

A Study on the Architecture of Maha Loka Marazein (Kuthotaw) Pagoda in Mandalay

Phyu Phyu San*

Abstract

This paper deals with the architecture of Maha Loka Marazein (Kuthotaw) Pagoda in Mandalay. Mandalay has been a city which had prioritized Buddhism since the reign of successive Myanmar Kings. During King Mindon's reign, he had patronized the promotion of the Buddha *Sāsana*. Mandalay Yadanapon Royal Capital was founded by King Mindon in 1856 simultaneous with the building of Maha Loka Marazein (Kuthotaw) Pagoda. Furthermore, Buddhism had prospered well. Myanmar had close relation with Sri Lanka with special respect in religious affairs. In order to promote the Buddha *Sāsana*, Pagodas and Stupas were built and King Mindon's Maha Loka Marazein (Kuthotaw) Pagoda has the same architectural design, probably following the traditional model.

Key words: construction plan, architectural design, conception

Introduction

As Mandalay is a site where the Theravada Buddhism has been prospering, quite a considerable number of religious edifices exist in Mandalay. As soon as a Myanmar King succeeded to the throne, he took the opportunity of assuming the prestigious title of the patron of the Buddha *Sāsana*. Of Seven Kings¹ who prioritized the role of the Buddha *Sāsana* in the history of Myanmar, King Mindon was among them. During his reign, the King took patronage for propagation and purification of the *Sāsana*. The Dhamma Vinaja Order was issued to carry out the religious affairs: forcing the fake monks to return to layman-hood, ordering the scholars to copy down the *Pitaka* Scriptures, and editing the errors, inscribing the scriptures on slabs of alabaster, building new pagodas, renovating, the old ruined pagodas and monasteries, raising the golden pinnacle to the Shwedagon Pagoda, and sending his officers with cash donations to Buddhagaya for renovating the ruined pagodas and monasteries there. The grand total of various expenditure was recorded as 226 millions.² This shows King Mindon's religious endeavors for the promotion of Buddha *Sāsana*.

* . Associate Professor, Dr, Department of History, Yadanabon University

¹ King Anawrahta (1044-1077), King Kyaswa (1234-1250), King Dhammaceti (1471-1492), King Hantahwaddy Hsin Phyu Mya Shin (1550-1581), King Rakinemin Razaigy (1593-1612), King Badon (1782-1819), King Mindon (1853-1878)

² U Tin, *Myanmar-min Oke-choke-pon-Sardan hnint Bodaw Phaya ei Razathat Khaw-thaw Ameint-taw Tan-gyi* (Treatise on Administration of Myanmar King and Bodaw Phaya's Great Royal Order called Criminal Law), Vol.V, Yangon, Seit Ku Cho Cho Press, 2012, p.370 (Henceforth: Tin, 2012)

In 1838, there broke out a violent earthquake in the royal capital of Amarapura, so the pagodas at the corners of the city, the city wall and the city doors got destroyed. Moreover, many pagodas and people's houses outside the royal palace were destroyed. This was one of the factors that led King Mindon to build a new capital in a new site.³ In 1852, after the Second Anglo-Myanmar War, the king may have decided to leave the site of the defeat and build a new site. So, Mandalay Yadanapon Royal Capital was founded by King Mindon (1853-1878) in 1856. One *pya* in local term is 50 *Tars* (525 feet) wide. As the city extends 12 *pyas* from east to west, and 12 *pyas* from north to south, 144 plots of the urban area of 525 square feet had been defined. 16 plots at the centre were devoted to the royal palace while on the other 128 plots were settled king, queens, ministers, rich people and the common people.⁴ During his reign, Buddhism had prospered well since he had patronized the promotion of the Buddha *Sāsana*.⁵ The Myanmar Kings who ruled Mandalay built pagodas and monasteries, and assumed the prestigious title of the patron of the Buddha *Sāsana*.

