

# THE BUDDHIST CULTURAL REMAINS OF SRI KSETRA

Win Kyaing

ITBMU Yangon, Myanmar

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## Abstract

The Buddhist cultural remains of Sri Ksetra stand as the evolutional Buddhist art and architecture of first millennium AD not only for prolong life span of the city itself but also for regional Southeast Asia. They have been also venerated till today and taken care on physically by structural conservations in successive periods and attempted on the reveal of archaeological research. The present paper tries to note the brief different stages of religious structures such as stupas, temples and ritual halls of existing and excavated positions, and statuary finds of iconographic interests additionally epigraphic evidences of literate Buddhism. Furthermore the paper is alike to highlight these Buddhist cultural remains of Sri Ksetra have been evaluated into the outstanding universal value when Pyu Ancient Cities of Halin, Beikthano and Sri Ksetra were World Heritage Site enlisted.

**Keywords:** Buddhist Cultural; Sri Ksetra; World Heritage

## Introduction

Sri Ksetra is the largest and latest Pyu city, once the capital of unified sovereign of early Myanmar might have been entitled it in Sanskrit and in Myanmar called as *Thaye Khittya* means “Field of Glory” or “Auspicious Land”. It is situated five miles east of recent modern city Pyay and stands north latitude 18° 50' and 95° 20' east latitudes. As existing as the largest ancient city, Sri Ksetra owns numerous archaeological heritage of city plan and landscape, religious and ritual buildings, excavated and unexcavated mounds, various kinds of antiquities, traditional life style of inhabitants and etc.

The city wall (14 km in length) of Sri Ksetra is enclosed the area interior in irregular oval or circle shape (1447 ha.). With the ancient city order it has properly fortified brick walls, gates and moats. From time to time the Department of Archaeology has already excavated 9 gate ways while the contemporary Chinese annals recorded the city of Pyu with 12 gates. There are extensive urban activities outside of the city, sometime they are further dispersed to the south 11 km, up to the North of Sinmezwe-myo. The major distinguish remnants of them are Pyutaiks which are rectangular walled terraces with two or three platforms. Almost of all religious buildings in Sri Ksetra are Buddhist monuments beyond Brahmanism sculptures and miscellaneous evidences were found in the area. That goes to others of contemporary known Buddhist country. Normally the monumental buildings are located in southern sector of urban area where the higher land surface lies. In the directions of Northeast, Southwest and Northwest outside of the city the famous tall stupas of Payama, Bawbawgyi and Payagyi stand respectively.

In the time of Sri Ksetra City the surrounding area are exploited naturally the forest resource, built *stupas* and *viharas* on the tops of hills, burial urn grave yards on the slopes, *Pyutaiks* in the lower ridge-plains and basically provided the rain-water from the hills fill up to the lakes, canals and moats. The city's interior areas of East, North and Northwest join the plain of Nawin River Valley. Today the seasonal gardening and rice fields are covered in these areas, hence the landscape of Sri Ksetra is built up of agricultural lands outer and interior of city wall, spread of ancient water tank, pond, drainage and canal, traditional villages and backing ground with little high hill-range. The old mounds, buried ancient structural activities and standing monuments are allocated in that landscape-area, which are noted numbers as 105 in inside and 172 outside of ancient city.

These physical features of ancient cultural remains have been represented as the supported subjects for criterias of outstanding universal value when the ancient Pyu cities were nominated in World Heritage List. Including Sri Ksetra and Pyu cities are the remarkable for (i) the interchange into new monastic communities, organized and supported by the local population, (ii) testimony as the first and largest Buddhist cities of Southeast Asia and (iii)

typologically localized response to the ecological challenges and natural resources of Pyu Ancient Cities set an example which quickly moved across much of mainland and parts of island Southeast Asia.

### **Brief History**

Many accounts about Sri Ksetra were described in the traditional chronicles in which briefly says- the founders of Sri Ksetra were the descendants of Tagaung in the north, upper Ayeyarwaddy region, - during the time of King Duttabaung (101<sup>st</sup> year of Buddhist Era, some two thousand four hundred years ago) the city of Sri Ksetra was founded, - the 25 kings are accounted with their reign for about 600 years, - the establishing religious building dedicated to Buddhism by royal patronage, - after the occasion of city-chaos by the foreign invasion there broke down unification and happened tribal conflict, - from which the main national groups of Pyu, Kanyan and Myanmar moved to the other regions and resided with together the indigenous inhabitants.

