

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AS OPEN AIR MUSEUM: BOROBUDUR WORLD HERITAGE SITE AND ITS SETTING

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'It is the landscape as a whole – that largely manmade tapestry, in which all other artefacts are embedded ... which gives them their sense of place'.¹

Candi Borobudur, built around 800AD and the largest Buddhist monument in Indonesia is located in Central Java some 40 kilometres from Yogyakarta. Regarded as one of the Wonders of the World this magnificent stepped pyramid style of building consists of nine terraces. The first six are rectangular and the upper three are circular, topped by a large bell-shaped stupa. There are four staircases facing east/west and north/south, the eastern one being aligned with Mount Merapi, the sacred mountain. The base measures 123 metres square; the whole edifice consisting of more than two million blocks.

Borobudur stands in the centre of the fertile and richly watered Kedu Plains flanked to the south by the jagged Menoreh Hills and to the east and north from Mount Merapi by a series of volcanic peaks linked by an undulating ridge. The whole setting is a gigantic amphitheatre with Borobudur standing in the middle on a low hill creating a memorable and evocative effect. The whole landscape ensemble is a vast outdoor museum of

theatrical proportions. The shape of Candi Borobudur itself mirrors the volcanic peaks. The sight of the monument rising out of the landscape is awe-inspiring. Its presence in this landscape suggests an association



View north from Borobudur to Mount Sumbing
Source: Photograph 2003.

between the monument and its setting that is palpable and rich in Buddhist meaning with Hindu overtones.

Two smaller temples, Candi Pawon and Candi Mendut, similar in style and craftsmanship, are in a perfect east west alignment towards Mount Merapi. But there are older markers in the landscape. These are the remains of around forty Hindu temples and archaeological sites which follow the lines of creeks and rivers. The Buddhist temples are surrounded by a rural landscape of rice paddies and palm groves with small towns and villages creating a sense of the stream of time and place.

The first restoration of Borobudur took place in 1907-11. Continuing deterioration of the stonework lead to other studies culminating in restoration by UNESCO Experts from 1968 to 1972 and 1975 to 1982. The temple was inscribed on the World Heritage list for its cultural heritage significance in 1991. It has been previously monitored by UNESCO Experts in 1986, 1989, and 1995 looking predominantly at stonework and such matters as stability and drainage of the structure. The latest monitoring exercise in July 2003 included consideration of the wider cultural landscape setting of the monument and tourist impact on the structure itself and surrounding region.

Two and a half million people visit the site annually with around 2.2 million being domestic visitors. There is little interpretation of the Buddhist meaning of the site and its landscape setting, both of which are assumed to be a Buddhist mandala representation.² Visitors swarm all over the stonework and the upper stupas. The steps are wearing away at the rate of 1mm per year. Around 2000 vendors collect around the entry and exit

area and vehicle parking is chaotic. The sense of arrival is shattered by noise, inappropriate advertising and aggressive selling. Street vendors are a part of Asian heritage sites, but the sheer number of vendors and merchandise one can buy anywhere is a concern. Traditional crafts associated with the area such as stone carving or Wayang puppets are notably absent. Three recent high telecommunication towers mar the view from Borobudur looking east across the rural landscape to Mount Merapi. Increasing development along approach roads is also impinging on the view of the temple as it rises majestically out of the landscape.

The purpose of this paper, given at the Fourth Experts Meeting was to



View to the monument from nearby town showing building encroachment. Source: Photograph 2003.



View north across Zone III showing setting of the monument against rice paddies giving a sense of cultural landscape fit. Source: Photograph 2003.

explore the idea of historical cultural landscapes and suggest application to Borobudur. In the 1980s five management zones were delineated. Zone 1, or sanctuary area, is the monument itself (200m radius). Zone II is the archaeological park area (500m radius) with visitor facilities, parking, offices, exhibition building, vendor stalls; it includes a landscape park surrounding Zone I planted in a regimented unappealing gardenesque style which does not reflect the ninth century landscape which would probably have been shady groves of tropical trees where Buddhist monks taught and lived bisected by pathways and possibly flower and vegetable growing. Later as the local population increased village fields and animal grazing would have surrounded the temple. An engraving by FC Wilsen (c.1850) shows such a landscape. The rice paddies and two villages were removed to make way for the park.

