

# **Cup Pottery from Prehistoric Sites in Upper Myanmar**

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# Cup Pottery from Prehistoric Sites in Upper Myanmar\*

## Abstract

Prehistoric archaeological sites in Myanmar reveal their respective pottery assemblages in material culture. There are considerable numbers of stylistic types of pottery which indicate the similarity or dissimilarity in cultural practice on the one hand, and technological achievements of the communities concerned on the other. Among them, one of the interesting type come from cup pottery type, designated with elongated pedestal or short pedestal vessels. This type of pottery was found in the Metal Age Cultural Context from Mu, Myint Nge (Dohtawady), and Samon Valleys, particularly more associated to Iron Age Cultural phase. As the external context, the same type of pottery has been documented from India, China, and Southeast Asia. It shows that there is cultural relation between the communities of the regions, and even indicates to the social rank practiced in ritual activities of Metal Age people in the prehistoric landscapes of Myanmar.

**Key words:** pottery assemblages; stylistic type; cup pottery; elongated pedestal; short pedestal; Metal Age Cultural Context; external context; cultural relation; social rank.

## Introduction

Pottery was used as an important thing in the whole archaeological culture of human communities. In Myanmar, the potsherds and pieces of pottery are expensively found in Neolithic sites, and later strongly evidenced in the Metal Age sites in Chindwin, Mu, Myit Nge, Ayeyarwady, and Samon Valleys. In these sites, potteries are found as the grave goods associated with the human skeletons remains. Though these potteries have been abundantly found at these sites, the absolute date for the pottery culture of Metal Age context cannot be assigned till to the present, the relative date for them can give from the comparing of their typological feature and technique, and other associated things. In fact, in the Metal Age sites, potteries are abundantly found among the other finds in various forms and shapes. Particularly, their forms show up

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the different character from one site to the others. Generally, the Metal Age pottery types can be classified into large pottery type, globular pottery type, spur pottery type, medium pottery type, carinated pottery type, cup pottery type, cylindrical pottery type, small pottery type, and bowl, dish and plates. Among them, cup pottery is one of the interesting types to the whole pottery assemblage of the Metal Age Cultural Context in the prehistoric landscape of the region. So, in this paper, the typological feature of cup pottery has been discussed by details study based on their stylistic form and statistic approach.

### **Typological feature of cup pottery type**

In stylistic approach, cup pottery type vessels found in the Metal Age sites in Myanmar can be divided into two groups: cup pottery with elongated pedestal; and cup pottery with short pedestal forms (Fig. 1).

#### **(a) Cup Pottery with Elongated Pedestal**

By detail account on cup pottery type with elongated pedestal, it is composed of three main parts: base, neck and upper vessel – the former two are usually composited. The bases are usually wider than the upper part of cup. The ends of the bases are flaring up to the upper and appear as the small groove. In some of the pottery style, the small holes can be seen at the base, designated with two perforations beside by beside; and some with three holes that are placed the two holes at the upper row and the rest is at the middle of the first row (Fig.2 and also Fig 1). However, the pot with three holes in base is rare than those with two holes.

Normally, as pedestal matching with the base, the neck parts are made by elongated form and the girth is narrow on a solid stick, then gradually tapering from

the joint with the base to the upper part (Fig. 3). Especially, the joints portions either of base or upper cut to the middle parts of pedestal have taken their exposure in proportionate arrangement. In fact, the majority of the base portion set up the neck part of pedestal has been found in pottery assemblage from Taungthaman site (Sein Maung Oo 1970-71, 1971-72; Ei Myat Khaing 2014).

In the upper part, the cup sets above either short or elongated pedestal on the widening base. It is occasionally fashioned like a pan or cup. At the pan shape, the joined places neck and upper part is neat and fine and at the middle of this upper part found an external ridge. The upper part of some of this type can be found in regularly slight curve with the concave forms (Fig. 4).

