

LIFE & TIMES HERITAGE

Borobudur beckons

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In a nod to Wesak Day today, **ninotaziz** traces the history of Borobudur, one of the most revered places of worship during this celebration

ON Wesak Day every year, Buddhists from all over the world visit the ruins of the Sailendra Dynasty's most recognisable ancient architecture, the Candi Borobudur, recognised as a Unesco World Heritage site in 1991. They come to honour Siddharta Gautama Buddha in a place so far away from his homeland in Nepal.

Borobudur was the name given by Stamford Raffles to the ancient temple when he rediscovered it in 1814. However, the Buddhist temple on the Kedu Plain in Java, completed in the 9th century, was a masterpiece of the ancient world long before Raffles arrived.

AGE OF DISCOVERY

Sailendra was a dynasty that once reigned in central Java. The people were the master builders of the imposing candi — unearthed after it was buried under the ashes of Mount Merapi for almost two centuries. After years of oblivion, it was Raffles' curiosity that led to the discovery of

the Sailendran Kingdom became the subject of many theses in many different languages. None could say with certainty as to its birth. Proof of its founding lay in the discovery of the Sojomerto Inscription in old Malay,

*"... - ryaon cri sata ...
... _ a koti
... namah ccivaya
bhatara paramecva
ra sarvva daiva ku samvah hiya
- mih inan -is- anda dapu
nta selendra namah santanu
namanda bapanda bhadravati
namanda ayanda sampula
namanda vininda selendra namah
mamagappasar lempewangih"*

These words mean, "Praise to Lord Shiva Bhatara Parameshvara ... from the honourable Dapunta Selendra. Santanu is the name of his father, Bhadrawati is the name of his mother, Sampula is the name of the wife of noble Selendra."

Its use of Old Malay, Javanese



Magnificent Stupa.

Steady research, especially the work of historian Poetbatjaraka, slowly uncovered more facts and theories. Despite the uneasy truce, around the middle of the 9th century, relations within the Sailendra deteriorated. The cause? The battle between religions. Those who were Hindu, and those who embraced Buddhism were in conflict. In 852 Rakai Pikatan of the Sanjaya family within Sailendra ousted Balaputra, the son of the king Samaratungga, and his Srivijayan queen, Dewi Tara. This almost ended Sailendra's presence in Java. Balaputra retreated to the Srivijaya in Sumatra, where he became ruler.



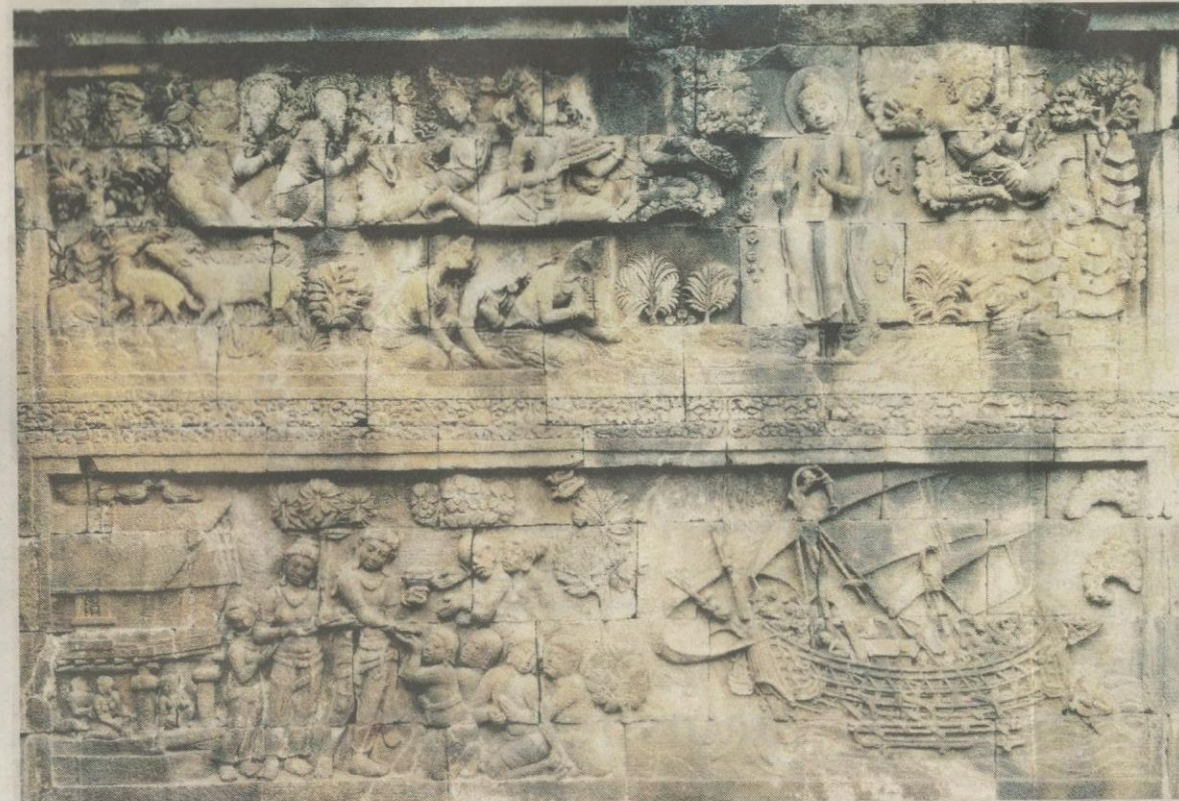
Borobudur.

