

## The Architecture of Indonesia's Sambisari Temple

by R.M. Susanto

The temple of Sambisari was first brought to our attention when a farmer found some temple stones in the paddy-field he was ploughing. He reported his finds to the First Branch Office of the National Archaeological Institute at Prambanan of Central Java. Thereafter, a trial excavation, held in 1966 revealed the temple site. Thus, the Sambisari Temple Reconstruction Project was conducted from 1976 until 1986.

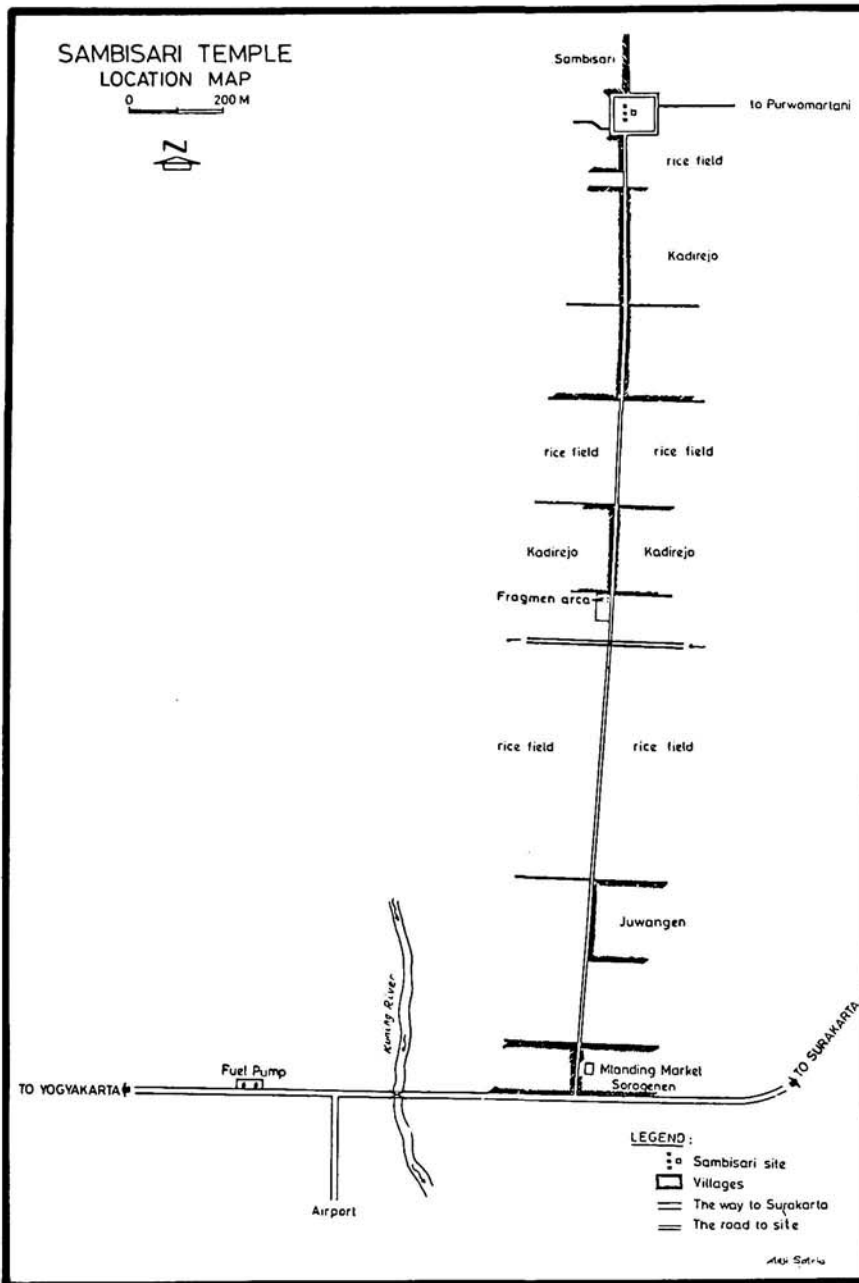
The temple is named after the village of Sambisari in Purwomartani, Sub Regent of Kalasan, Sleman Regency. It is under the Special Territory of Yogyakarta Province.

