

Hinduism in Pyu Period (1st to 9th Century AD)

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Abstract

This research paper seeks to provide insight into the religious practices of the Pyu by examining Hinduism-related artifacts, aiming to bridge gaps in our archaeological understanding of Hinduism in Myanmar's protohistory. Drawing from a comprehensive array of data sources, including previous research, library resources, personal interviews, and archaeological findings, this research employs a multidisciplinary approach. It integrates field methods, visual analysis, and the descriptive method to comprehensively analyze the archaeological evidence. The research yields compelling results that prompt a reevaluation of the traditional assumption of Buddhism's predominant role during the Pyu period. It sheds light on the nuanced attitudes of the Pyu people, who seemingly practiced Hinduism with other beliefs concurrently.

Keywords: Hinduism, Pyu, Protohistory, Artifacts,

1. Introduction

This research paper seeks to illuminate the religious customs and practices of the Pyu civilization, with a particular focus on the Hindu-influenced artifacts discovered within the ancient cities. These findings provide invaluable insights into the diverse religious landscape, where a multitude of beliefs and customs coexisted harmoniously during ancient times. Remarkably, vestiges of these traditions still linger, offering a tangible connection to the past. While many scholarly works concentrate primarily on Buddhism, the unearthing of Hindu deities and iconography emphasizes the vibrant presence of Hinduism, coexisting peacefully with other belief systems.

2. Literature Review

Existing literature on Hinduism in the Pyu period remains scarce, with "Brahmanical Gods and Goddesses in Burma" by Nihar-Ranjan Ray being the sole comprehensive publication on the subject in Myanmar. His examination encompasses 34 artifacts found in Sri Ksetra, Bagan, and Thahton, Myanmar. However, it is noteworthy that only three of these artifacts are primarily associated with the Pyu civilization, and all three were discovered in the Sri Ksetra Old City. Regrettably, his emphasis on Sri Ksetra alone, while fruitful, leaves a broader understanding of the Pyu's ancient religious practices somewhat incomplete. To unveil the religious practices of the Pyu in ancient times, this paper extends its purview to encompass excavated and discovered artifacts from not only Sri Ksetra but also Halin, Beikthano, Wadee and Maingmao, the five prominent ancient cities of the Pyu civilization.

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3. Research Questions

Did Hinduism truly flourish during the Pyu Period, and what evidence supports its prominence in Pyu civilization?

Which specific cults of Hinduism were prevalent in the ancient Pyu cities, and how did they contribute to the religious and cultural landscape of the region?

4. Materials and Methods

In order to effectively address the questions outlined above, an in-depth examination of primary and secondary sources pertaining to the Pyu old cities, namely Sri Ksetra, Halin, Beikthano, Wadee, and Maingmao, has been undertaken. This research draws upon a wide range of data sources, encompassing previous research, library materials, personal interviews, and archaeological discoveries. A multidisciplinary approach is employed, incorporating field methods, visual analysis, and the descriptive method to provide a comprehensive analysis of the archaeological evidence.

5. An Introduction to Hinduism

Hinduism, one of the world's oldest religions, has unknown origins; however, some elements probably date back to the prehistoric past.¹ This faith lacks a singular, identifiable founder, and its roots delve into the enigmatic depths of prehistoric times. While pinpointing its exact beginnings remains elusive, some elements of Hinduism can be traced back to the urbanized civilization of the Indus Valley in the middle of the third millennium BC.² The Indus Civilization significantly contributed to the development of Hinduism. The faith's early period, termed the *Vedic* Period 1500 and 1200 B.C.³, is primarily associated with the Indo-Aryans, a conquering group that likely entered India around the middle of the second millennium BC.⁴ Early *Vedism* emphasized the worship of nature and revered numerous gods, totaling 33 gods and goddesses⁵. Indeed, among these *Vedic* deities, *Indra*, the wielder of the thunderbolt⁶; *Agni*, the god of fire⁷; and *Soma*, the divine god of intoxicating drinks, held significant popularity during that era.⁸ Interestingly, some of the most renowned deities in contemporary Hinduism are absent from the *Vedic* pantheon. As Hinduism evolved, certain deities from the Vedic era receded, making way for the current Hindu Triad: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, who gained

¹ T. Richard Blurton, *Hindu Art*, London, Trustees of British Museum Press, 1994, p-12 (Hereafter cited as Blurton, *Hindu Art*)

² George Michell, *Hindu Art and Architecture*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2000, p-11 (Hereafter cited as Michell, *Hindu Art and Architecture*)

³ Jack Finegan, *the Archaeology of World Religions*, New Jersey, Prince University Press, 1952, p-129, (Hereafter cited as Finegan, *the Archaeology of World Religions*)

⁴ Blurton, *Hindu Art*, p-12

⁵ U Myint Swe, ဝေဒဓေတိယဦးကျေးမှုနှင့် ဘာသာရေးအတွေးအခေါ်, *The Vedic Culture and Philosophy*, Mandalay, Narawat Sarpay, 1979, p-61 (Hereafter cited as U Myint Swe, *Vedic Culture*)

⁶ Finegan, *The Archaeology of World Religions*, p-132

⁷ Ibid, p-132,

⁸ U Myint Swe, *Vedic Culture*, pp-61-89

widespread popularity. The aniconic representation of Shiva and Shakti through the *yonis* and *lingas* holds a prominent place in Hinduism and is indeed quite popular. It is estimated that there are approximately 30 million *lingas* in India, indicating the widespread reverence for these symbols within the religion.¹ Central to popular Hinduism is the belief in one Universal Being, Brahman, which assumes countless forms, each with distinct characteristics.

The Arrival of Hinduism in Myanmar during the Pyu Period

Myanmar, positioned as the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia, occupies a crucial crossroads between India and China, effectively serving as a gateway to Southeast Asia. Sandwiched between these densely populated nations, Myanmar naturally absorbed cultural influences from its neighboring giants. The archaeological evidence supports earliest trading route between India and Myanmar, which started in “mid–first millennium BC between Taungthaman site with Andhra and Tamil Nadu in Southern India and with Thailand and Cambodia on the other.”² Historical evidence indeed supports the existence of a land trade route as early as 128 BC, connecting India to China through Assam, Upper Burma, and Yunnan.³ This claim is substantiated by the writings of Luce, who stated, "Already, before 109 BC, when the Chinese first occupied East Yunnan, there existed some sort of a trade route, apparently by land, from China to India."⁴ This trade route not only facilitated the exchange of goods but also paved the way for the cultural and religious exchanges that would later play a significant role in the region's history. Along these well-established trade routes, Indian traders ventured across both land and sea, not only transporting commodities but also carrying their rich religious and philosophical traditions. These early interactions laid the foundation for enduring connections between India and Myanmar. Over time, these exchanges led to the assimilation of Hindu beliefs, rituals, and deities into the local customs of Myanmar. Furthermore, the blending of Hinduism with indigenous belief systems gave rise to distinctive syncretic forms of worship and spirituality.

