

Art and Architectural Features of Myin Hlaung Temple (Monument No. Na-069) in Aneint Old Town

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Abstract

Archaeological site of Aneint (Kan Neint) Old town is located at Chang O Township in Sagaing Region. By historical accounts, it is asserted that this town has been associated with the different cultural levels of Bagan and post Bagan periods with 445 religious monuments. In Archaeological evidences, there are totally 125 religious monuments which have been still remained. Among them, Myin Hlaung Temple (Monument No. AN-069) in Shwegu Htut Group reveals significant features to support to the town history of the site – particularly reflecting on its art and architectural exposures of plan composition, stucco work of art and mural paintings. In descriptive approach, this temple can be identified by three different stages of relevant periods of Bagan, Nyaungyan and Konbaung.

Key Words: Aneint old Town; cultural levels; Shwegu Htut group; art feature and architectural style; descriptive approach; Bagan periods; Nyaung Period; Konbaung Period

Introduction

Aneint is one of the ancient towns in Myanmar, and it is located on the eastern bank of Chindwin River in Chaung U Township, Monywa District, Sagaing Region.¹ According to the stone inscription, by King Narathihapate (1255–87 CE) it has been mentioned the name of the town as “*Kram tū Nim*”.² Today it is known as *Thone Pan Hla* Village.³ It is not far from the influence of Chindwin River and the Ayeyarwaddy River. So the strategic position of Aneint Village is very important not only for economics but also for politics and religion. In its background history, Aneint has been mentioned as the administrative units with 100 soldiers (ရာပြုမြို့) – which was legendarily associated with the story of the native place of *Praïma* of King Kyansitha.⁴ As in another historical account, this town is mentioned that during the late Bagan Period, a new sect of Buddhism which was founded by *Paung Laung Shin Mahakathappa* appeared in and around Aneint Old Town. This sect was known as

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¹ See Map.1

² U Nyein Maung, ရှေးဟောင်းမြန်မာကျောက်စာများ၊ ဒုတိယတွဲ၊ (Ancient Myanmar Stone Inscriptions, Vol. II), Yangon, Department of Archaeology, 1982, p.187

³ ရွှေဂူကြီးဘုရားသမိုင်း (History of Shwe Gu Gyi Pagoda), Yangon, Gone Htoo Maw Kon Press, August, 2015, pp.3–5

⁴ မှန်နန်းမဟာရာဇဝင်တော်ကြီး ပထမတွဲ (Glass Palce Chronicle (Vol. I)), Yangon, Ministry of Information, 1992, p.135

Aranyavathi or Ari. The Kings of Bagan supported this sect since early the 13th century CE.⁵ After Bagan period, Aneint old town has been also related to the successive periods of Innwa, Nyaungyan, Konbaung and Yadanabon.⁶ So, archaeological witness of the structural remains, particularly from Bagan period to Konbaung and Yadanabon Periods can be seen in Aneint Old Town.

Setting of Religious Monuments in Aneint Old Town and Location of Myin Hlaung Temple

According to the local saying, there are 445 religious monuments at and around Aneint Old Town. But according to archaeological survey accounts, only 125 religious monuments have remained till now in different parts of the town.

Of all these monuments, Myin-Hlaung temple is comprised in Shwegu Htut Group, located in the southern part of the town. Although the reliable historical account for the temple has been unknown, traditionally the local sayings asserted that once Kyansitthar (Hti Luin Min) was pented his horse at this place. So the local people called Myin-Hlaung temple. In Shwegu Htut pagoda Group, there are 14 structural remains of religious monuments such as Monument No. A Na 060, 061, 062, 063, 064, 065, 066, 067, 068, 069, 070, 071, 072 and 073. Among them Myin-Hlaung temple is Monument No. 069, closely standing to the north of Monument No. 069 and to the south of Monument No. 070 in the group.⁷

Art and Architectural Features of Myin-Hlaung Temple

(i) Architectural Features: Plan Feature and Stucco Work

Myin-Hlaung temple is a medium size temple. It has three entrances on the east, north, and south sides, but the west side is blocked in manner with blind forepart.⁸ Its main entrance faces to the east. Plan feature of the temple is, particularly based on octagonal platform, square in shaped, measuring about 15 ft on each side, but there are with 5 series of projections on each.⁹ As the decorated architectural feature, stucco work of three lion-statues are set up on each corner of the temple' platform. So there are totally twelve lion