Sambisari is situated in the northeast of Yogyakarta. It can be reached by car, passing the way to Surakarta. Ten kilometres away from Yogyakarta towards the north and exceeding 3 kilometres from the village road, the temple site is dusty during summer months.

Briefly, the temple of Sambisari lies in the intersection of  $3^{\circ} 36' 18''$  east longitude and  $7^{\circ} 46' 02''$  north latitude meridian of Jakarta (Army Map Service, Sheet 47/XLII-B, U.S. Army 1944). It is situated on a site composed of river-sand and volcanic tuff. The stratigraphy shows a cross-bedding as a result of volcanic erup-

tion and flood from the Kuning River, which lies two kilometres west of the site. Situated 30 kilometres north of Sambisari, is an active volcano called Merapi. It first erupted in the year 1006 A.d. (Dept. Pertamb. dan Energi, 1979:252).

The top view of Sambisari temple complex reveals the main temple facing three sub-temples. The main temple of Sambisari faces west while the three sub-temples face east. The temples are laid out on a rectangular yard surrounded by the stone wall. At every corner of the yard lies a false lingga (*pseudo lingga*). Four others are situated at the cardinal



directions. The false entrances could be found at the north, east and south. Only in the west could we find the real entrance. Six metres out of the west entrance is a staircase to the lower yard.

Vertically, the main temple of Sambisari could be divided into three: the top part or roof part, the body

and the basement. The lingga-yoni lies in the single room (*madhyacāla*), situated inside the temple<sup>2</sup>. Under the *madhyacāla* is a well. The ground plan of the main temple is a straight form and the staircase lies on the west side. This staircase is complete with a railing. The railhead is decorated by a Makara ornament supported by

dwarf figures (*Gana*). The temples are surrounded by a gallery enclosed by a balustrade. On the floor of the gallery are 12 foot stones surrounding the structures.

On the outer wall of the main temple structure are five inches with sculptures inside. In the northern niche lies Durga Mahisāsuraṁdī, in the eastern lies Ganeśa, in the southern lies Śiwa Mahaguru or Agastya. And in the niches at the left and right of the entrance lie Nandisvara and Mahakala as guard figures.

The three sub-temples are open structures. These temples are composed of a basement which is closed by a balustrade and a staircase lying on the eastern side. On the floor of the basement an underlayer or a pedestal was found.

### Interpretation

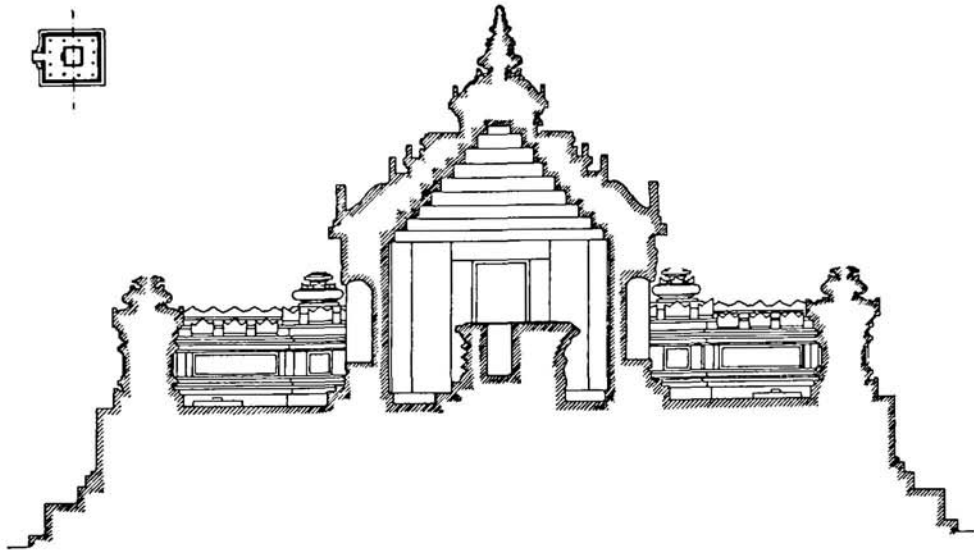
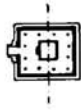
Hindu and Buddhist religions developed together in Indonesia. According to the *Nāgarakṛtāgama* book, the religious assistants of the king were called *dharmmādhyaksa ring kasaiwan* (Hindu Ciwaist advisor) and *dharmmādhyaksa ring kasogatan* (Buddhist advisor) (N.J. Krom, 1923: 87).

