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The iconography of Borobudur revisited
The concepts of śleṣa and sarva[duḥṣa]kāya

Introduction

The complex iconography of Borobudur has attracted scholars from the time of the first discovery of the monument to the present day. Yet, in spite of so much attention, Borobudur remains one of the most controversial monuments in the Buddhist world. Its stunning architectural conception and aesthetic beauty have elicited comment from many authors, ranging from the Buddhologically erudite Paul Mus (1935) and Alex Wayman (1981) to, unfortunately, the Buddhologically ignorant and romantic fantasizers who shall go nameless. Many authors, most of them serious scholars falling between the two extremes and often with either a speculative, or, in a few cases, mystical persuasion, have contributed significant observations but, by carrying their arguments and assumptions too far, have also clouded the issues. In spite of several attempts, none of these scholars, in my opinion, has actually solved the great riddle of the overall significance of Borobudur.¹

In contrast to the study of major monuments in India, the Himalayan areas, and East Asia, the study of the Borobudur stūpa is at a disadvantage. In spite of the identification of the scenes in the galleries around the lower terraces according to either known texts (or to text families), the primary text (or text family) for Borobudur has not been incontrovertibly established. In many other areas of Asia, however, the texts for monuments are well established; for

¹ There have been many authors who have attempted to understand the complex symbolism of Borobudur. The majority of these authors are either not trained as Buddhologists or if they are, they have had little background in art historical and iconographical techniques. It is therefore my general observation that either the Buddhological side or the art historical/iconographic side has been slighted in most studies. However, it is neither my intention in this brief article to present a review of the literature on the subject nor is it purposeful to criticize or call into question the work of others. It is obvious from the simple act of preparing this article that I believe that there are problems that were yet to be solved. For those interested in a thoughtfully annotated bibliography citing all major works on Borobudur iconography, see the recent publication by Soekmono, De Casparis, and Dumarçay (1990).
example, the 6th-century cave temples at Aurangabad in India were clearly inspired by the Mahāvairocanasūtra (Huntington 1981), the 11th-century wall paintings in the gSum brtsegs and 'Du Khang temples at Alchi in Ladakh are a detailed rendition of the maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatiparipāśodhanatantra, and both the 8th-century Daibutsu-den of the Todai-ji in Nara, Japan, and the famous Vairocana Cave 19 at Longmen in China are known by epigraphic evidence to have been the Avatamsakasūtra inspired. Further, because these sects are still active in Japan, one can even study in precise physical and textual detail the teachings of the Shingon and Tendai sects and thereby achieve a detailed iconographic understanding of works of art and temples associated with those sects.

In Java, however, there is scant literature (literally none physically extant from the period), disagreement as to the probable primary textual source for the Borobudur stūpa, and a lack of meaningful inscriptive evidence on the monument itself. Thus, the imagery of the monument is the only direct evidence available for its decipherment. Fortunately, however, indirect evidence is available through cross cultural analysis throughout the Buddhist world. During the past ten years there has been a virtual explosion of knowledge about Buddhist practice and iconographic methodologies for most areas of Asia, especially the Chinese, Tibetan, and Japanese esoteric traditions. These are no longer the 'mystery cults' that they once appeared to be: the soteriological methodologies of the Shingon sect in Japan, the dGe-lugs-pa, the bKa' rgyud and rNying-ma-pa in Tibet and, to a lesser degree, certain studies of monuments and literary sources in India proper, have given us new, even if complicated, insights. Knowledge of these materials and sites can provide a background for a comparative analysis of the Borobudur stūpa and, while we cannot go into the detail that is possible for Himalayan and East Asian Buddhist iconographics, it is still possible to suggest both a retrenchment from 'over-interpretations' and a new hypothesis regarding the symbology and original intent of the monument. Specifically, it will be suggested that the Borobudur stūpa is primarily based on the 'Vairocana family' of texts and that the monument's primary symbolism is that of Śākyamuni as identical with Vairocana in the dharmadhātu.

Most Buddhologically concerned authors, such as Mus (1935), J.L. Moens (1951), Wayman (1981), J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1965), R. Soekmono (1980), J.G. de Casparis (1981) and most recently, J.J. Boeles (1985), have used complex constructions and have culled their ideas and presumed textual

2 The inscriptions on the lower (covered) level of the galleries (Krom 1927, I:49-60) contain identifications of figures and objects, but are not attributable to any specific text either for the series of scenes or for the monument as a whole.
'sources' from a large variety of texts and Buddhological evidence to explain, sometimes in great detail, the monument. Unfortunately, each of these attempts, particularly those that go beyond the direct evidence of the monument itself, has had its shortcomings. In some cases, such as the arguments insisting on the association of the monument with the Saddharma-puṇḍarīkasūtra (Boeles 1985), the Laṅkāvatārasūtra (Moen 1951), and the like, there is such an obvious lack of direct correspondence between the text(s) and the monument that these theories need not even be given serious consideration.

A complete review and re-evaluation of every theory regarding the meaning of Borobudur is vastly beyond the scope of this article. What I propose to do here is examine the monument itself as the principal document and then, based on the communication that it manifests, identify the textual sources. Following this process, we will be able to identify one text, the Avatāmaśakasūtra or Buddhavatamāsaka, and one classification of texts, those of the Mahāvairocan cycle of Tantras, as the primary bases for the monument. Further, using that body of literature, we will be able to complete the iconographic scheme of the monument.

