SOAS SAAAP at 2nd SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference, Southeast Asian Archaeology, Bangkok: SAAAP-sponsored Myanmar papers on Buddhism

Four Myanmar scholars were supported by SAAAP in giving reports on their research in Bangkok to the 2nd SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference, Southeast Asian Archaeology, Bangkok: Daw Khin Ma Ma Mu (Dagon University rtd), Daw Nan Kyi Kyi Khaing (Kanazawa University), Dr Pyiet Phyo Kyaw (Yangon University) and U Win Kyaing, Principal, Field School of Archaeology, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture (MORAC).

Three papers profiled new themes in the exploration and excavation of Lower Myanmar. The first, by Daw Ma Khin Ma Ma Mu, presented a classification of 2000 terracotta votive tablets of the 8th to 11th century CE unearthed in 2015 from Stubbhumikka Monastery close to the traditional palace within the walled city of Thaton or ‘Suvannabhumi’ in Mon State. The second paper by Daw Nan Kyi Kyi Khaing, showed the ceramic production of the 15th to 17th century Buddhist domains of Lower Myanmar (Pathein, Bago and Muttama). She detailed the technology of the famous Martaban jars and placed the ceramic production within the context of the ‘33 myo’, the traditional cosmological hierarchy of celestial and royal figures ruling these ancient Buddhist kingdoms. The third paper by Dr Pyiet Phyo Kyaw, reviewed the numerous excavations of 2014-1016 expanding archaeological knowledge of the role of Lower Myanmar in the development of Myanmar Buddhism. The paper of U Win Kyaing showed the vital role of water in the development of villages and Buddhist monasteries in the growth of the Buddhist kingdom.

All four papers brought new and original knowledge to the conference, furthering the awareness of the art and archaeology of Buddhism in Myanmar from the 8th to the 13th century CE.
Paper 1. Daw Khin Ma Ma Mu: Votive Tablets from the Ancient Buddhist capital of Thaton (Suvannabhumi)

The presentation of Daw Khin Ma Ma Mu offered a fresh insight into the religious art of the ancient Buddhist city of Thaton from the mid-8th to 11th century CE. Her study classified the 1350 intact votive tablets from excavation at Stubhumikka (‘four level’) Monastery in Thaton, Mon State that yielded circa 2000 terracotta votive tablets. Her comparative chronology for the the Thaton Stubhumikka votive tablets showed similarities and differences with other areas in Mon State and elsewhere in Myanmar (Sri Ksetra in Bago Region and Vesali in Rakhine State) as well as India, Thailand and west Java. The votive tablets were divided into three groups:

1. Buddha Triad  
2. Buddha and Stupas  
3. Episodes of the Buddha

While the majority of finds were from the 9th to 10th century CE, the presentation showed an overall span of the 8th to 11th century CE. The monastery excavations have provided a significant body of new information from which to interpret local innovation and interchange in the religious art of ancient Thaton.

Depiction of 10 episodes of the Life of the Buddha (13 x 7.56 x 1.5 cm). From top, reading clockwise: 1) Mahaparinirvāṇa; 2) Enlightenment; 3) Descent from Tāvatiṁsa; 4) Twin Miracle; 5) Nativity; 6) Dukkaracaria; 7) Sujata’s milk rice; 8) Parliieyyaka retreat; 9) First sermon; 10) Nālāgiri elephant
Buddha Triad (type 4a) showing the daughters of Mara below the double lotus throne (11 x 6 x 2.5 cm), photo Nan Kyi Kyi Khaing

*Khin Ma Ma Mu delivering her paper on votive tablets from Stubhummioka Monastery at Thaton*

*Khin Ma Ma is from Dagon University (rt'd) and an Independent Scholar; (khinma2@gmail.com)*
Martaban or Muttama harbour on the seacoast was a significant port in the ceramic trade between China and India, and also with Southeast Asia through Malacca. In the 14th century Martaban was already a busy harbour for shipping cargos. The ancient black glazed jars shipped from the Martaban port are called Martaban or Muttama jars, and according to the historical records these jars are the local products of Martaban region. These jars were not only used as containers for foodstuffs such as pepper, citron and mango etc. prepared with salt, but also a popular export good in sea voyage. Not only Martaban or black glazed jars, but also celadon and opaque glazed wares of white, green, red and white glaze and green painted ware are also recognized as ancient Myanmar products among Southeast Asian ceramics. The black jar, celadon ware and some opaque glazed wares are unearthed from the various archaeological sites such as ancient cities, harbours and shipwrecks. According to the documented finds, Myanmar glazed wares were traded internationally from the 15th to 17-18th CE. The area of Martaban and Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) was nominally under the control of Sukhothai Ayutthaya from the mid-14th to the mid-15th centuries. Ayutthaya lost to control Martaban in mid-15th century, and the Mon capital of Pegu (Bago) in Hansawady (Pegu) kingdom dominated the ports of Bassein (Pathein), Syrian (Thanlyin) and Martaban (Muttama). The largest quantity of Myanmar ceramics were also exported as merchandise in 15th - 16th centuries particularly by Peguan merchants, mostly Moslems and the Portuguese merchants and travellers through maritime route. Apart from foodstuffs, the Peguan merchants exported gold, rubies, musk, tin, and Martaban jars to exchange for cloth, sandalwood, pepper, cloves, silk, porcelain and irons etc.

Historically three clans of Mon (Mon Dai, Mon Nya and Mon Da) settled in Lower Myanmar as early as since 2,700 years before present. In the 15th to 17th century CE Hansawady Period, the three provinces, Bassein (Pathein), Hansawady (Bago) and Martaban (Muttama) were known as the ‘33 myo’. Following ancient Hindu cosmology, each domain was traditionally ruled by a celestial and royal hierarchy of 33 figures.

