

A STUDY ON UNESCO MEMORY OF THE WORLD IN MYANMAR*

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Abstract

Myanmar is a country in Southeast Asia which has very long cultural history starting from prehistoric to the historic period. The abundance of cultural properties, historic sites and ancient monuments of different periods from prehistoric to 18th century AD are the sources of cultural heritage. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been exploring the world's heritage in world-wide sites and has started the program "Memory of the World" to carry out assessment of the heritage of the countries and select the heritages of the countries and select the heritages. The four heritages registered in "Memory of the World" are Kuthodaw (Mahalawka Marazein) Pagoda Stone Inscriptions (2013), Myazedi Quadrilingual Stone Inscription (Rajakumar Stone Inscription) (2015), The Gold leaf Letter (Shwe Pe Hlwa) (2015), and King Bayinnaung Bell Inscription (2017). The heritages may be said to provide evidence that the civilization of Pyu, Mon and Myanmar was well established from the Bagan period (11th to 13th century AD) to the Konbaung period (18th to 19th century AD) The purpose of this paper is to provide only the facts from such inscriptions for observers.

Keywords: Information Source, Ancient Myanmar Manuscripts, Stone Inscription, Rare Sources.

Introduction

The Southeast Asian country of Myanmar is one where significant findings of cultural heritage and historical ancient cities have been made throughout the country. The abundance of cultural properties, historic sites and ancient monuments of different periods from prehistoric to 18th century A.D are the sources of cultural heritage.²

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² Ministry of Culture, *Cultural Heritage Preservation and Cultural Sustainability in Myanmar* (Yangon: Ministry of Culture, 2006), 3.

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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has been exploring the world's heritage in world-wide sites and started the program "Memory of the World" in 1992 to do assessment on the heritage of the world's countries. The "Memory of the World" UNESCO has issued a list of heritage that goes as far back as 1700 AD registered in the "Memory of the World." Those heritages registered in "Memory of the World" included stone inscription, handwriting, valuable collection, newspaper, photograph and paintings, films, sound recording and video recording, CDs, and paper documents.³ The Memory of the World Register lists documentary heritage which has been recommended by the International Advisory Committee, and enclosed by the Director-General of UNESCO, as corresponding to the selection criteria regarding world significance and outstanding universal value.⁴ Out of 416 heritages which won the registration in "Memory of the World" 4 heritages submitted and issues the list of winner biennially. The four winners from Myanmar are Kuthodaw (Mahalawka Marazein) pagoda stone inscription, Myazedi Quadrilingual stone inscription (Rajakuma stone inscription), Shwe Pe Hlwa (Gold Leaf Letter), and King Bayinnaung Bell Inscription. This paper presents the physical description and content of these inscriptions from the library science point of view.

1.1 Aims and Objective

The main aim of this study is to provide information on Ancient Myanmar inscriptions. The objectives of this research are as follows:

- Propagation of ancient inscriptions of UNESCO Memory of the World in Myanmar.
- There inscriptions provide sound historical evidence.
- Such inscriptions are primary sources for scholars and researchers to use as reference.

³ Maung Thar (Archaeology), "*Myanmar Heritage in Memory of the World*", [Global Newlight of Myanmar-online]; [Access: 15 May 2017], available from <https://www.Globalnewlightofmyanmar.com>

⁴ UNESCO Publishing, "Memory of the World Register List-Unesco", [database-online]; [Access: 13 October 2017], available from <https://en.unesco.org/progr>

1.2 Scope of the Research

The research covers the facts of four objects registered in "Memory of the World" UNESCO: Kuthodaw (Mahalawka Marazein) Pagoda Stone Inscriptions (2013), Myazedi Quadrilingual Stone Inscription (Rajakumar Stone Inscription) (2015), Gold Leaf Letter (Shwe Pe Hlwa) (2015), and King Bayinnaung Bell inscription (2017) which are itemized on inscriptions concerning three main focused areas.