6. Pyu Civilization

The Pyu, a Tibeto–Burman group, originated in southern China and subsequently migrated to what is now Myanmar in the “3rd century BC.”⁵ They established a constellation of city–states across the region, including Halin, Maingmao, Wadee, Beikthano, and Sri Ksetra. Chinese texts written in the 4th century A D call them, Piao; Javanese inscription noted them as Tulichu; they called themselves Tulochu, Mon inscriptions of 11th century at Bagan refer them

¹ Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford, Clearndon Press, 1899, p-901, (Hereafter cited as Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*)

² Janice Stargardt, *The Ancient Pyu of Burma, Vol I* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p-44, (Hereafter cited as Stargardt, *The Ancient Pyu of Burma*)

³ D. G. E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, London, Macmillan CO LTD, 1964, p-23 (Hereafter cited as Hall, *A History of South-East Aisa*)

⁴ Luce, “Ancient Pyu”, *Journal of Burma Research Society*, IIVI, III, Yangon, Universities’ Central Library, 1937, p-239 (Hereafter cited as Luce “Ancient Pyu”)

⁵ U Thaw Kaung, *Selected Writing of U Yi Sein*, Yangon, Tun Foundation Press, 2011, p-167 (Hereafter cited as U Thaw Kaung, *Selected Writing*)

as Tircul.¹ The remnants and artifacts uncovered within these ancient city–states provide glimpses into the cultural standard of the Pyu civilization during this era. However, it is worth noting that excavations in Wadi and Maingmao have not yielded substantial evidence of Hindu–influenced artifacts, setting them apart from other Pyu cities in this regard. These results suggest that the influence of Hinduism may have varied among the Pyu city–states, adding an intriguing layer of complexity to the understanding of their cultural and religious dynamics.

7. Beikthano Old City

Beikthano Old City² holds a significant place among the ancient Pyu cities in Myanmar, possessing a rich historical and archaeological heritage. Nestled north of Kokkogwa Village, approximately twelve miles west of Taungdwingyi, in Magwe Division, this old city is one of the oldest among Pyu cities. Its city wall, though weathered by time, still preserves its rectangular layout, stretching two miles from east to west, and 1.6 miles from north to south³. Notably, the eastern city wall bears a distinctive 13 degrees incline towards the west.⁴ The initial surveys of Beikthano were conducted in 1905, followed by excavation efforts. Notably, two mounds situated to the south of the old city yielded an assortment of burial urns, displaying diverse shapes and sizes. Subsequently, systematic excavation activities commenced in 1958 and continue to this day, encompassing a total of 67 mounds. Of particular interest among the excavated artifacts are those related to Hinduism, shedding light on the religious practices of the inhabitants during the city's heyday. These findings have not only contributed to our understanding of the religious landscape but have also deepened our appreciation for the cultural tapestry of Beikthano Old City. Among the excavated artifacts and chance finds, the focal point of attention lies primarily on the sandstone relics associated with Hinduism.

Findings in Beikthano

Sandstone Religious Artifacts in Beikthano Old City

The uncovering of sandstone religious artifacts remains a common occurrence in ancient cities, and Beikthano Old City is no exception. This archaeological site has yielded a collection of noteworthy artifacts and icons that are predominantly linked to Hinduism. Some sandstone artifacts, unearthed during the excavation of Mound No. 2, are noteworthy to analyze in detail. These include a small sandstone slab adorned with low–relief depictions of floral motifs, a circular sandstone slab, a rounded sandstone object, and a circular sandstone slab, which, intriguingly, lacks the central drain and is split into two pieces. Additionally, a circular sandstone slab, now on display in the local museum of Beikthano, adds further interest to this remarkable

¹ Dr Naing Pan Hla, *Archaeological Aspects of Pyu Mon Myanmar*, Yangon, Lawka Alin, 2011, p-1 (Hereafter cited as Dr Naing Pan Hla, *Archaeological Aspects*)

² See Map (1)

³ U Aung Thaw, “ဗိသုနိးမြို့ဟောင်း” “Beikthano Old City”, ရှေးဟောင်းမြန်မာ့မြို့တော်များ, *Ancient Myanmar Cities*, Yangon, Yarppei Press, 2007, p-13 (Hereafter cited as U Aung Thaw “Beikthano Old City”)

⁴ U Aung Thaw “Beikthano Old City,” p-15

collection. These artifacts not only enrich our understanding of the religious practices in Beikthano but also provide valuable insights into the cultural and historical tapestry of this ancient city.

Mound No. 2 is situated approximately 300 yards northeast of the palace, which stands within the old city walls. The excavation of this mound was carried out during 1958–59 under the supervision of U Aung Thaw.¹ The findings from this excavation revealed the presence of a substantial habitation structure, characterized by the inclusion of four circular sandstone slabs. Within the structure, a smaller stone slab was also discovered. Among the unearthed artifacts were a sandstone roller, a circular sandstone slab, another circular sandstone slab without a central drain, and one more circular sandstone slab that had broken into two pieces. Additionally, one sandstone slab was donated to the local museum, sharing its material composition with the other sandstone artifacts and featuring a drain.

The small circular sandstone slab, modest in size, holds great interest for its intricate architectural drawing and design details. This small slab measures 2.9 inches in length, 1.6 inches in width, and has a thickness of 0.2 inches.² Remarkably, both sides of the slab bear meticulously carved floral motifs and symbols.³ One side features the depiction of two flowers, each with six petals, resembling the lotus—a symbol closely associated with Brahma, the creator god in the Hindu pantheon. The other side is similarly adorned with two lotus-like flowers, each displaying six petals. Additionally, a reverse carving on this side reveals two symbols that represent the goad and the discus.⁴ The goad and the discus both hold significant meaning within Hinduism. The goad is a prominent attribute of Lord Ganesh, the god revered as the remover of obstacles, known for his distinctive elephant-headed form. Similarly, the discus is another noteworthy attribute of Lord Ganesh, which, in later periods, became commonly associated with him⁵. Notably, the discus also holds a prominent place as one of the primary attributes of Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the universe. It is intriguing to note that the discovery of these two symbols likely pertains to Lord Ganesh rather than Lord Vishnu, emphasizing the significance of Lord Ganesh's presence in the archaeological context.

Another intriguing discovery is a sandstone artifact closely associated with Lord Shiva in the Hindu Triad. However, the original excavation report provides only a brief mention of this sandstone slab, lacking detailed descriptions and photographs. This circular sandstone slab, along with a sandstone roller, strongly suggests a connection to Lord Shiva. Another piece, a broken sandstone slab without a central drain, further indicates the presence of Lord Shiva.

¹ U Aung Thaw, “Beikthano Old City”, p-19

² Ibid, p-48

³ See Figure (2)

⁴ See Figure (3)

⁵ Kailash Nath Seth and B. K. Chaturvedi, *Gods and Goddesses of India*, Delhi, Diamond Pocket Books, 20023, p-15 (Hereafter cited as Seth and Chaturvedi, *Gods and Goddesses of India*)

Unfortunately, the absence of detailed photographs and architectural drawings poses a challenge for researchers seeking to understand its form and size fully.