Methodologically, I will attempt to apply the well-established 'principle of parsimony' to hermeneutical studies. The concept is used widely in the scientific community and, while it does not by itself lead one to correct answers or provide structural methodologies, it offers a guide through sometimes bewildering mazes of theories towards those that are most likely to be true. Simply stated, the principle of parsimony requires the use of the least complex explanation for the phenomenon observed. Applied to Borobudur, it dictates that one examine the monument for what is actually there.

However, before analyzing Borobudur, one apparently widespread and fundamental misconception in the understanding of Vairocan iconography must be clarified: that is the notion that Vairocan Buddha and Śākyamuni Buddha are distinct and separate identities. This particular misconception is so entrenched in art historical scholarship about Buddhist objects that a recent major book on the so-called 'cosmological Buddha' by Angela Falco Howard is rooted in this misconception and, therefore, one of the major points of discussion in this otherwise excellent book is moot (Howard 1986). Simply stated, in the Mahāyāna context, Vairocan Buddha and Śākyamuni Buddha are not separate Buddhas but are always an identity even when they are, for didactic and/or grammatical purposes, discussed independently. In Vairocana

3 The Mahāvairocanasūtra, the Vajraśekhara, the Sarvatahāgatatattvasamgrahasūtra and the Sarvadurgatipariprśodhanatantra are the major texts of the tradition.
cycle Buddhism, Vairocana represents an eternal continuum, usually known as the *sambhogakāya* ('bliss body') but occasionally, for instance in the Japanese Tendai, as the *dharma-kāya* ('body of the law'). Śākyamuni is this epoch's transformation of the *dharma-kāya* into corporeal existence and is called either the *rūpakoṭaya* ('form body') or the *nirmāṇakoṭaya* ('transformation body'). The identity of Śākyamuni and Vairocana is literally always true and is apparently pan-(Mahayana)-Buddhist; I know of no exceptions. This point will become significant in the following discussion.

**The iconography of Borobudur**

To return to Borobudur, it must first be understood that the Borobudur *stūpa* is a multivalent monument. This is not surprising since Mahayana Buddhist literature is deeply rooted in Sanskrit grammar, and one of the twelve limbs of composition in Sanskrit is *ślesa* or double meaning. This concept is so well known that it need not be discussed here except to note that it is implicit that Buddhist literature commonly may be read at completely different levels and that Buddhist art is often similarly structured. Indeed, there may be as many as three or more levels of interpretation possible in literature and, in the art, an equal number are expected and even more are possible. Multivalency is the norm, not the exception, and, in major monuments such as Borobudur, it is to be expected throughout.

Even though Borobudur as a multivalent monument has numerous meanings, it also has one overriding meaning: it is a demonstration of the absolute universality of the *buddhadharma* as defined in the *Avatamsakasūtra*. But it also has a number of other meanings. Most obviously, it is specifically Mount Meru and all Mount Merus in the Buddhist cosmological model. Secondly, around the galleries of the lower five terraces, as has been shown in detail by Krom (1927), it is the *nirmāṇakoṭaya jātaka* (former births) and life of Śākyamuni Buddha, the pilgrimage of Sudhana and the environments of the Bodhisattvas, Maitreya and Samantabhadra, and all such Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who will, by definition, live identical lives in the infinite *buddhaloka* throughout the universe. Further, as we shall see in the following, the fifth terrace is also a manifestation of the Akanistha heaven(s), highest of the *rūpācācara* heavens to which Śākyamuni retired to preach the Mahāvairocanasūtra immediately after his enlightenment. The whole monument, as will be seen, is also a generalized

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4 This is not to be confused with the well-known Ādi Buddha concept as found in the 'Aksobhya cycle Buddhism' but is a separate and distinct structure found only in the Tantras that emphasize some form of Vairocana as the 'universal'.
mandala of the Mahavairocana text cycles, probably the combined Mahakarunagarbhadihuta and the Vajradhata, through which the practitioner may seek enlightenment in the here and now. Ultimately, the whole monument is also the dharmadhata (the dharma realm), the absolute, unseeable state of existence – unknowable except by direct experience – and the expression of Sakyamuni’s identity with it. Lastly, at the mundane level, whether a relic is present or not, like all stupa, the Borobudur stupa is a reliquary of the corporeal existence of Sakyamuni Buddha and a physical reminder of his existence in this, the impure saha world. As we shall see, it is not coincidental that this would seem a cycle of progression from the mundane to the transcendent and an abrupt return to the mundane. Such is the nature of enlightenment.

As a demonstration of Mount Meru(s), the monument rises in a series of terraces. Early counts of nine levels apparently neglected the stupa at the summit, which constitutes a tenth structural level and which, Buddhologically, is the culmination of fruition stage – literally the most important of all the stages and therefore is absolutely necessary to include in any count. It is even conceivable that the monument must be viewed as having eleven stages since the ground upon which the monument rests is also counted in some Buddhological systems. For the purposes of this article, the ‘levels’ will be counted from the lowest structural level, while, to avoid confusion, the ‘terraces’ and ‘galleries’ will follow Krom’s enumeration (see fig. 1). Probably, but unprovably, the ten stages represented the dasabhumi or the eleven stages represented the dasabhumi plus the final realization stage (as defined in the Avatamsakasutra) demonstrated by the stupa at the summit.

