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Nativity Scene(A.D. 6 – 13 Century)

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Abstract

From the time when the Nativity Scene started in India and onwards, the style of carving the Nativity Scene changed and developed step by step. When Indian Civilization spreads in Myanmar, the Nativity Scenes are found in Terracotta Votive tablets at S'riksetra (2nd-9th Centuries A.D.), Pyu city. In Bagan period (11th -13th Centuries A.D.), many kinds of raw materials were used to make the Nativity Scenes and different styles were produced. The Nativity Scenes of Pyu and Bagan period are here described in compares with the Nativity Scenes of India and the countries where Buddhism flourished.

Keywords: Nativity, S'riksetra, Pyu, Bagan, Buddhism

Introduction

After Buddhism developed the depictions of the life of Gotama Buddha in India was not executed in human forms. The art of sculpture in stone emerged during the Kushan period (A.D.100 – 300) in Mathura and Gandhara areas. In one way sculptures appeared with the emergence of Mahayana sects where Gotama Buddha was transformed and worshipped from a teacher to an everlasting god complete with supernatural powers (Zaw Tun, 1975, 83). Before sculptures of the Buddha appeared in form bas-relief of four principle scenes were implemented as symbols of the Buddha. The birth of the Buddha was depicted as Maya standing and holding the branch of the sal tree (Foucher 1934, Plate II, III and IV). The Bodhisatta was not depicted in the scene. Instead, four Catumaharajas are seen holding up the footprints of the Bodhisatta on the panther skin.² In some depictions, a lotus flower is found on the ground.³ Instead of the figure of the Buddha for the enlightenment scene, a Bodhi tree is depicted on the throne. The sermon delivered to the *pancavaggiya* has been depicted with a *dharmacakka* symbol⁴ and two deer⁵ underneath it. Entering *nibbanna* scene has been depicted with a *cedi*.⁶ Figures or symbols used instead of the Buddha are elephant,⁷ bull,⁸ horse,⁹ lion,¹⁰ etc. These figures which symbolized the Buddha were created during the time of King Asoka (273 – 232 B.C.) and the kings of Sunga Dynasty (185 – 73 B.C.) (Zaw Tun, 1975, 85-6) (Than Tun 2002, 8-11). After those periods, the depiction of the birth of Buddha was not represented as a bull, lotus flower or footprints but the Indians acquired the art of portraying in human form from the Persians and Greeks. This fact was affirmed because the Persians and the Greeks influenced the northern part of India¹¹ where the life of the Buddha

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² The seven steps that were taken after the birth of Buddha were symbolized by footprints.

³ This is to symbolize the seven lotus flowers that emerged for the seven steps the Bodhisatta took after his birth.

The lotus symbol can be taken as growing out from noble pureness, glory, auspiciousness.

⁴ The first sermon delivered by the Buddha is symbolized by the *Dharmacakka* symbol.

⁵ As the first sermon was delivered at the deer park, the figures of deer denote the delivering of *Dharmacakka* sermon.

⁶ *Cedi* symbol is used to symbolize the death of Buddha.

⁷ In the dream the Buddha's mother Maha Maya felt that an elephant entered her womb. In another way this was how she conceived. Thus an elephant figure symbolizes the embryo of the Buddha in [the mother's] womb.

⁸ The Buddha was born on the full moon of Kason. In both Sanskrit and Pali the period falls under Taurus and the bull is its zodiac sign. Thus a bull figure represents the birth. The day he entered *nibbanna* was also on the full moon day of Kason. Thus the bull figure also denotes the demise of the Buddha.

⁹ As Prince Siddhattha renounced the world on a horse it symbolizes the renunciation.

¹⁰ The lion figure symbolizes the enlightenment of Buddha.

¹¹ Rajagaha, Sarnath, Gandhara, Mathura, and Patna.

started to be portrayed in human form (Than Tun 2000, 3-4) (Tin Maung Yin, 1970. 33-36)¹. Especially when the Greeks in India took up Buddhism, they introduced, they assimilated their native philosophy with Buddhist philosophy and started to make Buddha images. For the birth scene of the Buddha their ideal image was influenced by the Yakshi figures at the entrance of the stupa in Bharut built in 200 B.C. because, the stone relief of Yakshi figures and the birth scene of Queen Maha Maya look the same. There is no difference in Maha Maya's posture with the Yakshi standing and holding the branch of a tree in *tribhanga* form (Galloway 2004, 2). In Ghandara where a lot of Greeks lived in the northern part of India Greco-Roman art is found evidently. The kings of Kushan period (A.D. 100-300) and Gupta period (A.D. 400-600) were known for the transformation of Greco-Indian art to pure Indian art form. The spread of Buddhism and Indian Buddhist art were not only brought about by these kings but Indian merchants and those who were searching for new territory brought to Myanmar and other Southeast Asia countries.

