

ARCHAEOLOGY AND EMPIRE:
BUDDHIST MONUMENTS IN MONSOON ASIA

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Abstract

In this paper, largely based on archaeological data, I argue that colonial intervention between the 18th and 20th centuries in South and Southeast Asia, not only altered the nature of linkages that had existed across Asia from at least the middle of the first millennium BC onwards, but more significantly redefined our understanding of monuments, essentially religious structures, from being abodes of spiritual power to objects of artistic and aesthetic appreciation. This had far-reaching implications for the study and understanding of the nature of Indic religions and here I focus on Buddhism. The paper highlight changes introduced as a result of colonial intervention in three major monuments of South and Southeast Asia, viz. Bodh Gaya in eastern India, Borobudur in central Java and the Angkor complex in Cambodia.

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In his study of Borobudur published in 1935, Paul Mus emphasised the role of architecture as a material representation of religious doctrines of Buddhism.¹ Writing more than five decades later in 1987, Schopen argued that if the history of religions, which was text-bound had instead been archaeology of religions “it would have been preoccupied *not* with what small, literate almost exclusively male and certainly atypical professionalised subgroups wrote, but rather, with what religious people of all segments of a given community actually did and how they lived.”² Schopen, of course goes on to state that this did not happen and even in cases when archaeology was taken into account, for example in Paul Mus’ study of Borobudur, inscriptions were not considered. The issue then is: Can

religious architecture inform us about the history of religions, especially since many of the monuments were irretrievably altered as a result of colonial intervention?

Sacred landscapes in Asia have generally been studied in terms of the architecture and imagery of the monuments or with regard to chronology and patronage and more recently within debates of generation of colonial knowledge. A distinction is often made between colonial and nationalist studies of Indian architecture, with the former based on accurate delineation and documentation of architecture spearheaded by James Fergusson (1808-1886), while the latter took recourse in aesthetics and spirituality, as evident in the writings of Anand Coomaraswamy (1877-1947). The positing of this supposed opposition between western scientific study of architecture and the Indian or nationalist predilection for Sanskrit treatises presents a simplistic representation of the complex legacy of colonialism, which attempted to impose a monotheistic religious identity on essentially culturally pluralistic societies in Asia.

Within this broad canvas, this paper focuses on three issues: one, interconnections created across macro regions of South and Southeast Asia as the British, the French and the Dutch carved out Empires between the 18th and 20th centuries; surveyed and documented existing ruins and abandoned shrines, but more significantly often attempted reconstructions of the monuments based on perceived ancient origins. The second relates to the discovery of Buddhism by the Europeans and the impact of Victorian perceptions towards Indic religions. Finally, the paper discusses the diverse though shared trajectories of restoration at three major monuments. These include Bodh Gaya located on the Phalgu River, a tributary of the Ganga, 182 kilometres south of Patna, the capital of Bihar, but more significantly, the site where the Buddha attained Enlightenment, Borobudur located on a hill at the confluence of two rivers Elo and Praga in the fertile Kedu plains in central Java and the Angkor complex to the north of the Tonle Sap or Great Lake and south of the Kulen Hills, near modern day Siem Reap in Cambodia– all three World Heritage sites as defined by UNESCO. But first it would be appropriate to present a brief overview of the institutionalisation of archaeology in India, Indonesia and Cambodia.

I: THE ENGLISH, THE DUTCH AND THE FRENCH: COLONIAL RULE AND STUDY OF ASIA'S PAST

In many ways, the histories of archaeological development in South and Southeast Asia overlapped, both through the personnel involved and also because large parts of island Southeast were under British rule in the 18th and 19th centuries. The advance of European colonial powers in South and Southeast Asia began as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, largely through commercial imperialism, but from about 1750 to 1825 territorial empires had already been established. By the late nineteenth century European powers consolidated their control and the late nineteenth and early twentieth century marked the era of 'new' imperialism.

In India, the British East India Company's victory at the battle of Plassey in 1757 marks the beginning of its rule in the subcontinent. It is no coincidence that interest in the material heritage of Southeast Asia corresponds with British control, starting with the occupation of Penang in the Straits of Malacca by Captain Francis Light in 1786. By 1815, Ceylon became a Crown colony, but soon the English were ousted from Indonesia. Though the Dutch were able to establish control over Java, they had to fight hard and bitter for dominance over the northern Sumatran region of Aceh and the island of Bali. There are several similarities between the British experience in India and the emergence of the Dutch as a territorial power in Java, though Dutch control over the Indonesian archipelago was a slower process and was only completed by the early twentieth century. In 1819 Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781 – 1826) the Malay translator to the Government of India established the free port of Singapore.³ However, the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 limited British sphere of influence to the 'Straits Settlements' of Malacca, Penang and Singapore.

Up to the end of the eighteenth century, Burma had not been the target of European expansion, but this changed with the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, that gave the East India Company control of Arakan and Tenasserim in lower Burma. The Indian subcontinent came under the British Raj in 1858, after the unsuccessful Revolt of 1857 and soon thereafter 'British Burma' came into existence, after the defeat of the Burmese king in the Third Burma War (1885-1887). Thus by late nineteenth century, the British were able to establish their

control over large parts of South Asia and to keep French commercial influence at bay.⁴

The mid-nineteenth century was also the period when France was looking for possibilities to expand its trade interests in mainland Southeast Asia, especially with China. In this it saw Vietnam as a springboard and from the 1860s onwards was able to establish foothold not only in Vietnam, but also extend control over Cambodia. In 1863, the Cambodian monarch Norodom agreed to French protection and accepted what the French called their 'civilizing mission.' On 5 June, 1866 the French Mekong Expedition to find a channel of communication along the Mekong river to China was launched comprising of Ernest Doudard De Lagree, Francis Garnier, explorer and naturalist and Admiral Louis Delaporte. This expedition did little to find an alternative riverine route to China, but did put Angkor firmly on the map, as will be discussed in a later section.

In 1873, Admiral Louis Delaporte led an archaeological mission to Angkor along with three engineers, a diplomat and a museum curator and visited the temples of Bayon and Preah Khan at Angkor. The mission removed statues and lintels from the temples and made plaster casts of reliefs and returned to France with 70 stone sculptures, some of which were exhibited in the 1878 *Exposition Universelle*. Delaporte's book *Voyage au Cambodge* (Delagrave, Paris 1880) illustrates the removal and transportation of many of these antiquities. In 1882 Delaporte returned to Angkor with another French mission and by the end of the nineteenth century about three hundred pieces of Khmer statuary had been transported to France.⁵

As the British and the French pursued their interests in mainland Southeast Asia, one region that was able to maintain its autonomy and avoid colonial rule was Siam (the kingdom's name until 1939) or present Thailand. King Mongkut (reigned 1851 – 1868), an extraordinary ruler was the architect of Thai suzerainty who took positive steps to acquire Western knowledge and also allowed diplomatic concessions to the Europeans so as not to present them with an excuse to impose foreign rule. This policy paid off and was continued by his son and successor King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868-1910). In spite of this, European challenge could not be entirely avoided and Thailand had to cede territories, which had formed a part of Thailand for over a century. Thus in 1907, Thailand

relinquished its control over western Cambodia and Angkor, thus making Cambodia one of France's prized possessions.⁶

The eighteenth to twentieth centuries also saw the establishment of museums in Europe and the proud display of collections from the colonies in Asia. A common concern of the European States was to publicise information about their newly acquired territories and to add to scientific writings on recent 'discovery' based on first-hand knowledge. 1851 saw the setting up of the East Indian Pavilion at London's Great Exhibition, which set a precedent for the erection of fabulous facsimiles of Asian monuments in England and was followed by the gateway at Sanchi in South Kensington's International Exhibition of 1871.⁷ Khmer antiquities were exhibited in Paris in 1878 and again in 1889 at the *Exposition Universelle*. In 1931 Paris hosted the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* to promote the benefits of colonialism and to present its colonies to the French public and to visitors from around the world. Not surprisingly, a full-sized replica of the Angkor Wat was displayed along with pavilions of other colonies of France. By the beginning of the twentieth century state institutions had been firmly established in several regions of Asia for the practice of archaeology, which was largely concerned at this time with conservation work and reclaiming the heritage of the colonies, as also flaunting it through exhibitions in Europe.

I.1: The Archaeological Survey of India

The history of archaeology in India is closely linked to that of the colonial state. It has continued to be largely state-sponsored in the post-Independence period with little input from universities. It may be questioned that given the involvement of several literary societies (such as the Asiatic Society of Bengal established in 1784 and the Batavia Society of Arts and Sciences founded in Indonesia in 1778) and private agencies (individual archaeologists), can the term 'colonial' be applied to archaeology as practised in the pre-Independence period? The answer to that lies in the institutionalisation of the discipline of archaeology in the nineteenth century, as a result of which training and research in archaeology was brought under the purview of the State, rather than within mainstream education in colleges and universities.

