

Buddhism in Early Historic Period; Relationship between Bagan and SriLanka in 11th Century CE

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Abstract

Bagan civilization can be observed in many ways of comparison with Khmer, Pala and SriLanka. In the local community, it can also be related to those of the later phrase of Sriksetra Pyu old City. To describe the Buddhist religion, Bagan monuments were descended from the origins of Indian, SriLanka and ancient Mon and Pyu civilization. In this paper, the relationship between Bagan and SriLanka extracted from chronicles will be emphasized. It also contributes to extending the new information about Bagan civilization, involving the Sinhalese tradition of Buddhist missionary related to the architectural contexts in Buddhist Art and Architecture.

Keywords; Buddhist Religious, Buddhist missionary, Sinhalese tradition

Introduction

Bagan became a central powerbase in the 11th century CE during the reign of King Anawratha, who unified Myanmar under Theravada Buddhism. It is estimated that as many as 13,000 temples and Stupas once stood on this 42 sq. km plain in Myanmar. One of the earliest references to Buddhism in Myanmar is the Dipavamsa and the Mahavamsa where the two missionaries are mentioned. They are Sona and Utra who were sent by King Asoka to Suvannabhumi. At the same time, Arahata Mahinda was conveyed to SriLanka. Suvannabhumi has been identified as lower Myanmar. According to both Sinhalese and Myanmar historical records, however, religious and cultural relations between SriLanka and Myanmar began in the 11th century. This paper attempted to establish, SriLanka contribution towards the consolation of the Bagan Empire in items of religion, culture and civilization which attested to the Myanmar historical chronicles, inscriptions, art and architecture as well as in Sinhalese record.

Buddhism in Early Historic Period

The King of Asoka organized a network of missions to preach the gospel of the Buddha in and outside India. Nine missions were dispatched to several countries to spread Buddhism. It was those dissenting elements that led to the holding of the Third Buddhist council under the patron-age of King Asoka in order to purify the Buddhist religion (Sasana). After the Council held by a thousand *theras* (elders) under the leadership of Moggaliputta Tissa at Pataliputta, the Pali Canon of the Theravada, was redacted. This Council was also taken the importance, in making the decision of sending missionaries to different regions to preach Buddhism and establish the Sasana there. Moggaliputta Tissa *theras* deputed nine missions; 1.Majjhantika *Thera* to Kasmira Gandhara, 2.Mahadeva *Thera* to Mahisamandala, 3.Rakkhita *Thera* to Vanvasi, 4.Yona-Dhammarakkhita *Thera* to Aparantaka, 5.Dhammarakkhita *Thera* to Maharakkhita, 6.Maharakkhita *Thera* to Yonaloka, 7.Majjhima *Thera* to Himavanta, 8.Sona and Uttara *theras* to Suvannabhumi and 9.Mahinda *Thera* with Itthiya Uttiya Sambala and Bhaddasala *theras* to SriLanka, saying unto the five *theras* "Established in the delightful land of Lanka the delightful religion of the Vanquisher".¹ The king even permitted his son Mahinda and daughter Sanghamitta to join the mission when they were twenty and eighteen years of age

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¹ H.R.Perera, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, Kandy, Sri Lanka Press, 1988, pp.11-14 (Hereafter cited as H.R.Perera, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka*)

respectively. These two illustrious disciples became noted for their piety, attainments, learning and profound knowledge of the Dhamma.¹

The King of Asoka sent his son Mahindra *theras*, together with four others, to Sri Lanka and they preached the teachings of Gautama Buddha to king Devanampiyatissa (247-207 B.C.E) and his attendants. One mission headed by Theramahinda reached Sri Lanka while Sona and Uttara *theras* were sent to Suwanabhumi (golden land) generally believed to be lower Myanmar in Southeast Asia. Thera Mahinda son of India Emperor Asoka introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka during the reign of King Devanampiyatissa. The Bhikkhuni Sanga was introduced by their Sanghamitta, just six months after the introduction of the Bhikkhu sangha (Mahavamsa xi).²As mentioned above, the Pali Canon has been preserved in its entirety in this island and Sri Lanka Buddhism had great influence upon Myanmar, Cambodia, Thai, Laos the only other countries where Theravada Buddhism flourishes today.³