Early Buddhist Literature

There is division regarding Buddhism that had entered into Myanmar (Bishoff 1995, 4-11) (Than Tun 2002, 3-7).² According to archaeological excavations regarding Buddhism, the earliest supporting evidence had been found in Pyu city of S'riksetra (A.D. 200 – 900). Writings associated with Buddha *sasana* in Pyu mixed with Pali and Sanskrit were found inscribed on stone images, large stone slabs silver *bodhi* tree throne, votive tablets and gold plates. Pali and Pyu inscriptions were inscribed all around the four sides of the throne of a broken stone image without head found at Kan-wetgaung-kon (Duroiselle 1930, 128, PL. LIV h). Holy discourses such as *Maura sutta*, *Mangala sutta*, and *Ratana sutta* from the *parita*³ were inscribed on stone and placed at the entrance of the city. The inscriptions at Shwe Gate³ were of South Indian script, thought to be the style from A.D. 600 (Sein Maung Oo 1968, 167). The names of the four Buddhas and the four savakas around the circumference of the silver *bodhi* tree repousse were inscribed (Duroiselle 1930, 176. PL. XXXVIII c). The earliest excerpts from the *Pitaka* inscribed on twenty sheets of gold were excavated from Khin Ba mound. Excerpts such as *Siddham Avijja paccayasankhara* from the *Abhidhamma* and *Vinyapitakat* were inscribed (Duroiselle 1930, 179-80). There are also gold plates inscribed with the attributes of the Buddha such as *Itipisōbagava arahan sanma sambhudō* (Duroiselle 1930, 109, Pl. LI, ii). The two Maung Kan gold plates are also notable. Excerpts from the Buddhist *pitaka* are inscribed in Pali (Lu Pe Win, 1953, 10). Regarding the handwritings on the plates, they can be asserted as Kadamba script from south India of A. D. 600 (May 1956, 46). Thus, it can be asserted that Buddhism had arrived in Myanmar since A. D. 600 via S'riksetra. Not only texts associated with Buddhism but also *cedis*, temples, Buddha images and several votive tablets were found. Hindu images and Brahma images were also excavated. As Sanskrit literature, Hindu and Brahma images were found Buddhism in S'riksetra could be said as influenced Mahayana Buddhism.

¹ a) The 519 B.C. stone inscription of Emperor Darius and another after this period mentioned that Gandhara and other areas of India were included in the Persian Empire.

b) In 322 B.C., the king of Macedonia, Alexander the Great conquered the northern part of India which the Persians had taken and left a governor to rule instead.

² Some scholars stated that Tapussa and Bhalika had brought the hairs of Buddha while he was living and brought back to be enshrined in the Shwedagon pagoda. Some asserted that it had already arrived in Suvannabhumi assumed to be situated in lower Myanmar through missionaries sent to nine quarters and places during the reign of King Asoka.

³ Shwedaga gate

Buddhism in Bagan

Buddhism must have arrived firstly in Bagan via S'riksetra. The early Buddhism that arrived was associated with Mahayana sect because the Buddha sculptures and paintings have Bodhisattas flanking the Buddha. During the reign of Anawrahta (1044 – 1077) when Shin Arahan, monks and the *pitikas* got to Bagan from Thaton, Theravada Buddhism gradually won over. However, regarding the arrival of Buddhism to Bagan from Thaton, as there is no contemporary stone evidence of that period the assertion of scholars varies (Than Tun 2002, 6). The Buddhism that arrived in Bagan from Thaton and S'rikeshtra was Mahanayana Buddhism which flourished in Kalinga district in east India, Talingana district, Amaravati in Andhra district. Later Buddhism disappeared in eastern part of India and southern Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism gradually became influenced during the reign of Htihaingmin (1086-1113) it came from Concipura in the south and Sri Lanka. Therefore, the first part of *sasana* of Pyu, Mon and Myanmar cannot be denied that it was influenced by Mahayana Buddhism (Po Latt 1962, 19-20).