According to the modern historians and archaeologists it has been known more detail of the nation of Pyu and ancient Sri Ksetra via by their studies on the temporary of Greek, Roman and Chinese accounts and records. The Chinese pilgrims Hsuan-tsang in 648 and I-tsing in 675 mentioned the name of Srikshetra as “Shh-li-cha'- t'o-lo” and it was a Buddhist country. We hear about the peoples of Pyu and their culture from the extraction of Chinese Old T'ang History, New T'ang History and Man-shu Chiao-chu. The territory of the nation, the walled city with moat, palace and residence, judicial custom, life-style, costume, jeweler and ornaments, hair-style, behavior, monetary, dance forms, musical instruments, religion and so on. In 901-2 A.D. Pyu King K'un-moch'ang(Kumara Sandra of Sri Ksetra) sent a formal embassy to China via Nanchao led by Sunanda, a governor of provincial city with a troupe of 35 musicians.

The ancient epigraphic studies say at least two dynastic records\_ (i) inscription on the footing of Great Silver Casket discovered in excavation (1926-27) describes that “*Sri Prabhu Varman* and *Sri Prabhu Devi*”, the Sanskrit name of royal donors king and queen datable to the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.,(Varman Dynasty), \_ (ii) Stone urns inscriptions of Payagyi (1911-12) and Payahtaung (1993) pagoda say the royal entitles of the kings and their ages, reigns and the dates of their demise, the former stone urn names “*Hrividhama*, *Sihavikrama* and *Suravikrama*”, the later “*Devamitra*, *Dhammaditrvikrama*, *Brahimhuvikrama*, *Sihavikrama*, *Suravikrama*, *Harivikrama* and *Ardhitrvikrama*” (Blagden, 1917 and San Win, 1998), their dates belong to 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. and, successors of Vikrama Dynasty (Luce,1947). Another considerable names of the two rulers are expressed on the pedestal of head-miss Buddha statue that the one “*Jayacandravarman*” and his brother prince “*Harivikrama*”. Moreover a new name of the King of Sri Ksetra is additionally

found in Man-shu that Pyu King K'un-mo-ch'ang is transliterated to Kumara Sandra (Yi Sein,1993). We have also known the sudden end of Sri Ksetra in 832 A.D. by the depredation of Nan-chao and about 3,000 prisoners were taken to Yunan. Therefore it may be believed during the period of 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the city of Sri Ksetra declined and later the imperial power was moved to Bagan.

### **Archaeological Works**

The archaeological investigation in Sri Ksetra had been started since 1882-83 by the first Officer of Epigraphic Office named Dr. E. Forchammer, a German. Successively the excavations and preservation of ancient monuments were carried out. We have known the early records of conservations at Sri Ksetra during the time of Mr. Taw Sein Ko, Superintendent Archaeologist (1900- 1900) were mentioned in the Annual Reports of Archaeological Survey of India. During the years from 1908 to 1935 such ruins of East and West Zegu, Thaungbyegon, Shwedaga gate, palace tower, Atwin Moathtaw, Bawbawgyi, Kyaukka-thein, Payagyi and etc. were made more or less measure of preservations after they were exposed from excavations. In the "Report of The Superintendent, Archaeological Survey of Burma", for the year 1947, before the independence there mentioned a list of protected archaeological monuments including some of Sri Ksetra such as: \_ Bawbawgyi, Megalithic stone sculptures of Kyaukka-thein, Be'be' and Laymyathna.

From that time up to 1960 the archaeological works of excavations and preservations could not be attempted extensively due to the state affairs like breaking out civil war, multicolor arm-conflicts and etc. But the regular restoration works at the side of archaeological views carried on. In 1953, the antiquities of field museums in Kyaukka-thein at Hmawza and Thayat-taw closed to the South of Bawbawgyi were checked and registered. The repairing of Hmawza museum was also conducted in 1954. In the year 1956-57 the stone inscriptions of Bagan King Kyanzittha located on the slope of Shwesandaw Pagoda hill were kept in the shelter. During the years of 1957 to 1962 the prominent ancient monuments of Payama, Bawbawgyi and Payagyi Pagoda, Be'be', Payahtaung, East Zegu, Rahanda Temple and Subokkon encased stupa were properly maintained.

Then it was started again at Sri Ksetra the excavations following with preservations of recovered structures in 1963. Since that period up to now the outstanding works of preservations on excavated monuments are\_ Shwedaga gate, HMA. 008, 010, 011, 012, Southwest portion of Palace corner, Pyutaik, Myolaytaw, Naga-tount gate, HMA. 031, Lulin-kyaw gate, HMA. 036, 037, Rahanda gate, Natbauk gate, and Palace-cidetal.

The initiative archaeological excavation in Sri Ksetra was made by a French General Leon de Beyleie in 1906-07 with his own expense. To whom the permit and supports of Mr. Taw Sein Ko, superintendent archaeologist of Burma

Circle was added. Later Mr. Taw Sein Ko and his successors continued excavations, exploration and research works around Sri Ksetra. Among them the discovery of Khin Ba mound relic chamber was made a distinctive one ever, which was revealed in 1926-27 season by the attempt of Mr. Charles Duroiselle, a French- superintendent archaeologist of Burma Circle. During the colonial time 37 mounds and sites were excavated. After the Archaeological Survey of Burma was revitalized with national archaeologists who were trained under the Archaeological Survey of India, it became start scientific excavations in ancient Pyu urban sites of Beikthano, Pile (Maingmo) and Sri Ksetra. From time to time by the attempts of Myanmar archaeologists, there have been 65 mounds excavated since 1960s to present time.