As in all Buddhist countries, a distinct historical consciousness existed in Myanmar, which related especially to the chronological development of the religion and possessed a clearly defined origin with the death of the founder of the religion Gautama Buddha. Concerning the textual and formal aspects, the models were the Singhalese chronicles, Dipavamsa, Mahavasam and Culavamsa, which were already known and respected in Bagan. The chronicles went even further than the Kalyani inscription, drawn by King *Dhammaceti* of Bago (Pegu) on the occasion of his Sanga reform of 1476 only a few years earlier. This inscription as well can be counted to the traditive sources, as it contains the history of the Sangha reforms under earlier kings and the history of the orthodox Theravada Buddhism in a long Arenga.⁴

Relationship between Bagan and Srilanka in 11th century CE

King Anawrahta is credited with fostering the spread of Theravada Buddhism throughout his kingdom and especially at his capital, Bagan.⁵ Anawrahta came in to contact with a young Mon priest from Thaton named Shin Arahan who was visiting Bagan, belonged to the Theravada or primitive school of Hinayana Buddhism and was much impressed by his teaching. Anawrahta was so pleased with his teaching that he at once, his faith in the Buddhist doctrine, took his refuge in the Tri-ratna, and became a faithful covert. Shin Arahan was then duly installed in a monastery erected on a suitable site, and king Anawrahta took on himself the duties of lay disciples as the supporter of the Church.⁶

The numerous temple and Pagoda which still attract visitors to Bagan bear silent witness to the zeal with which the people professed Buddhism, We are told plainly by the chronicles that King Anawrahta and the monk Arahan brought pure Buddhism from Thaton, thus putting an end to the evil practices of the notorious Ari monks.⁷ Professor Stewart is of the

¹ H.R.Perera, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, pp.11-14

² Wilhelm Geiger, *The Mahavamsa or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, Colombo, Published by the Ceylon Government Information Department Press, 1970, p.77 (Hereafter cited as Wilhelm Geiger, *The Mahavamsa or The Great Chronicle*)

³ S.Radhakrishnan, *2500 Years of Buddhism*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Government of India Press, 1959, p.86)

⁴ Tilman Frasch, *Bagan City and State*, (Unpublished English translation of) Stuttgart; Steiner Verlag, 1996, p.7 (Hereafter cited as Tilman Frasch, *Bagan City and State*)

⁵ Barry Broman, *Bagan Temples and Monuments of Ancient Burma*, Thiland, Book Promotin and Service Co.Ltd Press, 2004, p.2 (Hereafter cited as *Bagan Temples and Monuments of Ancient Burma*)

⁶ U Mya, *History of Buddhism in Burma*, Yangon, Central Library Press, 1985, p.1 (Hereafter cited as U Mya, *History of Buddhism in Burma*)

⁷ U Pe Maung Tin, *Buddhism in the Inscription of Bagan*, Yangon, Myanmar Research Society Press, part.1, 1936, p.26 (Hereafter cited as U Pe Maung Tin, *Buddhism in the Inscription of Bagan*)

opinion that this form of Thaton Buddhism came from Sri Lanka. In 1056 Anawrahta sent a courteous request to the Mon King of Thaton for a supply of priests and scriptures to teach his people this form of Buddhism. His request was refused with contempt. He enraged at the insult and in the following year the king gathered an army together, attacked Thaton, seized the king and carried him off to Bagan with all his priests and scriptures. The latter laden on thirty two white elephants. After the king had captured Thaton, Anawrahta proceeded to raze the walls of old Pyay as well; and finally stripped the temples there of their relics, which the king took to Bagan to enshrine in stupa and temples of his own building. Thaton itself never recovered from this attack and its prosperity vanished; the center of Mon culture was transferred to Pegu. The results of the capture of Thaton were of prime importance for religion and art in Myanmar. First Hinayana Buddhism succeeded Mahayana as the principal forms of Buddhism in upper Myanmar and Pali superseded Sanskrit as the language of the scriptures. There is ground for believing that Anawrahta sent to Sri Lanka for scriptures and compared them with those of Thaton. Secondly, the Myanmar adopted the Mon alphabet and wrote their own language for the first time, the earliest Myanmar inscription known being dated 1058. Thirdly, there was a great influx of craftsmen from Thaton in to Bagan and Anawrahta inaugurated the great period of temple building which lasted for more than two centuries.¹

