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A fragmented Provenance Report regarding Four Buddha heads gifted by Artis in the NMVW and the social lives of Borobudur

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A fragmented

Provenance Report regarding Four Buddha heads gifted by Artis in the NMVW and the social lives of Borobudur

Marieke Bloembergen and Melle Monquil

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Introduction

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Introduction

‘Really, if Buddha heads could speak, then many spicy stories would turn up about their peregrinations’¹

The National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) has in its collection fourteen Buddha heads that are described in the registration system as originating, or “probably” originating from the eighth-century Buddhist shrine Borobudur in central Java, or as “in the style of” Borobudur Buddha heads.² This would mean that they belong to fourteen of the original 504 Buddha statues that once overlooked Javanese rice fields from Borobudur. The fourteen heads are in the custodianship of NMVW, of which eight were formerly in the collection of the Tropenmuseum,³ and six in the

¹ Th. Van Erp, “Nieuwe Aanwinst in Bruikleen van een Boeddhakop van den Baraboedoer,” *Bulletin van de vereeniging van vrienden der Aziatische kunst* 10 (1939): 253-256, there 253. “Waarlijk, wanneer Boeddhakoppen konden spreken, dan zouden er nog heel wat kruidige verhalen voor den dag komen omtrent hunne peregrinaties”

² Quotation “in the style of” is from <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/704917> <https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/#/query/5d9b1421-5e02-4a54-af50-805f273a5ddc>. Perhaps there is one more, that could equally be ascribed to Borobudur: that one, WM-25650, came in when NMVW included Wereldmuseum Rotterdam. In the Wereldmuseum’s collection history, it is said to have come from the Netherlands-Indies Government in 1922. It is ascribed to another Buddhist temple, Candi Sewu, Central Java, and it is not in the selection of PPROCE. Due to restricted time, it has been left out. But it may be worth tracking the biography of this object, too. See: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/1121794>.

³ These are TM-860-82, TM-860-83, TM-860-100, all, since 1934, have been registered as a gift from the Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap voor Kunsten en Wetenschappen in Batavia; TM-588-1, since 1929 registered as gift from the Oudheidkundige Dienst; and TM-A-5945, TM-A-5946, TM-A-5947, and TM-A-5948, registered as gifts from Natura Artis Magistra. Originally, for PPROCE only three of the Artis collection were detected and selected. We realised there was one more – TM-A-5948 – and added this to the selection

collection of the Museum Volkenkunde.⁴ Initially, it was assumed that there were eleven Buddha heads; through research, fourteen were identified. It is possible more will be identified in the future.⁵

This provenance report concerns a small selection of these fourteen stone Buddha heads under the custodianship of NMVW, and is unusual among the PPOCE reports of this collection. The authors follow a different format, which prioritises the social-political biography over provenance. For methodological reasons, the first part of this report (Section I) looks into the socio-biographical history of the *site of origin* – Borobudur – and discusses, in an embedded way, a few of the token Buddha heads in NMVW in connection to that history. In other words, it follows *the site* and its changing valuations in the context of heritage politics over time, and only to a certain extent the *objects* it lost. Then, in Section II, for just one sub-set of four Buddha heads, we follow the PPOCE format, but also reflect on the ‘Dutch’ public life of these objects. This ‘clustered’ report concerns the four heads in the NMVW Tropenmuseum mentioned in the subtitle of this report, that arrived there via the donation of the Artis Ethnographic museum in 1921.

With this different approach, we hope to provide insight into the merits and limits of doing provenance research exclusively in light of the topical, and admittedly highly relevant, debates on decolonising museums. Most provenance research into objects acquired in the colonial era that is currently carried out around the world follows an institutional and national ‘colonial-historical’ framework. It is our contention that this may impose unnecessary conceptual limitations for many of the objects under scrutiny. The fourteen Buddha heads kept at NMVW offer an illuminating illustration. These heads, allegedly decapitated from statues at Borobudur, the eighth-century Buddhist temple in Central Java, seem to fit in to a broader landscape that includes a large number of comparable Buddha heads, Buddha statues, and reliefs from Borobudur (which enact episodes from the lives (and previous lives) of the Buddha and some of his followers), and which are kept in museums and private collections in the Netherlands and worldwide, including Indonesia.⁶ If these

⁴ One, RV-2574-1, was a gift, in December 1945, by Wolter Jr. Broese van Groenou (1881-1971), the son of Wolter Broese van Groenou (1842-1924), who had the Buddha head in his possession. Wolter Jr., for some time took over his fathers’ sugar factory in Central Java, where this Buddha head, accordingly, was kept and perhaps to be seen, and apparently brought it with him to the Netherlands after this factory went bankrupt. Five of them, RV-1403-1607, RV-1403-1608, RV-1403-1690, RV-1403-2072, and RV-1403-2924, are from the 1403 series that came to the museum in 1903, when the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden transferred its ‘non-European’ antiquities (excluding those from Egypt) to the ‘s Rijks Ethnographisch Museum. One of those five was initially not selected by PPOCE: RV-1403-1608. Like RV-1403-1607, it was part of the RMO donation of 1903, and said to originate from a sending of Reinwardt and as such inventoried by Juynboll.

⁵ The first identification round may just reflect how complicated it can be to find particular objects in large museum collections. One explanation may be that the fourteen Buddha heads now identified, bring together these two formerly separate collections: NMVW Tropenmuseum and NMVW Museum Volkenkunde. Also, in TMS, when, for example, looking at RV-1403-2924, at <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/704917>, it is mentioned that there are eleven heads. One of them, RV-1403-1608, that entered the Netherlands as a gift of two (RV-1403-1607) from botanist C. Reinwardt is severely damaged at the left eye, and may have lacked attention.

⁶ For example: for tokens from Borobudur scattered on site and in Indonesian Museums, see Daud Aris Tanudirdjo, Tjahjono Prasodjo et al. "Laporan Penelitian. Kualitas penyajian warisan Budaya kepada Masyarakat. Studi kasus Manajemen Sumberdaya Budaya Candi Borobudur." UGM: 1993-1994, in particular pp. 79-92, for ‘sajian’ (gifts) of Borobudur this research team located in several Museums in Java (including reproductions, miniatures etcetera). For the Borobudur tokens that ended up in Bangkok: Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, “Exchange and the Protection of Java’s Antiquities: A Transnational Approach to the Problem of Heritage in Colonial Java,”

objects are what they are believed to be, they all share the same fate, that is, being disconnected from one and the same site, Borobudur, the site they originally belonged to. Since the 1810s, when Borobudur was rediscovered and became the object of huge cleaning operations, research, and conservation programs under changing colonial and postcolonial regimes, the temple transformed into a colonial, postcolonial, as well as world heritage site, and on the way got re-sacralised by various religious groups, with various aims. The Borobudur-objects that were carried away, and are now scattered over collections across the world, were taken during that modern, nineteenth and twentieth century life of the temple. In that context, the Buddha heads became part of networks of accidental and scientific collectors and museums *worldwide*; since the 1910s, the Buddha heads have also entered a rising market in Asian art that, if we consider the prices they sold for in the 2000s, is still booming. Therefore, research into these objects cannot be restricted to national or bilateral forms of collaboration, but requires international coordination.

Moreover, if these Buddha heads are in fact from Borobudur, then one thing immediately becomes clear — namely, the origin, the place where these objects belong, which is saying something different from the question of who is the rightful owner. But even if they are not from Borobudur, then provenance in the classical sense of origin may still not be the only interesting aspect to the social biography of their life.⁷ Study of the socio-political biography of objects implies that we can provide insight into the stories and conditions of exchange, collecting, theft, gifts, science, creativity, love, greed and/or violence that these objects have to reveal and to tell. These stories can broaden our view of history and how history works.⁸ As stated in the Final Report, *Sporen*, this can also be concluded from the Provenance Reports provided by PPOCE in general. Finally, the socio-political biography of the site of origin, Borobudur, to which we turn in the first section of the report, unsettles the question of provenance even further. For if a 'site of origin' of an object changes in meaning and use to people over time (which they mostly do), then the question would not only be to which decapitated stone Buddha statue, but also to 'which' (guise of) Borobudur the Buddha heads would belong. On the other hand, the social-political history of

JAS 72:4 (2013), 1-24. Utama Ferdinandus. "Arca-arca dan Relief pada Masa Hindu Jawa di Museum Bangkok." In *Monumen: Karya persembahan untuk Prof. Dr. R. Soekmono*, ed. Edi Sedyawati and Ingrid H.E. Pojoh et al (Depok: Fakultas Sastra Universitas Indonesia 1990), 78-101.. For the travels of some other Borobudur Buddha heads, ending up in France and the US, Marieke Bloembergen, "The politics of 'Greater India', a moral geography. Moveable antiquities and charmed knowledge networks between Indonesia, India and the West," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol 63, 1 (January 2021), 170-211. For earlier complaints on the carrying away of objects from Borobudur, see also Van Erp, "Nieuwe aanwinst."

⁷ Compare Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Salomi, Matur, "A parable of postcolonial return: Museums and the discourse of restitution," *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 133-164.

⁸ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

Borobudur may also help to provide clues for future research regarding the histories of transactions of tokens from Borobudur, *at location*.

PART I The social lives of Borobudur and its tokens, and the problem of ‘provenance’

Borobudur, the largest Buddhist shrine of the world, has been an official UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1991, and today is one of Asia’s major sites of (local and foreign) mass tourism – comparable to Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Bodh Gaya in India.⁹ All were ruins rediscovered in the nineteenth century that, under colonial and postcolonial regimes, transformed into majestic heritage-cum-pilgrimage sites. Built around 800 C. under the Sailendra dynasty that ruled over much of Java, Borobudur had gone out of use when, in the tenth century, the centre of power moved to the East of Java.¹⁰ Over time, it became overgrown with vegetation. Borobudur’s second public life, attracting increasing attention, began in the early nineteenth century. This was, notably, when the majority of the population in Java had converted to Islam, during a process that started in the late fifteenth century. In 1814, during the British interregnum and at the order of Lieutenant-General T.S. Raffles, Javanese workers cleared the vegetation from the temple. Trees had grown into and on the temple, and the temple’s galleries had filled with sand. It took 200 men one and a half months to complete the job.¹¹ And even then, the temple still needed further ‘cleaning,’ as can be deduced from the observations from Reinwardt, one of the donors of two Buddha heads and loose hands of the Buddha statues to the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, objects that subsequently travelled to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum in Leiden.¹² Reinwardt visited the temple in 1817 in the company of a large group of men, and noted in his travel diary how trees grew on the temple. He also expressed worries about the decay of the temple, observing how people freely took objects. For him, apparently, this was also an occasion to take (or buy, or accept) a number of heads and hands from Borobudur Buddha statues. Unfortunately, we do not yet know when and how he took possession of these objects.¹³ Other clearance operations would follow in 1816-17, and shortly after the devastating Java War (1825-1830).

⁹ This paragraph is from *The Politics of Heritage in Indonesia: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1,2.

¹⁰ A series of catastrophic eruptions and damaging earthquakes may have played a role in this move away of the centre of power from Central to East Java. See Jan Wisseman Christie, "Under the volcano: Stabilising the early Javanese State in an unstable environment," in David Henley and Henk Schulte Nordholt eds., *Environment, Trade and Society in Southeast Asia: A Longue Durée Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 46-61.

¹¹ John Miksic, *Borobudur: Golden Tales of the Buddhas* (Boston: Shambhala, 1990) 17.

¹² Now in NMVW Museum Volkenkunde, RV-1403-1607 <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/703593>; and RV 1403-1608, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/703594>

¹³ Reinwardt, *Journal van de reis naar Indië en excursies op Java, Oct. 1815- Oct.1818*. UBL Leiden, Special Collections, BPL 2424: 5. Digitalised version, p. 86-87.

These interventions reflect what Eickhoff and Bloembergen have observed regarding the phenomenon and political dynamics of heritage formation: when the ruins of religious buildings transform into archaeological sites, they form new spots on new maps that give historical depth to contemporary geographical and political imaginations.¹⁴ These sites convey historical, religious, and moral messages as they are found, but archaeological interventions like the ones just discussed, added scientific, (art-)historical, and governmental concerns, linking sites to new geographical, moral, and political imaginations – including various, conflicting or parallel developing notions of heritage. This happened to the temple ruins that European civil servants, military personnel, and travellers during the nineteenth century ‘rediscovered’ in South- and Southeast Asia. Borobudur became a colonial archaeological site in 1814, when Raffles ordered its uncovering and cleaning, thereby generating supra-local, academic, and governmental interests. But precisely because archaeological sites are ‘localised,’ and because of their histories, their religious connotations, and their moral messages, they are the centre of multiple geographies and moral spaces. They therefore do not necessarily overlap with the political boundaries in which, under changing regimes, they were rediscovered, excavated, cleaned, conserved, and appreciated again. Moreover, these temple sites travelled in time and in space: through images and copies; in ‘real’ pieces, as parts of pilgrim’s souvenirs, exchanges, and national or international exhibitions; as gifts, or as theft. Thus, while crossing boundaries they could play a role in alternative heritage politics that were not exclusively based in national or colonial state formations, but coexisted in parallel worlds which had other centres than Europe-based empires.

