The significance of North East India in the development of the sculpture of Bagan

Heather Elgood, MBE
Course Director, Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Arts
ABSTRACT

The paper briefly introduces Pala sculpture and the changes which took place from its pre-Pala style. It considers the growing complexity of design from the 8th - 12th century in East India and examines the religious context and the Buddhist monasteries’ esoteric aims of visualisation in their focus on the Buddha image in meditative discipline. It will consider what if any of these religious aims and stylistic characteristics might have been carried from the Pala region to Bagan, focussing on the development of Bagan stone and bronze sculpture in the 11th – 13th centuries. The paper will first look at evidence of the similarities and findings of Pala and Bagan pilgrim votive images. It will then explore similarities and differences between Pala and Bagan stone and bronze sculpture. The comparison will reveal the distinctive character and the development of a distinctively Bagan and Myanmar style in later sculpture, one reflecting the vibrant Buddhist practice which continues to this day. Finally, it will briefly touch on the clear link in the paintings of Pala text illustration and that of a few rare examples of twelfth century painting at the ancient Buddhist site of Bagan in Upper Myanmar.

![Map](https://example.com/map.png)  
**Map** Time estimate to travel between Bagan and Bodhgaya

Introduction

This paper explores the significance of North-East India on the development of the Buddhist art of Bagan in the eleventh to the thirteenth century. It considers Bagan not as a political and geographical capital but as part of a much wider Buddhist religious society. The parameters of this Buddhist community encompass North-East India, Bangladesh, Nepal and the Himalayan area. Buddhist monks and lay devotees from this region had the practice of pilgrimage and *dana* or gift giving, activities that firmly linked North-East India and Burma. Inscriptional and stylistic evidence demonstrates
the extent to which Buddhist monasteries, funded by lay offerings, were responsible for the patronage of religious sculpture. 1 Although current scholarship rightly sees the term ‘Indianisation’ as too sweeping,2 this paper argues that eleventh and twelfth century Indian sacred imagery had a strong influence on the Bagan small stone and bronze sculpture and wall paintings of this period.

In order to demonstrate this connection I will first compare a number of small portable Bagan stone and bronze religious icons and show their dependence on prototypes from North East India. Secondly, I will look at Bagan large images of the Buddha, where there is less reliance on Pala prototypes. These Buddha images reveal a distinct style, which ignored Pala decorative detail in favour of a harmonious simplicity, sweetness and quietness of expression. Lastly, this paper examines wall painting in two eleventh century Bagan temples which are indebted to the style and iconography of Pala manuscript painting. Overall this paper points to a subtle interaction of the styles and iconography of Buddhist North East India and Bagan and a fusion which included external influences and local traditions.

Pilgrimage

Buddhism as a religion appears in South-East Asia in the third century BC. Many monks left accounts of their journeys from India, some via the Silk Route to northern China, others by sea through the straits of Malacca to the coast of south-east Asia; many carried models of stupas and Buddha images in metal and stone.3 Myanmar became a haven for Indian Buddhist pilgrims and the reputation of Bagan spread during the two-hundred-year development under consideration. Bagan’s stylistic links with Indian prototypes has been noted by scholars, most specifically in the reproduction of the Bodhgaya Mahabodhi temple, constructed in Bagan by King Natonmaya (1210-34); and the two Burmese missions dispatched to Bodhgaya to assist in the repair of its temple.4 Pilgrims, monks and Indian traders maintained the ebb and flow of ideas and produce along the waterways and inlets of the coast

1 Shopen 1997 :30-31
2 A term which in the past defined the influence of India on the Buddhist art and architecture of Southeast Asia
3 Kerlogue 2004 : 100
4 Guy, 1991: 364
between Bengal to Bagan. Indeed the art of North-East India is famous as much for its legacy abroad as for its role in India.

“The cultural dominance of India in the early days is reflected in the use of Indian as well as local names for all of the cities. Prome, for example, was known as Sriksetra (called Sikset or Srikset in the Mon records) a derivation from the old name of present-day Puri”. ⁵

Another link between North-East India and Bagan is the reputed marriage of a young officer in the army on secondment to North-East India, King Kyanzitta, to Princess Abeyadana. Abeyadana came from a kingdom located in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent (around present-day Comilla District in Bangladesh). ⁶ A temple alleged to have been made for her was built around 1090 CE, during the reign of king Kyanzittha (see fig. 15). The scholar Luce wrote that there was a later ink inscription on the temple walls attributing its construction to Kyanzittha’s queen Abeyadana. ⁷.