⁵ Dr Than Tun, *ခေတ်ဟောင်းမြန်မာရာဇဝင် (Ancient Myanmar History)*, Yangon, Seikku Cho Cho Press, 2017, p.218

⁶ *စေတီယကထာမည်သော ရာဇဝင်ချုပ် (Brief History of Namely Cetiya Kahta)*, Sagaing, Thitagu International University of Buddhism, Department of Research and Dissertation Section, 2003

⁷ See Map.2

⁸ See Fig.1

⁹ See Fig.2

statues, but only two lions at the south-east corner are in good stage of preservation and the others were completely damaged.¹⁰

The superstructure is made by three terraces and the corner of each terrace has one corner stupa, flanked by two *Kalasa pots*. Above these terraces is topped by a stupa with cylindrical bell shaped dome and a series of concentric mouldings, but the uppermost of it was broken off. In fact, by these remaining features in upper part, Myin Hlaung temple shows up to stupa-temple of architectural type in character.

In the exterior architectural work, the main entrance of the temple is adorned with double pediments of archways. Although having definitely similarity to Bagan period's arch pediment styles, some parts of those are partly affinity to the Flaming Arch pediment of the Bagan Period style (*Rama Let Nhyoe*).¹¹ In Bagan Period, there are four types of pediment including the Flaming Arch. In later periods, the floral designs replaced the use of Flaming Arch.¹² The top of the pediment (Amortizement) is Konbaung Period style (*Duyin Design*). This design is different from Bagan Period style. It has no *Makara*, Flaming Arch, the Banana bud and became *Duyin Design* (Chest of Peacock) in early Konbaung Period.¹³ So it is suggested that it was repaired in Konbaung Period. The height of the entrance is 7' 6" and the width is 4' 8" respectively.

As outer surface of wall decoration, the upper parts of the pilasters were adorned with ogre head stucco carvings and at the base of the pilaster were adorned the ogre headed lion with double buttocks statues.¹⁴ The remarkable stucco works can be seen in Bagan Period.¹⁵ Remarkably, the original basement of the pilasters has the similar shape in *Kalasa pot* design. Moreover, the floral design of cornice is later period style but architectural work of crenellation parapet is nearly similar to Bagan style.

¹⁰ See Fig.3

¹¹ See Fig.4

¹² U Aung Kyaing, *ပုဂံခေတ်ဗိသုကာလက်ရာများ*, (*Architecture in Bagan Period*), Yangon, Bagan Princess Publications, 2019, pp.61-65 (Here after cited as, *Architecture in Bagan Period*)

¹³ Myo Nyunt,U, *ပုဂံဒေသရှိ နှောင်းခေတ် ဗိသုကာနှင့် အနုလက်ရာများ* (*Later Period of Bagan Art and Architecture*),Yangon, Htoo Press, April, 2016, p.30 (Here after cited as, Myo Nyunt, *Later Period of Bagan Art and Architecture*)

¹⁴ See Fig.5

¹⁵ U Aung Kyaing, *Architecture in Bagan Period*, p.118

Art Features: Mural Paintings

Inside the temple, on the walls and ceilings of the temple were adorned with colourful wall paintings. Red, green, white, black, reddish-brown and grey were used in paintings. The ceiling of the east vestibule was decorated with lotus flowers in octagonal frames.¹⁶ The ink inscription was written on the north wall of the east vestibule. In this inscriptions described the donation record.¹⁷ Under the in inscription, there are the scene of King Nay Mi Jataka such as “*ne mi mañ krī kui pā ta li nat sā ve ja yam tā ra thā...*”¹⁸ and “*ra se tui kui ne tuin ma prat swam...*” etc. Similarly, the south wall of the vestibule were drawn with the Scene of King Nay Mi Jat as well such as “*ne mi miñ krī kui pā ta li nat sā bit mham pra ham*” and “*i sui sī la chok tañ so kyon nat prañ cam cā ham*” etc. Therefore the walls of the east vestibule were decorated with the scene of King Nay Mi Jataka.