The idea of government-sponsored archaeology was largely the result of Alexander Cunningham's (1814-1893) bold initiatives and was in marked contrast

to the policies of the Asiatic Society. “The absence of any such ardour on the Society’s part is brought into high relief when viewed against its spirited fight for extracting financial support from an unwilling government for its resolve to bring to completion the printing of the Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian texts”.⁸ James Prinsep (1799-1840), the Assay Master of mints at Calcutta and Benares and Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal was against any organised archaeological effort. Instead, he said, “an independent pursuer of the object for its own sake, or for his own amusement and instruction” was needed.⁹ These objections notwithstanding, the Archaeological Survey (ASI) was founded in 1861 and Alexander Cunningham appointed its first Director-General (1861-1885), barely three years after colonial rule had been established in India. Progress in archaeological work declined in the post-Cunningham period and was revived under the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon in 1902.

In addition, legislation, such as the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act passed in 1904 under Lord Curzon in India changed the nature of archaeological sites and issues such as proprietary rights over shrines came to the forefront, rather than dynamic interaction and participation of the community. In his Presidential Address to the Indian Science Congress in 1946, Mortimer Wheeler, then Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India lauded the role of Curzon in the revival of ASI and of Curzon’s Director-General of Archaeology, John Marshall (1902 –1928). Wheeler lauded the colonial state’s conservation policy:

It is no exaggeration to say that the prestige both of Curzon himself and of Indian accomplishment through the ages has owed more to Curzon’s Ancient Monuments Preservation Act and to the Archaeological Survey re-founded to implement it than to any other single administrative action.

What Wheeler left unsaid was the extent to which Curzon’s policies were shaped by domestic compulsions in England and the need to project the imperial government as more ‘enlightened.’

The other aspect of the issue relates to perceptions of British administrators and archaeologists themselves. In his Presidential Address titled ‘Colonial Archaeology’ to the Oxford Meeting of the British Association on September 3, 1954 Sir Mortimer Wheeler stressed that the theme of his presentation related to

the safeguarding of cultural, historical and archaeological heritage in Britain's colonial territories. Thus it is evident that a primary concern of colonial powers was the safeguarding of the colony's heritage, but more significantly the subordination of indigenous interpretation of the world to European perceptions – an agenda that was pursued not only in South Asia, but in Southeast Asia as well.

I.2: Thomas Stafford Raffles and the History of Java

In the context of Java, the name of Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781 – 1826) stands out, first as a Malay translator to the Government of India and later in 1811 as the Lieutenant Governor of Java, who was soon promoted as Governor of Bencoolen (now Sumatra) who continued his work until 1824 when Java was ceded to the Dutch. Raffles' *The History of Java* first published in 1817 remained the standard work until the end of the century and included a chapter on the antiquities and monuments of the region. Colin Mackenzie (1753-1821) was appointed Chief Engineer to the British expedition against Java in 1811 and his collection of Javanese and European manuscripts proved invaluable in Raffles' endeavour. In 1812, Mackenzie visited the temple complex of Prambanan in central Java, surveyed the area and sketched the ruins. His notes and drawings were published in the seventh volume of the *Transactions of the Batavian Society*. In addition, Mackenzie travelled extensively on Java collecting manuscripts from a diverse range of sources:

Some were saved from the wreck of the Sultan's library at the storm of the Craten [kraton] of Djocjacarta, by permission of the prize agents and the concurrence indeed of all the military present – others were purchased and collected on the tour through that island: some were presented by Dutch colonists and regents, and others are transcripts by Javanese writers employed by Colonel Mackenzie to copy them from the originals in the hands of the regents, and with their permission.¹⁰

Colin Mackenzie is also known for the site plans and detailed drawings of sculptures that he made, as Surveyor General of India of Amaravati in south-eastern India.¹¹ In 1817, Mackenzie removed several stones from Amaravati and several of them later found their way to the British Museum. One aspect of Mackenzie's work was the official topographical survey and compilation of detailed maps and he was supplied with a staff for this. At the same time,

Mackenzie was involved in the collection of historical, literary and cultural material for which he built his own team of specially trained helpers and brahmana assistants.

In a span of forty-three years five major contributions were made to the study of the Southeast Asian past. These included William Marsden's *History of Sumatra* (1783), Michael Symes' *Journal of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava* (1795), Thomas Stamford Raffles' *History of Java* (1817), John Crawfurd's *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820) and John Anderson's *Mission to the East Coast of Sumatra* published in 1826. It is significant that in these publications, the academic discourse was often implicated in theories of race, which were firmly entrenched in Europe at this time.

In keeping with the search for 'origins,' Marsden made a distinction between the cosmopolitan Malays on the coast and the 'original' Sumatrans of the 'inland' country. As a linguist Marsden believed that one of the most important remnants of 'original Sumatra' was its language, which had existed on the archipelago and he called it the "Great Polynesian language". He even suggested in an article in *Archaeologia* that, in agreement with William Jones, "the parent of them all has been the Sanskrit."¹² In order to re-establish the ancient link between Sumatrans and Europeans, the Sumatrans had to retain, and Europeans had to rediscover, their 'original' culture.... Modern Western men, from their high point in the scale of civilisations, can revisit the purity of their origins by preserving the museum that is present-day Sumatra.¹³

Like Marsden, Raffles too believed in an original 'Polynesian language' common to all the islands, but saw 'foreign traders' as being the most important factor in the progress of a people. The Dutch, by their trade monopolies which restricted foreign trade, had 'interfered with, checked [and] changed in its character' the natural development of the Javanese.¹⁴ Raffles believed that English were the best rulers of Java because by freeing up trade they would allow the Javanese to return to their 'natural' course of development and also retain their ancient glory – a theme that he returns to in his second volume, as he painstakingly documented the ancient temples of Java.

These writings came at a time when what Trautmann refers to as the racial theory of Indian civilisation was firmly entrenched both in Britain and in India. This theory stressed, "India's civilisation was produced by the clash and

subsequent mixture of light-skinned civilising invaders (the Aryans) and dark-skinned barbarian aborigines (often identified as Dravidians).”¹⁵ Its beginnings may be traced to the Third Anniversary address that Sir William Jones gave to the Asiatic Society in 1786 in which he emphasised the common roots of Sanskrit, Greek and Latin. At the same time around 1816 Francis Whyte Ellis, a civil servant in Madras argued that the Sanskrit component of the south Indian languages, viz. Tamil, Telugu and Kannada was borrowed and overlay a core vocabulary, which was shared by the three languages. These developments based on philology often intersected discourses on ethnology and in the 18th and 19th centuries language and race were frequently correlated.¹⁶ This was true both for the discourse prevalent in British India, as also in French Indo-China.¹⁷

I.3: Cambodia – the French Protectorate

European travels into Asia and surveys conducted by military personnel and other officers often led to ‘discoveries’ of monuments in Asia and Cambodia was no exception to this. Portuguese and Dutch traders and missionaries travelled through Siam and Cambodia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and one of the earliest visitors to Angkor was Antonio da Magdalena, a Capuchin friar who explored the region in 1586.¹⁸ However these reports were not followed up and it was the French naturalist Henri Mouhot’s ‘discovery’ of the temples at Angkor in 1860 that brought the architectural heritage of Cambodia to the notice of the Europeans. Henri Mouhot made accurate drawings of Angkor during his second journey to Cambodia from December 1858 to April 1860. Mouhot’s letters reporting his impressions of Angkor were first read to the Royal Geographical Society in London in 1862, as it was they who had sponsored his expedition to Cambodia. Mouhot’s drawings and illustrations fired the “French imagination and will to imperialism”.¹⁹ Mouhot himself urged the French to add it to their crown, before the English snatched it.

In France, the study of Asian religion gained momentum with the establishment and expansion of Musée Guimet in 1889 and the creation of École Coloniale in Paris signifying the emergence of a career colonial service. Founded in Saigon on the initiative of the Académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres in 1898, the Mission Archéologique d'Indochine became the École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) in 1901. At the same time, its seat was transferred to Hanoi. The original tasks of EFEO included archaeological exploration of French

Indochina, the conservation of its monuments, the collection of manuscripts, and research into the region's linguistic heritage. In 1930 the Buddhist Institute in Cambodia was founded and the 1860s to 1900 saw French attempts to procure and catalogue Cambodia's Buddhist manuscripts and relics, which were paralleled by indigenous movements to purify and reform Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhism.²⁰

These activities did not take place in a vacuum and need to be placed in the context of the geopolitics of knowledge in colonial South and Southeast Asia. In early 1900s Curzon ordered a number of photographs of Angkor Wat from Saigon, while Louis Finot, the first Director of EFEO stressed the need to catch up with the progress made by the British. It is significant that around the time that Curzon was involved with legislation for conservation in India, Auguste Barth (1834-1916) Indologist and epigrapher who played a decisive role in drawing up the foundation charter of EFEO in Southeast Asia set out its programme in a letter to EFEO's first director Louis Finot.²¹ His instructions were terse:

We will no longer see fragments taken off into residences or sent to the Musée Guimet, losing their value as a consequence. Indochina will keep its riches. And as for your own collections, in the case of original material, you will only collect pieces which would otherwise be destroyed. They will not be obtained by pillaging or destroying monuments. Not only will you not demolish them, you will preserve and conserve them. But you will not restore, as that is usually the worst form of vandalism. The old-new Temple of Bodh Gaya must not have its counterpart in Cambodia.²²

In a strange twist of irony, French writings on the archaeology of Southeast Asia were taken up by Greater India polemicists in their nationalist fervour as they wrote of cultural conquest. Many of the influential thinkers of the society, such as P.C. Bagchi (1898-1956) and Kalidas Nag (1891-1966) had studied in Paris with celebrated Indologists Sylvain Lévi (1863-1935) and Jean Przyluski (1885-1944). Not only did the Director of EFEO George Coedès praise these attempts at rediscovery of the Indian heritage of colonization, but these interactions between Indian and French scholars of Further India and Greater India continued well into the 1950s.²³ It is interesting that though members of the Greater India Society wrote about Indian cultural expansion to Southeast Asia, as

also India's role in universal history, they contributed little to the study of Buddhism having accepted perhaps Alexander Cunningham's hypothesis regarding the decline of Buddhism in India after seventh century AD. How did this hypothesis about the decline of Buddhism gain ground? An answer to the question necessitates discussion on the study of Buddhism in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and the transmission of these ideas to the subcontinent through colonial institutions, such as the Archaeological Survey of India.

