

## **Ancient Knowledge and the Use of Landscape**

### **Walled Settlements in Lower Myanmar**

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#### ***Introduction: texts and sites***

A major challenge to achieving an archaeology of landscape is matching hard material facts with textual sources. This paper attempts to redress the balance between the two in Lower Myanmar studies. The archaeological evidence is favoured, but without losing the unique value of what is conserved in the epigraphic and chronicle tradition. Archaeological artefacts such as laterite walls and finger-marked bricks are difficult to tally with descriptions of cities and places found in inscriptions, chronicles and early Chinese travellers' accounts. Likewise, persons and places *not* mentioned in inscriptions are often deemed not to have existed. Both these approaches, in the self-imposed restrictions placed on their use of the evidence, prejudice investigation from the outset. This has particularly been the case in relation to texts demonstrating integration of monastic groups into early first millennium AD walled sites located in Lower Myanmar. The coastal distribution of these sites and their extraordinary degree of land alteration is unique within the early cultures of Myanmar, but objective study of these remains has been restricted to a few scholars (e.g. Aung Myint 1998 a, San Win 1986, 2002).

The earlier biases that have preconditioned this sphere of study should not be lightly dismissed, for these prejudices have created a range of possibilities from which to start (Johnson and Olsen 2000:111-2). Nonetheless, the approach here differs from previous ones in seeking to correlate the memory of the past embedded in texts to a distribution of walled sites stretching from the area of Kyontu (17.28n x 96.40e ) near Bago to Thagara (14.10n x 98.10e ) north of Dawei. (*Appendix* Map and table) This means looking at the use of laterite, brick and stone walls to

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alter the terrain. It also means considering whether these constructions were associated with Mon peoples and how they relate to references to Suvannabhumi and to the Pyu sites in Upper Myanmar. Questions of Suvannabhumi, the Mon and the Pyu, are vital, but the real aim of this paper is to try to settle something more simple. By this is meant acknowledgement of landscape change that appears to have been prompted by the introduction of Buddhist practice, the establishment of the Sangha, and its subsequent royal sustenance. In a manner akin to the preservation of points of major transformation in ancient Cambodia (Ang Choulean 1998:117), these landscape transitions appear to be preserved in the collective memory, recalled in the inscriptions of Kyanzittha and Dhammaceti as well as chronicle sources. It is these accounts that are discussed here, with sites detailed in a companion paper, *Early sites of the peninsular coast* (Moore 2004).

### ***Mon and Pyu-Bamar***

The majority of the peninsular walled sites are in the townships of Waw and Bilin in the present Bago Division and Mon State with others as far south as Dawei. Sites include Kyontu, Sittaung, Kyaikkatha, Kaw Htin, the Kelasa-Mya Thabeik (Dokkhalun) mountain, Winka-Ayetthema villages and Zothoke-Kyaikhtisaung. South of Zothoke-Kyaikhtisaung is Thaton, the traditional centre of Suvannabhumi and early Theravada teaching. Finger-marked bricks and early votive tablets have also been recorded to the east at Pa-an in Kayin (Karen) State (San Win 1986, 2002, Khin Ma Ma Mu 2000). Similar sites are found in the central part of the peninsula at Hmawbi (Sanpannagon), with Thagara, Shin Mokti and possibly other sites located near Dawei (Tavoy) (Aung Myint 2000b). To the south, around Myeik (Mergui), Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) and the many islands off the coast, early trading settlement is also indicated with mention of minerals such as tin, lead and iron. Although finger-marked bricks have not been found, walls remain from the old port at Tanintharyi, possibly the Tun Sun mentioned in 6<sup>th</sup> century AD Chinese records. Both Dawei and the Myeik-Tanintharyi areas would have been ports of call on a 'Maritime Silk Route' (Jacq-Hergoualch 2002:84). On the east coast of the Malay peninsula, a number of early historic centres are found, such as

Chaiya, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Yarang, identified with Panpan, Tambralinga and Langkasuka, respectively. Although somewhat after the period under consideration here, the significance of this whole southern area to the kings of Bagan is clear. For example, a signed votive tablet of Anawratha was recovered in Myeik, and in the 11<sup>th</sup> C AD, Saw Lu, son of Anawratha, erected an inscription near Maunglaw, some ten miles southeast of Myeik (Luce 1969:26-7). Two tablets from Shin Mokti at Dawei are inscribed by governors of Kyanzittha's reign (1084-113AD).

Economic and cultural networks existed not only along the coast, but west across the Bay of Bengal, as well as over and around the peninsula. While this range of relationships has been well documented for later periods (Om Prakash 2002), the patterns also provide a framework for considering the peninsula at an earlier time. Particularly disputed is the nature of interchange with the Pyu and later the Bamar to the north. The similarities between Mon and Pyu-Bamar have led to suggestions that the southern walled sites are appendages of the northern Pyu sites, with Mon speakers present only following later immigration from northern Thailand (Aung Thwin 2002:35,45). Today, many of the walled sites are in Mon-speaking areas. However, Thagara and Shin Mokti at Dawei are well past the town of Ye, the rough southern limit of the present Mon population (Than Swe p.c.08.03).