This paper acknowledges the debate regarding the extent to which pre-Buddhist practices and the Mahayana Buddhist traditions in Burma had an impact on the early phase of Buddhist sacred imagery of Bagan. It will however only briefly touch on this in the context of wall painting in Bagan. This paper argues for possible Mahayana, Vajrayana or Hindu Tantric iconographic elements in the Bagan 11th century Abeyadana temple (fig 15) and the 12th century Miyinkaba Kubyaukgyi temple (fig 20). Despite this King Anawrahta’s patronage of Theravada Buddhism led to his suppression of former practices such as Ari, animistic Nat worship, Mahayana and tantric Buddhism. Literary evidence and later imagery also indicates that by the twelfth century Theravada Buddhism was firmly established as the dominant faith of Myanmar. While this is the accepted history, more research is needed to understand the range of religious practices and the ways they were integrated into the Myanmar Buddhist culture.

**North-East India**

Between the eighth to the twelfth centuries in the region of Bihar, West Bengal and Bangladesh Buddhism reached its apogee. Monks and pilgrims came to this area to

---

⁵ Gaston-Mahler 1958: 31
⁶ Luce, OBEP, 1969 1: 321-344
⁷ Luce, 1969 1: 321
study Buddhism and took these traditions and practices they learnt to their homes in China, South East Asia, Nepal and Tibet. The Palas ruled this region of north-east India for 400 years and later the Senas were responsible for a surge in artistic patronage.

By the fifth century the image of the Buddha in stone or bronze reached what was to become known as its characteristic Gupta iconographic form, with lowered gaze, snail shell curls, naturalism in body form and transparent garment. See Fig 1

![Figure 1. Gupta period; late 6th–early 7th century; India (probably Bihar); Bronze; British Museum](image)

India in the fifth century was experiencing the gradual development of the Mahayana school of Buddhism with its focus on the intercession of the Bodhisattva and a co-existence of both Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. Monastic sites such as Ajanta provide inscriptional evidence of the patronage of lay devotees, as was found in the 1st century BC, but also of monks and royal ministers. Increasingly, under the growing influence of Mahayana ideals, the image of the Buddha was seen to embody his living presence.

Despite the political turmoil in North India following the collapse of the Guptas, the sixth century was a period of religious development. Although Buddhism was on the decline, Vajrayana practices continued in powerful monastic communities such as Nalanda in North-East India from the seventh to the eleventh century. Nalanda, in the

---

8 Schopen. 1997: 61-63
time of the Chinese traveller Hsuan-tsang, was a renowned and thriving centre of Buddhist learning.

“In the establishment were some thousands of Brethren, all men of great ability and learning, several hundreds being highly esteemed and famous; the Brethren were very strict in observing the precepts and regulations of their Order; they were looked up to as models by all India; learning and discussing they found the day too short; day and night they admonished each other, juniors and seniors mutually helping to perfection. If among them were any who did not talk of the mysteries of the Tripitaka such persons being ashamed, lived aloof. Hence foreign students came to the establishment to put an end to their doubts and then became celebrated, and those who stole the name of Nalanda Brother were all treated with respect wherever they went. Of those from abroad who wished to enter the schools of discussion the majority, beaten by the difficulties of the problems, withdrew; and those who were deeply versed in old and modern learning were admitted, only two or three out of ten succeeding”

As the birthplace of the Buddha North-East India was the pre-eminent pilgrimage destination for Buddhists. The monasteries maintained power and prosperity until the end of the eleventh century as universities of ritual and prayer and received numerous pilgrim donations, often votive panels and stone and bronze imagery.

In contrast to the simplicity and purity of the Gupta period, Pala art from the late eighth to the eleventh centuries became increasingly stiff, narrowed and stylised. Figures show a slimmer torso, with elongated stiffer and more column-like limbs. (See fig.2)

---


One of the principle characteristics of Pala stone sculpture is the carving of a grey or black chloritic local stone. Although few religious buildings have survived, a substantial number of sculptures exist, most formerly stelae set in niches or as separate shrines.

