

A Study of Myanmar Palaces(AD.1102-1859)

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Abstract

This paper is a study on the royal palace construction of King Htilaing's palace, Inwa palace, Hanthawady palace, King Nyaungyan's palace, Thalun's palace, King Badon's palace and King Mindon palace. In doing research, the comparative study is used to present that the fluctuation of Myanmar king's political power was related to the construction of new royal cities and royal palace. This paper could aid partially to observers for traditional customs of Myanmar palace. It is pointed out that powerful king used to construct new royal palaces. Myanmar Kings believed in Buddha Sasana and they accepted their royal palace as the center of the universe. These kings also constructed their royal cities and royal palace to be the same as the city of Sakkyawate Kings as much as they could. Myanmar Kings built the royal cities and palaces to reform the central administration to be stronger and to be better. The fluctuation of Myanmar king's political powers was related to the construction of new royal cities and royal palace. In particular, the powerful King only used to construct new royal cities and palaces.

Key words: Royal City, Capital, Capital city, Palace

Aims

To know about the Culture of Myanmar palace in pre-colonial Period.

To Understand the Causes on Construction of royal Palaces and the Shifting of royal palaces.

Introduction

The royal capitals and palaces were built form Pyu Period to Konbaung Period (1752-1885). The selection for sites for construction of royal capitals was based on considerations upon centrality in administration, easy accessibility in transport, agriculturally productive regions and advantage for security conditions. Myanmar kings used to construct their palaces only with wood. The reason for construction with wood had many point, such as location of capital in Dry Zone of Central Myanmar, abundant supplies of bamboos and woods and due to the tradition of religious building with bricks and stones. Among the eleven kings in Konbaung Period, five kings constructed new royal palaces and two kings, shifted their royal palaces.

Materials and Method

Historical research method is employed and it is presented as a comparative study. In this research paper, the primary sources and secondary sources are used. Royal Orders of Burma (1598-1885) is the primary sources. Particularly, this paper cited secondary sources as evidences. Data are collected from Mandalay University Library, History Department Library and private book collectors.

Research Questions

-Why did the kings prefer the construction of capital cities and royal palaces in pre-colonial period?

-How did the select the site of royal palace in the reign of Myanmar Kings?

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Literature Review

About Myanmar "Royal Palaces" wrote in Dr. Toe Hla's "*Kohti-Konan-Kokyangan-Hnint*" (With our Sovereign State) book, Dr. May Nyunt's "Founding of Capital Cities with Special Reference to Ratanapura and Amarapura", Ph.D. Dissertation and Mya-Ke-tu's "*Nandale-Hmattan-Mya*" (Record of cultural palace). In "*Kohti-Konan-Kokyangan-Hnint*" book, it stated about royal palace in Konbaung Period (1752-1885), shifting of royal palace in King Mindon (1852-1878), about royal families' hostels and the concept of cosmology. Also in Dr. May Nyunt's Ph.D. Dissertation, information about the Ratanapura studied in Mya-Ke-tu's "*Nandale-Hmattan-Mya*", ceremonies than constructing of royal palace was observed. In this research paper, eight building of new royal palaces and why they were built before Konbaung Period, from the reign of King Htilaing to Mindonmin (1852-1878) in Konbaung Period were studied.

Findings and Discussion

By studying this research paper "A Study of Myanmar Palace" the royal customs of Myanmar Palace in pre-colonial period was found. It can be observed that the art of building a new royal palace was the same as a political system and the fluctuation of Myanmar King's political power was related to the construction of new capital city and royal palace.

Establishment of Palaces

Myanmar kings used to build their palaces with timber from Pyu Period to Yadanabon Period. They, especially, built the Myenandaw which was used to hold royal meeting with timber and large logs. The reasons for choosing buildings were :

- (1) The royal capital is located in Dry zone of central Myanmar,
- (2) Myanmar was rich in forest resources of trees and bamboo, and
- (3) Myanmar traditional culture was used to build brick buildings only for the religious purposes.²

As Myanmar had such culturally high standard neighbours as China and India, they seemed to acquire the art of architecture from these countries and they could build their palaces.

As the palace halls, and buildings being constructed in Sriksetra an early Pyu town and Bagan were gilded and driven intake with brick, they were influenced particularly by the archeology of India.