By any known definition of the Mount Meru iconology, the lowest stages are the mundane worlds typified by Jambudvipa and Uttarakuru. At the peak of Mount Meru is, conceptually, the primordial three-footed spiral from which all movement arises. Seated exactly in this location, the yogin rises through the

5 The association of the Avatamsakasutra with the monument would virtually dictate that these be the dasabhumi (‘ten stages [of enlightenment]’) of the Daśabhumiṣṭhita portion of the Avatamsakasutra. However, the definition of the bhumi (stages of attainment) as given in the sutra do not give any precise correlation to the elements of the various stages of the monument. This is probably due to the multivalency of the monument and the simple fact of the existence of the ten levels is probably enough for the identification. Since, by the time Borobudur was created, virtually all stupa were (and for that matter still are) visual descriptions of soteriological methodologies as well as commemorative and reliquary monuments, the whole point is somewhat moot. The question is not ‘if’ but ‘how’ are the steps of progression to enlightenment described. The whole point of the stages of enlightenment is an ancillary issue to the main theme of this article. It must be noted that there are permutations of the dasabhumi that go beyond the ten stages. There is a system of eleven in association with the eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara and a system of thirteen found in late Gandhāran, Kashmiri, Nepali, and Tibetan iconography.
heavens to the transcendent realms. This point is best understood as a shaft much like a pillar of infinite length, the all-pervading dharmadhatu.

The lower levels of the monument are exactly what they seem and as they have been understood for the past several decades. Indeed, N.J. Krom, writing in the first quarter of this century, made remarkable insights into the iconography of the monument by studying the lower levels in detail and his descriptive analysis and iconography need little in the way of revision (Krom 1927). The imagery of the lowest level (160 reliefs covered at an early date by an added basement), is based on the Karmavibhaṅga or some other version of the so-called 'Sūtra of cause and effect' as Krom has shown. The reliefs in his 'first gallery' refer to the life of Śākyamuni, either according to the Lalitavistara or another, closely related, text and some version of the Jātaka or Jātakamāla. The reliefs in his 'second gallery' depict the pilgrimage of the youth Sudhana which is from the Gaṇḍavyūha portion of the Avatāṃsakasūtra. His 'third and fourth galleries' contain reliefs depicting the realms of Maitreya and Samantabhadra also from the Avatāṃsakasūtra. For the time at which Krom was writing, I cannot imagine how he could have gone further or accomplished more. Yet, in spite of their value, Krom's description of the scenes from the 'Sūtra of cause and effect', from the life of Śākyamuni, of the Gaṇḍavyūha pilgrimage and the realms of Maitreya and Samantabhadra as found on the lower levels of the monument, do not describe the primary message of the stūpa as a demonstration of the absolute universality of the buddhadharma. The realms his work describes are simply the mundane realms of every world system in which a Buddha may appear.

In order to understand the whole of Borobudur, the Buddhas of the terraces and the circular galleries above the terraces are of paramount concern. Citing Wilhelm von Humboldt's original insights regarding the worship of the Dhyāna Buddhas (more properly called the Jina or 'victor' rather than Dhyāna) in Java, Krom has correctly identified the Buddhas in the niches of the lower four terraces as the four directional Buddhas of the Vairocana cycle maṇḍala (Krom 1927, II:144-5). Modern scholarship would add that they are also manifestations of the saṃbhoga-kāya of Śākyamuni and all other transformation or nirmāṇa-kāya Buddhas.

In spite of the general agreement about the identity of the Jinas in the terraces, it is important to point out that these Buddhas apparently never occur in multiples in other known circumstances. As far as I am aware, the maṇḍala in both literature and art that contain them only have one of each. Therefore, strictly speaking, these Buddhas are not the four Jinas, that is: the usual
Akṣobhya (probably better known as Ratnaketu)⁶, making his usual bhūmi-sparśamudrā, in the east; Ratnasambhava (probably better known as Śaṃkusumitarāja), making varadamudrā, in the south; Amitābha, in dhyānamudrā, to the west; and Amoghasiddhi (probably better known as Divyadundubhimghanirghoṣa), displaying abhayamudrā, in the north. To be more precise, there are Akṣobhyas, Ratnasambhavas, Amitābhas, and Amoghasiddhis, 92 of each of them (Krom 1927, II:149).

In the 64 niches of the fifth terrace, there are images of a Buddha making a very low-position vitarkamudrā, a gesture of teaching that is often described as a ‘gesture of discourse’. On the circular terraces of the upper portion of the stūpa are 72 small, latticed, ‘see-through' stūpa, the openwork design of which allows the devotee to partially view the image sequestered in the interior. Each stūpa contains (or contained) an image of a Buddha displaying the dharma-cakra-mudrā. Because this version is primarily known from Javanese art, it should probably be called the 'Javanese variant' of the dharma-cakra-mudrā (fig. 2). In general this mudrā, regardless of the variant type, is considered to be the principal teaching gesture in Buddhist iconographies. And, finally, in the chamber of the great central stūpa there is the famous unfinished image of a Buddha in bhūmi-sparśamudrā.