The body in Pala sculpture deviates from the Gupta muscular form to a more abstract, swaying posture (see fig 3). The faces have a wider upper forehead and are more heart-shaped than oval. The rounded naturalism is refined and the waist slims. The bottom of the robe fans outwards with a double band of folds that hang above the ankles. The faces have a pinched quality with pursed lips and pronounced beak like noses.

Rich ore deposits throughout Magadha encouraged extensive patronage, mainly production of metal images in places such as Nalanda. These images were easily transportable and, as we will see, may have played an important role in providing prototypes for bronzes produced in Bagan during the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. According to Huntington these metal images were almost all made of bronze.
“According to ancient texts, the alloy was to consist of 8 metals (astadhatu), all of which needed to be present for ritual correctness. Other images were made of gold and silver, and many examples made of bronze had gilded surfaces. In general, metal images from this region are hollow cast, except in the case of the smaller works, which are usually solid.”

The widespread destruction of monasteries such as Nalanda and Bodhgaya due to the advance of Islam in north India in the eleventh and twelfth centuries strengthened the links between north-east India and areas further east such as Bagan. Though the great pilgrimage routes from India became perilous, extant mural paintings at Bagan surviving from this era hint that many monks and lay artisans may have sought sanctuary in monasteries in and around Bagan. There is little extant Buddhist architecture in North-east India due to its being constructed of brick, wood, bamboo and thatch, but a prolific number of stone and bronze sculptures and a few paintings survived. Pilgrims carried sacred images with them to Bagan and also to the Himalayan region of Nepal, an area which was an extension of the Pala style.

**Votive memorial tablets and pilgrimage**

The Buddhist practice of pilgrimage encouraged devotees in the wider Buddhist heartlands and beyond to be extremely mobile. A belief in “dana” or gift giving to acquire spiritual merit being the corner stone of this ritual, with pilgrimage enabling the devotee to seek transformation under the gaze of the living presence of the Buddha at the holy site. It also enabled the devotee to acquire spiritual future merit by the religious offerings and observance. Votive memorial tablets, for example from Bodh Gaya, were produced in terracotta and stone, easily transportable souvenirs that enabled the pilgrims to share the power they had experienced with neighbours who were unable to undertake the journey themselves. The popularity of the *bhumisparsha-mudra* calling the earth to witness under the Bodhi tree became

---


emblematic of Bodh Gaya and by association part of the Pala iconographic programme. It also became the most popular mudra for the Buddha image in Bagan.

A group of objects revealing strong similarities of form and design, important for assessing the nature of the relationship between Bagan and North-East India, are numerous stone memorial slabs, most of which are smaller than 20 cm. These are carved in a very fine-grained soft, pale beige pyrophyllite, named “andagu” in Burmese, a type of metamorphic rock, similar to schist or slate, which has a very fine texture that allows precise and detailed carving. Large numbers of small votive tablets have been found at Bodh Gaya, Nalanda but also in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Burma. Some are made in chloritic grey stone, (see fig 3); some in terracotta (see fig 4 and 5); and some in a pyrophyllite stone. (See fig 6). Pilgrim souvenirs from Bodh Gaya also included low-fired and sundried clay miniature stupas and clay impressions of prayer seals. Small stone steles have also been found in Tibet and Bagan.

Figure 3. Pala period; 10th century; Bihar, possibly from Nalanda; Black schist with traces of gilding; British Museum

While a simple attribution of the dark stone tablets to North-East India and the pyrophyllite tablets to Bagan was formerly accepted, this has now been challenged. The scholar Bautze-Picron has argued that several pyrophyllite tablets were found in

---

12Bautze-Picron, 1999: 38
places other than Bagan and states that deposits of this stone (andagu) can be found in the Purulia district of West Bengal. ¹³

Figure 4 Pala period ca. 9th–10th century; India, Bihar, possibly Bodhgaya or Nalanda; Terracotta. Dimensions: H. 6 1/2 in. (16.5 cm); W. 4 1/2 in. (11.4 cm); D. 2 in. (5.1 cm) unknown private collection

Most tablets depict the eight great events of Buddha’s life, especially the victory over Mara at Bodhgaya. It is significant that the victory over Mara under the Bodhi tree is the moment just before Buddha’s enlightenment. This reinforced the pre-eminence of Bodh Gaya and is a further argument for the paramount importance of the Buddhist story of enlightenment for the aspiring devotees. This is particularly relevant to Bagan where story and legend are paramount.