Zone III, the land-use regulation zone (2km radius), includes rural lands and villages and Candi Pawon and Mendut as well as other archaeological sites. Development is supposed to be

controlled to protect the setting of the monument. But encroachment by new buildings, erection of inappropriate signs, and increasing traffic all present management problems as they detract from the setting of the monument. Zone IV (5 kms) is the Historical Scenery Preservation Zone intended to protect the views and sense of address as one approaches Borobudur. It includes a number of villages and archaeological sites. Zone V (10 kms) is the National Archaeological Park Zone, intended to protect archaeological sites. Zones IV and V are important elements in the cultural landscape context of Borobudur, enhancing its meaning and its *original raison d'être*. The layers in this landscape create a sense of time and the concept of a vast outdoor museum.

In June 2003 the World Heritage Committee reviewed current management at Borobudur. It recommended, *inter alia*, the need to consider tourism impacts and advisability of evaluating and possibly redefining protective boundaries and management guidelines for the landscape areas surrounding the monument. This applies particularly to

Zones IV and V given that it is now thought that the mandala form of the monument is repeated in the wider landscape. The Committee also drew attention to the need for a comprehensive socio-economic study involving local communities and a marketing strategy for long term benefit to them. It also expressed concern over a recent proposal to build a large shopping complex in Zone III. It is with this background that the Experts' meeting requested a paper on Historical Landscape Planning.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: A WORLD-WIDE PHENOMENON

Historical landscapes with their heritage values – now widely referred to as cultural landscapes – have reached centre stage in the field of cultural heritage conservation and planning. The term 'cultural landscape' is now widely accepted internationally. Recognition was extended in 1993 to World Heritage status with three categories of cultural landscapes of outstanding universal value:

- **Clearly defined landscapes designed and intentionally created by man.**
- **Organically evolved landscapes in two categories:**

(i) A relict or fossil landscape in which an evolutionary process has come to an end but where its distinguishing features are still visible.

(ii) Continuing landscape which retains an active social role in contemporary society associated with a traditional way of life and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress and where it exhibits

significant material evidence of its evolution over time. With the World Heritage Committee's instruction in mind there is a need to evaluate whether the landscape surrounding Borobudur, as an inextricable part of the monument's cultural and intellectual setting, original creation, and continuation, fits this category.

- **Associative cultural landscapes:** the inclusion of such landscapes is justifiable by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic, or cultural associations of the natural element rather than the material cultural evidence. Uluru/Kata Tjuta National Park and the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras are two Asian/Pacific examples. Again it is germane to pose the question: does Borobudur and its wider landscape setting fit this category?

In addressing these two questions on the cultural context and authenticity of the whole setting of Borobudur it is important to visualise the cosmology of the Buddhist mandala (*cakkavāla/cakravāla*) assumed to be the crux of the building of Borobudur in its cultural (historical) landscape. A diagram reproduced in an early twentieth century collection of Daniel Gogerly's writings on Buddhism, the cosmology of the Buddhist mandala (*cakkavāla/cakravāla*) is represented as a single, circular world system surrounded by a mountain of iron (*cakravāla*) and at the centre is Mount Meru³ (represented by Mount Merapi at Borobudur). It is a single world system where relationships exist between various parts of the universe and where myth and reason coalesce to offer an exquisite visualisation of the order of things. Just

to look out over the landscape from the terraces of Borobudur is a stunning and moving experience: the landscape speaks dramatically and persuasively of a mystical but real relationship between people, time, events, beliefs and place. Here are layers in the landscape waiting to be read and interpreted to tell us something about who we are in time. If Borobudur is, as assumed, a representation of the universe – the cakkavāla – then the following ancient reflection from *The Ratu Boko Inscription of 792 AD*, Central Java, is apposite:

I pay homage to the Cosmic Mountain of the Perfect Buddhas ... endowed with the awe-inspiring power of wisdom, – whose caves are knowledge, whose rock is excellent tradition, whose brilliance is owing to its relic: the Good Wisdom whose streams are love, whose forests are meditation – truly the Mount of Few Desires, which is not shaken by the eight horrible winds: the worldly qualities.⁴

Historical landscapes under the banner of cultural landscapes emerged in the 1990s as a topic of great interest for the international conservation community. Thirty years after the Venice Charter the concept of value and significance that cultural landscapes brought with them challenged the long held distinction between cultural and natural values and the 1960s concept of heritage centring predominantly on monuments and sites of antiquity.⁵ This blurring of the boundary between what is natural – essentially a western view of the world dating from the Romantic period – and what is cultural has considerable attraction and merit in the context and cultural traditions of South East Asia. To this we may readily add

Australia with its increasing understanding of the meaning of country in Aboriginal culture where there is a fusion between culture and nature in a world where mythical ancestors – animal and human – made the landscape.⁶

LANDSCAPES AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

What has emerged is that we understand that in the historical landscape our sense of place and heritage are not limited to separate dots on a map each spatially and temporally isolated. We have embraced the concept of the inter-relationship between places, people, and events, through time. We see and feel in the landscape a sense of the stream of time which promotes attachment to our world. Further, and through historical cultural landscape study, there has been a growing understanding that cultural landscapes as an imprint of human history are the richest historical record we possess. They can tell us if we learn to read and interpret their stories something of the achievements and values of our predecessors, inform our own present-day values and, incidentally, those of future generations.⁷ They are a window onto our collective past, our culture on display.

Interest in the efficacy of historical landscapes as comprehensive documents of history with concomitant heritage values was recently further emphasised by the international workshop – *Conservation of Cultural Landscapes Workshop* – held in Rome in June 2003, organised by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). Representatives from sixteen countries attended bringing mutually

inclusive variations on a theme of what is heritage in the landscape including physical, ancestral, cultural and spiritual emphasis. This again underpins the importance of recognising intangible values based on cultural traditions that are apparent in historical landscapes alongside their physical fabric or form. In other words they are not merely what we see, but a way of seeing. We see with our eyes but interpret with our minds.⁸

WRITING (SHAPING) THE LANDSCAPE: READING THE LANDSCAPE

In looking at historical cultural landscapes it is perhaps helpful to state the obvious, but sometimes perplexing maxim, that they are literally most of what surrounds us. They are the landscapes – the places – urban, suburban and rural in which we live, work, and recreate. They embrace an extraordinary richness and variety of life and scenes as the landscapes settled and modified by people over time. They are then a representation of our ideologies. We create and shape the human landscape over time according to our ideologies and in this way historical landscapes reflect our cultural traditions and intangible values. As a result we modify natural landscape elements and superimpose human patterns to create cultural landscapes. These patterns represent a montage of layers through time.

Reading and shaping the landscape is not a modern phenomenon. In prehistoric times people such as hunters and gatherers learned how to read the landscape⁹ as they searched for game and plants and manipulated the landscape through that seminal discovery, fire. This was the beginning of landscape planning. The use of fire for hunting and to control vegetation followed later by early forms

of agriculture as people learned how to cultivate wild plants as crops involved deliberate change and manipulation of the landscape. For many societies natural components of the landscape itself – mountains, rivers, forests – have been and remain a reflection of their cosmological beliefs, and hence there evolved an intense sense of spirituality in the landscape, a sense of the sacred where culture and nature combined. This is not the sacred as opposed to the profane, but what we might now call the ordinarily sacred.¹⁰