The Bagan period (1044-1287CE), was the golden age of both secular and regional history in Myanmar. Even today deserted though it is, Bagan with its sixteen square miles of pagodas and religious buildings is one of the wonders of the world.² More significant than the assimilation of the federation of Mon port states, such as Patheingyi, Twante and Thaton, after Anawrahta's 1060 conquest, was the opening up of Myanmar to the influences of the older Theravada country of Sri Lanka, and possibly to lesser degree, South India artistic influences. The conquest of Thaton gave Bagan access to the sea and thus to Sri Lanka. It is known from contemporary epigraphy that Anawrahta assisted his fellow Buddhist king and contemporary Vijaya Bahu I (1055-1110). in the defeat of the Saivite South Indian Cola, who had occupied that sacred isle bringing about a wane of its Pali Buddhism and in the re-establishment of the Theravada faith there.³

From 1017 to 1070 CE Sri Lanka had been subject to the Colas; and when the king took in hand the revival of Buddhism, there were not enough Bhikkhus to form a chapter for holding ordination and other ceremonies. The King sent to his friend Prince Anawrahta in the Ramanna country, messengers with gift and fetched thence Bhikkhus who had thoroughly studied the three Pitakas, who were a fount of moral discipline and other virtues, and acknowledged as *theras*. After distinguishing them by costly gifts, the King had the ceremonies of word-renunciation and of admission in to the order repeatedly performed by them, and the three Pitakas together with commentary frequently recited, and saw to it that the order of the victor which had declined in Lanka, again shone brightly.⁴

The Culavamsa records that King Anawrahta requested the king to send him the tooth relic, the proudest possession of Sri Lanka. When the king saw it the Sri Lanka king made a long entreaty that the tooth which had proceeded should settle on his head, and it descended from the sky and settled on the top of the gem-embroidered casket on the king's head. And the

¹ Reginald May, *The Culture of South East Asia, The Heritage of India*, London, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. Press, 1954, pp.52-53 (Hereafter cited as Reginald May, *The Culture of South East*)

² G.Appleton, "Buddhism in Myanmar", *Myanmar Pamphlets*, India, Longmans Green Co.Ltd Press, 1944, pp.33-34 (Hereafter cited as G. Appleton, "Buddhism in Myanmar")

³ Paul Strachan, *Art and Architecture of Old Burma*, Singapore, Kiscadale Publications and printed by Kyodo Shing Loong, 1989, p.9 (Hereafter cited as Paul Strachan, *Bagan Art and Architecture*)

⁴ G.H Luce, *Old Burma Early Bagan*, Vol. I, New York, J.J Augustin Publisher, Locust Valley Press, 1970, pp.39-40 (Hereafter cited as G.H Luce, *Old Burma Early Bagan*)

