

## **Buddha Thrones found in mural paintings of Bagan Periods**

**Bo Ma\***

### **Abstract**

Different kinds of thrones can be found in mural paintings of Bagan Periods. They are thrones sat by Buddha, throne sat by kings, throne sat by Prince and throne sat by Queen. Among the different kinds of thrones, Buddha thrones were variously painted in the temple from Bagan Periods. They are tray-shaped lotus throne, inverted and upturned lotus throne, throne of inverted lotus, throne with one ledge, throne with two ledges, throne with three ledges, throne with five ledges, throne with seven ledges, throne with nine ledges, throne in the shape of mountain-cape and inverted lotus throne with reredos. In this paper, Forms, meanings and aims of the thrones which were found in Bagan mural paintings were discussed.

Key words: *Kya-khan-khon* (seat bore with lotus), *Cakka* (wheel), *Kho-nan-gjou* (projecting corners of building), *Keinnaya* (mythical male bird with human face), *Aparajita* throne (handfuls of glass became the throne).

### **Introduction**

The throne sat by the Buddha is known as Aparajita throne. Different styles of throne can be found in the scenes of wall paintings of Bagan Periods. Among them, 13<sup>th</sup> century CE Buddha thrones are the most elaborate and elegant ones. Thrones with nine ledges are found only in the scene of Late Bagan Period wall paintings. Buddha thrones were used to be adorned with scroll, *sein daun*, lotus petals, inverted and upturned lotus throne and glass mosaic shaped designs. Inverted and upturned lotus was the most popular decorative design in Bagan Periods. Lotus was associated with the life of the Buddha. Different style of the Buddha's throne of Late Bagan Period can reveal the standard of the art of Bagan Periods.

### **Buddha thrones found in mural paintings of Bagan periods**

Throne is a noble seat. According to Myanmar Buddhist Iconography, there are five kinds of thrones. They are:

- (1) Throne sat by Buddha
- (2) Throne sat by Great Brahmas
- (3) Throne sat by gods and King of gods
- (4) Throne sat by kings
- (5) Throne sat by preaching monks
- (6)

#### **Thrones Sat by Buddha**

Different kinds of thrones taken by Buddha can be found in mural paintings of Bagan Periods. They are tray-shaped lotus throne, inverted and upturned lotus throne, throne of inverted lotus, throne with one ledge, throne with two ledges, throne with three ledges, throne with five ledges, throne with nine ledges, throne in the shape of mountain-cape and inverted lotus throne with reredos.

Among different thrones, lotus throne will be expounded. In Myanmar society, lotus has been venerated since many eons and it has been elaborated in various meanings and conceptions. So, lotus is a kind of flower venerated by Buddhists and it is adorned in Buddhist monuments and edifices. In fact, lotus plays a vital role in the life of the Buddha in Samsara. At the life of Sumedha Hermit, while Sumedha was aspiring towards the Enlightenment of Buddha before Dipankara Buddha, Sumitta also made a solemn wish to be a

---

\* Tutor, Dr, Department of Archaeology, Yadanabon University

partner of Sumedha with lotuses. As soon as Siddhattha was born, he walked seven steps on lotuses. Buddha reflected his sublime *Dhamma* before addressing like a lotus flower that has rooted in water but appears upon the water surface. He preached *Dhamma* discourses on lotus throne. Then the qualities of lotus are fresh, auspicious and excellent. So, lotus is an indispensable flower in Myanmar society. Then, lotus plays an essential role in Myanmar Buddhist art and architecture.

### **Tray-shaped Lotus Throne**

Figure of tray-shaped lotus throne upon which Buddha sat and preached the king and his ministers is portrayed on the east wall of ambulatory outside Abeyadana Temple in about 11<sup>th</sup> century. (See Fig-1) The shape of the throne is that there are lotus buds at the base, lotus petals in the middle and above it lotus buds and then inverted and upturned lotuses. Lotus petal is round and big. Throne is wide enough for the sitting posture of Buddha. Tray-shaped lotus throne is thick. There is a white umbrella hoisting on the Buddha.

