

LATERITE ARTIFACTS OF THE MONS IN LOWER MYANMAR

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Abstract

Lateritic culture ranges from Cambodia, Thailand to Lower Myanmar in Southeast Asia. Periodization of laterite artifacts is dated back from the second century A.D. The earliest laterite site is P'ong Tük in Thailand, and belongs to the 2nd century A.D. At the Botahtaung pagoda in Yangon, a conical casket of laterite of this relic chamber belongs to the seventh century A.D. In Lobburi, the centre of the Old Mons, the temples of laterite, were built in the tenth century A.D. In Cambodia, religious monuments of laterite firstly appeared in the late quarter of the 9th century A.D. The Mons of Lower Myanmar also created the art of laterite in masonry in which the most famous site is the Kyaik Htee Zaung pagoda, the largest number of laterite remains. Other areas of laterite culture widespread in the delta and coastal strip. The total sites of them have over seventy places and most of them are in Mon State. Almost all the remains belong to the Buddhist Mon. At present, sculptures of laterite are sold for secular decoration. Buddhist sacredness of laterite are survived at the Kyaik Htee Zaung. Accordingly, laterite culture is prominent among the Mon-Khmer peoples.

Keywords: laterite, *stupas*, Buddha images, kilns, Walls, Angkor Wat, Lopburi, P'ong Tük, Kyaik Htee Zaung, Bilin, Kaik Katha, Bago, Than Lyin, Myaung Mya, Yangon, the Old Mon, Middle Mon and Modern Mon periods.

Introduction

As for historians, an important theme is that the more artifacts can be obtained, the more an ancient history is reliable. It intends to maintain the cultural remains and to know about culture of Mon-Khmer. This paper involves survey done in about seventy sites in Lower Myanmar. Decay and vandalism influences on such these artifacts and remains that this work also participates in the maintenance of cultural heritages. In Lower Myanmar, tropical monsoon is not kind on remains and old artifacts so that the buildings and artifacts of laterite also cannot largely remain.² Rather than causes of decay, vandalism chiefly attacks on remains of laterite.

Some of them are vandalized either through theft, inhabitations in historical sites, or repair which was mostly made as their meritorious deeds done by Buddhists. Again, re-enshrining ruined statues of laterite were usually made at ruined stupas when they repair. Some Buddha images of laterite were plastered with stucco. Since 1956 Col. Ba Shin in his anthology mentions that some of native people sold the bricks of laterite which were brought from old town wall of Thaton when he and his teacher Luce had visited there in April 1958.³ Therefore, historians should pay attention on ruins of laterite artifacts in Lower Myanmar.

Etymologically, laterite is *gawam*, a loanword of Mon, The Shwedagon Mon Inscription of 1485 mentions the word *tmo' lwān kalo'* meaning block of laterite.⁴ Rather, there were names of town and Buddhist ordination halls namely *Duñ Lwān* (town of laterite) in Sittaung (native town of Magadu, founder of Muttama),⁵ *Kyun Won* (village of laterite) in the Kyaikparan circle on the

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² Dr. Kyaw Lat, (2005), *History and Theory of Art and Architecture*, (in Myanmar), Yangon: the Spectrum Press, p.229.

³ Bo Hmu Ba Shin, (1967), *Thamaing Sardanmyar*, (Ba Shin's Collection which are imprinted in Magazines), Yangon: Bagan Books, p.38.

⁴ *Shay Haung Mon Kyauksar Baungchoke*, (in Mon and Myanmar), U Chit Thein, edit and trans., Yangon: Archaeological Dept., 1965, pp.80,160. Hereafter cited as Chit Thein, *Shay Mon Choke*, 1965. See also Blagden:1920: *Epi. Bir.*, Vol. III, Part II, pp.162.

⁵ Binnyar Dala, "Rājādhirij Ayedawbun", *Myanmar Minnmyah Ayedawbun*, (in Myanmar), Yangon: Ya Pyae Publishing, p.116.

right bank of the Attaran,¹ Mah Lwān *sīmā* in Than Lwin, Pāñjarām Lwān *sīmā* in Sittaung.² In English, *Laterite Culture* is a nomenclature given by Col. Ba Shin, a Myanmar historian of 20th century.³

In regarding with laterite mentioned by three nursery songs of the Mon tradition, ancestors of them flet into Suvannā, splendid land, where was a laterite cape.⁴ Modern Mon speakers write the word *wān* and pronounce it *wán*. It throws into a light that laterite culture is a prominence in the Mon. As Laterite soil forms a high clay content and water-holding capacity, the soil provides indiginous for cultivation and water supply. Laterite is dug in about 15 or 20 feet in depth of ground.

In Southest Asia, the use of laterite was prominent in a large range of Mon-Khmer peoples settled in the river valleys, i.e. the Ayeyarwady delta, the Sittaung valley, the Tanintharyi peninsular, the Lower Than Lwin valley, the Menam, the Mekhong and Thach That district, Hanoi in Vietnam. Accordingly, laterite had been used for bricks in monumental construction and sculptural material. Even at present, some of the Mons who live in Bilin and Kyaikto have been earning income by producing laterite wears, i.e. blocks, the decoratives and sculpturals. Using laterite significantly rose a tangible culture among the Mon-Khmer peoples.

