Devotees who were permitted to ascend to the first gallery inside the balustrade would have en- tered a new world. Here they were screened off from the outside world by high walls, enabling them to imagine that they were in a realm of fantasy. The first gallery contains four relief series; two on the outer balustrade, and two more on the main wall. It is thus necessary to circumambulate the monument four times in order to follow all the reliefs in proper order.

Starting from the outer wall, entering the monument from the eastern stairway and turning left, visi- tors first see two series of reliefs, one above the other. Both illustrate stories from a very popular source in Buddhism, the Jatakas or “birth stories” which depict acts of self-sacrifice performed by Gautama Buddha in his earlier incarnations. The Jatakas occupy 500 panels on the first balustrade and 100 on the balustrade of the second gallery, or 600 panels in all.

Jatakas were favorite subjects for both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhists (the type of Buddhism popular in mainland Southeast Asia today). Conventionally there are 547 Jatakas. They have been written down in several versions. Not all the Jataka reliefs at Borobudur have been identified; if as seems likely the Javanese had a particular manuscript of the Jatakas, it does not seem to have survived. It seems to have differed in some respects from versions known from other countries. A text entitled Jatakalamala or “Garland of Birth Stories” written in the fourth century is attributed to a man named Arya- sura. This text, or a very similar one, seems to have been used to design the first 34 stories covering 135 panels at Borobudur, but from there on the stories begin to deviate.
ABOVE: (2B 192-193-194) In these reliefs, the future Buddha is a giant sea tortoise. He takes pity on a ship in danger of sinking with sharks lurking nearby to eat the men. He carries the first merchant by carrying all others on his back. Arriving on a desert island where there is no food, he goes toward them to eat. The Jataka, Kacchapavadana, only appears in one Sanskrit text. This indicates that the Borobudur planners had access to some rare texts.
The upper series of reliefs on the first balustrade was added at a later phase in the monument’s development. The new stones were not integrated into the structure, and many have disappeared, either through natural collapse or looting. The reason for this addition has not been discovered, but as noted earlier, may have been intended to replace the depiction of the law of cause and effect on the now-hidden foot. The carving of the decorations separating the panels on the first balustrade have been judged as of poorer artistic quality than the rest of the monument, another indication that they were “tacked on.”

In Jatakas illustrated here, story 6 tells of the time when the future Buddha was incarnated as a rabbit. The rabbit taught his friends (a jackal, an otter, and an ape) the importance of generosity. The god Indra, adopted from Hinduism, often appears in Jatakas to test the future Buddha’s resolve to attain enlightenment. In this story Indra disguised himself as a brahman. Buddha’s three friends could bring food but the rabbit could not, so he gave himself by jumping into the fire (picture IBb2-25). In another story (picture 18 IBa20), the bodhisattva was a sea turtle. When he saw a ship sinking and a sea monster about to eat the hapless passengers, he rescued them and carried them to a nearby island. Seeing that there was nothing on the island for the people to eat, he gave himself to be cooked to save their lives.

The Jatakas appear to have been considered as slightly more elevating than the Law of Cause and Effect, since they were given a higher placement on the monument. The carving style is lively, even humorous, and seems to include many scenes taken from daily life in Java at this time. It includes pictures of people worshipping stupas, and also a garuda worshipping Buddha. Buddhism did not deny the existence of supernatural beings such as gods, garudas, and kinnaras, and it is no surprise that they were often incorporated into the service of spreading the law of Buddha.
ABOVE: (Iba77-78-79) Buddha is a golden swan living on Lake Manasa. He is probably the figure in the upper left of the first panel. In the second panel, the king of Banares sits on his throne. The scene of this scene shows a temple and a boat to the river. A hunter captures the Buddha (scene at right), but eventually frees him and Buddha goes to the king’s court voluntarily.

RIGHT ABOVE: (Iba58) Buddha as a quail. The forest where the future Buddha lives is threatened by fire. Buddha, in a scene that appears above, meets with Agni, god of fire, to spare the forest and the king.

FOLLOWING PAGE: (Iba365-366-367) In this unidentified story, a king is accompanied by female attendants; they pour water on a stupa from an ewer in an action of worship; at right, men bring pots of jewels to offer to the stupa.
The Avadanas are another class of popular tales. Some concern other people who attained enlightenment, while others seem to be purely entertaining fables. The first of these, shown on the lower register of the first main wall of Borobudur, depicts the love story of a human man and a nymph named Manohara. This story is known in many parts of Southeast Asia; in some areas such as southern Thailand it became the basis for a dance drama. The first 21 reliefs of the Avadana series on Borobudur are devoted to this tale, which seems to have been drawn from a Sanskrit original entitled Divyadana.

In relief Ib5, the young man named Sudhana sits beside a lotus pond where he has come upon Manohara and her sisters bathing. He has learned a spell from a wise man which paralyzes her. The artist who designed the relief has effectively emphasized her inability to move by isolating her against a plain background while on the left all the other nymphs are flying into the air. One looks back at Manohara in wonderment that she does not flee too (photo below, this page).

Manohara marries Sudhana and lives in the palace with him and his father the king. The other palace women become jealous of her beauty and hatch a plot to murder her while Sudhana is away on a military expedition. She recovers her power of flight and escapes from the palace. This relief is another of Borobudur’s masterpieces.

Another story concerns a righteous king who forbids killing. Indra decides to test him, and changes into a falcon in order to pursue a dove into the king’s palace. The king then forbids the falcon to eat the dove, but when the falcon points out that he must eat meat or die, the good kings Sibi offers to give the falcon an amount of his flesh to eat equivalent to the weight of the dove. Sibi cuts off various parts of his body, but Indra slyly fixes the scales so that they never are heavy enough. Eventually King Sibi offers his entire body, at which point Indra concudes Sibi’s good faith and restores him (photo above, this page).

The story of Rudrayana and King Bimbisara depicts the fate of a king who oppresses a Buddhist monk. In this relief jewelry and money pour out of oval vases floating in clouds just before the city of the evil king is to be destroyed. A dense crowd gathers up the treasure; one humorously-depicted man grins as he holds a bowl to protect his head. Two ministers at lower left who have been warned of what is about to happen fill their small boat with jewelry in preparation for their escape. The king, unaware of his approaching doom, sits in a pavilion in front of a building representing the rest of the city (picture Ib82). In the next photo (Ib86), pages 172-173, the good minister Hiru arrives at his new home. The ship in the right half of the panel is one of the best sources of information on ancient Indonesian ship construction; it is equipped with outriggers like traditional Southeast Asian craft, and has several sails. The strong sensation of movement imparted by the ship’s depiction contrasts vividly with the serenity of the left side of the panel, where Hiru is greeted by the local people. Their house in the background is also very realistically depicted. The house’s construction corresponds better to what we know of houses in other parts of Indonesia than to Java; it is set on pillars, and the roof employs the stressed roofbeam technique found today in parts of Sumatra and Sulawesi (page 158).