Another captivating circular sandstone slab was found near the palace wall, in close proximity to Mound No. 2, by a local villager who generously donated it to the local museum¹. This object features three stands on its back and a circular upper part, resembling a sandstone tool used for grinding the bark of the '*thanatkhar*,' a traditional cosmetic for women in Myanmar. Notably, one end of the slab includes a drain, resembling a *yonī*, that is used as the base for the *linga*, symbols revered by Hindus who worship Lord Shiva. While we cannot definitively attribute this artifact to Lord Shiva due to its unexcavated nature, we are fortunate to have discovered an original photo of a similar circular sandstone slab in a booklet by Hla Pe (1962)², providing valuable insights. This sandstone slab,³ while generally circular, features a slightly oblong spout at one end. In its center lies a circular drain connected to the spout, allowing water to easily flow out when poured onto the slab. The presence of this circular sandstone slab with a drain strongly indicates its association with Hinduism, particularly the Shiva *linga* and *yonī*. Although the *linga* stone was not uncovered alongside the *yonī*, the circular sandstone slab bears striking resemblance to a similar slab found in Hanlin old city.

Collectively, the discoveries of circular sandstone slabs, the sandstone roller, and other related symbols emphasize the profound influence of Hinduism within Beikthano old city. Further research should be conducted on Hinduism in Beikthano old city, and it promises to paint a more comprehensive picture of the city's rich history within the Pyu civilization."

8. Halin Old City

While most Pyu old cities boast a circular layout, Halin Old City⁴ stands out as a distinctive exception. Situated approximately 10.5 miles Southeast of Shwebo, the former capital of the third Myanmar Empire, and 6 miles northeast of Wetlet, a township in Shwebo within the Sagaing Division, Halin Old City is characterized by its unique geography. In contrast to the circular cities, Halin Old City takes on a roughly rectangular shape, stretching 9600 feet from north to south and 5800 feet from east to west.⁵ The city's layout deviates from a straightforward north–south orientation, with the city walls exhibiting a distinct 15 degrees 46 minutes inclination to the west from the north.⁶ This area was historically associated with salt mines,

¹ U Aung Thaw, "Beikthano Old City", p-49

² Hla Pe, ဗိသုဒ္ဓိမြို့ဟောင်း, *Beikthano Old City*, Yangon, Shwemyodaw Press, 1962, p-7 (Hereafter cited as Hla Pe, *Beikthano*)

³ See Figure (1)

⁴ See Map (1)

⁵ Department of Archaeology and National Museum, *Documentary on Excavation at Halin*, Yangon, Pujiyama Press, 2016, p-7 (Hereafter cited as Department of Archaeology, *Documentary on Excavation at Halin*)

⁶ U Myint Aung, "ဟန်လင်းမြို့ဟောင်း" "Halin Old City", မြန်မာ့ရှေးဟောင်းမြို့တော်များ, *Ancient Myanmar Cities*, Yangon, Yarppei Press, 2007, p-59 (Hereafter cited as U Myint Aung, "Halin Old City.")

which contributed to Halin's prosperity in bygone eras. Salt, a valuable commodity in ancient times, likely played a pivotal role in establishing Halin as a significant trading hub.

Excavation in Halin Old City

The initial excavations of Halin Old City were led by Mr. Taw Sein Kho, the leader of the Epigraphic Office of Burma. Ten mounds within this ancient city were excavated by Mr Taw Sein Kho in 1905. These early excavations yielded remarkable discoveries, including a sandstone slab adorned with inscriptions in the Pyu script and a large sandstone slab intricately engraved with over 50 human figures.¹ However, it was not until 1961 that the Department of Archaeology initiated systematic excavations in Halin Old City. Over the years, these efforts have culminated in the excavation of a total of 46 mounds, unveiling a treasure trove of invaluable artifacts. Halin Old City stands as a testament to the rich cultural heritage of the Pyu civilization, and ongoing archaeological endeavors continue to reveal its significance in Myanmar's history.

Hindu–influenced Artifacts in Halin Old City

Halin possesses two museums: one managed by the Department of Archaeology, where excavated artifacts are displayed, and another run by the abbot of the Nayungkobin Monastery. The Nyaungkobin Museum houses artifacts that were not recovered through excavations. Instead, many of these items were either collected by the monastery's abbot or generously donated by local residents. While most of these artifacts were unearthed in the Halin Old City, their provenances remain somewhat elusive due to the absence of systematic artifact recording. Although the Nayungkobin Museum may be relatively small in size, it holds a treasure trove of invaluable artifacts, many of which cannot be found in the Government Museum. Among these artifacts, some are mainly concerned with Hinduism.

Findings in Halin

Yonis in Halin:

In the Sanskrit Dictionary by Sir Monier–Williams, the term '*yoni*' is defined as "womb, uterus, vulva, vagina, and the female organs of generation."² Similarly, the Myanmar–English dictionary equates it to "vagina." In a broader context, sandstone yoni slabs are primarily associated with Shakti, the divine consort of Lord Shiva. In Hinduism, the *linga* symbolizes Lord Shiva, while the yoni represents Shakti. The combination of the yoni and *linga* is a common feature in Shaivism, prevalent in most Hindu temples, regardless of their scale. This pairing symbolizes the natural phenomenon of fertility within nature. Within the small museum, an intriguing collection is on display, including four circular sandstone slabs, one circular terracotta plate.

¹ Department of Archaeology, *Documentary on Excavation at Halin*, p-10

² Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p-858

The Unique *Yoni* Slab: An Innovative Artifact from Halin Old City

The *Yoni* slab marked as No. 1¹ holds the distinction of being among the earliest known examples, measuring approximately 10 cm in length. Its circular body features a spout at one end, characterized by a minimalist design devoid of decorative elements. Crafted from sandstone, this *Yoni* slab exhibits dimensions of 10 cm in length and 5 cm in width. Notably, at its center lies a circular drain, seamlessly connected to the spout, enabling efficient water drainage. The distinctive shape and design of this artifact stand out as unusual and intriguing, making it a rare find in Halin Old City. In fact, it may represent an innovative approach to crafting stone *yonis*, suggesting the city's propensity for unique creative expressions during its historical era. Determining its precise date of creation is rather challenging, although it could likely originate from the 8th to 9th century AD.

The Enigmatic No. 2 *Yoni* Slab: A Rare Find with Unusual Features

The *Yoni* slab labeled as No. 2² stands out as a remarkably uncommon and enigmatic artifact. Its appearance is notably distinct and seldom encountered. Fashioned from sandstone, this particular *Yoni* slab measures 12.5 cm in length and 7.5 cm in width. It comprises a circular body and spout, deviating from the conventional design. Strikingly, unlike No. 1 *Yoni*, there is no central drain; instead, it is fashioned in a manner resembling a bowl. While it does feature a drain in the spout, discerning its exact purpose is challenging, as water cannot readily exit through this opening when poured onto the slab. In essence, the small drain seems to serve more as a symbolic mark than a functional channel for water drainage. On the reverse side,³ the *Yoni* slab presents a notably flat and polished surface without any supporting stands. This distinct configuration prompts speculation that it might have served as an amulet for Shivites rather than being an actual *Yoni* representation. The exact date of making of the *Yoni* is very hard to know, although it might be in the 8th to 9th century AD.

