

# Mural Paintings in Post Bagan Period Special Reference with Social Affairs

Min Lwin\*

## Abstract

In archaeology, one of the values of mural paintings was depicted on ancient monuments in Bagan. The main features of art, architecture, sculpture and stucco, in their early workmanship resembling those of the Sri Ksetra Pyu and Mon of Thaton influences, no longer take on and retain these influences, but the Bagan murals being born of the Indian painting origin, assume Myanmar norms and style. Ancient religious structures in Bagan region were erected from 11<sup>th</sup> CE century to CE 13<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to the Bagan period architecture, the Post Bagan, Pinya Period, Innwa Period, Nyaungyan Period and Konbaung Period art and architecture were also found in this region. The painting of mural is the best manifestation of the characteristic features of a certain period concerned. This paper, revealed the Bagan region of the post Bagan period, Pinya, Innwa, Nyaungyan, Konbaung of the mural painting were mainly research with seven temples.

Keywords: Art, Sculpture, Mural Painting, Sri Ksetra Pyu, Bagan, Post Bagan

## Introduction

Archaeological and Historical evidences have proved that fine arts in Myanmar are as old as its history. The earliest painting extent in Myanmar belongs to the Bagan period beginning from the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. The paintings at Bagan are executed on the walls of masonry temples. The theme of the paintings on the walls of the temples is religious in character and mostly centres round the Buddha, incident from the life of Buddha and the Jatakas.

The style of the Bagan paintings shows strong West India influence in the earlier phase. Of the wall paintings of Bagan, those in the temples of Nandamanya, Payathonzu, Thmabula, Pathothamya, Abeyadana, Sulamani, Myingaba-Gu Byauk Gyi and the cave of Kyanzittha Umin still remain clear and bright. In the temples of late 12<sup>th</sup> century and 13<sup>th</sup> century CE and then post Bagan period, the art of painting has reached a high level of Myanmar culture.

These far reaching effects have been caused by the art of painting the other literary educative effort. The word painting and its associated vocabulary are first found in the Bagan Period. In the inscription dated of the Einyakyaung Inscription, the Shwezigon Bell Inscription of King Bayintnaung, Amatkyi Athawitdhama-mayar Incscription, Pwasaw Inscription, Amatkyi Nyarnapisee Inscription and Zanthi Pagoda Inscription at Minnanthu.

---

\* Lecturer, Department of Archaeology, Yadanabon University

### (i) Tetnwe Kyaung Monastery

Tetnwe Kyaung Monastery locates at the southern direction of the Shwezigon Pagoda in Nyaung Oo and at the east of Shwe Chaung of Wetkyi-inn village near eastern Kanywa village. On the south-east of the Tetnwe kyaung Monastery is the Tetnwe kyaung inscription in Pali and Myanmar languages datable to Sakaraj-804 (CE 1442) inscribed in the Pinya Period. Another inscription datable to Sakaraj-591(CE 1229) as an epigraph called also the Wetkyi-inn Shwe Kyaung inscription which is also known as the Dagagyi Mi and Dagagyi epigraph was erected in a stone slab at this site as well.

The Tetnwe Kyaung Monastery is a three storeyed building and it stands witness to the reflourishment of religion since the Bagan Period era though Bagan Period saw its downfall. This is a monastery that encountered ravages of the time and served as an abode of the Maha-hteres in the Innwa Period. As it belonged to the Innwa Period, it preserved the art of its time, manifesting 550 jataka stories and the life story of Arimettayya Bodhisatta, etc. The faintness of these paintings was probably due to the original colors, light effect or to bats. Unlike the different decoration done to the shrines or stupas, the monastery used to have lesser ornamentation.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest reference to the use of colors and pigments could be traced to the Sawhlawun inscription datable to Sakaraj-598 (CE 1236). It mentions yellow or pigment, vermilion, white line, lac and yellow ochre are to be purchased for the mural painting. These are the colors and pigments that the artists of the Bagan Period had to use. This Tetnwe Kyaung inscription (CE 1442) further deals with the paintings of different miscellaneous figures in gold, silver, red, green and vermilion in demarcating designs.

At the central image chamber, the birth stories of the Gotama Buddha have remained on the eastern and northern walls. That the Bodhisatta before renunciation enjoying the palatial bliss, are painted into the palace building, the dresses of the prince and princesses are painted closely associated with the Bagan Period manners and style of the dresses. On the southern wall are painted the Bodhissatta cutting of hair, sermons near Ketumati country. The cutting of hair scene even it drawn in the Bagan style, appears to be in the Innwa Period dress of open-chest dress. At the ceiling of the main chamber is drawn at the soffit of the arch, the post enlightened twenty eight Buddhas with their Bodhi trees and their Savaka or the main attendant saints.

