Introduction

The discourse between riverine and maritime sites in lower Myanmar during the late first and early second millennium CE has received little attention, with literature focusing on single sites and their dependence upon upper Myanmar [Map 1]. However, as we explain in this essay, it was the variety and fluctuations between a series of sites that sustained the economic and religious significance of this area.

Our argument is epitomised by the archaeology and chronicles of Sampanago (Campanāga) or “City of Serpents” (16°40’5.91”N, 97°35’46.90”E) [Figure 1]. Artefacts recovered inside and around Sampanago, 15 kilometres north of Muttama (Martaban, 16°32’13.92”N, 97°36’6.67”E), date occupation to circa the seventh to the eighteenth century. This longevity is supported by five successive toponyms situating Sampanago with a network of sacred and mercantile sites on the lower reaches of the Thanlwin (Salween) river [Map 2]. The artefacts and continual “naming” are concentrated along a relatively short span of the Thanlwin, suggesting that “Muttama” did not, as previously suggested, spread all along the coast from the Thanlwin to the Isthmus of Kra under Sukhothai and Ayutthaya control from the late thirteenth-sixteenth century (Gutman 2001: 111).

The names, such as Muttama-Dhañyawaddy and Sampanago-Lakunbyin, instead reflect a distribution of loosely linked towns over a 45 kilometre stretch of the river from Muttama to Pa-an (Hpa-an, 16°52’45.42”N, 97°38’28.77”E) and thence inland to Lampang (18°17’25.54”N, 99°30’37.43”E) and Phrae in Thailand (18° 9’0.75”N, 100° 9’12.67”E). We compare this riverine-maritime configuration to the Lampang-Phrae and U Thong-Nakhon Pathom-Khu Bua networks to highlight the synergy of maritime, riverine and overland interchange between lower Myanmar and Thailand (Dhida 1999: 46).

Sampanago: “City of Serpents” and Muttama (Martaban)

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Figure 1: Walled site of Sampanago, aerial view (Drawing courtesy of Aung Myint 2542: 256).
Five River Confluence: Geographical Context

The ecological niche of Sampanago, called Puñjaluin in Mon, is striking and a vital factor in understanding its longevity. The site is safely guarded from the drop into the Gulf of Muttama (Martaban), adjacent to the confluence of the Thanlwin, Attaran, Jaing, Dontami and Hlaingbwe rivers. The area is hilly, pocketed with swamp and flood areas. River meanders are common along this lower stretch of the Thanlwin with isolated limestone hills and caverns scattered along the ravine such as Kaw gun, Yathebyan, Pa-gat and Bingyi caves.

The surrounding hills are a continuation from those at Thaton, which stretch southward into two ranges [Map 3]. The eastern chain stretches from north to south-southeast to the confluence of Thanlwin and Dontami rivers at Sampanago. The southern more westerly range starts from Zimkyaik (Zingyaik) just south of Thaton and Kalama taung, summits with an average height of 914 metres. It continues south as the “Martaban hills,” connecting to the Taungnyo hills of Mawlamyaing (Moulmein) and the Ye area opposite Muttama. The end of this chain is rocky terrain called Muh Tamo’ in Mon (Muttama in Myanmar language) where chronicles record that King Wuteru (r. 1287-96) founded the city Ratanapura in 1287.

Between two ranges is the alluvium of the lower Thanlwin valley with cultivation of various crops in a region of stream beds, meanders and islands. As these details highlight, Sampanago was part of a vital nexus near to egress into the bay. The area was fertile, and not being directly on the tip of the landmass. “Kin Ywa” or revenue village, 3 kilometres upriver from the walled site, was probably a fortified way station for goods prior to shipment by sea or overland.

Walled Site Description

Sampanago is isolated, with no tarmac roads or railways near and around the city. The population consists of a small village at the west foot of the central hill, Dhat taw ywa, inhabited by Kayin (Karen) people but the rest of the site is covered with thick forest and bamboo glades. It is 19 kilometres east of Paung, the township headquarters, 38 kilometres south from Thaton, the district headquarters and 22 kilometres north from the capital of Mon state, Mawlamyaing. The site is easily accessible by boat from Mawlamyaing and Pa-an, the capital city of Kayin state, 23 kilometres north along the Thanlwin. It can also be reached overland via village tracks along the west bank of the river. The nearest sizeable town is Natmaw village, a ferry and local administration headquarters 3.2 kilometres north at the confluence of Thanlwin and Dontami rivers.