1.0 Laterite Cultural Sites of Myanmar

The art of laterite in masonry developed along historical periods of the Mon civilization in Lower Myanmar. Hence, two scholars, G. H. Luce, and Emmanuel Guillon, gave their views that laterite was not used except in coastal Myanmar⁵ and in contrast to the practice in Lower Myanmar, laterite was not used at Pagán.⁶ The following areas of laterite remains are totally suveyed,

1. Aung Ponthiha Shwepyi Aye pagoda, Htone Gyi, Bago Region,
2. Basic Education High School, Mu Thin village, Binlin, Mon State,
3. Bochay Tahtaung pagodas, Kyaik Kathar, an old city, Kyaikto, Mon State,
4. Botahtaung pagoda, Botahtaung township, Yangon city, Yangon Region,
5. Catubhummika Hngak Twin monastery, W.N of the Shwesaryan pagoda, Thaton, Mon State,
6. Dat Kyaik Cave, on the Wabodaw-Kamamaung road, Kayin State,
7. Dadagale, near ex-Mental Hospital, north of Yangon,
8. Daw Khin Lay Phyu's rubber cultivation, Kawkadut village, Bilin, Mon State,
9. Daw Pa Kyi's yard, Mu Thin village, Bilin, Mon State,
10. Daw Than Win's yard, Mu Thin village, Bilin, Mon State,
11. Dayae village, Chaungzon township, Mon State,
12. Hmawza, HMZ 54 site, Sriksetra old city, Pyay, Bago Region,
13. Hpa-auk Tawya monastery, 9 miles from the south of Mawlamyine, Mon State,

¹ *Gazetteer of British Burma*, Vol. II, Delhi: Cultural Publishing House, 1880/1983, p.294.

² *Kalyāṇī Mon Kyauksar*, (Kalyāṇī Inscriptions in Mon), in *Mon and Myanmar*, U Lu Pe Win, ed., Yangon: Archaeological Department, 1958, pp.96 ff.

³ *Achaypya Myanmar Naingganyey Thamaing*, (A Basic Political History of Myanmar), 1970, Vol. I, Part I, p.215

⁴ U Mya, 1961, *Shin haung Myanmar akharar sardan*, (Old Myanmar Scripts), in Myanmar, Yangon: Govt. Printing, p. 17.

⁵ Gordon H. Luce, (1969), *Old Burma-Early Pagán*, Vol. I, New York: the Institute of Fine Art, p.232.

⁶ Emmanuel Guillon, (1989), *The Mons: A Civilization of Southeast Asia*, trans. James V. Di Crocco, Bangkok: the Siam Society, p.117.

- 14 Hsindak-Myindak, a wall of laterite in relief, Bilin, Mon State
- 15 Htandapin Tawya monastery, one mile from the west of Hlaing Bwe, Kayin State,
- 16 Kaw Hmu, south of Yangon,
- 17 Kamarwak, 10 miles from Mawlamyine, Mon State,
- 18 Kanbe village, south of Twante, Yangon Region,
- 19 Kanthonzint, before an ex-resident of Sir San C Po, University of Pathein, Pathein, Ayeyarwaddy Region,
- 20 Kataik Gyi village between Thaton and Bilin, Mon State,
- 21 Kaw Khmae village, 5 miles from Mawlamyine, Mon State,
- 22 Kaw Paran village, 22 miles from the south of Mawlamyine, Mon State,
- 23 Kyaik Htee Zung pagoda, 7 miles from Southwest of Bilin, Mon State,
- 24 Kyaik Ba Buddha, near Kyaik Khauk pagoda, south of Than Lyin, Yangon Region,
- 25 Kyaik Bodhi Buddha Image, at the back side of the Myanma Economic Bank, near Than Lyin Clock, Than Lyin township, south of Yangon Region,
- 26 Kyaik Dhamma Theik pagoda, south of Bago, near Intagaw, Bago Region,
- 27 Kyaik Kalo pagoda, north of Mingaladon, Yangon Region,
- 28 Kyaik Kalè pagoda, north of Mingaladon, Yangon Region,
- 29 Kyaik Kalun Bun pagoda, beside the Mupalin bridge on the Sittaung river, Mon State,
- 30 Kyaik Waing pagoda, east of Thamaing, (now Yan Aung), Yangon Region,
- 31 Kyaik Khauk pagoda, south of Than Lyin, Yangon Region,
- 32 Kyaik Kasan pagoda, north of Kyaik Kasan quator, north of Yangon city,
- 33 Kyaik Makaw pagoda, Kawa, Bago Region,
- 34 Kyaik Moganein pagoda, Kawa, Bago Region,
- 35 Kyik Mukwak pagoda, Kawa, Bago Region,
- 36 Kyaik Pawlaw pagoda, 4 furlongs from the south of Kyaikto, Mon State,
- 37 Kyaik Phyaung Pyae Pagoda, west of Khattiya village, Twante, Yangon,
- 38 Kyon Tu pagoda, Waw, 30 km. from N. W. of Bago, Bago Region,
- 39 La Gun Byin, an old walled-town, Min Lwin Gon village, Hle Koo Township, Yangon Region,
- 40 Lokatharaphu Yanpyay Manpyay pagoda, Kanyin Pin village, near Kyaik Khauk pagoda, Than Lyin, Yangon,
- 41 Mo Khaing Gyi pagoda, Kawa, Bago Region,
- 42 Maungdi pagoda, Shanywar village, Kanbe, 6 miles from Twante, Yangon,
- 43 Mokhainggyi, Kawa, Bago Region,
- 44 Muhsoema channel, Kyaik Kathar old city, Kyaikto, Mon State,
- 45 Muhsoema pagoda, Thuyethumai village, Bago Region,
- 46 Myat Saw Nyinaung pagoda, Padagyi village, Kyauktan, S. of Than Lyin, Yangon,
- 47 Myo Haung village, 7 miles from Southwest of Myaung Mya, Ayeyarwady Region,
- 48 Mt. NagaKak, Tanintharyi Township, Taninthayi Region,
- 49 Mya Tha Beik pagoda built at the top of Mt. Kelatha, Bilin, Mon State,
- 50 National Museum, Religion and Culture Ministry, Nay Pyi Daw,
- 51 Nandawyar Gon, southeast Shwesaryan Pagoda, Twante, Yangon Region,
- 52 Nandawkon pagoda, Ywa Lay village, Mu Thin villages, Bilin, Mon State,