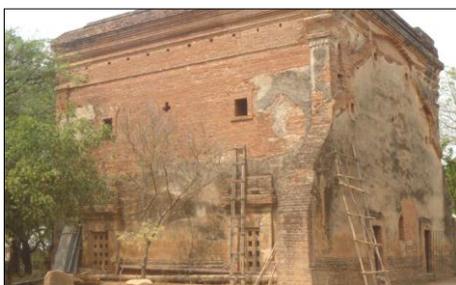


Fig.1 Tetnwe Kyaung Monastery



Fig.2 550 jataka stories

<sup>1</sup> U Myint Swe, MA, "ငါးရာဇာဏ်ဆယ်စာရင်းကျယ်", (*Inventory of 550 Jatakas Stories*), Yangon, Yonkyichet Sarpay, 2002, pp.114-115 (Hereafter cited as U Myint Swe, *550 Jatakas Stories*)

In mural paintings also, the Buddha figures in physical appearance has changed with changing times and this has been portrayed in paint. The paintings of Tetnwe Kyaung the Buddha figures of the Innwa Period show that its cheeks are broad, it has three horizontal lines at the throat, the eyes are down cast. Except the thumb the other fingers are shaped equal. The Tetnwe Kyaung was built in the first Innwa Period at the times of King Moehnyn Minthayar. It coincided with the sun set on the Bagan Period and witnessed the transition times where in the mural painting, stucco carving and sculpture became rare and scarce. The age met with declaims of culture and no flourishment was noticed. The murals of the Sulamani temple were belonged to the Later Innwa Period.<sup>2</sup>

**(ii) Sulamani Temple**

Sulamani is situated in the south-west of Minanthu village. It was built in 1183 A.D, by Narapatisithu, in plan. The Sulamani consists of two storeys, each of which is square in plan, with porches on all four sides but with the eastern porch extending further than the others.

The inner walls of the temple were once decorated with paintings, but they are now obliterated or overlaid with more recent paintings of on great artistic merit. From this time onwards, scale two-storey temples initiate the form of the Sula-mani, the most obvious example of the Htilominlo, for the Bagan king had found a temple form that ideally expressed all that a royal act of merit should be a demonstration of imperial prestige and stately grandeur and glorious confirmation of faith in the world religion and of royal support for it.



Fig.3 Innwa Period Dress



Fig.4 Innwa Period Dress

**(iii) Yadana Myintzu Pagoda**

This pagoda is by the road of Bagan-Chauk motor road and on the north of the Bagan Archaeological Museum. It faces east and it is crowned with a stupa. These are four oleographs at its corners with four entrances to its interiors. The pagoda contains paintings dating back to the Konbaung Period.<sup>3</sup> Its special feature is the Eta-dag (came from e-tag- agga<sup>4</sup>, the title honoured by the Buddha, meaning this person is holy) title recipients and the reasons assigned to its why

<sup>2</sup> U Myo Nyunt, "ပိဋကတ်တော်လာ ပုဂံခေတ်နံရံဆေးရေးပန်းချီ" (*Bagan's Murals from Pitakats*), Ministry of Culture, Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Yangon, 2014, p.30 (Hereafter cited as Myo Nyunt, *Bagan's Murals from Pitakats*)

<sup>3</sup> Myo Nyunt, *The later period of Architecture and Arts in Bagan*, pp.75-80

<sup>4</sup> U Myat Kyaw and San Lwin, မြတ်ဗုဒ္ဓပါဝစနအဘိဓာန် (*A Pali-yanmar-English Dictionary of the Noble Words of the Lord Buddha*), Yangon, Okkar Kyaw Press, April, 2002, p.69

they were honoured with such holy tiltes. So also why was not endangered the Gotama Buddha in his last one hundred and thirty six are fully described.

The twenty-eight Enlightened Buddhas and their respective Bodhi-trees are also drawn and painted. From the north-west corner of the main chamber to the south west corner is the space given to describe the enlightened Buddhas, their Bodhi trees, their life spans, their heights, their arahets (saits), their attendants are described with their names in ink writings.<sup>5</sup>



Fig.5 Twenty-Eight Enlightened Buddhas from Yadana Myintzu Pagoda

From the murals in the Yadana Myintzu Pagoda and painted Buddha images (the Konbaung Period) can give the physical features of the Buddha images in respect of their eyes which is shaped in almond-seed, round chin, arms, shoulders are not as strong and sturdy as those of the Innwa Period. Their heads are low and expensive. They have the forehead bands, etc.

