

STUDY BASED ON ELEPHANT HEADS STUPA (SINKHAM PHAYAS) IN BAGAN AREA

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Abstract

In Bagan, the basal plinth of eight monuments which are ornamented with foreparts of the alternation of elephant heads, kalasa pots, and Brala statues are found in solid type and hollow type stupa. These monuments are found in Bagan area only. These monuments can be called Sinkhan Phayas which have prominent features all over Bagan area. Bagan Architecture Inventory No 495(Kassapha Htupagyi stupa), No 675 (southern of Solawun temple), No 987(Sittana stupa- now called Setanargyi), No 1293 (Kusinaryon group), No 1790 (near Ywar Haung Gyi temple), No 1885 (between Ananda and Htilomimlo Temple), No 2217(Tuyin Taung Ceti) and No 2925 (near Upali Thein) are Sinkhan Phaya in Bagan Area. In this research paper these eight Sinkhan Phayas, are focused on. The culture of elephant figures derived from India and then gradually spread to Bagan period, Inwa period, Nyaungyan period and through to Konbaung period. Its figure can be found as based platforms of the stupa, mural paintings on the wall and plinth (gazarthana palliñ) etc.

Introduction

The elephants were mainly used for the matters relating to the armed forces through the successive dynasties of Bagan, Pinya, Inwa, Taungoo, Nyaungyan, and Kongbaung period. *Hmannan Yazawin* stated that When the King, Anawratha moved around the country , there were total of 730 escorting elephants, and a white elephant carried the King and other articles of use. The other royalty were placed on another white elephant. Other white elephants were surrounded by thousands of soldiers. Besides, other 10,000 trillion ordinary elephants, one hundred thousand horses, and three trillion soldiers followed them.² Therefore, it is a strong evidence that the entire packs of elephants were used at the early phase of Myanmar history.

Moreover the elephant corps was regarded as the heavy weaponry of Myanmar kings for the four combat arms consists of the elephant corps, the cavalry, the chariots and the infantry during ancient times. As the elephants are important for the defense of the country, the white elephants were eulogized at the royal occasions. The paintings of the elephant were also placed as the insignia of the palace. Therefore, the artists from the royal court cast covetous eye at the drawing of elephant figures. The elephant figures were painted in the mural and *Parabaik* paintings. Many different figures of elephants can be seen among the famous paintings of Kongbaung period.³

According to the archaeological records, there are four basic methods in Myanmar traditional painting. They are Kanote, Nayi, Kapi and Gaza. (1) Kanote which is a Pali word meaning lotus flower, the method of drawing lotus flower and also all floral and intricate designs. (2) Nayi is Pali word for girl, the method of drawing the figure of a girl and also of all human figures. (3) Kapi is Pali word, meaning ape or monkey or any agile, active, moving objects, wind, running water, falls. (4) Gaza is also a Pali word, meaning elephant, the method of drawing elephant figure and also all massive objects like big stone, mountain, big wave, and big thick cloud. Especially, Gaza called the method of drawing elephant figure is the basic method of painting. Elephants were found in Myanmar beginning from Bagan period until Myanmar Kings and so Myanmar artists were also experts in drawing the elephant figures.

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² *Mhanan Yazawin*, Volumn I, p-301

³ Yin Laing,,Mg, *The Culture of Myanmar Statue*, Yangon, Sapay Beikman, 2001,pp-149-153(Hereafter cited as Yin Laing,Mg)

The elephant figures were also carved at the religious monuments which are exalted place for the Buddhists. It can also be assumed that Buddha's birth stories and the life of Buddha are interrelated. Queen Medaw Maya dreamt that a white elephant entered her right side of womb when she was conceived. Based on this assumption, the elephant figures were drawn as the representation of Buddha. Prior to that the images of Buddha were not carved. The story of *king of Saddhan* elephant which illustrated the early life of Buddha as an elephant is especially well-known. Moreover the victory over *Nahtargiri* elephant was included as one of the Buddha's Eight Conquests. It can be assumed that the elephant figures were constructed at the religious monuments for the elephants are connected with the Buddhist stories. During the reign of ancient Myanmar Kings, there were elephant seat decorated thrones. The *Gajasana Palint*, elephant seat decorated throne is one of the eight thrones placed at the *Amarapura* palace during the reign of king Badon Min on (7 waxing day of *Tapui twai*) in AD 1144. The thrones were carved of *Zaga* wood.