- 53 Pada Gyi pagoda, Kyauktan, S. of Yangon,
- 54 Pawdawmu pagoda, Thayakon village, Mu Thin villages, Bilin, Mon State,
- 55 Paungdaw Oo pagoda, Zokthok village, Binlin, Mon State,
- 56 Payagyi Monastery, near the Kyaikpawlaw pagoda, Kyaikto, Mon State,
- 57 Payar Ngukto and its vicinity, 15 miles from E. of Kyar Inseik Gyi, Kayin State,
- 58 Phaungdaw Oo pagoda, Thaton, Mon State,
- 59 Rāmañña Buddhavihāra monastery, 7 miles from the south of Mawlamyine, Mon State,
- 60 Sihsee Kon village, Kawkadut, Bilin, Mon State,
- 61 Seven miles stone, Wey Lann village, Chaungzon township, Mon State,
- 62 Shan Payar pagoda, Winka village, Bilin, Mon State,
- 63 Shanzu village, near Banbweygon Dam on the Than Lyin-Kyauktan road, Yangon,
- 64 Shwegugyi pagoda on the Yangon-Bago road, Bago city, Bago Region,
- 65 Shwekyun Oo pagoda, Zoke Thoke village, Bilin, Mon State,
- 66 Shwesaryan pagoda, in the center of Thaton town, Mon State,
- 67 Shwesaryan pagoda, Mu Thin village, Bilin, Mon State,
- 68 Tadagale, half a mile north of ex. Mental Hospital, and half a mile east of Tadagale railway station, Yangon city,
- 69 Thakka Htupa pagoda, Waing Pak village, Bilin, Mon State,
- 70 Taung Thon Lun monastery, one mile from west of Hlaing Bwe, Kayin State,
- 71 Thadukan pagoda, Hmawbi, north of Yangon city,
- 72 Thanatpin, north of Bago, Bago Region,
- 73 Than Pyu Zayat, Mon State,
- 74 Tanintharyi Region Museum, Dawei, Tanintharyi Region,
- 75 Thiriyatana Shwe Gu Cave, Nat Kun village, near 4000 tons-produced cement factory, Myaingkalay, Kayin State,
- 76 Thein Kon pagoda, Mu Thin village, Bilin, Mon State,
- 77 U Ba Shin pagoda, Kyaik Tan, south of Yangon,
- 78 U Hoke Kyi's yard, Mu Thin village, Bilin, Mon State,
- 79 U Paw Aye and his spouse Daw Than Aye's yard, Ywa Lay village, Mu Thin villages, Bilin, Mon State,
- 80 U Aung Soe and U San's yard, Mu Thin village, Bilin, Mon State,
- 81 U Tun Aung's yard, Mu Thin village, Binlin, Mon State,
- 82 Wagaru Myohaung, 10 miles from northeast of Kyaikkhami, Mon State,
- 83 Winka village, archaeological sites between Bilin and Kyaikto, Mon State,
- 84 Yan Shin Man Kin pagoda, beside the Than Lyin graveyard, S. of Than Lyin, Yangon,
- 85 Yathae Myo, Hanthazaingganain, Kyauktain kan village, near Bago,
- 86 Yathae Pyan Cave, beside the Kawgun Cave, 2 miles from Hpa-kap village, near Hpa-an, Kayin State,
- 87 Ye, an old city, 100 miles from Mawlamyine, Mon State, and
- 88 Ye Aye San, Htone Gyi village, Bago,
- 89 *Yoni*, in Hindu temple, Aung Chan Thar, near the Kyai Khau

Some remains of laterites which are unimportant are not taken discussion in this paper.

1.1 Kyaik Htee Zaung Pagoda and Laterite Remains in Mon State

Among the areas flourishing laterite culture of Myanmar, the most prominent site is the Kyaik Htee Zaung pagoda (ex-name Kyaik Kyaik Zokthok),¹ which is 7 miles from Southwest of Bilin. Like the Angkor temple in Cambodia, big blocks of laterite are used as a basement of the pagoda but its upper part (135 ft. high) was taken place with a new one repired by Kyaik Htee Zaung Sayardaw. Its foundation plan forms an octagonal shape that is the same with that of the Sule pagoda at the centre of Yangon. The stupa was built with the big blocks of laterite not attaching with stucco. Besides, the precinct of the stupa, there is a house in which laterite artifacts are museumized. The artifacts—fragmented Earth-touching Buddha in different sizes, reliefs of the seated Buddha depicted on the slab of laterite, Bud-shaped of stupa of laterite, tray with a stand of laterite (3.5 ft. height and 3.08ft wide), The stupa of laterite (3.33 ft.height) in which the four Buddhas in *bhūmipaśra*, each facing with each cardinal point, residing in each nitche, A Bodhisattva with high *jaṭāmakuṭa*, right knee raised, left flat,² and Blocks of laterite—have been displayed in the house. Reginald Le May believes that it may be earlier than the eleventh century A.D.³

At Zokthok village, a wall of laterite (460 ft.long and 6ft. height⁴ from east to west), provides archaeological attraction of Mon State. Myanmar call *Hsindat-Myindat*, wall of laterite depicting—image of elephant and lions—in relief are decorated on the wall of laterite.⁵ The Old Mons built the wall against the *Rakhasi*, the ogres mentioned in the Kyalyāṇi Inscription of AD 1479, and who sea-gypsies, and cannibals coming from the Bay of Bengal.⁶ The well and preservior which these walls are built of big blocks of laterite can be found near the *Hsindat-Myindat*. At this village, some pagodas of laterite—the Thakka Htupa, the Shwe Kyun Oo and the Pawdawmu—remains but were ruined thorough repaired. In two miles from the east of Zokthok, a village, which remains fifty-eight pagodas of laterite there, is called Mu Thin composing of four villages, i.e. Thar Yar Kon, Mu Thin, Waing Pak and Ywa Lay⁷. At there, the Thein Kon stupa is built of entirely laterite remaining with an octagonal basement (22 ft. in height and 72 ft. in width) (see fig.40). Again, a good-ruinous stupa of laterite (45× 4517ft.)—a square basement and abovoe on it, two rounded-terraces (*medī/ālinda*) and a small dome (*anda*) missing parasol—has been discovered at Basic Education Height School of Mu Thin village. It has been revealed by Archaeological Department at the beginning of 2017. Typologically, it is believed that the stupa was built in the 7th-10th centuries A.D.