The visit in 1896 of King Chulalongkorn from Siam (current Thailand) to Borobudur and other ancient temple sites on Java can serve to illustrate this. It also reveals the heuristic value of focusing on the mechanisms of exchange to understand and study the *political* dynamics of heritage formation. And it makes clear that subsequent investigations such as provenance research influence these dynamics, as well as why they are part of it. By ‘giving’ a number of Buddha statues from Borobudur to King Chulalongkorn, the Dutch parties introduced themselves as owners. But so did some Javanese elites, who also honoured the Siamese king with gifts in the form of Buddha statues, which were drawn from other Javanese temple-sites. Objects from Borobudur and other ancient temple sites that travelled along with Chulalongkorn to Siam, ended up in temples and museum displays in Bangkok. There, they came to play a role in parallel, essentialising processes of heritage formation and religious identification that transcended those of the state, and of the kingdom of Siam. They became part of a popular Buddhist cult that legitimised the Royal elite of the Chakri

¹⁴ These two paragraphs are from Bloembergen and Eickhoff, “Exchange and the Protection of Java’s Antiquities: A Transnational Approach to the Problem of Heritage in Colonial Java,” 2013

dynasty, and thereby a Greater Buddhist Asia, with Siam as its centre. And around 1900 they generated an early form of provenance research in situ, when Theodoor van Erp, who was in charge of the first state-supported restoration of Borobudur and outraged about what he saw as a demolition of the temple, explored the histories and conditions of the exchange of Chulalongkorn's tokens.¹⁵

We should understand the Buddha heads of Borobudur within these dynamics of local, inter-Asian, inter-colonial, and international dynamics of heritage politics. That international, and entangled history of processes of heritage formation taking place in parallel, and at multiple sites which are connected by Borobudur, also complicates, to a certain extent, discussions about *to whom, or to which regime* the 'Buddha heads' belong. However, regardless of this wide-ranging and multi-layered historical matrix, if one thing is very clear, then it is the *place* where the heads belong: on one of the decapitated stone statues of Borobudur, watching out over Javanese mountains and rice fields.

Originally, Borobudur counted 504 Buddha statues, representing six meditative postures of the Buddha.¹⁶ Four postures — *bumisparśa mudra* (touching the earth), *vara mudra* (giving), *dyana mudra* (meditating), and *abaya mudra* (eliminating fear) — were each represented ninety-two times at the four lower levels on each side of the temple, and the fifth, *vitarka mudra* (preaching), was represented sixty-four times in the highest gallery. Seventy-two Buddha statues in the smaller stupas sat in preaching postures on the three circular terraces that surround the central, largest stupa.¹⁷ Finally, there was the so-called "unfinished Buddha," once posted in the main stupa but moved from there by military Engineer Theodoor van Erp during his famous restoration of the temple between 1907 and 1910. We now find this Buddha statue in the Borobudur site museum, carrying the debates over its original location and receiving regular offerings in its lap.¹⁸ Today, of these 504 Buddha statues, 43 are fully "missing," their posts left vacant. Over 300 others are damaged, of which 250 are "headless." According to the Borobudur Conservation Centre, only 56 "loose" heads remain on site. This would mean that 194 Buddha heads, and perhaps some more from the 'missing Buddha statues,' from Borobudur are scattered over the world in museums and private collections, and some in temples.¹⁹

¹⁵ Bloembergen, Marieke, and Martijn Eickhoff, "Exchange and the Protection of Java's Antiquities: A Transnational Approach to the Problem of Heritage in Colonial Java."

¹⁶ Bloembergen, "The politics of 'Greater India,' a Moral Geography:" 184-5.

¹⁷ Miksic, *Borobudur*: 53-55.

¹⁸ Soekmono, "Serat Centhini and the rejected Buddha from the main stupa of Borobudur," in: Marijke J. Klokke and Karel R. van Kooij (eds.), *Fruits of Inspiration: Studies in Honour of Prof. J.G. de Casparis* (Groningen: Forsten, 2001), 474-485.

¹⁹ At Wikipedia. "Borobudur." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borobudur>; and <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/11/20/buddhas-be-reunited-with-their-heads.html>. (both consulted 9 Jan. 2020). See also Daud Aris Tanudirdjo et al. 'Laporan Penelitian. Kualitas penyajian warisan Budaya kepada Masyarakat in particular pp. 79-92, for 'sajian' (gifts)

Thus, the Borobudur Buddha heads in museums in the Netherlands and elsewhere exemplify a wider practice of carrying away of such ancient – in this case Buddhist – objects from their site of origin in colonial (and postcolonial) times “which does not seem to have troubled those doing the taking.”²⁰ It should be noted, however, that before regulations against export there were also people who thought it remarkable, unethical, improper, or scandalous to do so, although after regulations the practice continued.²¹ The openness, or the formal illegality, of this practice has implications for provenance research into these kind of objects. Or, as the colonial archaeologist W.F. Stutterheim, head of the Oudheidkundige Dienst van Nederlands-Indië between 1930-1942, remarked, in the opening of a 1924 article on old Javanese antiquities in European museums:

the fate of the old Javanese small bronzes and pieces of stone sculpture has been, in general, rather adventurous. As for the latter, for several decades people freely considered temple ruins on Java as welcome fortunes for the honest finder. Many *residents* [colonial administrators MB] showed a shining interest in old Javanese art by benignly offering a new home to statues and ornaments, on their estate; sometimes these highly honoured sculptures accompanied their Maecenas in their final journeys home to Holland, or they were sent to Holland in advance to climatise.

[...]

[L]ater [...] when people began to understand that the Javanese antiquities actually belonged at their home on Java, they tended to keep silent about the sending or taking of such objects, to the effect that we completely lost track of their trajectory, whereas the honest theft of old days [at least] made it possible that, long thereafter, the adventures of the token objects could be traced back in time.²²

Whether or not Stutterheim was right in his idea that ‘openness’ makes it easier to get insight into the precise conditions under which Borobudur Buddha heads came into ‘Dutch’ hands and Dutch museums, is actually very much a question.

The Buddha heads central in this report, as objects registered as “from” or “in the style of” Borobudur, located in museums and private collections in the Netherlands, are thus not unique. Besides the fact that they (may have) once belonged to the temple, watching out over a Javanese sacred landscape, they now share the fate of a multitude of heads from Borobudur’s Buddha statues that are scattered over the world’s premier museums of Asian art, world civilisations, and

of Borobudur this research team located in several Museums in Java (including reproductions, miniatures etcetera).

²⁰ Bloembergen, “The politics of ‘Greater India’, a Moral Geography,” 182.

²¹ William Southworth. “Twelve Stone Sculptures from Java.” *Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 65 (2017): 245–74; Bloembergen, “The politics of ‘Greater India’, a Moral Geography,” 182-3; 190-191.

²² W.F. Stutterheim ‘OudJavaansche plastiek in Europeesche Musea’, *BKI* 1924, 287-301, there 287. When speaking about unconcealed theft, Stutterheim was here referring in particular to the famous statues from Candi Singasari, carried away from the site in 1804 by Nicolaus Engelhard (1761-1831), governor of Java’s North-east coast, to his residential garden ‘De Vrijheid’ (Freedom) in Semarang. From there, Engelhard sent them to the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815, as a gift to the newly installed king. Since 1903, they have been kept in NMVW Museum Volkenkunde (and remain prominently on display there today). Dutch original: ‘Het lot van oudjavaansche bronsjes en stukken steensculptuur is over het algemeen zeer avontuurlijk. Wat de laatste betreft, zoo heeft men gedurende tientallen van jaren de tempelruines op Java vrijelijk beschouwd als welkome fortuintjes voor den eerlijken vinder. Vele der residenten uit de vorige eeuw gaven blijk van hunne blakende belangstelling in oudjavaansche kunst door welwillend aan beelden en ornamentstukken een onderkomen te verschaffen op hun erf; soms vergezelden de aldus geëerde beeldwerken dan hun Maecenas op de eidelijke reis naar Holland of werden vast vooruit gestuurd om te acclimatiseren [...] [L]ater [...] toen men begripen ging dat javaansche oudheden toch eigenlijk op Java thuishoorden, werd het oversturen of medenemen van deze voorwerpen meestal verzwegen, wat tot gevolg had, dat wij nu in het geheel het spoor ervan bijster zijn, terwijl de eerlijke diefstal uit oude dagen nog lang daarna toestond de lotgevallen van het medegenomene na te gaan’.

ethnography, and a number of Buddhist temples. These Buddha heads display acts of taking that began in the early nineteenth century, when, and after, the temple was ‘rediscovered’ and cleaned at the initiative of governor-general T.S. Raffles, during the British interregnum. They reflect the intercolonial, transnational, and international dimension of an art market in Hindu-Buddhist antiquities developing since around 1900, as well as the forms of epistemic violence that facilitated this market.²³ The basic problem for provenance research into these kind of objects is that they may be connected to their site of origin (and, via new digital techniques even to the specific statue they belong to)²⁴ – but that it will be hard to solve who was involved in the taking, and under which conditions of exchange the objects were taken at location.

The problem of ‘provenance’

If, as suggested by museum registration, there is doubt whether *all* Buddha heads at NMWV were from Borobudur (discussed further in section II), the Buddha heads still deserve the kind of concern or curiosity as to *which site* they ‘belong,’ which is a completely different question from *to whom* they belong. If we presume that the Buddha heads indeed *are* from Borobudur then, at first sight, this set of objects differs from most of the other objects researched within PPOCE. For the Buddhaheads, it is not so much ‘provenance’ in its meaning of origin that needs solving, but the acts of removing the head at location, the question from which spot or statue precisely, and the conditions under which these acts took place. But the mere act of taking can be gauged as an act of violence and injustice in itself as these acts contributed to the destruction of the temple and local memories. If one thing is clear here, it is where the Buddha heads originally ought to be, and to *what* they belong, namely Borobudur, and ideally the decapitated Buddha statues on which they once overlooked the rice fields of Java.²⁵

Unfortunately, although for some heads we did get a better understanding of the *kind of* context and interest that made people take, or order, Buddha heads from the temple (such as Reinwardt's

²³ Bloembergen, “The politics of ‘Greater India’, a Moral Geography,” 184. Buddha heads of Borobudur can be found around the world. The following update of 14 Feb 2022 is not pretending to be complete. Heads are kept in London (the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum), Germany (Berlin (moving from the Ethnography Museum to the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in the Staatliche Museen); Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden), France (Paris (Musée Guimet)), the Netherlands (the Museum of World Cultures, the Rijksmuseum, Keramiek museum Prinsessehof), Switzerland (the Rietberg Museum), and the United States (the Metropolitan Museum, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Boston; the Cleveland Museum of Art); Austria (Oberösterreichischen Landesmuseum). Five Complete Buddha statues from Borobudur are shared between two temples in Bangkok, and the National Museum there displays some reliefs and a guardian statue from there. In Indonesia, the National Museum in Jakarta prominently displays four complete Buddha statues in the entrance of its old building, and its Stone Statues display includes at least two Buddha heads. All these examples reflect “tokens” from colonial times. Stutterheim mentions that the museum in Berlin had to sell “some” of its Buddha heads because of the crisis that followed World War I (1924: 300).

²⁴ At Wikipedia. “Borobudur.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borobudur>; and Bambang Muryanto, ‘Buddhas be reunited with their heads’, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/11/20/buddhas-be-reunited-with-their-heads.html>. (both consulted 9 Jan. 2020 and again 14 Feb 2022).

²⁵ Bloembergen, “The Politics of ‘Greater India’, a Moral Geography”.

scientific explorations on and around the site in 1817), precisely these kinds of site-centred, local circumstances will be hard to detect. Our research for PPOCE, which for reasons of time as well as restrictions caused by Covid, was limited to research in the Netherlands, has not led to any concrete details as to who exactly took the heads, nor from where exactly – i.e. from the ground, from the galleries of the temple, as ‘fallen’ objects, or from a statue still intact; nor can we answer questions that are as meaningful, such as at the request of whom, in which way, under which conditions, at the gain or loss of whom, leave aside that we can know from which Buddha statues exactly they derive.²⁶ It will probably be impossible to find anything about that because of the fact that they were ‘just taken,’ and that very precise act/moment is not registered, nor did anyone who received the Buddha head in the Netherlands bother to ask or write it down, as our research in the archives of NMVW and Artis reveals so far. This is just one aspect of the structural injustice that reflects the departure of the Buddha heads from their site of origin, and of their present fate being kept in depots or vitrines of museums – not only in the Netherlands, but worldwide, including in Indonesia.²⁷

In that regard, provenance on the Borobudur Buddha heads, for all of the fourteen Buddha heads, and all others scattered over museums worldwide, requires more combined, and site-centred research. For this kind of research, some general observations can be made. One is that periodisation might be a clue for research, since *the period in which* the Buddha heads were carried away from the site *and* in which they entered the Netherlands mattered both for their fate and the way they were gauged, and thus, perhaps also for provenance research. Until the 1890s, despite the first efforts to gate the temple and introduce a *Visitor’s Book*, it was probably easier for visitors to take objects as if they were free, than after. With the government-supported restoration conducted by Van Erp between 1907-1910, and the foundation of the Oudheidkundige Dienst (Archaeological Service) in 1913, the colonial state (and its successors) took charge of care and conservation of the site. As stated above, this was no guarantee that the site remained intact, or that other parties cared.²⁸ Objects that subsequently *entered* the Netherlands in the nineteenth century became part of a

²⁶ Conversation with Panggah Ardiayanshah, and Louis Buana, 21-10-2021. See for earlier efforts to relocate, restore and return tokens from Borobudur scattered around the site, as well as in the museum in Batavia, back to the site, during the preparatory research for the restoration Van Erp (1907-1911), amongst others: Van Erp, ‘Nieuwe Aanwinst’; Th. Van Erp, “Eenige Mededelingen betreffende de Beelden en Fragmenten van Borobodoer in 1896 geschonken aan de Koning van Siam.” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde/BKI* 73 (1):285-310; *Beschrijving van Barabudur. Deel 2: Bouwkundige beschrijving.* 's –Gravenhage: Nijhoff. On the practice and legacies of Anastylis and stone matching in colonial and postcolonial Indonesia: Jan Fontein, The retrieval and reconstruction of Indonesian sculpture’, *Aziatische Kunst* 26, 4 (December 1996), 2-23, there 20; and Bloembergen and Eickhoff, *The politics of heritage*, 202 . During the Unesco restoration, at the initiative of Australian partners, efforts were made to try to match heads and statues V.K. Khandelwal, “Cataloguing and matching of ‘missing’ Borobudur stones using a computer,” *Pelita Borobudur*, seri B, no. 9 (1977). For a more recent attempt to do so Bambang Muryanto, ‘Buddhas be reunited with their heads’, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/11/20/buddhas-be-reunited-with-their-heads.html>. (consulted 9 Jan. 2020 and again 14 Feb 2022).