From the above mentioned archaeological works we have noted the excavated monumental remains as 12 stupas, 17 ritual hall, 4 image hall, 7 temples, 16 structures of Palace, 10 structures of Pyutaik, 20 urban structures, 4 monastic structures and 2 habitation sites etc. from which we can study typological analysis on their architecture. The following descriptions on stupas, temples, ritual halls and other iconographic and literature evidences are arranged for chronology for development of Buddhist architecture and iconography of Sri Ksetra.

### **Stupas**

The stupas and stupa-like structures of Sri Ksetra demonstrate multiple routes of inter-change with the stupa traditions of Maharastra and Gujarat, the northwest India stupas of Taxila and the south India stupas of Amaravati and Nagajunakonda. The excavated stupa (HMA51, 2011-12) is notable for this example and the religious chronology of structural remains. It is a circular base dome within on a square brick platform(measuring 8.3 m per side, the central stupa measured 5 m in diameter) with steps on the west side resembling the stupas of Beikthano and Pinle.

HMA64 is a new numbering for the famous stupa mound of Khin Ba previously excavation of Charles Duroiselle in 1926-27. But at that time excavation did not examine the stupa, hence the re-excavation in 2016-17, 90 years later. This exposed the early stupa type with a high square platform attached four stairways in respective directions. The centre dome might have been destroyed in lootings before and during Duroiselle's excavation. The tradition of these comprehensive stupa types points to influence of Buddhist stupas at Taxila (Stargardt 1990). But Paleographical evidences of golden leaves of Pali texts from the Khin Ba stupa mound (HMA 64) are related to Nagajunakonda of Andhra Region (Stargardt, 1995).

Free-standing stupas are also typical of a second or mature architectural phase stupas illustrated by the Bawbawgyi, Payagyi and Payama stupas marking the south, northwest and northeast side of the Sri Ksetra city wall. The

Bawbawgyi located about 250 meters south of the city wall stand 46 meters high, with the circular form of the five terraces forming the base supporting an early dating for their construction. The notched bricks of its surface testify to the ancient plastering of the surface.

Scholars suggest that these tall structures may have been enlarged from earlier stupas resembling the bulbous relic caskets seen on many of the Pyu terracotta votive tablets dated to the 6th to 8th century CE. Many structures at the Pyu Ancient Cities were renovated with stupas often being encased with each new patron and so growing larger and taller over the centuries.

The Subokekon and Kyakgaungsa, later consequence phase of Srikssetra stupas issue became smaller in sizes. Their configurations consist of the three tiers of circular base, nearly bell shaped body surmounted by three series of *chattavali* (umbrella) and lotus finial topped. The base is supposed to adapted tradition from the preceding large stupas and the body and finial may consider the transitional advance to early Bagan stupas like No. 1973 and Inn-Payagyi.

## Temples

The Temples of Sri Ksetra can be identified into two traditional groups; the first consisting composite temples, in which the two kinds of earlier burial hall and image hall are sub-divided again. Burial hall is ascribed for its reveal of ash-urns in excavations, but more unknown functions might have been hold by Pyu society in their time. Hence it is sometime described as the multi-ritual hall. This monumental practice was a distinctive character of Pyu civilization and found in both of urban and rural inhabited area of Pyu. The custom of burial ash-urns might be initiated since the Pre-urban and Pre-Buddhist era as the ethnical belief. After the Buddhism introduced to the society of Pyu, the burial practice of ancestor worship coexisted. Its monumental buildings of ritual halls also matched side by side with Buddhist buildings of stupas and image halls. The burial or ritual hall can be sketched out its profile liked as the base foundation and terraced platform (within 1mtr. to 2mtr. Height) of brick structure, upon it wooden pillars are heightened as the super structure with cross-bracing beams and roofing slope (Stargard 1990). The roofs may be covered with wooden elements or terracotta tiles. The image hall also owns similar establishment with the addition of opening or step-way giving to the worshippers.

The second group of temple tradition in Sri Ksetra represents true brick structure what constructed with scientific vault and arch. It consists of the types of cross vault and the shrine with central solid pillar surrounding passage and entrance etc. Payahtaung, Lemyethna, Bebe, Rahanda and East Zegu are prominent temples of Sri Ksetra and previously they were described to prototype of Bagan temple. But the practical studies of epigraphic finds, stratigraphic survey, use of complex brick sizes, their existing upon earlier structure and degenerated architecture from Bagan temple style, comparison with the true

Bagan typology of other sites and same site of Sri Ksetra seem against the previous acceptance of prototype Bagan temple. It is continuously proposes new hypothesis that the second group of temples belong to the chronological sequence of Late or Post Bagan period.