The art of building palace was much different from buildings of homes. The ruling Kings had to build their palaces to be magnificent in accordance with their monarchical insignia. Since Buddhist Sasana had arrived at Myanmar, rationale Buddhist philosophies and perceptions could assist in building royal palace.³ According to the life history of Lord Buddha the monasteries where Lord Buddha used to reside were built in three types. The royal palaces of Bodhithata (Buddha to be) would be,

1. Yarma (Ninth tiered hall to reside in winter)
2. Thuba (palace hall for the raining season) and

² May Nyunt, Founding of Capital cities with special Reference to Ratanapura, Amarapura and Ratanapura.

Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Mandalay, 2014, p.58 (Henceforth: May Nyunt, 2014)

³ Herman Goetz, The Art of India, Newyork, Grey tone press, 1964, pp.120-121

3. Phuyarma (fifth tired palace hall to reside in summer)⁴

As the time pass by, building of Myanmar palace experienced changes. It could be the development of architecture. The same features in royal palaces were,

1. Built of woods,
2. Built in a single storey,
3. Built in tired roofs,
4. Surrounded by the wall and
5. Location of the palace at the center in the mantala shape.⁵

The King resided in the Magnificent palace hall with reference to sovereignty of the kings over all things.

Royal styles were started to find in Bagan Period because the archive for building palace in Mon language was found in the date of 1102 under Htilaingmin's rule.

The Kings who succeeded to Htilaingmin was also proud of building royal capitals, and they used to give the auspicious titles to their royal capitals. A Bagan king took the title of "Eintawshin" and another king took the title of "Shwenankyawt shin" as well as the title of "Phannanshin".⁶ Likewise, in Konbaung period,

1. Yadanatheinga Myonanteemin⁷ (Alaungmintaya)
2. Zeyarpura Myonantemin⁸ (Naung dawgyi),
3. Yadanapura Myonantemin⁹ (Myedumin),
4. Amarapura Myonantemin¹⁰ (Badomin),
5. Second Inwa Myonankemin¹¹ (Bagyidawmin)
6. Second Amarapura Myonantemin¹² (Thayawady) and
7. Yadanabon Myonantemin¹³ (King Mindon) were expressed as the builders of royal capitals.

Htilaingmin's Royal Palace

As there were more historical evidences during Bagan Period, royal palace during "pyu" period could be stated more commonly. Stone inscriptions, mural paintings, eastern

⁴Tipitakadara Sayadaw U viseitta Saravivamsa, *Naing-gan, taw Buddha sāsana Mahā Buddhawin* (State Buddha Sāsana Stories of the Buddha) Vol.II, Yangon, Department of Religious Affairs, 2002, pp.30-31

⁵Dr Toe Hla, *Ko-htee-ko-nan-ko-kya-ngan-nint* (With our Sovereign State), Yangon, Nawarat Press, First printing, 2005, p.15-16 (Henceforth: Toe Hla, 2005)

⁶U Kala, *Yazawinchoke* (The Brief Chronicle), Yangon, Yar Pyae Press, 2011, p.116

⁷Maung Mang Tin, *Konbaung-zet Maha yazawingyi* (The Great Chronicle of the Konbaung Dynasty), Vol.I, Yangon, Yar Pyae Press, 2004, p.80 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 2004a)

⁸Maung Maung Tin, 2004a, 248

⁹Maung Maung Tin, 2004a, 266

¹⁰ Maung Maung Tin, 2004a, 378

¹¹Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung zet-Maha yazawinyi* (The Great Chronicle of the Konbaung Dynasty), Vol. II, Yangon, Yar Pyae Press, 2004, p.162 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 2004b)

¹²Maung Maung Tin, 2004b, 168

¹³Maung Maung Tin, *Konbang zet Maha yazatwingyi* (The Great Chronicle of the Konbaung Dynasty), Vol.III, Yangon, Yar Pyae Press, 2004, p.111

brick cups, relief models, etc, were the historical material evidences of Bagan Period. These materials contained literature and pictured evidences in relation with royal palaces. The most important thing among them was the stone inscription about the building of royal palace by Htiaing (1084-1112) also well-known as King Kyansittha in Myanmar history. This stone inscription was inscribed in Mon language to record the biography of the king and his palace construction.¹⁴ It was the first record on the construction of royal palace in Myanmar literature and history.