The word *candi* is derived from *candika*, one of the names of Durga, who is Śiwa's wife and the goddess of death. It was concluded that a temple monument functions as a cemetery for the king (W.F. Stutterheim, 1931:2). But Soekmono, in his dissertation, states that the monument is merely a temple (Soekmono, 1974).

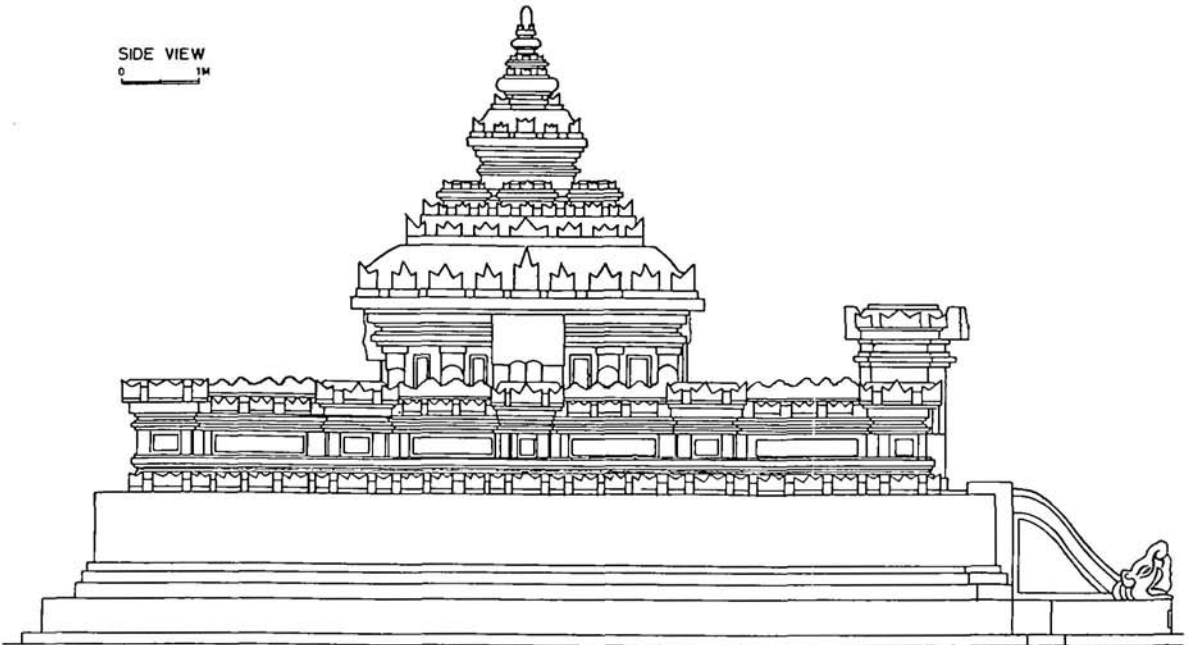
In general, the word *candi* in Indonesia is used to refer to a Hindu or a Buddhist monument. It originated from the Hindu influence period (Soekmono, loc cit).