The notion that the peninsular area was Pyu rather than Mon in the early centuries AD is plausible - although Pyu inscriptions would be expected. More importantly, the proposition highlights a linguistic bias colouring many of the arguments against what has been called the 'Mon paradigm. Identifying patterns of re-iteration has been central in this questioning the presence of a Mon kingdom prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD (Aung Thwin 2001, 2002). Many points of the case against the accepted understanding of the Mon role are useful. While these show the way that viewpoints have developed, the argument 'against' self-admittedly remains within a linguistic framework and focused urban definition. In relation to this present paper, for example, it is argued that had there been an early Mon state in Lower Myanmar, that there would be linguistic evidence and monumental remains (Aung Thwin 2002: 38-39). Within these estimations, the identification of walled sites with the Mon is not

dismissed. However, a full account of the archaeological evidence for complex settlements verified through remote sensing, ground survey and excavation is not included. Thus while agreeing with many parts of Aung Thwin's argument, those dealing with the early historical period do not tally with the complex evidence presented here.

One example of simplification at the expense of the peninsular settlements is seen where the Lower Myanmar sites of Winka, Ayetthema and Hsindat-Myindat are described as smaller urban sites close to if not identical with the Pyu (Aung Thwin 2002:35). In fact, Winka and Ayetthema are villages at the foot of Mt. Kelasa in Bilin Township, Mon State. The remains of laterite, brick and stone constructions in these villages are linked to sacred hermitage sites on the mountain. Hsindat-Myindat is a carved laterite wall, part of the Zothoke-Kyaikhtisaung complex, a multiple-walled site located southeast of Kelasa. This was perhaps a centre of teaching and ordination complementing Kelasa in a manner similar to the associations between Thaton and Zingyaik (Gacchagiri) mountain (16.41n x 97.28e) to the south. An array of smaller sites continues to the southeast of Zothoke including Zweekala, Waingpat and Muthin (17.10n x 97.11e), all low lateritic mounds with pagodas, laterite sculptures, and various types of laterite and brick linear constructions. Questioning whether these are 'Mon' or 'a state' is not irrelevant, but tends to funnel out understanding of the material remains into a rigid framework. This structure is the legacy of early linguistic studies, and does not incorporate ancient land alteration and the fluidity of early political domains demonstrated by the variation and the distribution of the walled sites.

Peninsular walled sites mirror the contours of the terrain in a way that is *not* typical of Pyu walled centres such as Beikthano, Halin and Sriksetra. Given the prior archaeological survey of the Pyu sites, the differences from what has been called the laterite (*gawun*) culture (Sar Win 1986) have been overlooked. Pyu walls make use of local incline with the inclusion, for example, of a lower *in* or seasonal lake at Beikthano and a higher area of lateritic hills at Sriksetra. The main determinant in the form of the peninsular walled sites, however, is laterite. The walls surround lateritic 'islands', making use of local material in

relation to local terrain, perhaps remnants of an initial phase of land alteration.

Although evidence is abundant for early habitation of the arid zone of Upper Myanmar, alteration of the terrain is not characteristic of these sites (Moore 2003). The Pyu walls enclose variable lands; they do not emerge from the contours and materials of the terrain as do the peninsular walled sites. But the peninsular sites do share many features with Pyu culture, from the use of finger-marked bricks to similar votive tablets and silver coins. The common artefacts roughly situate both groups prior to Bagan, when bricks grow smaller and are stamped, not finger-marked, and when votive tablets change in shape and style, and when silver coins cease to be used (Moore 2003b).

As recently discussed by this author in relation to the Pyu, we must look beyond ethnic paradigms to accommodate recent research. In regards to Upper Myanmar, this means discussing domains perceived as Pyu within the framework of ritual and technology, such as changes from animism to Buddhist practice, and the presence of bronze and iron mortuary goods (Moore 2003, 2003b). In the case of the peninsular walled sites, it means data on the multiple walled sites, a distribution stretching from Bago to Thaton, south to Dawei and possibly Tanintharyi. Research in this area has been impeded by the high rainfall, thick vegetation, inaccessibility and few well provenanced artefacts. The two existing radiocarbon dates, from the sixteen and seventeenth century AD, testify to the later importance of these sites but not their founding or development (Myint Aung 1999:53). Given these constraints, the use of remote sensing has been essential in identifying and analysing the form of walled sites located in the coastal areas of Bago Division, Mon State and the northern part of Tanintharyi Division (Aung Myint 1998b, San Win 1986).