²⁷ Bloembergen, “The Politics of ‘Greater India’, a Moral Geography.”

²⁸ See Southworth, “Twelve Stone Sculptures from Java.” Bloembergen, “The Politics of ‘Greater India’, a Mmoral Ggeography.” 182-183; 190-191.

circuit of ethnographic and/or antiquarian museums, and were, initially, predominantly considered to be objects of scientific competition. Stone sculptures from Java in the ethnographic museum generated a dispute about where they belonged: antiquarian study or ethnographic study, as we discuss below. Those objects that arrived after the 1890s, in the context of changing taxonomies that elevated objects from past Hindu-Buddhist civilisations as higher forms of art, would enter the circuit of the new and booming trend of Asian art museums and the Asian art market. The Borobudur Buddha head (RV-2574-1), gifted to the Rijks Ethnografisch Museum in 1945, by Wolter jr. Broese van Groenou (1881-1979), son of the colonial military officer and sugar entrepreneur in Central Java with the same name, seems a remarkable exception.²⁹

Suggestions for research into the social life of Borobudur-tokens

The Buddha heads like those kept at NMVW, or in any other private or museum collection in and outside the Netherlands, require an international coordinated research program. That research would be directed to the aim – in itself – to follow the Buddha heads in their journeys and socio-political biographies across time and borders, to provide insight into the conditions and politics of taxation and transactions that made them travel; and to gauge why they mattered, to whom, and how these transactions shaped and changed hierarchies of knowledge, and power relations. Ideally, to de-centre knowledge creation, such an international program should be initiated and centred in Indonesia, and if possible coordinated by the Borobudur-based Conservation Centre, Indonesian historians, and archaeologists.³⁰ Ideally, all museums that have such heads in their collection would pro-actively engage: by providing their staff serious time for provenance research, by opening up to external researchers, and by together investing in research that reaches outside museum walls, and into the various networks that museums are connect to, such as the world of Asian Art galleries, auctions, and trade. The first aim would be to identify the location of all Buddha heads in public and

²⁹ RV-2745-1 was gifted 16 December 1945, and accepted after inspection of the head in the house of Broese van Groenou jr in the Hague, by Museum director C.C.F.M. Le Roux, in January 1946.

Archives Rijks Ethnografisch Museum, NMVW, Leiden, *NL-LdnRMV_A01_242*. Agenda op 1945-1946, 1946-1-18, director C.C.F.M. Le Roux, to Broese-Groenau, dank voor geschenken Boeddha-kop; 16 December 1945, from W. Broese van Groenou: 'In ons bezit bevindt zich een Boedha-kop van trachiet +/- ware grootte, afkomstig van de suikerfabriek 'Tandjong-Tirto' ten oosten van Djokjakarta, in de buurt van Prambanan gelegen, uit den bloeitijd der hindoe-javaansche kunst'. If it is what the donor said it to be, this head was kept at Wolter jr.'s fathers' Sugar Factory Tandjong Tirtjo, located to the East of Yogyakarta. NB: the fact that this fabric was located close to Prambanan may well indicate that this Buddha head is from nearby Candi Sewu instead of Borobudur. This should be kept in mind when provenance research for this head is undertaken. If, when, how, and under which conditions it was acquired at Borobudur (or another temple, like Candi Sewu), when, and with which family member it moved to the Netherlands, cannot not be solved on the base of correspondence in the Museum. Perhaps private correspondence kept at the family archive in the Gemeente archief Den Haag will give clues. All other files in that family archive have been consulted and give insight in an interest in Javanese culture by Wolter Sr., but no clue leading to the family possession, or acquirement, of a Buddhahead. Gemeentearchief Den Haag, Archief Wolter Broese van Groenou, Archiefteogang 1019-01, 1.2.8. BNR 1019.

³⁰ Compare on the merits of de-centring knowledge production regarding Indonesian objects in museums worldwide, Panggah Ardiyansyah in his blog 'Object repatriation and knowledge co-production' (November 2021), at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/seac/2021/11/04/object-repatriation-and-knowledge-co-production-for-indonesias-cultural-artefacts/> last consulted 4-3-2022.

private collections and centralise this information.³¹ The second aim would be to research their socio-political biographies, and the third aim to include these in the socio-political historical narratives Borobudur has to tell. Given the multiple forms of economic, political-moral, religious, aesthetic interests Borobudur and its tokens have raised, over time, and at multiple sites, such a program should remain open for all various forms of knowledge, and knowledge production through exchange, providing insight into the choices people make, and in how these contribute to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

³¹ It may be that such information is kept at the Borobudur Conservation Centre, this requires research at location. For this research, orientating conversations were held with Indonesian archaeologist Daud Aris Tanudirdjo (UGM), 14-11-2019, and historians Panggah Ardiayanshah, and Louis Buana (in relation to Borobudur Conservation Centre), 21-10-2021, mainly in the framework of the particular queries of PPOCE in itself.

PART II The Artis Buddha heads. Draft of a provenance report

Introduction and summary of findings

From the fourteen Buddha heads registered today as ('probably') originating from the eighth-century Buddhist temple Borobudur in Central Java, the four heads central in this report go back to a donation, in 1921, from the *Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra* (The Royal Zoological Society Natura Artis Magistra, founded in Amsterdam in 1838, henceforth Artis), to the Colonial Institute in Amsterdam (which opened its doors in 1926, today NMVW Tropenmuseum) where they are kept until today. They were part of a larger donation that entailed the full collection of 'ethnographic' objects kept in the Ethnographisch Museum of Artis, which closed in 1910. The donation took place at the request of the *Vereeniging Koloniaal Instituut* (Society Colonial institute): a few prominent Dutchmen, mostly Amsterdam citizens and representatives of the Dutch cultural and economic elite that strove to generate competitive imperial allure to the Dutch capital through the establishment of a Colonial Institute and Museum.³²

For this research, aiming to trace the itineraries of the heads and their donors, we thoroughly examined the archives of Artis, kept at the Stadsarchief in Amsterdam, as well as the archives of the Colonial Institute (or of NMVW Tropenmuseum), held at the National Archives in The Hague and in the Institute itself. In addition, we collected material on the private donors who gifted or lent Buddha heads to Artis. We followed the lead of gift-registrations, and linked those to the board meetings and incoming correspondence. We also consulted former curators, and discussed the possibilities of doing research, in collaboration, in the context of the on-site Borobudur Conservation Centre. These conversations taught us that provenance research in Indonesia seems to have been restricted to 'stone matching' (e.g. to find a 'match' between a decapitated stone head and 'headless' body), in the context of conservation operations, and incidental advice based on material characterisation. Contextual findings are based on earlier research in Indonesia, and publications by Bloembergen and Eickhoff, which took place in collaboration with local historians and archaeologists, on the socio-political biography of Borobudur and the travels of its tokens elsewhere.³³

For the relevant contextual and historical background of Borobudur, its transformation into a heritage site in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as on the Buddha statues, Buddha

³² For related correspondence to this 'full' donation of the Artis collection, see '28-10-1910 van vereeniging Koloniaal Instituut aan Genootschap Artis' and Archives Tropenmuseum, 4395 – Stukken betreffende de overdracht van de ethnografische verzameling van de vereniging 'Natura Artis Magistra' te Amsterdam.

³³ Bloembergen and Eickhoff, *The politics of Heritage*; Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, "Save Borobudur! The moral dynamics of heritage formation in Indonesia across orders and borders," in Michael Falser (ed.), *Cultural Heritage as Civilising Mission: From Decay to Recovery* (Cham; Heidelberg: Springer, 2015), 83-122; 'Decolonising Borobudur: Moral Engagements and the Fear of Loss. The Netherlands, Japan and (Post) Colonial Heritage Politics in Indonesia', in: Susan Legêne, Bambang Purwanto and Henk Schulte Nordholt (eds.) *Sites, Bodies and Stories: Imagining Indonesian History* (Singapore: NUS, 2015), 33-66.

heads and reliefs it lost to museums, temples and private collections worldwide, we refer to part I of this report. In part II we only reflect on our findings regarding the Dutch trajectories of the Buddha heads we could trace in the Artis collection.

It is important to emphasise here what we do not know: despite extensive research in the Artis archives and following leads of donors, we found little information that helps us to connect individual gifts of Buddha heads that we located in the Artis archives to this particular set of four kept at NMVW Tropenmuseum, nor can we trace any of the gifted heads back to transactions taking place at the site of origin. As far as we can tell from the sources we have collected thus far, nobody – neither donors nor recipients – wrote down how the Buddha heads were acquired. Nor do the sources we have gathered so far relating to the gifts indicate whether anybody asked for this information verbally. Drawing on the Artis archives, only three of the Buddha heads are explicitly mentioned to originate from Java, of which two entered as gifts and one as a loan. Moreover, only two of these Javanese Buddha heads (one of the gifts, and the loan) are said to come from Borobudur. Information we subsequently found on donors is restricted to orienting (sometimes very limited) biographical information. When available, consultation of private correspondence of the donors around the time of their gift did not lead to any relevant information.

Little more can be said in that regard (linking Artis' Buddha heads to the four at NMVW Tropenmuseum) about the subsequent 'public' Dutch phase of the social biography of these Buddha heads that had entered the collection of Artis, because they cannot be followed individually. The first time they appear in public is in 1883, when Artis submitted 'four' Buddha heads to the International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition (*Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling*) in Amsterdam, where they were said to be from Borobudur, and were displayed as such.³⁴ In 1887, when the Ethnographic museum of Artis opened, the museum showed an unspecified number of Buddha heads said to be from Borobudur. In the guide written by curator Pleyte, they are only described in this general way. We can conjecture that the four heads, put on display at the International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition, are the ones that entered the Colonial Institute. This is likely for several reasons: 1.) because there were four, 2.) because of the description of one characteristic (one of the four has an *urna* on its head; *three* of the Buddha heads lack the *urna*, and 3.) because they are presented explicitly as "possibly from Borobudur."

³⁴ Krom, N.J. *Gids in het Volkenkundig Museum. IV. Het Hindoeïsme*. Amsterdam: Koloniaal Instituut, 1927. Pictures [amongst others] on page 17, fig 4, shows one of them, one with slight damage/ erosion visible on the nose. Following the description on old inventory cards, this may be 'TM-A-5946', where a curator noted that that one is "slightly damaged," and refers to this picture in Krom's guide. But note that also on the card of TM-A-5945, a curator refers to this picture. All may just be intended to compare.

However, we note again that in this research we have not managed to establish which of these individual four heads connects to which of the four entering the Colonial Institute. At the world exhibition, as discussed further below, they were not described individually, only as a group of heads said to derive from the temple, and numbered, under inventory nr. 25 (which counted 13 other stone sculptures), a-d. Yet we did find two inventory numbers of the heads on display at the Ethnographic museum in Artis – nrs. 10 and 11 – that we can connect to respectively TM-A-5947 and TM-A-5946 on the basis of the old inventory cards of NMVW Tropenmuseum.³⁵ The registration cards of the two other heads in the NMVW Tropenmuseum, refer to Artis' 0-series 12 and 13.

In the end, however, based on our research, we cannot (yet) connect particular Buddha heads gifted or lent to Artis in the nineteenth century to either one of the Buddha heads in the NMVW Tropenmuseum. More importantly, we have not found information that can connect them to any concrete transactions of taking, giving, or selling a Buddha head at Borobudur, nor at any other Buddhist site in Java for that matter, nor of any of these Buddha heads' journey from the temple to Amsterdam. This is the big silence in their history. Because of the persisting ambiguities as to which head gifted to Artis might be matched with one of the heads in NMVW, below we give a 'clustered,' and fragmented research report on the four Buddha heads that entered Artis. This report mainly follows their Dutch trajectories, with some additional reflections on timing, the period in which the Buddha heads may have been taken, to reflect on contemporary interventions taking place at Borobudur as well. These may serve as a lead for further 'site-centred' research into potential transactions of Buddha heads, and the conditions under which these took place at location.