A pagoda originated from a cemetery. When a dear person departed, a pinnacle on flowers were inserted at the top of the mound, which later took the form of a pagoda, as noted by the ancient Indian historians.⁶ The word "*Ceti*" derived from the *Pali* word "*Ceti-ja*", which means object of veneration.⁷ Pagodas, cave temples and the Buddha images were built in veneration in dedication to Lord Buddha. There are four kinds of *Ceti*, namely *Paribhoga Ceti*, *Dhatu Ceti*, *Dhamma Ceti* and *Uddissa Ceti*.⁸ The *Ceti* and the cave temple, though both being religious monuments, differs in basic concepts: the access can be made into the cave temple type, but not into a pagoda, which has no hollow inside;⁹ the former carries the implications of a monastery while the latter, those of a cemetery. But it is observed that enshrining the sacred relics and having the Buddha image for reverence or worship have been done in both a pagoda type and a cave temple type. Since the Theravada Buddhism has been the religious belief handed down from generation to generation in Myanmar, the majority of the Myanmar people have been the devotees of Theravada Buddhism. During Yadanapon period, since the King noted as the patron of the Buddha *Sāsana*, the people his royal subjects joined in the religious affairs with all heart and soul.

On 23 May 1859, King Mindon built the city, the moat, Maha Loka Marazein (Kuthotaw) Pagoda, Maha Atula Veyan Monastery, Thudhamma congregation hall, Ordination hall and *Pitakat- Taik* under the supervision of the ministers, *Atwin-wun*, *Wun-*

³ Natmauk Tun Shein, *Win-twe-hnint- te- khe-thit-Min-ne- pyi* (Royal City founded with ritual ceremony), Mandalay, Mandalay Daily Press, 2001,P.48

⁴ *Mandalay Yadanapon Ne-pyi-taw Dethandra Yazawin Article*, (Mandalay Yadanapon Ne-pyi-taw Regional History Article), Hanthawaddy Magazine, February, p.232

⁵ Daw Myint Myint Than, *Mindon-min-let-htet Thar-tha-na-ye-yar Phwè-si Oke-choke-pon*, *Pyinnya Padetha Sarsaung*, Vol. VII, part iii, October, 1972, p.105

⁶ Dr. Zaw Tun, *Ceti-Pahto Thamaing* (History of the Stupa), *Pyinnya Padetha Sarsaung*, Vol.X, part ii, June, 1975, p.22

⁷ Ashin-Aubasabhivamsa, *Thu-te-tha-na Tha-yok pya A-bhi-dan* (The Research Dictionary), Yangon, Pyinnya Narda Press, 1955, p.210

⁸ Ashin Pandita, *Ti-pe-da-ka Vi- nic-ca-ya Kyan*, Vol.I, Mandalay, Tampawaddy Press, 1908, p.399

⁹ Dr Than Tun, *Khit- haung Myanmar Yazawin* (The Ancient History), Yangon, Dagon Sarpay Press, 1964, p. 254 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1964)

htauk, and court officials.¹⁰ During King Mindon's reign, the religious monuments were built simultaneously with the founding of the royal capital and the other five construction sites were concerned with religious affairs, so it can be said that King Mindon prioritized the Buddhist customs and culture.

Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda¹¹ is located on the southeast of Mandalay Hill and northeast corner of the royal palace. Being epitomized as the meritorious deed of King Mindon, it is also known as the Kuthotaw Pagoda. Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda was built under the supervision of *Pabè Mingyi U Hmo*. King Mindon appointed him as *Pabè Wungyi*-minister of iron works and *Thei-nat Wungyi*-minister of musketeers.¹² It was built on 23 May, 1859 simultaneously with the founding of the royal city and was completed in June, 1862.¹³ On 19 July 1862, golden finial hoisting ceremony was held on grand scale with gun salute.¹⁴ Besides the three firewalls, the circumference of the basement of Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda was about 100 feet and the height of pagoda measuring about 80 feet.¹⁵ Two replicas of sacred tooth relics of Buddha were brought from Sri Lanka and enshrined in the second relic chamber of Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda.¹⁶ So, the Kuthotaw Pagoda belongs to the *Dhatu Ceti* type.