In about 12<sup>th</sup> century, such throne is found in the depiction of display of miracle on the south wall of the west side of Lokahteikpan Temple. (See Fig-2) In the figure there is a threefold lotus throne on each of which the Buddha sits in the middle and the other two on each throne in *Dhammacakka* mudra. On each side of the Buddha there are two standing Buddhas and left Buddha holds the moon while the right Buddha holds the sun. The king and ministers sit in praying attitude at the base of the throne. The form of the lotus throne is upturned and inverted lotuses. The lotus petal in about 12<sup>th</sup> century is not as big and round as that of 11<sup>th</sup> century. Sprouts can be seen. The stalk is ordinary without any bud and leaf. The lotus petal of 12<sup>th</sup> century is not as round as that of 11<sup>th</sup> century but it is oval shape. The throne is bigger than the sitting posture of the Buddha.

Tray-shaped lotus throne of 13<sup>th</sup> century can be seen in Phayathonezu Temple. (See Fig-3). The throne is adorned with inverted and upturned lotuses but stalk has no decoration. There are three Buddhas on the throne and the middle Buddha sits in *Dhammacakka* mudra while the other two at each side display miracles. The form of the throne is circular. The lotus petal is not as big as that of 11<sup>th</sup> century and there is no sprout like that of 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Inverted Lotus Throne with Reredos**

Such throne can be found only in Phayathonezu Temple in 13<sup>th</sup> century. Buddha is depicted seated on the throne in *Bhumisparsamudra* and king, queen and ministers in *Namaskaramudra* (prayer attitude with both hands joined) at each side and below the Buddha. (See Fig-4) The form of the throne is inverted lotus and reredos, without upturned lotus. There are nine petals in inverted lotus and it is fairly wide enough for the sitting posture of Buddha. The nine petals of the lotus signify the nine attributes of Buddha or the nine factors of *Lokuttara* (supramundane), as mentioned in *Postures, vehicles and Historical Sketch of Burmese Iconography* written by Sao Htun Hmat Win.

### **Inverted and Upturned Lotus Throne**

Most inverted and upturned lotus thrones can be seen in Bagan mural paintings. A few thrones will be highlighted. In describing the throne in 12<sup>th</sup> century, the throne from the scene of the Buddha's descent from *Tavatimsa* celestial realm from Lokahteikpan Temple will be emphasized. (See Fig-5). The Buddha standing right on the stamen of inverted and upturned lotus throne came down from *Tavatimsa* realm and the Brahma held an umbrella on the right side of the Buddha while Indra carried alms-bowl on the left side. Below him, Venerable Sariputta submissively paid respect to Buddha.

Then, a lotus throne can be seen in the scene of Palileyakkka forest from Phayathonezu Temple. (See Fig-6). Buddha sits sidewise with his legs hanging down on the

floor or ground over the lotus throne on the mound. There is a lotus under his feet. At the cave there are a standing elephant and three trees at the back of the scene. On the peak, a monkey gathers honey from the beehive and then it goes before Buddha and offers the honey into the bowl submissively. Such theme can be found in Lokahteikpan Temple of 12<sup>th</sup> century. There the scene of an elephant offering lotus food is emphatically depicted while a scene of a monkey offering honey is done in Phayathonezu Temple.

The inverted and upturned lotus throne is described as *Padumapitha* in *Postures, Vehicles and Historical Sketch of Burmese Buddhist Iconography* compiled by Sao Htun Hmat Win. The seat is made into the form of *Paduma* lotus. In Myanmar vocabulary it is called *Kya-khan-khon* (seat bore with lotus), especially, any one kind of lotus among *Kumod-Lotus, Paduma-Lotus and Punnarika-Lotus, Kya-ni, Kya-nyo*.

Twofold layer of lotus throne is known as *Viswapadma* throne. A lotus upturns while another is inverted. It is known as two layers of lotus or inverted lotus and upturned lotus. It is supposed that the most common lotus among five kinds of lotuses depicted in mural paintings of Bagan Periods is *Paduma* lotus. But other kinds of lotus cannot be seen.

### **Throne with One Ledge**

Throne with one ledge is found under the images of 28 Buddhas in Bagan mural paintings. Such throne can be seen under those images in Phayathonezu Temple of 13<sup>th</sup> century. (See Fig-7). The Buddha sits on a throne with *Dhammacakka mudra* and there is a tree behind the Buddha. The shape of the throne is square and it is decorated with floral scrolls and crenellation or *Sein daun* (decorative device resembling a row of upright leaves) at corners of the throne.