Along with the murals, the legends are associated. The mural ink writings are done in Mon language in the Early Bagan Period, Pali, Early Mon and Myanmar languages in the Middle Bagan Peiod and Pali and Myanmar languages in the Later Bagan Peirod.<sup>6</sup>

A number of one hundred and thirty six Buddhas lives which were not endangered, were also presented in paint in the murals. These were accounted for the life sacrifice for the other people and for those who were selfish or eco-centric. On the southern wall, which was the Prayer. It all, the Buddha's life in incarnations of monkeys, of elephant, of camera and on the northern wall, the incarnations of horse, of bullock, of buffalo and on the eastern wall of the southern approach Buddha's incarnation of *kinnara* parrot, pigeon, *karaweik*, *hansa*, on the western wall of the southern approach, the Buddha's incarnations of crane, the eastern wall of the northern approach contains, the incarnations of peacock king, large mime bird, cock and the incarnation of king pig on the eastern wall of the northern approach were painted.<sup>7</sup>

In drawing the animals, they were not done in lifeless carcass bat in lively and animated style. Drawing was done in eye level and the other figure was drawn in reduced size and it done 4.5 degree tilting way. In the Post Bagan painting, the drawing of animals was done mostly in vermillion and green. While painting in the Bagan Period, line drawing was resorted to giving

<sup>5</sup> U Myo Nyunt, ပုဂံဒေသရှိ နှောင်းခေတ်ဗိသုကာနှင့်အနုလက်ရာများ ( *The Later Period of Architecture and Arts in Bagan*), Yangon, Yone Kyi Chet Press, 2007, p.70 (Hereafter cited as Myo Nyunt, *The Later Period of Architecture and Arts in Bagan*)

<sup>6</sup> Myo Nyunt, *Bagan's Murals from Pitakats*, p.33

<sup>7</sup> U Aung Kyaing, ပုဂံခေတ်ဗိသုကာလက်ရာများ, ( *Architectures of Bagan Period*), Yangon, Aung Chan Tha Press, 1993, p.22

clear outline. In the Post Bagan time, animation was initiated in sketching the animals delineating their natural life. It also aimed at using nearness to natural color and hue and all that necessary decorations.

**(iv) Ananda Okkyaung (Konbaung Period)**

Ananda Okkyaung Monastery is located in Old Bagan. It was built during 1137 CE. Ananda Okkyaung Monastery simply meaning Brick Monastery. This is situated within the compound of Ananda Temple. It is a small red brick building. The inside walls are covered in 18th century paintings depicting Buddha's life and elements of the history of Bagan. The paintings describes that the monastery was built by three brothers.

Ananda meaning Eternity and the first vulnerable monk who resided in this monastery was Shin Thuddhamma Linkara and he died at the age of 69. During the reign of King Kyanzittha, the vulnerable monk was granted with a place where he could stay in peace and meditate.

Just west of Ananda's northern entry, this small vihara (sanctuary or chapel) features some detailed 18th-century murals painting with bright red and green, showing details of everyday life from the Konbaung period. In the southeast corner, which can see Portuguese figures engaged in trade. Like all its contemporaries, this temple combines the best values of creativity and innovation and stands testimony to the richness of Bagan art.



Fig.6 Serivaniya jewel stone dealer jataka



Fig.7 Sulasatha Jataka

**(v) Shwe Kyaung Kyaung U Pagoda**

This pagoda is situated on the north-east of Bagan and on the west of Taungbi village in the compound of the Shwe Kyaung Monastery. This Pagoda has some outstanding paintings datable to the Konbaung Period. At the centre instituted venerably a Buddha statue. The paintings of the twenty eight Buddha paintings, the seven stations showed where the Gotama Buddha stayed after Enlightenment, the Buddha's retreats for the sixteen times are described in beautiful paint.<sup>8</sup> Among them an outstanding mural was met with where the Kyaung U Pagoda model drawing was found. The Nipata of the Buddha's life in ten big jataka standing from the Temiya to Vessantara was depicted in paint. Beginnings from the eastern direction towards west

<sup>8</sup> Maung Maung Thein, ပုရပိုက်ပန်းချီလေ့လာချက်, (*Study of Parapike Painting*), Yangon, Sarpay Beikman, First edition, 2001, pp.20-21

on the southern wall of the pagoda are described from the Ta-nhan Kara Buddha to Gotama Buddha with their respective legends.