### *Early incorporation & Gawampati*

Unlike the walled cities of the Pyu, the peninsular sites receive abundant rainfall. Control of water would have been important, especially near the river mouths along the coast, where many of the walled sites are

found. The gaps separating the steep walls of the peninsular sites are narrow, more gullies than moats (Aung Myint, p.c, 08.03). Without metal tools, it is difficult to imagine how the lateritic landscape could have been so modified, and how the walls and ravines could have been constructed and maintained. However, this is also a region of abundant iron resources, offering plenty of raw materials favouring local production. At some point, the collective effort needed for the walled constructions became the norm, with the local *gawan* or laterite providing the first durable building material (Nai Pan Hla 1972:50). Remains of these early laterite constructions have been identified at Kyaikkatha, at the foot of Mt. Kelasa, at Zothoke-Kyaikhtisaung and sites to the south,

This was not necessarily a adjustment prompted by new technology but one instigating it, reflecting a changing importance of space in the choice and the form of attention brought to bear upon objects that are of concern (Foucault 1997:368-370). In this case, the absorption of a more highly synthesised royal and religious worldview affected demarcation of domain. It is argued here that memory of these transformations to place are seen in traditional accounts, with the initial absorption of Buddhist teachings recorded in references to the sage Gawampati. The name of this figure is said to derive from 'the living mass of earth' and commonly taken to refer to *gawun* or laterite (Cetana 1997: 32; San Win 2003 p.c).

The origins of Gawampati in Myanmar are found in legends of Zingyaik Mountain, south of Thaton. Gawampati (Canda Kumara) and his brother (Suriya Kumara) are bom from *naga* eggs, begotten from the union of a Zingyaik *weiza* and a female *naga*. The children are raised by two hermits of the region, one living on Zingyaik mountain and another on Zweekabin (Bandavagiri) to the east. Gawampati dies at the age of eight, and his brother later becomes King Siharaja of Thaton (Subbindanagara/ Suvannabhumi). Reborn in the time of the Buddha, Gawampati returns to the place of his earlier existence, eventually bringing the Buddha and a company of *arahats* to Zingyaik and Kelasa in the present day Mon State. There they meet his elder brother from a previous life, now known as King Tissadhammasiharaja (Cetana 1997: 24, 30, 37). In all of Gawampati's lives and capacities, the connection to place remains constant as messenger and founder, guardian of sacred or

royal constructions. This is seen in the earliest remaining texts, the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD inscriptions of King Kyanzitha. In the Shwezigon inscription, for example, Gawampati seeks to confirm with the Buddha that he will indeed build the city of Sriksetra together with a sage, the future King Kyanzitha (Taw Sein Ko and Duroiselle 1919:114). Significantly, in an inscription found at Ayetthema on Mt. Kelasa, Kyanzitha refers not to the establishment of a sacred structure, but to its *renovation*:

"...this pagoda...which was in ruins...to build and encase it afresh firmly and fairly, bigger than before...and had it dedicated" (No.V, Duroiselle 1960:146)

The first part of the Ayetthema inscription is similar to one found near Bagan. Both mention the future building of Sriksetra and the attendance of Gawampati:

" O, Ananda, in the year when I shall achieve Nirvana, the sage Bisnu, together with my son Gawampati, and King Indra, and Bissukamma, and Katakammanagaraja, shall build a city call Sri Kset..." (No. III, Duroiselle 1960:141)

This account is also incorporated into the *Glass Palace Chronicle*:

"At that time these Seven Exalted Ones - Gavampati, Rishi, Sakra, Naga, Garuda, Sandi, and Paramesura - met in accordance with the Lord's prophecy and conferred together about the founding of the city.. " (Pe Maung Tin and Luce 1960: 14)

In Kyanzitha's inscriptions, Gawampati then repeats the prophecy of the king's future births to Sakka in Tavatimsa. At the consecration of the Letteshe pagoda of Anawrahta, although Gawampati is not present as he was at Sriksetra, an image of the sage is enshrined and lands endowed. At the palace consecration of Kyanzitha, an image of Gawampati is installed next to one of the Buddha. Shorto emphasises Gawampati's multiple roles: the sage receiving the robes of a minister, acting as a guardian, and representing the Sangha (1967:136, Blagden 1938:37-8). There is nonetheless a common reference to place, both sacred and royal. At Sriksetra, Gawampati assists in the marking out of territory; at Bagan he is cited where lands are given, or in the case of the palace where land is being consecrated for the king. A similar role marks the references to him in later inscriptions of the Mon king Dhammaceti.

Among the records of Dhammaceti's pagoda restorations, a 1486 AD inscription from Hpaya-ywa near Bago notes Gawampati's multiple functions. Gawampati is first teacher to king at Thaton. He is then messenger bringing the Buddha Gotama to the king and later conveying the Tooth Relic. This multiplies into thirty-three for the king to consecrate the thirty-three stupas marking the capital and territories of the realm (Shorto 1970:16-21).

Then the Mahathera Gavampati remembered the instructions the Buddha had given him, and while the pyre stilled burned he took the tooth, which now through the Buddha's vow became thirty-three; those he bore to King Sirimasoka. When the king received them he built thirty-three small stone *cetiya*, and for the term of his life worshipped and revered them..." (Shorto 1970:17)

The importance of place remains a common theme, with links made to tutelary or ancestral spirits (Shorto 1963:576, 1967: 132-5). Gawampati's brief mention elsewhere also relate to place, although these raise unanswered questions about the derivation of the Mon-Bamar version. He is noted for instance in the *Mahakarmavibhanga*, where he voyages to Suvannabhumi (Levi 1932:62). His name in Sanskrit is seen to have the sense of either a radiant being or a guardian of the cattle of a place (Przyluski 1926: 240), In the *Mahabharata*, Gawampati is one of the names given to Shiva, linked to the bull Nandin (Levy 1957:83). In accounts of the First Buddhist Council, Gawampati's presence is requested to complete the required company of five hundred *arahats*. He is presented as a meditating sage, a bovine pre-Buddhist figure linked to Shiva, possibly a deity of drought and wind, called from his mountainous home in an elevated frontier territory (Przyluski 1926, Luce 1959:63). Upon hearing of the Buddha's departure, however, Gawampati decides upon self-cremation, causing flames to issue from his body. Four fountains spring up and water his ashes, and he departs without residue (Levi 1932:62, Levy 1957: 69, 83, 89).