II: THE EUROPEAN DISCOVERY OF 'BUDDHISM'

It is significant that the Buddha and Buddhism are rarely mentioned in Graeco-Roman texts and it was through early Christian writing that some information about Buddhism filtered into Europe.²⁴ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as European missionaries travelled to Asia, they discovered a new religion that they labelled *bauddhamatham* or Buddha's point of view. In addition, missions travelled to Tibet and Siam and the resulting accounts exposed Europe to writings of Buddhism. For example, in 1687-88, Simon de La Loubère published *Descriptions du royaume de Siam* containing translations of Buddhist texts in what he called *balie* or *baly*. By 1860 the large collections of Buddhist manuscripts and texts now available in oriental libraries and institutions of the West ensured that it became "a textual object, defined, classified and interpreted through its own textuality".²⁵

The school of Buddhist studies that emerged in Europe during the early nineteenth century remained dominated by Indologists well into the 1900s. These scholars constructed Buddhism as "an historical projection, derived exclusively from manuscripts and blockprints". In France this textual reification was exemplified by the work of Eugene Burnouf (1801-1852), a Parisian philologist who wrote *L'Introduction à l'histoire du buddhisme indien*, Paris: Imprimerie Royal, 1844. This in turn focussed Buddhist studies on the pursuit of master texts for deposit in European libraries.²⁶

The term 'Buddhism' seems to have arisen around the beginning of the nineteenth century and was marked by attempts to characterize 'authentic Buddhism' defined as being the teachings of the historical Buddha who lived and preached in the sixth-fifth centuries BC.²⁷ There was a significant increase in the editing and publishing of many Pali works from 1877 onwards, especially after T.

W. Rhys Davids established the Pali Text Society in 1881.²⁸ This increased interest in Buddhism meant that by 1907 there were adequate number of persons, either as Buddhists or as students of Buddhism to form a Buddhist Society in Great Britain and Ireland. The European valorisation of Buddhist scriptures as historical documents, like the scriptural emphasis of the reform movements, differed from long-standing ways of seeing religious texts in Theravada Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, as elsewhere in pre-colonial South and Southeast Asia, written texts were part of a performative tradition of Buddhist practice in which the word and art of listening were both modes of literacy and means of accumulating merit.²⁹

The appeal of Buddhism also lay in the perception that the Buddha had been an opponent of Hinduism, and the vast majority of Victorians easily comprehended this antagonism. The image of the Buddha as a social reformer who led a crusade against Hinduism not only looms large in Victorian writings, but through Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893) these ideas found their archaeological manifestation and continue to be repeated to the present. Thus while, James Fergusson highlighted a racial-religious framework for the study of Indian architecture based on photo archives of plans and architectural details, Cunningham's treatment took in sculptures and inscriptions as well. Cunningham sought to divide religious architecture on the basis of dynastic history, though his primary concern remained the study of Buddhism, which had found no mention in the *Puranas*.

In his 1871 publication titled *The Ancient Geography of India*, Cunningham divided the geography of the country into three periods, i.e. the Brahmanical period, which covered the expansion of the Aryan race over north India to the rise of Buddhism; the Buddhist period during which Buddhism was the dominant religion of India and this period is stated to have lasted until the conquest of Mahmud of Ghazni; and finally the Muhammadan or modern period. What is, however, intriguing is that Cunningham based his conclusions solely on surveys conducted in north India. By his own admission while his travels had been extensive and covered from Peshawar and Multan to Rangoon and Prome and from Ladakh and Kashmir to the banks of the Narmada, he had seen nothing further south than the celebrated Buddhist caves of Elephanta and Kanheri in western India.³⁰

Was the colonial government amenable to using religion for political gains? This issue can perhaps best be answered by tracing the archaeological discoveries of relics in stupas and their distribution from the nineteenth century onwards. In 1851, Alexander Cunningham and Captain F.C. Maisey opened stupa 3 at Sanchi, in central India by sinking a vertical shaft through the centre of the stupa where he found an inner chamber with two sandstone boxes, which contained small steatite relic caskets. Inscriptions on the lids of the caskets identified the remains as those of Buddha's disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana. Cunningham transported the caskets containing relics to London without any questions being asked and discarded the stone boxes in which the caskets had been placed. The stone boxes were subsequently located during the excavations conducted by John Marshall, but the relics along with the caskets seem to have been lost.³¹ Nor were these the only reliquaries that Cunningham found, other important ones being from stupa 2 at Sonari. It would seem that several of these were lost when the ship *Indus*, which was transporting these treasures to England, sank.

It is significant that the textual record of the relics of the Buddha's two principal disciples states that these were enshrined at Sravasti (Sariputta) and those of Moggallana at Veluvana near Rajagriha. John Marshall theorised that the relics of the two monks had been shifted to Sanchi when additions were made to the monastic structures.³² About 10 kilometres west of Sanchi, Cunningham and Maisey opened stupa 2 at Satdhara where they discovered another pair of relic caskets with small pieces of bone. Inscriptions on the lid clearly identified the relics as those of Sariputta and Moggallana.³³ While Cunningham went on to become the Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, Maisey was posted to Burma during the Second Anglo-Burmese War. On his return to England in 1866, he made drawings of the inscribed reliquaries from stupa 2 at Satdhara (nos. IM 216-1921 and IM 217-1921) and loaned the relics and the caskets to the Victoria and Albert Museum along with other antiquities that he had collected from Burma. Subsequently the museum bought these objects from his heirs in 1921.³⁴ Thus in the nineteenth century, Buddhist relics were transported outside the country without any qualms about hurting religious sentiments of the people, but this changed soon and archaeological objects were

caught in the changing nature of religious identities in South Asia and the political turmoil in the subcontinent.³⁵

In March 1939, the Trustees of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Burma lodged a strong protest to the British Government regarding the exhibition of relics in a museum, instead of being enshrined and worshipped in a pagoda. Similar protests were lodged by other organisations in India and on 24 February, 1947 representatives of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Government transferred the custody of the relics to Daya Hewavitarne, a representative of the Mahabodhi Society and the Government of India. The relics then travelled through several countries, such as Sri Lanka and Burma and were finally enshrined at Sanchi in November 1952.³⁶

Records in the National Archives of Delhi provide interesting details of the discovery and subsequent distribution of relics and especially the case of those from the mound of Piprahwa Kot in Basti district close to the Nepal border is significant. The mound was located within Mr. W.E. Peppe's estate and when he came to know that this was a stupa, he sunk a shaft down and came across a stone chest of large dimensions in which were three steatite urns and a crystal bowl and two stucco slabs. In the crystal bowl there were a number of small gems and a few stamped pieces of gold leaf. The most important relics were the charred bones and ashes, about a handful. On one of these urns there was an inscription in Pali indicating that the relics were those of the Buddha himself.