The stone inscription of Htilaingmin on the construction recorded all about on royal palace construction in detail. It is noted as follows according to that record.

- 21st February, 1102, Ceremony for placing stake,
- 3rd March, 1102, Ceremony for corners lap laying
- 5th March, 1102, Ceremony for gilding Urupillar,
- 7th March, 1102, Naming the new palace as Zeyarbon,
- 12th March, 1102, Erecting all pillars,
- 2nd April, 1102, Making doorways,
- 11th April, 1102, Making windows,¹⁵
- 25th April, 1102, Started building tired roofs,

By considering this dated stone inscription on royal palace construction, it can be estimated that, the royal, palace was not very large and it took only a few months for completion. Besides, as the inscription included that the staircases were built at the beginning, then the windows were made and there were tired roofed halls, it can be assumed that the royal palace was entirely made of woods, without any stone and bricks.

After Bagan experienced Mongolian invasion, Bagan declined its status of being royal capital. As a result, the core area of Myanmar political power shifted to Pinya, which lied on the south of old Inwa.

Pinya Royal Palace

Pinya royal capital was established by King Thihathu in 1312 and gave the name Vizarapura and the royal palace was called Kyaw Zaw Shwebon. The capital was called Panya with reference to obtaining golden flower at the town site and later changed to Pinya.¹⁶ The capital was reigned by six Kings from Thihathu to Uzanapyaung and lasted 64 years and 3 months.¹⁷ King Uzana was dethroned by Thatoeminphyia at 3 months of reign. Pinya was no longer in age due to low quality kings.

Inwa Royal Palace

In 1365, over 50 years after the ruin of Bagan King, Thatoemin Phya shifted royal capital to Inwa, which was better in security conditions than Pinya. The royal capital

¹⁴*Mon kauksapaung chroke* (The Brief of Mon Inscriptions), Edited by U Chit Thien, Yangon, Takatho Press, 1965, p.33 (Henceforth: Chit Thien, 1965)

¹⁵(a) Chit Thien, 1965, 33-35

(b) Toe Hla, 2005, 9-10

¹⁶Kala, 2006a, 259

¹⁷ May Nyunt, 2014, 64

construction was started in February, 1364 and it was completed within seven months. Then, the royal capital was named Yadanapura and the royal palace was named Shwebonathanan. The name Yadanapura was intended for both worldly and religious wealth abundance in the royal capital so that the name Yadanapura was given to it. It was meant that so crowded royal capital could be attained with various successes and auspiciousness from that day onwards.¹⁸

Although Thatoeminphyia selected the royal capital site on the basis of security from military defence point of view, the following three situations were found:

1. Centrality in the Country,
2. Abound in foods supply, and
3. Focal point in natural water courses¹⁹

During that time, Inwa was located at the center of the country for administration and military. Bhamo-Mohnyin in Upper Myanmar, Shan State in the east, Hanthawady, Dagon, Dala, and Mon areas in lower Myanmar and later to the Than win River and Chin State in the west. Therefore, it had advantages to control them rapidly with ease.

Moreover, Inwa was located in a fertile alluvial plain for food production and it was located in the adjacent area of Ledwin¹¹ *Khayines*, which was famous as the rice bowl of Upper Myanmar, only separated by the Panlaung River. In other words, Ledwin¹¹*Khayines* were rice granaries of Inwa.

Inwa was located near the confluence of the Myitnge River with the Ayeyarwady River. So the selection of Inwa as a site of the royal capital by Thatoeminphyia on the Ayeyarwady river course which is flowing from Myitkyina and Bhamo in the upper course to the sea in the lower course through central Myanmar should be idealized by the people.²⁰ Therefore, it can be easily understandable, about the importance of Inwa in military, economy and administration works of the country.

As a result, Inwa royal capital which was built by King Thatoeminphyia lasted 30 dynasties and 388 years of age.²¹ Due to the advantageous location of the town, Inwa was also selected as royal capital for two times by King Sinphyushin or Myedumin (1763-1776) and King Bagayidawor Sagaingmin (1819-1837). It can be considered as the righteous site selection for the royal capital at Inwa.