***Yoni* No. 3, A Rare Chance**

Yoni No. 3,⁴ crafted from sandstone, boasts impressive dimensions, measuring 33 cm in length and 15 cm in diameter, making it the largest among the *yonis* displayed at the Nyaunkobin Monastery Museum. Regrettably, it is broken into two halves. Lacking any external decoration, its main body maintains a simple circular shape. Within this main body, a circular drain is present, yet it lacks an outlet due to its complete circular form. Towards one end of the main body, an unadorned section without a drain is incorporated, seemingly designed purely for decorative purposes. The middle part of the main body is intricately carved out, resembling a shallow bowl, mirroring the center of *Yoni* No. 2. Deciphering the precise function of *Yoni* No. 3 poses a challenge, as it could be a replication of an actual *Yoni* or an innovative creation from antiquity. This artifact may date back to the 9th to 10th century AD, during the later Pyu period."

¹ See Figure (4)

² See Figure (5)

³ See Figure (6)

⁴ See Figure (9)

Yoni No. 4: A Unique and Compact Artifact

Yoni No. 4¹ stands as a distinct and rare specimen within the collection. Crafted from terracotta, it differentiates itself not only by its diminutive size but also by its material composition, adding to its uniqueness. The small size of this *yonis* suggests the possible existence of various *yonis* sizes during the Pyu period, offering insight into the diversity of religious practices. Measuring a mere 4.5 cm in diameter, *Yoni* No. 4 maintains a complete circular shape, without any carved-out portions akin to *Yoni* No. 2 and *Yoni* No. 3. Despite its lack of intricate decoration and somewhat modest craftsmanship, this artifact holds significance. Located near the brim, a circular drain is present, mirroring the design of the original *Yoni*. The absence of ornate details on the body suggests that this artifact may have been intended for practical and personal use rather than display. It could have served as an amulet for followers of Shiva, conveniently carried in their pockets for worship and devotion. *Yoni* No. 4 likely dates back to the 8th to 9th century AD, marking a valuable discovery as the only known example of its kind from the Pyu period. This artifact enriches our understanding of the diverse religious practices and artifacts that once thrived within this ancient civilization.

Yoni No. 5: A Remarkable Sandstone Masterpiece

Among the collection of five *yonis* in the museum, *Yoni* No.5² truly stands out as a captivating work of art. Crafted from sandstone, it is not only aesthetically pleasing but also unique in its design and making. This *Yoni* is a testament to the artistry of its creators. One of the most striking features of *Yoni* No. 5 is its intricate decoration, particularly along the brim, where delicate floral motifs grace the surface. These ornate embellishments add a touch of elegance to the overall appearance. The body of *Yoni* No. 5 maintains a perfect circular shape, but it departs from convention with the presence of a spout at one end, creating an oblong shape. What sets it apart even further is the absence of a central drain, a departure from the design of *Yoni* No. 1, 3, and 4. Instead, the central portion has been entirely removed, resulting in a shallow bowl-like configuration—rarity in Pyu period artifacts. Remarkably, a small and short drain is located at the spout, although it lacks any connection to the main body. This peculiarity suggests that *Yoni* No. 5 may not have been intended for practical use but rather as a miniature representation of a *Yoni*. 12.5 cm in diameter and 15 cm in length, *Yoni* No. 5 also features three short stands on its back³, enhancing its stability and display capabilities. While the exact date of creation remains elusive, the level of craftsmanship exhibited in *Yoni* No. 5 hints at a later period, possibly dating to the 10th to 11th century AD.

In essence, the discovery of both sandstone and terracotta *yonis* in Halin old city underlines the widespread tradition of crafting and revering *yonis* in a myriad of sizes and shapes. These diverse *yonis* exhibit a spectrum of forms, showcasing the innovative spirit of the Pyu

¹ See Figure (10)

² See Figure (7)

³ See Figure (8)

artisans in Halin. The diversity in size, design and material among these *yonis* reflects the abundant craftsmanship that thrived in Halin. The discovery of *yonis* in Halin old city indicates the presence of a community of Shiva devotees within the city, shedding light on the religious practices of that era. If new evidence is obtained from Halin old city, the understanding of the religious practices of the Pyu civilization could be further enriched.

9. Sri Ksetra Old City

Sri Ksetra old city¹, one of the largest in Myanmar, and quite possibly the largest in Southeast Asia during its heyday, is located 5 miles Southeast of Pyay in Bago Region. The city boasts a roughly circular shape, covering approximately 8.5 square miles.² The first researcher to conduct excavations in the old city was Dr. E. Forchammer, who undertook surveys in 1882–83–84 and produced detailed reports of his findings. In 1907, General Leyon de Belle and Mr. Taw Sein Kho also conducted excavations in the area.³ Subsequently, Mons Charles Duroiselle and U Lu Phe Win continued archaeological work in Sri Ksetra total of 67 mounds have been excavated, yielding a wealth of valuable artifacts. Notably, many Hindu–influenced artifacts were unearthed during the 1920, 1926, 1927 and 2011 excavations and are now on display in the Mawzar museum and site museum of mound no. 53. During the excavation, a Hindu temple, two *lingas* and eight artifacts with Hindu influence were unearthed. All these artifacts are crafted from sandstone and include: a standing Vishnu and Lakshmi, another standing Vishnu and Lakshmi, a standing Vishnu on Garuda, a four–armed Vishnu, the head of Lakshmi, Vishnu and the Hindu Triad, the left hand of Vishnu, the right hand of Vishnu.

Findings in Sri Ksetra

A standing Vishnu and Lakshmi, A Unique Masterpiece

A standing Vishnu on Garuda and Lakshmi⁴ were discovered in Pokungon, within the old city, during excavations in 1908–09. This sandstone artifact measures 68 cm X 62 cm X 13 cm, although its intricate details have been eroded due to damage over time. Nonetheless, the figures' general appearance remains discernible. Both figures stand rigidly, with Vishnu depicted as having four arms, although the specific attributes held in these arms are clearly visible. Vishnu is depicted with holding a conch in his upper proper left hand, a mace in his lower left, and a chakra in his upper proper right hand, although the lower proper right hand is missing. It can be assumed that this hand once held an object near his chest. Vishnu is adorned with a conical headdress. Vishnu stands atop Garuda, whose wings are outstretched, although the head of the Garuda is missing. Adjacent to the standing Vishnu stands Lakshmi, portrayed with only two

¹ See Map (1)

² U Sein Maung Oo, “သရေခေတ္တရာ မြို့ဟောင်း” “Sri Ksetra Old City”, *Ancient Myanmar Cities*, Yangon, Yarppei Press, 2007, p-93 (Hereafter cited as U Sein Maung Oo, “Sri Ksetra Old City”)

³ Ibid, p-93

⁴ See Figure (11)

arms. Her proper right hand is raised to her chest, seemingly holding a lotus, while her proper left-hand rests at her side. Like Vishnu, Lakshmi wears a conical headdress. The matching headdresses of Vishnu and Lakshmi, along with the presence of Garuda (Vishnu's mount), indicate their equal rank and status. Their shared stance further reinforces this notion. Although the figure beneath Lakshmi is heavily damaged, making it difficult to ascertain whether it represents Garuda, it is likely. Determining the precise date of the sandstone slab's creation is challenging, but it is estimated to originate from the early 6th, 7th, or 8th century AD. In summary, this sandstone slab serves as a testament to the presence of Vishnu's followers in the old city.