At this point the story of the find gets more complex as a high priest, Jinavaravansa, cousin of the king of Siam had come on a pilgrimage to visit this stupa, the recently discovered Asoka pillars, the Lumbini garden and the site of Kapilavastu. He sent a letter dated 9 April 1898 to Mr. Peppe, enclosing a memorandum on Buddha's relics stating that the ashes of the Buddha be made over to him for presentation to the king of Siam as the head of the orthodox community of the present day and the sole reigning Buddhist monarch.³⁷ While debating the fate of the relics, Dr. W. Hoey, Officiating Commissioner, Gorakhpur Division wrote to the Chief Secretary to the Government of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh:

It is a matter of common knowledge that the Buddhists are not satisfied because the Bodh Gaya temple is in the possession of the Hindus. The attitude of the Government of Bengal in this matter is

necessarily one of neutrality. At the same time the connection of the British government with Buddhist countries renders it desirable that if an incidental opportunity to evince its consideration for Buddhists should arise, advantage should be taken of it to manifest its goodwill. Viewing the Government of India in this case as the British Government I consider its relations with Siam, a country bordering on Burma, would justify the gift for which the application has been made. At the same time I believe that the coveted relic should be forwarded through this Government to the Government of India and transmitted by His Excellency the Governor-General to the king of Siam.³⁸

The Chief Secretary, V. A. Smith suggested in his reply that while the relics may be of interest to religious communities, the accessories e.g. the stone coffer, the crystal vase and the small finds were of importance for the Europeans and that the two classes of objects required different treatment. While the former could be gifted to the king of Siam, the appropriate place for the latter was the museum, such as the Imperial Museum, Calcutta. It was hence decided that the relics would be handed to a representative of the king of Siam, who in turn would distribute the relics to communities from Burma to be displayed at Rangoon and Mandalay and at Anuradhapura, Kandy and Colombo in Ceylon. In keeping with this agreement, the Royal Commissioner of Ligor Circle Phya Sukhum arrived with his Secretary on Tuesday 14 February, 1899 at Gorakhpur and proceeded to Piprahwa. On 16th February the relics were brought from the Royal Treasury and handed over with great ceremony. The relics were then placed in gold plated pagodas which Phya Sukhum had brought with him and that same evening he left Gorakhpur for Calcutta.³⁹

The address by Dr. Hoey on this occasion, alluding to references from the past and intertwining them with those of the present, is revealing:

On this occasion we cannot but recall the gathering of rival kings who were prepared to fight at Kusinara for the cremated body of the great preacher of peace among the many episodes of whose life none stand out more beautiful than his interventions between brother tribes and kingly neighbours to prevent bloodshed: nor can we forget the events that, which led to the extinction of Buddhism

in the Indian land where it was first propagated. One of many instances, which may be cited in the history of the world in which the power of kings was used to push or crush a religious system. Reflecting on these bygone days we are entitled to congratulate ourselves that we live in an age of toleration and of wide sympathy with the faiths, which others profess. As a practical illustration of this sympathy the present memorable occasion loses none of its significance.⁴⁰

Relics of bone were discovered during archaeological excavations of a stupa built in Peshawar, Pakistan by the Kushan ruler Kanishka in the second century A.D. In 1909, three pieces of bone (approx 1½ in. or 3.8 cm long) were found in a crystal reliquary in a bronze casket bearing an effigy of Kanishka and an inscription recording his gift. They were removed to Mandalay in Myanmar by the Earl of Minto, Viceroy and Governor General of India, in 1910, for safekeeping and were originally kept in a stupa in Mandalay. The outcome in this case was very different from that of Piprahwa and was complicated by a Petition from Sayed Amir Badshah and Sayed Ahmed Shah, owners of land from which relics were found stating that that the religious community be asked to pay for the remains and that the owners of the land be given half the price for their share of the remains. H.H. Risley of the Legislative department decreed that it would be desirable for the Collector to declare the treasure to be ownerless since “Buddhist bones belong to nobody and have no value” and should go through the form of acquiring it under the Treasure Trove Act VI of 1878. The intrinsic value of the casket could be ascertained for making payment to the owners, if need be.⁴¹

A different set of rules were applied to the relics found at Taxila and in this case Sir John Marshall, Director General, Archaeological Survey of India was allowed to visit Ceylon in January 1917 in order to present the relics to the people of that island.⁴² But perhaps the most embarrassing outcome was that of relics discovered in 1900 at Bhattiprolu in Andhra and kept in the Madras Museum. Sir Arthur Havelock, Governor of Madras offered them to the King of Siam who accepted the offer. Subsequently the J.P. Hewett, Secretary to the Government of India withdrew the offer and decided that relics of historical or archaeological value should be preserved in India and that such relics should not be parted with in future.⁴³

Thus in the nineteenth and twentieth century, we see transformations in several domains: on the one hand, texts acquired prominence in the study of religions, while at the same time text-based archaeology came into vogue, when texts were taken recourse to for the identification of sites associated with the life of the historical Buddha, through the indefatigable Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, Alexander Cunningham. The focus shifted to inscriptions and monuments for the study of Buddhism, with relic caskets dug out from stupas proving invaluable for cementing political ties between the British colonial state and the kingdom of Siam that continued to form a buffer between the British and the French in mainland Southeast Asia. In the next section, we focus on three major monuments in order to examine the role of the state in configuring sacred landscapes.

III: MONUMENTS OF REVERENCE

III.1: Bodh Gaya and the Mahabodhi Temple

The UNESCO charter describes the Mahabodhi temple as the earliest construction in the subcontinent and hence of great historical value. How valid is this definition? The Buddha is stated to have lived in the sixth-fifth centuries BC, whereas the earliest archaeological evidence at Bodh Gaya dates to the fourth-third century BC Mauryan ruler Asoka. In addition to questions of identification of sites associated with the life of the Buddha visited by Asoka and marked by pillars, there are sites, such as that of Sanchi, which had little association with the Master. Indeed considering that Sarnath, the site of the first sermon, is almost 240 kilometres from Bodh Gaya the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment, these issues of identification of spots associated with the Buddha's life need careful scrutiny.⁴⁴

More than its historicity, the Mahabodhi temple and the structures in its vicinity present a living record of additions and reconstructions – a practice frowned upon given the stress in archaeology on 'origins' rather than religious practice. These structures include a polished stone throne of third century BC date, stone railings that were added first in the first century BC as a result of donations by three women – Kurangi, Sirima and Nagadevi, the first being the sister-in-law of the ruler Agnimitra. After the reconstruction of the temple around the fifth century AD, a second railing was added in the sixth century AD, while a gateway was constructed somewhat later in the eighth century AD and there are

several inscriptions recording gifts of images. Two other edifices are important: a plastered walkway at the spot where the Buddha walked after attaining Enlightenment; and a tank that a brahmana got excavated at the site, as described by the seventh century AD Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang.⁴⁵

There is no doubt that Bodh Gaya has been revered as a sacred site and centre of pilgrimage from at least the fourth-third centuries BC onwards, but it is the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha is said to have attained Enlightenment that has been the centre of piety. The VIII Rock Edict of the Mauryan ruler Asoka at Girnar in Gujarat records that ten years after his coronation in around 259-8 BC, the Mauryan ruler went to the *sambodhi* or visited the Bodhi tree as a part of his travels for propagation of Dhamma. A platform to the east of the tree has been dated to the Mauryan period and was perhaps used for placing offerings to the tree. The temple, it is suggested is secondary to the tree.⁴⁶ As depicted on the railing of the stupa at Bharhut in central India dated to second-first century BC and recorded in an inscription from the site, the temple was an open structure enclosing the tree and the platform.⁴⁷ It is evident that the present structure is the result of restoration over several centuries and the transformation of the tree shrine into the present temple, rectangular on plan and with a tower topped by an *amalaka*.⁴⁸ A representation of a temple with a tower on a terracotta plaque excavated from Kumrahar near Patna and dated to second-third century AD on the basis of the Kharosthi inscription is often cited as a prototype for the Mahabodhi temple.⁴⁹ The issue then is: when did the tree lose its centrality to the temple? When was the temple constructed and by whom? Huntington argues that “the present temple is largely a nineteenth century British Archaeological Survey of India reconstruction based on what is generally believed to be an approximately fifth-century structure.”⁵⁰ The beginnings of the rediscovery and conservation of sites associated with the life of the Buddha dates to the nineteenth century when it became Alexander Cunningham’s primary mission.

In his search for sites associated with the Buddha, Alexander Cunningham relied on accounts of the Chinese pilgrims Faxian and Xuanzang who travelled to India in the fifth and seventh centuries respectively. Thus he argued that the extant brick temple at Bodh Gaya corresponded with the description given by Xuanzang and was certainly present at the time that the Chinese pilgrim visited the site, but Faxian makes no mention of it. Faxian refers to the tree where the

Buddha attained Enlightenment and to three monasteries that had been constructed at the place “in all of which there are monks residing”.⁵¹ Xuanzang, on the other hand, refers to a small vihara built by Asoka between 259 and 241 BC that pre-dated the temple and refers to the construction of the temple by a Brahman “in compliance with the instructions of the god Mahadeva conveyed to him in a dream” and the placement of the image of the ascetic Buddha inside it.⁵² An inscription dated AD 948 however ascribes the building of the temple to the illustrious Amara Deva, one of the members of the court of king Vikramaditya “in compliance with the command of Buddha himself, conveyed to him in a vision.”⁵³

From all the facts, which I have brought forward, such as the non-existence of any temple in AD 400, the recorded erection of a large one by Amara Deva about AD 500 and the exact agreement in size as well as in material and ornamentation between the existing temple and that described by Hwen Thsang between AD 629 and 642, I feel satisfied that the present lofty temple is the identical one that was built by the celebrated Amara Sinha about AD 500.⁵⁴

In spite of Cunningham’s assertion, his interpretation of the Mahabodhi complex was at variance with the Chinese text and description of the pilgrim and this is an issue that several of his contemporaries indicted him for, as well.⁵⁵ A second point that Cunningham did not take into account was the audience of Xuanzang’s writings. It is suggested that the Chinese pilgrim’s narrative of his pilgrimage to India was written specifically for the eyes of the Chinese emperor Taizong of the Tang dynasty (618-907) and hence Xuanzang highlighted aspects that would satisfy the curiosity of the emperor and also indicate his personal contacts and knowledge of foreign political leaders. Peiyi Wu argues that Xuanzang’s narrative includes “almost everything except his pilgrimage.”⁵⁶

It needs to be stressed that Bodh Gaya continued as a centre of pilgrimage well into the colonial period. In addition to the Chinese, the Burmese sent two missions in 1035 and 1086 AD to renovate and repair the temple. Burmese inscriptions from this period also record a history of the temple at Bodhgaya, crediting the Mauryan ruler Asoka with its construction. The great Tibetan translator Rinchen Sangpo (958-1051) placed offerings at the gate of Bodh Gaya followed by the Tibetan monk Dharmasvamin in 1234 AD. The latter refers to

several important places around the temple, such as the Tara shrine, a tooth relic and foot prints of the Buddha.