The east wall of Sampanago is the Thanlwin (Salween) river with newly deposited sandbanks on the opposite side indicating erosion of the west bank. The walled site, first documented by Aung Myint from aerial photography, remains well preserved (2542: 255-261). Three ramparts (15-25 metres wide, 2-4 metres high) and moats enclose the site, best preserved on the inner wall on the southwest side [Figure 2]. The wall measures 620 metres in length on the north, 2000 metres on the west and 500 metres on the south (126 hectares). A long earthen hill on the east side near the river is said by villagers to be an ancient reclining
image of the Buddha, with scattered laterite carvings around the site including a seated image of the Buddha (66 cm. height). The earthen and laterite ramparts are mixed with large (46 x 23 x 8 cm.) burnt bricks, including a number with finger-markings (Berfret 2011: 85; San Win 2530 and 2556) [Figure 3]. There are also brick reinforcements of later historical periods. Notably, however, large finger-marked bricks pointing to first millennium CE habitation have been found in situ throughout this area, including Kin Ywa to the north and Kyauksarit to the west.

The use of the moats to control water to flooded rice fields is seen on the southwest of the site where cultivation of mayin (summer paddy) has flattened the enclosing walls. The river comes close to the foot of the small range (ca 2.4 km.) within the walls that runs parallel to the river. This accounts for the slight widening of the site at points and the obtuse rounded angle of the southwest corner with possible remnants of a walled guard post extending to the southwest. The rectangular site is divided by a partition wall crossing from east to west two-thirds of the distance from the north to the south that may mark the limit of the original site subsequently extended south.

**Ground Survey**

The elevated area traditionally called the “palace site” and principal stūpa are in the northern part on a flattened area of about 0.4 hectares on the summit of the hill (40 metres) [Figure 4]. Six ruined stūpas were found on the summit during 2012 survey of the site, the largest, Dhat taw hpaya (relic stūpa) having been repaired in 2000 during one of the author’s previous trips to the site. From one stūpa on the southern hill of the complex under repair, a baked tablet (mye-bon-hpaya or “terracotta earth sacred image”) (7.6 x 5 cm.) was recovered from
a relic chamber that had been destroyed by treasure hunters. The tablet was broken in the top portion by the looters, showing a seated image of the Buddha on the front while on the back a name “Shyan Mi” (sham Mi) was inscribed, probably a monk who donated the tablet. Although only one tablet was found in the ruined stūpa, this type of tablet is seen in large numbers on the walls of Kaw gun cave where they are dated to the fifteenth to seventeenth century. The script on the back is Middle Mon probably dating to the fifteenth-sixteenth century era of the Muttama 32 myas or cities (Aye Kyaw 2514: 141-145; Shoro 1963).

At the foot of the hills, where the plains spread to the west walls, are the leadsa or royal rice fields. A number of beads dated to the early to middle first millennium CE were collected by one of the authors from surface survey, including barrel, short barrel, cylindrical ring and cylindrical examples made of bone, carnelian, agate and amber. The colours ranged from orange-yellow, orange and black, brown to yellow, bluish, and brown banded. Some had evenly spaced black and white line decorations although others were plain [Figure 5]. One large barrel-shaped bead, closely comparable to a bead from U Thong, had a black mid-section and orange ends (45 mm. in length, 12 mm. at mid-diameter with an end diameter of 6 mm.) [Dhida 1999: 99; Moore & Aung Myint 1993: fig. 58]. [Figure 6] Another was zoomorphic, a carnelian lion in a jumping or crouched position in orange colour about 40 mm. long with a hole penetrating the neck and tail. A villager in this area, U Chit Aye, reported recovering iron objects and ten stone beads at a depth of 1.8 metres from a well in front of his house, which he gave to the township office in Paung township. U Khin Shwe from this office showed one of the authors the beads but these were unfortunately lost during 1988 riots in Paung township. Similar beads are kept at the Ministry of Culture Museum in Mawlamyine, some recently looted examples, and comparable from upper Myanmar include sites such as Maingmaw (Pinle), Taungdwingyi, Halin, Śrīkṣetra and Beikthano. Other parallels can be seen in beads from central and southern Thailand, including Thung Tuck on the west coast (Boonyarit & Rarai 2552).

A significant number of pottery finds were also made during surface survey. These include an intact jar, 40 cm. high with a tall neck, flaring body and flat base (Naw Yuzana Win 2009) [Figure 7]. While the rim of the jar has broken, in form, decoration and finish, it closely recalls an unglazed stoneware baluster jar (32 cm.) dated to the fourteenth to fifteenth century Sukhothai or Ayutthaya period from the Ban Bang Thung Tuek on the west coast (Boonyarit & Rarai 2552). These recall Dvāravatī wares from Khu Mueang, Ayetthama, and Bago (Pegu).