Nativity Scene

According to the excavations at S'riksetra, the ancient Pyu is the earliest evidence of the founding of Buddhism the birth scene of the Buddha was also found there. The birth scenes were done in stone carvings and in clay votive tablets. In terracotta votive tablets the eight principle scenes were done in relief. Some differences are found there. Maha Maya and MahaPajapati were in the same size and stood together on a square platform. The Bodhisatta stands a little lower on a platform at his mother's right side, hands together on the chest as if paying respect to his mother. The left hand of Maha Maya is on the shoulder of Pajapati and her right hand hold the bending branch of the sal tree in tribhanga position. Maya's left foot bends a little to the back as safety in holding up the weight of the body. In one way, Maha Maya stance does not look as if she is giving birth but dancing. All the figures face front. The above-mentioned style can be seen in the stone bas-reliefs of the eight principle scenes of Varanasi, Shibbati and Bihar. The stone reliefs from India were executed earlier than the ones of S'riksetra and of a better quality. The birth scene in bronze of Bagan period resembles the one of S'riksetra. All the clothes of S'riksetra seem to be of thin material worn tightly to the skin so it can be said that the style was influenced by later Gupta period. Another birth scene: Maha Maya and the Bodhisatta can be seen standing together on a square platform but the figure of Pajapati was not included. The left hand of Maha Maya is on the hip, the right hand holds the sal branch as if to holding onto it for gathering strength the body in three-fold position. The Bodhisatta can be seen standing at the right knee of his mother with hands together at chest in paying respect position. A flying *deva* can be seen above the Bodhisatta. The figures in the bas-relief wore thin clinging clothes. Similar style of this birth scene can be seen in Bagan votive tablets. Moreover, it also resembles the figure of Maha Maya in the stone birth scene from Andhra area. This piece from Andhra is the most symmetrical of all.

A sandstone carving of Bodhisatta's birth was found at Shwenyaungbin ridge. Both Maha Maya and Pajapati can be seen standing together on a platform in abanga form. The Bodhisatta stands on a lotus platform a little higher than the former two. Maha Maya and Pajapati are almost in the same height with Maya having her left hand on Pajapati's shoulder and holding the branch of the sal tree with her right. Pajapati holds the waist of Maha Maya supporting her. Their features are round and smiling. The Bodhisatta stands at the right of Maha Maya wearing a headdress fully clothed. Both his hands are placed at the chest in *anjali mudra*. The eyes of the Bodhisatta are cast downwards and his face looks tranquil. The figures do not have plasticity and the clothes cling tightly as if they are wet. The style is similar to the figures in Ananda and Myinkaba Gubyaukng temples of Bagan period.

In Bagan period, the birth scene was not only made in terracotta but also in dolomite stone, sandstone, stucco and bronze but also painted in murals. The birth scenes in Bagan seemed to have been influenced by Pala culture of east India (Galloway 2004, 3). There are many differences in the birth scene found among the votive tables in Bagan. The first one is Maha Maya and Pajapati stand in tribhanga position facing front. Pajapati is made smaller than Maha Maya. Maha Maya has her left hand placed on her waist and holds the sal branch with her right hand for support. The Bodhisatta is seen in cross-legged position with both hands at his chest in anjali mudra as if paying respect to the mother. This style is not found in India. Also in Bagan, it is found only in terracotta tablets. The clothes of all the figures cling tightly to the body. The birth scene is identical with the votive tablet of S'riksetra so it obvious that the style copied from Pyu terracotta tablet. Among the Bagan period terracotta tablets is the most extraordinary. In this picture, the figures of the Bodhisatta, Maha Maya and Pajapati are made almost in the same height. All three stand in a straight position except their heads, their features facing front. Maha Maya's left hand rest on Pajapati's shoulder leaning onto her and the right hand holds the sal branch. Pajapati holds Maya's back with her right hand supporting her. The Bodhisatta stand on the right of Maha Maya with both hands down the sides. All the figures look stiff and do not have any plasticity. Similar kind was not found in India but only in terracotta tablets in Myanmar of Bagan period.