The consciousness that people have formed of space around them since our early ancestors, that is where space becomes imbued with meaning and therefore becomes place, continues to inform the way we see the landscape around us both in its historical sense and in the present time. In his now classic text, Edward Relph classifies the kinds of spaces – for me places – that carry meaning and significance for human beings.¹¹ He notes that the following different types of space are not separated by the human mind, but rather they are linked in thought and experience. Each has relevance to the task at Borobudur and its historical landscape surrounds in developing recommendations for the future with special focus on its spiritual, educational, and cultural values:

- Pragmatic or primitive space structured unselfconsciously by basic individual experience. This is organic space where we feel safe; it may have biological roots in our need for shelter and home. Habitation and agriculture of the Kedu Plains from ancient times has envisaged this kind of space thriving as it has through history on the well watered, richly fertile,

volcanic soils of southern Central Java. The pattern of ricefields, numerous rivers and canals, and villages has long antecedents at least back to the time Borobudur was built. J.G. de Casparis paints a fascinating picture in words of how the landscape of around 930 AD looked with clusters of many villages surrounded by ricefields and then green jungle,¹² the whole pattern embraced by mountains: a synergy of culture and nature.

- Perceptual space which involves direct emotional encounters with the spaces of the earth, sea, sky or with built and created spaces. Again the mandala construct of Borobudur and its surrounds fit this model. The pattern on the ground reflects a perceptual view of universal perfection that is palpable in Borobudur's undeniable sense of presence.
- Existential or lived in space where we create patterns and structures of significance through building towns, villages, houses, and the whole business of landscape making. This is space or place that is culturally defined. The landscape of the Kedu Plains again represents existential space, culturally defined and dating back to the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism and the control of Central Java by the Sailendra dynasty. The strong, common religion was undoubtedly a major force informing the building and meaning of Borobudur in relation to its landscape setting. There were also international connections with India and Sri Lanka as

part of a well-ordered system and interchange of ideas that had started in the fifth century AD, leading to Java being an important centre for Buddhism from the seventh to the tenth centuries. The strong social ties that bound this Buddhist society, coupled with what de Casparis¹³ calls a pious sense of duty, offered a willing labour force of hard-working peasantry without which Borobudur may not have eventuated. The monument, mosaic of ricefields and surrounding mountains and ridges combine physically and mentally as part of a tightly knit social fabric where people and landscape have merged through time.

One of the problems facing us is communicating – that is interpreting – the meaning of one cultural group's existential space to others, meanings which may grow opaque over time as societies change. This may be seen to have special relevance at Borobudur as we strive to see the monument in its historical landscape setting where myth, ceremony and ritual inform the setting.

- Architectural and planning space.
- Cognitive space with its reflective qualities referenced in maps, plans and designs. At Borobudur we might see cognitive space related to the Buddhist mandala concept in the holistic landscape setting with Mount Merapi, rivers of the Kedu Plain and the fringing mountains and in the monument itself as a mandala representation.
- Abstract space which is a creation

of human imagination and logical relations that allows us to describe space without necessarily founding these descriptions on empirical observations. Is this not the concept of the abstract/logical space of the mandala as represented at Borobudur? It permeates and excites the imagination.

Each of these spaces is closely linked in thought and experience. 'Pragmatic space integrates man with his natural, 'organic' environment, perceptual space is essential to his identity, as a person, existential space makes him belong to a social and cultural totality, cognitive space means he is able to think about space, and logical space ... offers a tool to describe the others'.¹⁴

INTANGIBLE VALUES AND HISTORICAL LANDSCAPES

A common theme linking these concepts of space/place and underpinning the idea of the ideology of landscape itself as the setting for everything we do is that of the landscape as the repository of intangible values and human meanings that nurture our very existence. This is where landscape and memory are inseparable because landscape is the nerve centre of our personal and collective memories. Notably in this regard are the words of Bambang Bintoro Soedjito, then Deputy Chair for Infrastructure with the Indonesian National Development Planning Agency, who suggested in 1999 that:

For us, the most important expressions of culture at this time are not the monuments, relics and art from the past,

nor the more refined expressions of cultural activity that have become popularised beyond Indonesia's borders in recent years, but the grassroots and very locally specific village based culture that is at the heart of the sense of community. And that sense of community, perhaps more that of the individual has been a strong shaping and supportive influence in times of trouble, through turbulence and now in strengthening a confident sense of identity as we combine heritage with a society opened to the opportunities of the world.¹⁵

Soedjito's sentiment on expressions of everyday heritage links comfortably with current international notions of the significance of historical landscapes and ideas of the ordinarily sacred. Pivotal to this is the realisation that, in addition to our national cultural heritage icons, it is the places, traditions, and activities of ordinary people that create a rich cultural tapestry of life, particularly through our recognition of the values people attach to their everyday places and concomitant sense of place and identity. Identity is critical to a sense of place – *genius loci* – for people. Relph aptly summarises this in his proposal that 'identity of place is comprised of three interrelated components, each irreducible to the other – physical features or appearance, observable activities and functions, and meaning or symbols'.¹⁶

So both tangible physical identity and intangible identity related to the existential distinctiveness of our lived-in world and human experiences are inextricably inter-woven with place meaning and significance for people. I believe this association has identifiable consequences also for the way we need

to see the inter-relationship between cultural heritage interpretation and presentation of places within the context of tourism which has emerged as a major issue in Asia. Here there is direct relevance to the future planning, interpretation and presentation of Borobudur in its historical landscape setting. A fundamental question is whose culture are we presenting and why? The extraordinary richness of Indonesian culture represented at Borobudur and its cultural landscape means that there is a need for a plurality of presentations.

CONCLUSION: BOROBUDUR IN ITS SETTING

What kind of actions ought we to propose at Borobudur to ensure the right outcomes for the conservation of the monument itself and the economic and conservation future of its wider setting, that is, its historical cultural landscape? Within the focus of outcomes we must include the protection and enhancement of local traditions and cultural heritage resources whilst engaging them within a comprehensive conservation management and tourism plan for the region. This is one where a dialogue is encouraged between conservation and tourism, but where tourism is not driving and selling heritage. It is where tourism fits into a heritage planning framework¹⁷ as part of an extensive sub-regional cultural mapping project.

I recommend that this Experts' Meeting consider proposing the concept of a Borobudur Region Cultural Map be initiated and that it include the following actions:

1. Identify all stakeholders and interest groups and devise a

program to involve them in future planning. This means that no particular group(s) should be privileged over others. It also means ensuring cultural context is fully appreciated and that there may need to be a change in how Borobudur is recognised and interpreted.

2. Recommend that an Historical Cultural Landscape Study be prepared by a multi-disciplinary team. A key initial step will be the definition of boundaries and it is proposed that the boundaries of the already recognised Five Zones be used. Zones III to IV encompass the wider landscape with its patterns and components including the communities that surround the monument, several smaller temples, archaeological remains, topographic and hydrological features and the landscape's overall significance historically as a mandala (cak-kavāla/cakravāla). These need to be assessed and analysed as an historical landscape with a remarkable richness of layers and meanings offering a basis for future action. The cultural landscape of these Zones may then be appreciated in the context of their cultural history and connection to Zones I and II immediately around and including the monument. A major focus of this task will be to re-state the authenticity of the association and meaning of Borobudur and its landscape setting where elements such as water, vegetation, topography, orientation, arrange-

ment of buildings and landscape engineering with the centre at Mt Merapi have meaning within the mandala and its laws governing orderly existence. Replanting of Zone II is recommended using local trees set out in an open woodland reminiscent of the landscape at the time Borobudur was built.