king bares it on his head to the harbor and descending neck-deep into the water sets it on the ship. Moreover the Sri Lanka king charged them saying 'let my friend Anawrahta descend, as the king has done, neck-deep in to the water and bear it on his head'. Anawrahta, hearing that they had come bringing the holy tooth in the ship he sent to Sri Lanka, was glad, and he mounted the white elephants called Pulepyon, and went forth to meet the tooth as far as the port Swedawkyo. Then at last the ship where on the tooth was laid came near, the king descended neck-deep into the water, and setting the gem-embroidered casket on his head, being surrounded with an innumerable host of ministers, fighting men, and followers, the king bare it to the golden throne. Anawrahta for the benefit of all beings set the holy tooth in a jewelled *paythad* on a jewelled white elephant and set it free saying. Kneel whosesoever's it be pleased to rest. And the white elephant ascended and knelt at Shwezigon where the front let-relic was enshrined. So Anawrahta enshrined the holy tooth in Shwezigon.¹ Myanmar culture was more or less a copy of the Mon. In other words, 1057-1113 is the Mon period of Bagan culture. Apart from this Mon culture, there is another important result of this conquest of the delta by Anawrahta. It gives for the first time to Myanmar an opportunity to have direct oversea contact with Sri Lanka, possibly India. These contacts are mentioned only in the chronicles. Desiring to have tooth-relic to be enshrined in the Shwezigon pagoda, Anawrahta sent a mission to Sri Lanka to ask for it. The chronicles of Sri Lanka make no mention of this mission. But a relationship of completely another nature is mentioned in the Culavamsa.²

Towards the end of Anawratha's reign, the system for numbering the Jataka changed from a Mon recession to the Ceylonese recession and under Kyanzittha (1084-1113) a revision of the *Pitaka* or scriptures, again on a ceylonese model is noticeable in the choice of subjects employed in contemporary painting schemes. Pali studies were, perhaps, the legacy of Sri Lanka contact. Just as Anawrahta had sent Bhikkhu to Sri Lanka, when the faith was on the wane there, in the face of south India Saivite pressures, so too Sri Lanka assisted Myanmar in the establishment of a pure canon at Bagan.³ Sri Lanka was in the development of Bagan religion and art. Sri Lanka was also in contact with the young empire. Kyanzittha's supposed bride, Abeyatana has been said to be a Bengali princess with Mahayanist inclinations, and the painted decoration in the temple name confirms this connection.⁴



(Figure-1) Sinhalese types of mural painting from Abeyatana Temple
(Source from Researcher)



(Figure-2) Sinhalese types of mural painting from Abeyatana Temple
(Source from Dr Than Tun)

Sri Lanka's relations with Myanmar consolidated when King Kyansittha (1084-1113CE) undertook the task of collection and revising the Tripitaka and his son Rajakumar

¹ Luce & Pe Maung Tin, *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Myanmar*, Yangon, Unity Publishing House Press, 2008, pp.90-91 (Hereafter cited as Luce & Pe Maung Tin, *The Glass Palace Chronicles*)

² Than Tun, "History of Buddhism in Burma A.D 1000-1300", *JBR*, XI, i & ii, 1978, p.7 (Hereafter cited as Than Tun, "History of Buddhism in Burma")

³ Paul Strachan, *Bagan Art and Architecture*, p.10

⁴ See Fig. 1

5. See Fig. 2

showed a special interest in the study of Pali and of the texts arriving from Mahavihara. All versions of the Tripitaka from that time right down to the edition issued by the Sixth Buddhist Council in 1956 have strictly adhered to the Sri Lanka version and a large number of Sinhala Bhikkhus taught Pali. Hall has confirmed that Rajakumar worked with a band of Sinhala and Myanmar Bhikkhu scholars.¹

Rajakumar, who never actually succeeded his father to the throne, seems to have devoted his life to scholarly pursuits, particularly the translation and study of Ceylonese manuscripts arriving at Bagan towards the end of the 11th century. The subjects chosen by him for the Kubayukgyi's walls reflect the great leap in Myanmar scholarship that had occurred with the influx of the *Pitaka* and other texts from Sri Lanka. The paintings adhere strictly to the fundamental texts of the Buddhist canon the *Sutta*, or collection of discourses, the *Abhidhamma*, or book of metaphysical Philosophy, and the *Vinaya*, rule for the order of the monks. Perhaps the culturally most significant findings in the temple are certain painted glosses that show the history of the religion and the history of Sri Lanka taken from the two Sri Lanka chronicles, the *Mahavamsa* and *Culavamsa*. These historical jottings, though never actually mentioning Myanmar, go up to the time of Anawrahta and Kyanzitta's contemporary Vijayabahu of Sri Lanka (1055-1114 CE). Myanmar historiography thus starts from here. A historically aware civilization is one that, having established suzerainty over territory, seeks to place itself as heir to chronological process.² The pictorial illustrations are no ordinary ones, for they are of immense historical value. They depict a large number of episodes that cover the history of Buddhism, not in Myanmar as one might have expected, but in Sri Lanka, up to the reign of King Vijaya Bahu, the contemporary of King Kyanzitta (1084-1113 CE).³ These illustrations include: the Buddha's visit to Sri Lanka, the three councils, the King Asoka and King Devanampiyatissa, meeting with Thera Mahinda their Sanghamitta's arrival in Sri Lanka carrying the Bodhi tree, the story of Dutthagamini, elephant Kandula, Elara's justice bell rung by a cow.⁴

