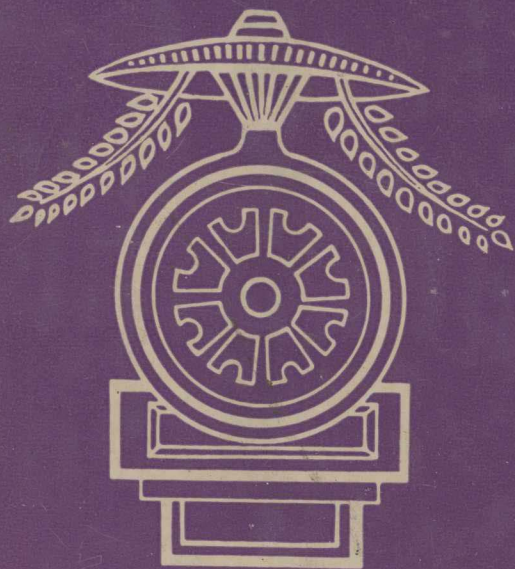


# Buddhist Art in India, Ceylon & Java



**J. Ph. VOGEL**

Translated from the Dutch by  
**A.J. BARNOUW**

# BUDDHIST ART IN INDIA, CEYLON AND JAVA

BY

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BUDDHIST ART  
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AND JAVA



LION CAPITAL FROM SĀRNĀTH

*Local Museum*

## PREFACE

IN February 1935 the Secretary to the Delegates of the Clarendon Press addressed me regarding the possibility of bringing out an English translation of my book *De Buddhistische Kunst van Voor-Indië*, published in 1932 by Messrs. H. J. Paris, Amsterdam. He suggested at the same time that the proposed English version should include an account of the Buddhist Art of Ceylon and Java, and it was considered desirable to give special prominence to that most important monument of the Buddhist religion—the Barabudur of Java.

There was all the more reason to accept the proposal of the Clarendon Press because Dr. A. J. Barnouw, Professor of the History, Language, and Literature of the Netherlands in Columbia University, had declared his willingness to undertake the translation. Let me take this opportunity to express my indebtedness to Professor Barnouw for the care bestowed by him on this task. The readiness with which Mr. H. J. Paris has lent his co-operation is also greatly appreciated.

The inclusion of Ceylon and Java in a book dealing with the Buddhist Art of India has much to commend it. In both these islands ancient architecture and sculpture, though obviously derived from the Indian Continent, show an independent development

in which the workings of indigenous sources of inspiration are unmistakable. The harmonious blending of Indian and local elements has produced in both cases a truly national art which, in my opinion, it is misleading to designate, as is sometimes done, by the slightly depreciative term 'colonial'. It may in truth be said that ancient Java especially has yielded works of art which are unsurpassed by anything found in the Indian homeland. In the Barabudur with its wonderful display of sculptural decoration the Indian *stūpa* attains its highest perfection. My brief account of this marvellous monument of the Mahāyāna is largely dependent on Professor N. J. Krom and Lieut.-Colonel Th. van Erp's volumes in which a century of archaeological research has been embodied.

In dealing with the ancient monuments of Ceylon the want of an up-to-date handbook is painfully felt. Here, too, archaeological research has made considerable progress during the last twenty years, so that earlier publications like Henry Cave's beautifully illustrated volume have now become antiquated. In my chapter on the Buddhist Art of Ceylon it has been my endeavour to include, as much as possible, the results of recent investigations. I wish here to record my great obligation to Mr. A. M. Hocart, late Archaeological Commissioner of Ceylon, and to Mr. S. Paranavitana, the learned editor of the *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, who have favoured me with many valuable suggestions.

It is, in truth, a somewhat bold undertaking to present an account of the architectural and sculptural art of Ceylon and Java in two brief chapters. But it must appear even more presumptuous to handle the Buddhist Art of all India in a book of so limited a size. That art covers a period of fifteen centuries and in the course of that vast expanse of time has revealed itself in many local schools, showing remarkably divergent varieties of style. With regard to this manifestation of Oriental Art it would certainly be most inappropriate to speak of 'the unchangeable East'.

In the present handbook it has been my chief object to give a historical outline of Indo-Buddhist Art, to sketch its various successive schools in their main characteristics, and to trace their mutual relationship. Some slight attempt has also been made to show in what manner the artistic phenomena must have followed the religious developments and spiritual movements of which they are the tangible signs.

I have preferred to keep to the firm ground of historical treatment rather than to be allured into the quicksands of aesthetic disquisition, which is too often biased by personal prejudice. At the same time I am ready to admit that in historical problems relating to Indo-Buddhist Art more uncertainty prevails than will perhaps appear from these pages. The modest size of my book did not admit of any extensive discussion of debated questions.



Perhaps these unavoidable deficiencies will be counterbalanced by the conciseness with which the main lines stand out more clearly.

Among the photographs reproduced, those relating to Indo-Buddhist Art were mostly taken by the Archaeological Survey of India, while I owe those pertaining to Ceylonese monuments to the Archaeological Commissioner in Ceylon. The photographic views and the ground-plan of the Barabudur have been borrowed, with the author's permission, from Professor Krom's book published in the same series as the original of the present volume.

J. PH. V.

LEYDEN

*November 1935*

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# I

## INTRODUCTION

**B**UDDHISM has been extinct in India, the land of its birth, for nearly seven hundred years. One has to go down to Burma to find it still a vital force in the religious life of the people. But the visitor who knows Buddhist teaching through the study of the sacred writings will wonder at the spectacle of these happy Burmese folk as they go up, in festive garb, to the pagodas aglow with blazing colours. Is this cheerful religion, he will ask in surprise, the melancholy Buddhism of the ancient Pali books?