The birth scene is also included in the eight principle scenes made in dolomite. The first one is Maha Maya and Pajapati are placed each on a lotus pedestal standing in abhanga position. Maha Maya's face is round and her figure is buxom. Her face looks front and her left hand holds on Pajapati's shoulder for support. The right hand holds the sal branch. Pajapati's hands are curved and appropriately leaning towards Maha Maya. The Bodhisatta is depicted in two postures, one above the right hip of Maha Maya in a flying position like the devas and another at the side of Maha Maya in a walking position. The earrings of both Maha Maya and Pajapati are quite prominent. As usual, the clothes of all the figures cling tightly to the bodies. As all features were executed in great detail, it is more superior to the terracotta tablets. The next one unlike the first one the birth scene is depicted on the right of the central figure of the Buddha but rather on the left side. Maha Maya and Pajapati can be seen standing on a lotus platform in abhanga posture. The left hand of Maha Maya is placed on Pajapati's shoulder and the right hand holds the sal branch for support. Pajapati also supports Maha Maya by holding her backside with her right hand. The Bodhisatta can be seen at the right side of the mother with both hands down. The figures are not supple like of the first one. Similar handwork can be seen on the sandstone piece of Buddha's birth inside Kyauksagayyi temple. The birth scene of the Buddha carved in dolomite can be seen in Rakhine, middle Myanmar and also in other parts of the world.

There are stone carvings of Buddha's birth scene in Kyaukku Umin, Kyauksagayyi, Ananda, temple no. 820 and Myinkaba Kubyaukng. Among them, the one in Kyaukku Umin is the oldest piece. In the picture, both Maha Maya and Pajapati stand on a square platform at the same level in tribhanga posture. The left hand of Maha Maya is on the shoulder of Pajapati. The right hand holds the sal branch. Pajapati takes in her left hand the hand of Maha Maya which is on her shoulder. Her right hand is curved in front in a supporting pose. The style of Pajapati takes in her left hand the hand of Maha Maya, which is on her shoulder and her right hand, is curved in front in a supporting pose can be seen in sandstone sculptures and mural paintings starting from Bagan period. However, it is not found in terracotta and dolomite votive tablets yet. The Bagan sculptures and artists portrayed the intimacy between Maha Maya and Pajapati. More over instead of the usual portrayal of the left hand of Pajapati take the hand of Maha Maya probably because it interfered with the figure of Bodhisatta placed on the side of his mother. Faces of both women are smiling and face front. Their busts are buxom

and their waists are small. The clothes they wear cling tightly to their bodies. The Bodhisatta can be seen above the right side of his mother's waist in cross-legged position and also standing beside his mother fully clothed with both hands at chest as if expounding the Dhammacakka discourse. Therefore, the stone sculpture was able to include two events in the one piece of birth scene. Although originally the figures have plasticity and look animate due to abrasion and scuffing, they got broken and the workmanship looked coarse.

In the birth scene of Kyauksagayyi temple, Maha Maya and Pajapati are seen standing same level in abhanga. Maya, her eyes cast downwards holds the shoulders of Pajapati with her left hand. The right hand holds the sal branch. Pajapati takes the hand of Maya on her shoulder with her left hand and has her right hand curving a little in front supporting her. Due to severe abrasion on the stone Pajapati's facial features cannot be discerned but both faces look front and Maya has downcast eyes and a tranquil face. The figure of Bodhisatta is not seen at the waist of Maha Maya, probably it might was there originally. However, the Bodhisatta can be seen standing at the side of the mother with hands in Dhammacakka mudra. Like the mother, the Bidhisatta also has his eyes cast downwards looking serene. As usual, the clothes they wear are of thin material and cling to their bodies. Although the figures have thin waists, the breasts are not very large. The decorations on the belts at the waists are exquisitely executed. Although the figures are in abhanga, the workmanship is excellent and looks lively.

The birth scene in sandstone carving of the Ananda temple could be said the most lively and best handiwork. There are five carving in stone of the birth scene inside the Ananda temple. Out of the five, three is made the same but there are small differences in the other two. In the first three Maha Maya and Pajapati stands side by side in tribhanga pose on a lotus pedestal. The left hand of Maya is placed over the shoulder of Pajapati and her right hand holds the sal branch. Pajapati takes in her left hand the hand of Maha Maya which is on her shoulder. Her right hand is curved in front in a supporting pose. Their faces face front and smiling. The Bodhisatta is seen on the tip of his mother's hip in a cross-legged position with both hands at the chest in dhammacakka mudra. This is followed by the four Maha Brahmas receiving him on a golden net, the four Catumaharaja devas receiving him on a panther's skin, then humans receiving him on raiment (Hoke Sein 1978, 652)¹. The carving shows the process step by step until he reached the ground in one scene. In the birth scenes of the Buddha in India the step-by-step process of birth with Brahmas, devas and humans receiving the Bodhisatta in sequence was not portrayed but after the birth the Brahmas, devas or humans are portrayed receiving him in a magnificent cloth. Both Maha Maya and Pajapati have small waists and fully formed breasts. Their attire are of fine clothes and the accessories such as earrings, necklaces, armlets and waistbands show that they are of distinguished noble class. In the centre of the waistbands is an ogre's head usually found as decorative motif along the friezes of Bagan temples. Therefore, the ogre heads in Bagan temples could be asserted as solely for decoration and not for the purpose of worship. On the left of Pajapati, there are two handmaids to assist them and one of them is carved smaller than the other is. This handmaid seems to be supporting Pajapati. These handmaids have ordinary attire of commoners. The stone carver skillfully showed the difference of status in his work.