### **Throne with Two Ledges**

Throne with two ledges can be seen in Tayokepyay Temple. (See Fig-8). The Buddha with *Dhammacakka mudra* is sitting on the throne. The form of the throne is square and the first step of the throne is decorated with circles in *Cakka* (wheel) and *Sein daun* and the second step with inverted and upturned lotuses. Throne having *Cakka* (wheel), according to description of Sao Htun Hmat Win, is called *Cakkasana* in *Pali*.

### **Throne with Three Ledges**

Throne with three ledges are described from Thambula Temple and Thadhamman ranthi temple. Buddha is seated with *Dhammacakka mudra* on the throne and there are two monks at each side of the Buddha in submissive posture and raised hands in prayer attitude and monks in praying attitudes below the throne. (See Fig-9). There are reredos in the throne and a tree behind reredos. The shape of the throne is square and the first step of the throne is decorated with *Kanote* floral scrolls. And then *Sein daun* can be found. The second and third steps are embellished with inverted and upturned lotuses. In the second step there is embossed line but it is smaller than inverted and upturned lotuses in the third step.

In Thadhammanranthi Temple, the Buddha is sitting with *Bhumisparsamudra* on the throne and there are one monk kneeling with raised hands in praying attitude at each side of the Buddha and four women donating alms-bowls to the Buddha below the throne. (See Fig-10). The throne is in square shape and what is different from other thrones is that there are legs. Then there is reredos in the shape of turret. The first step of the throne is decorated with lotus petals in inverted lotus while the second one with lozenge shapes. The uppermost step is embellished with lotus petals in upturned lotus. The throne is broad in the bottom and upper steps but narrow in the middle step.

### Throne with Five Ledges

Thrones with five ledges can be discovered in different forms in Bagan murals. Among them, those from Lokahteikpan Temple and Myingabar - Gubyaukgyi Temple can be mentioned. In mentioning throne from Lokahteikpan temple, a throne from the *Jataka* on the west wall of the main shrine will be said. (See Fig-11). Buddha is seated on the throne with mudra and preaching a sermon. Below the throne four monks listen to the Buddha and there are a tree behind them and another one at the back of Buddha. Throne is square shape and it is rarely found in Bagan murals. The first step at the below of the throne is embellished with *Kanote* floral scrolls and the second step with slope-formed and decorated with lotus petals in inverted lotus. The third step is decorated with red lozenge and the fourth is with slope and floral ascents and the uppermost is lotus petals in inverted lotus. There are *Sein daun* at corners of the fifth step. Such throne cannot be found in 11<sup>th</sup> as well as 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Throne with five ledges is referred to *Sangiti* scene from Myingabar - Gu byaukgyi Temple. (See Fig-12). In the painting, a certain Arahats sits on a throne with raised hands and likely holds a yak-tail fly-whisk in his hand. There are four monks kneeling with raised hands at each side of the monk and below the throne are the king and ministers in *Anjalimudra*. This throne is a kind of ovolo throne called angular projection (*Kho nan gjou*). Angular projection (*Kho nan gjou*) means projecting corners of building. In this throne, there are four angular projections (*Kho nan gjou*) and lozenge shapes are decorated at each step. There are *Sein daun* at the first and fourth step. The throne is wide at the upper and lower parts but narrow in the middle. Throne with angular projection (*Kho nan gjou*) seems to be introduced in about 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### Throne with Seven Ledges

Throne with seven ledges cannot be found in 11<sup>th</sup> century CE but different forms of such throne can be seen in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. Among them, a throne from Tatkalay Temple in 12<sup>th</sup> century CE (See Fig-13) and another from Phayathonezu Temple in 13<sup>th</sup> century CE are described. (See Fig-14)

The throne from Tatkalay temple is minutely employed like glass mosaic. Buddha sits on the throne with *Bhumisparsa mudra* and one monk kneeling in *Anjalimudra* at each side of Buddha. The first step of the throne is laid with *Kanote* floral scrolls and inverted lotus and upturned lotus are carved in central embossed line. Lozenge is embellished in the third step and inverted lotus and upturned lotus are carved with central embossed line in the fourth step. In the fifth step is decorated with lozenge and the sixth step is carved with inverted and upturned lotuses. The seventh step is beautified with upturned lotus. Lotus petals found in the throne are smaller than those of other thrones but the workmanship is done in detail. Then, others have *Sein daun*. This throne includes adventitious root together with *Sein daun*. Throne is bigger than sitting posture and more square-shaped.