Thailand

The form of Sampanago is similar to the Dvāravatī sites of Khu Bua (13°29'30.72"N, 99°49'56.36"E) and U Thong (14°22'32.00"N, 99°53'32.00"E) although neither is on a river and neither encloses substantial upland area (Dhida 1999: 61, 96-97). However, small artefacts such as beads and the elephant terracotta model mentioned above are common at Khu Bua and U Thong, with links between the brick architecture of these sites to structures such as Winka near Sampanago (Moore & San Win 2007). As discussed below, there are historical links to the later cities of Lampang and Phrae although the moats, walls and topography again differ in enclosing a flat rather than hilly area.

The strongest comparisons, however, are with other sites in lower Myanmar which like Sampanago were designed to cope with the strong variations in the seasonal monsoons. These include the closely distributed walled sites of Muttama, Thaton, Don wun, Winka, Ayethama, and Bago (Pegu).

Muttama

Muttama (Martaban, 97 hectares) is located on the east part of the 152 metre high Martaban range mentioned earlier. The town site faces the river on the east, while the west wall runs along the hillocks with Kyakphyuinsa “pagoda” on the south-west. The only visible portion of the wall is that running from the mountain to the river on the north, today known as the Sezon quarter. However, on the northwest the corner is visible and Kyak Kahun pun stūpa sits on the southwest edge of a 0.5 kilometre long oval-shaped rampart. While Muttama is widely known for trans-shipping of large “Martaban” glazed jars, the origins of the city
are hazy. It has also been proposed that Sampanago was the Kalaśapura or “City of Pots” referred to in a seventh century CE Sanskrit inscription found at Śrīkṣetra. References to Kalaśapura and its king, Śrī Paramesvara, hint at a southern port for the Pyu (Gutman 2001: 109, n. 1).

Thaton

Thaton (286 ha., 16°54′30.46″N, 97°22′8.16″E) is laid out on the escarpment of laterite high ground or myenigon, red-earth soil which is slightly elevated from the surrounding rice fields. The site naturally fortified on the east by the 2.4 kilometre long Myathabaik hills with the lowland swamp of Leik-in (Tortoise-lake) on the west, perhaps remnants of the Old Thaton harbour. This may have connected with the Sa Chaung or Thaton river, an old canal parallel to the railway which extends 16 kilometres to the northwest. Numerous small town sites such as Hein Phyu Kyun (16°56′16.36″N, 97°20′29.14″E), Mayangon (16°59′7.26″N, 97°15′6.71″E), Seik Kyun (17° 0′1.66″N, 97°14′47.10″E), Kadaikgyi (17° 2′2.59″N, 97°14′20.40″E) and Kadaikgaleh (17° 3′18.26″N, 97°13′49.18″E) are located on isolated mounds of laterite high ground 80-160 metres above the surrounding rice fields on the west of this canal with artefacts such as pottery, beads and mye-bon-hpaya tablets dating to the first millennium CE.

Don Wun

Don wun (17° 8′35.26″N, 97°16′30.09″E), 16 kilometres north of Thaton, dates to the fifteenth-sixteenth century Hanthawaddy period of the “32 myos” or cities, but the site is linked to Thaton and Muttama, referred to in the Chronicle of the Mons as “Wun” and the trader Makuta who befriended the king of Sukhothai and eventually became Wariraw of Muttama (“Rock Slab City”) (Tun Aung Chain 2010: 32-46).

Bago and Other Sites

Similar artefacts have been recovered in Taikkala (Ayetthama, 17°14′39.48″N, 97° 3′44.24″E and Winka, 17°13′34.42″N, 97° 4′16.07″E), Kyaikkatha (269 ha.), another of the 32 myos (satellite towns) of the sixteenth century kingdom of Hanthawaddy, Sittaung (72 ha., Kyaikkalun Pon Hpaya) and its sentinel site, Kawthin (16 ha.).

The outer wall of Bago (Usā-Hanthawaddy) (17°20′2.97″N, 96°30′42.38″E, 120 ha.) located adjacent to the northeast wall of Bayinnaung’s sixteenth century city, encloses a hillock approximately 1,500 x 800 metres called Hinthagon (“resting place of goose”) [Figure 12]. The length of the hillock is similar to that at Sampanago but its height, at 28 metres, is only 10 metres above the surrounding terrain while that at Sampanago, 39 metres is twice that of the surrounding area. It is however, the only site paralleling the unusual topography of Sampanago. The Bago “pagoda,” the Shwemawdaw Thamaing or chronicle history dates the city to 825 CE with a line of seventeen kings linked to Sampanago starting from Thamala, Wimala and Assakumma.7
Site Distribution

In short, Sampanago was part of a network of walled sites extending for some 100 kilometres from northwest to southeast, their form primarily determined by the coastal region terrain between the Sittaung and Thanlwin rivers. Thaton, Hsin Phyu Kyun, Don wun and other sites parallel Sampanago’s proximity to water transport routes. Walled enclosures reflecting the lateritic landscape are seen throughout the area, including Kyaikkatha, Sittaung and Kadaikgyi while the construction of ramparts around a markedly elevated area is seen at Ussā-Bago. Within this network, sites of different sizes and shapes profile a distinct regional adaptation, fluctuating site hierarchy and chronology of at least the middle to late first millennium CE. Combining this archaeology and chronicle records, Sampanago may have been the successor of Thaton and immediate predecessor of Ussā-Bago. This is supported by the size of the site, as Sampanago-Lakunbyin (126 ha.) is larger than others of the Muttama such as Wagaru (2,000 metres circumference) or Don wun and larger than Sittaung (72 ha.) although smaller than Kyaiakkatha (369 ha.) and Thaton (259 ha.) with their well-developed central palace site.