There had been architectural links to Bagan in the late Pyu architecture at Sri Ksetra. The example of Bebe and Lemyethna Temple are known in brick construction methods that could be seen in architecture at Bagan. Both the Bebe and Lemyethna Temple kept stone slabs with the Buddha image of Sri Ksetra Pyu Period. These Buddha images would have their own earlier temple structures which were renovated in Bagan and Post Bagan Period.

### **Ritual Hall Structure**

The other ritual structural remains of burial urn grounds appeared in the several excavations serve as the strong rival depiction of spiritual belief to Buddhist monuments in Sri Ksetra. The structures mainly form with the rectangular brick walls of platforms liked in the position of two or three receding terraces. They are functionally assimilated to the Pre-Buddhist burial halls of KKG. 9, KKG. 11, BTO. 29 and BTO. 30 in Beikthano. Although they have the respective ground plans in constructions, they would have a harmonious tradition of architecture. In conjectural view of burial buildings relate to the composite structures of brick platform paved with white gravels, wooden pillared bodily frame and terracotta tiles or thatch roof in both sites of Beikthano and Sri Ksetra. The recent excavated burial mound, HMA 53 and previously excavated HMA 10, 11 (in 1964) reveal hundreds of burial urns in successive phases which makes up as the typical cemetery site of Sri Ksetra Pyu

There are many rectangular buildings with brick platforms, wooden pillars and in some cases, remains of terracotta roof tiles known as memorial halls. The average brick size of the Pyu period (*circa* 44- 50 x 20-26 x 6.3-7 cm) is comparable to bricks (50 x 26.5 x 8.75 cm) used in structures of Mauryan Period, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC of India. Pyu bricks are often bore with one to four fingers marked and sometimes molded in various shapes. Many of the memorial halls also used molded bricks of semicircular, mango sprout and lotus petal shape to decorate basement of structure. At HMA-37, several layers were unearthed showing the continued use of the structure.

The Pyu memorial halls or ritual halls with their urns are unusual in the range of urn burials in Southeast Asia in the first millennium BCE and first millennium CE, firstly because they were all cremation burials rather than the secondary burials which were much more common in other cultures, and secondly because in many cases there were no offerings in the urns. Urns were also embedded in the foundations of other types of Pyu structures, with variations in their placement. However, the practice of cremation, the deposition of the ashes, bones and earth in urns, which were in turn placed in groups inside

or near monumental structures, was to remain a common factor throughout the *circa* one thousand years of archaeological evidence of the Pyu Ancient Cities.

### Pyu Inscriptions

Epigraphic evidence of the Pyu script, derived from Brahmi scripts such as the Iksvaku, is known from the discovery of seals and sealings, inscribed stone slabs and urns, inscribed solid gold palm-leaf shaped manuscript plates, inscribed silver ritual objects such as a gilded silver reliquary casket and from Pyu numbers and letters on bricks and on the rim of some pottery.

As noted, during the 3rd to 4th century CE, the Pyu had adopted and adapted the Iksvaku scripts of Amaravati and Nagajunakonda for their own use in transcribing Buddhist texts and some words in their own language. The longer Pyu Pali texts demonstrate that monks were not only well-versed in Pāli but also acquainted with the rules of Sanskrit orthography. This tradition of being able to recite by heart the Pāli texts by the Buddhist monks of Myanmar has been sustained since the Pyu period to the present day in annual recitation competitions held by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This longevity is well supported by the existence of extensive libraries of ancient manuscripts and continues today with the rigorous observance of recitation and propagation of the Pāli canon by the *Sangha* communities.

Among the finds in the Khin Ba Mound chamber were twenty solid gold palm-leaf shaped manuscript plates whose inscriptions include eight compressed excerpts from all three main canonical texts, including the chain of causation, the praises of the Buddha, and qualities of Enlightenment. Other gold palm-leaf shaped manuscript plates have been found in the region of Sri Ksetra, all inscribed with extracts from the Pāli canon. Two were found in 1897 at Maungan Mound 11 km south of the city wall, each was inscribed with three lines of Pāli including the emblematic *Yedhamma* stanza associated with conversion of one of the principle disciples of the Buddha and other sacred verses. A single gold plate was found in 1928 at the village of Kyundawzu, within the wall of Sri Ksetra inscribed with two lines of Pali containing the text from one of the dialogues of the Buddha, the same as one of the eight excerpts found on the 20 solid gold palm-leaf shaped manuscript plates within the Khin Ba Mound hoard discovered in 1926-27. This wealth of epigraphic finds in Sri Ksetra can be dated broadly between the 5th to 8th century CE which together with the other inscribed objects from Halin and Beikthano correlates well with the radiocarbon sequence described above and a chronology from at least the first century CE.