Another Vishnu and Lakshmi Sandstone Slab: A Unique Find

A sandstone slab featuring a standing Vishnu and Lakshmi¹ was initially discovered at Pokungon in 1909-10 and subsequently found at the Sri Ksetra city wall gate in 1928–29. Today, it is on display at the Mawzar Museum, measuring 66 cm x 63 cm x 17 cm. Over time, this sandstone slab has become significantly weathered, making it challenging to discern its intricate details. The figure on the proper right is likely a representation of standing Vishnu, although the attributes held in his four hands are no longer identifiable. Positioned on the left side is a figure that likely represents Lakshmi, Vishnu's consort, as she is depicted with two hands. One hand grasps an object resembling a lotus, while the other rests gently on her breast. Both figures are adorned with conical headdresses. Although both figures stand rigidly on the same level, their vehicle, Garuda, is absent from this depiction. Nevertheless, the fact that both figures stand on the same plane suggests they hold equal status. While it is challenging to definitively identify them as Vishnu and Lakshmi, given their matching discovery location, the similarities in their depiction such as four hands and two hands, conical headdresses, and shared standing position, strongly suggest their identity. Pinpointing the precise date of creation is difficult, but it is estimated to originate from the 6th, 7th, or 8th century AD.

Vishnu and Lakshmi Sandstone Slab: A Rare Chance

A remarkable depiction of Vishnu standing atop the Garuda with Lakshmi was unearthed in the garden of the Deputy Commissioner within the old city. This sandstone slab measures 94 cm x 63 cm x 11 cm² and holds significant historical and artistic value. Vishnu, in this representation, stands gracefully on the back of Garuda, the mythical bird and his divine vehicle. Vishnu possesses four arms, each holding essential attributes. The lower right hand clasps a round object, while the lower left holds a mace. In his upper right hand, he carries a conch, and though the upper left hand is missing, it is assumed to have held a sacred object. The conch and discus are the primary symbols associated with Lord Vishnu. Vishnu stands rigidly, adorned with a necklace, though he lacks wristlets, bracelets, or arm bands. His attire is unembellished, consisting of a lower garment secured at the center, which cascades gracefully to his knees. The upper garment is simple and unadorned or even appears half-naked. Sadly, the head of Vishnu

¹ See Figure (12)

² See Figure (13)

is missing, a significant loss for researchers. Vishnu's vehicle, the Garuda, is exquisitely crafted, featuring outstretched wings, yet the head of this avian figure is absent, and in its place, one might discern a human-like head.

Standing beside Vishnu is Lakshmi, distinguished by her two arms. Her right arm extends upward towards her shoulders, bearing a lotus, which is the customary attribute of Lakshmi. Her left hand gracefully rests along her waist. Notably, both of Lakshmi's hands are adorned with seven bracelets each, and her little finger and thumb touch to create a circular mark, a symbolic hand gesture whose precise meaning remains unknown. Lakshmi's attire consists of a lower garment that extends down to her ankles, accentuated with anklets. Her lower garment is secured with a belt, and she may also be wearing an upper garment, although it is challenging to definitively identify. Similar to Vishnu, the head of Lakshmi is missing, and the details of her headgear are shrouded in mystery. Both Vishnu and Lakshmi share the same standing position, signifying their equal status and rank. The origin of this sandstone slab is estimated to be from the 7th to 9th century AD. This discovery of Vishnu and Lakshmi within the old city serves as compelling evidence of the presence of Vishnu's followers in ancient times, shedding light on the rich religious diversity of the era.

Vishnu on Garuda: A Unique Discovery

In 1924, another intriguing artifact emerged from the depths of the Sri Ksetra old city, further attesting to the presence of Vishnu's followers in the region. Crafted from sandstone, this artifact, unfortunately, bears some damage, resulting in its current triangular shape. Its dimensions are described: "The stone is about sixteen inches high and about a foot wide at the base."¹ While the slab itself is missing today, its original photograph can be observed in Ray's book, "Brahmanical Gods in Burma." This remarkable piece portrays Vishnu standing atop the Garuda, whose wings are outstretched entirety. Regrettably, the head and lower part of the Garuda are missing, leaving a void in our understanding of its facial features and actual size. Nonetheless, the remaining outstretched wings of the Garuda are exceptionally rare and have been executed with great precision, showcasing outstanding craftsmanship.

Vishnu², in contrast, stands with his characteristic composure, adorned with bracelets, arm bands, and a necklace. His lower garment flows down to his ankles, featuring intricate decorative patterns consisting of lines and bands. Vishnu is depicted with four arms: his lower right-hand rests on his waist, while his left hand gently holds an unidentified object. His upper right arm cradles a conch, while the upper left wields a discus, both arms raised gracefully skyward. Vishnu's regal crown adorns his head, although the upper part is now missing. The slab's edges are adorned with exquisite floral motifs, a rarity that sets this piece apart. Indeed, it stands as a unique example within Myanmar's archaeological discoveries, depicting Vishnu

¹ Nihar-Ranjan Rays, *Brahmanical Gods in Burma*, Calcutta, University of Calcutta Press, 1932, p-27 (Hereafter cited as Rays, *Brahmanical Gods*)

² See Figure (14)

alone with exceptional artistry. Most stone slabs found in the old city traditionally feature pairs of Vishnu and Lakshmi. As noted by Ray: "We are accustomed to see in India and in the colonies Visnu as riding or seated crossed–legged on his vahana; Visnu standing on Garuda is rare; in fact, such representations are hardly seen. It is most interesting that the type has up till now been found in Burma alone, and that in more than one example."¹

Deciphering the original intent of the artisans from ancient times can be challenging. It is possible that new narratives or "puranas" about Vishnu and Garuda emerged, or perhaps local inhabitants crafted these representations based on entirely innovative ideas. In any case, these discoveries attest to the innovative spirit and unique contributions of the Pyu culture in Sri Ksetra.