In one of the two birth scenes which are not quite the same as the other three mentioned above although the rest look alike, Pajapati's right foot is different. Supporting Maha Maya, Pajapati as if to support her body bends her right foot and cross over the back. Pajapati's diverse posture is seen only in this stone carving. The other one is quite different from the rest. There is no difference in the postures of Maha Maya and Pajapati. The Bodhisatta is seen at the

¹ a very fine cloth made of the inner bark of the *dukula* plant (သို့ဇြိုဏ်း)

tip of Maha Maya's hip in cross-legged position with both hands in Dhammacakka mudra. The sequence of devas who came to receive the Bodhisatta are not included. Instead, two handmaids holding yak tail whisks stand at left and right of Maha Maya and Pajapati. The figure of one at the side of Pajapati is made bigger while the one beside Maha Maya is made smaller. They wore common clothing and stand casually in tribhanga position. Stone bas-reliefs that look the same as the ones in Ananda temple are found in Lumbini, Nalanda in India and Nepal. As the carvings in the Ananda temple are from early Bagan period, the fact that the facial features look Indian cannot be argued. However, the postures of Maha Maya and Pajapati portrayed in Bagan stone carvings are not found in Indian birth scenes.

The stone carving of the birth scene in temple no.820 is also another good example like in the Ananda temple where the workman had shown his skill in portraying fully in one description. In the picture Maha Maya and Pajapati stand together not exactly but slight in tribhanga form. As usual, Maha Maya leans onto Pajapati's shoulder with her left hand and her right holding on to the branch. Pajapati holds Maha Maya's hand from the wrist with her left hand. Pajapati's right hand is curved in front and on the palm, she holds a small cup. It can be assumed as containing medicine for Maha Maya to take after giving birth. In all the other nativity scenes, this is not found. From their hairstyles, headdresses, earrings, necklaces, armbands and bracelets, waistbands and anklets one could know that they are not commoners. In the middle of the waistband is the head of an ogre. They are smiling and face front with eyes downcast. One could clearly see Indian influence in the facial features. The stone carver could portray them in a casual manner. The breasts are not too buxom and look well with narrowing of the waist. The Bodhisatta sits in pallankasana on the right hip of the mother with both hands at chest in Dhammacakka mudra. The devas receiving him in sequence until he reach ground where he stood on seven round objects most likely to be lotus flowers. Although the Bodhisatta was a newborn baby, the carver had made him into a real Buddha with hair and fully dressed. The Bodhisatta's left hand is at the side and the forefinger of the right hand is pointed upwards declaring the great three proclamations. According to this portrayal it looks as if the carver fashioned that way because he already know of the Bodhisatta becoming an enlightened Buddha, so it does not seem natural. The attire of the woman on the left of Pajapati wore the clothes of nobility and seems to hold up an umbrella. She does not have anklets and her face seems to be turning slightly towards Maha Maya and Pajapati. This particular stone carving is one of the high quality carving during Bagan period like the ones in the Ananda temple and workmanship could be said as early period.

Although the nativity scene in Myinkaba Kubyaukge looks quite the same as the one in Kyauksaga-gyi, the portrayal of the Bodhisatta looks the same as the nativity scenes in the Ananda temple. Although the posture of Maha Maya and Pajapati can be in tribhanga position, they look stiff. The yak tail is not seen in Pajapati's hand but a handmaid standing to her left is the same as the one in Ananda temple. They features seem to be smiling. Their clothes are decorated with patterns and they look as if they are wet.