In the shape of cup in upper part, it is designated by the rounded base and at the middle of it is made with a ridge and the spurs side by side to hand and then gradually narrow to the end without the rim. Deeply shallow cup with shortly flanged rim is mounted over it. As the distinctive form added to this type, there are type vessels with one base with three necks and three upper parts which have been documented from Myin-oo-hle site in Samon Valley (San Winn 2009: 108-122, Fig.5). At Halin in Mu Valley, the variant style of this type sees with four necks in Mu Valley (Myint Aung, 2007, Fig.6). This form of pottery may be assumed as oil lumps in the ceremonial purpose or ritual function.

### **(b) Cup Pottery with short pedestal**

This type of cup pottery is generally manufactured by the two portions such as base or short pedestal, and upper part in which either the form of cup, pan, or bowl is mounted (See Fig.7, and 8). Normally, this cup pottery is particularly thick and

mainly fine fabric mostly in gray colour and some of red color. The bases of short pedestal pot are wider than the upper part, but some of these pots can be found in the same size the base and upper part. At this form of cup pottery type does not found the holes as the long pedestal type of pottery. The lower part of base is wide and gradually narrow liked concave joint. But some of this cup type pottery is extensively narrow from the base to the joint of upper portion – which has been found in Hnaw Kan site from Samon Valley culture (San Winn 2009: 154-167, Fig.9). In the feature of the bowl to the upper part of this pottery type, it takes as round incurved bowl with immediately rim with a flight ridge and rim is featureless This type of bowl can be found only at the short pedestal pot. The difference between large neck and narrow neck that may be differ the technical changes or technical weak and strong between prehistoric sites. The upper part of short pedestal type pottery is not many differ with the long pedestal pottery type.

### **Distribution of Cup pottery type and Statistic Accounts in Metal Age Sites in upper Myanmar**

Cup pottery type is distinctive style among many other type-vessels that found at the prehistoric archaeological sites in Myanmar. In fact, the evidenced finds for cup pottery type have been found particularly in three major groups of Metal Age Cultural Context - which orientated in the main river valleys of Mu, Myint Nge, and Samon. There are Halin in Mu Valley, Taunghaman in Myint Nge Valley, and Kokkohkala, Myin-oo-hle, U-Mhin, Ywa Htin, Hnaw Kan, and Myauk-Le in Samon River valley (Sann Win 2009, See Map. 1).

According to the exposure available from reported information, cup pottery type vessels were found in a several number of Metal Age Sites in the region. There

are 12 vessels from Taungthaman, 1 vessel in Kokkokhala, 6 pots from Myin-oo-hle, 1 vessel from U-Mhin, 3 vessels from Ywa Htin, 3 vessels from Hnaw Kan, 4 vessels from Myauk-le, and 3 vessels from Halin (Graph 1). But some site is found only short pedestal pots without elongated pedestal pot type.

In dimension, to short type of cup pottery, the wide of the rim is found to be 22 inches in maximum and 3.3 inches in minimum. The maximum base of this type belongs to 8 inches and the minimum to 0.4 inched. The maximum high is about 6.8 inches and the minimum is 1.7 inches. Particularly at the elongated pedestal cup pottery, the rim diameter is found between 8.3 inches and 1.9 inches. The base diameter is about 7 inches in maximum and 5.9 inches in minimum. The high is arranging from 11 inches to 2 inches in diameter (Table 1). By studying this dimension, this type of cup pottery is functional type without non-functional type. One remarkable fact to note that is, however, that all of the Metal Age sites revealing with cup pottery type are more or less represented in the Iron Age Cultural Context.

### **Conclusion**

The cup pottery type is not only found in the regional context of the sites represented in Metal Age Culture of Myanmar, but also as in the external context of other prehistoric cultural sites from India, China and Mainland Southeast Asia. But in such sites, the chronology for the same type of pottery shows up extremely more earlier than Myanmar finds. In India, they are found in Pre-Harappa and Mohenjo-Harappa culture of 2,700 B.C (Bridget and Allchi 1968, Fig.10). In China, in the early Bronze Age Site of Lungshan culture, this type of cup pottery is found (Clark 1978, Fig.11). In South East Asia, the early Metal Age site, namely Ban Khao in Thailand, particularly with the short pedestal form of cup pottery type has been found in the