Kawparan is a village located 22 miles from the south of Mawlamyine situated on the Gulf of Martaban. Finding a number of stone tools in Kawparan, the coastal area was a settlement of early men since prehistoric period. At Bhā Kwun monastery in Kawparan, there is a privity museum in which is displayed stone tools, artifacts of laterite, earthen pots, some bricks with inscriptions, a skull of chrocodine, some equipments of Japanese sodiers etc. Also, artifacts of laterite—a dual kneeling Vasundarī in high relief, pillars of laterite, three statues of earth-touching Buddha—are being cared by the abbot. A ruined pagoda is situated in this village and is now under the care of Archaeological Department. Another two ruined pagodas of laterite—one formed a

¹ U Shwe Naw, (1899), *Mon Yazawun hnit Payar Thamaing Baungchoke*, (Mon Chronicle and History of the Pagodas dedicated by the Mons), in Myanmar, Yangon: Hanthawady Press, p.43f. Hereafter cited as Shwe Naw:1899.

² Shwe Naw: 1899:44-191.

³ Reginald Le May, ((1954), *the Culture of South-East Asia*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., p. 49.

⁴ 450 ft. in length and 12ft. in height is measurement of *Hsin Dak Myin Dak*, wall of laterite mentioned in the *Note on Archaeological Tour Through Ramannadesa* done by Mr. Taw Sein Ko.

⁵ *MHAPC*, p.740.

⁶ U Myint Aung, “Ancient Heritage of Mon State”, *Mon Pyi Ney Nae* (Annual Day of Mon State), 1976, p.38f.

⁷ Interview with U Aung Ko Aye, Head of Village Administration, Mu Thin villages group, Bilin on 14 November 2017.

square basement (50ft. × 25 ft.) and another one that is a stupa missing its upper part and was vandalised at its bell-shaped part—are remained. Another one is a kiln of laterite remaining in the village where was found some fragments of pots. Beside the village, Kamarwak, “Jrā” mentioned in the Kyāñī Inscripton of 1479, is located in Mudon township, 14 miles from the south of Mawlamyine. There, a few number of seated Buddha of laterite remain on the ruined brick platform, basement of stupa is located at the back side of Administrative Office of Thein Kon quarter. All the images are missing heads. As the brick covers an area of 29×15×3cm belonging to the end of Middle Mon period, Buddha statues of laterite can be dated as early as 18th century A.D. Four pagodas of laterite—the Jrā (Zaya) pagoda, the Yogo pagoda near Hpa-auk, the Kandawgyi and Kandawle pagodas in Mudon—are mentioned in *The Amended List of Ancient Monuments in Burma*¹. However, modern repair have put on plaster at these monuments. About 20 miles from Kyaikkhami is Wagaru, the site of old city. Its walls were of laterite and that images of the same material existed in the vicinity.²

The two statues of laterite—Enthroned Buddha—are found at the Bochay Tahtaung pagoda, Malaew village in Kyaik Kathar old city at the mouth of the Sittaung river, 8 miles from north west of Kyaikto, Mon State. The two statues of laterite are about three feet in height. Both of them are missing head. Left hand of the statue is a posture of discussion. Another one is a *garuda* throne of laterite which possibly belongs to Cambodian style of the 15th century. However, Kyaik Katha is an only area where enthroned Buddha statues of laterite can be found in Myanmar. A statue of laterite is a kneeling posture and praying hand attitude that is called *nārmaskāra mudrā*. It is about 3 feet in height and missing head found at the pagoda. The same posture of laterite is also found at U Ba Shin pagoda, near Kyauktan, southernmost part of Yangon. They are unfortunately neglected and are being shrubed over them near the stupa although a brick building is situated beside the artifacts.

Between northwest Bilin, and southeast Kyaikto, archeaeological sites are located at Winka and Ayetthama villages. It is claimed by Donald M. Stadtnier that the three areas—Winka, Kyaikkatha and Zokthok—are the three important first millennium site in Lower Myanmar.³ In Winka, Buddhist monuments of laterite—the Mya Kyun Thar pagoda, the octagon of laterite-based Kumarazedi, the Shanpayar, *cāmarī* (mythical creature), releif of laterite found before U Maung Tin’s house, peacock in pride of laterite in relief found at the middle of village street—are searched by San Win.⁴ In 2013-2014, Archaeological Department undertook excavations in Winka. Most of the excavations belong to Buddhist monuments and residential buildings. Among the excavation sites, WK 8 and 11 sites belong to the foundaton of stupa which is formed octagonal base with three terraces. On the terraces, there may be a bell shape. It is built of bricks, granite and laterite. These bricks of laterite are 16.5 in length, 7.5 width and 5.5 in. in height. Recently, a vandalistic digging revealed ubiquitous figers-marked bricks of Myanmar and someblocks of laterite (1×0.5 ft.) founded at six feet in depth belong to the early first mellenium A.D.

Thaton was an ancient centre of the Old Mons in Lower Myanmar. Recently, plethora of terracotta votive tablets found at Hnak Twin monastery beside the Shwesaryan pagoda can get rid of this inductive refusal. As the thousands of votive tablets are enclosed with short pillars of laterite, dating of remains of laterite also belongs to the early Christian era. Another remains of laterite exist at the Thagyar Payar and the Paungdaw Oo pagodas in Thaton. The Thagya Payar is a square-

¹ *Amended List of Ancient Monuments in Burma*, Yangon: Government Printing, 1921/1960 Reprinted, pp.12f.

