Chapter IV

Temples in context of religion and politics

ARCHITECTURE OF THE MAJAPAHIT PERIOD

The Javanese temples in general symbolically represent the mythical Mount Meru, the seat of the gods.\(^1\) The ways that this concept was incorporated into an architectural shape differed in Central and East Javanese art. While Central Javanese architecture has a concentric layout, East Javanese architecture displays a terraced and linear layout.\(^2\) The best example for Central Java is the Borobudur. This temple has been interpreted as a *mandala*, which is a concentric geometric structure.\(^3\)

For the East Javanese period it is the Majapahit period which yielded the architectural characteristics in a most conspicuous way. The terraced structure is most obvious in the small-scale mountain sanctuaries, the layout of which follows the linear ascent of the mountain slope, such as Candi Kendalisodo and Candi Yudha on Mount Penanggungan. Most of these sanctuaries consist of a *pemujaan*, a place for worship, which is built in several terraces. In front or next to this structure there are often one or more small altars. Temple complexes such as Candi Panataran

---

\(^1\) Major publications in the field of ancient Javanese architecture are Krom 1923; Stutterheim 1931; Bernet Kempers 1959; Dumarçay 1986a, 1986b, 1993; Soekmono 1995. The issue of Mount Meru has been discussed by several authors, for example by Stutterheim (1931:13) and Bernet Kempers (1959:20-1).

\(^2\) Beyond the marked difference in layout it seems to me that there is also a difference in the size of East and Central Javanese temples, respectively. My impression is that most East Javanese temples are of a rather small scale compared to those in Central Java. Though beyond the scope of my study, it would be interesting to investigate the size and also the number of temples in East and in Central Java in comparison to each other. From this we might perhaps draw conclusions about the religious and political function of the temples. For Central Java, such an inventory has already been worked out by Degroot (2009).

Compare the remarks by Wiseman Christie (1983:26-7), who points to the shift from large-scale temples to smaller ones as reflecting a shift from the king as the most important donor to officials of lower rank.

\(^3\) See discussions of this interpretation in Gómez and Woodward 1981; Lokesh Chandra 1980.

© Lydia Kieven, 2013
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-NonDerivative 3.0 Unported (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0) License.
and Candi Sukuh are divided into three separate terraces, arranged in linear ascent with three large courtyards. Candi Panataran, the largest temple in East Java, represents the most elaborate form of this linear schema. The terraced structure also applies in the layout of freestanding temples such as Candi Jago and the Main Temple of Candi Panataran. These consist of several receding terraces with the rear part arranged in a near-vertical structure while the front-entrance section features large platforms on each terrace, yielding the impression of a mountain slope. These terraces constitute the temple foot. The temple body, most of which is no longer extant, contains the cella in which originally one or several sculptures of a deity were placed. It has been suggested that such freestanding candi had roofs with several storeys in the style of the meru of present-day Balinese temples (Soekmono 1990:83). Mountain sanctuaries do not have a cella, although the uppermost terrace in many cases carries an altar and originally may also have featured a sculpture.  

Still another structural characteristic of East Javanese architecture is the so-called tower temple, a high and slender structure, such as Candi Kidal, Candi Singosari, and Candi Jawi. These temples usually have one or more cella containing sculptures of deities.

The layout of a temple is organized according to a hierarchy of graduating degrees of sacredness. The vertical spatialization follows a hierarchy in ascending from the more mundane sphere on the lower levels of a multiple-terrace temple to the higher ones, the sacred character increasing and reaching its climax in the cella. In the case of mountain sanctuaries, which usually have no cella, the climax is reached in the altar. This schema was already known in Central Javanese architecture, primarily in Candi Borobudur. The horizontal layout of the temple displays a similar principle: the rear side is the most sacred part of the temple while the entrance side is dedicated to the more mundane sphere. These hierarchies also apply to narrative reliefs, which are arranged and placed according to their character and symbolism. This refers to the aforementioned difference in the character of ‘post-mythological stories’ and ‘mythological stories’. While the former are depicted in the lower part or the entrance of the temple, the latter appear in the higher or rear part.

---

4 Hariani Santiko (1998:245) argues that no sculptures were placed in the mountain sanctuaries because the pilgrims worshipped God Siwa seated on the mountain peak, represented by the terraced sanctuaries. I do not concur with this opinion, as indeed statues of deities have been found on Mount Penanggungan (see the inventory by Van Romondt 1951).