According to the archaeological research and excavation, the trade products of Myanmar glazed wares were manufactured by using four types of firing supports seen only in Lower Myanmar ancient kilns. It is found that three groups of potters produced glazed wares in the three regions: 1) the potters of Tala old city region and Hanthawady (Hansawady, Lagunbyee) region in Yangon and Bago Division (Hansawady group); 2) the potters of Pathein, Myaungmya and Ngaputaw region (Pathein group) and 3) from Muttama region in Mon and Karen States (Muttama group). Celadon wares were produced in all kilns. However, the ancient kilns of the black and blackish-brown glazed jars have to date been identified only in Karen State, and Myaungmya kilns based on the very large tubular firing supports only from ancient kiln sites in these areas. Moreover, opaque glazed wares such as white, white and green, brown glazed dishes, bowls, jars and tiles were also fired in Karen State kilns.

Many of the present archaeological finds of Martaban jars from excavation sites are the broken fragments apart from the shipwrecks and private collections, although reliable fragments of Martaban jars and other Myanmar ceramics from international archaeological sites can be confirmed as having Myanmar provenance. It is essential to identify in detail their provenance in the corpus of trade ceramics because some Myanmar glazed wares are reported as Thai - particularly celadon and black jars because these are in some cases having the same fabric and glaze style. The ceramics from Thanlyin Museum are also a good collection for study of ancient Myanmar ceramics, particularly the complete Martaban
jars with different shapes and decorations showing the variation of the ancient potters. Even today the Martaban jar type of glazed jars with different glaze colours and shapes are very useful to use as container of many things in the coastal regions and also as decoration in many places such as hotels and gardens.

U Chan Thar Kiln, Min Ywar village, Kawkareik Tsp., Karen State with remains of Martaban Jars, photo Nan Kyi Kyi Khaing.

Martaban Jar (TLE 450, mouth diameter 32.5, height 74.5, circumference 234.5, base 32 cm), photo Toe Toe, Thanlyin Museum, Karaweik Management, Zaykabar Co. Ltd.
Nan Kyi Kyi Khaing delivering her paper on Martaban jars and the ancient Buddhist kingdoms of the 15th to 17th century in Lower Myanmar

Daw Nan Kyi Kyi Khaing is a doctoral student at Kanazawa University and an Independent; (nkhaingmm@gmail.com).

Professor Elizabeth Moore is Emeritus Professor of Southeast Asian Art at SOAS, University of London (em4@soas.ac.uk) and SAAAP In-region Liaison.
The archaeology of Thaton has remained controversial among scholars and archaeologists due to the lack of significant archaeological findings. Recently artifacts found in Thaton’s Catubhummika monastery offer new evidence for the significance of Thaton in Lower Myanmar archaeology.

The artifacts were principally terracotta votive tablets and potsherd unearthed by chance when monks tried to prepare a cemetery for his teacher-monk. From the 600 votive tablets nearly 20 types were found along with the potsherds in a stratigraphic sequence. These new finds support the development of Thaton prior to and during the early Bagan Period (10-11 century CE). The paper compares Thaton archaeology before and after the Trap inscription along with the pottery and votive tablets.

The paper concludes by relating the archaeology of coastal Lower Myanmar archaeology to Thaton and comparing it to inland Upper Myanmar. The votive tablets and potsherds discovery at Thaton are part of an expanding corpus of significant finds. These include a Dvaravati style 8-9th century image of the Buddha found in a sugarcane plantation near Thaton, and a glass production site at Mupon south of Mawlamyaing where chemical analysis and comparative study suggests an early first millennium CE date.

The contribution of this study supports the Buddhist arrival to the Lower Myanmar as well as Mainland Southeast Asian Region with the references of recent archaeological findings. Then the potential area of Myanmar archaeological challenges can be obviously determined as the Lower Myanmar area associating the Dvaravati civilization of Thailand.

Recent archaeological chance finds found at excavated and surveyed sites in Lower Myanmar; Map Pyiet Phyo Kyaw after Google earth
Chance finds of Buddhist terracotta votive tablet in catubhummika monastery (right one) similar to those of Sri Ksetra; Photos Dr Pyiet Phyo Kyaw
Apsidal Plan excavated at the PNG site located southwest of Yangon in Lower Myanmar; Map courtesy U San Win

Thaton Old City in Lower Myanmar; Map Pyiet Phyo Kyaw after Google earth
The Jetty of Kyaikkatha Old City located in the mouth of Sittaung River; Photo Pyiet Phyo Kyaw

Dr Pyiet Phyo Kyaw delivering his paper on recent explorations of Buddhist sites in Lower Myanmar

Dr Pyiet Phyo Kyaw is Assistant Lecturer, Yangon University; (pyietphyo@gmail.com)

Although Bagan is located on the bank of the great Ayarwaddy River, current archaeological research is showing that the capital of Burma (Myanmar) from 9th-13th century depended on hydraulic works in the nearby Tuyin hills as well as river water to service the extended urban area with thousands of religious monuments and villages spread over 80 sq/kilometers. The new research indicates that the water management systems were probably imported to Bagan from the earlier Pyu cities that developed for half a millennium before Bagan was founded on a cluster of Pyu settlements beside the Ayarwaddy.

Map showing the slope and hydrology at Bagan; Mao U Win Kyaing and Department of Archaeology, Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs
Left to right: Dr Pyiet Pyho Kyaw, Director General of Archaeology U Kyaw Oo Lwin, Prof. E. Moore, Prof. J. Stargardt, Dr Ni Ni Khet, U Win Kyaing

U Win Kyaing delivering his paper on water at the Buddhist kingdom of Bagan.

U Win Kyaing is Principal of the Field School of Archaeology (Pyay), Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, Myanmar; (wkwinkyaing@gmail.com)