Although this account is not replicated in the Mon version of Gawampati, what is paralleled is the ability to instigate an uncommon response from natural forces. Gawampati is also similarly linked to the founding years of the Buddha Gotama's practice, and repeatedly triggers

extraordinary events. For instance, both children born from the *naga* eggs are fed with milking flowing from the forefingers of the hermit foster-fathers. When Gawampati returns to the place of his former existence to find his previous mother, he knows her present village and knows that she is a young girl of seven years of age. Finding her, he makes an assertion that milk might flow from her breasts. This it does, going from the breasts of the young girl to the mouth of Gawampati (Cetana 1997: 24, 35; Nai Pan Hla 1972:49). As noted above, the other child, Siharaja, follows a royal course. With the assistance of Sakka (Thagyarmin) and his foster-father, the hermit of Zingyaik, he establishes Thaton (Tin Gyi 1931:13-14). At one point, Gawampati recalls this heritage, for he notes that in a previous existence he was the younger brother of the king's father, in turn the founder of the second Thaton dynasty (Shorto 1970:18). These episodes display the same coalescing of royal and religious circumstance that marks subsequent phases of the narrative, one to some extent reminiscent of the royal option relinquished by a succession of Buddhas.

In the later existence when Gawampati brings the Buddha Gotama to Suvannabhumi, he enters into the palace of his brother, taking his seat in an appropriate place. This visit of the Buddha is described in both Mon Chronicles and in the inscriptions of Kyanzitha (Tun Aung Chain 2000, Cetana 1997: 31). Upon arrival, the Buddha pauses at Mya Thabeik before arriving at the nearby summit, the Kelasa peak. At his departure, the Buddha gives Sacred Hair relics to six hermits on the mountains of Zingyaik (Gacchagiri), Zwegabin (Bandavagiri), Kelasa (Dokkhalun), Kyaikhtiyoe (Dohkamawt Katun galain), Kusinara (Siripabbata), and Meilon (Nagapabbata) (Cetana 1997:48). Although the king requests a relic, he is told to wait thirty-seven years until the time of the Buddha's demise. At this time, Gawampati arrives with the Tooth Relic that multiplies into thirty-three, as mentioned above.

As with the references to Gawampati connected to the First Buddhist Council, however, he then disappears from the Suvannabhumi record. Gawampati is credited with the establishment of Buddhist teachings. However, it is the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC monks Sona and Uttara who establish a school of Buddhist learning and pass away while still in the area, meditating at Kusinara Zeidi near Bilin. Buddhaghosa journeys to

Kelasa several hundred years later when he returns from Sri Lanka with the translation of the sacred texts. Gawampati does not permanently vanish, however, for according to the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, he is present at the founding of Sriksetra, in 443BC. He is also recalled in the epigraphy of Kyanzittha's Mon-influenced reign, where as we have seen, an image of Gawampati is honoured as part of the palace foundation ceremonies. In this context Kyanzittha's inclusion of Gawampati is a significant reminder of the amalgamation of Mon and Pyu strands into the Bamar kingdom at Bagan. However, it is not the usual link that focuses on the Thaton sage Shin Araham. The Shin Araham tradition does not commemorate the Pyu Buddhist legacy, its complexity illustrated by the variety of texts inscribed on the gold plates recovered from Sriksetra. Gawampati, however, draws upon both Mon and Pyu, for he is instrumental in the introduction of Buddhist teachings in the Mon lands, is present at the founding of Sriksetra, and much later returns at Bagan.

### ***Royal monastic communities***

As monastic communities were founded and new elites established, social and ritual needs prompted technical variations in the method and form of constructions. One of these was the incorporation of brick alongside laterite, seen in the large finger-marked bricks found in the walls and buildings of the peninsular sites (Moore and Aung Myint, 1991; Aung Myint 1998; Moore 2003, San Win 1986). Kyaikkatha (17.21n x 96.55e) and Zothoke-Kyaikhtisaung (17.10n x 97.10e) for example, are notable for their multiple inner and outer walls. It is possible that these outer enclosures represent a second phase, one following initial laterite construction. Development would have continued around the sacred centre of Mt. Kelasa with sacred sites on the uplands linked to habitation areas at the foot of the mountain. Finally, along the coast, both to the north and south, sites such as Sittaung and Thagara could have served as ports, and Kaw Htin as a guard post or distribution point, fluctuating in their relationship to Kyaikkatha and later Thaton. The focus of the chronicles shifts inland to Thaton after the visit of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC monks Sona and Uttara. Geographically this meant a shift inland from the port area of Kyaikkatha near the mouth of the Sittaung (Nai Pan Hla

1972:46). Chronicles also consider Buddhaghosa a native of Thaton, and it is to Thaton that he traditionally brings his translation of the texts in about 400 AD.

