



**Southeast Asian
Ceramic Society**

PUBLIC LECTURE

Who Were the Javanese Worshipping at Borobudur?

Speaker: Dr. John Miksic

Lecture Room, Peranakan Museum, Armenian Street, Singapore

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Buddhism entered Java in the early centuries AD. Recent archaeological discoveries of stupas and votive tablets at Batujaya, West Java, provide evidence of a significant early Buddhist presence there before the foundation of Srivijaya in Sumatra. Later, Buddhism seems to have become less popular in Java until the appearance of the Sailendra lineage in central Java around 778. Shortly after that date, a hill in the Kedu plain northwest of Yogyakarta was converted for use as a major Buddhist monument. This structure, called Borobudur, underwent several phases of construction during the 9th century, after which it may have remained in use for a while longer, but no further renovations were made.

We have no written descriptions of Borobudur during its glory, nor any later documents which shed any light on its meaning. Buddhism was in a state of rapid intensification and involution during the 9th century, with numerous new doctrines appearing throughout the Buddhist realm from India to China and Japan. We are not even sure which Buddhist deity, of the many which flourished during this period, was the central focus of worship at Borobudur. By comparing Borobudur with other central Javanese monuments and inscriptions, we can form some idea of the deity who probably occupied the central place at this great monument.

About the Speaker

John N. Miksic served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Malaysia from 1968 to 1972. He received his Ph.D. from Cornell University with a dissertation on *Archaeology, Trade, and Society in Northeast Sumatra*. He lived in Bengkulu for two years, in Yogyakarta for 6 years, and has lived in Singapore since 1987. He first taught in the Department of History, National University of Singapore, and in 1991 helped found the Southeast Asian Studies Programme, where he is Associate Professor. He has organized archaeological excavations and museum exhibitions in Southeast Asia. In his spare time, he translates scholarly articles into English from Indonesian, French and Dutch.

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