1.3 Methods of the Study

For required data, necessary documents are searched by literature survey method and documentary analysis which relies on both primary and secondary sources.



Figure 1: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNESCO Memory of the World in Myanmar

2.1. Kuthodaw (Mahalawka Marazein) Pagoda Stone Inscription (2013)

The person responsible for creating the Kuthodaw Pagoda Stone Inscriptions was King Mindon – the founder of Mandalay and convener of the fifth Buddhist Synod. The inscriptions were done from 1860 to 1869 taking 7 years 6 months and 14 days to finish the whole project. It is popularly called the Kuthodaw stone slabs inscriptions as metaphorically as the World's Biggest Book. It is located in the precincts of the Maharlawka Marazein Pagoda at the foot of Mandalay Hill.⁵ Mahalawka Marizein or Kuthodaw Inscription Shrines documentary heritage submitted by Myanmar and recommended for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register in 2013.⁶



Figure 2: Memory of the World Register

Physical Description

The stone tablets with inscriptions of the Tripitakas text in Pali are made of marble (crystalline limestone). The inscriptions are inscribed on marble (729) and it has 729 leaves or 1460 pages with each page measuring

⁵ Ludu Daw Ahmar, *The World's Biggest Book*, 2nd. ed. (Mandalay: Ludu Press, 1980), 9.

⁶ UNESCO Publishing, “*Memory of the World*”, [database-online]; [Access: 15 Oct 2018], available from <https://unesco.org/new/progr> [hereafter cited as Memory of the World]

three and a half feet width, five feet length and about five inches thickness. Certainly the pages could not be bound together. Each page is put upright on a stand of its own and all these stands occupy a square site of thirteen acres. There are 80 to 100 lines on each side. Each stone, by having one foot and a half underground, is securely held up to stand separately.

Small cave-like structures of the Sinhalese relic casket type is build to shelter each stone and the stone are arranged in neat rows within the three enclosures. There are 42 of item in the first enclosure ,the second or middle enclosure has 168 and the third or outer enclosure has 519, all adding up to 729 which are Pitika text of Buddhism. At the Southeast corner of the first enclosure stands one more memorial stone with records of events so there are 730 stone inscriptions within the Kuthodaw Pagoda compound. Originally the letters on the stonesurface were chiseled out and gold ink was spread along the chiseled marks.



Figure 3: Kuthodaw (Maharlawka Marazein) Pagoda Stone Inscription

Contents of Inscription

The inscription contains not only the complete Pitika but also some Pali commentaries like Niti (နိတိ), Milindapanna (မိလိန္ဒပဉ္စာ), and Petakopadesa (ပေဋကောပဒေသ). The script used is the Burmese script, i.e. letters of Indian origin in rounded characters. There are 5 parts of Vinaya (ဝိနည်း) on 111 stones, 7 parts of Buddha Abhidhama (ဗုဒ္ဓအဘိဓမ္မာ) on 208 stones and 3 parts of Suttam (သုတ္တန်) and 5 parts of Nikaya (နိကာယ်) on

410 stones. In fact, there are three more inscriptions at the northeast corner of the first enclosure on which are inscribed all the meritorious deeds of King Mindon. The total cost of this work was kyats 22 crores and 6 millions.

Evaluation

The writings of the Buddha's teachings on leaves of gold, silver, copper and palm-leaves or on stone surface in Myanmar, dated back to the time when Buddhism first arrived Thayekhittaya (သရေခေတ္တရာ). But, King Mindon's Pitikas stone slabs are complete with full record of Buddha's teaching. A hundred and fifty years have passed since the Kuthodow stone inscriptions came into existence. Those inscriptions are the memory objects of Myanmar. The stones used were of first class quality. Among all the religious buildings left by Myanmar Kings of Konbaung dynasty, the Kuthodaw pagoda and inscriptions are the best because due to their structural designs they are both awe-inspiring and magnificent. It seems that motive of merit by King Mindon was not entirely religious. There probably were some political considerations in it. So, Myanmar people have to take pride in the vision and farsightedness of King Mindon.