In Bagan period, the nativity scene was also cast in bronze. Two kinds, high relief and repousse are found in bronze nativity scenes. In the bronze high relief nativity scene, Maha Maya and Pajapati stand together on a lotus pedestal. Maya's left hand is on the shoulder of Pajapati and the right hand holds the branch of the sal tree. However, the tree is not depicted. Maya's left foot is bent to the back in order to support her weight; her eyes look downwards and have a smiling face. Pajapati holds over the fore part Maya's left hand with her left giving support and her right hand crosses over the waist of Maya supporting the body. The fact that Pajapati's left foot is slightly bent because she has to support the body of Maha Maya and also she turns up her face to Maya considering on Maya's condition. Their attire is not as elaborate as in the stone carvings but they are of good quality. The Bodhisatta is at the right of Maha

Maya with left foot forward on a round double lotus pedestal. The Bodhisatta wears a crown and is fully clothed. He has both his hands to the chest in anjali mudra as if paying respect to Maha Maya. Compared to other nativity scenes the hands and feet positions and attire of the figures in bronze carvings are unusual and different.

The workmen had unusually portrayed the nativity scene in bronze repousse.¹ In portraying the eight principle scenes in Buddha's inside lotus petals, the event is executed at the base of the lotus petal. The reliefs are executed not on the lotus petals but at the base of a Maha Bodhi-like cedi in the middle of the lotus bud. Although the lotus buds are not done the same, the nativity scenes on both are the same. Maha Maya holds the sal branch with her left as well as her right hand. The features face front and stand in tribhanga form. She has a small waist, full breasts and the clothes cling to the body. Because of space, Pajapati is not included. In Dhammacakka mudra, only the Bodhisatta is seen on the tip of Maya's right waist in pallankasana with both hands at chest. Maya holding the sal branch with both hands is not usually found in Myanmar but in nativity scenes of Varanasi, Sarnath, and Bodhgaya in India, Bangladesh and Nepal.

In Bagan period, several nativity scenes are also portrayed in mural paintings. Unfortunately, many of them have become blurred and damaged. In the remaining paintings of the nativity scene can be seen in Lokahteikpan, Pathothamyia and Nandamanya temples. The paintings of nativity scenes are presumably based on the stone carvings as they look the same. Because it is painting and as the artist could create to his liking, it is quite obvious that the clothes are done in accordance with the fashion and design of that period. Although Bagan period artists are talented in art, they lack the skill in drawing feet. In Lokahteikpan, like in other stone carvings, Maha Maya and Pajapati stand on a lotus round pedestal in tribhanga position and their hand gestures are the same. Pajapati holds a yak tail whisk which is quite unusual. Both Maha Maya and Pajapati's full breasted but the artist made Maha Maya breast fuller than Pajapati's so as to indicate the condition of a new mother full with milk naturally. Both have small waists. Their facial features are slightly smiling. Although Pajapati face front Maha Maya turns her face towards the Bodhisatta. Maha Maya's feature looks more Indian than Pajapati. The lower garments of Maha Maya and Pajapati are of thin material and the design is also simple. On the right hip of Maha Maya, the Bodhisatta sits cross-legged in Dhammacakka mudra. Next, the Bodhisattva is seen standing on a lotus pedestal over six kalasa pots one on top of each other. As if the Bodhisatta had already become Buddha, the hair is knotted on the head. After that Sakka pouring authentic water over the Bodhisatta, a deva blowing a trumpet, another beating a drum and blessing, and Brahma holding an umbrella above the head can be seen. An unusual fact is that instead of the four Brahmas receiving the Bodhisatta with a golden net they hold small vessels in their hands. Likewise, each of the four catumaharajas and humans hold a small vessel in their hands. Here it diverged from the carving from Ananda temple. Probably it was the artist imagination of the varied offerings to the Bodhisatta in various ways. At the right side of Pajapati, a handmaid turns slightly towards her so as to offer any help needed. The formation of this nativity scene is perfect and includes all necessary points. The depiction of the nativity scene in Lokahteikpan looks similar to the painting on palm leaf from Bihar in India. Maha Maya looking sideways at the Bodhisatta, Pajapati holding a yak tail whisk, their waistbands and their smiling features look very much the same as the one from Bihar. In the one from Bihar the fact that a deva receiving the Bodhisatta with his hands from the tip of Maha Maya's right hip and a pot to pour authentic water at the base of her right foot are not seen in Pyu and Bagan period nativity scenes. More

¹ Also in India there are bronze lotus flower repousse.

Moreover the Bodhisatta portrayed without any clothing, which is in accordance with natural childbirth, differs from the Pyu and Bagan depictions. In later part of Bagan the nativity scenes the Bodhisatta is portrayed naturally without any clothes at birth.