Given his identification of the Jina Buddhas from the Mahāvairocanamanda on the lower terraces, Krom identified the Buddhas displaying vitarkamudrā on the fifth terrace as Vairocana (Krom 1927, II:152), which, as we shall see, is only partly off. Further, he identified the Buddhas in the 'see through' stūpa as Vajrasattva (Krom 1927, II:155-8). Although for Krom's time it was a very good guess, his latter identification is virtually impossible since Vajrasattva never appears as a Buddha. Throughout the Buddhist world, he is almost invariably depicted as a Bodhisattva-like figure (on occasion as a

⁶ I doubt if Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, and Amoghasiddhi are actually the appropriate names for the Buddhas of the east, south and north. In the Mahāvairocana-sūtra, the names of the Buddhas are Ratnaketu (=Akṣobhya), Śaṃkusumitarāja (=Ratnasambhava), Amitābha, and Divyadundubhimghanirghoṣa (=Amoghasiddhi), while in the Sarvatahāgata-tattvasamgraha, the Buddha of the west is named Lokeśvararāja (=Amitābha). Given the clear primacy of the Mahāvairocana-sūtra in the Vairocana cycle context, and the tendency in the Buddhist world to generalize maṇḍala in the simplest (usually early) form, the names in the Mahāvairocana-sūtra would seem the most appropriate. The Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, and Amoghasiddhi names as given have become a modern scholarly convention (also adopted in some Japanese Buddhist circles) based on the list of the Jina Buddhas from the Guhyasamājatantra/Akṣobhya cycles found in the eastern Indian, Nepali, and Tibetan traditions first published by Brian Hodgson. Interestingly, it is from Hodgson that Wilhelm von Humboldt’s identifications actually derive. Without inscriptions, we cannot be sure of the names of any of the Buddhas at Borobudur and my identifications simply follow scholarly convention for the morphological iconographies involved.
Bodhisattva, for example in Japanese Shingon) with the *vajra* held in the right hand in front of the chest and the *ghanta* silenced against the left thigh. In some sectarian contexts (primarily surviving in 12th through 14th-century Tibetan art), but only rarely, he is depicted with his inherent female counterpart (*prajna*). Identical iconographies (without the *prajna*) are standard in Java and other parts of Southeast Asia. Vajrasattva is, by definition, the practitioner himself, who must generate the *manjala* that he is to meditate upon. The *manjala* appears in a complex array as the Mount Meru headdress of Vajrasattva on which the Buddhas and sometimes Buddhaprajnas of the Paicajina cycle appear as ornaments. By definition, Vajrasattva is inherently at the base of the *manjala* and is the underlying substructure above which the *manjala* appears. In short, Vajrasattva is probably conceptually present at Borobudur but, because Mount Meru is, by definition, his hair arrangement, he would have to be *under* the very centre of it. On these grounds alone I think we must retreat from the identification of the *dharmacakramudra* Buddha as Vajrasattva.

Before the identification of the *vitarkamudra* Buddha and the 'unfinished' Buddha can be made, it is necessary to determine the identity of the *dharmacakramudra* Buddhas in the 'see through' *stupa* on the three circular terraces.

Given the presence of the four Jinas of the terraces and the fact that they refer to a very specific and conservative tradition in which the central Buddha can only be Vairocana, it must be argued that the 72 *dharmacakramudra* Buddhas of the upper circular terraces are Vairocana. Since each of the four Jinas occurs in multiples, it follows that there should be multiples of the fifth Jina, the central figure of the *manjala*. Although the Buddha displaying *vitarkamudra* on the fifth terrace also occurs in multiples, two factors mitigate against these Buddhas being the central images of the *manjala*. First, they are simply not near enough to the centre of the *manjala* to suggest this role and, second, Vairocana does not appear displaying the *vitarkamudra* anywhere else in Asia. Thus, it is unlikely that these Buddhas are depictions of Vairocana, and, from the point of view of the completion of the *manjala*, the *dharmacakramudra* displaying Buddhas of the upper three terraces are the only logical choice for the necessary Vairocana image. Further, because of the associations of the Borobudur *stupa* with the Avatamsakasutra, it also seems that Vairocana should play an important role in the iconographic programme of the *stupa*.

In Buddhist iconographies throughout Asia, various forms of Buddhas displaying *dharmacakramudra* are associated with Vairocana. At Dunhuang for example, in representations of Vairocana in the nine assemblies of the Avatamsaka-sutra, he is invariably shown in the *dharmacakramudra*. Accordingly, I would have to argue that it is very likely that the 72 *dharmacakramudra*
displaying Buddhas of the upper three terraces are the Vairocanas, primarily of the Pañcajina maṇḍala from the Vairocana cycle Tantras.

Many others before me have made the same statement, and it is only to establish the overall pattern of the iconography that I emphasize it. Vairocana in the Avatāṃsakasūtra is the unknowable, transcendent Buddha-nature that pervades the universe. In the Vairocana maṇḍala of the Mahāvairocanasūtra and the Sarvatathāgatattvatvasamgraha, Vairocana is the progenitor of the maṇḍala. As such, he is thereby what is known in Japan as the Sho or Arya of the whole. Regardless of any numerical significance, such as that which Wayman supposes (Wayman 1981:157-60), there are 72 Vairocanas on the three terraces of the stūpa. There are, therefore, essentially 72 maṇḍalas of Vairocana.

In maṇḍala practice in general, the central deity of the maṇḍala can serve as a reminder of the whole as he (or she) is considered the progenitor of the whole; there are numerous examples all over the Buddhist world of a single image serving as the substitute for the full maṇḍala. Thus, when there are five deities present from the cycle, there can be no doubt that the maṇḍala was actually intended. Given the five Buddhas of the maṇḍala of the Mahāvairocana cycles, in spite of their multiplicity, it is self-evident that the primary cycle of deities from those texts, with all of their implications, was assumed by the designer (I prefer to call him the 'iconographic authority') of the Borobudur stūpa.