3. Site design for car park and vendor area promoting a sense of arrival and address, signage, interpretation centre and walks.
4. Development of interpretative programs to enrich the presentation of the monument itself and to offer the basis for wider cultural landscape interpretation in the form of brochures, guide books and heritage trail pamphlets. Education of guides and development of an enforceable code of behaviour for visitors are necessary. In this regard it would be productive to organise a Training Course involving experts, locals, tourist operators where aspects of authenticity, significance, visitor behaviour and management, constraints and opportunities, and site management and planning are discussed with all stakeholders. An excellent example at Yungang Caves is described by Sharon Sullivan.¹⁸ Such actions needs to link through to recommendation 5 below with cross referencing of tourism potential to the significance of cultural context and heritage resources.

5. Development of a cultural tourism plan linking tourism to the underlying social and cultural landscape and the economic well-being of the area whilst not detracting from the meaning, authenticity, and splendour of Borobudur and its setting.

6. Address the issue of whether we believe that Borobudur and its setting satisfy the requirements for re-inscription on the World Heritage List of Cultural Landscapes and propose that an objective of an Historical Cultural Landscape Study be to recommend whether it fits the two following categories:

- *Organically evolved continuing landscape* by virtue of the manner in which the landscape retains an active social role in contemporary society associated with a traditional way of life where the evolutionary process is still in progress and where there is significant material evidence of its evolution over time.
- *Associative cultural landscape* by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic, and cultural association of the natural elements in the landscape related to the cosmic significance of the landscape as a mandala representation of the universe with both physical and metaphysical manifestation.

The sense of continuity, fit with the setting, and Borobudur's undeniable presence as the 'Cosmic Mountain of the

Perfect Buddhas' make it one of the remarkable edifices of not only Central Java but the entire Buddhist World.¹⁹ Its haunting presence reflecting an ancient belief in the indivisible junction between man and nature where Mt Merapi to the east and Borobudur itself are the focal points of a sacred landscape suggest it is timely that it be considered as a cultural landscape of outstanding universal value.

ENDNOTES

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- 3 J. D. Gogerly, *Ceylon Buddhism: Being the Edited Collected Writings of Daniel John Gogerly*, A. S. Kegan, Trench, Trubner & Co, London, 1908. See also R. Kloetzli, *Buddhist Cosmology. From Single World System to Pure Land: Science and Theology in the Images of Motion and Light*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983.
- 4 Quoted in Soekmono, J.G. de Casparis, and Dumarcay, *Borobudur: Prayer in Stone*, Editions Didier Millet, Paris and Archipelago Press, Singapore, 1990.
- 5 D. Jacques, 'The Rise of Cultural Landscapes', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, (2), 1995, pp. 91-101.
- 6 See K. Taylor, 'Nature or Culture: Dilemmas of Interpretation', *Tourism Culture & Communication*, Vol. 2, 2000, pp. 69-84 for a discussion of how culture and nature fuse in Australian Aboriginal meanings of country and the concept of the ordinarily sacred.
- 7 See K. Taylor, 'Reading and Interpreting the Cultural Landscape', *Canberra Historical Journal*, March 1992, pp. 2-9, 'Making Spaces into Places: Exploring the Ordinarily Sacred', *Landscape Australia*, Vol. 2, 1999, pp. 107-112.
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- 13 Soekmono, J. G. de Casparis, and Dumarcay, *Borobudur* see 'Introduction' by de Casparis.
- 14 C. Norberg-Schultz, *Existence, Space and Architecture*, Praeger, New York, 1971, quoted in Relph, p. 26.
- 15 Bambang Bintoro Soedjito speaking at World Bank Conference, *Culture Counts*, Florence, 1999.
- 16 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*.
- 17 K. Taylor, 'Cultural Heritage Conservation and Tourism: Dilemma of the Chicken and the Egg', *International Symposium and Workshop, Managing Heritage Environment in Asia*, Yogyakarta, January 8-12, 2003, pp. 13-20.
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- 19 M. A. Johnstone, *Borobudur An Analysis of the Gallery 1 Reliefs: Pelita Borobudur Seri C No.*, 1981.