Bronze Age Cultural context (Stargardt 1990, Fig. 12). Remarkably in Myanmar, the cup pottery type is documented only when in the Iron Age Cultural context. They are probably used to more rather than regularly domestic purpose, but probably as the thing of the ritual or ceremonial activities. In fact, the type of cut pottery occurring from the regional sites was occasionally found in association with other distinctive type of cylindrical pots, termed as beer cans. One notable fact is that in the cultural practice of the Metal Age Context in the worldwide phenomena such as in Europe, India, China, and even Southeast Asia, the ceremonial drinking is one of the ritual activities for the chieftain level in social status of the communities concerned. So, this type of cup pottery may be assumed that concerned with the ritual practice in some form of communal activities and in differentiation on social status of the Metal Age communities in prehistoric Myanmar.

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**Map 1. Showing the Bronze Age distribution pattern of groups  
in Upper Myanmar**

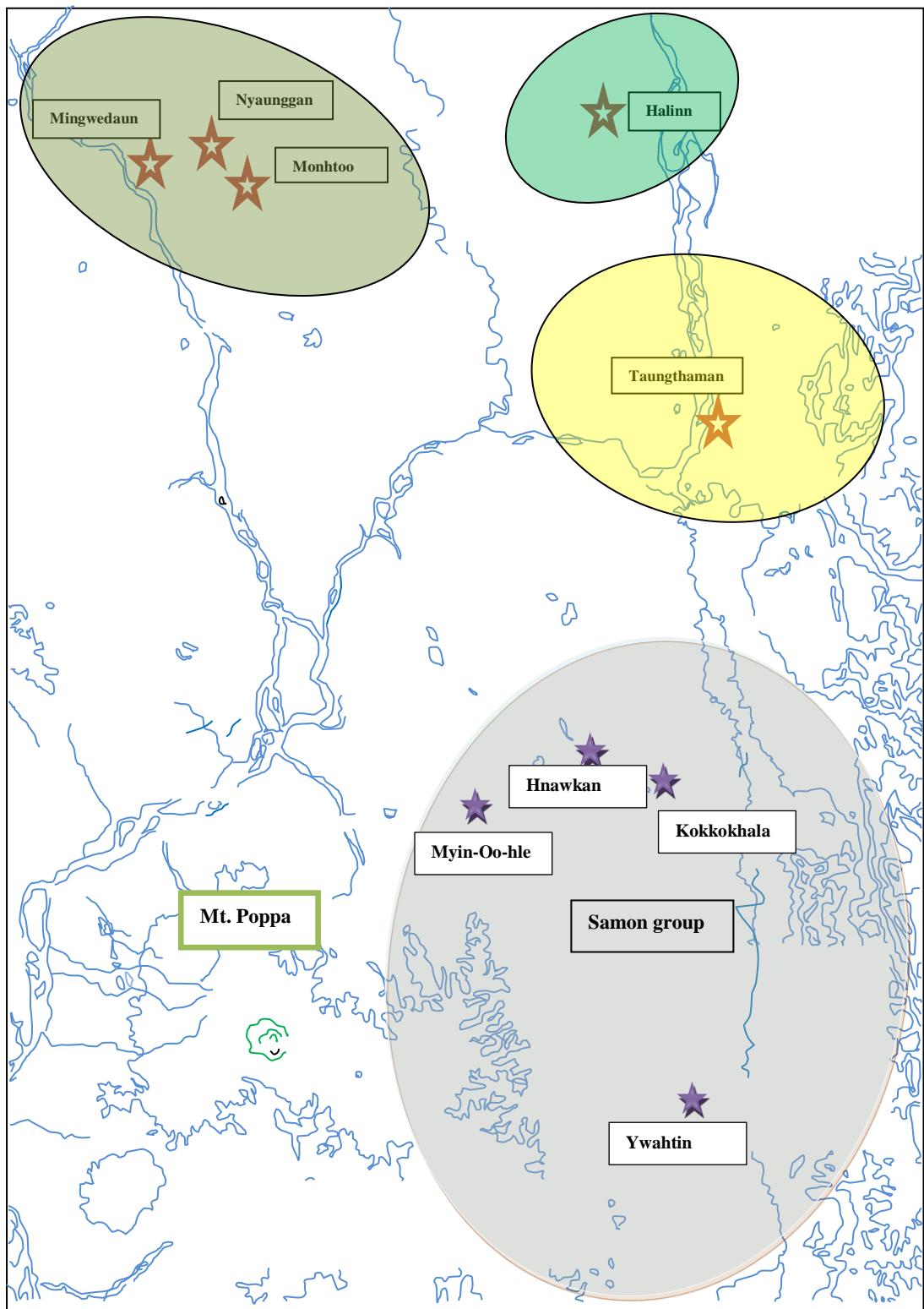




Fig. 1 Completely elongated pedestal and short pedestal cup of pottery type  
(Sourced from U Pyin Nya's collection)

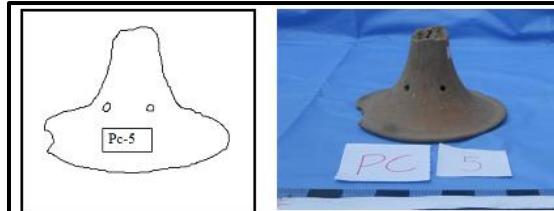


Fig.2 Remains of base from pedestal cup type pottery with two holes  
(Sourced from U Pyin Nya's collection)

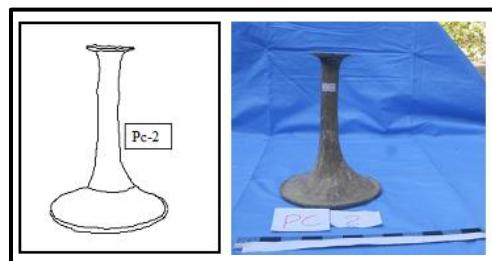


Fig.3 Neck part of elongated pedestal Remains  
(Sourced from U Pyin Nya's collection)

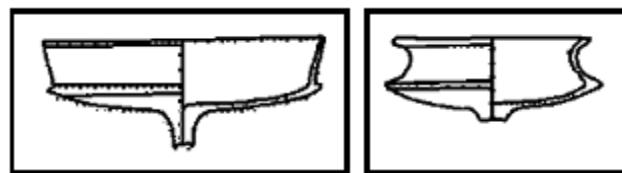


Fig.4 Upper part of the long pedestal cup with the trace of the neck  
Various potteries from Myin-Oo-Hle site  
(Sourced from Sann Win, 2009)

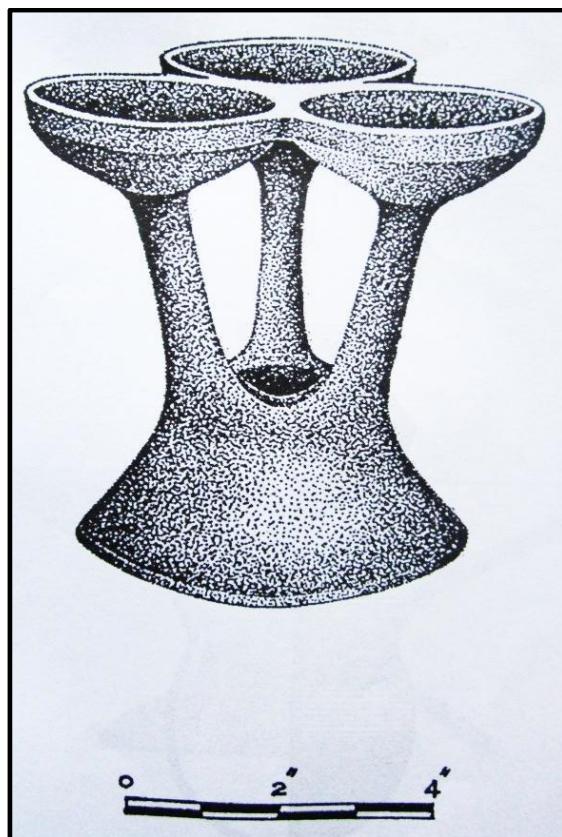


Fig.5 Three necks and cups on one base from Myin-Oo-Hle site  
(Sourced from U San Winn, 2009)