Figure 5. Votive tablet; Bagan late 11th -12th century; terracotta; Museum of Fine arts, Boston

¹³ Bautze-Picron, 1999: 39
An eleventh or twelfth century terracotta panel from Bagan reveals important evidence of the aims of religious patronage. (fig 5). An inscription in Myanmar script can be seen on the reverse which states that the image was made by the son-in-law of King Kyanzittha (1084-1112 AD) in order to gain deliverance. The inscription along the bottom edge contains the so-called “Buddhist Creed” in Pali, in Mon-Myanmar script and is followed by a repetition of the donor’s name and his wish for deliverance. This tablet not only provides evidence of its Bagan production but also echoes north-east Indian prototypes.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 6.** Buddha’s eight great events, pyrophyllite stone, 12th – 13th century – found in Bagan. Bagan museum 14

Fig. 7 depicts Buddha’s enlightenment at Bodhgaya. Bautze-Picron argues that fine carved details in a comparative image 15 may demonstrate the workshop of Bodhgaya. 16 Although the comparison of fig. 6 with the latter does reveal some differences in a slightly broader forehead, and a lowered head and shorter neck, the carving of the tablet referred to in footnote 17 also reveals many stylistic similarities fig 6. In consequence, the style of these tablets is almost indistinguishable and it is difficult to be convinced by Picron’s claim for different provenances for these two

---

14 Cited in Bautze-Picron 1999: 42 fig 7 (appendix 8)
15 Ibid: 44 fig 10 (appendix 36)
16 Ibid
images. This reinforces my view for an Indian prototype for the votive tablets produced locally in Bagan. It is also probable that Myanmar was the centre of the production and innovation of the Andagu, while following a clear stylistic Indian prototype.

Bronze Sculpture

Figure 7. Buddha. Bronze, Bagan - 12th-13th century, British Museum

A comparison of Bagan and Pala bronzes fig 7 and 8 reveals some important similarities and differences. One characteristic of Bagan bronzes is the high nickel content, which produces a silver-like finish. Yunnan rather than North-East India shares this feature, underlining the need for further research to understand the multiple networks that stimulated the art of Bagan.  

17 Ibid: 42 fig 7 (appendix 8)
Figure 8. Licchavi Nepal 9th century – shows a lowering of the head which finds its echo in the stylistic development of the 11th – 13th century Bagan bronzes. Unknown private collection

In the Bagan example fig 7 one observes a broad forehead, tapering face and usṇīṣa (cranial bump) with gem setting. Both figs 7 and 8 show a similar cap of hair in snail shell curls, a similar lowered triangular face, long ears and arched eyebrows. The key difference in these figures is the more patterned robe in fig 8. The mudra and sitting position is also markedly different. However this is seen on a notable number of votive tablets excavated at Thaton, Lower Myanmar.19 A further factor is the stiff upright posture and the wider shoulders echoing the larger shoulders of the Gupta style.

According to Zwalf (fig 8) is:

“one of the finest known Burmese bronzes of the Bagan period, a piece which reflects the powerful influence of eastern India and particularly the adaptation of a stylistic current in the Bodh Gayā region. One characteristic mark of Bagan bronzes is a high nickel content producing a silver like finish. Certain bronzes from Yunnan, China share this but this is not found in eastern India. No traces of workshops known at Bagan but the fact that majority of bronzes found there suggests a casting centre.”20

19 One example (13 x 7.5 x 1.5cm) from Khin Ma Ma Mu. 2015. Terracotta Votive Tablets from Catubhummi Hngak Twin Monastery, Thaton. Paper delivered by E. Moore at SEAMEO-SPAFA International Conference, Bangkok.
20 Zwalf, 1985: 161 fig 222

26/10/2017
Bagan standing images show similarities and differences to Gupta and Pala imagery. Compare fig 9 and fig 1. In both there is a flourish at the bottom of the robe but in the Bagan example this fans outwards with a double band of folds that hang just above the ankles. \(^{27}\) This double wavy bottom of the robe is distinctive of the Bagan Buddhas, including the large original ones extant in the Ananda temple. This wavy design is an extension of fig 1. A further comparison of Bagan and Pala standing bronze Buddha images is the wide shoulders in the former and the rhythmic sway of the body in the latter. In the Bagan bronzes one observes a precision of detail with an erect posture. The *ushnisha* of bronze images are often surmounted by a conical flame with a cavity for an inlaid precious stone.