In addition to the gold plates, at the centre of the one meter square Khin Ba Mound relic chamber, a gilded silver reliquary casket over 70 centimeters in height was found. The casket, with a flat cover supporting the trunk of a *bodhi* tree, bore images in high relief of the four Buddhas of this era (Konagamana, Kakusandha, Kassapa, Gotama) flanked by smaller figures of His disciples

(Kassapa, Moggallana, Sariputta, Ananda). The names of the Buddhas are inscribed in Pyu and Pāli on the upper rim of the casket, while at the bottom are the names of the disciples and a later dedicatory inscription in Pyu with the Sanskrit names of the donors, *Sri Prabhu Varman* and *Sri Prabhu Devi*.

Of the five stone urns found at Sri Ksetra, four were found in the early 20th century from the area around the tall Payagyi stupa on the northwest side of the walled site and the fifth was recovered in 1992 from a chamber inside a stupa set within the Paya-taung monastic compound (HMA-31) adjacent to the city's central palace-citadel. The Pyu inscriptions on these five stone urns from Sri Ksetra are written in Pyu with inter-liner Brahmi, possibly used to mark the end of syllables. The scripts have been dated 7th to 8th century CE, and but although the inscriptions include numbered years, none specifies an era, leading to continued debated about their dating. The four urns from Payagyi stupa each bear the name of a single person, firstly deciphered by the scholar C.O. Bladgen using the Myanmar Era (ME) which adds 638 to the Christian Era. These texts have been transcribed to read:

In 35 a relative of Suriyavikrama died.

In 50 Suriyavikrama himself died, at the age of 64.

In 57, 2nd month, 24 days, Harivikrama died, aged 41 years, 7 months and 9 days.

In 80, 2nd month, 4th day, Sihavikrama died, aged 44 years, 9 months and 20 days.

The fifth urn from Paya-taung (HMA-31) is a large urn (now in the National Museum, Yangon) is inscribed with the five lines of writing giving all the names in serial order. Using this information, and basing the era on the Gupta (adding 319 years), the Myanmar scholar U San Win obtain a different sequence of names:

On the 9th day of the 7th month in the year 41 King Hri vikrama died. His age was 57 years, two months and 24 days.

On the 20th day of 9th month in the year 44 King Singha vikrama died. He was 80 years old.

The beloved wife of King Suriya vikrama (the queen) died. She was 35.

In the year 64 King Suriya vikrama died, at the age of 50 years and 5 months.

## Relic Chamber

In Sri Ksetra a great discovery from excavations was made by Charles Duroiselle, the superintendant of Archaeological Survey of Burma in 1926-27. The excavated mound situated on the land of U Khin Ba of Kalagan village, and it is closed to the city wall of southeast portion. Discovery of this relic chamber accounted the contents of 68 different kinds and totally 430 objects numbered. In which the central Great Silver Reliquary, gold and silver miniature stupas,

gold, silver and bronze Buddha images, silver bowls and trays, statues of devotee, caskets and trays, coins and beads, rings and animal figurines, cups, rattan balls, relief sheets and lotus flowers in different metals and stones, 20 leaves of Golden Pāli Texts and etc. are distinguish finds.

Among these over 400 objects, the leaves of Golden Pali Texts are evaluated as the oldest Pali Texts in the Buddhist World (Stargardt, 2001), described about the extractions from the Tri Pitakas and written in Pyu alphabets circa. Mid 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D dated. The Great Silver Reliquary is made of silver sheet by repoussé technique into the form of the cylindrical body with the depiction of Four Buddhas in this present *kalpa*(world) and disciples with their identical names. Upper center of cylindrical body originally sprouted the silver Bodhi tree. The rims in the high and foot were inscribed of Pali Text extractions and the royal donors of King and Queen as *Sri Prabhavarman* and *Sri Prabhudevi*.

### **Bronze and Other Metal Figurines**

Another discovery was made by the Department of Archaeology in the mound of HMA 8 in 1967. The mound is assumed as a monastic brick building locates northeast of Payama Stupa, north of the city wall. The finds consist of five bronze Buddha images, 11 inches high bronze bell, which covered the five figurines of Pyu artistes and terracotta burial urns. Pyu artistes look alive in the postures of drummer, dancer, clown, flutist and cymbalist, all male gender.

A well-known bronze figurine of Avalokitesvara was found in the excavation site near Bawbawgyi stupa. It is a standing pose, but legs and three of four arms are mutilated. Other two gold Avalokitesvara were also noticed to the existence of Mahayana Buddhism in later Sri Ksetra times. The earlier one was found in the mound near Yindaik-kwin in 1928-29 excavation. Three inches high and portrayed in repoussé technique statue has in *lalitasana* sitting attitude, four handed of two in discussing and the rests in holding *trisula*(trident) and lotus.