Fig.6 Four necks and cups on one base from Halin site  
(Sourced from Myint Aung, 2007)

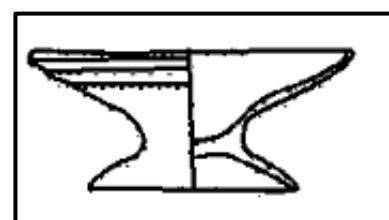
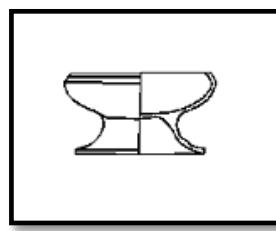


Fig.7 Short pedestal pot of bowl type from Hnaw Kan

Fig.8 The short pedestal pot of pan shape from Myin-Oo-hle

(Sourced from Sann Win 2009)

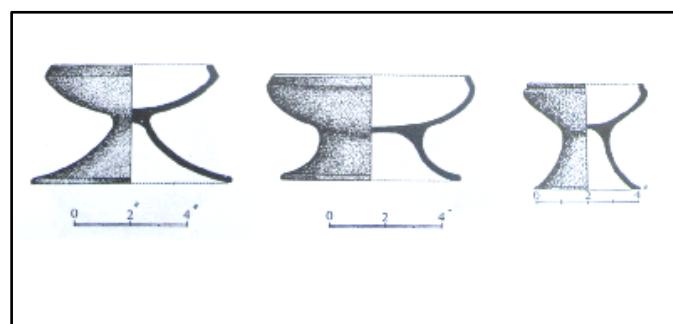


Fig.9 Short pedestal pots from Hnaw Kan site  
(Sourced from Sann Winn, 2009)

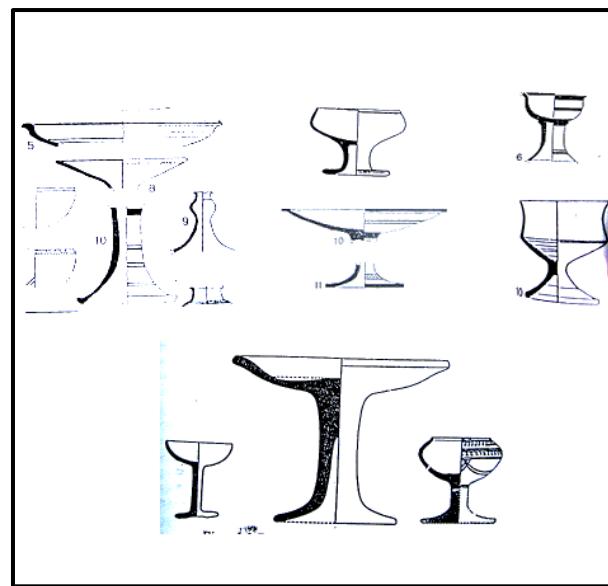


Fig.10 Various types of Cup pottery from Pre-Harappa and Mohenjo-Harappa culture  
 (Sourced from Bridget and Allchi 1968)

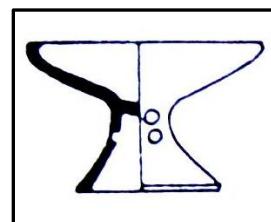


Fig.11 Short pedestal type of cup pottery from Luangshan culture in China  
 (Sourced from Clark 1978)