The arch of the east passage was decorated with scroll serpents stucco carvings on both sides. These serpents flanked by two birds probably parrots (or) zarmani birds. The height of the arch is 7' and the width is 3'. The ceiling of the arch was adorned with floral design in diamond shape frame. The north and south walls of the arch were painted with Suvanasama jataka such as “*sā to su wa nna shyim nhñ may tou kha mai tou tui nhn ta kwa khym sā ra...*”.

The upper parts of the north and south walls of the east passage were painted with Mahajanaka Jat such as “*jā na ka mañ sā san po pyak---*” and the human being from the hell can be seen at lower part.

The lotus flowers were drawn on the ceiling of the eastern arch of the central shrine. The north wall was decorated with the scene of Mahajanaka jat such as “*jā na ka mañ krī pui ta toñ rhi so le tañ ham*”¹⁹ and the hell. The south wall was drawn with the life of Buddha.

The ceiling of the central shrine was built by the cross vault and the north and south walls of the central shrine were painted with the life of Buddha such as “*mu ca li nā auin twan mrat cwā bhū rā na gā pa pyan mui cam cā ham*” and “*ca tu loka pā la nat sā tui sa pit lhū—bha li ta ta phu ssa ññ non tui pya mun chwam lhū ham*” *phu rā sa khan kui pa uca wa ggī ññ yok tui kha rī u krui chui ham*”) etc.... Similarly the east wall of the central

¹⁶ See Fig.6

¹⁷ See Fig.7

¹⁸ See Fig.8

¹⁹ See Fig.9

shrine was painted with the scene of Waithantara Jataka such as “*jā li ga nā rhañ ma dī tui nan camī chā hamī*”.²⁰

The ogre figures (Dwarapala) in the sitting posture, holding the club were drawn on both sides of the inner wall of north and south porch²¹. Moreover the ceilings of the north and south porch were decorated with lotus flowers.

The ceilings of the north and south passage were painted with Buddha foot prints respectively. The detailed designs of 108 marks can be seen. Each foot prints were coiled by two serpents. The monks who were holding up lotus flowers in their hands are gathering around the foot print in respect manner.²²

On the west wall of the north passage King Tay Mi Jat was drawn and east wall was decorated with the figures of 101 kings with different styles. The radiation vault probably in Bagan period can be seen on the northern arch of central shrine.²³

The figure of a man with a smoking pipe and the soldiers were painted on the east wall of south passage. The west wall was drawn with Mahosada Jat. And then the scenes of the Buddha cutting his hair and the animal figures such as the black elephant, white elephant, peacocks, parrots and horse can be seen there.

Seated Buddha image was shrined in the central shrine. The design of the rope and the body posture of the Buddha image is from Amarapura Period and the head is in the style of Yadanabon Period. And then stone colour is different between the face and the body. So it is suggested that the head was rebuilt in Yadanabon Period.

In this wall painting, most of the man figures wear a headgear and their faces were blowze on one side. The woman figures hairnet upright at the middle of the head and were decorated with golden ornament. The earrings were in big circular shape. They are wearing the cloth that looks alike the corset and cloak the mantilla. Mostly the human figures had smiling faces. According to these facts, it is suggested that these mural paintings belonged to Nyaungyan Period style.²⁴ the wearing style, the face style and the hair style of the human being, the lotus from the ceilings, the Buddha foot prints and the drawing style were closely similar to Nyaungyan Period style. But the Duyin design (the

²⁰ See Fig.10

²¹ See Fig.11

²² See Fig.12

²³ See Fig.13

²⁴ U Myo Nyunt, သမိုင်းမတင်မီ သမိုင်းတင်ခေတ်ဦး ပုဂံခေတ်နှင့် ညောင်ရမ်းခေတ်ဆိုင်ရာ သုတေသနစာတမ်းများ (Research Papers of Prehistory, Protohistory, Bagan and Nyaungyan Periods), Yangon, Shwe Yeyint Press, 2014, p.191

chest of peacock) pediments were mostly used in Konbaung Period. Moreover some architectural styles of this temple such as radiation vault, cross vault are in Bagan Period style. So it is suggested that the temple was built in Bagan period and it was renovated in late Nyaungyan (or) early Konbaung Period. Therefore the remarkable styles from Bagan to Konbaung Period can be seen in this temple.