---

**Figure 9a** Buddha 11-12th century, Bagan Archaeological museum. **Fig. 9b** Side view

In 1937 this image (fig 9) was found in the chamber of a shrine after a brick wall collapsed. The practice of interring bronzes within a relic chamber of the brick structure was to enhance the efficacy of the donation. This practice is also found in the terracotta votive tablets placed within stupas and under the floors of temples as part of a traditional ritual enshrinement of relics in the ground, middle portion and uppermost part of the structure. Stone inscriptions at Bagan record that metal objects

---

\(^{27}\) Murphy 2016: 16

26/10/2017
were interred within stupas and even encased within large images of Buddha inside temples.

Overall despite minor differences in form and bronze content there are strong parallels in the bronze sacred sculpture of Bagan and Pala North-East India and Nepal highlighting the active interchange between these areas.

**Stone Sculpture of Pala and Bagan 12-13th century**
Unlike the parallels in the portable terracotta memorial tablets and the bronze imagery, the stone sculpture of Bagan shows a distinct character and departs in some detail from Pala prototypes. This is complicated by the fact that the Pala workshops themselves were not from a single place production but a great many with distinct regional characteristics.22

![Stone Buddha](image)

**Figure 10.** The Buddha triumphing over Mara - *Bhumisparsha mudra* - India, probably Kurkihar, Bihar state. 900-1000 AD. Basalt Stone British Museum

A comparison of Fig 10 from the region of Kurkihar with the example from Bagan (fig 11) shows interesting differences and similarities.

22 Huntington, 1985: 389

The larger scale stone sculpture fig 11 illustrates the distinct Bagan eleventh to thirteenth century characteristics. Bagan stone sculpture in general tempers the Indian aesthetic. Images were carved in the round and depicted the human form with greater naturalism. A comparison of fig 10 and fig 11 show some similarities and some distinct differences of style; fig 10 shows similarity with fig 11 in the small cone-shaped curls of the hair, however in fig 11 the hair forms an arched cap over a broader forehead. The eyes are wide and lowered in both images; the bridge of the nose is higher, while the lower lip is slightly thicker in the latter. The upper ear in fig 11 has small lines carved in the centre of it; the lower is longer than fig 10 almost touching the shoulders. The diaphanous robe can be seen in both however the folds over the chest of the latter have a more decorative flourish. The garment in the latter is simplified with a less subtle flourish of cloth; the background stelae is undecorated. The recessed structure under the throne in the former is replaced by the sharply carved double lotus in the latter. The comparison of fig 10 with fig 11 shows parallels in the sharply carved double lotus in comparison with the Pala image fig 12.

This growing simplification and the rounded naturalism, together with a lack of concern for superficial decorative ornament suggests a greater interest in what the image
emanates than in what it depicts, although it is possible that the pieces may have been clothed with fabric during part of the year or painted. One might also observe that local sculptors from Bagan lacked the guidance of immigrant Indian craftsmen, although there is evidence of the Bagan sculptor following Buddhist popular iconographic forms particularly the *Bhumisparsha* mudra showing the moment of Buddha’s enlightenment.

![Figure 12. Pala 11th century stone sculpture, unknown private collection](image)

In my view pre-Buddhist concerns, animism and the love of storytelling together with the respect for replication all contributed to the distinctive style of Bagan stone sculpture which compared to the small portable images was less dependent on North-East Indian prototypes.

**Fresco painting**

In the Pala-Sena period apart from some recently discovered and badly damaged murals found at Nalanda all that remains of the Pala-Sena painting tradition are a number of fragments of palm leaf manuscripts. The most frequently published and illustrated is the *Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita*. (See fig14)
Palm leaf manuscripts in North-East India fulfil both an illustrative and a spiritual function. The imagery not only illustrates key events of Buddha's life but serves a talismanic function. Powerful red surrounds the image, rather than placing the images of deities in a landscape or architectural context. Figures are drawn with a decorative flourish and the bodies have a distinct sway in their stylised depiction. Eyes are elongated and faces are portrayed either fully frontal or from a three-quarter angle, sometimes with a further projecting eye. A complex colour and iconographic symbolism serve to identify the deities depicted. Attributes such as the vajra or the lotus express the identity of the deity; for example, the vajra is an attribute of one of the Bodhisattvas and the lotus the Bodhisattva Padmapani. Certain specific colours identify the multiple forms of Taras and Bodhisattvas in the Varyana pantheon from eleventh and twelfth century North-East India.
In Bagan, fresco painted temples become common in the eleventh to thirteenth century. Many depict the Jataka stories, which are tales of the former lives of the Buddha. However one or two of temples are remarkable for exhibiting a selection of imagery, which echoes some of the iconography associated with the Vajrayana or Mahayana school of Buddhism from the Pala school of North-East India. The Bagan temple which exhibits this most clearly is the eleventh century Abeyadana temple. On the north side of the entrance hall there are eight rows of Jataka frescos with titles in the Pali language and descriptions in the Mon language; and often the number of the Jataka tales. There is also an image of the goddess Tara who is shown with a curvilinear body, dressed in royal attire. On her left side there is a white lotus and on her right side there is a blue lotus. (See fig 15).