By definition, Vairocana is the subtle body, unseeable and unknowable except through direct experience, and Śakyamuni is, even in the heavenly, 'Vairocana-robbed' body in which he taught the Mahāvairocanasūtra, seeable and knowable by direct visualization. It may be suggested that the 'unseeable, unknowable-except-by-direct-experience' nature of Vairocana is the reason for the 'see through' stūpa. What could be a better way to express this dual aspect of Vairocana/Śakyamuni than by the 'see through' stūpa? Half-seen, half-unseen, the stūpa guard their hidden message well, but not too well, a truly inspired stroke of genius by the architect of the Borobudur stūpa.

From what is already established, there can be only two text groups definitively associated with the Borobudur stūpa: one, the Avatāṃsakasūtra, especially the Gaṇḍavyūtha portion, and an uncertain text or texts from the Mahāvairocana cycles. Initially, one presumes a primary knowledge of the Mahāvairocanasūtra itself, but other texts such as the Vajraśekhara, the Sarvatathāgatattvatvasamgraha, or the Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra, are also possible. Whatever the case, the iconography is clearly neither of the Aksobhya cycle texts, one of the Heruka cycle texts, or the so-called 'action Tantras', the

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For example, the single image of Vairocana as the ekamudrā maṇḍala of the Sarvatathāgatattvatvasamgraha in Shingon practice (compare Tajima 1936).
only possible alternatives to the Mahāvairocana cycle in Tantric Buddhist literature.

Before we progress further, there is one additional point to interject. A broad overview of the corpus of Javanese inscriptions reveals something very interesting: all of the Buddhist inscriptions are in Sanskrit, frequently quite good Sanskrit, while those concerning legal and secular matters and the like are in Old Javanese. This reveals something very specific about the individuals behind the making of the great Śailendra Buddhist monuments — they were fully trained in Sanskrit, presumably for the purpose of learning about the Sanskrit basis of Buddhism. Accordingly, I think it is perfectly appropriate to employ Sanskrit texts that were current at the time to analyse the monuments of the 9th-century Śailendra Java.

With the foregoing in mind, the Buddha of the fifth terrace suddenly makes perfect sense. As is well known, there is somewhat of a competition for primacy of teaching among certain classes of Buddhist literature, and, for example, there is a tradition in the sūtra itself that the Avatāṃsaka was taught by Śākyamuni immediately after the enlightenment while still under the Pipal tree. The beginning of the sūtra reads:

'Thus I have heard, At one time the Buddha was in the land of Magadha, in a state of purity, at the site of the enlightenment, having just realized true awareness' (Cleary 1984:55.)

Such openings to sūtra set the stage for the teaching that is to come and, in this case, provide the primacy over the usual 'first sermon' (the dharmacakrapravartana, 'setting the wheel of the Law in motion') at the Mrgadāva or Deer Park. So, too, it is for the Vairocana mandala texts, where, in the Chinese tradition, Śākyamuni/Vairocana resides in the vast palace of the vajradharma-dhātu (Tajima 1936:49), or in the Indic tradition, Vairocana, the sambhogakāya of Śākyamuni, resides in the Akaniṣṭha Gaṇḍavyūha of the worldly realms which is the Kusumatalagarbhālaṁkāra which is said to be described in Chapter 8 of the Buddhavatamsakasūtra (Lessing 1968:205).

Since the Buddhas of the fifth terrace are at the top of the form realm at Borobudur, this can only be Akaniṣṭha. Thus, they are easily identified as Śākyamuni/Vairocana preaching specifically the Mahāvairocana texts (not in the general way of the Vairocana/Śākyamuni of the 'see through' stūpa, but specifically according to the introduction of the texts themselves). Moreover, we have been given a primacy of the Avatāṃsaka, as describing the environment of the setting in which the mandala texts are taught. The mandala texts are, therefore, linked with the Avatāṃsaka taking precedence and serving as essentially a root text. That they are linked in the monument is confirmed as
appropriate by the text tradition itself, thus supporting the findings that the two
texts are the basis for the Borobudur stūpa. This is a very important point and,
indeed, this linkage is not even a reflection of multivalency, but is simply the
internal structure of the texts themselves.

Already noted by Fontein, but not explained or carried to its logical
conclusion in his study of Sudhana (Fontein 1967:167), there is an obvious
Japanese analogue of the vitarkamudrā Buddha of the fifth terrace. On each of
the original, 8th-century petals of the lotus of the Daibutsu in the Daibutsu-den
at the Todai-ji in Nara is a Mount Meru with a Buddha presiding at the highest
level, by definition Akanisṭha, and that Buddha makes vitarkamudrā. Although
traditionally called Śākyamuni by Japanese scholars and iconographers of
Japanese Kegon (Avatamsaka[stūra]) Buddhism, in the texts, the Buddha who
sits in Akanisṭha is always Vairocana (remember the identity with Śākyamuni);
Vairocana, the sambhogakāya of Śākyamuni; or Śākyamuni in his Vairocana
robes. Here, he is not the progenitor of the maṇḍala but a teaching modality of
Śākyamuni/Vairocana at the highest level of the form realms. Again, the
multiplicity of images may be pointed out: like the Jinas below them and the
images of Vairocana above them, these Śākyamuni/Vairocanas are plural, 64 in
number, representing at least 64 world systems in which Vairocana has mani-
fested himself to preach the Dharma.

