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# Wuntho Town and Outstanding Activities of Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat

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## Abstract

Wuntho is a town located in Upper Myanmar and included in Katha District with an estimated population of 73,665. A recent excavation shows that it was established not later than 5th century AD. In this paper, the evidence found by excavation is shown in detail. It is also explained how the name of Wuntho appeared and what it was called before. Wuntho was a hiding place for the leaders of the anti-imperialist movement. The paper also describes how the British suppressed resistance leaders and how they controlled the administration of Wuntho. Using primary sources, secondary sources and field work the successive rulers (*Sawbwas*) of Wuntho are also described, including *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat and his attempt to protect the country, his support for the development of the region, and how he helped the welfare of people. This work shows the importance of the Wuntho *Sawbwa*'s efforts for the development of the region. His contribution of irrigated land and religious buildings for the welfare of the people are still giving benefits to the region. This work will be of significant value for social history.

**Keywords:** Shan, *Sawbwa*, Patriotism

## Aim

This paper aims at highlighting the patriotic encasement of the Bamars, as well as that of other national races of Myanmar, against the colonists during the Colonial Period of Myanmar.

## Introduction

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part presents the detailed account of the life span of Wuntho Town, based on the field study, the excavation of the ancient Rock City, located in Mai Thon village, where some objects used by the Pyus were discovered. The source of the derivation of the name Wuntho is discussed. The second part deals with how the Shan lords, called *Sawbwas*, who successively ruled Wuntho, were appointed, the Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat's revolution against the British, and his efforts to develop the economy of the city during his rule, based on the evidences.

## Materials

The date for this paper were obtained from the Department of Archaeology and National Museum, the records of the field study made in Mai Thon Village, Wuntho Township, Sagaing Division, the *Sar-chun-taw* ("Order of Appointment") from U Hla Win, of U-yin-Taw Quarter, Wuntho, and the secondary sources were obtained from Mandalay University Library.

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My thanks go to the Department of Archaeology and National Museum for granting permission to take copies of the records related to Mai Thon Village, Wuntho Township. I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Dr Thu Nandar, Professor, Department of History, Kyaing Ton University, for her invaluable advice.

## A Brief History of Wuntho Town

It is of historical interest to study the town. Though different statements on the origin of Wuntho have been made, no exact date can be discovered. However, based on the findings in U Ye Win's field, about 6 furlongs from Mai Thon Village, 22 miles from Wuntho, discovered on 26 October 2017, the life-span of Wuntho Town dated back to about 1500 years ago, as assumed by the authorities of the Department of Archaeology and National Museum.<sup>107</sup> So it can be assumed that Wuntho's existence dated not later than AD 5<sup>th</sup> Century. The history of the town has been referred to in *Wuntho yarzawin* by Wuntho U Poe Khar, an anonymous account of Wuntho. History and Byaggapura Wuntho *Yazawin Thit* Treatise by Van. Second Khan-Ti *Sayadaw* U Suzana, Khanti Lecturing Monastery, Wuntho.<sup>108</sup> Since the historical accounts mention that Wuntho had existed since the rule of Lord Maha Thamata in the pre-historic times,<sup>109</sup> the archaeological findings were discovered.

Mai Thon Village, Wuntho Township, Sagaing Division, has 81 houses, and the population of 524. The site of the archaeological findings was the field on the hill of U Ye Win, at the altitude of about 2,000 feet. Headed by U Than Htay, the personal assistant of the Prime Minister of Sagaing Division, and U Zin Maung, U Win Ko and U Yarzar Aung from the Department of Archaeology and National Museum, the department heads of Wuntho and the journalists went and took records.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Field Study Record, (26 October 2017). The Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Mai-Thon Village, Wuntho Township, Sagaing Division, (Henceforth: Field Study Record, 2017).

<sup>108</sup> Venerable Khan-Ti *Sayadaw*, (1961) "*Byaggapura Wuntho Yarzawin Thit*", Mandalay, Thamata Press, 1 (Henceforth: Khan-Ti *Sayadaw*, 1961).

<sup>109</sup> Khan-Ti *Sayadaw*, 1961, 3.

<sup>110</sup> Field study Record, 2017.



Figure (1): Mai Thon Village, [photograph] (Dr San Yu Aung's own private collection).  
Source: Field study Record 2017, Department of General Administration

The excavation of the ancient Rock City site, an ancient town in Wuntho, discovered a number of the objects, used by the Pyus broken pieces of earthen pot, arrow, harpoon, sharp prices, chisel, various sizes of traditional beads for adornment, knife, sword, short blade, double blades, one- blade knife of various kinds, bronze jingle bells (spiral-shaped), bronze pieces, bone pieces, and metal pieces.