# SAMBISARI TEMPLE

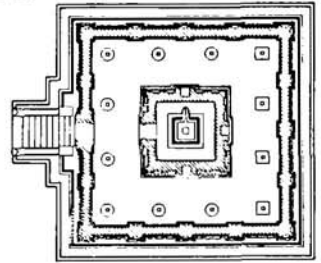
## THE MAIN TEMPLE SECTION



SIDE VIEW



THE MAIN TEMPLE TOP VIEW

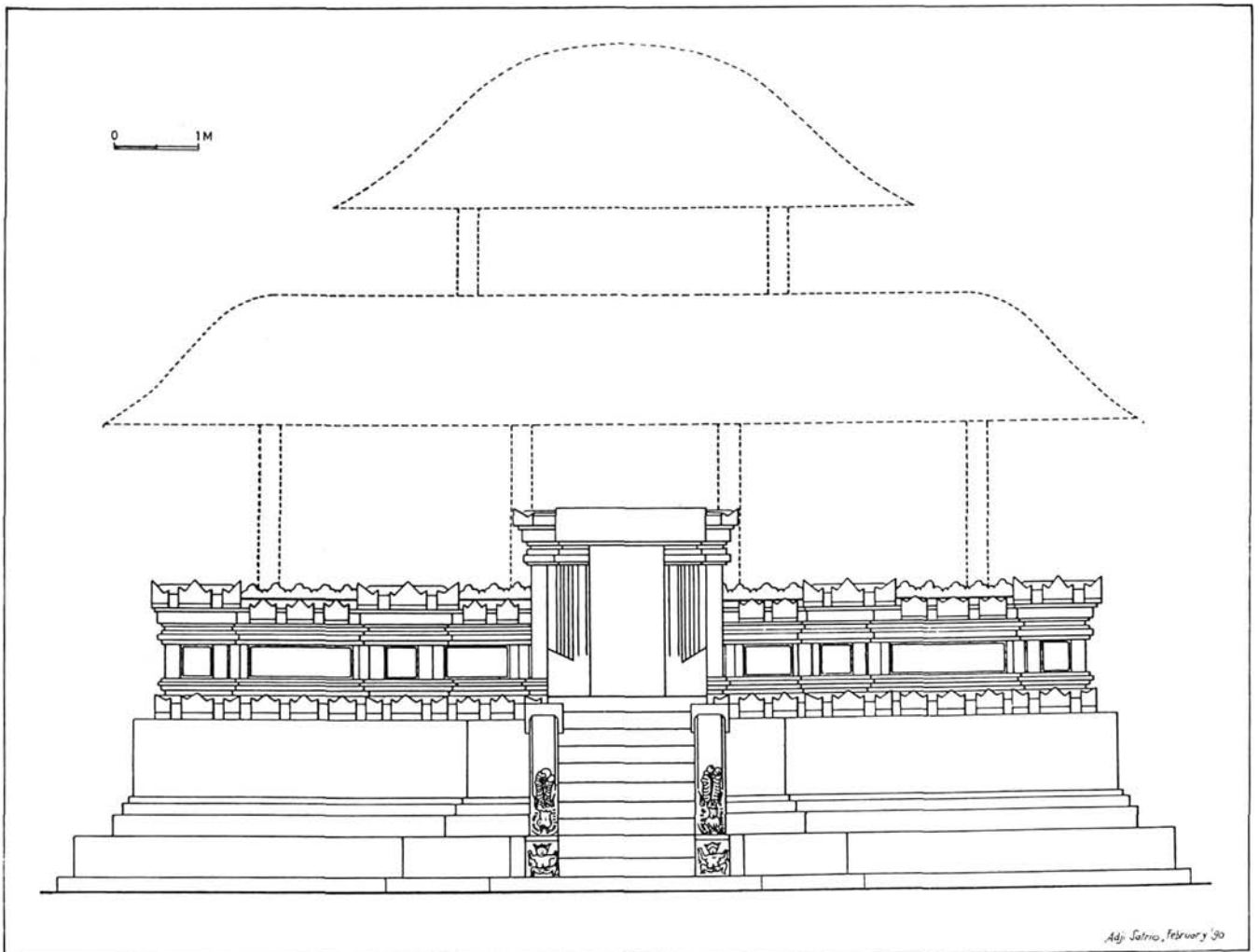




Above: A closer view of the stairs leading to the main temple.

Left: The main temple of Sambisari.

Below: An estimate of the main temple's original form.



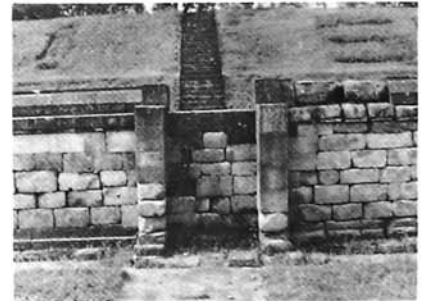
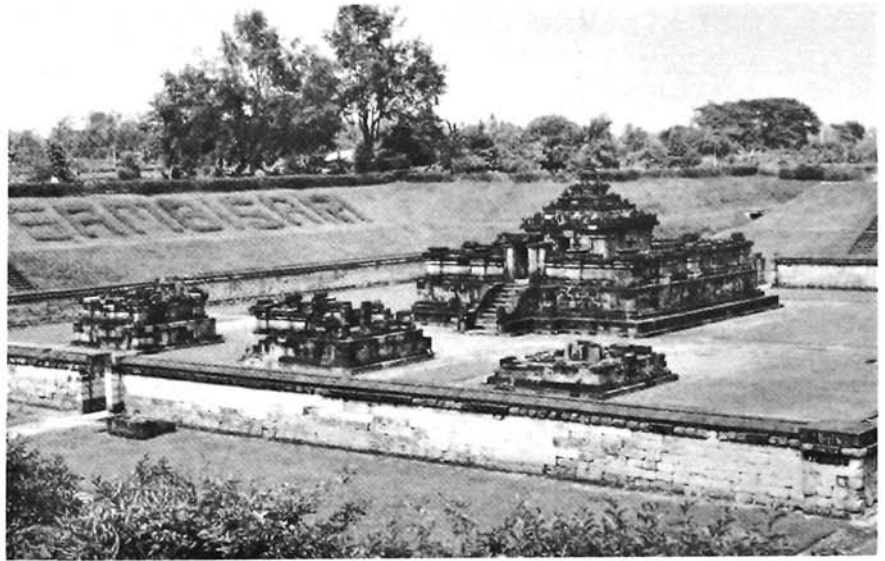
The lingga is one of the manifestation of Siwa and Yoni is the other characteristic from of Śiwa's wife. So the Lingga-Yoni is the symbol of the unity between Śiwa and his wife. It also means the unity of the masculine and the feminine symbol. Ultimately, the unity of the lingga and Yoni symbolizes fertility.

During the reconstruction of the Sambisari Temple a small gold leaf inscription, in old Javanese, was found. The inscription reads: "om Siwastha na" na-/-/. It means Siwa's palace (Soediman, 1976 :48<sup>b</sup>, H.H. Juynboll, 1923: 644). In his book Sukla wrote: "The chief image in the central shrine of a Siva temple is always a Lingga"(D.N. Sukla,1958: 2).

Based on all of the conjectures, Sambisari Temple is a Hindu monument for the Lingga cult. In other words, the Sambisari temple is dedicated to Siwa Moreover, it supports the attributes of sculptures belonging to the Siwa family.