Conclusion

Art and Architecture of Myin Hlaung temple were found to be the mixture of Bagan, Nyaung Yan and Konbaung Period styles. Construction Technology in Bagan Period, architects used mostly brick works such as varieties of vaults. These vaults include radiation vault, lean to vault, cross vault, tunnel vault, flat vault, multi-layer vault and corbelled vault. At Myin Hlaung Temple, cross vault used on the central shrine and radiation vault used on the northern arch of central shrine can be seen there. Konbaung period style can be determined by Duiyin design pediment. This design was found at the pediment of Myin Hlaung temple. Seated Buddha image in the central shrine reveals the Amarapura and Yadanabon period style. The mural paintings and the writing inscriptions of these temples are closely similar to those of Nyaung Yan Period. The themes of paintings are the scenes of Buddha life story and the last Great Ten lives of Buddha such as Temi, Janaka, Suwanatharma, Nemi, Mahos adha, Bhuridat, Sandha-suriya, Vidhura and Wethantara. And then the Buddha foot print with 108 marks, 101 kings figures, lotus flower and floral designs the soldiers with portugee face and the animal figures such elephant, horse, lion, peacock, parrot, etc were drawn at this temple. The similar mural paintings and the inscriptions were found in Powin Taung Cave in Monywa and Trilawkagura Temple in Sagaing Region.²⁵ Therefore according to the art and architectural features of Myin Hlaung temple, it was probably built in Late Bagan Period and repaired in Nyaung Yan and Konbaung Period. Moreover Myin Hlaung temple was an evidence to testify the Aneint Old town which existed since Bagan Period and continuously flourished in later successive period.

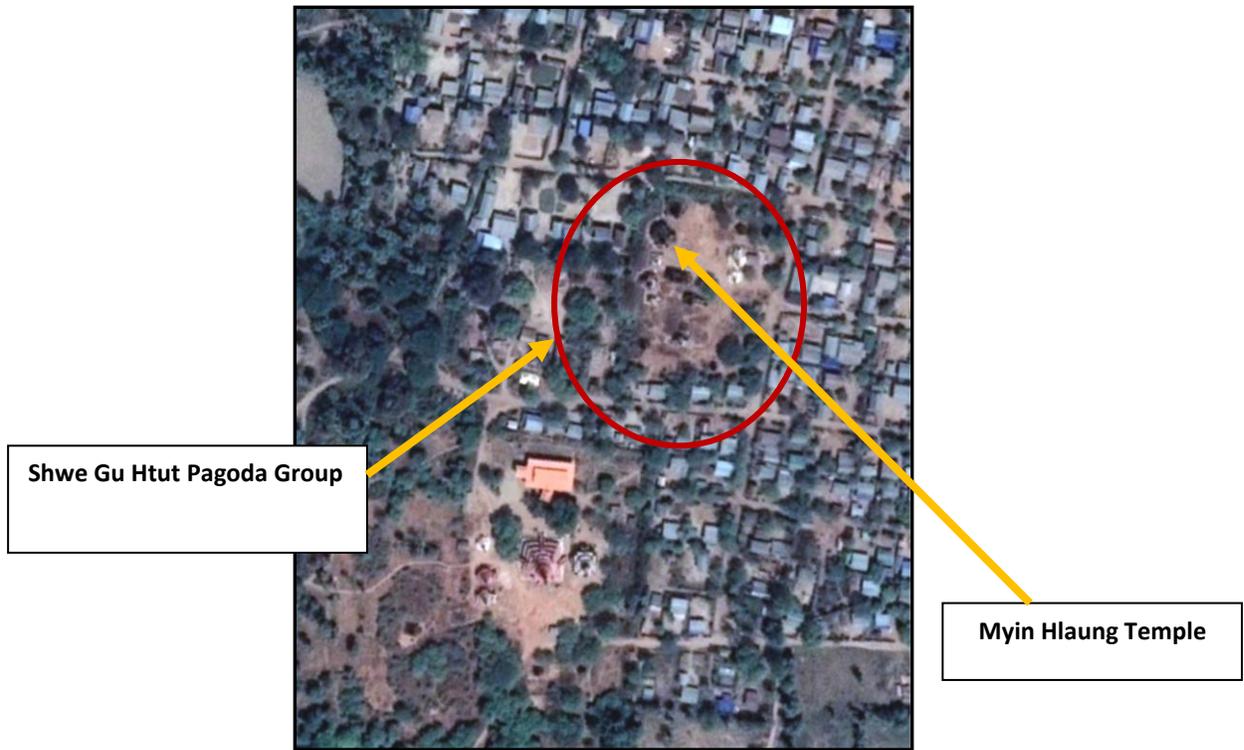
²⁵ See Fig.14

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(Sourced from Google Earth)