² Taw Sein Ko, (1913), *Burmese Sketches*, Yangon: British Burma Press, p. 107. Hereafter cited as *Burmese Sketches*.

³ Donald M. Stadnal, (2011), “Demistifying Mists: The Case for the Mon”, *The Mon Over Two Millenia*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, p.34, (25-57).

⁴ U San Win, (2013), *Research on Suvāṇṇabhūmi*, (in Myanmar), Mawlamyine: Badradevi Books, in Myanmar, pp. 218ff.

based stupa is built of laterite but the original laterite of the stupa is now concealed in plaster and white wash.¹ When Dr. Min Nwe Soe and I visited the upper terrace of the pagoda on 24 December 2016, we found a new fragment of laterite on the terrace which was broken from the stupa. It therefore confirms that the stupa is built of laterite. As a statue of laterite was found on the precinct of Shwesaryan pagoda, it is possible that the stupa is also a monument of laterite. The Kyaik Kalonbun pagoda is a massive laterite base on the hill above the town of Sittaung within the old town. This pagoda of laterite has been plastered and renewed.²

In Chaungzon (Balukyun) which is comprised of thirty-two satellites of Mottama³, there are eight ruined Buddhist pagodas of laterite remained at 7 KM mile-stone of Wey Lann village, west of Chaungzon. They are now covered by bamboo and wild plants in the rubber plantation. Of them, a ruined pagoda remains its basement which is square (62× 62 ft.) in shape. Some artifacts of laterite—bud shape, blocks, a earth-touching Buddha missing head which belongs to 15th century A.D—remain at this pagoda.

2.0 Laterite Culture in Yangon and its Vicinity

On the east bank of River Yangon, the Kyaik De-ap pagoda, a well-known name as Botahtaung, (132ft. and 7 in. height) was bombed in 1945, during the outbreak of the Second World War. Then, the relic chamber of pagoda was discovered before it was rebuilt. Some sacred enshrinements—a cone of laterite for relic enshrinement of the Buddha, a statue of fat monk, a terracotta votive tablet with “*Ye Dhammā*” Pāli creed of Piṭaka cannon engraved on its reverse of it which paleographically belongs to the seventh century A.D—were revealed. Being the votive tablet dated the seventh century, it is believed that a cone of laterite, which is found at the same place, also belongs to the same dating. The laterite culture of the Mons in Lower Myanmar, we can guess, appeared in the seventh century A.D.

During the reign of Queen Shin Sawpu (r.1452-1472), she and her successor Dhammazedi (r.1472-1492) reformed the coarse precinct of the Great Shwe Dagon pagoda (see fig.29). Then, they used blocks of laterite to renovate the ground of precinct. Now, some blocks of laterite are found at middle terrace of the precinct.⁴ Another Mon title-given pagodas of Yangon—the Kyaik Kalo, the Kyaik Kalè, the Kyaik Kasan and the Thardukan(Kyaik Sādhū) which were rebuilt by Rājādhirāj in 1383 and the Kyaik Waing—are situated in the north of Yangon. All the stupas were built of laterite. In the construction of Kyaik Kalè, some parts—its basement, terraces, and bell shape—was masoned of laterite. Also, precinct of the Kyaik Kalo was built of laterite⁵ Therefore, the pagodas of laterite on the north of Yangon belong to the Middle Mon period.

A lateritic culture site was in Yangon but it has disappeared through repaire made by later Buddhists: it is Tadagale which lies on the laterite ridge west of Mingaladon near the Tadagale railway station. In 1938-39, it was excavated by Archaeological Department. Their excavations revealed some artifacts, i.e. laterite statues of the Buddha (3 feet high and 2½ feet broad), many numbers of laterite blocks (20× 10 × 6 in.), a bronze statue of standing Dīpaṇ -karā Buddha which is six inches tall that belongs to the Gupta school of art and dates back to circa 5th century A.D., votive tablets with inscription in Pāli dating back to the 12th century A.D and etc.⁶ The Kyaik

¹ V.C O'Connor, (1996), *Mandalay and Other Cities of the Past in Burma*, Bangkok: White Lotus Press, p.337.

(b) Donald M. Stadtner, (2011), “Demystifying Mist: The Case for the Mon”, *The Mon Over Two Millenia*, p. 38, (25-57).

² *Gazetteer of British Burma*, Vol. II, Yangon: Government printing, 1880/ 1983, p. 282.

³ Mottama Yazawun Paungchoke, (Chronicle of Mottama), (in Myanmar), n.d, n.p, p.28f.

⁴ C.O Blagden, ((1934), *Epigraphia Birmanica*, Vol.IV, Part I, ed. U Mya, Yangon: Government Printing, p.33, 42.

⁵ J.S. Furnivall and W.S. Morrison, (1914), *Burma Gazetteer: Insein District*, Vol. A, Yangon: Government Printing, p.38.

⁶ *Report of the Superintendent, Archaeological Survey, Burma, (1938-39)*, p.6f.