The discovery of the objects dating back to the Pyu Period all in one site was made for the first time in the field of U Yè Win, of Mai Thon Village, Wuntho Township as noted by the field study trip member U Win Ko. Through it cannot be exactly deduced, there could have been a site of an ancient Pyu City, based on the evidences showing the dwelling of an ethnic tribe settled in one site. More systematic archaeological excavations need to be done. The objects excavated were:

1. 101 Sharp weapons of various sizes and shapes
2. 4 arrows (2 double blade; 2 one blade)
3. 3 iron spikes
4. 1 sharp piece
5. 2 hoes
6. 3 coiling rings
7. 5 iron hollow heads
8. 39 bases of earthen pot
9. 10 iron fragments
10. 1980 red beads (small)
11. 2 red beads (medium-size)
12. 45 blue beads
13. 48 yellow beads
14. 2 green beads
15. 6 bronze spiral –designed jingle bells
16. bone pieces, metal pieces, bronze pot fragments and bronze pieces

It is assumed by the Department of Archaeology, that these objects belonged to about 1500 years ago. So it can be deduced that the existence of Wuntho Town dated not later than AD 5<sup>th</sup> century.



Figure (2): Colored beads [photograph] (Dr San Yu Aung's own private collection).



Figure (3): Bronze pieces [photograph] (Dr San Yu Aung's own private collection).



Figure (4): Spiral-designed bronze jingle bells [photograph] (Dr San Yu Aung's own private collection).



Figure (5): Swords and Arrows [photograph] (Dr San Yu Aung's own private collection).

Wuntho is located in Katha District, Sagaing Division. In Katha District are included Katha Township, Kawlin Township, Htee-Gyaik Township, Pinlebu Township, Ban-Mauk Township, Wuntho Township and Inn-taw Township.

During the monarchial days of Myanmar kings, the Shan lords successively made Wuntho as the pivot of the region.

To the east, from the middle of the Ayeyawaddy to Kambawza Land, to the South, Yètha Village, Halin- Gyi (Hansa- nagra Land); to the west, from the middle of the Thanlawaddy to Manipur; to the north, the Land of Moe-Gaung and Kyaw-kai (Narasuvana Land); to the north east from Kauk-kwe Creek to the middle of the Ayeyawaddy; to the south east, from Tamo-Auk-zin Creek to the Ayeyawaddy, to the south west, from shit-lone Gold Mine to the Middle of the Thanlawaddy; to the north west from the U-ru Creek to the middle of the Thanlawaddy; the region covered 55 district in four directions and eight sub-directions.<sup>111</sup>

This is the boundary of the region ruled successively by the Wuntho Shan lords.

The name Wuntho derived from a Shan name Wein-Hse: *Wein* means Towns, Hse means Tiger, giving out the meaning of the town being "Town of the Tiger".<sup>112</sup> In Wuntho *Yarzawin Thit* by Ven. Khanti *Sayadaw*, the name of the town derived from the word Kyai-Hse: Kyai means the Valley; Hse means Tiger. The name of the town, according to this, means the Town founded by Prince White Tiger wandering in the valleys of the three mountains.<sup>113</sup> The name kya-phyu-min (Prince White Tiger) changed in the course of time: Hse into Hso; Hso into Tho. Obviously, the name of Wuntho is closely associated with the Town of the Tiger.

The name of the town changed as follows:

AD 991 Kyai-Hse under the rule of Tho-Han-Bwa

AD 1343 Kyai-Hso under the rule of Ho-Moe-yan

AD 1383 Mein-So under the rule of Khun-Sai

AD 1588 Thin-le-Sin-le under the rule of Saw Nyo

AD 1638 Byaggapura under the rule of Nga Thura

AD 1763 Wuntho under the rule of Aung Nyo.<sup>114</sup>

So it can be assumed that the name Wuntho may have derived from the Shan Language.

During 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Kingdom of Bagan met its decline, as the Shans from Myin-Sai, namely Athinkhaya, Raza-Thingyan and Thiha Thu rose to power. Since the Shan lords from Mao-Shan Region made conquests of Pinya and Sagaing, it can be assumed that Wuntho may have been founded by the Shan lords.

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<sup>111</sup> Khan-Ti Sayadaw, 1961, 24.