At the time of discovery of the ruins, Raffles wrote: "It was alone, abandoned in the darkness of the jungle, in ruins and debris, with moulds and cracks infected the stones, and heads of Buddha statues lie around in the waist-high weed". Its resurrection brought into the limelight the missing thread in the history of Nusantara.

However, not all the mysteries were unravelled. The existence of

and Sanskrit on ancient inscriptions suggested strong alliances with Srivijaya. Finally, throughout the length and breadth of the islands of the Malay Archipelago in Java such as the Kalasan and the Kelurak, the Kedukan in Sumatra, the Ligor in Thailand and the Nalanda in India confirmed the dynasty's existence and the fact that a Sailendran monarch commissioned the building of Candi Borobudur. Unfortunately, little else came to light.

ROYAL HOUSES WITHIN THE FAMILY
The two religions, Hindu and Buddhism co-existed, at times in harmony, at times in throes of tension, always side by side in the form of the royal houses of Sanjaya and Sailendra in central Java. It was a religious leader who came up with a solution. The spiritual counsellors of the Sang Raja SailendravamĀtilaka persuaded Maharaja Tejapurnapana Panangaran of the Hindu Kingdom of Mataram to construct holy buildings



Scene from royal court life.

for the Buddhist goddess Tara. The Guru Sang Raja Sailendravamcatilaka was convinced if the Sailendran were not allowed to worship their own religion, the people would constantly be battling their conscience.

It's also believed that while King Dhanaindra was a Sailendran conqueror, he was keen to build a great candi. However, his campaigns all over the Nusantara didn't give him much time to settle in Sailendra to finish the job. Samaratunga, the Sailendran crown prince, was a man of peace and felt the sufferings of his hardworking people — common folk who had to work the land, to produce the food and the spices coveted by the traders from beyond the high seas, mine the gold, silver and copper to fill the treasury of the king for arms and war.

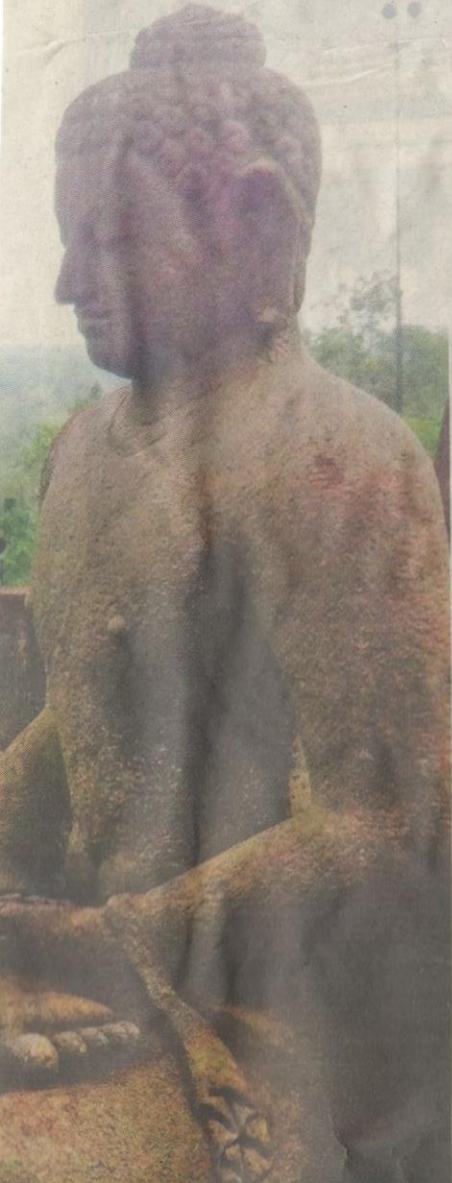
Sumaratunga also realised the dilemma of his subjects caught between the two faiths. It was widely believed that he undertook to finish Borobudur.