The structure of the Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda is as follows: on the plinth of the base platform are four lion statues. There are three platforms call *paccaya*: in the corners of the first and second platforms are placed the pots, and in the corners the third platform are brick miniature pagodas. The three platforms have been accessible terrace. Moulded rings, assuming conical form, inverting and spreading lotus petals, tapering plantain bud and finial topped the bell-shaped dome.¹⁷ There are four accessible terraces climbing up to the third platform. At the top of the base terrace, on both side of the staircase, are figures of *ma-gan*-mythical sea monster, with a figure of *manusiha*-sphinx placed below the chin of the creature, as if lifting up its chin. As the beginning of the middle platform is an arched entrance over the *ma-gan* handrail with two figures of ogre. The arched entrance has a base decorated with a tier-top and floral designs which had the figures of two peacocks instead of the usual *tu-yin* (vertical ornamental embellishment) design. On both side of the flower base on three lion

¹⁰ Si Thu Maung Maung Kyaw, *Mandalay Myo-ti-nan-ti Sar-tan* (Paper on the construction and erection of Mandalay City and Palace), Mandalay, Yadanar Dipan Press, 1959, p.159 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Kyaw, 1959)

¹¹ See photo (1)

¹² Hmaw Bi Saya Thein, *Myanmar Wun gyi Hmugyi-mya A-htoke-pat-ti* (Biographies of Myanmar Court Officials), Yangon, Myanmar Gonyi Press, 1999, p.49

¹³ Shwekaingtha, *Ahnint-tayar-pye Mandalay* (Hundred Anniversary Mandalay) Mandalay, Kyipwaye Press, 2007, p.262 (Henceforth: Shwekaingth, 2007)

¹⁴ Dr Than Tun, *Ne-hle Yazawin* (Field Research on Myanmar History), Vol.III, Yangon, Nant-thar Press, 1969, p.159 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1969)

¹⁵ U Maung Maung Tin, *Konbang -set Maha Yazawin-taw-gyi* (Great Chronicle of Konbaung Dynasty), Vol.III, Yangon, Historical Research Department, 2004, p.211 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 2004)

¹⁶ Ashin Pannissa, *Mandalay Da-go-kyi Pha-ya-mya Tha-maing* (History of famous Pagodas in Mandalay), Mandalay pitakataw Hlyatsit Press, 1960, p.104

¹⁷ Field Study

statues diagonally in parallel.¹⁸ Such an architectural design belonged to that of building pagodas during Bagan Period.

Though the Maha Loka Marazein is of traditional architecture of pagoda, its entrance of the accessible terrace is interesting. The archway is adorned with the celestial figures, lion, peacock and *ma-gan*. The peacock is the symbol of the sun; in other words, national emblem of the Kingdom of Myanmar. Both ends of arch- pediments were decorated with three slender pilasters each. The central pilasters which was the highest one has a figure of deva. Building such figures of lion statues, as well as figures of *manusiha* (sphinx), at the corner of the platforms, may carry the implications of commemorating the enlightenment of Lord Buddha. Naturally, the lion statues were placed in the corner of the base platform. The meaning of *ma-gan* creature can be observed in the handrails of the religious monuments; so can the figures of celestials. The number of the relief lines of the pagoda is seven: the line of flat relief alternates with that of round one. The pennant- shaped vane on the top of finial was decorated with the figures of Brahminy duck, crow, parrot and rooster.¹⁹

The architectural style of the Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda can be compared with the styles of the Shwezigon, Mingalar *Ceti* of Bagan. The closest models of comparisons are the Aungmyei Loka *Ceti* (Sagaing) of King Badon, the Mahavijira *Ceti* (Amarapura) of King Sagaing and the Eindawya *Ceti* (Mandalay) of King Bagan. King Mindon's Kuthotaw Pagoda has the same architectural style, probably following the traditional model.

On the entrance of the four passageways of the Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda, at the western entrance, is raised a tier roof structure called *pyat-that*, adorned with the curving line and the lion statues²⁰. The teak door fixed at the firewall of the entrance is so huge and heavy, with wood carvings on the frame.²¹ As the pagoda was surrounded by three walls, known as *Tadaing Mi-ta*, the sacred precincts were well protected not only from fire and flood but also from the impurity of mundane world.