³⁵ Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv.1899, Scan 3: "(nr.) 10, 11 Boeddhabeelden ___Java" vermeld onder (scan 2: "Ethnographisch Museum, [...], Zaal I"). See also Inv. 1901, onder het kopje "Vitrine 1, Oudheden", staat vermeld "De overige zich in de zaal bevindende gehouwen steenen koppen werden bij den Boro-Boedoer, den beroemden boeddhistischen tempel, in de residentie Kadoe, gevonden. This texts overlaps with the description of this room by Pleyte in his guide to the musuem of 1888. (C.M. Pleyte, *Gids voor den bezoeker van het Ethnographisch Museum. Insulinde. I. Java*. Amsterdam: Tj. Van Holkema, 1888, p.4); In another file, we found reference to other antiquities, all categorised under Serie O, followed by their number. Artis' serie O may well have been the 'Oudheden', or antiquities.

Tentative reconstruction provenance

Ca. 800 CE

Building of Borobudur temple, under the Central Javanese, Buddhist Sailendra Dynasty.

Tenth Century

Probably due to a series of environmental catastrophes, the centre of power moves to the East of Java; from this period, probably, Borobudur is no longer structurally maintained. Over time it is overtaken by vegetation.

[Jan Wisseman Christie, "Under the volcano: Stabilising the early Javanese State in an unstable environment," in David Henley and Henk Schulte Nordholt eds., *Environment, trade and society in Southeast Asia: a longue durée perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 46-61].

1814-

During the British interregnum (1811-1816), beginning of clearance works by 200 Javanese workers, on the order of the Lieutenant-General T.S Raffles. This moment also marks the beginning of the second public life of Borobudur. In this life, due to activities of cleaning, research, documentation, glossy books, gates, guestbooks, and surveillance, the temple transformed into a site of heritage under a number of colonial and postcolonial regimes, and from the 1950s, also entered the context of an international heritage movement, which led to UNESCO's Save Borobudur campaign and restoration in the 1970s. In 1991, Borobudur was enlisted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From the nineteenth century onwards, Borobudur has become a site of local, trans-Asian, and international pilgrimage, as well as a place of tourism, spiritual meaning-giving, and Buddhist revivalism. Thus, in the context of multiple archaeological, touristic, diplomatic and pilgrim's interventions, the site, which already counted headless statues at its rediscovery in 1814, became less and less 'complete' as it lost tokens to private 'collectors,' pilgrims, tourists, and museums worldwide, as well as to local villages. The Buddha heads from Borobudur, scattered over the world's museums and private collections, must have been taken during this (ongoing) second social life of Borobudur that began in 1814-1816.

1851

First mention of a gift in the Artis Archives, of "an important collection of antiques from the Hindus," gifted by captain J.G. Veening (1798-?) to Artis. Veening sailed between Amsterdam and Java between 1829-1840. The content of this collection, which, given the fact that Buddhist, Hindu-Buddhist, and Hindu were used interchangeably for Buddha heads, may have included Buddhist sculpture as well, is not specified in related correspondence. This gift

only indicates that by that time Artis had a number of Hindu and/or Buddhist antiquities from Java in its collection.

[*“Eenige afgodsbeelden der Hindous,”* Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 104, scan 49].

1862

Earliest concrete reference to a stone Buddha head gifted to Artis described as “One of the heads (stone head) of the Javanese idol-temple at Baero-Boedo.”³⁶ Donor was Pieter Arnold Diederichs (1804-1874), who was a well known Amsterdam-based public figure: businessman, publisher, book-seller and collector (of autographs, manuscripts, coins, tokens, and portraits).

Letter of Diederichs to Westerman (21 November 1862), Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 228 (incoming letters A-I, 1862), folder D.

1883

Four Buddha heads, said to be from Borobudur and submitted by Artis, are on display at the International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition in Amsterdam. Very probably one of these heads, then still in the form of a loan, was the one that I. (Israel) Schnitzler (probably a commissioner with family and a trading company of the same name in Semarang) after closure of the exhibition, gifted to Artis, since after closure of the exhibition, Israel Schnitzler inquired about the willingness of the Artis-directors to take over some objects he had lent to the exhibition. He proposed, amongst other objects: “the head of a woman and two hands from the Buddha times.”³⁷ Several weeks later, he sent another letter accompanying his donation in which he specified that, indeed, it concerned a Buddha head.³⁸ Besides the four Buddha heads of Artis, no other Buddha head from Java is mentioned in the catalogue of the exhibition, which is why we reason that Schnitzler’s Buddha head was categorised among the four Artis-heads.

³⁶ ‘Een der hoofden (kopstuk) van den Javaanschen afgoden-tempel te Baero-Boedor’

³⁷ ‘Weledele heeren! Bezitter van de ondervolgende voorwerpen door mij in de Tentoonstelling tentoongesteld, ben ik bereid die voorwerpen aan uw museum af te staan, indien u die wenscht te aanvaarden: [...] Een vrouwenhoofd en twee handen uit den Boedah tijden.’ Letter Schnitzler to directors NAM (19 October 1883), Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling, gehouden te Amsterdam in 1883 van mei-oct. achter het Rijksmuseum, 1880 – 1888, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 2188, scan 269.

³⁸ Amongst other objects, his gift consisted of a ‘Bouddha kop’, a ‘Bouddha hand’, and a ‘Bouddha voet’, Letter Schnitzler to directors NAM (8 November 1883), Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling, gehouden te Amsterdam in 1883 van mei-oct. achter het Rijksmuseum, 1880 – 1888, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 2188, scan 253.

P.J. Veth, *Catalogus der afdeeling Nederlandsche Koloniën van de Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandeltentoonstelling van 1 Mei tot ulto. October 1883. Amsterdam. Groep II.* Leiden: Brill 1883, Nr. 25, pp. 329, inv. 25, a-d.

Letter from Schnitzler to directors NAM (19 October 1883), Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling, gehouden te Amsterdam in 1883 van mei-oct. achter het Rijksmuseum, 1880 – 1888, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 2188, scan 269.

Letter from Schnitzler to directors NAM (8 November 1883), Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling, gehouden te Amsterdam in 1883 van mei-oct. achter het Rijksmuseum, 1880 – 1888, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 2188, scan 253.

1888

‘Several’ Buddha heads are on display in the Ethnographic Museum in Artis, in the newly opened building De Volharding, in Room 1, dedicated to Java, under the category ‘Antiquities.’ In his guide to the museum, C.M. Pleyte does not mention the exact number, nor does he indicate inventory numbers.

[C.M. Pleyte, *Gids voor den bezoeker van het Ethnographisch Museum. Insulinde. I. Java.* Amsterdam: Tj. Van Holkema, 1888, p.4].

1889

Mentioning of another stone Buddha head, originating from Borobudur, in this case not a donation, but a part of the ‘Bruikleen-collection’ (Loan), dating from “after 1893” of protestant missionary Jacques H. de Vries (1860-1937), who had been posted in the Netherlands Indies between 1888 until 1922, amongst other places, in Yogyakarta and Magelang (thus close to the site). De Vries appeared to have been a fervent collector of cultural objects at the various locations where he worked. However, whatever the conditions under which De Vries got hold of a Buddha head, on 15 March 1898 Artis curator J.C.M. de Meijere adds in the book of loans that this collection was “transported” from the ethnographic museum of Artis, and returned to the “owner.”³⁹

³⁹ KIT, inventarisnummer 7852 (sijn 7778), PDF pages 49-53, manuscript pages 27-30: ‘Bruikleenverzameling van Dr. J.H. de Vries, predikant te Magelang, Java’, see nr 6. ‘Boeddhakop (Baraboedoer)’, .Notes Melle: *Op pdf p. 49 (van 138) [p. 27 van het boek] staat, als onderdeel van: ‘Bruikleen verzameling van dr. J.H. de Vries, predikant te Magelang, Java’, als No. 6 (oorspronkelijk nummer 61), een ‘Boeddhakop (Bara boedoer)’. Verder, op pdf p. 51 [p. 29 van het boek] staat dat deze collectie objecten zijn ontvangen op 20 november 1893. Op pdf p. 52 [p. 30 van het boek] staat dat ‘bovenstaande collectie is op 15 maart 1898 van het museum afgevoerd en aan de eigenaar afgeleverd.’*

“Bruikleenverzameling van Dr. J.H. de Vries, predikant te Magelang, Java,” see nr 6.

“Boeddhakop (Baraboedoer),” KIT, inventarisnummer 7852 (sisn 7778), PDF pages 49-53

(manuscript pages 27-30), in particular PDF page 49, 51 and 52.

1901

Indische Tentoonstelling in het Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam: One of the Buddha heads is on display, as nr. 50 “head of a Dyani Buddha. Originating from Barabadoer.”

[Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. nr. Scan 4, onder het kopje "Archaeologische Verzameling" binnen een selectie voorwerpen die werd uitgeleend aan het Stedelijk Museum voor een Ethnologische Tentoonstelling: "Twee Boeddhakoppen." For the one Buddha head on display at the exhibition in the Stedelijk:

N.P. van den Berg, *Gids voor den Bezoeker van de Indische Tentoonstelling in het Stedelijk Museum te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy, 1901), 36].

1910

Ethnographic Museum Artis closes. Founding of the Vereeniging Koloniaal Instituut/ Colonial Institute Society in Amsterdam. Ethnographic Collection Artis donated to Colonial Institute, including the four Buddha heads.

For related correspondence to this ‘full’ donation of the Artis collection, see “28-10-1910, Vereeniging Koloniaal Instituut aan Genootschap Artis” and Archives Tropenmuseum, 4395 – Stukken betreffende de overdracht van de etnografische verzameling van de vereniging ‘Natura Artis Magistra’ te Amsterdam.

1921

The Buddha heads are transferred to the Colonial Institute, and re-registered.

1926

Opening building Colonial Institute which has an Economic and Ethnographic Museum. The Buddha heads get a place in the Vestibule dedicated to ‘Borobudur,’ posing as remains of a high civilisation cared for by an ethical colonial state, and as regalia of the Great Dutch Empire.

[Krom, N.J. *Gids in het Volkenkundig Museum. IV. Het Hindoeïsme*. Amsterdam: Koloniaal Instituut, 1927].

Object information

For all four Buddha heads, there is a general description to give. Particularities and differences in external characteristics will be mentioned below. For all four Buddha heads we compared the general description in NMVW’s collection registration system TMS, with relevant literature, and tried to reimagine them as part of what is missing: the sculptured stone body of a Buddha. In TMS they are all described as: a stone head of a Buddha Statue, from Central Java, probably from the eighth-

century Buddhist shrine Borobudur, near Magelang. They are all fixed on a pedestal with a metal pin. They represent the head of Buddha, and once must have been part of a complete seated Buddha, sculpted from stone, in one of the Buddha's six preaching poses, posting on the outer galleries or in the niches of Borobudur.⁴⁰ Furthermore, for all four Buddha heads' characteristic attributes can be recognised, that experts consider typical for the sculpted heads of the Buddha: the eyes on the Buddha head are almost closed. His ears are stretched in length, which, according to experts like Jan Fontein, refer to the jewellery the Buddha threw off when he decided to strive for enlightenment.⁴¹ The curls on his head are styled, and turned to the right. The head is crowned by a three-dimensional oval topknot, the so-called ushnisa. As can be seen on the photographs, only one of the four, TM-A-5947, has another characteristic that typifies most sculptured Buddha heads: the urna on the forehead.

⁴⁰ For a brief overview of scholarly discussions over the meaning of these various poses, Miksic, *Borobudur*, 53-55.

⁴¹ Jan Fontein, 'Het goddelijk gezicht van Indonesië', in: Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer eds. *Het Goddelijk gezicht van Indonesië* Zwolle, Waaanders: 19190, 113-301, there 134.

TM-A-5945 Stone head of a Buddha Statue, Basic information⁴²

 <p><i>Photo: Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nr. TM-A-5945</i></p>	Title	Stone head of a Buddha
	Current possessor	
	Current location	NMVW Tropenmuseum Amsterdam
	Inventory number	TM-A-5945
	Material/technique	Andesite stone sculpture. Made c. 800. Central Java, Indonesia. Sculpture is fixed on a pedestal with pin, made in the atelier of the Tropenmuseum
Measurements	33.6 x 24.5 x 22.2 cm Height incl. pin: 41 cm	

Object information TM-A-5945: Stone head of a Buddha Statue

This Buddha head fits for the most part the general description presented above. Notably, however, the old inventory card registers “een grote knobbel midden op het hoofd,” which would be, in the style of most sculptured Buddha heads from that period and region, the urna.⁴³ Yet, this urna is not visible on the photograph of this particular Buddha head. On the old inventory card, a curator also typed, “comparable to A-5946, yet darker in colour.” And he or she refers to the old N.A.M. Serie O no.12.⁴⁴ Comparing the photographs in TMS today, it seems to be the other way around: A-5946 looks darker than A-5945.

⁴² Taken from TMS registration system and inventory cards..

⁴³ Old inventory card, scanned in TMS, of TM-A-5945.

⁴⁴ Old inventory card, scanned in TMS, of TM-A-5945.

Object information TM-A-5946: Stone head of a Buddha Statue⁴⁵

 <p><i>Photo: Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nr. TM-A-5946</i></p>	Title	Stone head of a Buddha
	Current possessor	
	Current location	NMVW Tropenmuseum Amsterdam
	Inventory number	TM-A-5946
	Material/technique	Andesite stone sculpture. Made c. 800. Central Java, Indonesia. Sculpture is fixed on a pedestal with pin, made in the atelier of the Tropenmuseum
	Size	Height: 33 cm

Object information TM-A-5946: Stone head of a Buddha Statue

This Buddha head fits for the most part, the general description, presented above. According to the ancient registration card, this head had no urna (“het kleine knobbeltje boven de neus ontbreekt hier”), however, and is apart from that comparable to A-5948. The colour of the stone is lighter. And the sculpture is “somewhat damaged” (“eenigszins geschonden”). Looking at the (recent) photograph, his head is damaged, especially at the nose, the forehead, and the right eye (in such a way that it even seems half open). The registering curator refers to the old N.A.M. Serie O no.11.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Taken from TMS registration system and inventory card..

