

Significant Features of Stucco Arch pediments From Temples in Bagan

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Abstract

All of the religious monuments of Bagan area show not only with their particularly architectural style but also with significant art features, especially including stucco mouldings and carvings, stone carvings and mural paintings. Among them, Stucco work of art plays as one of the important roles in detail decoration of building architecture. In fact, stucco work from Bagan can be noted by 11 items of decorations such as: floral design (*kanote*); lotus patterns; crenellation and cornice; corner pilaster and ornate mouldings; frieze with ogre heads; arch pediments; figures of gods, humans, animal figures of Brahmanical duck (*Himsa*), peacocks, lions, horses and various kinds of birds as well as mythical features of *Kinnara* and *Kinnari*, *Makara* etc.; Sculptures of great 4 scenes from Buddha life story; Sculptures of Buddha images; perforated windows; and capitals and urn profile base (*Kalasa pot*). All these items express significant features in terms of Early, Middle and Late Period Styles, reflecting social and cognitive aspect of Bagan society. Among them, the area is limited to "Significant Fetures of Stucco Arch Pediments from Temples in Bagan".

Keywords: Bagan, stucco reliefs, temple,

Introduction

In the field of Myanmar culture, architectural workmanship could be divided into two portions; building architecture and art architectur with the study purpose. The first portion is the architectural handicraft of the monuments. In fact, ancient Myanmar architectural handicrafts were based on the Buddhist arts. Those monuments used to be built with the aim of enduring for the long run with the aim of flourishing Buddhism and sustaining 5,000 years of *Sasana*. As the results, the religious monuments were durable, glorious and purposeful. If the ones studied ancient monuments that encompassed the Myanmar tradition and culture, they would see the structure of the monumental buildings as well as the ornamentation and floral designs of the buildings. Among them, this paper is an attempt to study and analyze the distinguished features of the stucco reliefs on the decorated stucco arch pediments. Such impressive religious monuments could be seen until now. Among the stucco arch pediments, the remaining religious buildings of *Bagan*, significant stucco arch pediment and decorated stucco reliefs would be studied in this paper.

General Conditions of Stucco Arch Pediments

Stucco decorative scroll and relief works of arch pediments are usually seen at temple with a hollow vaulted base and some stupa. Among them, *Sein Nyet Nyima* that decorated with stucco arch pediment on each side of all four directions on could be seen rarely (Fig. 1). In fact, incredible stucco decorative scroll and relief works of arch pediments are assumed as the important priority in estimating the architectural standard of temple.

Actually, the arch pediments of *Bagan* temples were constructed not only with the decorative purposes. They were closely related to the cosmological concept of Myanmar culture. This concept explains the topography of the globe that Mount *Meru* is surrounded by seven mountain ranges, seven seas and four main islands. (Fig. 1) It also explains that the beings move from one realm to another of thirty-one realms in the universe according to their vices and virtues. In fact, decorative arts of temples and stupas were composed of the symbolical indications relevant to the Buddhist arts and architecture. *Ngapyo-phuu* (tapering,

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spire-like part of a pagoda, where its shape resembles a plantation bud) of the arch pediment represents the Mount *Meru*, *Rama Letnyou* (forefinger of Rama) represents seven mountain ranges, Lotus buds amongst *Rama Letnyou* represents seven seas, and *Magan* figures (mythical creature) that curved on *Sain-paung* (decorative accent on arches in the form of a wild-ox's haunch) represent the aquatic creatures of four islands respectively.

Varieties of Arch Pediments

The arch pediments of Bagan period could roughly be divided into four categories.

The first category is the arch pediments with terraces and spire-like top. The second category is the arch pediments with *Sain-paungs* (corner pediment) on the right and left sides and decorated with *Rama Letnyou*, lotus buds arch, owl and *Ngapyo-phuu* figures. The third one is the arch pediments without *Rama Letnyou* decoration. The last one is the arch pediments with *Kundaun* (pyramidal spire) or Ceylon type on top.² Normally, the windows of the Bagan temples used to be decorated with one ply arch pediment. But the entrance of the vestibule hall of the massive temples used to be decorated with two ply arch pediments.