The culture of elephant figure like other statue culture descended from *Mijjimadesa* of India where Buddha got enlightenment. It can be assumed that the carving of elephant figure and drawing of elephant figure technique also were found together with the spread of Buddhism as well as the Buddhist culture.

Discussion of Shinkhan Phayas in Bagan area

It is adorned with elephants front body from the base part and it is called Sinkhan phayas. These types are found in eight pagodas in Bagan area. I have also focused and I would like to discuss on mentioned eight Shinkhan Phayas. Among them, there are five stupas with circular base elephants and two stupas with square platform elephants and one temple with exterior decoration into the niches on outer wall. Detail presentations are as followed.

Circular basement with elephants

One stupa of these types is no 675 stupa which lies on the north-western part of Minnanthu, west of No 447 Le-myet-hna monastic complex. The architectural layout of this temple, it is built in the enclosure walls of monument no 676–So La Wun temple. This temple is a small sized single storeyed Sinhalese type stupa and circular in shape with two circular terraces face to the west point. It is standing on the square platform with stairways, made by eight steps with sand stone slabs on west sides¹. Plan is square central shrine² and facing to the west. Upper parts are bell shape dome and relic chamber- hermika was constructed with brick masonry and cloister vault over shrine and barrel vault over vestibule and porch on the western face.³ Exterior decoration is stucco moldings, some parts are still in place and basement of circular plinth with elephant heads. This decoration is prominent feature of this stupa. There are total of 21 elephants. Elephant's position is half sitting with plain stucco molding without ivory. Interior decoration is mural paintings and under the vaults, ceiling and on the northern wall of the shrine. All mural paintings are used in red, green and black in color. Central shrine is square room and one seated Buddha image with *Bumiphassa mudra* are found with plinth, but I think, this image is renovated work in the later years. Survival evidences is refilled and original image is disappeared and a few of mural painting still remains intact and a few pieces of outer wall stucco carving were left.

Second stupa of these types is no 1293 which lies in the group of Kuthi-na-yon and southeast of Myinkaba village. This stupa type is small size and single storeyed stupa, circular

¹ Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan*, Vol.V, KISCADALE EFEO UNESCO, France, Paris, 1994, pp. 244-248 (Hereafter cited as Pichard, *Inventory of Pagan*, Vol.V, pp.244-248)

² see fig no 5

³ see fig no 6

in shape and together with 1294 and 1295. Plan is circular base and two circular terraces. Exterior decoration is with only elephant heads. Total elephants are twenty four front body with ivory.¹ Upper part is bell shape dome, relic chamber and conical spire. Bell shape dome was rebuilt and renovated now. It would be repaired that I suggested it. And construction is brick masonry and present conditions are maintained. And base and terraces disintegrated and upper parts are badly damaged. This stupa was estimated to have been built in 13th century AD.²

Third stupa of these types is no 1790 sited a short distance to the Ywar Haung Gyi temple. It was built small size and single storeyed temple, and circular shape on a broad square platform with stone stair ways on the west and north.³ Plan is with square solid core and circular outer wall with four vestibules and porches. Upper part is bell shape dome and square crowning block- relic chamber and conical spire.⁴ Construction form is brick and masonry, interior feature are four Buddha images, facing to four sides, are housed against the central core wall. Hand gesture is *Bhumisparsa mudra*, the Buddha is seating on the throne with projections. The interior wall of this stupa was decorated by mural paintings nearly with ten percent in origin. These paintings are found in the wall of central shrine, vestibules and on the wall of central core exterior decorations are ornated with stucco moldings, and circular base with 27 elephants' heads, alternately with kalasa pots and totals are 28 elephants and 28 kalasa pots. Elephant does not have ivory and it is sitting position, front body is like the one in stupa no 675. Present condition is maintained and upper part is nearly destroyed and repaired by Archaeological department. Construction period is estimated to be 13th century AD.

Fourth stupa of these types is no 1885 located eastern part of old Bagan city and between Ananda and Hti- lominlo temple. Its type is circular in shape and small size and single storeyed temple on a ruined platform together with Stupa 1886. Plan is circular base with elephant heads and alternating kalasa pots. Accounts of elephants are total in 32 and elephant's position is standing figure without ivory. And then three circular terraces and square solid core is thick and circular outer wall with four vestibules and four porches.⁵ Upper part is bell shape dome and square crowning block-relic chamber and conical spire. This temple was built with bricks and masonry and high barrel vault over corridor and low barrel vault over vestibules and porches. Present condition is repaired and strengthened by Archaeological department. Four seated Buddhas image were built back to back on the central solid core with throne. Hand gesture of all of the Buddha images are *Bumipphassa Mudra*. Exterior decorations are plain and dado with lotus petals stucco molding a few parts are still in place. Interior decoration is mural painting, still in place on the walls and central solid core (nearly disappeared). Construction period is estimated to be 13th century AD.