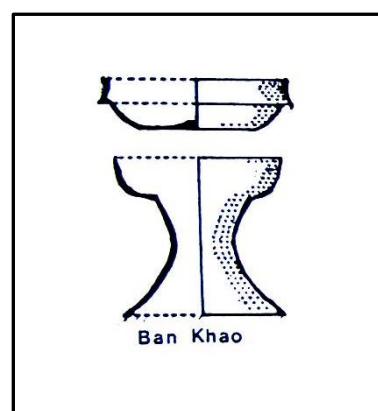


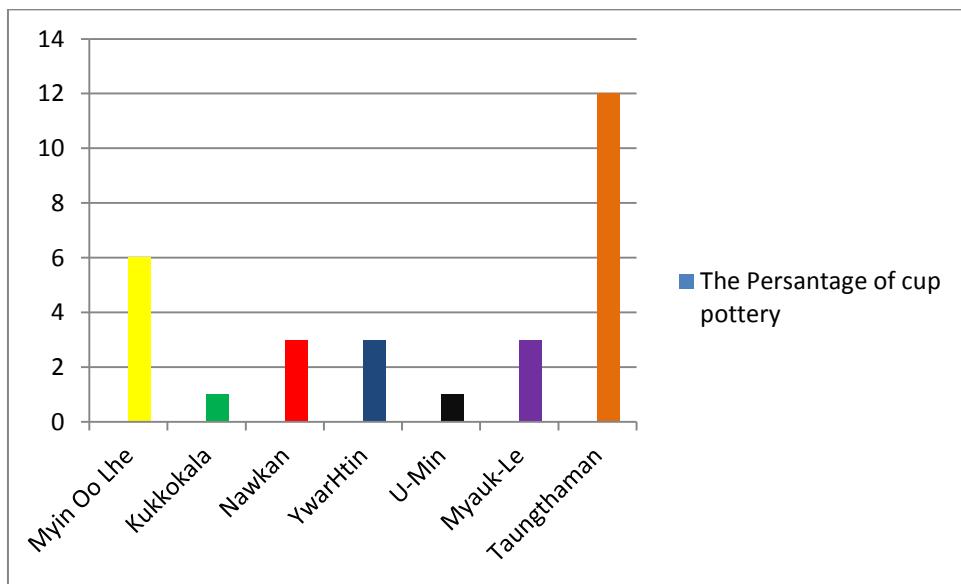
Fig.12 Short pedestal type of cup pottery from Ban-Chao  
 in Thailand of Southeast Asia  
 (Sourced from Stargardts 1990)

**Table (1) Dimension of cup pottery from Metal Age Sites in Myanmarn**

	<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Type of pottery</b>	<b>Rim diameter</b>	<b>Base diameter</b>	<b>Height (whole)</b>
	Myin-oo-hle	long	3 inch	1in	7 in
			6 in	-	-
			8.2 in	-	2 in
			2.7 in	-	4.2 in
		Short	5.8 in	3.8 in	2.6 in
			6.8 in	1.8 in	4.6 in
	Kokkohkala	Short	9.5 in	2 in	3.9 in
	Hnaw Kan	Long	4.5 in	-	4.2 in
			2 in	-	2.1in
		Short	3.3 in	-	1.8 in
	Ywar Htin	Short	3.4 in	3.5 in	2.8 in
			6 in	5.6 in	3.5 in
			5.28 in	0.4 in	4.3 in
	U-Mhin	short	22 in	8 in	-
	Myauk-le	long	6 in	7 in	12.5 in
			8.7 in	0.5 in	11.8 in
			0.3 in	-	11.4 in
		short	8.7 in	7.5 in	7.2 in
	'aungthaman	Long	5.2 in	5.9 in	11 in
			-	5.9 in	8.3 in
			-	6.1 in	4.7 in

		II	1.9 in	7.0 in	6.9 in
		II	-	6.1 in	3.5 in
		II	-	6.6 in	3.5 in
		Short	5.2 in	4.6 in	6.8 in
		II	4.2 in	4.9 in	4.2 in
		II	3.7 in	3.5 in	4.3 in
		II	4.8 in	5 in	5.5 in
		II	4.9 in	-	-
		II	3.9 in	3.7 in	2.8 in

(Databased from U San Win 2009)



Graph.1 Outcome rate of cup pottery type from Metal Age Cultural sites in Prehistoric archaeological landscape of Myanmar