What is fascinating is that from the thirteenth century, the Mahabodhi temple became a model that was emulated at several other centres and there are at least four re-creations in Burma and Thailand. The earliest was built at Pagan in the 13th century followed by Schwegugyi in Pegu dating to 1460-1470, Wat Chet Yot in Chiangmai (1455-1470) and the fourth one at around the same time in Chiengrai.⁵⁷ The two replica temples in Peking were consecrated in 1473 and 1748 respectively.⁵⁸ Perhaps the last temple to be built on the basis of the models was the Mahabodhi complex at Bodh Gaya itself. The British engineer J. D. Beglar undertook this restoration work in 1881 and used two stone models for reference.

In addition to replicas, twenty stone models of the temple made between the early thirteenth and the late fifteenth century AD provide a crucial link in the fascinating record of the British discovery and restoration of the Mahabodhi temple. These stone models, averaging about twenty centimetres in height and carved in dark grey schist are widely dispersed from eastern India to Nepal, Tibet, Arakan and Myanmar and represent not just the Mahabodhi temple but the entire complex including the rectangular outer wall and a representation of the bodhi tree positioned on the west terrace.⁵⁹

It is difficult to evaluate the extent to which the models served as direct prototypes for these (re-created temples), or the extent to which those responsible for designing them relied on first-hand information gathered from by missions sent to Bodhgaya itself. A major reason for their construction, which spans the early thirteenth to the late fifteenth century, must have been the desire to create surrogate temples to allow veneration to continue after access to Bodhgaya itself had been so severely curtailed by Muslim control of eastern India.⁶⁰

At this point Rajendralal Mitra's (1823/4-1891) contributions need to be brought into the discussion, especially his critical approach to the conservation work of the Burmese at Bodh Gaya. Mitra distinguished himself on account of his knowledge of Indian languages such as Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu and Hindi and edited several Sanskrit texts. Much has been written about Mitra's project to write

history based on India's ancient architecture and sculpture and his claim that the Hindu temple qualified as an elevated art form and his subsequent differences with James Fergusson on the Greek legacy in Indian stone sculpture, which led the latter to write a book in 1884 titled *Archaeology in India, with special reference to the Works of Babu Rajendralal Mitra*. This has been seen as colonial insecurity against a Western-educated native scholar in the context of the politics of the Ilbert Bill of 1883, which threatened to subject the British in India to the jurisdiction of native judges.⁶¹ It should also be stressed that notwithstanding Fergusson's diatribe, the colonial state, in this case the Government of Bengal supported Mitra's work. In 1877, the Secretary, Government of Bengal wrote to Mitra stating that in the wake of conservation work done by the Burmese in 1305 and 1877, Mitra should visit Bodh Gaya "to inspect the work and the remains collected and to give advice as to their value and to their disposition and whether there are any that should go to the Asiatic Society; and generally to advise the Government in regard to the manner in which the operations of the Burmese excavators should be controlled". Needless to say, Mitra's unqualified support of the rules of conservation as laid down by the Archaeological Survey of India brought him into conflict with Burmese norms of restoration.⁶²

At the end of this section, it would be useful to digress and to discuss the archaeological data from neighbouring Gaya on the Phalgu river 6 kilometres from Bodh Gaya, which is sacred for the performance of ancestral rituals. References to Gaya occur in the *Mahabharata* and by the fifth century AD it had attained great sanctity as recorded in the *Visnusmriti*. The *Vayu Purana* dated to eighth-ninth century lists 324 holy sites around Gaya related to ancestral rites and also contains an elaborate mythology of Gaya recorded in the *Gaya Mahatmya*. The location of these holy sites mark out the Gaya *ksetra* or the meso-cosmos around the Visnupad temple covering a radius of eight kilometres and including the Mahabodhi tree in the south, which is to be worshipped on the fourth day of the rituals.⁶³ Despite these references, building activity at the site dates to mid-eleventh century when the ruler of Gaya established a temple of Vishnu (Gadadhara) and other religious shrines. In the late eighteenth century Queen Ahilya Bai Holkar of Indore built the Visnupad temple complex at Gaya enshrining the footprints of Visnu. There is nevertheless inscriptional evidence

from eighth century onwards of donations and of a continuous tradition of pilgrimage at least from twelfth to sixteenth centuries.

In addition there are several examples of images from Bodh Gaya, which include a relief dated AD 807 depicting Surya, Lakulisa and Visnu. Its inscription indicates dedication of a *caumukha* Mahadeva icon within the boundaries of the temple complex for the benefit of the *snatakas* who were the inhabitants of the Mahabodhi.⁶⁴ There are several other Saiva images found at the Mahabodhi temple complex that survive, while others are worshipped as heroes given the Vaisnava identity of the present temples at Gaya.⁶⁵ Today the Visnupad temple forms the centre of ancestral rituals, though this was not the case earlier, when the modest Gayasiras shrine located just below the Visnupad was venerated as the most important on the route.⁶⁶ Thus it is evident that Bodh Gaya and Gaya formed a religious complex revered by several sections of society with diverse religious affiliations and underwent both spatial and temporal changes. In the search for origins and chronology, the social history of religious architecture or the constant changes that any religious structure underwent as a 'living' monument in Asia were eliminated in the colonial period. This transformation of a shrine with varied following into a relic is a practice that was to be repeated not only at other places of worship in South Asia, but as we shall discuss below, at Borobudur and Angkor as well.

III.2: Borobudur

The origins of the name *Borobudur* are unclear. The only old Javanese manuscript that hints at the monument is *Nagarakertagama*, dated to AD 1365, which mentions *Budur* as a Buddhist sanctuary. It is likely that it is associated with Borobudur, but the manuscript lacks any further information to make a definite identification. The eighteenth century Javanese manuscript, the *Babad Tanah Jawi* (or the History of Java), recounts the history of Java from the prophet Adam up to the eighteenth century depending on the version of the text and is an important narrative of Javanese culture. The author of the text wanted to demonstrate that the realm of Mataram was a successor and a copy of Buddhist Majapahit and his dynastic history of Java starts with Watu Gunung or the eighth century Sailendras of central Java, thereby drawing Borobudur into the meta-narrative.⁶⁷

Construction at Borobudur probably began around AD 760 and was completed by about AD 830. Two inscriptions found in the region may be relevant. The first dated AD 824 refers to the construction of a religious edifice by king Samaratunga and the second of AD 842 mentions queen Sri Kahulunan who allocated revenue from a village to support the sanctuary.⁶⁸ There are indications to suggest that one part of the monument collapsed during construction and there were other setbacks as well. The plans for the structure changed over time requiring more work. It would also seem that originally the entire monument was coated with white plaster and then painted. During the Dutch colonial period ochre was applied to several sculptures to increase contrast and facilitate photography and some of the stones continue to retain this change in colour.⁶⁹

Borobudur is a unique Javanese monument consisting of a series of terraces of decreasing size that rise above the Kedu plains. Exquisitely carved with 1460 stone panels, Borobudur contains more than 500 life-sized Buddha images set around the monument. In the middle of each of the four sides, a long, straight stairway leads from the ground to the uppermost terrace, a climb of nearly 26 meters. The most striking are the sculpted galleries, which illustrate five Buddhist scriptures, some of them highly abstract. Of all the texts, one that occupies four hundred and sixty panels is the story of prince Sudhana and his quest for knowledge, as inscribed in the *Gandavyuha*.