The northern portion of the western wall was painted. Suvanasama jataka was completely depicted where in his parents Dukula and Pirika gave birth to their son Suvanasama. At his ripe age, his parents while gathering fruits had met heavy rain and they took the shelter from rain under a hillock and the cobra breathed and his poisonous wind. Caused, them blind men. The Bodhisatta Suvanasama looked after them. While he was gathering water with his flock of deer, the king Piliyakkha shot him with his bow. The Bodhisatta related all about his attendance or his parents who were blinded by a snake. On his behalf, King Piliyakkha fed the enjoying good health and well being again. There a mural lesson which Suvanasama gave that king Piliyakkha obligation towards his blind parents derived much benefit.

The northern part of the western wall contain the Nemi jataka(No-541) in paint. In the story the Bodhisatta Nemi preached the people the virtues of charity and precepts. As result of good deeds, the dead people were reborn again in the celestial abode. With the supplication of the *devas*, the *saka*, king of gods, ordered Matali to harness the Vejayata chariot to be sent to Nemi who was taken first to hell and later to celestial abode. King Nami preached *devas* for seven days and was taken back to the human world again.<sup>9</sup>

The western portion of southern entrance, the Sanda kumara jataka was painted. There in the story, the Khandhahala Brahmin who was bribe taking and injustice at legal administration approached the king with accusation of the Bodhisat prince Sadakumara. At this malicious Khandhala Brahmin, the king would sacrifice his own son Sandakumara. Thereupon, the Saka threatened the king and the people killed Khandhala and the king was burnished and the Prince Sadakumara was enthroned in the king's position.<sup>10</sup> Though the story is fully retold in paint, the legend in ink writing could not be legible. This is a mural lesson that those who are of good character and straight should come out victorious.

In the western approach on the southern wall was painted the Narada jataka fully. The story reveals that king Angati, accepted naked ascetic master's wrong conception and did sinful acts. The princess Guza preached him in all possible ways but in vain and vowed to get who could relieve her father of the wrong views. In such a situation, the Buddhisatta Narada came in monk's disguise and preached the king Angali and rectified the wrong views and conceptions.<sup>11</sup> All these events were revealed in paint but the legend in ink inscription are not legible.

The western wall of the northern approach has the murals on the Vessantara jataka. Although the ink writings are not legible, the pictures are quite used to the people that the story could acquainted with the public so much so that the context of the whole jataka was easily understandable.

---

<sup>9</sup> U Myint Swe, *550 Jatakas Stories*, p.138

<sup>10</sup> U Myint Swe, *550 Jatakas Stories*, p.88

<sup>11</sup> U Myint Swe, *550 Jatakas Stories*, p.135



Fig.10 The dress of the Konbaung Period

Even though this temple is small, it contains a variety of facts and figures. There no space is left unpainted. The Maha Nipata is ten big jatakas being treated in detail without leaving and painted the 550 jatakas. On both the southern and northern walls, the donors both men and women are treated in paint who come to offer flowers, drinking water, lights to the Buddha, thereby in the murals, we can see the way of hairdo, the use of stripe pattern upper garment as the wearing of sarong on the lower body, could easily be seen. These dresses are the same as the clothing models of the Konbaung Period.

#### (iv) Pitakat Taik

This building is on the north of the Kyansitta Umin and the south-west of the Shwezigon Pagoda. The paintings dating back to the Konbaung Period consists of the Buddha and the diaper painting on the ceiling are drawn the floral designs and lotus pattern ornately painted. Some scenes suggest the royal ceremonies to take place and the Vessansara jataka is described with its legends in mural writing completely.



Fig.11 Buddha pada in Pitakat Taik

#### (v) Thayetkyin Pagoda

The Pagoda is located at on the south of the Kandawpalin Temple and in the compound of the Bagan Archaeological Museum. At the mid- point of the shrine, a seated Buddha figures and their respective enlightened Bodhi trees and some stories of the Buddha's life well as the dress belonging to the Konbaung Period and the physical characteristics of the Buddha can be studied. These paintings show the women folks wear lug sleeved upper garment with loose belts around their breasts and shawl over the bodies. The figures also wear big ear-plugs and breast cover

shawls. The Buddha figures have round chin which do not protrude. The eye is a little open. The forehead band is large. They have three levels of creases on the front neck.