In various accounts the Thaton area is also referred to as **Ramaññadesa** (Skt. country of the Rmen), a term connected to the Mon (Rmen) people and sometimes linked to Muttama (Cetana 1997:44). Like Suvannabhumi, its usage remains a matter of debate (Aung Thwin 2002, 2001; Chen Yi-Sein. 1999). While the historicity of many chronicle references is also questioned, Theravada presence at Thaton is generally accepted from about the fifth century AD, with a number of artefacts and inscriptions roughly placed within the second half of the first millennium AD. It is the memory of this Thaton or Sudhamma, 'city of the good law' as the seat of Suvannabhumi that was perpetuated in Dhammaceti's 15<sup>th</sup> century AD texts (Aung Thaw 1972:34, Luce 1969:21).

" The religion shall stand and shine for five thousand years in..Tharehkittara, Thiripyissaya, **Ramaññadesa** he took it and crossed over and reached the city of Thaton, called Sudhammavati." (Pe Maung Tin and Luce 1960:48).

The line of kings established by Siharaja ruled until the time of King Manuha, to whom the Bagan King Anawrahta turned to obtain a full set of the Theravada texts and thus shifting the legacy to Bagan. Shin Arahan, the monk responsible for converting the king to Theravada teachings, is said to have come from Thaton, this connection explaining the continued indication of Gawampati in later Bamar chronicles. The memory of Gawampati and that of Shin Arahan are both preserved in the inscriptions and chronicle records of King Kyanzittha. Like other citations, the episodes are all centred on place and the enshrinement of *htarpanar*:

"In a former life Shin Arahan was a monk, and king Hthlaingshin [Kyanzittha] a puppy who followed the monk wheresoever he went. One day the puppy died and the monk in pity gathered the bones and kept them in a heap. At the place where the heap of bones lay a tree had grown, and whenever the tree shook in the breeze the king's head suffered pain. Though all his masters of magic treated him with medicine he might not

be relieved. When Shin Arahan heard of it he preached before the king and told him of what had been of yore; and he took the bones and gave them to the king, who buried them well." (Pe Maung Tin and Luce 1960: 108)

In this account, the links to particular locales are maintained throughout several existences, one marked by a tree emerging from the heap of bones and in a later time by their transfer to the king. This importance of place, and the synergy of sacred and royal acts is a consistent theme seen again in a tradition that prior to the time of the Buddha Gotama, a sanctified area called Subbindanagara (Thubbeindanagara) is said to have existed in the present day region of Suvannabhumi. Nearby was a royally auspicious ground where victory was ensured if the king trod there before going into battle. However, "the significance of the royal site does not derive from its mere antiquity. Rather, like the *bodhimanda*, the site where successive Buddhas attain Enlightenment, it is of permanent significance because it is a 'victory ground' (Myanmar *Aungmyei*, Pali *Jayabhumi*)" (Tun Aung Kyaing 1999:3-4). Suvannabhumi is simultaneously sacred and royal, a context not invented, but re-iterated by Dhammaceti. Here the ancient topography is further detailed, the city being described as half resting on a hill and half on flat land adjacent to the coast (Blagden 1928). This depiction uniquely fits the upland and lowland areas of Kelasa mountain and has been one of the numerous texts cited in relation to Suvannabhumi.

### *Early accounts of Suvannabhumi*

There has been continuing debate as to the extent and location of Suvannabhumi, 'golden land'. Opinions have varied from a single city to all of Lower Myanmar, to the Malay peninsula. It is plausible that Suvannabhumi was used in all these contexts, just as *myo* was used to refer to an area of variable size (Aung Thwin 1987:89). Given the identification of Mon peoples with **Ramavijaya**, Suvannabhumi has also included Dvaravati areas of Thailand (Nai Pan Hla 1972:45). The term is mentioned in the dialogues of king Milinda and the monk Nagasena. It is also preserved in Sri Lankan texts relating the story of the two merchant brothers who received Sacred Hairs from the Buddha Gotama,

traditionally part of the Shwedagon *htarpanar* (Htin Aung 1967:24-6, Nai Pan Hla 1972:46). Dhammaceti's 15<sup>th</sup> century Kalyani inscription also refers to the mission of Asokan monks to Suvannabhumi:

"[Of these Theras, he sent] our lord Mahindathera [to establish the religion in the island of Tambapanni [Ceylon] and Sonathera and Uttarathera to establish the religion in] 91.6) the Mon country, [which was also called Suvannabhumi],...At the time when our lords the two monks, namely Sonathera and Uttarathera (arrived?), [a king called Sirimasoka ruled over the country of Suvannabhumi. His capital was situated to] (1.7) the north-west of the Kelasapow pagoda." (Blagden 1938:111).