<sup>112</sup> Ya-Wei Htun, 1953. Wuntho Arzarni, Yangon, Pyinnya Alinpya Press, 1 (Henceforth: Ya-Wei Htun,1953)

<sup>113</sup> Khan-Ti Sayadaw, 1961, 18.

<sup>114</sup> Khan-Ti Sayadaw, 1961, Introduction, Aye.

The historical accounts of Wuntho read that the town was ruled successively by 264 Shan lords, starting from Thohanbwa.<sup>115</sup> Since 1769, there had been a gap in the rule of the Shan lords over Wuntho for 70 years. During King Mindon's reign among the towns ruled by 99 Shan lords, Wuntho was included. On 17 December 1852, when Prince Mindon made an uprising against his elder brother King Bagan, the Shan lord U Shwe Thar fought on the side of Prince Mindon. So, in 1852, the Shan lord U Shwe Thar was conferred on the title Min Hla Thamaraza, and appointed as the Town Headman of Wuntho. There were 12 villages placed under his rule.<sup>116</sup> Soon he was promoted to the position of *Sit-kè*.<sup>117</sup> On 3 November 1866, Min-Hla Thamadaraza *Sit-kè* U Shwe Thar captured the rebels entitled to the revenue of Pa-Tein, and handed over to King Mindon. The Myanmar Kings was so pleased with the *Sit-kè* that the *Sit-kè* was promoted to the *Sawbwagyi*, the Shan lord, of Wuntho, ruling the town of the present area in boundary, bestowed upon with the royal insignia. The three titles were also bestowed: (1) Mahavansraza Thohonbwa (2) Maha Theikdi Zeya Thohonbwa (3) Mahavansa Thiriraza Tho-Han-Bwa.<sup>118</sup>

The exact version of the royal order of appointment of the title for Wuntho Lord is given as follows:

The Royal Order of Appointment of Wuntho lord to Mahavansara Thohonbwa (11 waxing of Tazaungmon, M.E 1228. Sunday. The Messenger Than-taw-Sint Min Hla Min Htinraza).<sup>119</sup>

I, Mahavansaraza Thohonbwa humbly submit a request for the royal order of appointment of Wuntho Lord to me to carry out the royal Orders of Your Majesty. (Accept the Royal Order of Appointment. Remain royal as ever). Order of *Wunshintaw* Yenanchaung *Myosa*. 4<sup>th</sup> waxing of Nataw, M.E 1228. Note-taking by Wun-htauk-taw Poppa *Myosa*. Clerk U Kye.<sup>120</sup>

Your Majesty, Lord over the Lands and Water and the Royal Hsadan Elephant and Mighty Weaponry, Mahavansaraza is appointed as Wuntho Lord. He shall be entitled to the revenue, carrying out the taxes as in the tradition, setting the local people in the royal service and doing administration for the welfare of the Region.

4<sup>th</sup> waxing of Nataw, M.E 1228. The Royal Order of Appointment declared by the Than-taw-Khan U Poe in the assemblage of *Wunshintaw* Pakhangyi *Myosamingyi*, Yenanchaung *Myosa Min-gyi* and the *Wun-htauks* in the Golden *Hluttaw*.<sup>121</sup>

Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Shwe Thar, being qualified for physical and mental powers, was a loyal subject to King Mindon. He always made efforts to keep his region free from the harassments of Thieves or

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<sup>115</sup> Khan-Ti Sayadaw, 1961, 20.

<sup>116</sup> 20 villages under Mai-So Village, 1 Kin Soe Village, 13 villages under Ma-Kyun-Soe Village, 7 villages in Mga Taung Township, 1 Village under Moe Kaung Town, Kyi-Wun Province, Gyo-Htaung-Maw-Nai, Shwe-hmu, Wun-tho.

<sup>117</sup> Khan-Ti Sayadaw, 1961, 22.

<sup>118</sup> Ya-Wei Tun, 1953, 50.