At the temples that built in early *Bagan* period, it can be seen the window arch pediments with several levels in tiered and spire-like roof. (Fig. 2) At the temples that built in twelfth century and later on, however, it can be seen the arch pediments which decorated with slender *Rama Letnyous*. (Fig. 3) At these arch pediments, *Rama Letnyou*, *Moat cheik* and *Ngapyo-phuu* figures and *Magan* were curved on *Sain-paungs*. Those decorations used to be applied with glaze and consequently it makes the temples bright under the sunlight with green glaze could be seen at *Sularmani* temple. One thing should be noted that is the arch pediments at the entrance of prayer-halls used to be fixed droop. On this occasion, it can be assumed that such drooped style would aim at attracting the attention of pilgrims. (Fig. 4) In some cases, it can also be seen the simple and well proportionated arch pediments without stucco reliefs. The best examples of such kind of arch pediments could be seen at *Pyasat Shwegu* Temple and *Pahtotha Mya* temples, Natkyi temple near Abeyadanar temple. Moreover, the stucco reliefs that decorated on the corner pillars of arch pediments are also magnificent. The most decorated figures were lotus flower, lotus leaf, lotus stem, lotus vine, *Brahminical* duck, lion, crocodile, *Keinnari* and *Keinnara* (male, female mythical bird with human head and torso), , *Byala* (mythical creature), *Manuthiha* (mythical creature), deer, fish, etc. (Fig. 5) Those figures used to be carved in details with stucco reliefs. The arch pediments could be seen not only at the entrance of prayer-halls but also at the entrance of *Gandakudi* (relic chamber room). Moreover, the stucco arch pediments that used as ornamental background of throne for Buddha statute and painted with multi-colour could be seen at most temples. (Fig. 6) Above mentioned facts are the general features that could be found at the arch pediments of *Bagan* temples.

Decoration that could be found on Arch Pediments

When studied the decorations of the arch pediments, it can be found that *Ngapyo-phuu* figure was carved at the middle top of the arch pediments. On both sides of the *Ngapyo-phuu*, *Rama Letnyou* that represents seven mountain ranges used to be carved. Amongst *Rama Letnyou*, lotus buds, lotus blossoms, lotus vines and lotus stems that represent seven seas were carved. At the edge of each side, *Magan* figure that represent the aquatic creatures of four islands were carved on *Sain-paungs*. Amongst those figures, stucco reliefs were also depicted. These decorations were so common on the arch pediments of *Bagan* temples.

² Aung Kyaing, Minbuu, *Architectural Handiworks of Bagan Period*, Yangon, Aung Chan Tha Press, 1997, pp.50-51 (Hereafter cited as Aung Kyaing, *Architectural Handiworks of Bagan Period*)

Stucco Reliefs that found amongst *Rama Letnyou*

Together with the stucco reliefs amongst *Rama Letnyou*, the figures of deer, rabbit, *Keinnari*, bird, lion and *nat* (god) were also carved glamorously. At some arch pediments, above mentioned kinds of figures were not carved at all. Instead, the figures of floral designs alone were carved. Such decoration is called *Thazin-kway*. Such decoration could be seen at temple Tha Man Phaya (Bagan inventory no 555). At some arch pediments, it can be found that the figure of lion on each *Rama Letnyou* was carved splendidly. Such decoration could be seen at *Thabaik-hmauk* or *Panthuku Mahahtay* temple near *Minnanthu* village. On some arch pediments, the figures of Garuda were carved on *Rama Letnyou* together with the floral reliefs and *Kenneri* figures alternatively. Such pattern could be seen at *Thanbula* temple of *Minnanthu* village. (Fig. 7)

At the brick monastery that situated in the compound of *Hsu-taung-pyae* temple of *Phwa Saw* village, an arch pediment that decorated with the figures of *Hintha* on *Rama Letnyou* could be seen. Moreover, an arch pediment that decorated with the figures of lion, deer and ox on each of *Rama Letnyou* could be seen at *Tayok-pyi* (*Narathihapate*) temple. On such pattern could be seen at Sin Phyu Hsin temple with floral design and the figures of *Hintha* and the figures of *nat* (god) on each of *Rama Letnyou* could be also seen at double entrance of arch pediments. (Fig. 8)

Stucco Reliefs that decorated on *Ngapyo-phuu*

The pointed central top of the arch pediment is called *Ngapyo-phuu*. On that *Ngapyo-phuu*, the floral designs reliefs together with the figures of *nat* and ogre were carved. Above them, the figures of dragon and Garuda were carved. The figure of *nat* that sit on cross-legged was carved on top. Such kind of *Ngapyo-phuu* could be seen on the entrance arch pediment of *Thanbula* temple of *Minnanthu* village. Analogous arch pediment could also be seen at *Tayok-pye* (*Narathihapate*) temple. On the *Ngapyo-phuu* of the arch pediment of this temple, the figure of ogre was carved at the bottom. Above it, the figures of dragon, lion and *nat* that sit on cross-legged were carved one after another. On the *Ngapyo-phuu* of the arch pediment of *Hsinphyushin* temple of *Minnanthu* village, the figure of ogre was carved at the bottom. Above it, the figures of lion and *nat* that sit on cross-legged were carved. Above all, the floral designs and lotus bud were carved on top.