The most viable context within which to understand the long chronology and multiple names referring to Sampanago, however, is that of an inter-linked trade and pilgrimage network linking this lower part of the Thanlwin both to the sea and overland to Thailand.

Origins of Sampanago

The name “Sampanago” is thought to derive from the Pāli element “sampa” (sappa) (Htoke Sein 1978: 640). Pronounced as “thampa” in Myanmar, it is distinct from words such as zahheg, boa constrictor and zahhun, python (Myanmar Language commission 1993: 103). At present, written references for Sampanago are limited to two chronicle tales, one of a nāga-queen, the mother of princes Thamala and Wimala, the founders of Bago and the other of a Khmer nāga-princess who comes to Bago. In both cases the accounts are understood here as not an actual reptile but reference to a local female lineage and fecundity, possibly associated with serpent veneration.

In the first of these, it is said that when King Theinnaginga was ruling in Dhañyawaddy (Old Muttama) he mated with a maiden, the queen, who was born from an egg laid by a female nāga. She gave birth to two sons, the twin brothers of Thamala and Wimala, founders of Hanthawaddy city. Another traditional account holds that prince Assa, the successor of King Wimala at Bago (Ussā, Ussu) was famed as a warrior in fighting with Indian merchant groups. His renown spread to Khmer regions and in due course, a Khmer princess of the same nāga race as prince Assa, came to Bago to be married to this prince (British Burma Gazetteer 1879; Tin Gyi 1931).

It has been argued that the Assa story is a later tale, but the relevance here is the repeated use of the nāga metaphor in relation to the Muttama-Sampanago and Bago (Aung-Thwin 2005: 94). Notably, the Sampanago name survived into the colonial era, mentioned as a deserted village circle (Tsampa-na-go) in the Martaban (Muttama) township, Amherst (Moulmein, Mawlamyaing) district. The location is correct for Sampanago, lying on the right bank of the Thanlwin (Salween) below the Bheng Laing or Dontami river with a population of 4,602 in 1877-78 being assessed for the British capitation tax for Rs. 4,327 and land revenue was Rs. 3,893 (British Burma Gazetteer 1879: II, 834). After that the village was deserted and the population shifted to nearby villages with only the name Sampanago remaining on the British One Inch map of Burma (No. 94, H, 10) between Nathmaw village in the north and Hmawbi in the south.

Written accounts combining Sampanago with “Lakunbyin” occur in 1783 and 1874 orders of King Bodawpaya (Badon), the Muttama sittan (The Revenue Inquest of King Bodawpaya for Muttama 32 myos) where one of the palm leaf manuscripts notes that:

[…] lakunbyin town being set up a palace (for kings), it was called, “Sampanago-Lagwanprañ” and by the Mon they called it as “Lakunbyin,” King Sitta ruled over it. (Yangon, National Library Palm-leaf manuscripts, no. 2272, “ku” leaf, back face; lines 8-9)

From citations such as these, we suggest that Sampanago and Lakunbyin refer to the same place, with the former being the original name and the latter an additional one. Further, as discussed below, the name “Lagwanprañ” or “Lakunbyin” recurs in the later alleged Mon migration of Haripunjaya.

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Figure 12: The near square 16th century palace enclosure at Bago with the remains of the earlier oblong city of Ussā-Hanthawaddy to the east [Photograph courtesy of Williams-Hunt Collection (SOAS); geo-referenced by S. Lertlum].
Origins of Lakunbyin

The name “Lakunbyin” (Laganphen in Mon) is also given to a site near Hlegu in Bago with both possibly connected with the often-cited Mon migration from the Haripunjaya Mon kingdom of Queen “Sa-madevi” (Câmadevi) in the tenth or eleventh century (Woodward, this volume). This migration is best known from the Câmaderwam, a northern Thai chronicle written some time between 1410 and 1417 by a monk named Bodharamsi, who noted as follows:

At that time the early tenth century the people of Haripunjaya suffered from a widespread cholera epidemic […] the remaining population of Haripunjaya, in order to save their own lives, fled to a city named Sudhamma [Thaton] and settled there. The city of Haripunjaya consequently fell into decline and was abandoned […]. The king of Pukam [Bagan or Pagan] observing the masses of weak and starving people, was moved to pity and out of his compassion restored the city of Sudhamma for them to occupy. Unable to bear their suffering any longer, the people of Haripunjaya left Sudhamma [Thaton] and went to Hamsavati [Bago or Pegu] […] where they continued to live. At that time the king of Hamsavati seeing the [needs of the] people of Haripunjaya, […] gave them many necessities, including clothing, jewelry, paddy, rice, various salty and sour foods, and dwelling places. (Swearer & Sommai 1998: 105-106)

There are many ambiguities in this statement such as why the people left Thaton for Bago. However, while the account has been queried due to the later date of extant copies it is generally agreed that the migration came from the area of Lamplun, Lampang and Phrae in upper-central Thailand (Aung-Thwin 2005: 92). Their route would have taken them across the Thanlwin at Dakwin near Pa-an and continued along the upper reaches of Bilin river and valley of the Yanzalin river that joins across the Thanlwin at Dakwin near Pa-an and continued along the upper reaches of Bilin river and valley of the Yanzalin river that joins the Thanlwin near Myaing-gyi-nge opposite Kamamaung in Kayin state. From there, they could easily reach Sampangoko-Lakunbyin.

Accepting the traditional occupation of Thaton by Aniruddha in 1057, we postulate that the city may have been governed by an appointee of Bagan [Pagan], mentioned in the legend of Queen Cāma as the “king of Pukam.” The presence of a Bagan governor and depopulation from the occupation may have made Bago (Hamsavati) a more secure and prosperous refuge for the Mons from Haripunjaya:

The inhabitants of Haripunjaya and of Hamsavati came to know and love each other. Even their languages were the same […] When the disease was brought under control those who want to return to Haripunjaya departed and dwelt again in the city […]. The people of Hamsavati, who still love their friends and relatives in Haripunjaya often, visited them bearing many letters. (Swearer & Sommai 1998: 105-106)

In brief, the name Lakunbyin at Bago and Muttama (Thaton) may derive from this Mon migration from central Thailand with “lakun” recalling Lamplun and “byin” for Phrae. In any case, the name survived into later records, at times paired with Sampangoko and at others mentioned as Lakunbyin. For example, in a royal order dated 10 February 1006, “[…] Yehintaha, the servant of Sakaimgin, is appointed to be Myosa, Governor of Lakunbyin, in Muttama confederation” which suggests that Lakunbyin was a satellite town or in the revenue circle of Muttama.

In the Muttama 32 myos situm revenue inquest of Bowdawpaya noted above, dated the eighth waxing day of Natara in 1145 (Myanmar Era 1183 CE) soon after he had ascended the throne on the fourteenth waxing day of Tapawte, Monday, in 1144 (1782 CE) the names of the 32 myos included Lakunbyin (Punya 2462-81: 28). Lakunbyin appears again in Aye Kyaw’s work (2514: 141-145), where he divided the Muttama region into two parts, west and east of the Thanlwin. Lakunbyin, although not exactly located, is included in the western group.

A different name is given in Nai Pan Hla’s editing of the Rajadhiraj Ayawdawpun Kyun, by which he notes it as “Lagaynbyin” in Myanmar and “Don Laganphun” in Mon. The importance of the site in this work was its strategic position in the connections between Muttama and Zimme (Chiang Mai) and Bago (Hanthawaddy or Hamrewati) in the fourteenth century. Three years after the accession of King Banya-Oo (r. 1348-1385), father of Rajadhiraj, the rebellion of Saw-al-di and Bow-kray broke out in Don wun. When the rebels were defeated they fled to Chiang Mai for asylum but returned to attack Muttama with the help of Chiang Mai. Although the attack failed, many lesser towns along the way to Muttama such as Sittuung, Taikkala, Don wun, Yinnyain and Lakunbyin were destroyed by the rebels (Nai Pan Hla 2541: 48-49). Taking this order in its geographical context, Lakunbyin was not far from Muttama.

Again, fifteen years into Banya-Oo’s Muttama reign another rebellion broke out. The king, in distress because of the death of his white elephant, went up to the forest in search of good elephants, taking his ministers, armed men and family. This time, the rebel leader was his brother in law, Brat Hula, the governor of Muttama to whom he entrusted guardianship of his throne. Brat Hula had three brothers, Eiprabun, the governor of Lakunbyin, Lokphya, the governor of Myaungmya and U-lo, the governor of Mawlamyai. They also armed their towns against Banya-Oo. As King Banya-Oo could not defeat this rebellion, he abandoned Muttama and lived in exile in Don wun for six years before re-establishing Bago (Hanthawaddy) in 731 (1309 CE). During his stay at Don wun (Ton Wun) his chief queen Sri Māvā (Medaw) gave birth to a son Apason or Banya Nwe, later who become King Rajadhiraj (Nai Pan Hla 2541: 68).