Head of Lakshmi: Unearthing Divine Beauty

Another significant discovery strengthens the notion that Vishnu had devout followers within the old city. This particular sandstone slab was unearthed in the Nyaungnibin mound, Hmokeshay Village, in 1928. It represents a fragment, the upper part of a divine figure, with dimensions measuring 36 cm x 21 cm x 10 cm. Lakshmi² is adorned with a tiered headdress, a usual feature for deities, and wears a gorget, a distinctive aspect of this depiction. Remarkably, she also sports ear–plugs, gracefully touching to her gorget. With two arms, like other Lakshmi images discovered in the old city, her proper left hand cradles a lotus—a usual attribute associated with the goddess. Adjacent to Lakshmi's head is an arm bearing a conch shell that might be part of Vishnu. This coupling hints at the possibility that the broken stone piece could have once been part of a larger representation of Vishnu and Lakshmi, perhaps life–sized. Such an intricate sculpture would likely have graced a hall or a Hindu temple. Indeed, an archaeological expedition in 1926–27 uncovered a Hindu temple in Kalarkan Village within the old city, further substantiating the presence of Vishnu's devotees. The unearthing of this head of Lakshmi not only reveals the artistry and devotion of ancient inhabitants but also attests to the widespread reverence for Vishnu within the old city.

Hands of Vishnu: A Glimpse into the Divine

In 1963, two fascinating artifacts came to light during excavations in the Nyaungnipin Mound, nestled within Hmokeshay Village in the old city of Sri Ksetra. These discoveries held a profound significance, shedding light on the influence of Hinduism in the region. One of the treasures unearthed was the proper right hand of Vishnu³, sculpted from sandstone, measuring 27 cm x 18 cm x 6 cm. This magnificent artifact featured the discus–Vishnu's principal attributes. Though devoid of ornate decorations, the hand's exquisite craftsmanship was evident in the meticulously carved, elongated fingers. Complementing this discovery was the unearthing of Vishnu's proper left hand⁴, grasping a conch. This intricately crafted hand measured 18 cm x 24

¹ Rays, *Brahmanical Gods in Burma*, p-28

² See Figure (15)

³ See Figure (16)

⁴ See Figure (17)

cm x 6 cm and was found in the same location. These two fragments provided crucial evidence suggesting that they once belonged to a life-sized representation of the four-armed Vishnu. The existence of these upper hands offers compelling insights into the presence of a Vishnu cult in Hmokeshay Village. It is plausible that this larger representation of Vishnu was once enshrined in a hall or temple, serving as a focal point for devotees. These findings further underscore the profound influence of Vishnu worship within the realm of Sri Ksetra.

Four-Armed Statue: A Unique Discovery in Sri Ksetra

A captivating statue emerged from the Nyaungnipin Mound in Hmokeshay Village in 1963, marking a distinctive find within Sri Ksetra. What sets this artifact apart is that it stands as the sole statue in Sri Ksetra entirely crafted from sandstone, while most other unearthed relics take the form of reliefs. This commanding statue commands attention with dimensions measuring 60 cm x 36 cm x 10 cm, serving as a testament to Vishnu's four-armed manifestation¹. Regrettably, the upper two arms have suffered damage over time, yet it is noteworthy that these upper arms were adorned with armlets, introducing intriguing details to this enigmatic figure. The statue's head, unfortunately, remains missing, representing a substantial loss for researchers. Nevertheless, this artifact remains unparalleled, not only for being the sole sandstone creation but also for its unique embellishments.

The statue is depicted wearing a gorget embellished with leaf-shaped rosettes—a rare feature among divine representations. Further enhancing its regal appearance, the figure is bedecked in royal *salwe*—exceptional form of royal jewelry. The upper attire, strikingly plain, lacks decorative elements, except for the royal jewelry. A notable peculiarity lies in the lower garment, tied at the waist and adorned with a pattern of horizontal stripes cascading from the waist, punctuated with delicate floral motifs. Unlike other depictions, this garment is shorter, extending only slightly above the knees—an unusual portrayal among divine figures. Despite the absence of lower legs and other attributes, the fragmentary nature of this artifact does not diminish its significance. From an iconographic perspective, the sandstone statue likely dates back to the 6th, 7th, or 8th century AD. The discovery of this regally attired torso and the associated sports of two hands of Vishnu, points to the possibility that the four-armed figure might represent Vishnu. Further research holds the potential to unveil the full nature and significance of this intriguing find.

Reclining Vishnu and the Enigmatic Hindu Triad: Unveiling Sri Ksetra's Religious Landscape

In 1919–20, during an excavation near Kalarkan Village in the old city of Sri Ksetra, an intriguing artifact came to light, now housed in the Mawzar Museum within the old city. This remarkable sandstone slab measures 38 cm x 36 cm x 10 cm in its current state.² The original composition of this sandstone slab, first mentioned in "Brahmanical Gods in Burma" by Ray, is

¹ See Figure (18)

² See Figure (19)

divided into two distinct parts: the lower section features the reclining Vishnu, while the upper section comprises the Hindu Triad. However, it's essential to note that only the upper portion, representing the Hindu Triad, is currently on display at the museum. The depiction of the reclining Vishnu, known as Ananta Sayana Vishnu, is not only popular in India but also prevalent in Southeast Asian countries, with Myanmar being no exception. The presence of this Reclining Vishnu on a serpent alludes to the culmination of the Vishnu Cult in Sri Ksetra. According to Ray's observations:

The god is represented as lying straight with his two legs crossed at the ankles. The head with the usual head–dress rests on a higher plane, and the body stretches not on the coils of a serpent but, so far as it seems, on a lotus couch that rests on a makara, the head of which is clearly visible on the left corner at the bottom of the slab. This is peculiarly interesting, for we have not yet been able to discover any sculpture or text where the reclining Vishnu is ever represented as having any association with makara. The usual practice, as we have already seen, is to represent him as reclining directly on the serpent, Ananta. It is, therefore, possible that the colonial artists either followed a text yet unknown to us or that they misinterpreted the whole story as known in India.¹

Deciphering whether the figure under Vishnu was a serpent or a makara remains challenging, primarily due to the missing lower part. If it indeed represents a makara, it could signify an innovative interpretation by the craftsmen of Sri Ksetra. Determining the exact creation date of this sandstone artifact poses difficulties, but it may align with the late Pyu period, spanning from the 9th to the 10th century AD.

The sandstone slab showcases a relief sculpture featuring three prominent Hindu deities: Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu. Brahma sits cross–legged atop a lotus flower, characterized by his three heads and four arms. His upper two arms are raised to the shoulders, with the attributes they once held now eroded. The lower two hands rest upon his chest, with the precise attributes difficult to discern due to wear and tear. Notably, Brahma's head–dress differs from that of other gods.

Vishnu, occupying the central position in the Triad, boasts four arms. The upper proper right hand once held a cakra (partially damaged), while the upper proper left hand clutched a conch (partially missing). The lower proper right hand cradles an object on his chest, while the lower proper left rests on the lotus seat. Vishnu wears a distinctive headdress, setting him apart from the other gods. His posture features a bent proper right knee, with the proper left leg folded beneath him.

Shiva, depicted with four arms, raises his upper proper right and left hands upward, grasping a drum and trisula (three–pronged fork), the primary attribute of Shiva. Unfortunately, the trisula is not clearly visible due to damage. The lower proper right hand is placed on the chest, gripping a round object, while the lower proper left hand rests on his knee. Shiva is seated upon a lotus flower. All three deities are surrounded by halos adorned with lotus petals and share

¹ Rays, *Brahmanical Gods in Burma*, p-29

a consistent seated posture. They are adorned with meticulously crafted ornaments, including those for their ears, arms, necks, and waists.