Inside the three walls are the tiered-roof brick *pyat- thats* that house 729 slabs of inscriptions on which the Buddhist Scriptures were inscribed. On 14 October, 1860, under the supervision of the Venerable *Sayadaws* and officers, the inscribing of the scriptures on the marble slabs of the Sakyin Hill came to completion.²² The slabs of inscription are: 111 slabs on *Vinaya*, 208 slabs on the *Abhidhamma*, and 410 slabs on *Suttanta Pitika* (altogether 729). There are 42 shrines housing the inscriptions within the first wall, 168 shrines within the second wall and 519 shrines within the third wall.²³

During King Mindon's reign, there existed good relationships between Ceylon and Myanmar. The architectural style of the inscription shrines at Maha Loka Marazein gives the impression of Sinhalese style: the body of the *Ceti*, has a bell-shape; square block above the

¹⁸ See photo (2)

¹⁹ Field Study

²⁰ See photo (3)

²¹ See photo (4)

²² Shwekaingtha, 2007, 262

²³ Historical Record Inscription, Reverse, lines,45-47

bell-shape, the repository of sacred relics and the finial.²⁴ The pagodas built in Myanmar in the model of Sinhalese pagodas are the Pepin *Kyaung Ceti* of Bagan and Sapada *Ceti*, Nyaung-U.²⁵ The round shape of pagoda at the top of the inscription shrine in the Maha Loka Marazein precinct resembles the shape of gourd; at the base, the down lotus, instead of the repository of sacred relics, the octagonal shape. Below are the *Ceti* with corner proportions, the base throne; down below are the platforms and the temple. The temple has four risings at the entrances; inside, the inscription slab is erected. There was another inscription slab erected within the first enclosure, which recorded how the copying of *Pitaka* on stone slab was done.²⁶

Inside the precinct of the firewalls, are grown shady star flowers trees. Outside around, to the east is Maha Surinrika Garden; to the west, the A-yan-khan. Garden, eleven brick foundation public rest houses between that garden and the west firewalls; to the south, two ponds, and eleven brick foundation public rest houses; and to the north, twelve brick foundation public rest houses. It is the laudable endeavor of King Mindon who built the repository of the Buddhist Scripture together with the pagoda. Besides, the landscape composition of gardens and public rest houses may be well noted for the good planning.

Conclusion

To sum up, Mandalay is the city where the Myanmar Kings of Konbaung Dynasty had made the last seat. Since Mandalay is the city where the majority of the Buddhists live, a considerable number of pagodas, stupas and monasteries have existed. As soon as a Myanmar King succeeded to the throne, he took the opportunity of assuming the prestigious title of the patron of the Buddha *Sāsanā*. Of seven kings who prioritized the role of the Buddha *Sāsanā* in the history of Myanmar, King Mindon was among them. In 1838, there broke out a violent earthquake in the royal capital of Amarapura, so the pagodas at the corners of the city, the city wall and the city doors got destroyed. This was one of the factors that led King Mindon to build a new capital in a new site. So, Mandalay Yadanapon Royal Capital was founded by King Mindon in 1856. During his reign, Buddhism has prospered well, since he had patronized the promotion of the Buddha *Sāsanā*. King Mindon built the Maha Loka Marazein (Kuthotaw) Pagoda with three walls. What is noteworthy it resembles the structure of the Shwezigon pagoda of Bagan. It has lion statues and platforms, etc. Especially in King Mindon's reign, there took place the relationship between Ceylon and Myanmar. It is assumed that architectural designs of the inscription caves in the pagoda precincts may have received the influence of Sinhalese architecture.

Acknowledgement

²⁴ Pictorial Gride to Bagan, Yangon, Government Printing, 1925, p.8

²⁵ U Aung Thaw, Historical Sites in Burma, Yangon, Ministry of Culture, 1972, p-46

²⁶ Field study

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Photo (1)

Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda



Photo by Researcher From Southern side

Photo (2)

Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda's Accessible Terrace



Photo by Researcher From Southern side

Photo (3)

The Arch Gateway of the Outer Wall of Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda



Photo by Researcher From Southern side

Photo (4)

Wooden Sculpture of the Gate on Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda



Photo by Researcher From Southern side