Even more problematic for most scholars has been the unfinished Buddha in
bhūmisparśamudrā in the centre of the great stūpa at the top of the monument.
However, given the foregoing information, there can be only one conclusion: it
is the Śākyamuni of the dharmadhatu. He is preaching the Avatamsakasūtra,
and because of the Avatamsakasūtra's primacy over the maṇḍala texts, he is
further engendering the full panoply of the maṇḍala texts; in short, it is
Śākyamuni, under the Bodhi tree at the moment of enlightenment who is the
progenitor, the Ārya, of the entire Borobudur stūpa. Let me recall the text for
you.

‘Thus I have heard, At one time the Buddha was in the land of Magadha, in a state of
purity, at the site of the enlightenment, having just realized true awareness’ (Cleary
1984:55.)

What other position is appropriate to the bodhimaṇḍa Śākyamuni than the
bhūmisparśamudrā? In this textual context, the Buddha Śākyamuni as the
dharmadhatu is Vairocana and is the progenitor of the whole of the Ava-
tamsakasūtra which, as we have just seen, is the root text for the Mahāvairocana
cycles maṇḍala texts.

Earlier authors were simply not in a position to make this realization.
Typically for this time, all of Krom’s iconographic assumptions were coloured by
preconceived notions of what should be there. Krom, arguing that the dharmacakramudrā image cannot be Śakyamuni, stated:

Can we imagine that after having been shown the utmost future we are to be drawn back again to the toiling earth, to the things that held our thoughts on the first gallery, the preaching Čakyamuni [...]? [...] [this] would be a falling-back of the greater to the less, from a higher to a lower sphere.‘ (Krom 1927, II:153.)

Ironically, Krom is almost exactly right – except for his conclusion. It was simply not known to western scholarship at the time he was writing that the main principle of Mahayana Buddhist soteriology was the identity of the nirmanakāya Buddha with both the saṃbhogakāya and dharmakāya. Obviously, it is not a 'falling-back'. It is an expression of the identity of the transcendent and the mundane. Śakyamuni is the dharmakāya in an absolute and total identity.

In order to recognize the contributions of, and problems confronted by early scholars, it must be realized that no one writing on Borobudur until Wayman (1981) had any real idea in the Tantric context of the full process that the practitioner goes through to become a Buddha. Indeed, the whole system of devayoga was unknown and unsuspected prior to the publication of Tucci's Theory and practice of the maṇḍala (Tucci 1961). Looking, as Krom did, for 'higher truth' cast in their own Judeo-Christian religious beliefs and not those of the Buddhist world, previous authors could not have known that what appeared to be obvious was in fact the only possible truth. The yogin, in this case Śakyamuni, realizes his identity with and as the dharmadhātu, the obvious conclusion becomes immediately apparent – the Buddha in the central chamber can only be Śakyamuni. Iconographically, his position in the core of the central stūpa is the ultimate statement of the allegory of his transcendence – an attempt at the physical reification of the phenomenon of unknowable – except by direct experience – Buddhadhātu.

The unfinished state of the image is very unlikely to reflect some higher metaphor or allegory of transcendence (his position in the central stūpa takes care of that). Indeed, I think we need look no further than human nature for the explanation to the unfinished state of the image.8 If the unfinished state of the

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8 At the conference, this idea met with considerable resistance of the 'there-must-be-some-meaning' type. However, since there is no actual evidence, either from Borobudur or from any other Buddhist monuments that I am aware of, that unfinished states of images are used to indicate philosophical or religious concepts, I stand behind my suggestion. Further, I have been encouraged in my position by verbal information from P.R. Hoffmanns, that many of the monuments in Java that he has visited are in some way unfinished. As this pattern of 'unfinishedness' also occurs commonly in the western Indian cave temples of
image has any meaning whatever, it may be relative to the narrative of the early image at Bodh Gaya (c. 380 BC) which is traditionally said to have been of divine inspiration and, because the chamber was opened a day early, to have been left unfinished. If the story of the early image was known in Java at the time of the construction of Borobudur, then it is possible that an unfinished image would have been an attempt to further demonstrate the identity of the central image with the sacred site (prīha) of Bodh Gaya by conforming to a known and unusual characteristic of the traditional image believed to have been made there. Regrettably, this narrative is known to me only from Tibetan sources9, and while it is entirely possible (even probable) that it was known in Java, there simply is no proof. At this time, it is my opinion that it is impossible to attach any meaning to the unfinished state of the image.

What then, about the multiplicity of the Buddhas? To my knowledge, there is no other related mandala in which the Jinas appear in multiples. However, evidence for the multiplicity as a demonstration of the universality of Vairocana occurs in many other contexts. In Vairocana-cycle Buddhism in general, the multiplicity of Buddhas may be seen as ultimately the dharmakāya. This aspect of the dharmakāya is perhaps best understood by reference to the sarva-[buddha]kāya aspect of the dharmakāya as found in the nayamanḍala of the 9th-century sketchbook of deities from the Sarvatathāgatātattvavāsamgraha known as the Gobushinkan10 (fig. 3).

In the Gobushinkan version of the mandala, the dharmakāya, at the left, is shown with three collateral bodies, the vajrakāya, at the top, the sarvakāya (an abbreviation for the sarva[buddha]kāya), at the right, and the buddhakāya at the bottom. The identity of these 'bodies' is expressed by the fact that there is no emanator or Ārya of the mandala in the centre. The figure of the sarva-[buddha]kāya shows the central figure emanating many Buddhas. Images apparently demonstrating this body of the Buddha have been known in Vairocana-cycle Buddhism since the late 5th century, as seen in Cave 18 at Yungang where the brhad image of Śākyamuni/Vairocana is depicted with hundreds of tiny Buddhas all over him (Huntington 1985a:146-9). The concept is clear from many texts, especially the Avatamsakasūtra, wherein it is said the 'Buddhas emanate from every pore of the Buddha Vairocana' (Cleary 1984:

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9 For a discussion of the early Bodh Gaya image and of the narrative see Huntington (1985b:37-9).