As soon as Rajadhiraj became king in 745 (1383 CE) in Bago he attacked his rivals in the lower Myanmar 32 myos and started to fight Don wun, Tayai, Thanaung and Lakunbyin. In the battle of Lakunbyin, Rajadhiraj ordered the whole town to be set on fire. As the governor of Lakunbyin, Bow-la-gun, was busy fighting a fire on his elephant’s back, Rajadhiraj’s men cut him down and killed him on the spot. Rajadhiraj then occupied the town, made Lakunbyin his base to attack Muttama and conquered Muttama, Mawlamyai and all the 32 cities in the region. A similar event occurred in a battle of Muttama during the reign of King Tabinswehti of Taungoo (Youngoo, 1530-1550 CE). In 899 (1537 CE), soon after becoming the king of Hanthawaddy (Bago),

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Tabinswehti marched on the Muttama 32 mya. The Maharajawanthit ("The Great New Chronicle") compiled by Maha-sthu U Tun Nyo records the name of Lakunbyin (Lakwnphyan, Lawan) upstream of Muttama (Kyaw Win 2551: 39, 60). The Muttama defence lines were strong with walls made along the sides of the hills. On the river side were seven ships armed with cannons that destroyed the troops of Tabinswehti. Tabinswehti’s fleet as well, some 3,000 war boats and 130,000 armed men, could not manage to advance. The siege lasted for two months with attacks by river and land, until at last, Tabinswehti appointed Thamañ Maru as his admiral and made Lakunbyin his headquarters. The admiral ordered his men to build a bamboo raft measuring 189 metres in length and 91 metres in width, on which they piled firewood up to a height of 9 metres. Another bamboo raft was built bigger than the former measuring 549 metres in length and 110 metres in width on which they built a stockade higher than the walls of Muttama. They arranged battlements, railings and cannons on the stockade and after setting fire to the piles of firewood on the raft, set the two bamboo rafts afloat upstream from Lakunbyin so they would move downstream to Muttama at dawn when tidal current started to retreat. As a result, all seven ships at Muttama harbour were burnt, and as there were no ships to guard the river side on the east of Muttama, the raft with the stockade approached the city and fired its cannons. The troops guarding the city fled from their defence lines and Tabinswehti occupied Muttama (Kyaw Win 2551: 34-35). As all these accounts underscore, Lakunbyin was an ideal military base as it was only a short way from Muttama with its defences sustained in subsequent centuries.

Dhañyawaddy and Du’wop

With Dhañyawaddy and Du’wop, we bring Kaw gun cave into the Sampanago-Lakunbyin network. The link is vital as Kaw gun, the most significant archaeological and religious site in this region, probably stood more closely to Sampanago-Lakunbyin than Muttama. It is not only Kaw gun for there are further caverns of note less than 3 kilometres to the northwest, at Yathebyan (16°50′28.83″N, 97°33′50.70″E) with further caves in the area at Hpa-gat, Bāngyi (Bayiñyu) and Dhañyuak. Finger-marked bricks (46 x 41 x 5 cm.) recorded from Kaw gun suggesting a first millennium CE date supported by the iconography of many of the mye-bon-hpaya tablets and carvings in the cave as well as palaeographic dating of the epigraphy. All the caves in this area have long been a matter of study, with the first British visit in 1827 by the envoy John Crawford. At Kaw gun, the entire outer and inner surface of the walls and ceiling are covered with mye-bon-hpaya tablets and Sukhothai style dated to the thirteenth to fourteenth century CE [Figure 13]. Over time, they have been arranged symmetrically to make terraces and spires, many painted brown and golden colours (Nai Pan Hla 2007: 68). The plaques and other carvings in stone bear many images of Buddha in regalia seated in meditation or with legs pendant (Than Tun 2002: 23-24).

There are also images of the reclining Buddha, all framed with floral designs and arches and pediments as well as dancing half-bird figures (kinnāri-kinnari). One standing image of the Buddha is in the fearless hand gesture (abhaya-mudrā), others flanked by royally dressed figures, or ones bearing a human head on a lion body or two lively yakṣas. It is within this cave that several significant early inscriptions for our study of Sampanago-Lakunbyin are found, one including the phrase “du ve” that we connect to Dhañyawaddy. The compound-word “Dhañyawaddy” derives from the Sanskrit dhānya for rice or paddy and sa for town site. It was a common name for any site with suitable or arable rice lands. So while in Myanmar this name is often linked to the Buddhist walled site in Kakhine state (Arakan), it may also be a reasonable referent to the walled site north of Muttama, Sampanago-Lakunbyin. The name is used for the Muttama region in the Mon chronicle, as “Dhañña-watti-Mottama” linked with “Suvaṇṇabhūmi-Sudhammavatī” (Thaton) and Hanthawaddy (Hamšavatī or Bago/Pegu) through the Gavampati tradition of the Buddha’s visit to the Mon lands (Tun Aung Chain 2010: xxviii).