Chronicle accounts also include reference to the ruins. For example, U Pyinna locates Suvannabhumi at Winka. U Shwe Naw also described Taikkala as being at the foot of Dokhalun Hill, fortified with a natural cliff on the south. Its 900 x 450m fortifications were broken by gates on the east, west and north, and bordered on the north by an earth and rubble wall. According to U Pyinna's account, in the generations following King Sirimasoka, half of the city of Taikkala was lost to the sea, prompting a shift of the court to the area of present day Thaton (Myint Aung 1999:21-2).

While the Taikkala-Suvannabhumi tradition centred on Kelasa is fairly consistent and geographically viable, the name Suvannabhumi has also been linked to the Bago region and to Chin-lin, a placename contained in early Chinese accounts of the area. The Chinese references are fragments only. They mention kingdoms including Chin-lin, located west of Funan. One notes that the king of Funan, Fan Shih-man disappeared and presumably died during an attack on Suvannabhumi (Briggs 1951:21, Myint Aung 1999:20). The Chinese mention of Chin-lin is found together with reference to Lin-yang, with varied opinions about whether to locate this pair of toponyms in present day Thailand or Myanmar (Moore 2003b forthcoming, Htin Aung 1967:7,9, Luce 1965:10, Wheatley 1983: 167, Chen Yi-Sein 1999: 1999:86-7).

While the Kelasa identification cannot be discounted, the vagueness of the Chin-lin reference has frustrated attempts to link it to a precise location. U Pyinna records the founding by King Sirimasoka of towns near Thaton and Kyaikte pagoda (Myint Aung 1999:22). Both of

these are Sacred Hair Relic (*Hsandawshin*) pagodas, a distribution of highly venerated sites centred on Kelasa and Zothoke-Kyaikhtisaung. These extend north to Kyakhtiyoe and south to Thaton and Zingyaik (Kyaikhtisaung Sayadaw Nd.). In traditional accounts, as mentioned above, the arrival of the monks Sona and Uttara in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC is linked to the area around Mt. Kelasa (Sao Saimong Mangrai 1976, Myint Aung 1999, New Light of Myanmar 21.11.01, Moore 2003a). The monks subdued a child-eating ogre by replicating an even more fearsome creature, a *manothaya*, a figure with two lion bodies and a man's head. The earliest depiction of the figure is said to be a stone statue on the platform of Kelasa Zeidi. The child-eating ogres from the sea are sometimes linked to the mention of the Pisacas, the earlier occupants also cited in the Kalyani inscription. These traditions do not contradict those surrounding Zingyaik, but introduce another strand of memory linked not to the introduction of Theravada teachings, but the establishment of communities to sustain these.

Scepticism about identifying this region with Suvannabhumi recalls similar debates about Srivijaya, where it has been necessary to define the nature of a coastal state rather than searching for an monumental centre like the Khmer capital at Angkor (Nik Hassan 1990:63). It has also been suggested that the lack of geographical clarity surrounding the location of Suvannabhumi may have arisen due to there being a succession of centres, rather than a single longterm capital (San Win p.c. 01.03). This hypothesis, one supported by some of the chronicle accounts cited earlier, would make Thaton a later capital. Indeed, it is Kelasa, not Thaton nor Zingyaik that is identified with Taikkala, another term found in early accounts (Aung Thwin 1982-83:18). When considered together, the richness of the Zingyaik-Kelasa narratives in relation to the introduction of Buddhist teachings supports the repeated mention of the region or a number of polities, not a single city. This in turn may shed light on the difficulty of incorporating Chin-lin. In this context, the initial impetus for the construction of the walled sites arose and remained one of changing power. Suvannabhumi need not have been either a centre of political and religious power *or* a region, but plausibly was both, part of a group of changing 'galactic polities'.

***Recent sustenance***

Most all of the sacred structures associated with the peninsular walled sites continue to be venerated today. The relevance of this to the archaeological perspective is two-fold. Firstly, the Suvannabhumi heritage is part of a living tradition. It is a tradition of remembrance and representation, centred on venerated sites and stupas (Trainor 1997). Donations have gone into improvement of roads, hospitals and schools at sites such as Kyaikhtiyoe, Kelasa, Mya Thabeik, Winka (Rajamuni/Yazamuni (a) Rajakumara/Kumarazeidi, Shwesayan), Ayetthema (Mya Theindan) and Zothoke-Kyaikhtisaung (Moore 2003a, New Light of Myanmar 2002,2003). Offerings have been made, relics enshrined and consecrations carried out at many sites, all practices embodying themes central within the heritage. These are commemorated by inscriptions drawing upon past texts.