Another throne can be found in Phayathonezu Temple and it is not painted. Buddha is seated on the throne with *Bhumisparsamudra* and gods venerate Buddha in *Anjali mudra*. It is not wholly painted but seems to be just depicting. By studying the painting, the art of painting in Bagan Period can be studied. The throne is of seven ledges with reredos. There is no decoration at each step of the throne but there are *Sein daun* and adventitious root. The throne and sitting posture is fixed size.

### Throne with Nine Ledges

Throne with nine ledges cannot be seen in Bagan murals in about 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century CE. A few of such depictions are found in 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. Such throne is found in Thambula Temple. (See Fig-15). Throne stands under the Bo tree and there is reredos. *Keinnaya* (mythical male bird with human face) figures are decorated at each side of the top of reredos.

Buddha is seated on the throne with *Bhumisparsamudra*. A celestial being carries an umbrella on the right side of Buddha while another one holds a conch on the left side of Buddha. The first step of the throne is decorated with *Kanote* floral scrolls and the second step with inverted and upturned lotuses. The third step is carved with circular shapes and the fourth is with inverted and upturned lotuses. The fifth is embellished with lozenge while the sixth with circular shapes. And the seventh is with inverted and upturned lotuses. The eighth step is with *Kanote* floral scrolls and the uppermost step with rows of inverted and upturned lotuses. There are embossed lines in rows of inverted and upturned lotuses. There are *Sein daun* in the first step and the throne is bigger than sitting posture. Such throne is known as *Aparazita* throne in the book of Sao Htun Hmat Win. While sitting under the Bo tree the Buddha received eight handfuls of grass. These handfuls of grass became the throne and it is called *Aparazita* throne. If there are nine ledges in a throne which represent the attributes of Buddha, it is regarded as *Aparazita* throne. When a throne is ordinary, it is *Bodhiasana*. Such throne is not a royal throne but a special throne dealt only with Buddha.

### **Throne in the Shape of Mountain-Cape**

Throne in the shape of mountain-cape can be mostly seen in murals of Bagan Periods. Such throne is found in *Hatthipala Jataka* in Nagayon Temple of 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. (See Fig-16). In the scene *Bodhisatta Hatthipala* hermit is seated on the throne with *Dhammacakka* mudra under a tree and preaching a sermon. Hermits whose hair is knotted at each parietal bone of their head are kneeling and hearing the discourse at each side and celestial beings are kneeling, raising their hands and hearing the discourse below the throne. The shape of the throne is that many capes are made one layer after layer. So it looks like a mountain. A stone slab is laid on the mountain-shaped throne and *Bodhisatta* is seated on the throne and addressing a discourse.

The thrones mentioned above are those on which Buddha was seated in Bagan mural paintings.

### **Conclusion**

It is said that religions seem to be syncretism in Bagan. But, according to mural paintings, Theravada Buddhism flourishes more forcefully and greatly than Hinduism, etc. Among thrones taken by the Buddha, the Brahma, Gods, Sakka, Kings, Queens, Judges and Monks, thrones sat by the Buddha are the commonest scene. It implies that those of Bagan Periods were well-versed in teachings of Theravada Buddhism. Then, there are different kinds of thrones such as tray-shaped lotus throne, throne with three ledges, throne with five ledges, throne with nine ledges, etc. The numbers represent some essence of the Buddha's teaching. For example, three stands for *Ti-ratana* (Triple Gem), five represents five mentors and nine for nine attributes of the Buddha. So, symbols representing thrones seem to be appreciated by artists as well as devotees.