Waing (Kyā Tmo Wan in Mon) is situated in Thamaing, southeast Insein, western Yangon. It was built of laterite but original monument disappeared because of many repairs in previous periods. Traditionally, the ruined pagoda was rebuilt by Rajadhirij, a king of Harṣavātī Kingdom. Unfortunately, it is hard to accept because of no historical source which provides the king's dedication.¹

Furthermore, laterite culture is yielded in the precinct of Buddhist pagodas on the south of Yangon. The culture-flourished land is Than Lwin embracing Kyauktan, due south of Than Lwin. Like Bago and Patheingyi, the town is a popular seaport in Lower Myanmar. The toponym Sreñ² was Than Lwin in the Kalyāṇī Inscription of 1476 in Mon. *Sreñ* is also mentioned in the Suppatita Stupa Inscription of AD 1479 erected by King Rāmaḍhipati, (Dhammazedi 1472-1492). Being a large number of remains of laterite found in Than Lwin, the town is the second most prominent laterite artifacts-remained sites. The most prominent remain of laterite is the Kyaik Khauk pagoda, south of Than Lwin, being the stupa entirely built of laterite. It has an octagonal basement and 133 ft. height and 900 ft. in width. Being the Cyclone Nargis (2 May 2008) decayed in Yangon, some part of the Kyaik Khauk pagoda—banister of southern stair, and some part of brickwork of laterite—revealed. Then, we saw that not only the stupa but also its precinct and walls are built of laterite. A native man said that the Bago-centered earthquake of 1960 had destroyed the pagoda to fall its umbranll and bud-shaped part at its top. Then, native people of Than Lwin saw that the Kyaik Khauk pagoda is encased. It is accepted that King Aśoka renovated stone-ruined thirty-three pagodas in Suvannabhūmi country which is mentioned in the Payar Gyi Inscription of Bago in the Middle Mon period.³

Twante, twelve miles west of Yangon, was Dala mentioned in the Kyāḥ Jra Naṁ Inscription of A.D 1362 erected by King Bannay Oo (Hsin Byu Shin in Myanmar meaning Lord of White Elephant) and the Kalyāṇī Inscription of 1476 A.D.⁴ In southeast Twante, there is an old walled-city called Kyabin (*Krabañ dāmyon* in mid. Mon and “Black Khābin’ and Pali *Kabbaṅganagara*), 7 miles east of Twante. At San-ywar village, half a mile of it, there is a prominent Buddhist stupa of laterite: it is called the Maung Di stupa built of laterite blocks (1.5 ft. in length) and its basement (6 feet in height) and upper two octagonal terraces are built of laterite. There was no corner-stupas.⁵ Only the lower part of stupa can be claimed to be original. On the precinct of the pagoda, many number of terracotta votive tablets bearing the seal of Aniruddha (1044-77) remain.⁶ It provides the dating of Maung Di pagoda and Aniruddha's power ranged at Twante (Dala) and built the stupa with architectural assistance of the Mons. Some laterite artifacts—the Buddha images, fragments of stupa, and statue of tiger—were discovered in Kabin village.⁷ In 2008, Archaeological Department carried out exploration in Twente area and discovered 56 sites of laterite-built remains, i.e. ruined stupas, wells, stairs.⁸

Another remains of laterite—walled-town, and pagodas—exists at La Gun Byin which was a satellite of Hanthawaddy laying on 150 meters from the north of Min Lwin Gone village, Hle Gu township, Yangon. At there, the brick walled-town (3 miles in diameter) basing with three layers

¹ Sayar Thein and U Oun Kyaing, *Kyaik Waing Ceti Thamaing*, (History of the Kyaik Waing Pagoda), Yangon: 1982, p.112.

² Bladen, (1928), *Epi. Bir.*, Vol. III, Part II, ed. C. Duroiselle, p. 162. See also the Kalyāṇī, tran. U Lu Pe Win, 1958, p.39, 96.

³ U Chit Thein: 1965., *Shey Mon Choke*, p. 90.

⁴ Blagden, (1927), *Epigraphia Birmanica*, Vol. III, Part II, p.272.

⁵ *Report of the Director, Archaeological Survey, Burma*, (1958), Yangon: Government Printing, p.13.

⁶ U Mya, (1961), *Votive Tablets of Burma*, (in Myanmar), Vol. I, Yangon: Archaeological Department, fig. 12 (a) and (b).

⁷ *ASB 1957-58*, p.67.

⁸ U San Win, (2016), *Excavation at Pawdawmu Sein Kyaung Monastery, Kaw Hmu Township, Yangon Region*, (in Myanmar), Archaeology, National Museum, and National Library Department, p.11. Unpublished.

of laterite blocks (14× 6.5× 7.5 in.). Within the old town, the Nan Oo, a brick-built pagoda on octagonal basement of laterite, and the Kyaik Thalun pagoda also was built of laterite.¹ Now, these have been plastered by repairs.

Ya Thae Myo (the town built by hermit) was built of laterite during the reign of Dhammazedi.² It is also called Hanthazainggaing, including the thirty-two satellites of Hanthawaddy province.³

3.0 Laterite Culture at Old Myaung Mya Village

Myaung Mya is geographically situated in Southwest Ayeyarwady delta. It also lies on 32 miles from the south of Patheingyi. It was a town which took part in the thirty-two towns of Patheingyi Province, Rāmaññadesa in the Middle Mon period. Then, Myaung Mya is composed of two parts: New Myaung Mya called Kyaik Amon and Old Myaung Mya called Kyaik Zalai Htaung⁴ possibly derived from Kyāḥ Kalay (*Kalai*), a name of *sīmā* mentioned in the no. L Face, the Kalyāṇī Inscription of 1467.⁵ It was Mañ Mala in Medieval Mon. The *Cambūdīpa Uchoṇ*., a geo-political work, also mentions that Myaung Mya was surrounded by the brick-walled town which is 800 *tā* (1.59 miles) in length.