The first Inwa dynasty was established by King Thatoemin and the royal throne was newly constructed by thirteenth King, who was well-known as Shwenan Kyawtshin in great chronicles. As the newly constructed royal palace was so magnificent in the architect royal style, King Narapati who constructed that palace was praised as Shwenankyawtshin.²² Its architectural style was so good that the palace deserved to be recorded in archives.

King Nyaungyan's Royal Palace

After the ruin of second Myanmar Empires, established by Hanthawady Sinphyushin, prince Nyaungyan, one of the sons of the king went to upper Myanmar and constructed a new royal capital in the site of old Inwa, on 17 January, 1598, by opening to four directions. The

¹⁸Kala, 2006a, 275, 277

¹⁹May Nyunt, 2014, 65, 66

²⁰ May Nyunt, 2014, 66

²¹May Nyunt, 2014, 66

²²U Kala, *Maha Yazawingyi* (The Great Chronicle), Vol.II, Yangon, Yar Pyae Press, 2006, p.105 (Henceforth: Kala, 2006b)

name of the town was changed into Shwewamyogyi by erasing the old name Yadanapura. The king constructed royal palace, royal capital, Shwezigon, Gudawthit and five gateways simultaneously on 5th July, 1599. The construction of the royal palace by King Nyaungyan was recorded in palace, royal capital, Shwezigon, Gudawthit an 5 gateways simultaneously on 5th July, 1599. The construction of the royal palace by King Nyaung Yan was recorded in palace construction archive.²³

King Thalun's Palace

King Thalun, who ascended onto the royal throne after Nyaungyanmin and Anaukphatunmin also constructed a new royal palace. The timbers and logs which were used in the palace construction were given by the respective *Myozas*. According to the records, there were 27 halls and 238 teak logs, *Lakkhan-thit* 586 logs, 118 *Pyin-thit* and 10 *Saung-thit* were used for the palace construction.²⁴ The shape of the palace was the same as the stake plan map of King Nyaungyan and later kings from Badonmin to King Mindon had to construct their royal palaces based upon the model of king Thalun's palace. As there were more records concerning palace construction, the royal capital constructions were more reliable than

those of the past.

King Badon's Palace

Badonmin started construction works for new royal palace on 21st October, 1782.²⁵ The king had prepared erecting scaffold with 500 carpenters and architects on 30th December, 1782. Seven places in construction of palace, including lake, moat, monastery, *pitakateik*, pagoda and the town were simultaneously inlaid with stakes as the same time of palace stake inlaid-ceremony. Then, these seven places were constructed simultaneously on 9th January 1783. The new palace of Badonmin was composed of 51 halls and they were constructed by 529 carpenters.²⁶ King Badon started palace construction in December 1782 and completed the work in April, 1783. Therefore, only four months time was used to complete palace construction.

After the capital was founded, it was named "Amarapura". The royal capital was named "*Myananbonsan*", and royal palace was named "*Aungnansanya*", on 17th May 1783.²⁷

King Badon also carried out maintenance and reparation works for perpetuation of the royal palace continuously.²⁸ On 11th, July 1795, a royal order was released to repair the damages on palace roof, rafter and walls.²⁹ The king also orders to repair the elephant sheds.³⁰

²³May Nyunt, 2014, 70

²⁴U Kala, *Mahayazawingyi* (The Great Chronicle), Vol.III, Yangon, Yar Pyae Press, 2006, p.140-141 (Henceforth: Kala, 2006c)

²⁵Maung Maung Tin, 2004a, 1391

²⁶May Nyunt, *Amarapuramyotinanti Samaing* (History of Amarapura: Founding of Capital city and palace), M.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Mandalay, 1993, pp.54-55 (Henceforth: May Nyaunt, 1993)

²⁷May Nyunt, 1993, 25

²⁸The Royal Orders of Burma (AD 1598-1885), Edited and Translated by Dr. Than Tun, Vol.V (AD 1788-1806), Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asia studies, Kyoto University, 1986, p.557 (Henceforth: ROB V, 1986)

²⁹ROB V, 1986, 584

³⁰ROB V, 1986, 821

A royal order was released on 6th March, 1806, not to build the houses closely to keep the royal palace and royal capital to be clean. It could be to prevent the danger of fires.³¹

On 13th March, 1810 a great fire broke out in Amarapura, starting from Tayoketan in the western portion of the royal palace. The royal palace was also burnt by the great fire.³² As relief and reestablishments on the fire were performed immediately, the royal palace also had to be reconstructed. It can be assumed that the second reconstructed royal palace was not as great as the first palace. King Badon was the one who had to construct the royal palace two times one in 1782 and another in 1810. As Badonmin left the complete records on the construction of the royal palace, his works could be compared to the next palace construction by King Mindon.

