

THE INDONESIAN SPAFA SUB-CENTRE FOR PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS

BASED AT BOROBUDUR

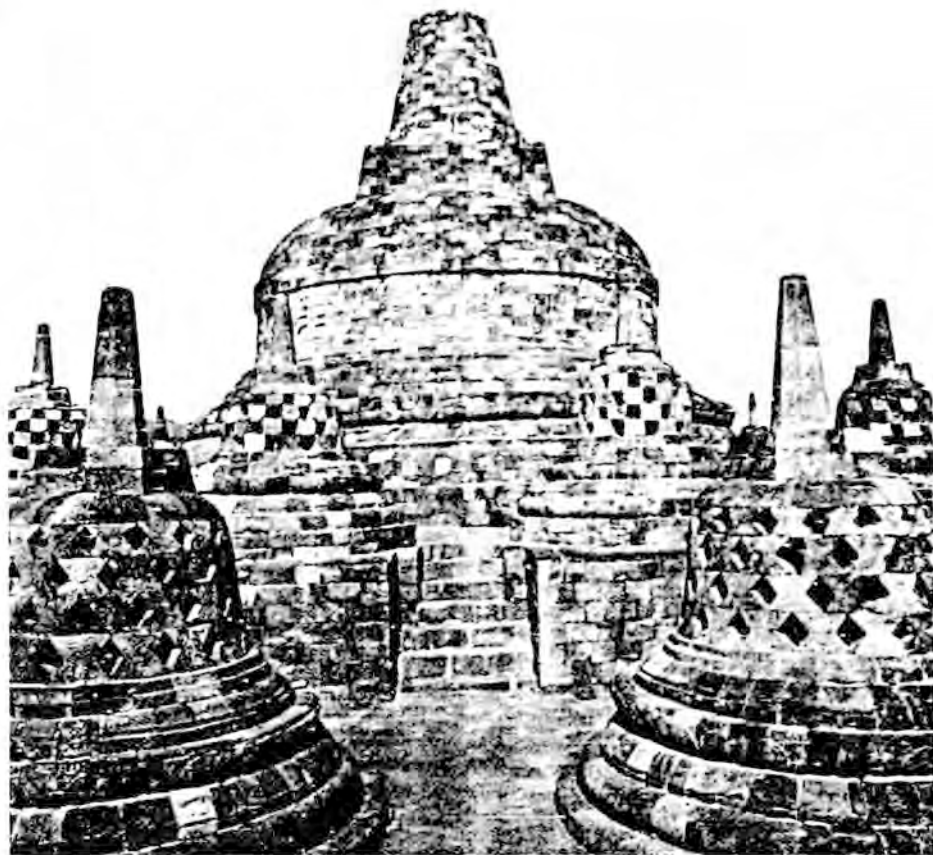
"Chandi Borobudur is for Indonesians today a tangible witness of their glorious past, and a spiritual beacon which fosters the self-confidence that will enable them to achieve their national aspirations."

Dr. Soekmono, Head, Agency for the Restoration of Chandi Borobudur, and Director, SPAFA Sub-Centre for Preservation and Restoration of Ancient Monuments.

It is not known with certainty how long Chandi Borobudur was in active use, or when it ceased to function as a monument to glorify the greatness of the reigning royal dynasty and at the same time as a centre of Buddhist pilgrimage. The general assumption is that the Chandi fell into disuse when people were converted to Islam in the fifteenth century, but it is quite possible that the monuments in Central Java were abandoned as early as the tenth century when historical importance shifted to East Java.

Although the Chandi has never been completely lost to memory, especially among the villagers who lived nearby, it was not until 1814 during the short period when Java was under British rule that Chandi Borobudur emerged, actually and figuratively, from its dark past. Through the combined enthusiasm of the British Lieutenant Governor-General, Sir Stamford Raffles, and Cornelius, a Dutch engineer officer, the earth and rubbish in which the monument had long been buried were cleared away, though many parts of the galleries were unearthed because of the danger of collapse.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, however, concern for Chandi Borobudur was confined to amateur. Investigations and excavations were mostly carried out because of someone's personal interest or an eagerness to know more about what was still kept hidden by the rubbish.



Chandi Borobudur, the big dome and the perforated stupas.

Government interest dates from 1849. In 1885 the Archaeological Society in Yogyakarta made a sensational discovery that the broad base of the Chandi enclosed the "hidden foot" with series of reliefs carved all around it and a photographic recording of the reliefs was made in 1890-1891.