### References

- Murals in Bagan: *Abeyadana and Lawkahteik pan*, ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, Myanmar, 2010.
- Mg Kyin Pann(Myinka pa), *ယုတ်မုတ်မုတ် (Nandapyinnya Temple)*, Pres Aung Tagon, Feb 2014.
- Nandar Thein Zan, *“လှေ” (Lotus)*, Yangon, Hlaine Thit sarpay, First Published, 1992.
- Sao Htun Hmat Win, *Postures, Vehicles and Historical Sketch of Burmese Buddhist Iconography*, Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1980.
- T. Richard Bluton, *Hindu Art*, London, British Museum Publication Ltd, Second impression, 1994.
- Tin Aung Thwin , *“ ဝိသုဒ္ဓိယုတ်မုတ်မုတ် ” (The Golden Lotus Being the World Embellishment)*, Yangon, Nyan Lin Dhamma-sarpadetha, First Edition, June 1985.
- U Myo Nyunt, *ယုတ်မုတ်မုတ် မြေပုံများနှင့် ယုတ်မုတ်မုတ် မြေပုံများ (Bagan Mural Paintings From Buddhist Texts)*, Ministry of Culture, February 2011.

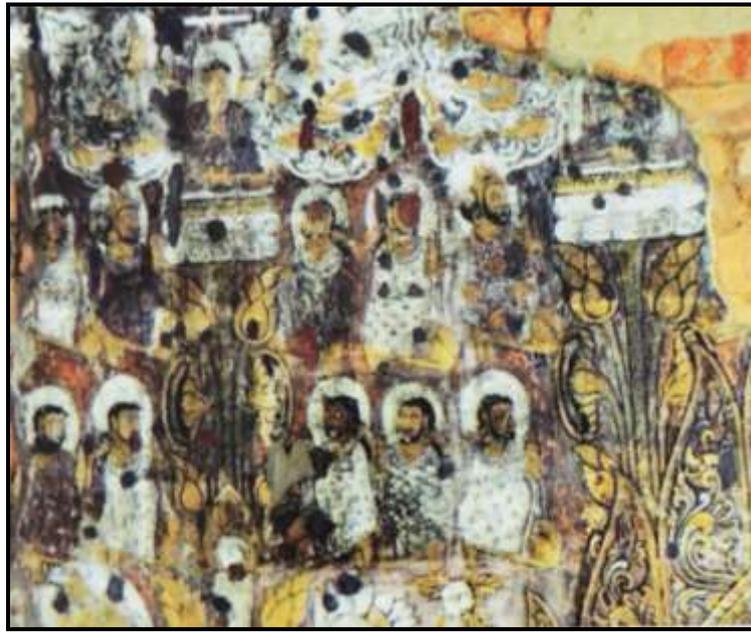


Fig.1 Tray-Shaped Lotus Throne from 11<sup>th</sup> Century CE, Abeyadana Temple  
(Photo by Researcher)

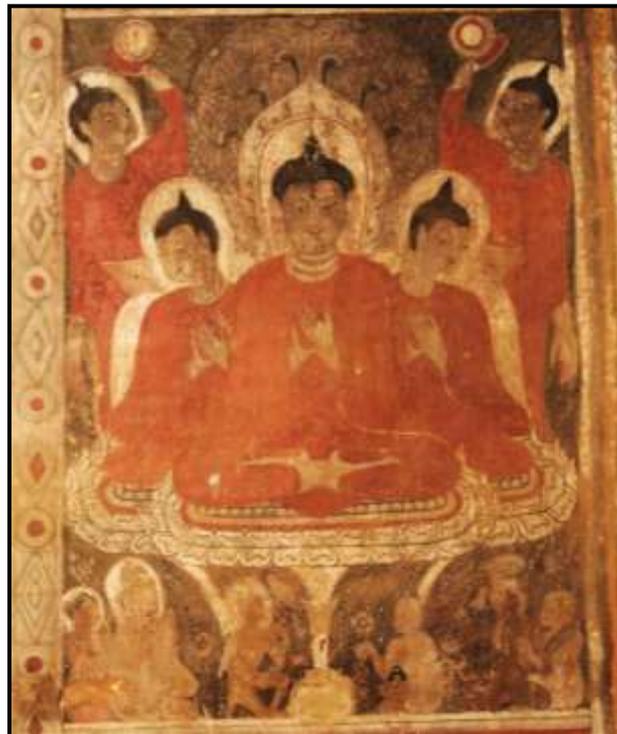


Fig.2 Tray-Shaped Lotus Throne from Lokahteinpan Temple, 12<sup>th</sup> Century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.3 Tray-Shaped Lotus Throne from Phayathonezu Temple, 13<sup>th</sup> Century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)