⁴⁶ Old inventory card A-5946, scanned in TMS.

TM-A-5947 Stone head of a Buddha Statue, Basic information⁴⁷

 <p><i>Photo: Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nr. TM-A-5947</i></p>	Title	Stone head of a Buddha
	Current possessor	
	Current location	NMVW Tropenmuseum Amsterdam
	Inventory number	TM-A-5947
	Material/technique	Stone sculpture. 'anorganic material'. Made c. 800. Central Java, Indonesia. Sculpture is fixed on a pedestal with pin, made in the atelier of the Tropenmuseum
Size	Height: circa 35 cm	

TM-A-5947 Stone head of a Buddha Statue, Basic information

For the most part, this Buddha head fits the general description mentioned above.

On the old inventory card a curator has typed: "comparable to A-5948, yet lighter in colour stone."

And he or she refers to the old N.A.M. Serie O no.10.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Taken from TMS registration system and inventory card..

⁴⁸ Old inventory card, scanned in TMS, of TM-A-5947.

TM-A-5948 Stone head of a Buddha Statue, Basic information⁴⁹

 <p><i>Photo: Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nr. TM-A-5948</i></p>	Title	Stone head of a Buddha
	Current legal owner	
	Current location	NMVW Tropenmuseum Amsterdam
	Inventory number	TM-A-5948
	Material/technique	Stone sculpture. 'anorganic material'. Made c. 800. Central Java, Indonesia. Sculpture is fixed on a pedestal with pin, made in the atelier of the Tropenmuseum
Size	Height: circa 33.8 cm Wide: 25.3 cm Deep: 22.2 cm Iron Pin: 42 cm	

TM-A-5948 Stone head of a Buddha Statue, Basic information

For the most part, this Buddha head fits for the most part the general description, presented above. According to the old inventory card, it has an urna – described as a “knobbeltje,” (small lump)⁵⁰ – on its fore head. However, from the photograph in TMS, it seems that this has disappeared. We can see a very small hole, which may be the place where the urna had been attached. According to the old inventory card, this object refers to: N.A.M. Serie O no.9.⁵¹

Comparing older descriptions of external characteristics with photographs

A visit to the depot to see and study the actual heads, which was cancelled earlier because of COVID restrictions, will be planned after the deadline of this report. What follows, comparing descriptions and photographs, might be adapted on the basis of that study-visit.

If, in 1883, the visitor of the International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition would have carried Veth's catalogue along (it was published long after the exhibition opened) and looked for the

⁴⁹ Taken from TMS registration system and inventory card.

⁵⁰ Inventory card TM A-5948, scanned in the TMS registration. Visit to depot is planned for 21 December.

⁵¹ Inventory card TM A-5948, scanned in the TMS registration. Visit to depot is planned for 21 December.

four Buddha heads of Borobudur on display there, submitted by Artis, she or he would find them described under entry number 25, which entailed a collection of seventeen stone statues from Artis, and there under *a-d*: “Four heads of Buddha-statues, one of which with a wart on its head.” The “wart” in the quotation, refers to the “urna” that characterises sculptured Buddha heads. Nobody had bothered to add more detailed information.⁵²

Regarding the connection between these four heads and the four that entered the NMVW Tropenmuseum: if we look at the photographs of the Buddha heads included in the TMS registration (a visit to the depot to see the actual heads is planned for later), we see only an urna on inv. nr. TM-A-5947.⁵³ If we turn to the old inventory cards in the TM registration, however, three of the four Artis Buddha heads are said to have an “urna,” except for one (TM-A-4946). As said, this goes against what we actually see. It may be that the others may have also had an urna when they entered the Colonial Institute, which may have gotten lost, but these kinds of changes cannot be deduced from the registration cards. Alternatively, the explanation may be that the curators writing down the information on the first inventory cards took the complete Buddha head as a model. This fate is also typical for Borobudur, which from an archaeological/(art-)historical view has most often been studied in a complete form, reconstructed in the mind, on paper, or as an ideal and complete model, with all 504 Buddha statues and their heads included. Whereas today, as noted in part I, of these 504 Buddha statues, 43 are fully “missing,” their posts left vacant. Over 300 others are damaged, of which 250 are “headless.” As a possible indication, the photograph of TM-A-5946 shows a small hole on the forehead, where an urna might have been fixed. In general, regarding the question whether they all had an urna, and when and where these got lost might be an interesting lead for further research to establish the link between these heads and the heads on display at the world exhibition in Amsterdam.

Doubt

One curator-expert of NMVW Tropenmuseum explicitly expressed his doubts as to whether *any* of the eight heads in the museum are actually from Borobodur. Later curators, and object-registrators echoed that doubt. Yet, their doubt is solely based on an experts’ generalised comparisons between the different heads kept by the museum that are ascribed to the temple, which they deemed to differ too much from each other. The same goes, by the way, for the Buddha heads that ended up in

⁵² P.J. Veth, *Catalogus der afdeling Nederlandsche Koloniën van de Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandelentoonstelling van 1 Mei tot ulto October 1883. Groep II*. Leiden: Brill, 1883, 329.

⁵³ Again, we haven’t yet been able to check, since our visit to the depot of the Tropenmuseum was cancelled due to Covid measures. Another visit will be planned after the deadline of this report.

the Ethnographic Museum in Leiden.⁵⁴ On the basis of detailed differences, the present TMS registration for both museums concludes that the Buddha heads in the NMVW Tropenmuseum must have different origins: “the mutual divergences in size, type of stone, and elaboration (a huge variation in the number of curls, both on the head as on the ushnisha), the uma’s, corner of the mouth, eyelids, forms of the ear all point to different origins.”⁵⁵

However, the same registrations observe that *at* the Borobudur temple, in situ, the Buddha heads, though at first sight uniform, also show remarkable small differences. “This is also the case for the Buddha heads at NMVW Tropenmuseum. For example, there are differences in the number of rows of curls, de width of the mouth, the fulness of the lower lip, the form of the eyelid, the curve of the ear. NMVW Tropenmuseum Buddha heads show generally centimetres in difference in height, width, depth.”⁵⁶ This ambiguous doubt, combined with the suggestion that only TM-A-5947 *might* be seriously ascribed to Borobudur, which curators wrote down on registration cards, would be copied later on, and recurred in the 1990s, for several heads in the digital registration system TMS.⁵⁷ As such, this ‘generalised’ doubt reflects a general ‘loose’ concern for the precise circumstances in which the Buddha heads ended up in collections in the Netherlands – which we also see in the early nineteenth century – but also of the research priorities of museums, even in times of critical self-reflection.⁵⁸

It is intriguing that of the four Buddha heads deriving from Artis, nr. TM-A-5947, the one that is complete, and has an urna on its head, is being considered as truly originating from Borobudur, implying that its ‘completeness’ makes it more convincing.

Reconstructing the Dutch context. Buddha heads ‘gifted’ to Artis

⁵⁴ In his catalogue of the Javanese antiquities’ collection of the Museum of Ethnography, Juynboll observes comparable differences for the Buddha heads registered there. “Presumably all originating from Borobudur,” he concludes. H.H. Juynboll, *Catalogus van ‘s Rijks Ethnographisch Museum. Deel V. Javaansche Oudheden*. Leiden: Brill, 1909, 37

⁵⁵ From TMS registration of TM-A-5947. ‘De onderlinge verschillen in afmeting, steensoorten en detaillering (grote variatie in het aantal krullen, zowel op het hoofd als de ushnisha), uma’s, mondhoeken, oogleden, oorvormen wijzen op diverse herkomstbronnen’

⁵⁶ From TMS registration of TM-A-5947. The registration, signed BCM, is probably from ‘South Asia’-curator Ben Meulenbeld, (curator between 1986-2013). This observation may reflect more in general a ‘loose’ concern for the precise circumstances under which these Buddha heads were taken, and the circumstances through which these ended up in the collection, and as a side-effect, estrangement from the museum towards its collection. See Bloembergen 2022 (essay Bloembergen in the PPOCE Report). We have been trying to contact Meulenbeld, via the network of (former) museum curators but to no avail. We had a meeting with William Southworth 21-12-2021, on different sizes of the Buddha heads; see also the e-mail of Marijke Klokke, 7-10-2021 on ‘doubts’ and on the German project documentation. Both confirmed that while there may be doubt, museums, at least those in the Netherlands haven’t given time to take such doubt as a stimulation for serious provenance research into the Buddha heads. This was the case until fairly recently, when the NMVW held a Big Buddha exhibition in 2016-17: ‘dat was een zeer hectische tijd waarin er weinig tijd was voor dit soort onderzoek naar collectiegeschiedenissen’, aldus Marijke Klokke.

⁵⁷ Systeemkaarten, en TMS description online, TM-588-1; TM-860-82; TM-860-83; TM-860-100; TM-A-5945; TM-A-5946; TM-A-5947.

⁵⁸ See Marieke Bloembergen, ‘Koloniale overvloed zonder onbehagen. Herkomst van museale voorwerpen en de economie van verzamelen’ 2022 (essay Bloembergen in the PPOCE Report).

As summarised above, going through the available gift registrations and minutes of board meetings kept at the archives of Artis (held in the Stadsarchief Amsterdam), we found *three* heads of stone Buddha statues mentioned as such in the correspondences. And for these, only in *two* cases did the donor or curator explicitly link the head to Borobudur. One of these two Buddha heads connected to Borobudur was registered as a “free loan” which was ultimately returned to the owner. It was lent to Artis by a protestant missionary, Jacques H. de Vries (1860-1937), who had been posted, amongst other places, in Magelang (thus, very close to the site of Borobudur). However, chances are limited that this head ended up in the NMVW Tropenmuseum. This missionary only arrived in the Netherlands-Indies in 1888 to begin his work of proselytising (and, on the way, collecting ethnographic objects), in Ambon. The Buddha head he lent to Artis only entered the Artis collection after 1893. There, it was registered – in the registration of the ‘loans’ in Artis that were (or were not) transferred to the Colonial Institute – as “returned to the owner.”⁵⁹ Below, while keeping the option open, we will explain why there are strong arguments to reason that it is improbable that this was one of the four Buddha heads that Artis sent to the Colonial Institute, but, also reflect on the context in which he may have acquired a head. If, however, we have to exclude the donation of the missionary, we are left with two explicit references to Buddha heads, only one of them in connection to Borobudur. In addition, we hypothesise that a large donation of “Hindu stone statues” brought to the museum in 1851 by Captain J.G. Veening, may have included one or more Buddha heads. Unfortunately, the archive lacks detailed descriptions of this donation. Veening’s travels, and career may provide leads for further research: he captained four different ships that sailed to the Dutch East Indies between 1829 and 1844, two of which we found the name.⁶⁰

We could not connect the individual Buddha heads mentioned in the archival paperwork directly to the four in the NMVW Tropenmuseum. Nor did we find any information on when, how, and under what circumstances donors acquired these Buddha heads and whether they did so directly from a specific site in Java, or indirectly. In the remaining part of this report, we therefore mostly restrict ourselves to providing the information we found on the Dutch itinerary, and new contexts and valuations of the Buddha heads we found, with some possible leads for further research following the owners.

⁵⁹ Loan of De Vries, as such (‘returned to owner’) registered in ‘Bruiklenen van de Artis collectie die met Natura Artis Magistra naar Koloniaal instituut zijn gekomen’, Nationaal Archief, Archief van het koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, (1856) 1910-1995.(hereafter, Archives Tropenmuseum), inv. nr. 7852 (sisn 7778).

⁶⁰ According to Artis’ director G.F. Westerman, Veening sent an “important collection of antiques of the Hindus” (*‘Belangrijke verzameling antieken der Hindous’*), Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 204, folder ‘V’. Further details regarding captain Veening are hard to find. In the Artis-archive, his initials are written as J.G., which leads to Isaac Gerard Veening (1798-?) in the database of the *Stichting Maritiem-Historische Databank* (Marhisdata). There, Veening’s initials are debated, because different maritime registers mention different initials (G.J. Veening and I.G. Veening). Veening captained four different ships that sailed to the Dutch East Indies between 1829 and 1844. See: <https://www.marhisdata.nl/gezagvoerder&id=13028>

Veening's gift of Hindu-Buddhist antiquities to Artis: competing interests

The Society *Natura Artis Magistra* was established in 1838. Two years earlier, an initiator of the project named Gerardus Frederik Westerman (1807-1890) had already tried to obtain royal approval for the building of a zoo, which could compete with other European knowledge institutions. King Willem I refused to provide such an endowment, compelling Westerman to privately start a Society (*genootschap*) with his friends J.W.H. Werleman and J.J. Wijsmuller in 1838. The Society *Artis* subsequently bought terrain and private animal collections to launch a zoo, *Artis*, in the Plantagebuurt in Amsterdam. After some profuse first years, during which the Society accumulated various private collections, possessed more and more terrain, and erected a large building to house its zoological, geological, and ethnographic collections, King Willem III eventually lent his name to *Artis* in 1852, which thus became a royal society.⁶¹

This honor is considerable, since it propelled the number of donations to *Artis* by private persons and functionaries of the state. Consequently, even before *Artis* decided to actively acquire ethnographic objects in 1859, *Artis* already possessed an extensive ethnography collection whose pillars were constituted by donations of F.A. Jöhr, C. de Vlaming, and Captain J.G. Veening.⁶² Only the last seems to have donated objects related to Hindu-Buddhist artefacts: on 19 May 1851, Westerman mentioned during a board meeting the arrival of Veening's donation comprising "some idols of the Hindus."⁶³ Some weeks later, a letter was sent to captain Veening, thanking him for "the important collection of antiques of the Hindus."⁶⁴ Veening's gift was considered foundational for *Artis'* ethnographic collection, which is endorsed by a letter sent by C. Leemans, the director of the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden, to the directors of *Artis*. In this letter, Leemans inquired about the possibility to transfer an ensemble of "old-Hindu" stone statues from Java to his museum:

⁶¹ Sonja Wijs, "Een Plaats voor de Mens: De Etnografische Musea van het Koninklijk Zoologisch Genootschap *Natura Artis Magistra*," *Heden en Verleden: VVE Jaarboek 8* (2020): 50-56.