The *Gandavyuha* was translated from, Sanskrit into Chinese in the fourth century and was popular both in China and Japan, but in Java not only is there divergence between image and text, but it also acquires representation very different from anywhere else in the Buddhist world.⁷⁰ Short inscriptions survive on the figures on the base and it has often been assumed that these indicate instructions for the artisan, though De Casparis has argued that these were meant to provide indications to pilgrims visiting the monument.⁷¹ This is further supported by finds of a large number of ritual objects at the site. These include silver plates with one-line inscriptions, two hundred and fifty-two clay votive tablets and two thousand three hundred and seven clay miniature stupas, many of them inscribed with short Buddhist formulae.⁷²

Archaeologists have found no less than thirty ancient sites within a five kilometre radius of the monument. Borobudur was linked to two nearby temples

by means of a long axial pathway that begins at Candi Mendut and ends at the bottom step of Borobudur's outermost staircase to the west. According to the Dutch archaeologist A. J. Bernet Kempers, an early Dutch survey of the area determined that Borobudur's summit is 1,750 meters to the southeast of Candi Pawon and 2,900 m to the southeast of Candi Mendut. Candi Mendut originally was merely one building in a large temple complex that was surrounded by a brick wall measuring about 110 by 50 m. Today, however, the only other standing structures at this site consist of a few small memorial stupas that are located in the general vicinity of the yard's entranceway, which that is today located on the northwest side of the monument.⁷³

Borobudur was perhaps the first major monument that drew the attention of the British in Southeast Asia, almost forty-seven years before Henri Mouhot brought the ruins of Angkor to the attention of Europe. As discussed earlier, in 1814, when Java was under British rule, Raffles first evinced interest in the stupa at Borobudur located on a hill at the confluence of two rivers Elo and Praga in the fertile Kedu plains that forms the geographic centre of Java. He sent a Dutch engineer H.C. Cornelius to explore and document the stupa. Cornelius cut down trees, cleared the area around the monument and made some drawings, which Raffles used to illustrate his *History of Java*. In 1835, C.L. Hartmann, the Dutch administrator of Kedu region arranged for the removal of debris and the clearing of the galleries at the site, though no details survive of his operations. Once the earth covering the monument was removed depriving it of its protective cover, the exposed stones quickly became covered with moss, algae and lichen leading to deterioration of the sculptures and carved panels. In 1844, colonial authorities allowed a tea-house to be built on top of the monument for the benefit of visitors to the monument. It is evident that the authorities were slow in assessing the gravity of the situation.

The Dutch Government sent F.C. Wilsen, an engineer to make architectural drawings and sketches of the reliefs during 1849 and 1853. Three years later, J.F.G. Brumund was appointed to make a detailed description of the monument, but he withdrew co-operation when he learnt that his drawings would form a supplement to Wilsen's study. Finally C. Leemans was appointed to compile a monograph based on drawings made by Wilsen and Brumund. Leemans' monograph appeared in 1873 followed by a French translation in

1874.⁷⁴ In 1896, king Chulalongkorn of Siam visited Borobudur and the colonial authorities accepted his request to take back with him to Bangkok eight cartloads of sculptures from the site.⁷⁵

Finally in 1901, The Dutch Government established a Commission in the Netherlands Indies for Archaeological Research in Java and Madura, which was re-designated in 1913 to Archaeological Service in the Netherlands Indies. Borobudur owes its next phase of conservation activity largely to efforts by an engineer Lieutenant Th. Van Erp who was entrusted with conservation work at Borobudur from 1907 to 1911. He also received permission from the Commission to dismantle and rebuild the circular terraces and his work provided the basis for the development of what was termed the 'anastylosis' procedure for reconstruction. Van Erp's work at Borobudur involved excavating the surrounding area for seven months, which resulted in the recovery of stones and fragments from the stupa, narrative panels, twenty Buddha heads and so on. At Borobudur, the greater part of the structure still existed. Niches, galleries, gateways and the like could consequently be rebuilt and completed on the model of the better preserved specimens in the same category still in situ. Of the four hundred and thirty-two niches, one hundred and fifty-one were completed; the frames of forty-one were rebuilt, while only a few of the original twenty-four gateways could be fully restored. In contrast the fifth balustrade was broken down and rebuilt.⁷⁶

While the monument at Borobudur was restored close to its original form, except perhaps the pinnacle, the landscape around the site had changed considerably as a result of the conservation work undertaken. A number of Hindu and Buddhist shrines were located within 3 square kilometres of the confluence of the rivers Elo and Praga, but while the Buddhist structures are relatively well preserved, the Hindu temples have disappeared.⁷⁷ The reason for the longevity of Borobudur lies perhaps in the fact that it did not ever lose its position within Javanese cultural memory and visitors continued to go to the monument. Chinese ceramics and coins dating from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries have been found at the site and a fourteenth-century Javanese poem indicates that pilgrims continued to visit the shrine. By the 1850s, nearly four decades after Borobudur had been reclaimed from the jungle, the Javanese were again performing rituals at the shrine and especially important was the first day after the end of the Muslim

fasting month of Ramadan when crowds of people both Chinese and Javanese, assembled at the site. The most popular image was that on the first terrace referred to as Kakek (grandfather) Bima or Bhima of the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata* and worshipped for boons.⁷⁸ This record of continued cultural dialogue between the community and the monument was an aspect of life in pre-colonial Asia evident in the next case study as well.

III.3: The Discovery of Angkor

It is said “Angkor had not been discovered, for the good reason that it had never been lost or forgotten.”⁷⁹ More than fifty major monuments and dozens of smaller buildings are found on the Tonle Sap plain near the present town of Siem Reap and scholars often use the term “Angkor” to describe the complex of archaeological sites found between the Tonle Sap and the Kulen hills to the northeast.⁸⁰ It was here that Jayavarman I laid the foundations for Khmer rule around 800 AD, but it was Yasovarman I who ascended the throne in AD 889 who launched an ambitious building programme. Yasovarman I founded a city and named it Yasodharapura, while the reign of Jayavarman VII (1181 - 1220) is known for its intensive building programme and the creation of the city of Angkor Thom. The account of the transformation of Yasodharapura into Angkor is no less interesting than its discovery by the Europeans.

Angkor derived from Sanskrit *nagara* or city developed between the eighth and fifteenth centuries and local accounts date its abandonment in 1431 to Thai invasions of the region. Another theory suggests that the city of Angkor was not completely abandoned at that time, but a different lineage of the Khmer king took the opportunity to establish his own power as a rival state in the south around Phnom Penh and that the final downfall of Angkor was actually due to the shift of the economic core south to the Phnom Penh region, which became a growing and flourishing trading centre, especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

The religious affiliation of Khmers rulers is often seen as oscillating between allegiance to Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism, with Theravada Buddhism appearing somewhat later in the thirteenth century. A study of religious architecture however indicates that a shrine to the Buddha did not differ markedly from one to Visnu or Siva and a good example is that of Bat Chum inaugurated in 953 AD where the Buddhist settlement followed the same architectural pattern as

that of others dedicated to Siva or Visnu. Though inscriptions refer to Buddhist monasteries and to tenth century hermitage or āśrama dedicated by Yasovarman, none of these have as yet been identified in the archaeological record.⁸¹

Jayavarman VII founded two enormous temple complexes beyond the walls of Angkor Thom, Rajavihara (Ta Phrom) and Nagara Jayasri (Preah Khan) to honour his mother and father respectively.⁸² The king's son Sri Suryakumara was the author of the foundation inscription of the temple, which stresses the king's ancestry from his mother's side. In addition to the principal image of the king's mother in the form of the Buddhist deity Prajñāpāramitā, nearly two hundred and sixty other images were found from the temple and many of these can be identified on the basis of brief inscriptions on them. It is evident that the temple complex may be seen as a centre for the worship of ancestors, which incorporated not only the image of the king's mother, but also images of ancestors of members of the king's court.

An analysis of the inscriptions of Jayavarman VII indicates that both Ta Phrom and Preah Khan were enormous complexes. While the former was home to eighteen priests, 2740 officials and another 2,202 supporters including six hundred and fifteen female dancers, the records from the latter mention royal temples supporting 306,372 people divided into 13,500 grāmas, the reference being to 'servants of the gods' rather than to slaves.⁸³

The history of Buddhism in Cambodia and Vietnam is still inadequately researched. Nevertheless by the seventh century there are references to visiting teachers from India including Punyodhana from central India who promulgated Vajrayana Buddhism in Champa.⁸⁴ From the seventh to the early tenth century there is evidence for the spread of Mahayana Buddhism in Champa with links with the religious traditions of Thailand and Java.⁸⁵ Thus the extensive network of temples to the Buddha in South and Southeast Asia is evident. At the beginning of the eleventh century, lineage temples probably constituted a fairly large group of sanctuaries and it is suggested that members of the lineage managed the property attached to these temples. Jacques cautions against placing too much emphasis on the large stone temples that survive without taking into account the smaller village temples and shrines that must surely have existed and formed an extensive network of religious shrines in the Khmer region.⁸⁶

In 1296 the Chinese traveller Zhou Daguan travelled to Angkor along with a mission to extract homage for the Chinese emperor and has left a detailed account of the structures as well as the customs of the Cambodians in the reign of Indravarman III. Zhou Daguan's portrays a society in which the king wore a gold crown like that worn by Vajradhara, the Buddha in the Vajrayana form of Buddhism, where Buddhist monks termed *zhugu* were universally revered along with Saivite priests and Hindu pundits or wise men. He mentions boys serving as monks in school.⁸⁷

In the sixteenth century Angkor Wat was named after its royal builder Suryavarman II (AD 1113-50) and it is in his name that several bas reliefs were completed. The Cambodian annals record that the king of Siam removed many Buddha images to his own court at Ayutthaya and that in 1569 the Burmese subsequently moved them first to Pegu and subsequently in 1734 to Mandalay where they are still preserved.⁸⁸

Several Khmer kings are known to have travelled to Angkor in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and Middle Khmer inscriptions dated from fifteenth to eighteenth century describe their visits as 'pilgrimages' and refer to many others undertaken by the common people. Around 1550-1570, an unknown king of Angkor attempted to restore a temple without success. Besides, in the seventeenth century there were Japanese settlements in Angkor city, as at least fourteen Japanese inscriptions have been found in the area. One of the most renowned Japanese inscriptions belonged to Ukondafu Kazufusa who had visited Angkor and celebrated Khmer's New Year there in the year 1632. In the early seventeenth century a Japanese pilgrim left a map and descriptive notes. Many of these inscriptions retain the historical memory of the foundation of the city as Yasodharapura, but also introduce a new element and identify it as Indraprastha or the city or realm of Indra, which he built for his human son Ketumala.⁸⁹ Thus Angkor retained its importance in Khmer religious practice, though with the entry of Europeans in the region, the monuments entered the international arena of conservation, research and study.