In Pahtothamya, the nativity scene if compared with the one in Lokahteikpan the workmanship is of low quality. The headdress of Mahan Maya differs from the one in Lokahteikpan. The breasts of Maha Maya and Pajapati are not full but their waists are small. Pajapati holds a yak tail whisk in her right hand. The patterns on the clothes are of simple design. The waistbands are decorated with lotus petals. They seem to be smiling but their facial features do not look Indian. The Bodhisatta stands a little further on the right side of Maha Maya. Unlike in Lokahteikpan the Bodhisatta does not have a hair knot but wears a headdress, which is appropriate for a Bodhisatta. Although the productive arrangement it does not come up to the standard of the one in Lokahteikpan, scholars assert that the nativity scene in Pahtothamya is the earliest among the depictions (Than Tun 2002, 34).

The nativity scene painting from Nandamanya when compared with the one in Lokahteikpan, the work is done later. Although this painting could be compared to the one in Lokahteikpan, the composition is not up to the standard. In Lokahteikpan, Brahmas, devas and human figures are included in the nativity scene but in Nandamanya, they are painted below. In this picture the headdresses of Maha Maya and Pajapati do not look the same as in the painting of Lokahteikpan but similar to the ones in Pahtothamya. Pajapati encircling the waist of Maha Maya with her right hand in support also is also similar to the bronze carving of nativity scene. Their breasts are not buxom but their waists are made small. The facial feature of Maha Maya looks more Indian than Pajapati. The designs on the clothing are painted in detail. Apart from their headdresses the clothing look quite the as commoners attire. Unlike in the stone carvings courtly bearing is not found. One point that is found accordance in all the nativity scenes of the Bodhisatta is that both Maha Maya and Pajapati's faces are smiling slightly. The Bodhisatta is seen at the right of Maha Maya standing on a lotus with hair knotted at the center top of head. Beautiful acanthus scrolls designs can be seen in this picture. The fact that Brahmas, devas and humans are painted below could be an innovation of the artist. Probably the artist wanted to place emphasis on Maha Maya and Pajapati in the picture. A lot of white has been used in the nativity scene in Nandamanya so the colours are quite remarkable.

Conclusion

Looking at the nativity scenes of Pyu and Bagan periods it could be said that the art arrived to Pyu and Bagan area along with Buddhism from India. In India, the nativity scenes were portrayed since 300 B. C. sculptures as bull figure, lotus flower, footprints, Maha Maya alone, standing and holding the branch of sal tree, etc. In fact, according to the faith of Theravada Buddhism it is thought not appropriate to make the figure of a deity in human form. Later when Mahayana sect appeared revering Gotama Buddha as a mentor was changed to venerating an everlasting god possessing super natural power. From then the tradition of making Buddha images appeared. The Greeks in Northern India influenced in the making of Buddha images. As the Greeks are skillful in making human figures, Buddhism materialized primarily in Greek fashion in Gandhara area. Therefore, western style dominates the nativity scene in Gandhara; especially human nature is fully carried out. Facial features, body structure, attire and hairstyle are not Indian. When the Greeks started to make the nativity scene, Maha Maya was portrayed standing in Lumbhini garden holding the branch of sal tree and the Bodhisatta coming out from the right side of the waist. Probably because the Bodhisatta entered as a white elephant through the right side of Maha Maya in the dream, the Bodhisatta was made to come out of the right side in the birth scene. This fact is in accordance with the

notion of both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism. However, in Theravada Buddhism it is not mentioned from which section of waist Maha Maya gave birth or how the Bodhisatta was born. In Mahayana Buddhism, it is mentioned clearly that Maha Maya gave birth from the right waist. Thus it could be said that the Greeks executed the nativity scene as desired by the Mahayanists (Myint Aung, 1979. 172). In Gandharan nativity images, half of the Bodhisatta's figure can be seen coming out from the tip of Maha Maya's right waist. Although Indian, Pyu and Myanamar artists executed the nativity scene in phases, none had the half-protruding figure of the Bodhisatta from the waist of Maha Maya. In the votive tablets of eight principal scenes in Pyu and Bagan periods, Indian influence is wholly obvious. In another way the mold for making votive tablets were probably brought from India. Votive tablets carved from steatite stone were found in Rakhine, middle of Myanmar and other places in the world. The mode of sculpture and construction of figures do not differ from the ones found in Bagan. Some sandstone carvings and mural paintings are not free from Indian influence. A point agrees that, in nativity scenes of Pyu and Bagan, both Maha Maya and Pajapati wear headdresses. The ones found in Andhara in India, Boddhagaya, Lumbhini garden and Bihar also wear headdresses. Therefore, in executing nativity scenes the Pyu and Bagan artists imitated the works of Gandhara and Gupta in India which was based on the notion of Mahayanists making as much in accordance with their own nature.