The discovery of the reclining Vishnu alongside the Triad provides compelling evidence of Vishnuism's popularity in Sri Ksetra. The unearthing of a Hindu Temple in Kalakan Village further attests to the practice of Hinduism in the region. Additionally, in 1926, a stone *linga* dedicated to Shiva was found near the village, shedding light on the prevalence of Shivism within the old city. In summary, the presence of the reclining Vishnu, the Triad, a Hindu Temple, and the Shiva *linga* collectively reveals that Hinduism was an integral part of the religious practices of the Pyu in ancient Sri Ksetra.

A Sandstone *Linga* in Mound No. 53: A Remarkable Discovery

A small sandstone *linga* came to light during an excavation in 2011 in mound no. 53, situated just outside the old city wall near the Bawbawgyi Stupa. In the Sanskrit–English Dictionary, the term "*linga*" is defined as "the sign of gender or sex, organ of generation, the male organ or Phallus."¹ This interpretation of the *linga* holds significance within certain sects and rituals in Hinduism. The mound's precise coordinates are N 18 degrees 47 minutes 11.2 seconds and E 95 degrees 16 minutes 53 seconds, with dimensions measuring 25 meters from east to west, 70 meters from north to south, and a height of 1.3 meters.² The structure, constructed of bricks, consists of three tiers. The bottom tier spans 22 meters by 12 meters, the middle tier 16 meters by 7 meters, and the uppermost tier 13 meters by 7 meters. The excavation yielded a total of 290 burial urns³, some of which were associated with Buddhism, although they are not discussed in detail here.

At the center of the uppermost tier, the sandstone artifact⁴ in question was discovered. This artifact measures 24 cm in length, 10 cm in width at the base, and 3 cm at the top. It consists of two parts: a square base and a round top. The lower section, measuring 15 cm in length with one side at 10 cm, is square at the base and transitions into a round shape at the top. Notably, this sandstone artifact is a unique find among the Pyu cities. The artifact's striking resemblance to Shiva's *linga* is evident, characterized by its composition of a square lower part and a round upper part. In general, Shiva's *linga* comprises these two distinctive sections: the square lower portion and the rounded upper portion. Occasionally, a face is carved into the top part, known as a "*mukha linga*." Such *lingas* with facial features can be observed in other ancient cities in Southeast Asia that coexisted with the Pyu civilization. Therefore, it is plausible that *lingas* were crafted and venerated in Pyu cities during ancient times. The discovery of this sandstone *linga* in Sri Ksetra strongly suggests the presence of the Shiva cult in the region. If additional artifacts

¹ Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p-901

² Department of Archaeology, *သရေခေတ္တရာမြို့ဟောင်း ကုန်းအမှတ် (၅၂) (၅၃) တူးဖော်မှု အစီရင်ခံစာ, Excavation Reports of mound no 52 and 53*, Unpublished, Naypyidaw, 2011, p-11 (Hereafter cited as, Department of Archaeology, *Mound no 52, 53*)

³ See Figure (21)

⁴ See Figure (20)

are unearthed in Pyu old cities, a more comprehensive understanding of Pyu religious practices and beliefs can be gained, enriching our knowledge of this fascinating civilization.

Hindu Temple and *Linga* from Kalagan Village: A Glimpse into Pyu Religious Practices

In 1926, Charles Duroisell conducted a significant excavation in Kalakan Village¹, unearthing several remarkable artifacts that shed light on Pyu religious practices. The excavation encompassed five mounds in and around the village, chosen partly due to a villager's discovery of a sandstone hand of Vishnu holding a conch while digging for bricks. During the excavation, the remains of a small brick building with foundation walls intact were uncovered. Additionally, fragments of Hindu sculptures, potentially constituting several distinct figures, came to light. Among these discoveries, the most striking find was undoubtedly the sandstone *linga*, standing at an impressive height of 14 inches.² This *linga* served as indisputable proof of the existence of Shivaism in old city.

Notably, the excavator also stumbled upon bricks bearing Pyu characters, enabling him to estimate the dating of the Hindu temple to approximately the 8th to 9th century AD. Although he provided detailed descriptions of some artifacts, it is regrettable that photographs of the *linga* were not included in his report, a significant loss for researchers seeking insights into Pyu religious practices in Sri Ksetra. The discovery of the small Hindu temple, the Vishnu hand, related images, and the prominent sandstone *linga* collectively attest to the prevalence of Hinduism, encompassing both Vishnu and Shiva cults, in Kalakan Village and its environs. This remarkable evidence underscores the peaceful coexistence of diverse Hindu cults within the broader framework of Pyu religious practices in Sri Ksetra, offering a fascinating glimpse into the spiritual landscape of this ancient civilization.

The finding of Hindu-influence objects such as two sandstone slabs of Vishnu and Lakshmi, standing Vishnu on Garuda, four-armed Vishnu, the head of Lakshmi with a figure of a conch, left hand of Vishnu with a conch, the right hand of Vishnu with a discus, a small sandstone *linga* of 24 cm, a sandstone *linga* of 33 cm, and a small Hindu Temple in Sri Ksetra points out the peaceful nature of the different cults of Hinduism and they inhabited peacefully with other locals who embraced with other religious practices.

10. A Comparative Study of Pyu Cities

Numerous artifacts have been unearthed through excavations and discoveries in the ancient Pyu cities, bearing testament to the advanced technical skills of the Pyu people in ancient times. Most of these artifacts are crafted from sandstone, although there is one notable exception, a terracotta piece. Among these cities, Sri Ksetra, has yielded a wealth of Hindu-influenced artifacts, all of which were discovered during excavations. Noteworthy among these findings are

¹ Mons Charles Duroiselle, "Excavations at Hmawza," *Archaeological Survey of India*, Calcutta, Central Publication Branch, 1930, p-182 (Hereafter cited as Duroiselle, "Excavations at Hmawza")

² Duroiselle, "Excavations at Hmawza" p-182

the depictions of Vishnu and Lakshmi, indicating the prevalence of Vishnuism in Sri Ksetra. Simultaneously, the presence of Hindu temples and sandstone *lingas* primarily points to the worship of Shiva. Hence, it becomes evident that both Vishnuism and Shivism thrived in Sri Ksetra. In Beikthano old city, the findings are mainly concerned with goddesses, Parvati, Shiva's consort. In contrast, the discovery of sandstone yonis and related artifacts in Halin strongly suggests that Shivism held a central position as the primary cult in that area. In summary, a comparative analysis of the three Pyu cities reveals that Sri Ksetra, in particular, showcases representations of all the major gods of Hinduism, indicating the coexistence of different Hindu cults alongside other religious practices in this city. It is likely that further research will unveil a more comprehensive understanding of the religious history of these ancient Pyu cities.