A comparison of fig 16 from the Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita which depicts the Bodhisattva Vajrayana can be made with fig 17, from the Abeyadana temple. In fig

---

Figure 14. Tara with two lotuses Abeyadana temple Bagan 11th century\textsuperscript{23} - Photograph Courtesy of U Min Han

\textsuperscript{23} Bautze-Picron, 2003 dates this temple 1202
16 the Bodhisattva holds in his upper left hand, a sword and in his right hand a vajra (thunderbolt). In fig 17, a trident is visible in the hands of the possible Dvarapala (or Mahasiddha)\(^ {24}\) in the Abeyadana temple. This trident \(^ {25}\) may be interpreted either as a weapon of a Vajrayana (fig 16) or Mahayana deity or be the trident attribute of the Brahmanic form of Shiva.\(^ {26}\) Either version may suggest the figure has the role of a protector or a form of a Dvarapala.

Figure 15. Vajrapani 11\(^ {\text{th}}\) century Pala manuscript

\(^ {24}\) Ibid: ch V11 fn 47 cites U Mya 1936 :183 quoted by Luce 1969/70. 1:329
\(^ {25}\) Luce 1969 1: 333 (see re the interpretation of the weapons and attributes)
\(^ {26}\) I am grateful to Elizabeth Moore for her suggestion that the image/attribution may also be adopted for its visuality more than its meaning in the foreign context thus not necessarily replicating its original ritual meaning
A further remarkable link between Buddhist Indian wall painting and Burma is demonstrated by a portrait of the King and Queen in the *Mahajanaka Jataka* scene of Cave 1 (fig 19), in fifth century Ajanta and the depiction of a royal couple on the walls of the Abeyadana temple (fig 18). Despite the length of time between their dates of production, one cannot deny the visual similarities. These parallels between figs 18 and 19 are seen in the postures; the tilt of the head of the queen; the large head dress and even the type of striped lower garment which resembles later south-east Asian *ikat*. In my view this may be explained by the existence of stock images, or sketchbooks

"containing images of terrifying gods, which they do not always seem to have recognised or know, which would account for the difficulty if not indeed impossibility of a definite identification".  

Indeed the Ajanta painting (fig 18) may be the first evidence of this textile technique, or other textiles depicted on deities and royal figures, which later became identified with Southeast Asia.

---

27 Bautze-Picron 2003 :175
Figure 17. King and Queen (Manjusri and attendants)\textsuperscript{28} in the Abeyadana temple 11th century Bagan - Photograph Courtesy of U Min Han

Figure 18. King Mahajanaka and his Queen Sivali, Ajanta Cave 1, 5\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid pl 111 :99
Evidence of the Pala style is also seen in (fig 20) from the twelfth century Myinkaba Kubyaungyi temple and its comparison with the Tara portrayed in (fig 14) in the Pala manuscript illustration. This can be observed in the use of Indian attributes and the distinct sway in the posture in the Bagan example.  

Bagan murals adorned temples which were primarily constructed for the purpose of enshrining an image and individual worship, teaching or other ritual celebrations. These temples with painted walls come alive today under the light of a torch – and given the dim interiors of many of the structures, may recall their earlier use. They create a fitting environment for the living presence of the spirit of the Buddha, Here the Bagan love of spirit and narrative lives on in this hidden world of the spiritualised portrayal of the celestial world and virtuous climate of the Buddhist environment. The evidence of the swaying forms so different from the stiff immobile images of the bronze and stone sculpture again reinforces my argument for the Pala prototype or indeed immigrant painters. If the legend of the Indian Queen Abeyadana is true it would not

---

29 These paintings have been conserved much more than Abeyadana indicating a possibly the vivid colours of many of Bagan paintings?
be surprising that she should have employed painters who could remind her of the home she had left, particularly the environment for her prayers.