⁶² Sonja Wijs, "Een Plaats voor de Mens: De Etnografische Musea van het Koninklijk Zoologisch Genootschap *Natura Artis Magistra*," *Heden en Verleden: VVE Jaarboek 8* (2020): 56-57. Wijs refers to P.H. Witkamp's *Amsterdam in Schetsen* (II), where we read: 'Onder de talrijke voorwerpen, door leden en belangstellenden als geschenken aan de musea van *Natura Artis Magistra* vereerd, waren vóór 1859 enkele voorwerpen betrekking hebbende tot de kleeding, wapening, leefwijze en godsdienst der Oost-Aziatische volken. De Schout bij Nacht F.A. Jöhr, Kapitein J.G. Veening en de Heer C. de Vlaming, waren onder de eersten die tot deze uitbreiding der verzamelingen bijdroegen.' Pieter Harmen Witkamp, *Amsterdam in Schetsen. Tweede Serie* (Amsterdam: G.W. Tielkemeijer, 1869), 148.

⁶³ 'Eenige afgodsbeelden der Hindous', Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoologisch Genootschap *Natura Artis Magistra*), Inv. 104, scan 49.

⁶⁴ 'Belangrijke verzameling antieken der Hindous', Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoologisch Genootschap *Natura Artis Magistra*), Inv. 204, folder 'V'. Further details regarding Captain Veening are hard to find. In the *Artis*-archive, his initials are written as J.G., which leads to Isaac Gerard Veening (1798-?) in the database of the *Stichting Maritiem-Historische Databank* (Marhisdata). There, Veening's initials are debated, because different maritime registers mention different initials (G.J. Veening and I.G. Veening). Veening captained four different ships that sailed to the Dutch East Indies between 1829 and 1844. See:

<https://www.marhisdata.nl/gezagvoerder&id=13028>

Some time ago, while visiting the zoological garden of the association *Natura Artis Magistra*, some old-Hindu stone statues transferred from Java caught my eye. They are somewhat covertly placed in a corner and had previously slipped my attention or have only recently arrived in the garden. These objects cannot be deemed appropriate for mere decoration; if added to the state's collection of similar antiquities, serving science and surveyed by experts, they would be deservedly appreciated.⁶⁵

It is likely that Leemans referred to at least a part of Veening's gift, which had arrived one and a half years prior to his letter. Although no further details are mentioned concerning the exact composition of the gift, we can conclude that already in 1852, Artis held custody over a considerable collection of Javanese Hindu statues, which might include Buddhist sculptures as well. For observers at that time, and well into the early twentieth century, it was not uncommon to use the characterisation 'Hindu' for sculptures with Buddhist and Hindu religious iconography.⁶⁶ It is therefore possible that one or more Buddha heads from Java, and Borobudur in particular, were already part of this collection, but this is not certain.

Leemans' request reflected a typical competition in cultural and scholarly appropriation of the objects, for he questioned to which modern science-in-the-making the material remains of Java's Buddhist and Hindu past belonged: should they be considered as ethnography or archaeology. His initial request was resolutely refused by *Natura Artis Magistra*'s directors.⁶⁷ In 1859, however, the six statues were transferred to the Museum of Antiquities, under the condition that Artis remained the owner, and was mentioned as such. Only in this final transfer are the statues described: there is not a Buddha head amongst them.⁶⁸

Apart from this history, we do not know if the collection that Leemans received completely overlaps with the statues Veening gifted. Thus Veening might still provide a lead for further research into the way Hindu or Buddhist Javanese antiquities, and perhaps Borobudur Buddha heads included, were taken and transferred to the Netherlands. The period in which Veening sailed back and forth to the Netherlands Indies, 1829-1842 — starting just before the ending of the devastating Java War

⁶⁵ 'Eenigen tijd geleden den zoölogischen tuin van het genootschap *Natura Artis Magistra* bezoekende viel mijn oog op eenige uit Java overgebrachte oud-Hindoësche steenen beelden, die, enigzins in eenen achterhoek geplaatst, vroeger mijner aandacht ontsnapten of welligt eerst in den laatsten tijd in den tuin aangekomen waren. Als versiering kunnen die en diergelijken voorwerpen niet zeer geschikt worden geacht, terwijl zij bij andere soortgelijken in de Rijks oudheidkundige verzameling gevoegd, voor de wetenschap dienstbaar gemaakt, onder de oogen van deskundigen gebragt, en naar hunne waarde geschat zullen worden.' Letter from Leemans to directors of NAM (N. 86, 6 December 1852), Archive RMO, Inv. 013 (sent letters 1851-1852), scan 184/188.

⁶⁶ Note that in 1927, the Guide for the Ethnographic collection in the Colonial Institute, and published by the Institute, which has a photograph of one of the reliefs of Borobudur on its cover, is entitled *IV. Het Hindoeïsme* (Hinduism). This is part IV of a series of small guides visitors could carry along, and in this part the Borobudur Buddha heads from Artis, and the way they are put on display in the Colonial Institute, are described, See Krom 1927: fig. 4, and p. 49.

⁶⁷ See: Recordings of the assemblies of 13 and 27 December 1852, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap *Natura Artis Magistra*), Inv. 105, scans 6-8.

⁶⁸ See, amongst others, Letter Leemans to directors of NAM (9 May 1859), Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap *Natura Artis Magistra*), inv. 1879t

(1825-1830) – was when resident C.L. Hartmann, the colonial administrator in Kedu, in 1835 and 1836 began a second round of clearance of Borobudur (after the first cleaning works at the order of Lieutenant-General T.S Raffles, during the British regime, in 1814-1816), probably with the help of local workers provided by the *regent* of Magelang. This clearance entailed the sweeping away of sand and rubbish from the galleries of the temple, which made the reliefs depicting the life and previous lives of the Buddha clearly visible for the first time to contemporary viewers and visitors.⁶⁹ While the temple became thus more and more apparent and accessible, it attracted more and more curious individual visitors, like the Dutch artist Hubertus N. Sieburgh, who portrayed the temple in a starry night, or the Javanese author of the generative encyclopedic text, *Serat Centhini*.

Thus, at the time of Veening's donation in 1851, the temple had not only reacquired fame and new meanings in Java, the Dutch East Indies, and wider Asia, but also had become famous within Europe, and thus also the Netherlands.⁷⁰ We could therefore expect that if any object of Borobudur was in the collection, this 'provenance' would show up in the correspondence on this donation. But again this remains uncertain and it seems that at this time it was more a question of quantity than of individual quality (leaving aside questions regarding provenance) that the staff of Artis' ethnographic collection expressed interest in.

Follow the Buddha heads

Beyond the general descriptions of "some idol statues of the Hindus," the earliest concrete reference to a stone Buddha head in the Artis Archives dates from 1862. On 24 November of that year, in a list of incoming gifts attached to the assembly's recordings, we read that P.A. Diederichs donated "one antique stone Buddha head from Java, an extensive collection of objects from the Dutch East Indies, mainly comprising of lances, clubs, arrows, longbows, oars, etc. among which from Timor."⁷¹ Aside from De Vries' later loan, Diederichs' donation of a Buddha head is the only *donation* of a Buddha head we found that mentions its provenance to be from the Borobudur temple. In the letter accompanying his gift, he wrote that it concerned "one of the heads (head piece) of the Javanese idol-temple at Baero Boedor."⁷²

⁶⁹ For *Serat Centhini* and the visit to Borobudur, see: Soekmono, 'Serat Centhini and the rejected Buddha'; Bloembergen and Eickhoff, *The politics of heritage*, 32-33.

⁷⁰ Miksic, *Borobudur*; Bloembergen and Eickhoff, *The politics of Heritage*.

⁷¹ 'Van P.A. Diederichs, alhier: 1 antieke steenen Budda kop van Java, eene uitgebreide verzameling voorwerpen uit Nederl. O Indië, bestaande voornamelijk uit lanzen, knotsen, pijlen, boogen, roeispanen, enz. waaronder van Timor.' Recordings of the assembly of 24 November 1862, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 115, scan 87.

⁷² 'Een der hoofden (kopstuk) van den Javaanschen afgoden-tempel te Baero-Boedor', Letter of Diederichs to Westerman (21 November 1862), Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 228 (incoming letters A-I, 1862), folder D. The special collections library of the University of Amsterdam keeps a letter of Westerman to Diederichs (November 1862) in which he thanks Diederichs for his donation. Unfortunately, this letter does not provide additional information concerning the

Together with his brother George Frederik (1799-1862), Pieter Arnold Diederichs (1804-1874) was a businessman who ran the publishing and bookselling company *Gebr. Diederichs*. From 1831 onwards, this company issued the newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* from its offices on the Bloemmarkt in Amsterdam. Besides working as a bookseller and publisher, P.A. Diederichs was an active member of various artistic and philanthropical societies. Typically, within the field of nineteenth century cultural history, in which Diederichs is mentioned, his connections to the Dutch colonial enterprise, or perhaps a market in so-called 'exotic' or ethnographic objects from Java is not explored. He is warm-heartedly evoked as a "powerful figure whose generous laugh was widely heard," but also as an invested collector of autographs, manuscripts, coins, tokens, and portraits. Diederichs' network must have been extensive, stretching far beyond Amsterdam, as can be concluded after a glimpse at his extensive correspondence, which is held at the special collections library of the University of Amsterdam. There, we checked his correspondence with Artis' director Westerman, which provided no information on the way Diederichs obtained the head. Further research in P.A. Diederichs' correspondence prior to 1862 (the year of his donation to Artis) might give more details about his acquisition of the Buddha head.⁷³

Again, P.A. Diederichs' 1862 donation is thus far the only *donation* to Artis we found that establishes a link between the object and the Borobudur temple. But this does not necessarily mean that Borobudur was indeed the provenance of this particular head. In the archive, there are more traces to stone Buddha heads, yet nowhere do they carry claims of stemming from Borobudur. Nonetheless, we will shortly discuss these traces below.

A second Buddha head turns up in a list of incoming gifts attached to Artis' assembly recordings. The list, dated 19 November 1883, reads: "J. Schnitzler, here [Amsterdam], 2 standards, 2 racks with arrows, 2 longbows, 1 headgear from Java. 1 Buddha head, hand, foot from idem [Java], 1 Arab. pipe."⁷⁴ Notably, one week before these specifications, Schnitzler's donation was already announced in the assembly. There, on 12 November, it reads: "Some objects, by mister J. Schnitzler, also exhibited there."⁷⁵ "There" refers to the International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition in

Buddha head. 'Brief van G.F. Westerman aan Pieter Arnold Diederichs (1804-1874)', Bijzondere Collecties UvA, Allard Pierson Depot OTM: hs. 24 By 2.

⁷³ Biographical information about Diederichs was obtained from Chantal Keijsper, "'Alle vakken, alle vormen, alle prijzen'. Het fonds van de negentiende-eeuwse Amsterdamse uitgeverij de Gebr. Diederichs", *De Boekenwereld* 14 (1997-1998): 54-67.

https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/boe022199701_01/boe022199701_01_0013.php

⁷⁴ 'J. Schnitzler, alhier, 2 standards, 2 rekken met pijlen, 2 handboogen, 1 hoofd-deksel van Java. 1 Boudhakop, hand, voet van idem 1 Arab. pijp', Recordings of the assembly of 19 November 1883, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 136. The gift registers also mention Schnitzler's donation. There, his address is written to be Keizersgracht 37. This might be valuable information in the search for more background on Schnitzler's persona for, at this point, we have little references regarding this matter. "Registers der geschenken", Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 1272, scan 10.

⁷⁵ 'Eenige voorwerpen, door den heer J [L?] Schnitzler, mede aldaar tentoongesteld.' Recordings of the assembly of 12 November 1883, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 136.