2.2 Myazedi Quadrilingual Stone Inscription (Rajakuma Stone Inscription) (2015)

Myazedi Quadrilingual Stone Inscription was submitted by Myanmar and recommended for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register in 2015 according the meeting of International Advisory Committee of UNESCO's from 4-6 October 2015.⁷ Out of many stone inscriptions of Bagan Period, Rajakuma Stone Inscription, a prominent documentary evidence of cultural heritage of Bagan was found in two places. One was found near Myazedi Pagoda of Myingabar Village and now had been placed in the Archaeological Museum in Bagan. Another one found near Gubyaukyi Pagoda and now placed in the precinct of Myazedi Pagoda. The inscriptions on both stones are incomplete statement the same.

⁷ *Memory of the World.*

Myazedi Quadrilingual Stone Inscription

Documentary heritage submitted by Myanmar and recommended for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register in 2015.

Located in Bagan Historic city, Myazedi quadrilingual stone inscription is the oldest Myanmar Language inscription documenting the Myanmar history, religion and culture in 12th century A.D. The document is an inscription in four languages, Pyu, Mon, Myanmar and Pali, on each of the four sides.



- Year of submission: 2014
- Year of inscription: [2015](#)
- Country: [Myanmar](#)

Figure 4: Memory of the World Register

Physical Description

The letters on Rajakuma Stone Inscription were inscribed in four languages: Pyu, Mon, Pali and Myanmar. The stone was rectangular pillar in shape, hence having four faces that accommodate one language on each of the stone. One of two stone inscriptions was found near Myazedi Pagoda and it was in good condition. Another one was broken into three parts, but fixed them intact again and placed in the precinct of Myazedi Pagoda.

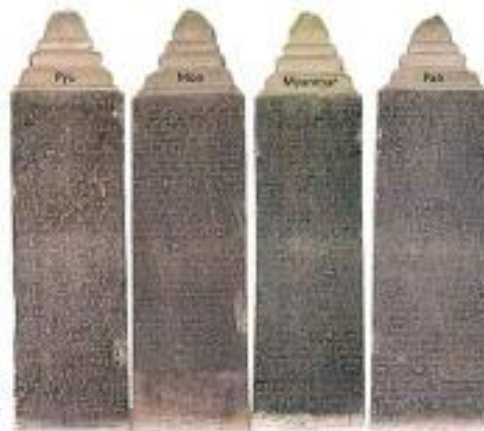


Figure 5: Myazedi Quadrilingual Stone Inscription (Rajakuma Stone Inscription) (2015)

Contents of Inscription

One thousand six hundred and twenty-eight years after Lord Buddha had attained Nibbana, The King was named Sri Tribhuwanadityadhammaraj (သီရိတြိဘုဝနဒိတျဓမ္မရာဇ်) reigned in the city was named Arimaddanapur (အရိမဒ္ဒနပူရ်). The King's consort was called Trilokavatansakadevi (တြိလောကဝဋ်သကာဒေဝီ) and her son was named Rajakumar. The king gave her three villages of slaves. When the queen died, the king gave these villages to the noble queen's son Rajakumar. After the king had reigned for twenty-eight years, he was sick nigh unto death. Rajakumar being mindful of the king's beneficence in bringing him up, caused a golden statue to be made in the likeness of noble Buddha and giving the golden Buddha to the king. Then, in the presence of the noble disciples, the noble king poured water. Thereafter, Rajakumar had the golden Buddha enshrined in a cave for which a golden spire was made. In consecrating the cave-pagoda, three villages namely, Sakmunalun (သက်မုနလွန်), Rabai - **&AJ** (also Rapay - ရပါယ်), and Hinbo (ဟိဗ္ဗိ) (also Henbuiw – ဟန်ဗွယ်) were assembled and assigned to the pagoda and prayed thus: If any harm be done to any of these slaves, or if any violence done against them be not deterred, be it my own son, be it my grandson, be it my own kinsman, be it any stranger, let him never see the noble Arimettaya Buddha.