In the Early Bagan Period painting, priority was given to the painting of the religious matters. The common people were shown in the painting when they were venerating or going on pilgrimage, etc. At the Shweleik U Pagoda the women folks were found at handing the lotus flower and worshipping pagoda and they were painted in reddish brown colors. They had alternated waist but their facial appearance are same as those of the men folks. But they did not have moustache and beard, giving lesser signs that they were women. They Kyansitta Umin was a building of the Bagan Period but the murals in it rare done at the Late Bagan times. The worshipping women figure in the Kyansitta Umin was the result of a handicraft art. This women figure wrapped body with a long shawl. She wore armlets, wristlets, ear plugs, etc. The Htmain (sarong) are reddish brown and her body was painted in cream. In comparison of the two women figures in their worshipping altitude, it is worth of note that they had changes of their clothing in the two phases from the Early Bagan Phase and the Post Bagan Phase.

In painting, the line drawing or sketching in black in brown or deep cream on the upper level over-whelmed. At the Later Phase, they used yellow, green, red and white color or their mixture is used. The artistic techniques are the Myanmar own imagination and own cultural heritage. The artistic tractate their subjects especially in dealing with shrines and stupas, they gave their alteration to the contemporary events which have become the reflection of their times.

The paintings of the Buddha's life can evoke the un looker's mind-eye, increasing their donation, their chastity and their enthusiasm. They can be election evidence of evil things. They educate those ignorant persons or those who did not have knowledge in religious matters.

Such perpetual heritage of art is real Myanmar customs and traditions. With regard to the perpetual preservation of these Myanmar characters, the genuine Myanmar murals for later generation of Myanmar life and is country bound to be our duty.



Fig.12 Buddha's life and the dress belonging to the Konbaung Period, Thayetkin Pagoda

### Conclusion

Bagan region was erected from 11<sup>th</sup> CE century to CE 13<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to the Bagan Period architecture, the Post Bagan, Pinya Period, Innwa Period , Nyaungyan Period and Konbaung Period architecture were also found in this region. In the early history of Myanmar, the mural painting of Myanmar art had been influenced by Indian culture and civilization. Later, the

arts of the mural painting were used own culture and style. The most depiction in painting of the Buddhist birth stories from the Bagan period to the later time include the Buddhist nativity scene, Enlightenment scene with his victory an attainment of Bodhi tree and golden throne, the first sermon , the taming of Nalagiri elephant etc. In addition to the Buddhist scene and stories on the murals, these are the other celestial beings such as spirits, Brahma, arched, kings and princes, the royal counters, queens and princess, royal harems, palatial buildings, landscapes, human lives and manners, horses and elephants, *keinari*, *keinara*, *harsa*, ducks the musicians and dancers, the *kanote* or floral designs, lotus flowers and diaper paintings. All these scenes and sights were painted in murals. The art of painting was dear to have been developed by unique of the religion. Its subject matters are the Buddhavam and its jatakas, Cariya Pitaka, Vimara Vutthu, Peta Vutthu, Apadain and their commentary and they are the most prolific subjects.

#### Acknowledgement

First express deep sense of gratitude to Professor/Head Daw Tin Tin Win, Head of the Department of Archaeology, Yadanabon University, who gave trainee a lot of archaeological knowledge not only theoretically inside the classroom but also practically approach at the archaeological site of Bagan.

#### Reference

- |                             |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Aung Kyaing,u               | ပုဂံခေတ်ဗိသုကာလက်ရာများ, ( <i>Architectures of Bagan Period</i> ), Yangon, Aung Chan Tha Press, 1993                                                                 |
| Maung Maung Thein           | ပုရပိုက်ပန်းချီလေ့လာချက်, ( <i>Study of Parapike Painting</i> ), Yangon, Sarpay Beikman, First edition, 2001                                                         |
| Myint Swe,U                 | ငါးရာ့ငါးဆယ်စာရင်းကျယ်", ( <i>Inventory of 550 Jatakas Stories</i> ), Yangon, Yonkyichet Sarpay, 2002                                                                |
| Myo Nyunt, U                | ဝိဇ္ဇာကတ်တော်လာ ပုဂံခေတ်နံရံဆေးရေးပန်းချီ, ( <i>Bagan's Murals from Pitakats</i> ), Ministry of Culture, Department of Archaeology and National Muesum, Yangon, 2014 |
| Myo Nyunt, U                | ပုဂံဒေသရှိ နှောင်းခေတ်ဗိသုကာနှင့်အနုလက်ရာများ ( <i>The later period of Architecture and Arts in Bagan</i> ), Yangon, Yone Kyi Chet Press, 2007                       |
| U Myat Kyaw<br>and San Lwin | မြတ်ဗုဒ္ဓပါဝစနအဘိဓာန်, <i>A Pali-yanmar-English Dictionary of the Noble Words of the Lord Buddha</i> ), Yangon, Okkar Kyaw Press, April, 2002                        |