Amsterdam (*Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling*), which was held behind the Rijksmuseum between May and October 1883. At the request of Professor Veth, Artis loaned several objects to the organisers of this exhibition, amongst which were seventeen “stone statues from Java,” which, notably, were insured for 2000 guilders.⁷⁶ There was a brief discussion in the correspondence between the organisers of the exhibition and the direction of Artis, whether the statues needed separate pinnacles, or whether they would be installed on a portable showcase, to be provided by the exhibition. The organising committee of the exhibition decided against pinnacles.⁷⁷

After the exhibition, J. Schnitzler sent a letter to Artis in which he inquired about the willingness of the Artis-directors to take over some objects he had lent to the exhibition. He proposed, amongst other objects: “the head of a woman and two hands from the Buddha times.”⁷⁸ Several weeks later, he sent another letter accompanying his donation in which he specified that, indeed, it concerned a Buddha head.⁷⁹ One of the four heads at the world exhibition may thus have been this one. However, Schnitzler is not mentioned on the page with relevant entry in the catalogue of the exhibition (Group II, ‘The native population of the colonised and ruled regions,’ 12th class, ‘Religion and Religious practices’, subsection II. Hindoeïsme, inv. nr. 25, nrs a-d), nor in connection to other ‘Hindu-Buddhist’ entries in this section, nor in the general introduction to these objects under the 11th class, Arts and Sciences’ in the catalogue (discussed below), so that we cannot directly link an individual head of the Artis donation to the Colonial Institute (NMVW Tropenmuseum) to Schnitzler’s donation.

Keeping other options open, more can be said about the *loan* of a Buddha head to Artis, briefly discussed above, and said to be from Borobudur, that turned up in 1898. It was mentioned as a part of the ‘Bruikleen-collection’ (Loan), dating from “after 1893” of Jacques H. de Vries (1860-

⁷⁶ Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling, gehouden te Amsterdam in 1883 van mei-oct. achter het Rijksmuseum, 1880 – 1888, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 2188, scans 330-331 (Veth) and scan 106 (insurance).

⁷⁷ Organising committee Exhibition, to G.F. Westerman, 6 April 1883, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), inv.nr. 2188.

⁷⁸ ‘Weledele heeren! Bezitter van de ondervolgende voorwerpen door mij in de Tentoonstelling tentoongesteld, ben ik bereid die voorwerpen aan uw museum af te staan, indien u die wenscht te aanvaarden: [...] Een vrouwenhoofd en twee handen uit den Boedah tijden.’ Letter Schnitzler to directors NAM (19 October 1883), Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling, gehouden te Amsterdam in 1883 van mei-oct. achter het Rijksmuseum, 1880 – 1888, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 2188, scan 269.

⁷⁹ Amongst other objects, his gift consisted of a “Bouddha kop,” a “Bouddha hand,” and a “Bouddha voet,” Letter Schnitzler to directors NAM (8 November 1883), Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling, gehouden te Amsterdam in 1883 van mei-oct. achter het Rijksmuseum, 1880 – 1888, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 2188, scan 253. The gift registers also mention Schnitzler’s donation. ‘Eenige voorwerpen, door den heer J [L?] Schnitzler, mede aldaar tentoongesteld.’ Recordings of the assembly of 12 November 1883, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 136; ‘J. Schnitzler, alhier, 2 standards, 2 rekken met pijlen, 2 handboogen, 1 hoofd-deksel van Java. 1 Boudhakop, hand, voet van idem 1 Arab. pijp’, Recordings of the assembly of 19 November 1883, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 136.

1937). De Vries was a minister/ reverend, who worked between 1888-1922 in the Dutch East Indies, beginning in Ambon, and who became a fervent collector of ethnographic objects at the various locations where he worked. From 1892-1898 he was based in Yogyakarta and later on in Magelang, both nearby Borobudur.⁸⁰ He came there, notably, just after the year that engineer J.W. IJzerman, together with the Christian court-photographer of the Sultan Hamengkubuwono VII of Yogyakarta, Kasian Cephas, had uncovered, photographed, and recovered the so-called hidden foot of Borobudur.⁸¹ This was a sensational discovery at the time which cannot have escaped the attention of De Vries. The intervention of IJzerman and Kasian Cephas at Borobudur was accompanied, moreover, by further 'clearance' of the site, which may have generated opportunities for others to take (and/or sell) 'loose' objects from the site. However, whatever the conditions under which De Vries acquired a Buddha head, on 15 March 1898 in the book of loans, the registering Artis curator J.C.M. de Meijere adds that this collection was 'transported' from the ethnographic museum of Artis, and returned to the "owner."⁸² This information, and the fact that this Buddha head cannot have been on display at the world exhibition in Amsterdam, nor can it be one of the heads mentioned in Pleyte's guide to the Ethnographic Museum of Artis, since this was all before De Vries left for the Dutch East Indies, the chance is small that this Buddha head became part of the Colonial Institute's museum (unless De Vries got hold of the Buddha head before he left for the Dutch East Indies, but then the fact remains that according to the registration of Artis, the head was returned to De Vries).

The last traces of Buddha heads in the archives of Artis can be found in documentation related to the 'Indies Exposition' (*Indische Tentoonstelling*) in 1901, held at the *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam*.⁸³ Together with an exhibition held at the Museum voor Kunstnijverheid in Haarlem, this exhibition was a prestigious spin-off of the Dutch colonial entry to the world exhibition in Paris

⁸⁰ Loan from De Vries, as mentioned in Nationaal Archief Inv. 7852 (sisn 7778) from the Inventaris van het archief van het koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, (1856) 1910-1995. Information on J.H. De Vries kindly given by Tom van der End, by e-mail, 3-8-2021.

⁸¹ Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2020: 64-65.

⁸² KIT, inventarisnummer 7852 (sisn 7778), PDF pages 49-53, manuscript pages 27-30: 'Bruikleenverzameling van Dr. J.H. de Vries, predikant te Magelang, Java', see nr 6. 'Boeddhakop (Baraboedoer)', .Notes Melle: *Op pdf p. 49 (van 138) [p. 27 van het boek] staat, als onderdeel van: 'Bruikleen verzameling van dr. J.H. de Vries, predikant te Magelang, Java', als No. 6 (oorspronkelijk nummer 61), een 'Boeddhakop (Baraboedoer)'. Verder, op pdf p. 51 [p. 29 van het boek] staat dat deze collectie objecten zijn ontvangen op 20 november 1893. Op pdf p. 52 [p. 30 van het boek] staat dat 'bovenstaande collectie is op 15 maart 1898 van het museum afgevoerd en aan de eigenaar afgeleverd.'*

⁸³ At that time, the Stedelijk Museum was not the separate modern art museum which it is now, and housed various 'Period' collections. The Hindu and Buddhist antiquities on show at the Indische Tentoonstelling, including the plaster casts of Borobudur were divided over what were then 'the Vestibule' and the 'Erezaal'. For a brief history of the Stedelijk Museum in that time, see John Jansen van Galen & Huib Schreurs, *Het huis van nu, waar de toekomst is. Een kleine historie van het Stedelijk museum, 1895-1995*. Naarden: V + K Publishing. No mention there of the Indische Tentoonstelling.

(1900).⁸⁴ Counting Queen Wilhelmina and Prins Hendrik among its visitors,⁸⁵ it reflected a rising interest in Hindu-Buddhist antiquities, to legitimise the idea of an ethical Dutch colonial state, to be taken care of by that state, as much as it was also source of inspiration for a Dutch arts and crafts movement. This can be exemplified by the main Dutch pavilion at the world exhibition in Paris, a plaster cast copy of the Buddhist temple Candi Sari filled up with plaster casts from Borobudur reliefs, along with ornaments and statues from other temples on Java.⁸⁶ These plaster cast reliefs and objects were also on display in Amsterdam.

For the exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum, Cornelis Pleyte, the former curator of Artis' ethnographic museum (between 1887 and 1896) and co-curator of the exposition at the *Stedelijk Museum*, established a list of objects that had been put on loan to the exposition by his former employer, Artis. On 23 March 1901, he noted that, amongst other objects from the "archaeological collection," two Buddha heads returned to the Artis museum. Notably, other returning antique statues on Pleyte's list were filed with a number that starts with 'Ser. 0'. This is important, because the inventory cards of the four "Artis"-Buddha heads in the NMVW-collection also carry a number that starts with 'N.A.M. Serie 0', besides their TM-numbers.⁸⁷ This suggests that the 'Serie 0'-numbers on the inventory cards were already linked to the Buddha heads in 1901. At this point, the 1901 'Indies Exposition' at the *Stedelijk Museum* does not provide us with more information concerning the Buddha heads it put on display. Its visitor's guide mentions only one "head of a *Dhyani*-Buddha, originating from Borobudur," made of "lavatradiet."⁸⁸

Public life of the Buddha heads in the Netherlands: antiquity, religion or art?

While not entirely fitting in provenance research *pur sang*, in this section we briefly follow the Artis Buddha heads in their Dutch social lives, comparing categorisations and valuations, from the moment they were put on display at the world exhibition, to the way they gained post in the Ethnographic Museum of the Colonial Institute. Provenance may not be the most interesting aspect

⁸⁴ *Tentoonstelling der afgietsels van bouwkundige en ornamentale fragmenten avn eenige Hindoemonumenten op Midden-Java [...] geopend op 30 maart 1899 in het museum van kunstnijverheid in Haarlem*. S.l. Nederlandsche maatschappij ter Bevordering van Nijverheid, 1899; Saher, E. Von, *De Versierende kunsten in Nederlandsch-Oost-Indië. Eenige Hindoemonumenten op Midden Java*. Haarlem: Erven F. Bohr, 1900.

⁸⁵ Het bezoek aan de Indische tentoonstelling.. "Leeuwarder courant". Leeuwarden, 08-03-1901, p. 4. Geraadpleegd op Delpher op 01-03-2022, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010596019:mpeg21:p004>

⁸⁶ See Bloembergen *Colonial Spectacles*, 164-219.

⁸⁷ These inventory cards can be consulted, after appointment, in the *Tropenmuseum*. The TM-numbers are related to Artis-numbers in the following way:

TM-A-5945 carries N.A.M. Serie 0, no. 12

TM-A-5946 carries N.A.M. Serie 0, no. 11

TM-A-5947 carries N.A.M. Serie 0, no. 10

TM-A-5948 carries N.A.M. Serie 0, no. 9

Pleyte's list can be found at: Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 395 (Archief van het Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra), Inv. 1893, scan 4.

⁸⁸ N.P. van den Berg, *Gids voor den Bezoeker van de Indische Tentoonstelling in het Stedelijk Museum te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy, 1901), 36. <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/boeken/view?coll=boeken&identificer=MMSFUBA02:000008952>

of the socio-political biography of an object. The changing valuation and taxonomies of these heads over time tell as much (or more) about their own fate, and about the Dutch and colonial and international (epistemic) violence of heritage politics, as the basic fact that they were once carried away from their site of belonging. Insight into these mechanisms of valuation and taxation that are part and parcel of the politics of heritage also complicate the merits of provenance research directed towards provenance *pur sang* (i.e. origin). There is also much to win by telling the (international, alternative, violent) histories objects can tell.

The appearance of the Borobudur Buddha head at the exhibition of the Stedelijk Museum reflected a trend, already visible at the 1883 World Exhibition in Amsterdam, where the material remains of the Hindu-Buddhist past of Java, and Asia at large, were, in the Netherlands, and elsewhere, no longer mainly appreciated, in competition, as ethnography or antiquity – as we saw in the request of Leemans to have the stone statues from Java in the Museum of Antiquities. They were also increasingly appreciated as expressions of high art, in competition with ‘religion.’ Reflecting forms of epistemic violence, we can see this in the interpretations of the Buddha heads from Artis at the world exhibition, as articulated by the experts who compiled and wrote for the catalogue: Leiden based Indologist P.J. Veth, and anthropologist Lindor Serrurier, who had become Director of the Ethnographic Museum in Leiden in 1882.

At the world exhibition in Amsterdam, the four stone Buddha heads described as “vermoedelijk” (probably) from Borobudur (Veth II, 1883:329) were situated in Group II ‘The native population of the colonised and ruled regions,’ or the Ethnographic Group, which was one of the three main Groups in which this exhibition was organised – briefly simplified Group I ‘Nature’; Group II ‘Ethnography’ and Group III ‘Colonial modernity’ – and thus situated in an evolutionary framework of thinking.⁸⁹ Within that group, the heads were categorised, as mentioned above, in the 12th class: ‘Religion and religious practices’ (‘Godsdienst en godsdienstige gebruiken’), according to the evolutionary ethnographic scientific standards of that time reflecting higher expressions of civilisation. Moreover, they were grouped in subsection II. ‘Hindoeïsme’, and to be found there under inv. nr. 25, ‘Seventeen Stone statues from Java’, Kon. Zool. Gen. Natura Artis Magistra, te Amsterdam, a-d.’ At this entry, there is no further detailed information on the four Buddha heads than “Heads of Buddha statues probably originating from Boro Boedoer, one of which with a wart on its head.”⁹⁰ However, they were described, in a general way, both in the introduction of class 11, ‘Arts and Sciences’, and in this 12th class on religion.

⁸⁹ Bloembergen, Marieke, *Colonial spectacles: the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the world exhibitions, 1880-1931* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006) 60-63.

⁹⁰ Veth, *Catalogus der afdeling Nederlandsche Koloniën II*, 329-330.