Stucco Reliefs on *Sain-paung*

Each side of the arch pediment is called *Sain-paung*. That part of *Sai-paung* used to be decorated with stucco relief. Mostly, *Sai-paung* used to be decorated with *Magan* figure. According to the saying “Lion tread on *Magan*”, the figure of lion that tread on *Magan* could be seen mostly. Such figures could be seen at *Tayokpyay*, *Thabaikhmauk*, *Hsinphyushin*, *Sutaungpyae*, *Letputkan* and *Thanbula* of *Minnanthu* village, *Thagyahit* of *Wetkyiin*, *Thayarwate* temple lies edge of ancient *Bagan old city*. (Fig. 9) As an exception, the figure of fish within *Magan* could be seen at the northern arch pediment of *Thinganyoun* temple and No 635 temples. Floral designs on the figure of *Magan* could be seen at the northern entrance arch pediment of No 1374 temple. Very strange designs are particular figures of *Magan* are two temples that look back over its shoulder could be seen at temple no. 1826 (that situated on southern side of *Upali Thein*) and temple no. 1026 near *Lokananda garden*. Those temples are one storey temples. Apart from the figures of *Magan* within *Sai-paung*, the figure of the dragon head could be seen at *Wutthanataw* group of temple and the figure of *Kenneri* could be seen at the temple that situated on the southern side of *Kuthinayoun*. Moreover, the figure of lion that tread on *Magan* could be seen at the western arch pediment of temple no. 1374. (Fig.

10, 11) Moreover those figures used to be decorated with lotus buds and lotus flowers. However, more field works have to be done for revealing more evidences to confirm that dating. Nevertheless, already found handiworks express high standards of Myanmar culture, handicrafts, and rich knowledge in religion.

Conclusion

In fact, the Myanmar decorative arts consist of the crafts of blacksmith, gold and silver smith, making items from bronze, making stucco reliefs, mason, wood and ivory carving, painting and making lacquerware. Among them, the art of making decorative works in reliefs with stucco on the monuments is called *Pantot* (ပုဆိပ်ချွန်). The *Pantot* craftsmen of *Bagan* period mostly decorated with stucco reliefs. Among them, floral arabesque with resembling lotus flower decorations is used to decorate on arch pediments, *Rama Letnyou*, corner pillars, entrance doors and Sein-taung, etc. Rama Letnyou figures on the arch pediments that carved with stucco reliefs of the Bagan period are plump and curl up to the top as twelfth century handiworks. But in the late twelfth century and later, the figures of Rama Letnyou became slender and then late thirteenth century became more and more slender. It can be said that, in the arch pediments of early Bagan period were low and those of late Bagan period became high gradually. In order to classify the handiworks of those arch pediments, more research need to be done.

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Fig.1 Arch pediment on Bell Shape Dome from Sein Nyet Nyima Stupa and Mural Painting of Ceiling from Winedho and Right Wall from Kusa Phaya (Universal)



Fig. 2 Pahtosamra Temple, Pasada Temple and Arch way from Phyatsa Shwegu Temple



Fig.3 Myebon-tha Phayahla Temple and Thayawatae Temple



Fig.4 Hsin Phyu Shin Phaya , Natkyi Temple and 359 from Watthanataw group



Fig.5 Stucco Work of Art from Southern Part of Monument No.1374



Fig.6 Vestibule Entrance with Mural Painting Arch Pediment (Monument No.357 & 395)and Lokaoak Shaung Temple



Fig.7 Arch Pediment From Thamann Phaya, Thabeik Mhuk Phaya and Thanbula Phaya



Fig.8 Arch Pediment from Hsutaung Pyi Monestry, Narathihapate(Tayokeype) Temple and Sin Phyu Shin Temple



Fig.9 Arch Pediment from Thambula Phaya, Thinkhan Yone, Tayokepye, Dhammayan Gyi, Sinpyuhsin Templ



Fig.10 Thabeik Mhuk and Myin Gabar Gubyauk Ngeand Thin Khan Yon

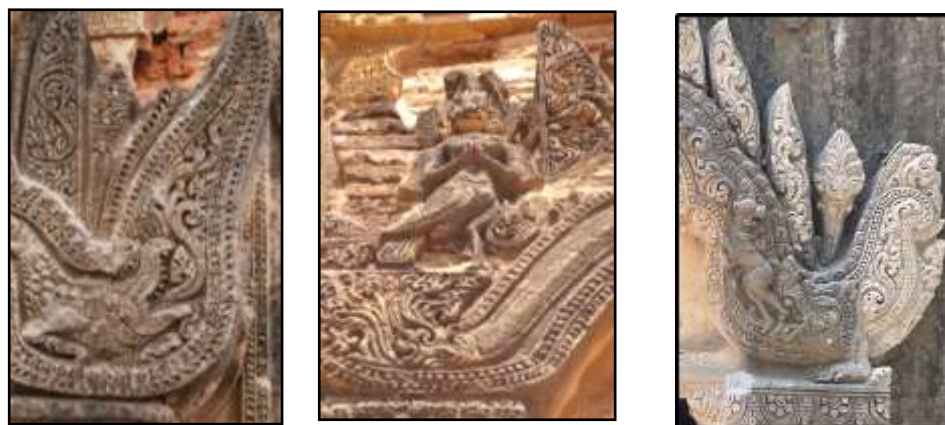


Fig.11 Temple No.1374, No.1483, No.1483(eastern part) and Temple No.1026