replica of Borobudur. The monument has become almost an icon, grouped with the wayang puppet play and gamelan music into a vague classical Javanese past from which Indonesians are to draw inspiration.



*Emblem of Central Java displaying Borobudur.*

Several archaeological relics taken from Borobudur or its replica have been displayed in some museums in Indonesia and abroad. Other than Karmawibhanga Museum within Borobudur temple ground, some museums boast to host relics of Borobudur, such as Indonesian National Museum in Jakarta, Tropen Museum in Amsterdam, British Museum in London, and Thai National Museum in Bangkok. Louvre museum in Paris, Malaysian

National Museum in Kuala Lumpur, and Museum of World Religions in Taipei also displayed the replica of Borobudur. The monument has drawn global attention to the classical Buddhist civilization of ancient Java.

The rediscovery and reconstruction of Borobudur has been hailed by Indonesian Buddhist as the sign of the Buddhist revival in Indonesia. In 1934, Narada Thera, a missionary monk from Sri Lanka, visited Indonesia for the first time as part of his journey to spread the Dharma in Southeast Asia. This opportunity was used by a few local Buddhists to revive Buddhism in Indonesia. A Bodhi tree planting ceremony was held in Southeastern side of Borobudur on 10 March 1934 under the blessing of Narada Thera, and some Upasakas were ordained as monks. Once a year, thousands of Buddhist from Indonesia and neighboring countries flock to Borobudur to commemorate National Vesak ceremony.

The emblem of Central Java province and Magelang Regency bears the image of Borobudur. It has become the symbol of Central Java, and also Indonesia on a wider scale. Borobudur has become the name of several establishments, such as Borobudur University, Borobudur Hotel in Central Jakarta, and several Indonesian restaurants abroad. Borobudur has been featured in Rupiah banknote, stamps, and numbers of books, publications, documentaries and Indonesian tourism promotion materials. The monument has become one of the main tourism attraction in Indonesia, vital for generating local economy in the region surrounding the temple. The tourism sector of the city of Yogyakarta for example, flourish partly because of its proximity to Borobudur and Prambanan temples.

- End of Assignment -

**Source:**

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borobudur>
2. <http://borobudurpark.com/en/buddhist-teachings-reliefs-foot-borobudur-temple>
3. <http://masterpieces.asemus.museum/borobudur/map-home.html> (The hidden base of Borobudur – Interactive map)