This discovery led to a government decision to take up seriously the problems of physically safeguarding Chandi Borobudur and this resulted in the first major restoration work undertaken from 1907-1911 under the supervision of Van Erp, an army engineer officer. His success in dismantling and subsequently rebuilding the circular terraces and the

perforated stupas and the fifth balustrade, fully justified his approach to restoration problem. Van Erp however did not touch the position of the walls. Once assured that the sagging and leaning of the walls did not preclude future upkeep of the structure, he thought it better not to interfere further than was absolutely necessary with the character of the monument as it had survived through the centuries; he merely prescribed regular checks to verify the extent and degree of slanting.

In 1929 a Government Commission was appointed to make a complete check-up to the Chandi and to identify the causes of damages and suggest means of arresting further decay. The pain-

Dr. Soekmono, Head of the Borobudur Restoration Project and Director of SPAFA Sub-Centre in Indonesia, Mr. Dejo Savanananda, SPAFA Governing Board Member for Thailand, and Mrs. Satyawati Suleiman, SPAFA Governing Board Member for Indonesia; at Borobudur.

staking studies and the recommendations of the Commission were highly appreciated by the Government but the world-wide economic depression of the thirties and the second world war put a stop to all the suggested restoration measures.

The importance of Borobudur as a source of national aspiration was demonstrated by the fact that the Chandi received special attention during the struggle for independence immediately after the second world war. In 1948, while fighting still continued in various parts of the country, two Indian archaeologists were invited to survey it.

The problem of safeguarding Chandi Borobudur became an international one as soon as the Republic of Indonesia was recognized in 1950 and joined the United Nations and UNESCO. The opportunity was seized to take advantage of the latest developments in technology and their application to archaeology and in 1955 the Indonesian Government asked UNESCO advice on the problem of counteracting stone weathering in Indonesian monuments, and Chandi Borobudur in particular.

The researches of various kinds carried out by the Indonesian Archaeological Institute were still inconclusive when all activities on the Chandi had suddenly to be stopped because of political disturbances towards the end of 1965. The Archaeological Institute did not however remain idle but continued the analysis of the engineering problems involved in the provisional reconstruction design. In 1967 the Government again asked UNESCO for technical assistance and similar appeal was made at the Twenty-seventh International Congress of Orientalist (Ann Arbor, Michigan, U.S.A.). The response was prompt and from 1968 experts from several countries came in turn to carry out on-site studies, in close cooperation with the Archaeological Institute and the various Indonesian governmental agencies involved.



The international experts expressed their highest appreciation of the studies so far carried out by the Archaeological Institute and agreed with their Indonesian counterparts that Chandi Borobudur faced imminent destruction through collapse of the structure and disintegration of the building stones, and that the only effective way of arresting decay was a complete reconstruction, because the Chandi was so integrated and the deterioration so widespread that no partial restoration could effectively ensure its safeguard.

It was proposed that the execution of the Restoration Project with the estimated budget of US\$7,750,000 be entrusted to the Indonesian themselves, so that UNESCO assistance would only comprise fund-raising from international sources to supplement the Indonesian National Budget, the supply of equipment and material and missions of technical advisers.

To ensure the single-minded dedication to the Restoration Project the Indonesian Government in April 1971 set up the **Badan Pemugaran Candi Borobudur** - (Agency for the Restoration of Chandi Borobudur), to lighten the burden of the Archaeological Institute which is responsible for the care of all monuments throughout Indonesia. Staffed by senior engineers and archaeologists, and assisted by advisers in the various branches of sciences from several universities in Indonesia, the autonomous **Badan**, working in close cooperation with a UNESCO co-ordinator, was in-

tended to handle all aspects of the project, technical and administrative, national and international.

When it was decided in 1976 that SPAFA be set up to take care of SEAMEO activities in archaeology and fine arts outside the framework of ARCAFA, a SPAFA Task Force was constituted to visit SEAMEO member countries to identify the needs as well as institutions best suited to implement SPAFA programmes and activities. When the SPAFA Task Force visited Borobudur it was found that in addition to restoration work the Borobudur Restoration Project also conducted in-service training for Indonesian technicians. Dr. Soekmono, Head of the Restoration Project, expressed his willingness to offer training services to the whole of Southeast Asia in monument restoration with specialization in stone conservation, because experts helping in the Borobudur Restoration Project could be used for the training and the well equipped laboratories on stone disease would be at the disposal of the SEAMEO trainees.

From 1978 to 1980 the SPAFA Sub-Centre for Preservation and Restoration of Ancient Monuments based at Borobudur conducted 7 training courses in various aspects of monument restoration for architects, engineers, art historians, archaeologists, chemists, scientists, as well as technicians recruited from government offices and institutions responsible for monument restoration works in SEAMEO countries.