Dhañyawaddy may also be connected to the name Du’wop, mentioned in an Old Mon inscription engraved on the inner hem of the adorned so-called “Jambūpati Buddha” found in Kaw gun cave, 17 kilometres north of Sampanago. Scholars agree that Mon phonology, grammar and lexicon changed considerably over time, some contending a linguistic evolution which is unparalleled elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Shorto 1971: ix). In this context, we suggest that “Du’ wop” in Old Mon comes from the Sanskrit dhañña or Pāli dhañña and sa, with the first changing to “du” and the second to “wop” to accord with local pronunciation and scripts. Nai Pan Hla has noted a similar pattern of shortening in Indic words when brought into Old Mon (2007: 107-110) [Appendix 1].
The inscription, as seen below, also mentions Sampanago (Campānagara or Campānāga) with Nai Pan Ḥla (2007: 70) connecting Du'wop to this site:

The name of the city given in the Old Mon inscriptions engraved on the inner hem of the Jambupati Buddha found in Kaw gun cave is entirely unknown. We cannot trace the name of a city called Du'wop in any Mon chronicles. The nearest city name known as Campānagara (Campānāga) is located about five miles north of Martaban [Muttama] and some 25 miles south of Kaw gun cave.

The Kaw gun image, described by Nai Pan Ḥla as Jambupati, may in fact depict the descent of the Buddha from Tāvatiṃsa, with a second similar image also found at Kaw gun having been identified in this manner (Naw Yuzana Win 2009: 51; San Win 2556: 89). Remarkably, there is a duplicate of the Kaw gun inscription at Thaton, like the Kaw gun example, not bearing a date (Chit Thein 2509: 9-10). A duplicate of it was placed in the dhammayon of the Thaton Shwesayan “pagoda” by Taw Sein Ko in the early twentieth century and still kept in an inscription shed in the “pagoda” compound. Thus, even though we are not able to give a precise date, the similar palaeography temporally pairs Kaw gun and Thaton while the inscription itself puts Sampanago into the same timeframe and site network. The inscription, according to Nai Pan Ḥla (2007: 70), reads as follows:

This image of Lord Buddha, it was I, queen Muh Tah residing in the city of Du'wop who carved and made this Holy Buddha. Stone and clay Buddha situated either in this city or outside the kingdom were made by one together with my followers who were skilled in carving stone images. Many other teachers and craftmen appear to carve Buddhas of stone!

The Old Mon inscription from Kaw gun is dated by Nai Pan Ḥla (2007: 68) to the tenth century, correlating it with a Hindu trimūrti stone relief bearing similar Mon writing identifying the piece as Viṣṇu. Moreover, a three line old inscription referring to Śrī Parameśvara is inscribed on the wall of the Kaw gun cave audience hall in Sanskrit mixed with Mon. Palaeographically, this undated inscription is ascribed in the seventh century (Nai Pan Ḥla 2007: 67). As noted above, along with the proper name, queen Muh Tah, the inscription also contains a place name, “Don du’wop,” where we follow Nai Pan Ḥla in connecting to Sampanago-Lakunbyin not later than tenth century. Many scholars have long debated the location of Du'wop, with Gordon Luce locating it near Pa-an in Kayin state (1953: 5 and 1985). Michael Aung-Thwin included it in a table of forty urban, sacred/mythical and natural sites in lower Myanmar all of which he dates to the eleventh-thirteenth century.10 Du’wop, despite Luce’s identification as an urban site, is estimated as fourteenth century in reference to the reign of an unnamed queen. As the inscription described above is without a written date, he postulates that queen Muh Tah was the fifteenth century Shin Saw Bu (Aung-Thwin 2005: 59, Table 1).11

Conclusions

While problems have been raised on drawing connections between Thaton, Muttama and Bago (17°18'34.77"N, 96°29'41.73"E), the Myanmar landscape we describe is more complex, drawing in Kaw gun caves (16°49'36.59"N, 97°35'8.85"E) and Winka (17°13'34.70"N, 97°4'16.07"E) to the northwest of Sampanago (Aung-Thwin 2005: 79-105). We bring together legends and artefacts to define the trading networks of the Mon state in the late first millennium and early second millennium CE. An ancient town site of Sampanago-Lakunbyin may also have been called Dhāniyawaddy, a name derived from Du’wop in Old Mon. Because it is built beside the rocky mountain it was also called Muh ‘Tam’ or Muttama (Muttama), a name well-known in the thirteenth century.