The Shwedagon has also been included within this framework. Ancient Dagon (present Yangon) was Mon with the earliest recorded reconstruction at the Shwedagon being the 1372 AD work of King Banyas Oo of Hanthawaddy (Shwedagon Board of Trustees 2001), The works of the Mon King Dhammaceti are recorded in a 1485 AD inscription at the Shwedagon. Dhammaceti, as he did at Kelasa, places his renovation and propagation of the teachings in relation to the arrival of Sona and Uttara. The Zingyaik legend, through Gawampati's brother is drawn into the subsequent establishment of the Sangha:

" Two hundred and thirty-six years after the Parinibbana (Final Release) of the Lord Buddha (308 BC), the monks Sona and Uttara arrived in Suvannabhumi Thaton to propagate the Religion. When the Religion was established and an Order of Monks set up, King Sirimasoka requested the two Elders thus: 'O Venerable Monks, we have received the Dhamma (Law) and the Sangha (Order). Can you not provide us with the Buddha to worship?' The two Elders then showed the King the Shwedagon in which the sacred hairs of the Lord Buddha were enshrined. King Sirimasoka cleared the overgrowth and built a pagoda and an enclosing pavilion with a tiered pyramidal roof. From that time onwards the people of the Mon country went to worship there." (Tun Aung Chain & Thein Hlaing 1996:3)

The present continuation of this custom also brings together Gawampati and the Asokan Theras in laterite images of nine key figures in the Suvannabhumi tradition. These were consecrated several years ago in the U Ba Yi Tazaung on the northeast corner of the Shwedagon platform (Moore 2003a). To bypass present undertakings such as this in the course of reconstituting the past would ignore changes affecting that context. Meaning is derived from context, and new data highlights different relationships. An essential part of interpretation is an understanding of ongoing development. In this case, it is noting the variations emerging, both for their sustenance of ancient sites and the process of change.

### *Mon and Pyu centres*

As discussed in relation to Pyu centres in Upper Myanmar, identification of a single capital often leads to an unrealistic chronology with a vague foundation date and an abrupt demise (Moore 2003). Further, such exercises, grounded as they are in the textual record, prioritise epigraphy at the expense of the remains of the sites. In the context of the southern walled sites, Thaton certainly was a significant and perhaps the most prominent site of Suvannabhumi. The greatest number of inscriptions and richest variety of sculpture found to date derive from Thaton, somewhat similar in that sense to Sriksetra. But just as the material culture of Beikthano and Halin demonstrate unique trajectories within Pyu culture, a series of different developments and perhaps sects existed within the culture of Suvannabhumi.

Both Mon and Pyu sites are commonly identified by the presence of finger-marked bricks, walls, beads carved from semi-precious stones, and silver coins. It can be difficult to distinguish between beads from Pyu and Mon sites although silver coins from the two areas are different. For instance, those from the Mon areas are often heavier and bear a conch. However, it is in the form and material of the walls that the greatest contrast between Mon and Pyu sites can be seen. For instance, the brick walls of Pyu sites are in most cases built directly on the ground.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are notable exceptions. For example, at Beikthano the wall on the north and a southern partition wall were constructed on top of a dike of yellow clay.

Generally Pyu walls were without foundations and sited on sloping areas to make use of slight inclines. They incorporate streams and seasonal lakes or *in* as part of the perimeter. Given the aridity of the central zone, the provision of adequate water was a major concern, one not present in the southern coastal areas. Moats were created with the digging of earth for the production of bricks and also for wall reinforcements. For instance, at Halin the inner wall was banked up with a rampart of earth and brickbats, with the transfer of dirt for this purpose resulting in a new moat.

Peninsular walls also used brick, but in combination with laterite, an abundant local resource. For example, the Ayethema northern wall, some 8.1m (27ft) high, is earthen, topped with two courses of laterite. However, a cutting of the wall yielded a number of brickbats in the uppermost of three layers, suggesting several construction phases (Myint Aung 1999:23-4). Laterite also affected the overall form of many of the Mon sites, located on remnant lateritic formations that are distinct from the surrounding rice fields. The walls follow the terrain contours, giving them a more undulating shape than Pyu sites (Aung Myint and Moore 1991, Aung Myint 1998a, San Win 1986). This topographically determined form recalls that of moated sites in Northeast Thailand, where the shape of multiple moats and earthworks is derived from the remnant river terraces on which they are located. Exploitation of the iron-rich lateritic soils of these sites has been linked to the inception of localised iron production in the late first millennium BC or the early centuries AD (Moore 1992, 1988, 1989).

This link between site form, resource exploitation and technological change is useful in separating sites from the questions of ethnic identification that colour consideration not only of the peninsular sites but the overall distribution of irregular enclosed sites on the mainland. For example, in Northeast Thailand, enclosed sites are commonly linked to Mon Theravada habitation but inscriptions indicate a changing ritual adherence not tied to a single ethnic group nor to a population speaking a single language. One example comes from inscriptions that refer to the 'Mon' kingdom of Sri Canasa in the region around Nakhon Ratchasima near Prasat Hin Phimai. These 7-10<sup>th</sup> century

AD inscriptions have been found at Bo Ika, Hin Khon and Ayutthaya (Moore 1988:5, 9). They are in both Sanskrit and Khmer, with the earlier inscriptions being donations to Buddhist foundations and the later ones Saivite dedications, so possibly reflecting Khmer hegemony. However, these sectarian and ethnic labels do not explain the composition of the groups that differentiated themselves by means of site enclosure.