The sculpture of Durga Mahisasuramrdini in Hindu mythology is described as Katyayanī killing Mahisasura (Ratnaesih M, 1979 : 10). Ganeṣa in Hindu mythology is mentioned as the son of Śiwa and his wife Umā. Smaradahana literature mentions that during his fight against Nilarudraka his tusk was broken so he called Ekadanta (R.M. Sutjipto W, 1964 : 115).

In Siwaism, Ganeca is worshipped as a minor deity (J. Kachachiva : 164). The Siwa Mahaguru sculpture is always depicted as an old man in a standing pose. He has a potbelly and his left hand holds a water-pitcher (*Kamandalu*) while his right hand holds a rosary (*aksamala*). A standing trident is also shown on his right side.



Topmost: A southwestern view of the Sambisari Temple Compound.

Above: A false entrance to the Sambisari Temple Compound.

Above Left: The front view of one of the three sub-temples in the compound.

Left: Foot-stones on the gallery.



The standing Ganeça from Karang Kates, Malang, Eastern Java.



Durga Mahiṣāsuraṁrdinī.



Ganeça.



Śiwa Mahaguru.



Above: An Underlayer (pedestal) found in one of the sub-temples.



Left: One of the pseudo lingga found at every corner of the temple yard.

In the inscription of Dinoyo (Eastern Java), dated 760 A.D., the other names for Śiwa Mahaguru are mentioned as Agastya and Kumbhayoni (Poerbatjaraka, 1926: 107). Then on the *Mahakala and Nandicwara figures*, Dr. Poerbatjaraka says: "...die oorsprongkelijk een manifestatie is van Ciwa in zijn functie van Vernietiger..." (Poerbatjaraka, loc cit). This means the Mahakala and Nandicwara functioned as guard figures.

Vertically and horizontally the temple could be divided into three parts. This division is in conformity with a Hindu doctrine which says that the universe is divided into three levels, namely: svarloka (old Javanese word meaning heaven), bhavarloka (transition world) and bhurloka (the lowest world) (Stella Kramrisch, 1946: 300)<sup>1</sup>. The temple roof symbolizes the svarloka, the edifice as the bhavarloka, and the basement of the temple as the bhurloka.

The roof and the structure of Sambisari Temple are laid on the basement. But it is so much larger horizontally than vertically. Hence, the main temple appears stout when compared with the Siwa Temple at Prambanan (Central Java) or the Central Java temples in general.

Because the 12 foot-stones were laid on the ground of the gallery, the author assumes that at the beginning, the main temple was an open building. Originally the architecture of the main temple was like the sub-temples. The main temple had a semi-permanent roof, supported by 12 wood pillars, laid on the 12 foot-stones. Therefore the roof and the super structure seen at present are additional parts.

Based on the gold leaf inscription, the temple of Sambisari must have been built in the ninth century

A.D. (Soediman, op cit). But the scroll designs carved at the temple very much resemble those at Borobudur, which date back to about 800 A.D.

Candi Sambisari or Sambisari Temple proves the occurrence of certain circumstances. That Hinduism co-existed with Buddhism in Central Java, even from the end of the eighth century A.D. And that since the temple is covered by lava, it also proves that Merapi Volcano erupted in the mid-10th century, causing the transfer of the administrative government from Central Java to Eastern Java.

Although the architecture of Candi Sambisari may not be as distinguished as Borobudur, it could

spark further studies on life during its existence. ■

## FOOTNOTES

1. The arrangement of the temple, vertically and horizontally, into 3 parts is also the arrangement of the universe. Similarly the term *paradiso* means heaven, *purgatorio* the transition world, and *inferno* hell.
2. The *madhyacala* is an old Javanese word. It means the main room of the temple.
3. The *makara* is a mythological animal. Because it has a trunk it looks like an elephant.
4. The term pedestal generally refers to the underlayer of a sculpture. Sometimes, however, it is used as a base for flower offerings.
5. *Pseudo lingga* is not a real lingga. It is used to mark the boundary of a sacred area (the boundary stone).

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