THE GREATEST CANDI OF ALL

The breathtaking beauty of the land invoked a sense of serenity to all the inhabitants on the Kedu Plain. Even their king couldn't escape from its mesmerising grandeur. The rising peaks of Merapi in the distance were shrouded in smokey clouds emitting from the crater. The longstanding royal architect and monk, Gunadharma, was entrusted to build the candi.

In the tranquility of the monastery, Gunadharma burnt the midnight oil poring over old Malay, Javanese and Sanskrit scriptures. He worked hard to translate the aspiration of Mahayana Buddhism into the design of a place of worship that would manifest the path that devotees must take to achieve perfection. The pinnacle of Merapi became the inspiration for a single stupa to be the temple's crowning glory.

As much as Borobudur was to reflect the life of Siddharta Gautama on the walls of the monument, the



Beauty of the Sailendran ship.



Samaratunga bequeathed to this princess the responsibility of looking after Bhumi Sambhra Bhudhura which meant "The mountain of combined virtues of the 10 stages of Boddhisattvahood".

She awarded tax free lands to ensure the funding and maintenance of Bhumisambhura, the original name of Borobudur. (Karangtengah inscription dated 824)

between the Javanese and the Malays in Java today reflect those ancient times. It is true how our history and heritage of our ancestors continue to influence us until today.

MERAPI

It was said that the people of Sanjaya didn't care for the temples. The people on the Kedu forgot to continue the good work of Samaratunga. No one built new temples. The people forgot the warnings of the ancient Guru Sang Raja. One day, the Merapi and Sundoro both erupted, covering the lake and the beautiful candi with volcanic ash. Soon, the wild jungle hid the remains of the monumental temple. And for centuries, the great legacy of the kings of Sailendra were truly buried. And forgotten.

REDEMPTION AND TRUE APPRECIATION

Since its rediscovery, Candi Borobudur, as the largest Buddhist temple in the world until today has remained a monument to architectural beauty and religious pilgrimage. Today, the Wesak Festival in Borobudur, Indonesia celebrates the birth, death and the enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama and is one of the world's biggest celebrations for Wesak.

Held on the evening of the full moon day, the spiritual procession starts as the Candi is lit up in the moonlight. After the completion of prayers, the pilgrims circle the temple three times — this is the Pradaksina ritual. Thousands of Puja lanterns are released into the sky to symbolise the



Exquisite carvings.

Sailendran kings must have dreamt of seeing the story of their own triumphant reign and conquest chiselled on to the relief that would adorn the walls of the shrine. This can be seen in the carvings of the many royal court scenes with musicians and the lavish lifestyle they enjoyed, including the famous Borobudur ship paying homage to the maritime kingdoms then.

The temple was erected in search of heavenly enlightenment. However, it must be recorded that the toils of the people of Sailendra saw to its completion. The shrine was built in the form of a stepped-pyramid of six rectangular storeys, three circular terraces with a central stupa rising at the summit. Back-breaking daily work, chiselling more than two million blocks of the dark lava rock, cut to perfection, interlocking intricately, continued for decades.