<sup>119</sup> 21 November, 1867

<sup>120</sup> 29 December, 1867

<sup>121</sup> The Royal Order of Appointment of the position Wuntho Sawbwa, 1867, collection of U Hla Win (great grand-child of Wuntho Lord U Aung Myat), of U-yin-taw Quarter, Wuntho.

dacoits. He had a strong patriotic spirit while promoting the prosperity of the Buddhist *Sāsanā*. He was bent on doing meritorious deeds. He renovated the Ho-taw-Oo pagoda, a small one donated by the former *Sawbwa* U Htin, and built it into a bigger one. Thus, measures were taken for the prosperity of the Buddhist *Sāsanā* in Wun-Tho.<sup>122</sup> The monasteries built in donation by the *Sawbwagyi* U Shwe Thar in the area of Wuntho were:

- (1) Taung-Paw Monastery
- (2) Shwe Monastery (3)
- Khan-Ti Monastery (4)
- Lay-Htat Monastery (5)
- Hman Monastery
- (6) Sabai-yon Monastery
- (7) U-yin-taw Monastery
- (8) Kyaung-Thit Monastery
- (9) Kan-taw Monastery<sup>123</sup>

The Shan lord U Shwe Thar made efforts to promote the Buddhist *Sāsanā* and the welfare of the local people. He built not only monasteries and pagodas for the promotion of the religious affairs, but also lakes and canals for irrigation.

U Shwe Thar handed over the position of Shan lord to his son Maung Aung Myat in 1882. Maung Aung Myat was then only at the age of twenty. On 18 April 1882, the title, Mahavamsa Thirizeya Thohonbwa was awarded, and the position of Wuntho *Sawbwa* was handed over. In 1883, in Moegaung and Monhyin, rebels of about 3,000 men, led by the Rebel Maung Wa and Maung Paw, made an uprising, so Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat, together with *Sitkè* Min Htin and Min Hla yarzar sent from the royal capital, crushed the rebellions, and handed over the arrested rebels to King Thibaw. So, on 13 June 1883, the title "Moriya Mahavansa Thiri Suddhamma Yarzar Thohonbwa" was bestowed once again to U Aung Myat. On 24 November 1884, Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat built the Mahar Hman-Kyaung Monastery ("Glass-mosaic Monastery") to the north of the town at the cost of K.30,000, and donated it to the Buddha *Sāsanā* in libation.<sup>124</sup> Since, according to the pattern of the royal administration of Myanmar Kings, Wuntho was located far from the royal capital, it was enlisted among the records of Distant Towns and Villages under the King's rule.

Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat took measures to prevent the outbreak of crimes theft, accuse in the region and dealt with other tax collection matters. In times of military service, the Wuntho *Sawbwa* went along with the 205 armed men. Moreover, the Wuntho *Sawbwas* were also bestowed upon extraordinary insignia. When a Wuntho *Sawbwa* died, he was buried in the same rituals of other

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<sup>122</sup> Ya-Wei Tun, 1953, 53-54.

<sup>123</sup> Khanti Sayadaw, 1961, 82

<sup>124</sup> Soe Maung (Myanmar-Alin), (1956). Wuntho Sawbwa-Gyi, Yangon, Thamma Seitta Press, 48 (Henceforth: Soe Maung, 1995).

Shan-lords' funeral. The King sent some attendants to the burial service of the Wuntho *Sawbwas*.<sup>125</sup> If compared with the gifts from other town headmen, those present by the Wuntho *Sawbwa* succeeding to the position were greater in number.<sup>126</sup>

During the rule of Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat, the region enjoyed peace and the rule of law. Since the criminals were sentenced to death, there broke out no crimes in the region.<sup>127</sup> Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat succeeded not only in ruling the region in peace and order, but also in developing the economy of the region. In order to boost the productivity of cultivation, dams and lakes, as well as the Daung-Myu Creek and the Nan-Lai Creek, were blocked, and measures were taken for irrigated cultivation. In order to ensure the drinking water for the local people, those arrested for gambling in Dice Game, were ordered to dig ponds and drinking wells in punishment. The drinking well, known, as the Dice well is still in service to all the city dwellers of Wun-Tho.<sup>128</sup>



Figure (6): Dice-Shanged well [photograph] (Dr San Yu Aung's own private collection).

On 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1886, the Viceroy of India Lord Duff in declared that the whole Burma was annexed into the British Empire. So all the national races of Myanmar, including Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat, picked up arms and launched revolution against the British colonist. As a result, the military tactics of the British did not succeed as expected.<sup>129</sup> Though the British gave offers of opportunities to Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Shwe Thar and U Aung Myat, the latter never surrendered themselves, but remain independent from the British rule without making uprisings.<sup>130</sup> Since the British was engaged

<sup>125</sup> Mo Mo Thant, (1991). "Wuntho *Myo-ne Thamai*", (History of Wuntho Township) (1886-1945), M.A Thesis, Mandalay University, p.126 (Henceforth: Mo Mo Thant, 1991)