Fifth stupa of these types is no 2217 Tuyin Taung Ceti situated on highest peak of Tuyin- taung ridge and medium size stupa on a platform with stairway on the western part. Plan is two octagonal terraces and one circular terrace. Upper parts are circular bell shaped dome, conical spire and series of umbrella.⁶ Construction is brick masonry and present condition is maintained from archaeology department. Exterior decoration is stucco moldings still in now fully place but these conditions is hundred percent renovated and then plain stucco moldings and gold painted on terraces and ornate waistband and frieze with ogre heads around

¹ see fig no 11,12

² Pichard, *Inventory of Pagan*, Vol. V, pp. 244-248

³ see fig no 13

⁴ see fig 14

⁵ Pichard, *Inventory of Pagan*, Vol. VII, pp. 244-248

⁶ Pichard, *Inventory of Pagan*, Vol. VIII, p.197

bell shaped dome.¹ The prominent feature is elephant heads around base, one side has four and total of 32 elephants and standing position with ivory.² Construction period is 11th century AD, this period is King Aniruddha reigned.

Square platform with elephants

First stupa of these types is no 495 built on northern sector of Minnanthu and east of Le-myet-hna monastic complex which was estimated in 13th century AD building. It is solid type and medium size Sinhalese stupa. It has three circular terraces and over the terraces, there are sequentially composed with bell shape dome, and relic chamber.³ It was built on a square platform with two stairways built up sand stone on the eastern and western platform.⁴ The prominent feature is elephant heads and kalasa pots alternating around plinth of platform with plain stucco moldings decorated, a few parts area still in place.⁵ Twenty-one Elephant heads and twenty-one Kalasa pots are adorned on the Southern and northern part of platform. But the eastern part and western part are only eighteen elephant head bodies and kalasa pots. These elephants and kalasa pot are adorned beside the sand stone stairway on the platform.⁶ There are total of 78 elephants and position is standing with front body. This building was built with brick masonry and present conditions are renovated work of all building and conical spire is repaired. There are no remains of stucco work on the building.

Second stupa of these types is no 987- this colossal stupa, name Sittana stupa, now called Setanagyi Stupa is situated on the southerly of Bagan cultural region, on the south-east of Thiri-pyitsaya village. It is a largest sinhalese type and most beautiful stupa. Plan is square based and plinth is decorated with row of elephants pointing outwards about the plinth of the lower terrace. On each face and there are total elephants of 156 alternating with urns⁷ and elephants position is standing without ivory. All of these terraces do not have any flight of steps on each side. It was built at the center of a square walled outer enclosure with gateway one each side⁸. The enclosure walls of stupa embossed on the outer side with exactly squared. Enclosure, in the center of one, four face of the enclosure wall, there is usually a large gateway, often elaborately arched and roofed. There is one standing Buddha Image in each niches of corner stupa.⁹ Long corridor on a zig - zag plan, now blocked and upper parts is hemispherical dome- downturned bowl and square crowning block- relic chamber and conical spire-series of umbrella. Construction was built with brick and masonry and then each terrace with stone gutter that first terrace has seven, second terrace has six, third terrace has five and fourth terrace has four with all are glaze pipe, but this is of later renovated work. Exterior decorations are with stucco moldings and now only a few parts were. There are plain stand moldings on terraces and dado with inverted ovals around all terrace and base of hemispherical dome and axial sun rosace and floral decoration on each face of square crowning block-hermika.¹⁰ Construction period is estimated 13th century AD or early? Present condition is maintained and renovated.

¹ see figure no 24,25

² acconuted by myself , see figure no 26

³ see fig no 2

⁴ see fig no 1

⁵ Pichard, *Inventory of Pagan*, Vol.V, pp.244-248

⁶ see fig no 3

⁷ see fig no 7

⁸ see fig no 8

⁹ see fig no 9

¹⁰ Pichard, *Inventory of Pagan*, Vol IV,

Temple with elephants as exterior decoration

This temple is no 2925 situated near Upali Theim and on the Nyaung U- Bagan road, old Bagan city. It was built with one storeyed temple and face to the west. Plan is rectangular in central room and the door in it. One door on the west side, it is main entrance, another door are on the south and north side. Construction is brick and masonry. Exterior decoration is made by elephant, Lokapala statue and Byala statue. On the western part, there are two elephants between main entrance, on the eastern part, there are two elephants between Lokanat statues, but on the southern and northern part, there are two elephants and one elephant is between the entrances. The corner of northeastern, southeastern and southwestern, there is one Byala statue each. There are total of ten elephants, three Byalas and one Lokanatha statue. All statues are made of brick and plain stucco, and elephants with ivory.¹ This temple is estimated to have been built in later period.