### **Stone Sculptures**

Stone sculptures are the prominent antiquities yielded from the explorations and excavations in Sri Ksetra and its environs. The most are preserved and displayed in the site museum and some others are at the National Museum in Yangon. Most of sculptures belong to the Buddhism and a few are Hinduism. Buddhist stone sculptures are mostly known to the Buddha relief on stone slabs, the best example to this type known to the three megaliths of Kyaukka-thein, near museum, Htupayon in Taunglonnyo village and Pokhaungkan slabs. They are usually a triad in erection. The reliefs on the surface of every triads, the Buddha always sits in the center with the posture of cross-legged, the hands in earth touching, meditation or alms bowl keeping. He

is flanked by the stupas or attendants of Devas, Bodhisatvas or disciples. The notable relief sculptures of Buddha are known from near Bawbawgyi stupa, East Zegu, Nuaungnibin mound, Kanwetgaungkon and Shwenyaungbingon.

The sculptures of Mahayanist Buddhism were also found as the Boddhisattva Maitreya and the female deity of Taradevi. Other extraordinary sculptures of Dvarapala (guardian) were discovered in the city gate and the entrance of citadel. The existence of Brahmanism in Sri Ksetra is authenticated with the evidences of stone sculptures like a slab of Vishnu and lakshmi, a standing Vishnu on Garuda and a reclining Vishnu on the serpent with three lotus of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

One of Pyu cultural objects of funeral urns are found in numbers. They are usually made of clay, bronze and sandstone to put and bury the ash from cremation. The Large stone urns used by the royalty are in limited numbers. The four large stone urns discovered near Payagyi stupa in 1911- 12, six of Queen Beikthano Cemetery and a large one near Pyahtaung in 1992, were accounted.

Another stone sculptural work of huge pedestal is comprehended by the explorations. The pedestals are beautifully carved with the decorations of wood like turning posts, lotus, diamond bud and floral designs. The earlier two are known in the mounds of Sinma-koe-wintin-gon on the southeast of Bawbawgyi and north of Man-aung Monastery. The third one is a fragmentary position latterly noticed in the mound near Payagyi.

It needs to describe that the two stone slabs from Khin Ba mound excavation are depicted early stupa shape with surmounting umbrellas. With comparable to the Amaravati stupa type of the relief stone slabs were the covers of relic chamber found in situ in excavation. When the relic chamber was discovered, it was covered with a massive stone slab (190 x 137.5 x 15 cm) with a sun and crescent moon carved in relief on the top above a cylindrical stupa in a style dated to the late 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. The stupa, with a rectangular *harmika* (relic chamber) and five-tiered *chattravali* (umbrella) and streamers on each side and at the bottom, is carved with niches along the base containing images of the five Buddhas of the current era (*Bhadrakalpa*), a concept developed in South Asia which took on a new importance in the distinctive Buddhism of the city.

The largest numbers of sculptural images have been found at Sri Ksetra some with Pyu inscriptions, including a finely caved headless image found in 1927-28 at Kan-wet-gaung-gon (Wet-gaung-kan-gon), a 'pig-shaped lake near a hill' south of the Bawbawgyi stupa at Sri Ksetra. The base of this image is inscribed with a 7th century CE Pyu and Sanskrit inscription including a Buddhist verse or *sutra* (Pāli: *sutta*) and negotiation by a 'Wise Master' for a peace agreement between two rulers. The image was donated by Prince Jayacandra varman who refers to his younger brother Harivikrama and in the last verse, a hope that friendship and common adherence to the Buddhist teachings of their hermit teacher will continue to the end of the world.

Other reliefs reflect the syncretic amalgamation of Theravada, Mahayana and Brahmanic elements in the varied religious sects of the Pyu Ancient Cities. This is illustrated by Pho Khaung Kan relief depicting a seated image of the Buddha in *Bhumisparsa mudra* with the throne backed by a *makara* reredos and flanked by Bodhisattvas, Brahma and Indra and flying attendant figures. The image is dated to the 6th to 7th century CE, comparable to Gupta schools of Western India such as found at Aurangabad, Ellora and Kanheri.

There are additional Brahmanic figures from Sri Ksetra such as a rectangular stone slab dated to the early 8th century CE depicting two standing figures, Vishnu standing on a mythical garuda bird with his consort Lakshmi on his left on a double -petalled lotus. Another is a stone image dated to 9th century CE showing Vishnu reclining with a lotus emerging from his navel on which Brahma, Shiva and Indra are seated, other images of the Hindu god Vishnu and the Mahayana female deity Tara Devi a piece dated to *circa* the 7th century CE. As these examples show, many cults were active at all of the Pyu cities with sculptures documenting both Brahmanic and Buddhist followers particularly from the 7th to 9th century CE.