Fig.1 General view from east side to Myin Hlaung Temple at Aneint

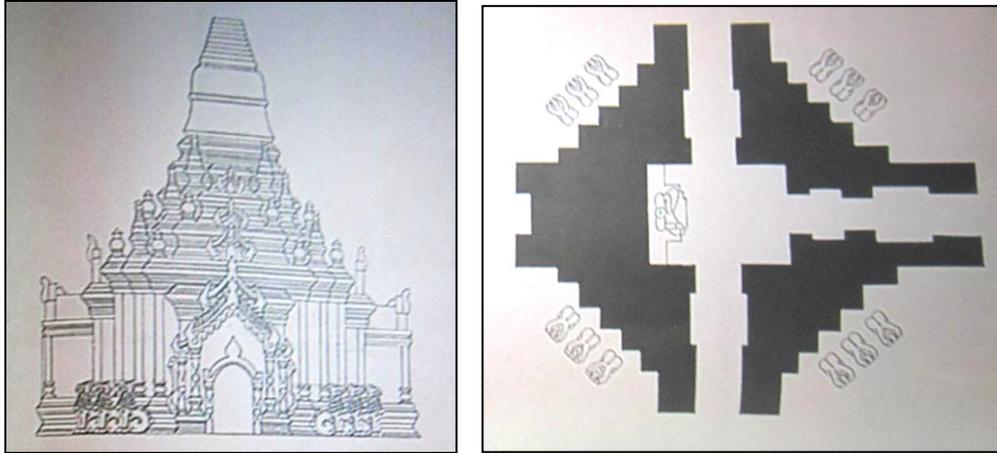


Fig.2 Plan feature and section of Myin Hlaung Temple at Aneint



Fig.3 Traceable remains of three lion figures and two remaining statues in southeast side on the Myin Hlaung Temple



Fig.4 Main entrance feature and arch pediment in probably complex work of Bagan and Konbaung periods of Myin Hlaung Temple



Fig.5 Surface decoration in stucco work of ogre-head patterns from Myin Hlaung Temple



Fig.6 Mural paintings of lotus flowers in octagonal frames under the vault of eastern vestibule from Myin Hlaung Temple



Fig.7 The Ink Inscription on the north wall of the east vestibule from Myin Hlaung Temple



Fig.8 Scene of King Nay Mi, taken by Chariot on the north wall of the east vestibule from Myin Hlaung Temple



Fig.9 Scene from *Maha Janaka* holding up the bow



Fig.10 Scene of *Vessansara Jataka*



Fig.11 Dwarapala figures



Fig.12 The Buddha Foot Print figures
with 108 Marks



Fig.13 The radiation vault on archways

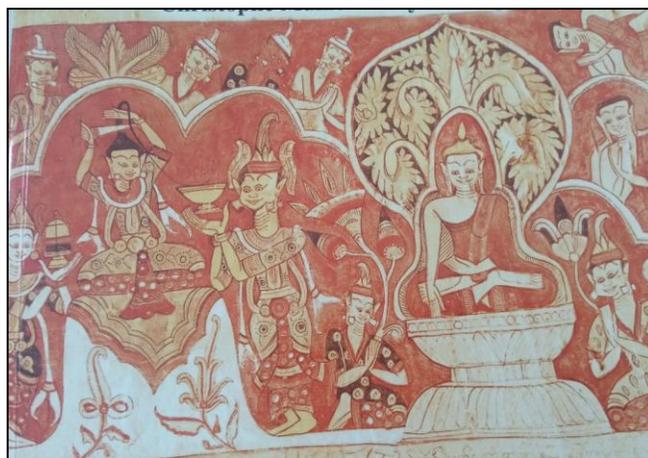


Fig.14 The mural painting from Powin Taung Cave (Nyaungyan period style)
Source from Burmese Buddhist Murals