Discussion above Shinkhan Pagodas can be found not only rectangular plan in shaped with elephant front body of Pahto, but also around the circular basement part of Ceti and into the arch of outer wall of temple.

Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, the pottery figures (kalasa pot), statues of Byala (a regional version of the Nawa Rupa mythical creature) and Lokapala statues (guardian of the world) can be found together with the elephant figures as exterior decoration at the Sinkhan eight stupas. It can be assumed that these figures were carved as the portent or sign of peace, strength, and durability. The elephants were used by the successive Myanmar kings for the defense of the country and the elephant figures were also carved with the purpose of strength and durability. The statues of Byala seemed to imply the nature of auspiciousness and freedom from arrogance. The pottery figure (kalatha pot) means the signs of peace and prosperity. Moreover Lokapala statue found at no.2925 temple in Bagan implies that it guarded the world peacefully. It can also be assumed that Myanmar art and architecture was most flourished in Bagan period. Myanmar art and architecture in Bagan was influenced by the Indian culture. Before the Bagan period, the relief of elephant figures, statue of elephant and elephant seat decorated thrones were also found as *Ajanta cave* and *Illora cave* in Southern India also in Myanmar. The elephant figures can be found in the mural paintings and they are carved concerning with 550 Jataka stories. Besides, above eight stupas in Bagan region, they can also be found as the exterior decoration from the pahtos in Sagaing region and Sale region were found as enclosure wall or decorated art. (This seated Buddha on an elephant was eight distinctive seated Buddha on an elephant which were found in Bagan. Besides, there are other elephant seated Buddha statues in some regions. Therefore detailed study for this Buddha images are still needed.)

¹ see fig no 24 to30

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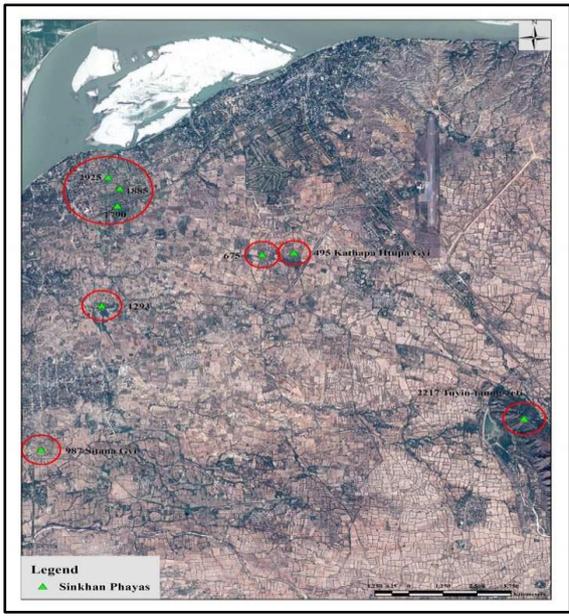
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Map1. Sinkan Pagodas from Aerial Photo(Source From GoogleMap)



(Source after GoogleMap)