At present the earliest - dated to possibly the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE - sculpture from Sri Ksetra commemorates depicts local heroic figure on one face of a stone stele, over 1.5 meters high, recovered north of the palace-citadel at Sri Ksetra. The throne stone may reflect the aniconic phases of the Amaravati School in *circa* the 2nd century CE. The stocky figure carries a massive club that has been likened to local chronicles recording the gift of an invincible weapon by the Hindu god Indra to Duttabaung, the Pyu king said to have founded Sri Ksetra in the year 442 BCE, 101 years after the Nirvana of the Buddha. The figure is flanked by two attendants bearing *cakra* and *garuda* (wheel and mythical bird) emblems. The obverse side of the stele depicts an empty throne, and two bare-breasted female attendants.

As these examples demonstrate, Sri Ksetra is typified by a number of massive stone sculptures, many dating to *circa* the 7th century CE. Additional examples include sculptures from Lemyethna, Bebe, East Zegu and the megalithic slabs of Kyaukkar-thein and Tupayon, where pieces include two rows of three slabs carved with images of the Buddha and attendants.

## Discussion

The stupas of Sri Ksetra are square structures with a circular core similar to the great stupa at Nalanda and to 2nd - 4th century CE Mora Moradu, Sikrap and others from Taxila. The examples of this type are Mathigya-gon stupa excavated in 1907 and Khin Ba mound stupa excavated in 1926-27. The stupa type of Bawbawgyi was scholarly evaluated the developed form of early hemispherical cetiyas of Sanchi and Amaravati of South Indian styles. It is frequently coincided with the Dhammekh Stupa of Varanasi of Northern India. If it adds another view

this is much look liked relic casket form, with comparing similar shaped casket (displayed in the museum) made up of gold plated bronze ware found from the excavation site near the stupa. The archaeologists dated the establishing of stupa belonged to 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. a mature phase of Sri Ksetra. In the closing centuries of the first millennium CE, the Pyu stupas became smaller with the almost bell-shaped dome with receding umbrella and lotus finial. The base consisting of the three circular tiers is seen locally as an adaptation from the earlier larger stupas while the bell-shaped dome and finial presage the form of early Bagan stupas such as No. 1973 (IMP) and Inn-Payagyi at the 9th to 13th century CE capital of Bagan.

The chronological study on temples of Sri Ksetra is suggested and attested from the archaeological works and typological trend. The initiate establishments of composite temples are firstly known to earlier burial hall and image hall, which were more or less contemporary with those of Beikthano and some of them may have belonged to Pre-urban and Pre-Buddhist era as the ethnical belief in respective regions. Later the continuation of those ritual halls also matched side by side with Buddhist stupa and monastic structures. This type of ritual and image hall structure might have been in the whole life time of the city of Sri Ksetra. The next temple type of with true brick vaulted structure is as discussed above as the late Pyu architecture in Sri Ksetra. The example of Bebe and Lemyethna Temple seen today in Sri Ksetra might have been renovated in Bagan and Post Bagan Period when the older city became under the influence of empyreal power and new architectural diffusion.

The art of Buddhist stone-sculptures in Sri Ksetra drew out in periods and interchanged with the different schools. The throne stone with bifacial depictions of throne and warriors distributes its prior phase of in-iconic manner of Amaravati School (circa. 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.) (Guy 1999, Hudson 2004). Then the scholarly approved stupas relief of Khin Ba relic chamber to 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. in which although the shape of stupas are the direct contact of Southern Indian style, the features of five Buddhas and the two holders of umbrella are similar to Pyu. The next periodical advance of Buddhist sculptures can give an account to Pho Khaung Kan relief. It is a seated Buddha in *Bhumipassa mudra* and backed with the *makaras* reredos, flanked by Bodhisatvas, Brahma and Indra, the flying figures, roles of attendants. It could be datable 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. with comparison to the Gupta school of Western India e.g. Aurangabad, Ellora and Kanheri. This contemporary date is suitable to other compositional sculptures from Laymyethna, Bebe, East Zegu and the famous megaliths of Triad Buddhas of Kyaukka-thein and Tupayon. The scholarly dated 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. period is relevant to say the glorious age for stone sculptures of Sri Ksetra Buddhist art. It followed the similar megaliths of Bodhisattva and Tara Devi with the advent of particular Mahayanist sects.