11. Discussion

The findings from the Pyu cities of Sri Ksetra, Beikthano, and Halin shed light on the complex religious tapestry that existed in ancient Myanmar. The prevalence of Hindu-influenced artifacts in these cities indicates the significant role of Hinduism in the Pyu period. In Sri Ksetra, there are prominent representations of Vishnu and Lakshmi. This suggests that Vishnuism had a substantial follower in Sri Ksetra. The presence of Hindu temples and sandstone *lingas* further reinforces the prevalence of Shivism, highlighting the coexistence of multiple Hindu cults in this city. Beikthano, in contrast, showcases artifacts related to goddesses, notably Parvati, the consort of Shiva. This suggests a strong presence of Shivism in this city, with Parvati being a significant figure in Shiva worship. The emphasis on goddesses in Beikthano provides valuable insights into the diversity of Hindu practices within the Pyu civilization. Halin presents a unique picture, with the discovery of sandstone *yonis* and related artifacts indicating a central role for Shivism in this city. The focus on *yonis*, symbolic representations of the feminine divine, underscores the importance of Shaktism, a form of Hinduism that worships the divine feminine, in Halin.

12. Conclusion

The comparative study among the Pyu cities of Sri Ksetra, Beikthano, and Halin reveals a rich religious landscape characterized by the coexistence of various Hindu cults alongside other religious practices. Sri Ksetra provides evidence of Vishnuism and Shivism thriving side by side. Beikthano's emphasis on goddesses, suggests a strong presence of Shivism with a focus on the divine feminine. Halin's concentration on yonis and related artifacts highlights the significance of Shaktism. These findings challenge the notion of a monolithic religious landscape in the Pyu period and underscore the diversity and tolerance of religious beliefs and practices. The Pyu civilization appears to have embraced various Hindu cults and allowed them to flourish alongside indigenous traditions. This comparative exploration not only enriches the understanding of the

Pyu civilization but also highlights the need for further research to uncover the intricacies of religious practices in these ancient cities.

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Map I;

Map of Myanmar with Pyu cities; Halin, Wadee, Maingmao, Beikthano and Sri Ksetra

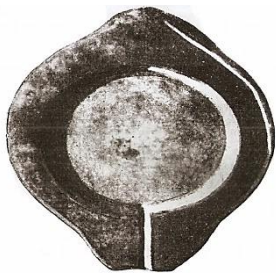
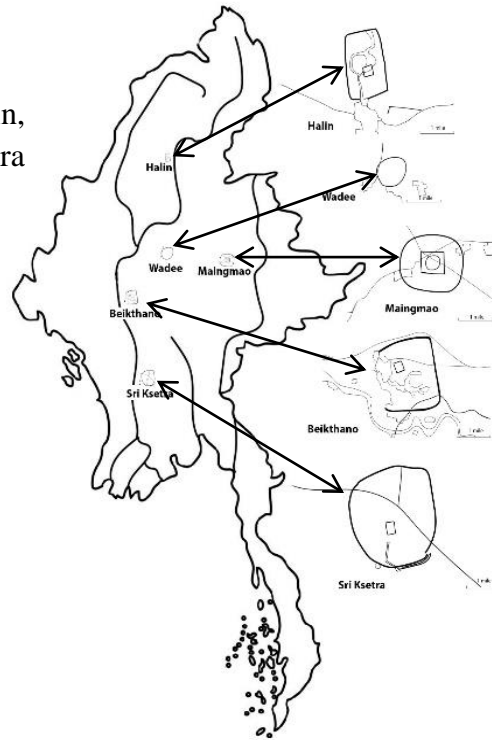


Figure 1; Sandstone Yoni with drain in the spout, width-c. 33 cm, Beikthano Museum, Magwe Region (After Hla Pe-*Beikthano Old City*, 1962)

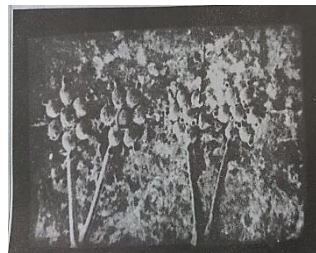


Figure 2; Lotus, six petals, sandstone relief, 7.5 cm x 4 cm x .5 cm, Beikthano Museum, Magwe Region (After U Aung Thaw- “Beikthano Old City”, 2007)



Figure 3; Goad and discus, attributes of Ganesh, relief on sandstone slab, 7.5 cm x 4 cm x .5 cm, Beikthano Museum, Magwe Region (After U Aung Thaw “Beikthano Old City”, 2007)



Figure 4; *Yoni with drain*, sandstone, 10 cm x 5 cm, Nyaungkobin Museum, Halin, Sagaing Region



Figure 5; *Yoni with drain in the spout*, front, sandstone, 12.5 cm x 7.5 cm, Nyaungkobin Museum, Halin, Sagaing Region



Figure 6 *Yoni*, back, sandstone, 12.5 cm x 7.5 cm, Nyaungkobin Museum, Halin, Sagaing Region



Figure 7; Yoni with drain in the spout, front, sandstone, 15 cm x 12.5 cm, Nyaungkobin Museum, Halin, Sagaing Region



Figure 8 Yoni, back with three short stands, sandstone, 15 cm x 12.5 cm, Nyaungkobin Museum, Halin, Sagaing Region



Figure 9; Yoni with central drain, sandstone, 33 cm x 15 cm, Nyaungkobin Museum, Halin, Sagaing Region



Figure 10; Yoni with central drain, terracotta, 4.5 cm, Nayungkobin Museum, Halin, Sagaing Region



Figure 11; four-armed Vishnu and Lakshmi on Garuda, Sandstone, 67 cm x 62 cm x 13 cm, Mawza Museum, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region



Figure 12; four-armed Vishnu and Lakshmi, sandstone, 66 cm x 63 cm x 17 cm, Mawza Musuem, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region



Figure 13; four-armed Vishnu on Garuda and Lakshmi on Lotus flower, sandstone, 94 cm x 63 cm x 11 cm, Mawza Museum, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region



Figure 14; four-armed Vishnu on Garuda with outstretched wings, sandstone, 41 cm x 31 cm, Mawza Museum, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region, (After Rays, *Brahmanical Gods in Burma*, 1932)



Figure 15; Head of Lakshmi, sandstone, 36 cm x 21 cm x 10 cm, Mawza Museum, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region



Figure 16; proper right hand of Vishnu, sandstone, 27 cm x 18 cm x 6 cm, Mawza Museum, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region



Figure 17; proper left hand of Vishnu, sandstone, 18 cm x 24 cm x 6 cm, Mawza Museum, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region



Figure 18; four-armed Vishnu, sandstone, 60 cm x 36 cm x 10 cm, Mawza Museum, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region



Figure 19; Hindu Triad, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, on lotus flower, sandstone, 38 cm x 36 cm x 10 cm, Mawza Museum, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region



Figure 20; Linga and Burial urn, sandstone, 24 cm x 10 cm, mound no. 53, site Museum, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region



Figure 21; Burial urns, total 290, top-layer, mound no. 53, site Museum, Sri Ksetra, Pyay, Bago Region