King Kyanzitta, who as his predecessor Sawlu had done before, maintained good relations with Sri Lanka. In his lifetime, he had received nine Buddha relics sent by the Sri Lanka king, which he enshrined in several stupas. He also undertook the task of collecting and revising the Tripitaka and, constructed a library built of stone for the study of Pali texts that were arriving at the Mahavihara monastery of Sri Lanka, where his son Rajakumar worked with a band of Sri Lanka and Myanmar monk scholars. Historical evidence shows that Rajakumar mastered Pali and the Tripitaka under the guidance of the Sinhala Bikkhus when Rajakumar undertook his task of getting the walls of the Myinkaba Kubauk-gyi Temple painted.⁵

¹ Hema Goonatilake, "The role and status of Sinhalese monks in 13th century Bagan", *International Conference on Early Myanmar and Global Connections*; held in Bagan, 2012, p.1 (Hereafter cited as *Early Myanmar and Global Connections*)

² Paul Strachan, *Bagan Art and Architecture*, pp.72-73

³ G.H Luce & Pe Maung Tin, *Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, p.6

⁴ Hema Goonatilake, *Early Myanmar and Global Connections*, p.2

⁵ G.H Luce, "Bagan Myingabar Gubuykkyi of Rajakumara (1113AD)", *BBHC*, 1961, P.4 (Hereafter cited as G.H Luce, "Bagan Myingabar Gubuykkyi")

6 See Fig. 3

7 See Fig .4

8 See Fig .5

9 See Fig. 6



(Figure-3) mural painting from Myinkaba Kubyauk kyi

(Source from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gubyaukgyi Temple \(Myinkaba\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gubyaukgyi_Temple_(Myinkaba)))



(Figure-4) mural painting from Myinkaba Kubyauk kyi

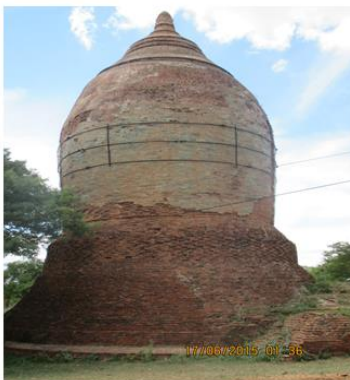


(Figure- 5, 6) Sinhalese Jataka designs of mural painting from Myinkaba Kubyauk kyi Temple
(Source from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/poorfish/5162448347>)

(Source from <https://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Asia/Myanmar/North/Mandalay/Myinkaba/photo1529096.htm>)



To present the identity of Sinhalese typed stupas, it was observed in visual design and functions of architectural composition. The monuments of the Bagan Period can be divided into three portions as follows; Early Bagan Period, (2) Middle Bagan Period, (3) Late Bagan Period. To study the Bagan architectural style, the construction methods and visual design can be classified to analyze. The early phase of Bagan architectural composition can be measured with the role of Pyu Stupa Baw Baw Gyi, Pharamar, and Pharagyi. In summary, to say about Pre-Early Bagan architectural composition, the plinth was mostly built with circular shape, and the body main part was composed in cylindrical or bulbous form.¹