The town-wall is also surrounded with water mote which is 7.5 ft. in depth. The town is bordered with the Zalai Htaung Tamun stream in the east, the Bay of Bengal in the south, Panmawaddy in the west, Tamuway Swim in the north.⁶ King of the Pantheys established Myaung Mya. In A.D 983, King Rājādhiraj of Htharwady, suppressed the Pantheys (Chinese Muslims) in Patheingyi and reigned for six months at Myaung Mya. The king built palace, town wall and moat. However, his account is such mere short note without references that it is hard to accept.⁷

In Old Myaung Mya, an in-ground kiln of laterite remain at the back of monastery near the precinct of Shwezigon pagoda on the bank of Myohaung stream. Another four in-ground kilns of laterite were investigated at bamboo-grown yards near the Sittan Oo pagoda, Myo-haung village. The kilns have each elongated hole into the natural laterite. A firebox was made at the lower end and a chimney at the lower end and a chimney at the upper level. The kilns were used to fire domestic grinding platforms (pieces of which can be seen fused to the firewall) and perhaps other wares. Don Hein gives his guess that this site is reputed to be up to 1000 years old and is thought to have been an important city in earlier times. With the kilns of laterite, some artifacts—a ceramics-distorted pot (44cm. in height), two votive tablets (3×5 cm.), a ceramic vessel (26 cm. height), bricks (16×34cm.), a pillar of laterite (16 cm. in height and 40cm. in width) which may be a *sīmā*-bordered pillar—are discovered at this village.

4.0 Laterite Culture in Bago

In the south of Bago city, the Shwegu Gyi pagoda, a replica of the four Holy places of Buddh-Gaya in Central India remaining debris stupa, was built by King Dhammaceti in 1479. It was possibly built by the Khmer (*Krom* in Medieval Mon and *Kamboja* in Pāli) architects, war-prisoners who were captured and were settling in Lakkhiyapūra near Twente mentioning in the

¹ U Aye Ko and others, (1990), *La Gun Byin Myo Haung*, (in Myanmar), Lecture Notes at staff training at Archaeological Department, Yangon, on 9 March 1990, type-writing manuscript, pp.4f.

² Malcolm B.S. Lloyd, (1868), *Gazetteer of the District of Rangoon: Pegu Province*, Yangon: the Central Goal Press, p. 110.

³ *British Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. II, Yangon: Government Printing Press, 1880, p. 854.

⁴ "Myaung Mya," *MHAPC*, p. 463.

⁵ Blagden: 1912: 273.

⁶ J.S Furnivall and U Pe Maung Tin, ed., *Cambūdīpa Uchoṇ*., (in Myanmar), Yangon: Burma Research Society, 1960, p. 50.

⁷ M. S. Collis "the History of Old Myaung Mya", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol.V, Pt. ii p.78, (77-78).

Kalyāṇī Inscriptions in Mon and Pāli.¹ Moreover, Kawkamay (the Khmers' village) has two villages which are located in Kyaikto and Hpa-Auk, south of Mawlamyint.² In this constructional use of temple, materials—blocks of laterite for brickwork and sandstone for cross beams—is closely the same with the Angkor Wat in Siam Reap, north of Cambodia.

Similarly, further Khmer architecture style remains at the Mokkhainggyi pagoda, a ruined stupa which is built of sand stone and laterite, is situated about five miles from the east of Bago river, about seventeen miles from the north east of Indakaw, southeast of Bago Region when it can be reached by road. In the British period, only navigation in the rains can be transported there.³ At this pagoda, stairway at terraces of stupa which is made of sand stone is highly sloped and its treads are very narrow. It was also ramparted with wall of laterite (200 feet in length). A middle Mon inscription was erected at this pagoda. Another pagoda which is built of entirely laterite is the Kyaik Makaw pagoda⁴ which is located at Palè (Phalay) 18 miles from the northeast of Kawa. Now, a new pagoda encased it. However, some remains—groove of laterite, blocks of laterite, two fragmented stone inscriptions in Middle Mon⁵, and a fingers-marked brick—are displayed at the office of pagoda trustees.⁶ According to the brick, this pagoda is dated from 1500 BP and it had been also repaired during the reign of Mon dynasty centered at Hanthawaddy. This inscription mentions that the Mons believe the pagoda which was built by King Aśoka.

Another pagoda of laterite is situated in Myin Mangu village, Kawa, South of Bago: it is called the Kyaik Dhamma Theik pagoda which is now repaired. At precinct of this pagoda, some ruined pagodas of laterite remain covering a rest house. At this pagoda, a Mon inscription remains. Traditional history of pagodas—the Kyaik Khauk in Than Lwin, the Kyaik Makaw, the Moggainggyi, the Moganein etc.—in Bago, Mottama, and Yangon assert that the original founder were hermit who enshrined there one of the Buddha's hairs. It gets a difference with inscriptional history in Medieval Mon which mention that these pagodas enshrining relics of the Buddha built by King Aśoka had ruined so that the king performed his meritorious deeds by repairing these pagodas.

To prove the fact, the Khmers were sent to Bago. Perhaps, they were brought from Ayutthaya. The *Bago Yazawan* (the Chronicle of Bago, in Myanmar) indicates that a good and friendly Hanthawady-Ayutthaya relations was being developed during the both of Dhammaceti and Boromo Trailokanat (r.1448-1488) reign.⁷ Another evidence which shows Angkor influence on Bago is that a Cambodian head of Crowned Buddha was found at the Kyaik Pun Buddha Images dedicated by Dhammaceti beside the Shwegu Gyi temple.⁸ Then, a great danger to Angkor was the Thais who founded new capital Sukhotai and as a result, Angkor Thom, the last kingdom of Angkor, was captured in 1431 and they absorbed much of the Khmer culture. This Cambodian influence was further fortified when Thai raiders carried off and enslaved ten thousands of the best Cambodian scholars, artists, and craftsmen in the post Thai-Cambodian war.⁹ Therefore, it is a pretty

¹ Blagden, (1928), *Epigraphia Birmanica*, Vol. III, Pt. II, p. 198.

² *British Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Yangon: Government Press, p. 249.

³ Page, *Pegu*, 1921, p. 123.

⁴ *Ancient Monuments in Burma*, Pegu Division, 1921, p. 4.

⁵ Chit Thein, *Old Mon*, 1965, pp. 99, 203. Although this inscription does not mention its date and whose reign, A.J Page and J.A Stewart in their *Burma Gazetteer: Pegu District* mentions that this inscription is erected during the reign of Razadhitrit. (Ibdi, p. 17.)