10 It must be noted that the version of the nayamanḍala in the Gobushinkan is significantly different than the nayamanḍala as it occurs in the nine manḍala of the vajradhātu as it is practiced in Shingon Buddhism (compare Tajima 1936 for details).
162). The *sarva[buddha]kāya* is a 'body' or *kāya* of the complex Vairocana/Śakyamuni hypostasis that generates all form bodies or *rūpakāya* Buddhas in all directions through all time.

The history of the Gobushinkan, 'Visualizing the five part deities', ties in directly with the cult of Vairocana Buddhism and is of virtually the same period as Borobudur. The contents of the Gobushinkan are 'core' Mahāvairocana material because it contains the drawings of and the ritual *mantra* and *mudrā* for the deities of the Sarvatathāgatatattvamārga and, since (as will be explained below), the original was by an Indian monk, it represented concepts that were demonstrably in the 'source region' for Javanese Buddhism.

The earliest surviving copy of the Gobushinkan is the one at the Onjo-ji which dates from AD 855. However, the original is traditionally ascribed to the Indian monk Subhakarasimha who, at the age of 80, arrived in China in 716 after having stopped for two years in Kashmir to further study Vairocana-cult Buddhism. Significantly, even in the Onjo-ji copy, the Gobushinkan exhibits clear traces of Kashmiri stylistic elements, especially in the crown type and in certain *mudrā*, which provide an internal verification of the traditional version of the origin of the iconographic sketch-book. Thus, it is certain that by no later than the early 8th century, when Subhakarasimha made his original version of the Gobushinkan, the concept of a Buddha body that generated or radiated other Buddha bodies had already come into existence.

The Buddhas emanated by the *sarva[buddha]kāya* are Buddhas just like Śakyamuni, each with their own past, present, and future; each resides in a Buddha world (either a *buddhaloka*, 'Buddha world', or *buddhaksetra*, 'Buddhahfield') and there teaches the *dharma* to the inhabitants of that world. How many worlds are there? According to the Avataṃsakasūtra, there are Buddha worlds equal to the number of atoms in the cosmos (Cleary 1984:162).

If we apply this understanding of the nature of Vairocana to the Buddhas of Borobudur, they are not then the Jina, but 'every Jina' of the entire Buddhist universe up to the numerical limits that the architects imposed on the artisans who created. Thus, except for the identification of the Buddhas of the Mahāvairocana *maṇḍala* as a demonstration of the generalized presence of those *maṇḍala*, it matters little who any of the Buddhas of the terraces are: they are conventionally represented as the directional Buddhas of the *maṇḍala*, but that is almost irrelevant. They are any Buddhas and all Buddhas – manifestations of the *sarva[buddha]kāya*. Thus, regardless of any relationship to a *maṇḍala*, at one level of multivalency, each Buddha in its niche with its complement of *stūpa* represents a *buddhaksetra* or 'Buddhahfield'. In total, there are 504 of them at Borobudur. While the actual number of 504 Buddhahfields is
dictated by the exigencies of quadrilateral symmetry, in Buddhist literature the number 500 is a standard Buddhist number indicating a vast number. For there to be 500 Buddhas is essentially a restatement of the infinity of the sarva-
[buddha]kāya.

If this foregoing iconographic observation is correct, the Avatāṃsakasūtra should confirm it, and, indeed, we need go no further than the opening paragraphs to find the confirmation we are looking for. In the Avatāṃsakasūtra description of the first assembly of the newly enlightened Śakyamuni, it is stated

'At the site of the enlightenment were boundless enlightened beings [bodhisattvas]. [...] By the spiritual power of the Buddha they were able to embrace the entire cosmos in a single thought. [...] At that time the Buddha in this setting attained supreme enlightenment, His knowledge entered into all time with equanimity, his body filled all worlds [...] as space extends everywhere, he entered all lands and his body sat at all sites of enlightenment, [...] he constantly demonstrated the production of all the Buddha lands, [...] [all of the enlightened Bodhisattvas there had, in the company of Śakyamuni] attained Vairocana Buddha [...] [at the final stage of the ten stages] [...] they all had thoroughly comprehended the rarely-attained, vast secret realm of all Buddhas (sarvabuddha).' (Cleary 1984:55-9.)

In other words, the state of the sarvabuddha is one of the definitions of the goal of the Avatāṃsakasūtra, an exact correspondence to the foregoing analysis.

In addition, there are a series of gāthā in the Avatāṃsakasūtra in which the assembled beings describe the sarvabuddhakāya in infinite terms, among them:

'The realm of the Buddhas is inconceivable:
no Sentient being can fathom it.' (Cleary 1984:66.)

'The [true] Body of the Buddha is formless, free from all defilement.' (Cleary 1984:70.)

'The infinite scenes of the Buddha's miraculous displays [prāthihārya]
Appear in all places in a single instant.' (Cleary 1984:71.)

'The Buddha-body is like space, inexhaustible –
Formless unhindered, it pervades the ten directions [...] The appearances of the Buddha-body are boundless.' (Cleary 1984:73.)

'The Buddha appears throughout the ten directions
Universally responding to all hearts.' (Cleary 1984:74.)