The later phase of Pyu Buddhism in Sri Ksetra (circa. 8<sup>th</sup>- 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) should be concerned with popularity of Mahayana. Therefore Stargardt (1990) gives an appropriate event that is *“This affinity provides an interesting insight into the growing range of Buddhist influences reaching the Pyu from the fifth century onwards, including contacts with the Buddhist kingdoms of Northwest and Northeast India as well as the South.”* The artifact remains after the decline of Sri Ksetra were periodically revealed by the archaeological works, among them the Buddhist sculptures of Shwe-nyaungbin-gon Temple (made up of the raw stone ‘tuff’) are represented the most characteristics of Bagan art.

## Conclusion

The archaeological evidences of Sri Ksetra are told in the past society of whose build and maintain the ritual structure, rice fields and massive walls of urban areas for over one thousand years. The results of this social cooperation and ecological understanding are tangibly demonstrated by the religious architecture, the innovative Brahmi-derived Pyu script and the rich variety of the sculpture associated with the clusters of ritual structures. These cultural remains stand with the long living of the city as per together the religion of Buddhism and urbanization introduced to the proto urban sites of Ayeyarwaddy Valley of Central Myanmar in 3<sup>rd</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Since that time many structural and artifacts from archaeological excavations proved that Pyu Ancient Cities had lastly survived up to Bagan Period (11-13 century AD). And each cultural phases of remains such as early, middle or mature and late evidence can be seen in the cities’ active duration. Especially in Sri Ksetra the early phase like as ritual hall (HMA 61), stupa (HMA 51), inscription (20 golden Pali manuscripts of Khin Ba Mound) are shown the progress and initial innovation of Indianization and indigenous culture of Pyu. In this stage the architecture of Buddhist stupa and Pyu alphabets of Brahmi derived-scripts are comparable with those of South and Northwest Indian Buddhist Culture. At the same time there were similarity among the locally Pyu ancient cities of Halin, Beikthano, Maingmao and coastal urban sites of Lower Myanmar.

Such cultural traits of Sri Ksetra continued harmoniously to the next mature level of as the Buddhist Image hall (Kyaukka Thein), enlarged stupa (Bawbawgyi), ritual hall (HMA 53), Buddha reliefs on stone slab (megaliths of Pokhaungkan), stone pedestal (Sinma-ko-wintin), variety of Buddhist statues in stone carvings and bronze-casting are typologically and stylistically identified. Especially inter-iconographic tradition of Mahayanist Buddhism had been derived in the late time of the city’s development stage and co-existed along with older Theravada Buddhist school of Sri Ksetra. The structural activities of Buddhist buildings were more progressed like the Bawbawgyi Stupa as the sovereign building for neighbouring Buddhist territories and regional innovation. The religious connection with Northeastern and Eastern coastal

regions of India and regional communication with Lower Myanmar, Dwaravati of Thailand had been and seen in this developed phase of the city.

The late phase of Sri Ksetra was used to advent progressive Buddhism and Brahmanism, that existence could be supported by the numerous finds of statuary imposition of Meiteya, Avalokitesvara and Tara Devi, Vishnu and etc. The phase of the city is suggested as beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> century AD to the Post Bagan Period, it could be noticed on the transformation of stupa type (Subokkon), renovation of image hall (Be Be Temple) and construction of Bagan temple type in small size (East Zegu), introduction of local style Buddha image and influence of royalty from Bagan (HMA 31-B, Shwesandaw stone inscriptions).

These mentioned cultural remains Sri Ksetra and contemporary Pyu Cities during the prolonged period of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to 9<sup>th</sup> century AD are attested as the first and permanent foothold of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, and the religion was embraced by all classes of society. The construction of religious building in brick through royal and common patronage approve the shift to permanent material from earlier timber building technique used in ritual or funerary structures of mortuary practice and Image hall. Additionally the religious establishment of Sri Ksetra and Pyu Cities are justified prototype for later state formation following the onward transmission of Buddhist teaching and monastic practice into other parts of mainland Southeast Asia. It is explained in the Nomination Dossier for Pyu Ancient Cities to World Heritage List in 2012 and it has been achieved enlisting World Cultural Heritage in 2014.

In conclusion the Buddhist cultural remains of Sri Ksetra existed in the crucial role of Buddhist art and architecture progress in the first millennium AD beyond the Buddhism rooted land of India. Over the prolong period of the city the monumental characteristics serve in respective phases of transform, style, and iconographic features, and finally those interrelations of religions and ethnical societies of the city made itself as cosmopolitan. The late phase of structural and cultural activities said that the city was survived with multi religious functions of ancestor worship, Theravada, Mahayana Buddhism and Brahmanism. That time might be 9<sup>th</sup> century AD and the decline of the city was started, soon after the move of political power from Sri Ksetra to Bagan. But the city was not abandoned with succeed of elite supports in socio-economic sector to the continuous inhabitants of ancient city of Sri Ksetra. Alternatively the cultural traits of Sri Ksetra more or less supported to the new foundation of empyreal capital of Bagan and later successive history of Myanmar and regional Southeast Asia.

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