King Mindon's Palace

In monarchical history of Myanmar, Yandanabon royal capital which was more popular than Mandalay was the last royal capital of Myanmar. The capital was constructed by King Mindon starting in 1856.³³ Although King Mindon's construction and shifting of a new royal capital seemed the same as those of the earlier Kings, it was much different from them in many ways. The most important point is that construction and shifting of King Mindon's new royal capital took full political essence. The capital was shifted to a new site to keep the independence and sovereignty of the country and to carry out new reforms for the country's development. The ultimate political objective was to regain the lost territories to the British colonialists.

When the site for the new royal capital was selected, King Mindon pointed out the site directly by himself. It was placed at the south west of the foot of Mandalay Hill which was a little far from the Ayeyarwady River. Royal order to construct new royal capital was released on 13th January 1857.³⁴ The record on the construction of new royal capital and palace included the following works.

30th October, 1856-Search for site selection to build new royal capital,³⁵

31st October, 1856-Blue print of the royal capital and palace were submitted,³⁶

4th December, 1856, Clear the forest³⁷

January, 1857, Issued money from royal treasury³⁸

31 January, 1857, Preittas were recited at the selected site for construction for royal palace and listened by royal accidence,

12th February, 1857, offer to Nats (spirits) and performed ground works in the palaces

³¹ROB V, 1986, 821

³² Maung Maung Tin,2004b, 132

³³Toe Hla, 2005, 67

³⁴Toe Hla, 2005, 75

³⁵Sithu Maung Maung Kyaw, *Mandalay Myotinanti Sa tan* (Founding of Mandalay city and palace), Mandalay, Ratanadipan Press, 1959, p.62 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Kyaw, 1959)

³⁶Maung Maung Kyaw, 1959, 64

³⁷Maung Maung Kyaw, 1959, 71

³⁸Maung Maug Tin, 2004c, 175

for royal capital and the palace.³⁹

14th March, 1857, A temporary Palace was constructed at the north-western corner of the royal palace⁴⁰

7th May, 1857, An armoury was constructed at the south eastern corner of the royal capital⁴¹

16th July, 1857, Royal Palace was given the name of Myanansankyaw

22 May, 1859, completion of all construction works for royal capital and palace.⁴²

Total work force, who had to participate to complete the construction of Mandalay royal capital was totally 36240 royal servants. During the palace construction works, over 100 halls were constructed. When all construction works were completed, King Mindon held royal ceremony for ascending throne on 22nd, May, 1859 and gave the name Yadanabon to the capital, Lay-kyun Aung-Myay to the royal capital and gave the name Myanansankyaw to the royal palace.⁴³

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Conclusion

Although large towns were discovered by excavations, there were no evidences up to the present time in relation with the plans for the royal palaces. The basic architectural styles are found to be nearly the same in construction of royal palaces from Bagan Period to Yadanabon Period. In Myanmar history, Myanmar Kings used to construct new royal capitals and palaces, and shifted their capitals because they wished to be proud of themselves as the builders of Capitals and palaces, because they wish to receive the reputation that they were descended from the powerful Sakkyawate kings, the generations of Thakka royal families, and because they felt that their existing capitals were in weak security conditions according to the prophecies and men in the events. The construction of royal capital and shifting of the royal capital were mostly found in the actions by Myanmar Kings. In Myanmar history, the most frequent shifting of capitals and royal palaces were particularly found during Konbaung period. Out of eleven kings of Konbaung Dynasty, five Kings established new royal capitals and palaces while two kings shifted their royal capital and palace. Although it was said as the shifting of royal capitals, these were much looked like constructions of new royal capital and thrones.

³⁹Maung Maug Tin, 2004c, 175

⁴⁰Maung Maug Tin, 2004c, 176

⁴¹Maung Maug Tin, 2004c, 177

⁴²Toe Hla, 2005, 78

⁴³ Toe Hla, 2005, 78

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