<sup>126</sup> Dr Yee Yee, (1968). "Konbaung-Khit Myone-Oke-Choke-pon" (Township Administration during Konbaung Period), Literature and Social Science Journal, Vol.I, No.12, 368 (Henceforth: Yee Yee, 1968)

<sup>127</sup> Maung Thodda, (1984). "Sawbwa gyi-i-Thamai-Hmat-tai-mya" (Historic landmarks of the Sawbwagyi), Shwe Wun Yadanar Magazine, Yangon, Gon-Yaung Press, 11 (Henceforth: Thadda, 1984)

<sup>128</sup>(8 August 1984). The 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Khan-ti Lecturing Monastery, Wuntho, Shwe Wun Yadanar Magazine, Yangon, Gon Young Press, 26 (Henceforth: Shwe Wun Yadanar, 1984)

<sup>129</sup> Sir. C. Crosthwaite, (1968). The Pacification of Burma, London, Fraik Cass, 9-10 (Henceforth: Crosthwaite, 1968).

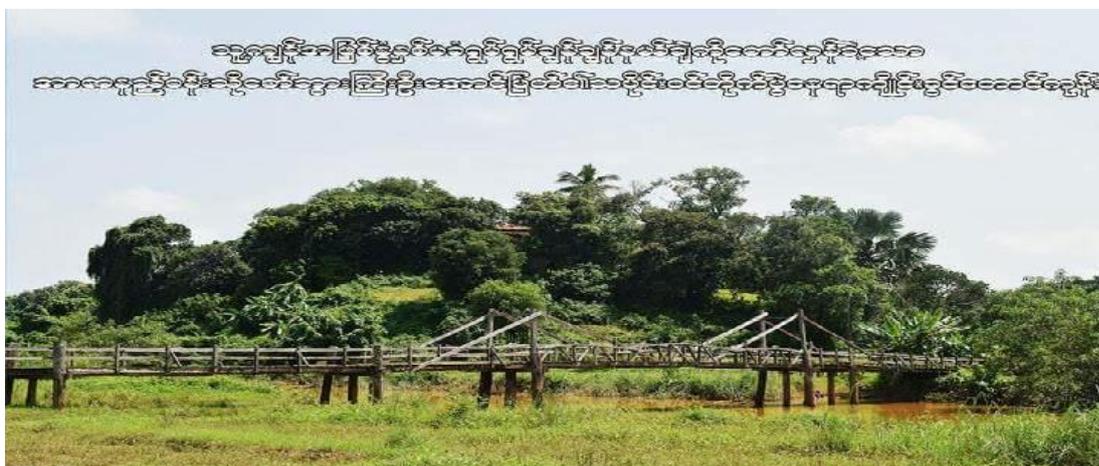
<sup>130</sup> So Maung, 1956, 56.

in crushing down the armed uprisings of the national races all over the country, they allowed Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat to stay peacefully without being organized by the British.<sup>131</sup>

In 1889, The Commissioner of Kathar Metthew Karman station the British troops in Hman-le, Maw Lu, Mohnyin and Palè and planned to organize the Wuntho *Sawbwa*. Negotiations were made by the aid of the Thaung Thut *Sawbwa*, his brother-in-law and through the help of the agent of the Bombay Burma Timber Company, but to no avail.<sup>132</sup> Starting from 1890, Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat Launched the revolution against the British. Among the battles against the British, the followings were well known: Hman Kin Battle, Kawlin Battle, Pinlebu-Mansi Gyo-Taung Fortress Battle, Kyauk-Kyan Taung Battle, the Kyauk Tai Battle near Kyaung- Kon and Kyai-Khwin Battle.<sup>133</sup>



Figure (7): Inscription Record of Kyai Khwin Battle and Kyai Kwin Hill [photograph] (Dr San Yu Aung's own private collection).



<sup>131</sup> Mo Mo Thant, 1991, 10.

<sup>132</sup> Dorothy Woodman, (1962), *The Making of Burma*, London, Cresset, 171 (Henceforth: Dorothy Woodman, 1962)

<sup>133</sup> Khan-Ti Sayadaw, 1961, 53-55, 57-58.

To sum up, though Wuntho enjoyed a good tradition in history, its existence cannot be exactly identified yet. According to the recent excavations made in Wuntho, its existence dated not later than AD 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Wuntho Town has been the center of the Shans for their settlement, and was a town of significance in the history of Myanmar's struggles for the independence. During the monarchical days of the Myanmar Kings, because of the physical and mental prowess of Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Shwe Thar and Wuntho *Sawbwa* U Aung Myat, Wuntho was well known as a town of great historical significance.

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