In a perceptive account of his travels in nineteenth century mainland Southeast Asia published posthumously by his brother, Henri Mouhot describes not only the monuments that he encountered but also the communities living around them. Thus at Ta Prom he refers to seven gateways "formed by a central

tower at the entrance and by lateral galleries,” which were entered by Cambodians from a hamlet outside the enclosure, who cultivated a few rice plantations.⁹⁰ The towers were eight to ten metres high, well preserved and real works of art, but two of them were being taken to pieces, “in order to transport them to Bangkok, the king having issued orders to that effect, and appointed one of the mandarins to carry them out.”⁹¹ The narrative of this European discovery of Angkor is relevant as it defined the terms of reference through which the history of Angkor came to be studied, with the emphasis on the grandeur of the temples and the brilliance of the artistic styles.

In the nineteenth century the Khmers were Theravada Buddhists, but revered Angkor as a symbol of their religion or *sāsanā*, which was devoid of the denominational divide. Thus while for the Khmers, Angkor Wat was a living shrine, for French archaeologists, it was a monument of ‘historic’ importance, which needed to be restored to its ‘original’ state and pristine glory. “Such scholastic ambitions correlated with nostalgia for France’s eighteenth century loss of its Indian empire to Britain, as reflected in popular French depictions of Cambodia and its monuments as ‘France’s’ India”.⁹²

The presence of Buddhist statues and the practice of Buddhist worship at Angkor presented unwelcome challenges to colonial desires to compartmentalise Cambodia both vertically, through time and horizontally, through the categorisation of religion. On site, the Hindu framing of Cambodia encouraged Angkor’s new guardians not only to relocate members of the Cambodian monkhood or sangha, but also to remove Buddhist statues that had been erected in positions of central prominence and sacred significance during the temple’s centuries-long conversion to a site of Buddhist worship. During the following decade, colonial attempts to re-Indianise Angkor would see the quarantining of scores of such Buddhist icons in a designated space, which became known as Mille Bouddha (thousand Buddha) gallery. Those monks, who had been the chief curators of the temple complex long before the EFEO was founded, were also cleared off the land in 1909 as their presence in front of the temple was considered an eyesore.⁹³

In keeping with French policy of removing all traces of an active religious life from the monument, the priority was to open the cella in the central tower by removing the massive Buddhist sculptures that had been placed there. While European visitors to Angkor generally accepted removal of accretions made by 'ignorant natives,' they argued for the retention of the vegetation that provided mystery to the monuments. As a result, it was decided that a majority of the monuments would be 'scientifically' cleared and restored, but in cases where the jungle had blended with the architecture, they would be left untouched.⁹⁴ It is not surprising that the temples of Ta Phrom and Ta Som left untouched were shrines to Buddhist deities, which had lost their religious significance in the twentieth century.

The 'scientific' method that the French adopted for Angkor from 1930 onwards was based on Dutch practice that had been introduced in Java for restoration of Borobudur from 1907 to 1911. The Angkor Conservation Service was modelled on the more successful Archaeological Service of the Dutch East Indies and its Director Dr. P. V. Van Stein Callenfels was invited to Angkor in 1929 during the tenure of Henri Marchal (1876 – 1970) as curator at Angkor. Termed the theory of anastylosis, literally re-erection of columns, it was developed by the Greek architect Balanos and endorsed restoration or reconstruction of a monument using its own materials and according to the construction method proper to it. The Javanese model however, could not be replicated in its entirety in Cambodia. For one, the sandstone used at Angkor was softer and more friable than the andesite of Borobudur monuments; and second was the non-availability of necessary expertise in Cambodia. As stated by Marchal, "the principal lesson to be learnt from the methods applied in Java is the advantage of a more discreet use of cement....As in Java, the visitor should ideally be unable to see the least trace of cement."⁹⁵

Thus French aspirations at Angkor determined the nature of conservation work at the site. As in the case of Alexander Cunningham's search for the historical Buddha, French imaginings of the lost world of India and the perceived origins of Angkor Wat were instrumental in deciding the nature of the monument.

IN CONCLUSION

The three case studies discussed amply illustrate radical transformation in sacred landscapes as a result of colonial intervention, altering not just the nature

of the site, but shifting its location from within religious networks to national histories and as monuments to national glory and artistic pride. In the pre-colonial period, religious architecture was an important indicator of interaction with diverse interest groups, such as worshippers, ritual specialists, patrons, artisans, etc. Besides shrines formed a part of pilgrimage networks that provided connectivity and mobility both locally and within the region, as also across the Indian Ocean world.

It is significant that Chinese visitors to Bodh Gaya included not just monks, but also members of the naval fleets sent by the third emperor of the Ming dynasty Yong-le (1403-1425) to more than twenty countries in Southeast Asia, as well as to Bengal and the Malabar coast and Aden, popularly known as the voyages of Zheng He. Nor were the Chinese the only power to evince interest in the region. An aspect of colonialism often neglected is rivalry between European powers, especially between the British and the French in South and Southeast Asia from 1862 to 1904, as each of them sought to expand their trade interests.⁹⁶ These examples can be multiplied to underscore the importance of political interests in the documentation and survey of ancient sites.

In the final analysis it is evident that colonial policies and redefinitions of monuments, history, ruins, and conservation practices shaped and reflected larger imperial politics and the bureaucratic order. In considering colonial encounters, it is therefore important not to allow the re-colonization of South and South East Asian intellectual history by inclusion of studies of monuments in dynastic mode into linear meta-narratives of national histories, with emphasis on political legitimisation, 'decline and fall', followed by the myth of colonial salvation. The need then is to think outside both national borders and the abstraction of a world without borders, and to locate research at the 'intellectual intersections of mobility and territorialism'.⁹⁷

Examining how new forms of knowledge, such as archaeology arose and was harnessed to suit the colonial vision through institutions such as the Archaeological Survey of India, the Archaeological Service in the Netherlands Indies and the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient must involve addressing indigenous thought-worlds and knowledge practices, such as methods of restoration of religious shrines. How did the state deal with resistance to colonial

attempts at enforcing conservation practices, which were clearly contrary to the local practice of sponsoring restoration of religious shrines?

In the case of Bodh Gaya, while Mitra sided with the Government of Bengal and argued against the restoration work done by the Burmese, the question that needs to be addressed relates to Mitra's methodology in the study of religious architecture and the extent to which it differed from that of Cunningham and Fergusson? Mitra stressed that "every literature, however fabulous or mythical may be its character, has a historical value and that of India cannot be an exception. In the same way, almost every monument or carved stone... bears on its face an index to the intellectual condition of some individual or community and may be made, with proper care to yield an acceptable contribution to the cause of history".⁹⁸ Thus of all the three, Mitra's canvas as it related to a study of the visual data for a social history of India was perhaps the widest, since Fergusson focussed mainly on architecture to the detriment of sculpture and the textual evidence and Cunningham on the archaeology of Buddhism based on accounts of Chinese pilgrims. Also it was Mitra who attempted a social history of architecture – a methodology largely neglected in subsequent writings.

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¹ Mus, *Barabudur: sketch of a history of Buddhism*.

² Schopen, 'Burial *Ad Sanctos* and the physical Presence of the Buddha' p. 193.

³ Benjamin, *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism*, p. 370.

⁴ Osborne, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 73-5.

⁵ Delacour, 'The Building of a Collection', pp. 72-7.

⁶ Osborne, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 80-3.

⁷ Edwards, 'Taj Angkor: Enshrining L'Inde' pp. 13-28.

⁸ Imam, *Sir Alexander Cunningham*, p. 44.

⁹ Imam, *Sir Alexander Cunningham*, p. 46.

¹⁰ Weatherbee, 'Raffles' Sources for Traditional Javanese Historiography' p. 65.

¹¹ Howes, 'Colin Mackenzie and the Stupa at Amaravati', pp. 53-65.