OF KINGS AND ALLIANCES

Samaratunga was said to be a man of peace. But he was passionate about the dream to finish the temple built by Gunadharma. The candi symbolised Man's world of desire which was influenced by negative impulses; the middle level, the world in which Man has control of his negative impulses and uses his positive impulses; while the highest level is of the world of Man which is no longer bounded by physical and worldly ancient desire.

Samaratunga himself must have struggled to realise this state of mind. He commissioned bas relief scenes to adorn the candi walls. The lowest level had reliefs depicting the nature of cause and effect while the middle level contains various stories of the Buddha's life from the Jataka Tales.

The highest level had an unadorned balcony with a majestic view, fashioned after a circle without beginning or end.

Seventy-two Buddha statues were placed into small stupas surrounding the main stupa. Each of these statues had a mudra indicating one of the five directions: east, with the mudra

of calling the earth to witness; south, with the hand position of blessing; west, with the gesture of meditation; north, the mudra of fearlessness; and the centre with the gesture of teaching. All this, Samaratunga made sure was built to perfection.

THE UNITY OF TWO KINGDOMS

To seal alliances between Srivijaya and Sailendra, the betrothal of Samaratunga to the Sri Vijayan princess, Dewi Tara, was proposed. Her father Dharmasetu sent emissaries to approach Samaratunga. Soon, Dewi Tara arrived at the Sailendran court from Palembang, crossing the Sunda strait and hazardous mountain range before arriving at the Kedu plain.

The king himself came to welcome Princess Tara and she must have intrigued him with her name, the name of the very Buddhist Dewi Tara. With their marriage, their two kingdoms were united and peace reigned.

The royal couple were blessed with a child, a princess they named Pramodhawardhani. In time,

BEGINNING OF THE END

The new king of Sanjaya, Pikatan, wanted to be the sole lord over Samaratunga. The peace-loving smoothen the relationship with the Royal House of Sanjaya. When Pramodhawardhani was of age, she was betrothed to Sanjaya Rakai, Pikatan. They married and she became his Sri Kalahan. Together they wielded a lot of power. Secretly, Pramodhawardhani was determined to rule after her father.

It was devastating when the prince, Balaputra, was born to King Samaratunga and Queen Dewi Tara. The infant Balaputra was made crown prince almost immediately. Pikatan's hopes of controlling the Sailendran Kingdom were dashed.

Then Samaratunga died. As a young heir to the throne, Balaputra's authority in central Java was frequently challenged by local landlords. Pramodhawardhani considered her brother Balaputra a weakling. If Balaputra was out of the way, both she and Pikatan would rule Sri Vijaya, Mataram and Sailendra.

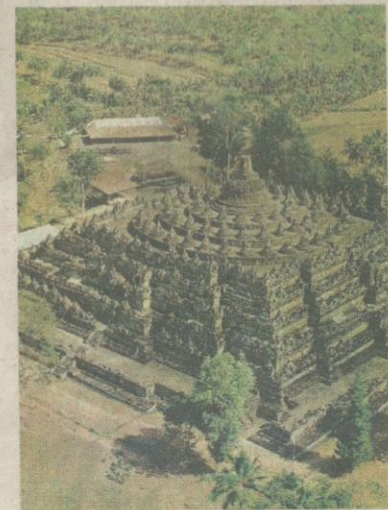
Fearing for her life, and that of her son's, Dewi Tara took refuge with the child. Despite being the Queen, she was always considered an outsider in many ways. The people of Sailendra were eventually forced to leave Java for Palembang, the seat of Srivijaya. Balaputra became ruler. With his retreat, central Java fell into the hands of Sanjaya, ending Sailendra's rule over the area. In a twist of fate, Srivijaya rose to greater glory in Palembang.

In many ways, the uneasy truce

...led into the sky to symbolise the enlightenment of all mankind.

From an aerial view, the Borobudur is a stepped pyramid but it is shaped like a giant lotus flower — a revered symbol of purity behold.

In Indonesia, Wesak is celebrated on June 2.



Borobudur aerial 1987.

NINOTAZIZ believes that our legends are the memories of our ancient civilisations. For this article, she would like to thank The Patriots, and independent researchers Cik Srikandi, Raja Ariff Danial, Fairuz Kamarulzaman, Tun Fiqa Mohammad and Pusat Kajian Balai Melayu, Jogjakarta, for their invaluable assistance.