The anthropologist Lindor Serrurier (1846-1901), who a year earlier had become Director of the Ethnographic Museum in Leiden, in his introduction to class 11, interpreted the Buddha heads within his general observation on the “impressive remains of Hinduist art.” Typically following an evolutionary perspective, and mixing up Buddhist and Hindu religion, he understood these material remains in terms of hierarchies of civilisations, but described them also from an aesthetic viewpoint, as an expression of art, of “half-civilised” peoples. In the catalogue, Serrurier observed that these objects, as expressions of art would clearly have “a larger appeal” to a western public. And he argued that this could be explained by their origin: “Hindu-civilisation.” By way of proof, Serrurier pointed to the other “witnesses:” “the stone statues, carried away from temple niches, that in quite numerous quantities are transferred to Europe,” thereby explicitly referring to Borobudur and the nearby, likewise eighth-century Buddhist temple Sewu.⁹¹ He furthermore pointed to the “mythological” persons visualised in bronze and stone statues, and reflected on the legacies of such ornamentation in Javanese arts and crafts in his own time “despite centuries of art-destroying influence of Islamism (“niettegenstaande een eeuwenlange kunstdodende invloed van het Islamisme”). This shows a typical anti-Islamic trope and civilisational hierarchical thinking, as well as condescension towards Islam and an ignorance of Islam as a real presence in Java – in fact, the faith to which the majority of the population in the Netherlands-Indies had converted at least since the sixteenth century. Notably, this negative attitude and habit of not seeing Islam in Indonesia was not, and would not be, restricted to the Netherlands, nor to Europe.⁹²

Serrurier thus introduced, and predominantly understood the Buddhist and Hindu Sculpture from Java as admirable artistic expressions typical of “Hinduistic” civilisation. However, in the actual exhibition in Amsterdam, and in the inventory in Veth’s catalogue, the four Buddha heads from Borobudur were not placed under this artistic category (class 11, Arts and Sciences) but under religion, or class 12, ‘Religion and religious practices.’ Indologist P.J. Veth, the compiler of the catalogue, explained: “The monuments of Hindu-Art, discussed in this introduction, are scarce and neglected on this exhibition, and, because they are to the largest extent relating to religion, most often not situated in this class [Arts and sciences, MB], but in the 12th class (‘Religion and religious

⁹¹ L. Serrurier, ‘11^{de} Klasse. Kunsten en wetenschappen’, *Catalogus der afdeling Nederlandsche Koloniën van de Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandelstentoonstelling van 1 Mei tot ulto October 1883. Groep II*. Leiden: Brill, 1883, 284-5.

⁹² See amongst others Mirjam Shatanawi, *Islam at the Tropenmuseum* (Arnhem: LM Publishers, 2014); Mirjam Shatanawi “Making and unmaking Islam: Lagacies of colonialism in museums,” PhD thesis, to be defended at the University of Amsterdam, 2022; Formichi, Chiara, ‘Islamic Studies or Asian Studies? Islam in Southeast Asia’, *The Muslim World*, 106 (October 2016), 696-718. Bloembergen, Marieke, ‘Borobudur in ‘the light of Asia’. Scholars, pilgrims and knowledge networks of Greater India, 1920s-1970s’, in Michael Laffan (ed.), *Belonging across the Bay of Bengal: Rites, Migrations, Rites* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) 35-56. Bloembergen, ‘The politics of Greater India’

practices’).” Veth wrote the introduction to this section, likewise from an evolutionary perspective, arguing, typically, that the Hindu-Buddhist civilisation was of foreign “Indian” origin⁹³:

The Hindus [meaning from India, MB] brought along their civilisation, their art, and their literature to Java [...] In Central and East Java their influence has been much larger than in the West of Java. [...] the Hindus covered the whole of Java with monuments, which Sivaists and Buddhists founded in competition. [...] Remarkable is the amount of temple ruins spread over the island, uncountable the number of statues of gods and heroes, *found* [italics MB] on and around the ruins, many of which reflecting artistic capacity. Memorials like the Buddhist Boroboedoer, the Sivaïst temples of Prambanan and the Dieng plateau, even in their state of decay, fill the European visitor with awe about the magnificence of their conception, and the beauty of their construction.⁹⁴

The awe expressed here makes the act of taking objects from such sites all the more remarkable. However, next to the longing to have, or greed, an assumption of being in charge, and of knowing better, seems to provide some of the explanations why the person who did the act of taking might think himself (or herself) right. Or, like Serrurier, Veth goes on to explain that “With the establishment of Islam, the Hindu art, to which the original indigenous population never played a larger role than delivering labor to construct the plans of their rulers, got completely lost. [...] The period of Hinduism has irrevocably gone. The *Indische* archipelago has, strictly speaking, no right anymore to carry the name “Indië.”⁹⁵

After the four Buddha heads had been transferred to the Colonial Institute, they gained a special place there, in the space left to the main entrance, or the vestibule, which was as a whole dedicated to Borobudur. There, at the start of the ethnographic collection, they personified Borobudur, together with pictures, plaster casts of full Buddha statues and of a lion from Borobudur (described as Indian by origin), served as crown jewels of the Dutch empire. In 1927, one year after the opening, the Colonial Institute published part IV of the guide to the ethnographic collection, dedicated to Hinduism. The author was the archaeologist N.J. Krom, the former head of the Colonial Archaeological Service, also author of a huge monograph on Borobudur. Krom paid scant attention to the Buddha heads: he described them as the only “original” pieces of Borobudur in this room, and pointed to two typical characteristics: the urna, and the long stretched ears. He does not mention

⁹³ For the Greater India perspective on the Hindu-Buddhist remains of Indonesia’s past, amongst others Bloembergen Bloembergen, “The politics of Greater India.”

⁹⁴ Veth, *Catalogus der afdeling Nederlandsche Koloniën II*, 321-2.

⁹⁵ Veth, *Catalogus der afdeling Nederlandsche Koloniën II*, 324.

whether one or more Buddha heads missed the urna. The guide features a photograph of the vestibule (fig. 3) where we can identify at least two, maybe three of the heads (the third further behind, one on the left, against the wall) and one photograph zooming in on one of them, a Buddha head that carries an urna (fig 4.). Comparing that picture to what is now TM-A-5947 (the Artis head that still today has an urna), they look different. But the photographed head of 1927 also seems different from the other three.⁹⁶ Given the fact that, as far as the TMS data informs us, before 1929, the Colonial Institute had no other Buddha heads than the four acquired from Artis, this raises questions about whether the heads have changed due to cleaning or conservation-interventions. We have not explored this lead (nor was it brought up by the curators we consulted with a more general question).

Krom, meanwhile, situated the Buddha heads both in the context of an analysis of Buddhism, and the temples religious meanings, but also as part and parcel of “Hindoe-Javaanse kunst” (referring to another influential book he wrote).⁹⁷ In line with the Greater India mindset by which ‘experts’ valued the remains of Asia’s Hindu-Buddhist past, he argued that this Hindu-Javanese ‘art’ was, like the religion, imported from India. Situating himself in a discussion on who could then be the builders of the temple sites on Java, he followed a middle line: converted Javanese followed the architectural ideas and rules originating from India, which were orally given to them over time.⁹⁸ He highly esteemed the ‘art’ produced under the Sailendra dynasty, following subjective criteria, and progressive teleological thinking.

De gebouwen zijn grootscher en gedurfter; zijkapellen omgeven de heiligdommen, de versiering is weelderiger en ovalender, de techniek verbeterd. In de complexen treedt vooral aan het licht, hoe naar streng volgehouden principes en in volstreekte regelmaat alles medewerkt om de eenheid van de kunstschepping als geheel, culmineerend in het centrale heiligdom, te doen uitkomen⁹⁹

Thus Krom deemed Borobudur a “kunstschepping” (a work of art).

The double, or ambiguous evaluation of the Buddha heads – is it art or is it religion? – expressed in the evaluations and categorisation of the Buddha heads at the world exhibition, and in the Colonial Institute, shows that the hierarchies and ways of gauging and valuating such objects were not yet fixed in this period. This ambiguity was to be the fate of most objects that belonged to ancient Hindu and Buddhist temples in the Netherlands Indies, and that have been carried away to other sites and collections in Asia, Europe, the US and Australia, ending up, if not in private

⁹⁶ Krom, *Gids in het Volkenkundig Museum*, : 49, and figures 3 and 4.

⁹⁷ Krom, N.J., *Inleiding tot de Hindoe-Javaansche kunst*. I-III (’s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1920 [2nd revised edition 1923]).

⁹⁸ Krom, *Gids in het Volkenkundig Museum*, : 32-36

⁹⁹ Krom, *Gids in het Volkenkundig Museum*, 38

collections, either in ethnographic museums, museums of world civilisations, or museums of Asian Art.

A comparison

For comparison, we can briefly look at the ‘social life’ of five other Borobudur Buddha heads, which Bloembergen (2021) explored in another context, and that turned up a bit later in Europe, in this case, in France, around the 1910s, in the midst of the high tide of Buddhist Art trade.¹⁰⁰ Some of these Buddha heads ended up in the Museum of Asian Art in Paris. Another one, via France, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. All along, these Buddha heads became part of changing taxonomies and valuation of the material remains of Asia’s Hindu-Buddhist past that helped transform them into High Art. That is: of Higher artistic value than what was considered the standard then in the west: Roman-Greco Arts. According to influential art theorists like Ananda Coomaraswamy and Ernest Havell, who became well known at the time, this was because of the capacity of the makers of these Hindu-Buddhist sculptures to visualise the divine. Yet, these objects were also appreciated as Arts of Greater India. Or, they were put on display as art “representing the capacity of its *Indian* creators to visualise the divine.” Their market price rose accordingly, between 1911 (in France, about 442 USD in today’s prices) and 1918 (in the US, about 2240 USD in today’s prices), by around 1700 dollars – which is nothing compared to prices asked and paid in the 2000s.¹⁰¹

The comparison between Dutch and international trajectories of Buddha heads of Borobudur may reveal how periodisation mattered as to where they ended up, that is, in what kind of museum collection. Objects that entered the Netherlands in the nineteenth century became part of a circuit of ethnographic and/or antiquarian museums, and were predominantly considered to be objects of science, generating a dispute about where they belonged, antiquarian study or ethnographic study. The Buddha heads the Colonial Institute (NMVW Tropenmuseum) received from Artis, entered – and remained within – ethnographic museum collections. This can partly be explained by their relative early arrival in Europe, in this case in the Netherlands, in the context of direct colonial relationships. The Buddha heads that arrived after the 1890s could also directly enter the circuit of the art market,

¹⁰⁰ Discussed in: Bloembergen, "The politics of Greater India."

¹⁰¹ Bloembergen, "The politics of Greater India," 188. For example, at an auction in Paris, in 2016, a ninth-century Buddha head from Central Java sold 86 500 Euros. See: <https://conflictantiquities.wordpress.com/2016/12/15/dismembered-buddha-indonesia-sold-estimate-christies-paris-auction/> consulted 16 Feb. 2022.

like the “French Buddha heads.” The Buddha head Wolter Jr. Broese van Groenou (RV-2574-1) gifted to the Ethnographic museum in December 1945, seems, in that regard, a remarkable exception.¹⁰²

However, the way the ethnographic museums from the late nineteenth century onwards would gauge and display the Buddha heads in their exhibition and valuation history would not make a huge difference when we compare this to how they are exhibited in Asian Art Museums. The prominent position of, and the way of displaying the Singasari statues, shining in *claire obscure* at NMVW Volkenkunde in Leiden, shows the aesthetic appreciation. Both kinds of museums would emphasise graceful, spiritual beauty of Javanese Hindu-Buddhist antiquities as a unifying theme. At the Colonial Institute, the four Buddha heads from Artis played a role as eye-catchers in a reception hall that emphasised the beauty of Hindu-Buddhist art, and jewels in the Dutch colonial crown. The ethnographic Museum in Leiden held an exhibition on Buddhist Art (with a capital A) in 1915, and opened a room in the 1930s, ‘Buddhist Art’, with Buddhist objects recognised as art. By appropriating and displaying the objects in this way, they neglected to show any interest in local memories and present-day local practices of engagements with these objects at location, which shows a form of structural injustice.

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, the Artis Buddha heads, as well as the other Buddha heads in the collections of the NMVW have ended up in the depots, rarely being exposed in temporary exhibitions. This might be explained by contemporary interests of exhibition makers, mere affluence, and subsequent estrangement of a museum towards its collection.¹⁰³ A former curator from NMVW, however, provided an alternative explanation. From a historical and ethnographic viewpoint, she noted, it would make little sense to only have the head of the Buddha without the body. “An incomplete Buddha statue cannot be a Buddha. It is a western idea (going back to Greek/ Roman traditions) to produce or display a stone sculpture of someone’s head.” She added that “with this kind of research (provenance research MB/MM) they (the loose stone Buddha heads) regain a function in the Netherlands.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See footnote 29 in this report. Archives Rijks Ethnografisch Museum, NMVW, Leiden, *NL-LdnRMV_A01_242*. Agenda op 1945-1946, 1946-1-18, director C.C.F.M. Le Roux, to Broese-Groenau, dank voor geschonken Boeddha-kop; 16 December 1945, from W. Broese van Groenou: ‘In ons bezit bevindt zich een Boedha-kop van trachiet +/- ware grootte, afkomstig van de suikerfabriek ‘Tandjong-Tirto’ ten oosten van Djokjakarta, in de buurt van Prambanan gelegen, uit den bloeitijd der hindoe-javaansche kunst’. NB: the fact that this fabric was located close to Prambanan may well indicate that this Buddha head is from nearby Candi Sewu instead of Borobudur. This should be kept in mind when provenance research for this head is undertaken.

¹⁰³ Bloembergen, ‘Koloniale overvloed zonder onbehagen’.

¹⁰⁴ E-mail from Marijke Klokke to authors, 11-10-2021.