References

စိန်မောင်ဦး၊ ၁၉၆၈၊ သရေခေတ္တရာမြို့ဟောင်း၊ တက္ကသိုလ်ပညာပဒေသာစာစောင်၊ အတွဲ ၃၊ အပိုင်း ၁၊
 ဇော်ထွန်း၊ ဒေါက်တာ ၊ ၁၉၇၅၊ ဗုဒ္ဓဆင်းတုတော်များ၊ တက္ကသိုလ်ပညာပဒေသာစာစောင်၊ (ဝိဇ္ဇာစာအုပ်)၊ အတွဲ ၁၀၊ အပိုင်း ၄၊ ၈၃-၉၂)
 တင်မောင်ရင်၊ ၁၉၇၀၊ ရှေးခေတ်ဟောင်းကမ္ဘာသမိုင်း၊ (ဒုတိယတွဲ)၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ တက္ကသိုလ်များပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊
 (မှတ်တမ်းစဉ် ၁)၊ ၁၉၆၄၊ ပုဂံမင်္ဂလာတောင်သာလှိုင်စာပေ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ရန်ကုန်တက္ကသိုလ်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊
 မိုးလတ်၊ ဦး၊ ၁၉၆၂၊ ရှေးဟောင်းမြန်မာရာဇဝင်နှင့်ယဉ်ကျေးမှုသုတေသန၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ပညာနန္ဒပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊
 မေဝါဝိ၊ ဘွဲ့၊ ၁၉၉၈၊ ယနေ့ဗုဒ္ဓဂါယာ၊ မန္တလေး၊ ရတနာဒီပံအောင်စာပေ၊
 မင်းသုဝဏ်၊ ၁၉၅၇၊ ဗုဒ္ဓဆင်းတုတော်လေ့လာချက် ၊ ယဉ်ကျေးမှုစာစောင်၊ အတွဲ ၁၊ အမှတ် ၂၊ ၉-၁၇၊
 မြ၊ ဦး၊ ၁၉၇၉၊ ရှေးဟောင်းအုတ်စွက်ဂူပုံစာပေဆင်းတုတော်များ၊ (ပဌမတွဲ)၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ရန်ကုန်တက္ကသိုလ်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊
 မြင့်အောင်၊ ဦး၊ ၁၉၇၉၊ မြန်မာရှေးဟောင်းယဉ်ကျေးမှုသုတေသန၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ မြင့်အောင်စာပေ၊
 ရှေးရိုးမြန်မာပန်းချီ၊ ၁၉၆၆၊ ရှေးဟောင်းသုတေသနဌာနခွဲ၊ ပြည်ထောင်စုယဉ်ကျေးမှုဌာန၊ စာပေဝိမာန်၊
 လူမေဝင်း၊ ၁၉၇၃၊ သရေခေတ္တရာသာသနာနှင့်ပြုမင်းအဆက်ဆက်ကိုးကွယ်သောနန်းစဉ်ဘုရားများ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ဗမာ့ခေတ်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊
 လှမာန်၊ ၁၉၉၂၊ နိပေါနိင်္ဂါတက္ကမန္တမြို့မြန်မာသံရုံးမှဝန်ထမ်းတစ်ဦးစီစဉ်ပြုရသည့်။ ရန်ကုန်၊ သာသနာရေးဦးစီးဌာနပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊
 သိန်းလွင်၊ မြန်မာမြေ၊ ၁၉၉၈၊ ဗုဒ္ဓဝင်ရံစမ်းကြေးကြားများ ၊ ယဉ်ကျေးမှုမဂ္ဂဇင်း၊ အမှတ် ၅၊ ၃၆-၄၀၊
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Plates



Plate 1
Sanchi
Foucher 1934, Plate III (13)



Plate 2
Gandhara, Sandstone, (c. 2nd -3rd centuries)
Maya (Mother of Buddha) *Wikipedia*.



Plate 3
Sriksetra, Pyu, Sandstone relief
Luce 1985, Plate 47(a)



Plate 4
Bagan, Sitagu International Buddhist
Academy, 2008 calendar