Evaluation

Rajakuma prince, son of King Kyansittha had his men engrave the letters on the stone in four languages; Pyu, Mon, Pali and Myanmar. There are some differences between them, especially concerning the names of King, Queen, and villages of slave; for example, Although the King's name according to Pyu, Mon and Myanmar was named to Sri Tribhuwanadityadhammaraj, (သီရိတြိဘုဝနဒိတျဓမ္မရာဇ်), The Pali Language name is Tibhuvandicca (တိဘုဝနာဒိစ္စ). The queen was called Trilokavatamsakadexi (တြိလောကဝဋ်သကာဒေဝီ) in the Pyu, Mon and Myanmar versions but it was "Usaukpan" (ဦးဆောက်ပန်း) in the Pali inscription. There were differences in the name of the village also; the villages

named "Rabai" (ရဲဗဲ) and "Hinbo" (ဟိဗို) in Pyu, became "Rapay" (ရပါယ်) and "Henbuiw" (ဟန်ဗိုယ်) in Mon and Myanmar.

The Rajakuma Stone Inscription is a quadrilingual document that renders a historical, religious and cultural account of the Bagan period. Moreover, it records the administration, social and economic affairs, literary works, construction of pagodas, the enslavement of villages by royal princes and princesses. In addition it includes exhortations for paying respect to parents and doing meritorious deeds which therefore provides some information concerning social behavior and customs of the time.

2.3 Gold Leaf Letter (Shwe Pe Hlwa) (2015)

The Gold leaf Letter of the Burmese King Alaungphaya to King George II of Great Britain documentary heritage submitted by Germany, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Myanmar constitutes another documentary heritage and recommended for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register in 2015.⁸ The gold leaf letter had been kept in the underground chamber of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Library of Hanover, Germany for over 250 years. King Alaung Mintaya U Aung Zeya, who found Konbaung Dynasty sent the gold leaf letter to King of Great Britain, George II on 8 May 1756. King Alaung Mintaya sent the letter (gold leaf letter) to the British King, George II through the East India Co., with the intention to foster friendly relations between the two countries. The digital copy of the Gold Leaf Letter is now on display in the National Museum in Yangon.

⁸ *Memory of the World.*

The Golden Letter of the Burmese King Alaungphaya to King George II of Great Britain

Documentary heritage submitted by Germany, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Myanmar and recommended for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register in 2015.

The Golden Letter of the Burmese King Alaungphaya to King George II of Great Britain from the year 1756 is a unique attestation in world history as well as in the history of Burma and Europe in the eighteenth century and is of outstanding aesthetic value. The content of the letter is a trade proposal from Alaungphaya to the English. Year of submission: 2014

- Year of inscription: [2015](#)
- Country: [Germany](#), [United Kingdom](#) & [Myanmar](#)



Figure 6: Memory of the World Register

Physical Description

The Gold Leaf Letter is rectangular in shape having a length of 55 cm. and a breadth of 12 cm. The manuscript itself is pure gold leaf on which the letter has been written in the Myanmar Language. 12 pieces of ruby has been studded on each end of the gold leaf. The Gold Leaf Letter was put in an ivory case together with the translated version in English.



Figure 7: Gold Leaf Letter (Shwe Pe Hlaw)

([r\[m&mZOifBuD](#)); The King Bayinnaung Bell Inscription was accorded registration in the "Memory of the World" on September 2017.

King Bayinnaung Bell Inscription

Documentary heritage submitted by Myanmar and recommended for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register in 2017.