It is with equal wonder that we ask ourselves what connexion there can be between the doctrine of Buddha and the Buddhist art of India. That ancient lore weighs us down with its pessimism, it chills us with its despair of life and renunciation of the world, for it teaches man's highest aim to be release from the great sorrow which is inseparable from all existence. Such a doctrine of escape seems a barren soil for an art such as we find in India, an art which revels in luxuriant forms and profusion of colours.

It is a case of nature refusing to be regulated. The temper of the Indian people has asserted itself like sunshine breaking through the clouds. The Indian, in his inmost being, feels a powerful impulse

to worship the deity and to manifest that worship in visible signs and tangible symbols.

In Buddhist India it was the person of the great Master himself which satisfied that impulse to worship. The homage of his followers raised him upon the throne of the deity, which he himself had left empty. He was at first worshipped in his relics, later on also in his image.

That deep-rooted need to adore is coupled in the Indian with yet another craving, a veritable passion for adornment, the evidences of which can still be observed in present-day India. The Hindu covers not only the white walls of his house with various colourful figures, he decks even animals, such as elephants and horses, with paints, if only their natural hue lends itself as a background for gaily tinted ornament. This pleasure in decoration, which sometimes deteriorates into a mania, also manifests itself, with ever-increasing insistence, in old Indian literature. It is, indeed, one of the most characteristic features of the plastic art of the Indians.

Those who know Buddhist art solely from the ruins, the mouldering images, the faded frescoes of India proper, can scarcely visualize the gay splendour which those ancient sanctuaries must once have radiated. Such an orgy of colours would dumbfound a Westerner. The surface of these crumbling buildings was once covered with a layer of gleaming white plaster, which was doubtless not left unadorned.

One can still find traces of colour and gilding on the sculptures of stone and stucco. Those mutilated grey stone images of Buddha must have stood there once with orange robe and gilded skin, as the faithful imagined that the Master himself had walked the earth. But one has to go to Burma, or to Ceylon, where Buddhism is still a living religion, in order fully to realize the gorgeousness of that Oriental splendour.

Though it is difficult to discover any connexion between the doctrine of Buddha and the plastic art of the Buddhists, it does not follow that this art never expresses the serene peace of mind, the infinite compassion and tenderness, and similar sublime qualities that mark the moral teaching of the Master. But the profound philosophical foundations upon which the Buddhistic world religion has been built can be left out of account when the object of our study is the wealth of sculpture and fresco that has been lavished upon the adornment of that noble edifice.

We must, however, give a moment's thought to the Buddha himself, the first person of that holy Trinity—the Buddha, the Dharma (his Doctrine), and the Sangha (his Congregation)—to whom every faithful Buddhist turns for protection. For the life of the Buddha was to the artists of ancient India an inexhaustible source of inspiration when they were called upon to decorate the sacred shrines.

This is, in brief outline, the legendary story of his

life. In the town of Kapilavastu, at the foot of the Himālayas—to be more exact, on the border of present-day Nepāl—King Śuddhodana ruled long ago over the tribe of the Śākyas. He had married a princess whose name was Māyā. One night Queen Māyā dreamt that the future Buddha—the Bodhi-sattva, as the Buddhists call him—descended in her womb in the shape of a white elephant. In the morning she recounted her dream to her husband. He summoned Brahman soothsayers, and these predicted that she would bear a son who was destined to become either a world-ruler or a Buddha. When the time of her confinement approached, Māyā went to the park called Lumbinī, a pleasure garden not far from Śuddhodana's capital. There she gave birth to the child who was destined to become the founder of a world religion. He was given the name of Siddhārtha. When the prince was sixteen years old he married Yaśodharā, whose hand he had won by his prowess in knightly contests. For young Siddhārtha, says the legend, was an excellent archer and an athlete skilled in many sports.

But the time approached at which Siddhārtha reached the turning-point of his life—his renunciation of the world. The story goes that his father, King Śuddhodana, was far from pleased with the prospect of his son becoming a Buddha, and tried his best to prevent it. He let the prince indulge in all the pleasures that an Indian court affords, and



kept him ignorant of the sorrows of mankind. But there came to Siddhārtha four experiences that made him another being. Driving one day in his chariot he saw an old man; another time he found a diseased man; on his third ride he discovered a corpse. His charioteer, Chhandaka, revealed to him the truth that old age, sickness, and death are inseparably linked with human existence. This made him realize the vanity of worldly pleasures, and when, on a fourth excursion, he met a mendicant friar, he decided to follow his example and renounce the world.

The following night Siddhārtha left his father's palace. His wife Yaśodharā had just given birth to a son. But even the sight of his wife asleep with her new-born babe did not shake his determination. On the contrary, the sleeping servant girls, who had tried to distract him with music and dancing, aroused his disgust, and he told his charioteer to saddle his horse.

The king had ordered the city gate to be closed in order to prevent the prince's escape, but a deity opened it for him, and Yakshas supported the hoofs of the horse Kanthaka, lest the keepers should be wakened by their clatter. He rode all night and in the morning sent his servant with the horse back to town. He took off all his princely trappings, clipped his long hair, and bartered his costly robe for the simple garb of a hunter whom he met in the wilderness.