⁶ Nai Win Bo, U Maung Maung Lwin and I visited there on January 1, 2018.

⁷ The *Bago Yazawin*, (in Myanmar), Yangon: National Library, palm-leaf manuscript no. NL1454, ki/recto, l.9 and ki/verso.

See also Tun Aung Chain: (2010) *A Chronicle of the Mon*, the *Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya*, p. 85,86, 2005:45-47.

⁸ G. H. Luce, (1972), *Phases of Pre-Pagan*, Vol. II, plate no. 87,C.

⁹ P. L. Briggs, (1951), *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, Philadelphia, p.257. See also Steinberg: 1959:260.

certain that the influence of Cambodian art and architecture came to Hanthawady during the reign of Dhammaceti. It also reached at Bago via from Ayutthaya.

The Kyon Tu pagodas, Twins Pagoda of laterite¹ is located in Waw eighteen miles from northeast of Bago. On the precinct of pagodas, some artifacts—terracotta plaques, statues and bricks of laterite, a reclining Buddha made of laterite covered with stucco—are found *in situ* on the south and west retaining wall of the two pagodas.² These plaques belong to the 5th century or possibly pre-Dravidian type which belongs to City of Yakkhas in pre-5th century A.D.³ With the terracotta plaques found in the twin pagodas, the two lion statues (3½ ft. in height) of laterite and big bricks of laterite on the precinct damagelessly remain on the precinct of Kyontu.

On the west of Kyauktain Kan village, Bago, there was a old town which is called Yathae Myo (one of thirty-two satellites of Hanthawaddy) built of laterite.⁴ Unfortunately, it was ruined through repairs. At this village, King Dhammazeti built seven pagodas and Maharamavihar monastery.⁵ On the east bank of Sittaung river, about 40 miles northeast of Bago, there were two ruined pagodas of laterite in Thuyethamai-Kunzeik village: Musoema Payah (the pagoda built by a widow) and Kyaik Deh Thoke (Nan Oo pagoda), which is located about two miles from southeast Musoema Payah. On the Kyaik Deh Thoke pagoda, each Buddha image made of laterite covered with stucco is shrined at each vestibule of the pagoda. An important finding is a stone inscription bearing *Paṭiccasamuppāda* in Pāli in South Indian scripts of 7th-8th centuries. Guillon believes that the inscription is of a Mon type.⁶

Conclusion

Geographical location is a fundamental cause of emergence of laterite culture. Ethnically, the Mons firstly settled on this laterite soil. When British occupied Lower Myanmar bricks of laterite were used in urbanization. Even in the present time, laterite culture is being survived in Kyaikto and Bilin, Mon State. The culture can be periodized into three stages: the Ancient Laterite Culture, the Mediaeval Laterite and the Modern Laterite Culture. The ancient laterite culture developed in Dvārāvātī, Lopburi and others in Thailand, the Kyaik Htee Zaung pagoda and its vicinity in Mon State as well as Botahtaung and Tadagale in Yangon. The mediaeval laterite culture continuously developed in different areas of Lower Myanmar.

In Lower Myanmar, some artifacts of relic chamber of the Kyaik De-ap Pagoda (Botahtaung)—a miniature stupa of laterite, a fat monk of stone, a sacred relic casket, a votive tablet bearing with “*Ye Dhammā*” Pāli creed on its reverse dating back 7th century A.D., and other votive tablets—which revealed through the bomb-dropped ruin of the Second World War throw into light that laterite culture appeared in the seventh century A.D in Lower Myanmar. The Kyaik Htee Zaung and *Hsindak-Myindak* area belong to the early first millennium A.D. which are provided by finding fingers-marked bricks. The Maung Di pagoda, a Buddhist monument of laterite in Twante, is a prominent evidence that belongs to the Aniruddha period (11th century). Therefore, laterite culture is the significant emblem of the Old Mons who founded early kingdoms in Lower Myanmar and Central Thailand.

¹ J.A Stewart, (1917), “History of Pegu”, *Burma Gazetteer: Pegu District*, Vol. A, Yangon: Gov. Printing, p.17.

² ASB (1937-38), Yangon: Govt. Printing, 1938, pp.10f. See also Aung Thaw: 1972:110f.

³ G.H Luce, (1953), “Mons of the Pagan Dynasty”, *Journal of Burma Research Society*, Vol. XXXVI, (1-19), p.6ff.

⁴ Malcolm B. S. Lloyd, (1868), *Gazetteer of the District of Rangoon: Pegu Province*, Yangon: the Central Gaol Press, p.110.

⁵ Chit Thein, *Shay Mon Choke*, 1965, p. 64 f.

⁶ Maung Maung Thaik Kyaw, *His Paper Collections*, (in Myanmar), pp.75ff. Guillon: 1999:148.

Depreciations of laterite culture include two causes: fragments of lateritic artifacts which were either thrown away or re-enshrined, and weakness of cooperative activities within governmental departments to maintain cultural remains and artifacts. Accordingly, this heritage will be hard to survive in future. It mainly causes due to vandalism which is unintentionally committed by Buddhist repairers who believe to proliferate their merits if a ruined Buddhist monument can be repaired. Furthermore, treasure seekers mindlessly had committed vandalism against religious monuments since the early 1900s. In that case, treasure seekers broke in Buddhist monuments but they did not take some clay and laterite artifacts because these are not light in weight and not high of price for sale in antique shop.

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Illustrations



Elephant in relief of laterite, Zoke Thoke, Bilin



Groove of laterite, Ma Kaw Pagoda, Bago



Enthroned Buddha image of laterite,
Kyaikkathar, Mon State



Relic casket of laterite, Hlaing Bwe,
Kayin State



Parts of stupa, laterite, Hnak Twin
Monastery, Thaton, Mon State



Relic casket of laterite, Botahtaung, Yangon