**Conclusion**

This paper has argued that North-East Indian prototypes were significant in the development of the sculpture and painting of Bagan in the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. This is especially apparent in the comparison of the portable objects such as the votive memorial tablets and the portable bronzes. A more distinctive Bagan style is visible in larger stone sculptures. This reveals itself in a greater naturalism and simplicity of form.

The characteristic of the Bagan facial type is seen in (fig 21) this is typified by the heart-shaped hairline; the urna; fleshy nose; tight full lipped mouth; eyebrows swallow in flight; eyes like bird drinking; and the ears which touch the shoulder.

![Figure 20. 11th century Buddha head from Bagan, Bagan museum. Photograph and annotations courtesy of Miranda Bruce Mitford](image)

In the Bagan large stone Buddha images, the emphasis is on the interior presence rather than the Pala highly elaborate decorative surface ornament. One distinctive aspect of this Bagan sculpture is the emphasis on what is invisible, the emanation of power of the image rather than the visible form and ornamentation. The importance of the spiritualized presence and power of the sacred image of the Buddha is reinforced by the popular practice of enshrining bronze sculpture in relic chambers within sacred buildings, as discovered in the example of fig 10. There is a pervasive belief at Bagan.
of the power of particular Buddhist images especially sculpture. This is in contrast to
the more malevolent power of animistic or nat images.

“In addition the nature of popular religious belief in Myanmar encourages
the forgotten neglected or unknown image to be imbued with remarkable
power generations after creation. This phenomenon affects the longevity of
imagery where this image is replicated over time”

The belief in the power of the story and its popularity in Myanmar is demonstrated by
the exclusively popular replication of the moment of Buddha’s enlightenment. At
Bagan, more important than the objects themselves are the stories, which imbue the
objects with meaning and sanctify them. The image of Buddha at the moment of
enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, the Bhumiparsha Mudra lies at the
heart of Bagan Buddhist icons and the goal of the Buddhist aspirant. The replication
of the scene and the moment is inextricably bound to the tale and its location in the
heartland of north-east India. It has been assumed in the past that the stylistic and
iconographic influence on Bagan was from India. However this paper reveals that it
was more fluid and complex. Bagan belonged to a much wider Buddhist world in which
a great number of mutual interactions occurred. The parallels seen in the sculpture,
votive stelae, bronze sculpture and particularly fresco paintings provides evidence of
the integration of craftsmanship, iconography and meaning in the wider community of
Buddhist practice across the region. Evidence from the iconography in the painted
temples of Abeyadana reveals that in the early eleventh century there was no clear
cut division between the two streams of Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism. Imagery
reveals a syncretic mix of traditions melded together with elements of Brahmanism
and a pre-existing animistic tradition embodied in nat worship.

30 Proser 2002:75
Bibliography

Bautze-Picron, Claudine. “Between India and Burma the Andagu stelae“. The Art of Burma New Studies, Marg, June 1999 : 37-52


Casey, Jane “Medieval sculpture from Eastern India. Selections from the Nalin collection, Livingston NJ” in The life of the Buddha in the Pala monastic environment, 1985


Kerlogue, Fiona. Arts of Southeast Asia, 2004

Kossak, Steven; Casey Singer, Jane. Sacred Visions: Early Paintings from Central Tibet. Metropolitan Museum of Art. 1988


Murphy, Stephen. “Cities and Kings a journey through the art and archaeology of Myanmar” 14-21 in Cities and kings Ancient treasures from Myanmar: 14-21

Panke, Patrick “Buddhism and its practice in Myanmar in Buddhist art of Myanmar” in the Art of Burma, ed. Stadtner, Marg, vol. 50 (June) 1999:31


Schopen, Gregory. Bones, stones, and Buddhist Monks: collected papers on the archaeology, epigraphy, and texts of monastic Buddhism in India, 1997

Stadtner, Donald “ “, in the Art of Burma, *Marg* vol 50 (June) 1999


Zwalf Wladimir *Buddhist Art and Faith*, British Museum Publications 1985