Fig 1,2,3. Bagan Architecture Inventory No 495

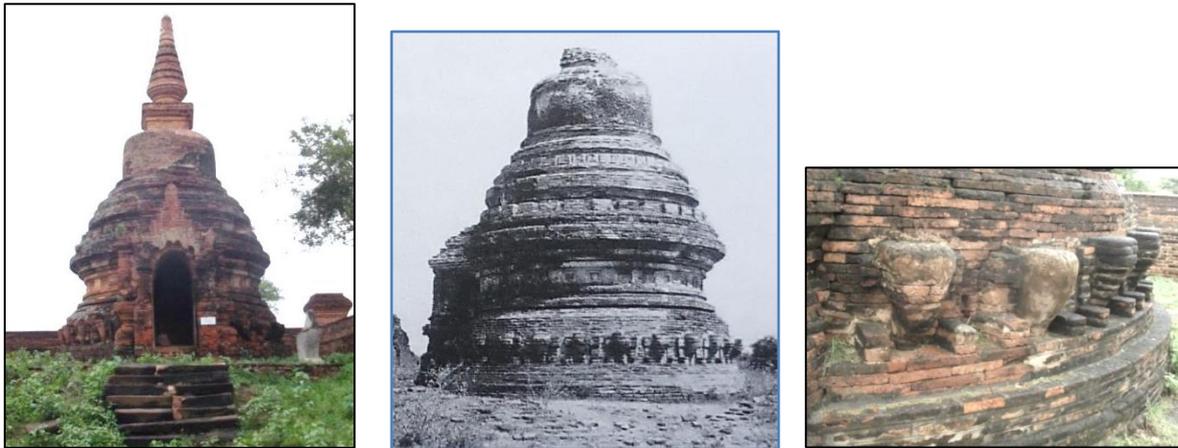


Fig 4,5,6. Bagan Architecture Inventory No 675



Fig 7,8,9. Bagan Architecture Inventory No 987



Fig 10,11,12. Bagan Architecture Inventory No 1293

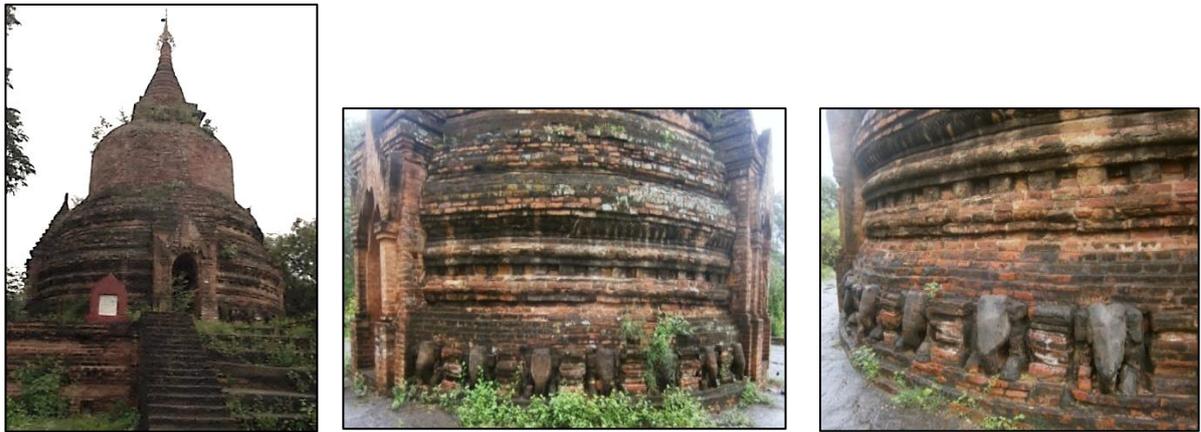


Fig 13,14,15. Bagan Architecture Inventory No 1790



Fig16,17,18. Bagan Architecture Inventory No 1885

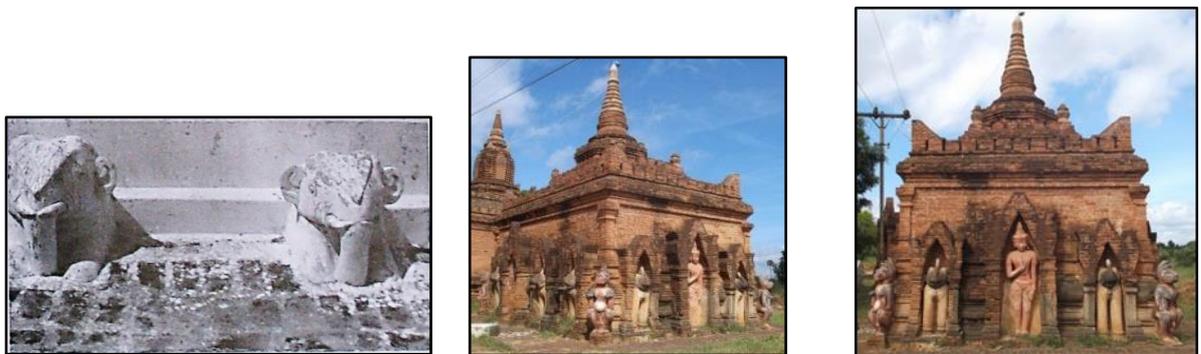


Fig 19,20,21,22,23,24. Bagan Architecture Inventory No 2217