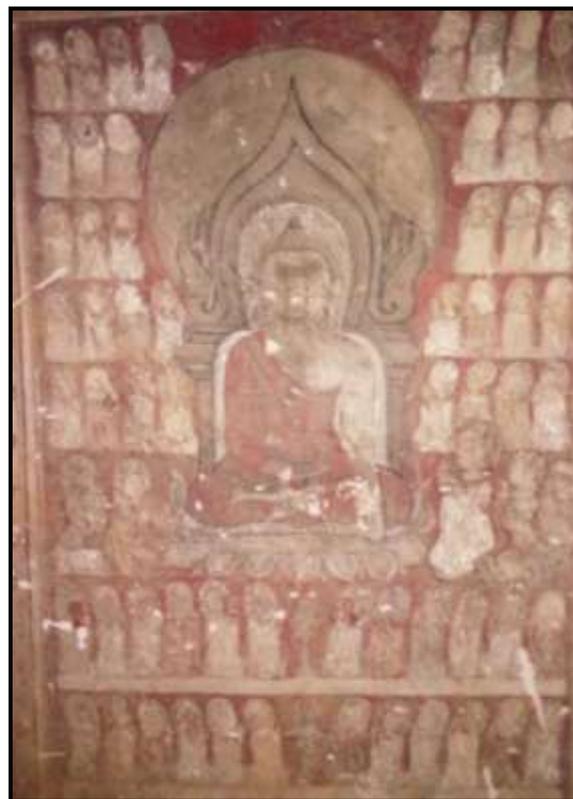


Fig.4 Inverted Lotus Throne with Reredos from Phayathonezu Temple,  
13<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)

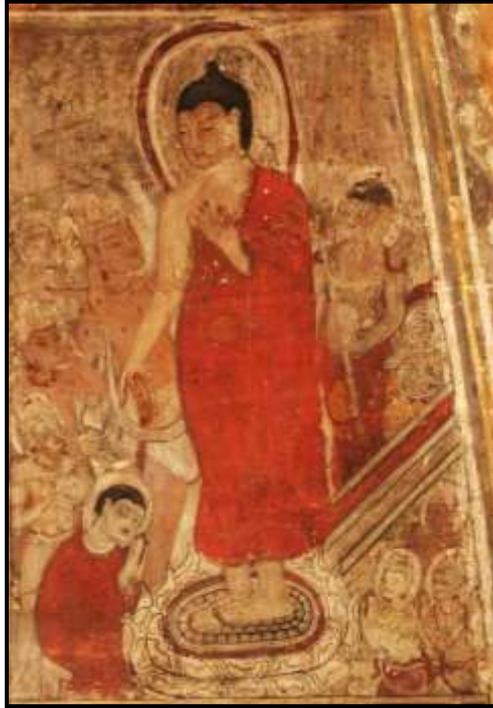


Fig5 Inverted and Upturned Lotus Throne from Lokahteikpan Temple,  
12<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.6 Inverted and Upturned Lotus Throne from Phayathonezu Temple,  
13<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.7 Throne with One Ledge from Phayathonezu Temple, 13<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.8 Throne with Two Ledges from Tayokepyay Temple, 13<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.9 Throne with Three Ledges from Thambula Temple, 13<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.10 Throne with Three Ledges from Thadhammanranthi Temple, 13<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.11 Throne with Five Ledges from Lokahteikpan Temple, 12<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.12 Throne with Five Ledges from Myingabar Gubyaukgyi Temple,  
12<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.13 Throne with Seven Ledges fromTatkalay Temple,12<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.14 Throne with Seven Ledges fromPhayathonezu Temple,13<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.15 Throne with Nine Ledges from Thambula Temple, 13<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)



Fig.16 Throne in the Shape of Mountain- Cape from Nagayon Temple,  
11<sup>th</sup> century CE  
(Photo by Researcher)