¹² Marsden, *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 11.

¹³ Quilty, *Textual Empires*, pp. 58-60.

¹⁴ Raffles, *History of Java*, I, p. 192.

¹⁵ Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, p. 4; p. 206: "The racial theory of Indian civilization was constructed by narrativizing the encounter of polar opposites of

Victorian racial thoughts, the fair-skinned civilized Aryan and the dark-skinned savage, and by finding evidence for their encounter in the Vedic texts. It was the work of Sanskritists, and British Sanskritists were at the forefront in its construction”.

¹⁶ Trautmann, ‘Constructing the Racial Theory of Indian Civilization’, pp. 282-5.

¹⁷ Bayly, ‘French Anthropology and the Durkheimians’, 581-622.

¹⁸ Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor*, pp. 140-1.

¹⁹ Edwards, ‘Making a Religion of the Nation and its Language’, pp. 63-85.

²⁰ Edwards, ‘Making a Religion of the Nation and its Language’, pp. 63-85.

²¹ Edwards, ‘Relocating the interlocutor,’ pp. 277-335.

²² Clémentin-Ojha and Manguin, *A Century in Asia*, p. 20.

²³ Bayly, ‘Imagining ‘Greater India’, pp. 703-744.

²⁴ “We can thus safely conclude that early Hellenistic literature knew hardly anything about the Buddha” Karttunen, *India and the Hellenistic World*, p. 63.

²⁵ Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism*, pp. 12-3.

²⁶ Edwards, ‘Taj Angkor: Enshrining L’Inde,’ p. 18.

²⁷ Historians date the life of the Buddha from [circa 563 BC](#) to [483 BC](#), though some scholars have recently suggested dates around 410 or 400 BC for his death, but there is little consensus on the latter view. Cousins, ‘The Dating of the Historical Buddha,’ pp. 57-63.

²⁸ Rhys Davids taught Pali and Buddhist literature at University College, London and was instrumental in the setting up of the School of Oriental Studies. He was also the first to hold the chair in comparative religion at the University of Manchester (1904-1915).

²⁹ Edwards, ‘Making a Religion of the Nation and its Language,’ p. 68.

³⁰ Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India*, p. viii.

³¹ Marshall, *The Monuments of Sanchi*, p. 12.

³² Marshall, ‘Where the Restored Relics of Buddha’s Chief Disciples Originally rested,’ p. 142.

³³ Cunningham, *The Bhilsa Topes*, pp. 191-3.

³⁴ Daulton, 'Sariputta and Moggallana,' p. 109.

³⁵ Brekke, *Makers of Modern Indian Religion*.

³⁶ Willis, *Buddhist Reliquaries*, p. 81, footnote 6.

³⁷ National Archives of India, 1899 Foreign Department, External A Pros. April 1899, nos. 92-117: Presentation to the king of Siam of certain Buddhist relics discovered near Piprahwa in the Basti district. Visit of Phya Sukhum to India to receive the relics.

³⁸ National Archives of India, 1899 Foreign Department, External A Pros. April 1899, nos. 92-117: Presentation to the king of Siam of certain Buddhist relics discovered near Piprahwa in the Basti district. Visit of Phya Sukhum to India to receive the relics: No. 94, no. 4366 – VII-32 dated 13th April 1898.

³⁹ National Archives of India, Foreign Department, External A Pros. April 1899, nos. 92-117: Presentation to the king of Siam of certain Buddhist relics discovered near Piprahwa in the Basti district. Visit of Phya Sukhum to India to receive the relics: no. 115.

⁴⁰ National Archives of India Home Department Public A, April 1899 Pros Nos. 3 to 20: Visit to India of HE Phya Sukhum, envoy of the king of Siam.

⁴¹ National Archives of India Home Department, Archaeology and Epigraphy A: Proceedings December 1909, nos. 13-16: Petition from Sayed Amir Badshah and Sayed Ahmed Shah, owners of land from which Buddhist relics were recently found at Peshawar claiming a share of the relics.

⁴² National Archives of India Government of India Finance Department Pay and Allowances for Proceedings February 1917 nos. 84-5: Tour of visitation by Sir

John Marshall, DG to Ceylon to present the Buddhist relics in person to Buddhists of that island.

⁴³ National Archives of India, Foreign Department, External B Proceedings March 1901 No. 97: Disposal of a relic of Buddha, which was offered to the king of Siam and accepted.

⁴⁴ A detailed account of this occurs in the Mahavagga of the *Vinaya Pitaka*, an account that is argued by Bareau and others to be a later addition indicating the new authority of the Sangha (Karetzky 'The First Sermon,' pp. 127-148).

⁴⁵ Cunningham, *Mahabodhi*.

⁴⁶ Huntington, 'Sowing the Seeds of the Lotus,' p. 60.

⁴⁷ Lueders, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* II, part II, p. 95.

⁴⁸ Myer, 'The Great Temple at Bodh Gaya'. Malandra, 'The Mahabodhi Temple,' pp. 9-28.

⁴⁹ Mukherjee, 'Inscribed Mahabodhi temple Plaque from Kumrahar,' pp. 43-6.

⁵⁰ Huntington, 'Sowing the Seeds of the Lotus,' p. 61.

⁵¹ Legge, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, pp. 87-90, chapter XXXI.

⁵² *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report* volume I, p. 6.

⁵³ *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report* volume I, p. 7.

⁵⁴ *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report* volume I, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁵ Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, p. 117.

⁵⁶ Wu, 'An Ambivalent Pilgrim', p. 67.

⁵⁷ Brown, 'Bodhgaya and Southeast Asia', p. 108.

⁵⁸ Guy, 'The Mahabodhi temple', pp. 356-367.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Guy, 'The Mahabodhi temple', p. 365.

- ⁶¹ Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, pp. 108-111.
- ⁶² Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*.
- ⁶³ Singh, et al, 'Sacredscape and Manescape'.
- ⁶⁴ Barua, *Gaya and Buddha Gaya*, p. 231.
- ⁶⁵ Asher, 'Gaya: Monuments of the Pilgrimage Town', pp. 74-88.
- ⁶⁶ Jacques, *Gaya Mahatmya*. Williams, 'Shraddha Ceremonies at Gaya', pp. 200-204.
- ⁶⁷ Berg, 'The role of Structural Organisation and Myth', pp. 100-103.
- ⁶⁸ Miksic, *Borobudur*: 23.
- ⁶⁹ Miksic, *Borobudur*: 26; 151: footnote 11.
- ⁷⁰ Miksic, *Borobudur*: 127-9.
- ⁷¹ Casparis, *Indonesian Palaeography*, p. 32.
- ⁷² Miksic, *Borobudur*: 34-5.
- ⁷³ Bernet Kempers, *Ageless Borobudur*.
- ⁷⁴ Soekmono, *Candi Borobudur*, p. 6.
- ⁷⁵ Miksic, *Borobudur*: 29.
- ⁷⁶ Bernet Kempers, *Ageless Borobudur*.
- ⁷⁷ Soekmono, *Candi Borobudur*, pp. 1-2.
- ⁷⁸ Miksic, *Borobudur*: 28-9.
- ⁷⁹ Dagens, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire*, p. 14.
- ⁸⁰ Stark, 'Pre-Angkorian and Angkorian Cambodia', p. 101.
- ⁸¹ Pottier, 'Yasovarman's Buddhist Asrama in Angkor', pp. 199-208.
- ⁸² Higham, *The Civilisation of Angkor*, pp. 125-6.
- ⁸³ Higham, *The Civilisation of Angkor*, pp. 126-7.
- ⁸⁴ Snellgrove, *The Image of the Buddha*, p. 155.
- ⁸⁵ Mabbett, 'Buddhism in Champa', pp. 299-300.
- ⁸⁶ Jacques, 'Sources on Economic Activities in Khmer and Cham Lands', pp. 327-334.
- ⁸⁷ Zhou Daguan, 2007: 24-5.
- ⁸⁸ Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor*, p. 140.
- ⁸⁹ Pou, 'From Old Khmer Epigraphy to Popular Tradition,' pp. 19-20.
- ⁹⁰ Mouhot, *Travels in Siam, Cambodia, Laos and Annam*, p. 253.

⁹¹ Mouhot, *Travels in Siam, Cambodia, Laos and Annam*, p. 254.

⁹² Edwards, 'Relocating the interlocutor,' p. 290.

⁹³ Edwards, 'Taj Angkor: Enshrining L'Inde' p. 17.

⁹⁴ Dagens, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire*, p. 173.

⁹⁵ Dagens, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire*, pp. 108-9; 173-5.

⁹⁶ Christian, 'Anglo-French Rivalry in Southeast Asia', pp. 272-82: There was a persistent belief that a short route could be found that would provide access to the wealth and trade of interior China, particularly Yunnan and Szechwan. Indeed, twice (in 1893 and 1896) the two countries were on the verge of battle for control of the Menam and Mekong routes to Yunnan.

⁹⁷ Ludden 'Presidential Address', pp. 1070.

⁹⁸ Mitra, *Antiquities of Orissa*, volume I, p. v.