'The Buddha-body manifests everywhere in the ten directions [...] The Buddha-body is inconceivable;
Like reflections it shows separate forms equal [in number] to the cosmos.' (Cleary 1984:77.)

'The real body of the Buddha is fundamentally non-dual;
yet it fills the world according to beings and forms.' (Cleary 1984:79.)
These passages (and the many more like them that appear in the Avatamsakasutra) would seem to be the basis for the multivalency of the monument and the expression universality as seen by the demonstration of the sarva[buddha]-kāya.

To be literal-minded for a moment, if there are 92 sets of Jinas, then there are 92 overlapping Mount Merus at Borobudur. The makers were themselves not so literal, however, for there are only 72 Vairocana/Śakyamunis on the upper three terraces, and thus 20 of the maṇḍala are incomplete. I doubt if this worried the designers (‘iconographic authorities’) very much. They had already conceived of the grandest expression of buddhadharma ever to be produced in the Buddhist world.

Conclusion

The primary iconographic theme of Borobudur may thus be charted as seen in fig. 4. The unfinished Buddha in the core of the central stūpa is the dharmadātu Vairocana/Śakyamuni, primarily demonstrating Śakyamuni at the moment of enlightenment just as he is about to teach the Avatamsakasūtra. The dharmacakramudrā Buddhas of the 72 see-through stūpa are primarily Mahāvairocana of the Pañcajina maṇḍala (which Buddhologically demonstrates the state of Śakyamuni’s attainment of the five jñāna) from the Mahāvairocana cycles, either dharmanāya or sambhogakāya but which is impossible to determine without specific text references. The maṇḍala is completed by the four Jinas of the terraces (each also an aspect of Śakyamuni’s attainment as one of the five jñāna). The Buddha on the fifth terrace, making vitarkamudrā is Śakyamuni/Vairocana in Akanisṭha heaven teaching the Mahāvairocana-cycle texts. Not only is the symbolic cycle complete, but it is doubly self-referent providing a redundancy of meaning that literally reiterates its own theme. Śakyamuni/Vairocana as in the dharmadhātu expounds the primary text of the Avatamsakasūtra while Akanisṭha Śakyamuni/Vairocana expounds the Mahāvairocana-cycle texts. All the rest, even though it is conceptually intended to demonstrate the totality of the cosmos, is simply ancillary to these profound events. In closing I shall cite another, somewhat abbreviated passage from the Avatamsakasūtra:

'In each of the Buddha’s pores
sit Buddhas as many as atoms in all lands, [...]
The Buddha sitting at rest on the enlightenment seat,
displays in one hair oceans of lands [...] he sits in each and every land,
pervading the lands one and all [...]

In lands as numerous as atoms in the cosmos
he appears in every assembly
[every being in those assemblies]
Having entered the far-reaching vows of Samantabhadra
each produces the teachings of the Buddha
in the ocean of Vairocanā's teachings
[and thus] the practice and master Buddha-hood.' (Cleary 1984:162-3.)

Depending on only two closely related texts, both of which are known to have
been practiced in Java at the time and that are demonstrably identifiable at
Borobudur itself, and depending only on closely related documents for inter-
pretative material, the pieces of the Borobudur puzzle finally fall into place:
Borobudur is nothing less than a reification of the concept of universal totality
of Buddhahood as defined by the Avatamsaka and the Mahāvairocanasūtras.
The builders of Borobudur, perhaps the Sailendras themselves, had built one of
the fullest expressions of the ultimate realization of Buddhahood possible,
literally the totality of the Buddhist cosmos.

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Fig. 1  Section of the Borobudur stupa showing 'levels', 'terrace', and 'galleries'. From: Krom (1923, III:pl. 26).
Fig. 2  Above: 'Javanese variant' of the dharmacakramudra with the right hand above the left with only the ring fingers touching.

Fig. 3  Below: Nayamandala from the Gobushinkan.
survived the ravages of time. Candi Iago was built around the year 1266 or possibly twelve years later due to the performance of the śrāddha ceremonies for the deceased king. Furthermore, there appears to be strong evidence for W.F. Stutterheim's hypothesis that the present Candi Iago is the result of certain rebuilding activities which took place in the mid-14th century (Stutterheim 1936-1937; 1939). In this site, however, it is apparent that the five main statues were erected. The five statues themselves show a strong stylistic resemblance to contemporary statues of the Northeast Indian Pāla-Sena period, although their ornamentation appears to be representative of the Śrīvijayan period. Anyway, the iconography provides a basis for the identification of the statues and their relation to the rest of the stūpa. The discussion in this chapter will focus on two of the major architectural elements in the stūpa: the vajrasana and the vajrākṣasā parvata. It is my intention to present a comprehensive analysis of the iconography and architectural features of the stūpa.

The vajrasana, or seat of the Buddha, is an integral part of the stūpa's design. It is a canopy or umbrella-shaped structure that supports the sculpture of the Buddha. The vajrasana is often associated with the concept of the Buddha's teaching, which is represented by the vajra, a sacred object in Buddhist iconography. The vajrasana is typically located at the center of the stūpa, and it is often decorated with various images and inscriptions.

The vajra-ākṣasā parvata, or vajra-protected mountain, is another important architectural feature of the stūpa. It is a large, round mound that surrounds the vajrasana. The vajra-ākṣasā parvata is typically decorated with various images and inscriptions, and it is often considered to be a representation of the Buddha's protection over the stūpa and its inhabitants.

Fig. 4 Iconographic chart showing the Buddhas of Borobudur. By John C. Huntington.