(Figure.7) Sinhalese type of stupa from Nga Kywe Nadaung



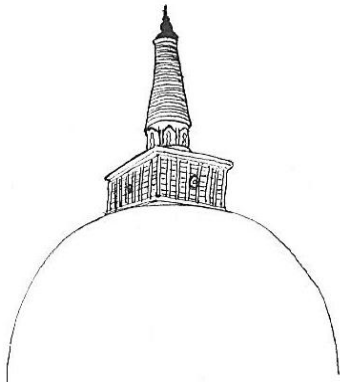
(Figure.8) Sinhalese type of Stupa (No.1038, 1039, 1040, 1041)

(Photo by researcher)

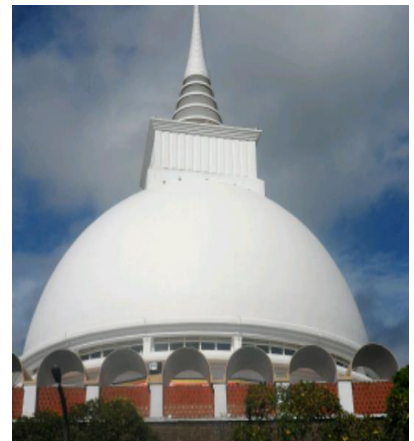
¹ See Fig.7, Field Research (17 June 2015)

2. See Fig.8, Field Research (18 June 2015)

After that, in Early Bagan Period 11th century CE, the dome shape *anda* was gradually changed from the cylindrical form. Because of the *anda* the dome shape body, the relic chamber or *hermika* was involved with the top of *chathavali* on behalf of umbrella. The shape of plinth was distinctly changed from circular shape to octagonal shape with eight sides. The proportion of stupa was measured between the lower terraces and upper main body also called *anda* the dome shape. Architecturally, it can be drawn with the four façades of three-dimensional vision and the scale of the building can also be symmetrically measured. The top part of stupa can be seen in two different forms such as the dome shaped stupa with *hermika* and without *hermika*. The dome shaped stupa with *hermika* can be known as *dagoba* type of Sinhalese stupa and the rest can be known as simple stupa.¹



(Figure-9) Symbolism of the early Sri Lanka type Stupa
(Source from A.K Narain)



(Figure-10) Kalutara Chaitya in Sri Lanka
(Source from www.Srilanka.com)



(Figure.11) Sinhalese type of Stupa
from Pawdawmu



(Figure.12) Sinhalese type of Stupa
from PepinKuang

(Photo by researcher)

Myanmar and Sri Lanka historical records, however, direct religious and cultural relations between Sri Lanka and Myanmar in the 11th to 13th century. The cultural, religious and political relationship between Myanmar and Sri Lanka spans a period of around a thousand

¹ See Fig. 9

2. See Fig.10

3. See Fig.11, Field Research (17 June 2015)

4. See Fig. 12, Field Research (18 June 2015)

years. The relationship has been mutually beneficial for both countries on many fronts. It is a good foundation to strengthen the friendship between two countries. It also contributes to extending the new information about Bagan civilization involving the Sinhalese tradition of Buddhist missionaries related to the architectural contexts in Bagan Buddhist Art and Architecture.

Conclusion

According to facts, in conclusion, the relation between Sri Lanka and Myanmar was strongly established in the religious field in Buddhism during the Bagan period. As a result, the Sinhalese Buddhist sect took an important role in the Singha order through the Bagan period and continued to exist after the Bagan period. Together with the influence of the Sinhalese Buddhist sect, the Sinhalese style and style of Stupas, monasteries as well as Buddhist images appeared during the Bagan period and some remains of them can be traced and studied in the Bagan area at the present day.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Tin Maung Tun, Rector of the University of Yangon for his permission to conduct this paper. I also would like to express our gratitude to Dr Soe Ni Tun, Professor, Head of the Department of Archaeology, University of Yangon and Dr Kalayar Myat Myat Htwe, Professor of the Department of Archaeology, University of Yangon, for their giving helped me guidance in all the time of research and writing of this paper. I also would like to express my special thanks to Dr Pyei Phyo Kyaw, Professor of the Department of Archaeology, University of Mandalay for his guidance and support in completing this research paper.

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