The King Bayinnaung Bell Inscriptions document the donations made for Buddhist religious merit and are inscribed in 3 languages; 43 lines in Myanmar language, 35 lines in Mon language and five lines in Pali language. Recorded on the bell, are the name of the donor, their endeavor for the country, their meritorious deeds, prayers, and occupied regions with the dates; the date of throne ascendance and the donated date of this bell. Also the inscriptions include the accurate regal titles for the king and his chief Queen. The Bell inscriptions are now located at the Shwezigon Pagoda in Bagan and were donated by King Bayinnaung in 1557 AD.

- Year of submission: 2016
- Year of inscription: [2017](#)
- Country: [Myanmar](#)



Figure 8: Memory of the World Register

Physical Description

The bronze bell measures 3 feet and 8 inches in height, girth of 3 feet and 6 inches, foot girth of 10 feet and 3 inches, 6 inches in thickness, a foot in diameter and 4 foot one inch in the neck of girth. It was cast in 2100 of bronze bowls. The King Bayinnaung's donation was made for Buddhist religious merit and are inscribed in 3 languages; 43 lines in Myanmar Language, 35 lines in Mon language and five lines in Pali Language.



Figure 9: King Bayinnaung Bell Inscription

Content of the Bell Inscription

In the year 1550 AD after King Tabinshweti (တပင်ရွှေထီး) had passed away, King Bayinnaury occupied Taungoo (တောင်ငူ) and Pyay (ပြည်) in 1551 AD, Pago (Hanthawaddy) in 1552 AD, Inwa (Ah-wa) in 1555 AD, and lastly, Momeik, Mohnyin (မိုးညှင်း) Hsipaw (သီပေါ) and Mokaung (မိုးကောင်း) in 1557 AD. Afterthat, the King Bayinnaung founded the second Myanmar Kingdom. The inscriptions also includes the accurate regal titles for the King namely. Sri Parama Mahadhamarajadirit (သီရိပရမမဟာဓမ္မရာဇာဓိရာဇ်) and his Chief Queen, by the name of Sri Akgamaha Dhamarajadevai (သီရိအက္ကမဟာဓမ္မရာဇာဒေဝီ).

The texts on the bell inscription gives an account of how King Bayinnaung carried out much for merit at every region he visited and how he prayed for becoming a future Buddha. It also contains a statement that wages future succession of monarchs to do merit by promoting the Buddha Sasana. King Bayinnaung's endeavours for the country described with the date in full.

Evaluation

The bell inscription describes especially the political, economic, social and cultural conditions of the time and also includes the merit of the donors. Moreover, the inscriptions mention wishes made for merit, weight of the bell, donors, its cost, and the skilled artisans who cast it in bronze and brass. In studying the texts, the bell inscriptions are important as a comprehensive survey of the socio-economic development of the time.

Records on the King Bayinnaung Bell Inscription minimally provided information of the date on which are inscribed the name of the donor, the endeavor for the country, meritorious deeds, prayers, and regions occupied together with the date of the King's ascension to the throne and donation date of the bell.

Conclusion

The richness of the archaeological heritages indicate the cultural standards of a nation. Ancient monuments and evidences which were built through Myanmar and Myanmar people which have thrived for so long suffered deterioration and less due to natural disasters and human factors. Myanmar cherishes her ancient cultural heritage and yearn to protect them. These records as goodwill which are seriously regarded in accord with Myanmar traditions of gratitude. In the spirit of carrying out conservation and protecting the national treasures, the Department of Archaeology focuses not only on zone protection, inventory survey, artifacts collection, restriction of tangible culture heritage but also have coordination with international organization like; UNESCO and ASEAN. Therefore all people have the obligation to passionately love, take value and conserve the nation's cultural heritages that have already been discovered across the country. Hoping that this paper will certainly support scholars, and researchers in doing research concerning with the history, culture and civilization of different periods from Bagan Period to Konbaung Period.

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