A number of language clusters were present across the mainland in the later first millennium AD. The common use of enclosure with massive fortifications is a reflection of contestation between increasingly stratified societies. The synergy between systems of political rule and growing monastic and tutelary hierarchies undoubtedly operated within an existing context of patronage where competition was inherent. Within this framework may be placed the somewhat similar walled forms shared by Pyu, Dvaravati sites in Central and Northeast Thailand, and sites such as Vesali and Dhanyawadi in Rakhine (Arakan) (Woodward 2003, Gutman 2001a, 1977). The distribution of these enclosed sites roughly parallels that of silver coins, extending from Vesali in the west to Oc-éo (Funan) on the east. It has been suggested that this corresponds to a trade route with the production of coins at times centred in Funan and at others at Pyu sites such as Beikthano (San Shwe 2002). Like silver coins, these centres appear to slowly fade in political terms by around the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD with the rise of more hierarchical kingdoms (Wicks 1992:139). This hypothesis, in being centred on the similarity of coins rather than the different linguistic groups, is a useful model for future investigation of the period.

### **Conclusion**

The peninsular walled sites played a pivotal part within this critical era when Buddhist practice was absorbed and more hierarchical kingdoms emerged. As suggested in traditional histories, this may have commenced at Zingyaik with Gawampati, who subsequently brings the Buddha Gotama to the region. At the close of the Buddha's visit, he gives Sacred Hairs to six hermits, their mountain retreats marking out a sacred geography along the coast. This topography is then elaborated in the final

appearance of Gawampati bearing the Tooth Relic of the Buddha. When multiplied, these are deposited in stupas erected on the low lateritic mounds found throughout this area, opening up the walled site culture. Laterite water-related and defensive constructions then appear to have been enhanced with the addition of bricks, many of them finger-marked. It is suggested here that these changes in form and construction material correspond to the gradual replacing of accounts of Gawampati by those of the monks Sona and Uttara. Centred on the Kelasa region, this may correlate to the development of walled sites such as Kyaikkatha and Zothoke-Kyaikhtisaung. Finally, again bringing together site elaboration, artefacts and tradition, the focus shifts inland, with the return of Buddhaghosa to Thaton and Kelasa. A number of large pieces of stone worked in relief have been recorded in the Thaton area, and the linear stone constructions of Mya Thabeik on Kelasa may also date to this time,

The memory of this laterite-brick-stone sequence appears to be preserved in a line going from Gawampati, to Sona-Uttara, and to Buddhaghosa. All are staunchly retained in Myanmar traditional accounts despite continued academic debate on their historical veracity. Technical change is implied in the variation of form and location of sites centred on the Zingyaik and Kelasa region. Enclosure of land may have initiated a systematic and expanding exploitation of laterite, one that also facilitated local production of iron. Developments such as these perhaps corresponded to changing attitudes towards demarcation, prompting construction of multiple Walls, at times around both an inner centre and an outer domain as seen at Kyaikkatha and Zothoke-Kyaikhtisaung.

Competition could also foster alliances that fluctuated over time as centres of patronage and teaching shifted. To search for the remains of a central urbanised 'kingdom' of Suvannabhumi in peninsular Myanmar between roughly 500 BC to 500 AD implies a clear and fixed hierarchy at odds with the fluid relationships sketched out here. Dupont long ago queried the existence of a Mon State, concluding that the 15<sup>th</sup> C Dhammaceti had recast the past (Aung Thwin 2001). Although this 'recasting' has used to argue against the 'Mon polity', the approach bypasses a memory of the past carried by various texts. This is seen most particularly in bestowing a dignity of age. Without long prior existence,

these sites would have lacked the stature to bestow honour on the acts of Dhammaceti to purify ordination. Myth and legend are not archaeological data, but in their selection of places and the allusions made, they offer a glimpse of far earlier memories of people and places still alive and highly valued at the time of Dhammaceti.

From the various citations given above, a Sriksetra to Thaton to Bagan route for Gawampati has been identified (Shorto 1970:23). Kyanzittha places himself with Gawampati at the founding of the Pyu centre of Sriksetra but Gawampati's later presence at Bagan comes via the Mon city of Thaton. Despite the close cultural relationship between the Pyu and Mon, they have been separated into monolithic competing entities. Primarily on linguistic grounds and apparent geographical separation, the unrealistic model of a single paramount ruler and state continues to be sought. Such distinctions have remained even in attempts to dispel earlier paradigms, it being suggested for example that the Pyu not the Mon inhabited and probably dominated the peninsular coast (Aung Thwin 2001). Shorto called the acceptance of Gawampati "curious", labelling him the "patron saint" of the Mon and a transformed guardian deity. Gawampati remains a somewhat mysterious mixture of uncertain origin, yet firmly connected to a period of synthesis as Buddhist teachings were absorbed into the tutelary hierarchy (1967:136). He persists in Pyu, Mon and Bamar contexts, and with consistent links to royal and sacred place should not be expunged from an archaeological consideration. If perception of a culture is perpetually constructed in relation to another, there is little space within which to develop a set of criteria for the less known entity. The material presented here purposefully and repeatedly draws upon the memory recorded in chronicles and suggests ways that their meaning may also be preserved in the archaeological 'scars' inscribed on the terrain.

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