The site thus appears to have been referred to as Sampanago-Lakunbyin, Muttama, Dhāniyawaddy and Du’wop. Each reflects the different conditions, with Sampanago and Lakunbyin for example, perhaps different groups of Mon-Khmer speaking people. Dhāniyawaddy, a Sanskrit-derived word, recalls the local ecology and appears to have survived in inscriptions such as those at Kaw gun cave as Du’wop, a Mon derivation of Dhāniyawaddy. Recalling their mother’s nāga lineage, Thamala and Wimala, the legendary founders of Hanthawaddy-Bago are said to have migrated from Sampanago, the “City of Serpents,” in the sixth century. The next Mon influx would have been from Haripūjaya or Lamphun with its associations to the name Lakunbyin. Other chronicles and traditional stories call it Dhāniyawaddy (blessed place) with Sanskrit origins, Muttama and Du’wop, the last possibly a Mon derivation of Dhāniyawaddy.

 Artefacts from ground survey supporting a sixth to ninth century culture include coins, beads and finger-marked bricks paralleling finds from Khu Bua, U Thong and other early sites in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. Sampanago’s location on the Thanlwin thus facilitated trade eastwards as well as to the north, west and to the coast. Sampanago-Lakunbyin did not exist in isolation, with artefacts, sculpture, chronicles and inscriptions from Thaton (Sudhāmanna) and Kaw gun (Kotgon) cave defining the significant role of the Mons in lower Myanmar in the second half of the first millennium CE.

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In Pāli to be Muttama period of the thirteenth century CE

Bingyi: There was an old town site with the same name. The upper reaches of Dontami river parentage, traditionally founded the city. nāga 592 CE, who were exiled from their father’s kingdom Theinnaganga, the legendary king of Dhañyawaddy in India. Thamala and Wimala, the twin sons of that island of the white elephant, located on the north-west part of the walled site of Thaton.

Jaing: A river joining together with Thatwin (Salwedi) on the west bank of Thaton.

Kadaikgyi: A village 1.6 kilometres east of Kadaikgaleh called “Kaka jok” in Mon “Big Kadaik”). The ancient site is built on a large area of laterite high ground surrounded by walls and a moat.

Kalama taung: The meaning of “Mountain of Indian Lady” (914 metres in elevation), the highest place in the Thaton-Muttama region and a continuation of Mt Zingyaik (797 metres in elevation). First millennium CE habitation sites have been documented on its slopes and summit.

Kaw gwun (Kotoum): A celebrated Buddhist limestone shrine located near the west bank of Thanbwin (Salwedi) in Kayin state. Other cavers of the same type are found in the area including the group of Pagat, Yathebyan, Binyi, and Dhañkuai.

Myaung: A name derived from Śrī Ratanapura, meaning “Mountain of Washing ceremony” indicating its antiquity was found at Kyauksarit village.

Mutuma: This site is Martaban in English, “Muh Tamo” in Mon and the Myanmar name “Mada,” meaning “Rock Shalf City.” The Chronicle of the Mon (1879) located near Muttama. It is said that King Siharja built Shwesayan to enshrine the Hair Relic and Tooth Relic for veneration.

Sanpanago: A walled site and village recorded in the British Burma Gazetteer (1879) located near Muttama. It is referred to as Campangara or Campanaga in Pāli/Sanskrit, in this essay as “City of Serpents.”

Seik Kyun: This means “ferry-port island” in Myanmar, located near Mayangon village in the Kadaikgyi group of sites.

Shwesayan: “Shwesayan” in Myanmar is a common name for the site of Muttama (see Bago). The name appears with this example location at the ancient site of Thaton. The Chronicle of the Mon noted that the Buddha, at the request of Venerable Gavampati, visited Thaton (Suvaṇṇabhūmi) during the winter of the year 1114 Mahā Era (507 BCE), and had first given his hairs for worship to hermits who dwelled on various mountains and to Siharja, king of Thaton. Then, when he entered the Final Decease at Kadaikgyi group of sites.

Sittaung: This is also known as Sitatun, the name of a river, an old town site and a village within the old walled site located north of Kyaikkatha.

Taikkala: This is an ancient site of archaeological significance in Bago, Mon state, which lasted until the British occupation of lower Burma (Myanmar). Excavations were made during 1975-78 CE at the site of Mt Kalatha (Kela) to document ancient Taikkala (Suvaṇṇabhūmi) 49 kilometres northwest of Thaton

Thaton: A district of Mon state in lower Myanmar. This is the historical site of so-called Suvaṇṇabhūmi where King Anuruddha of Bagan (Pagan) is said to have attacked and occupied in 1057 CE. The ruins of Thaton can be traced in and around the modern Thaton town.

Ussā: This is one of the names of Bago (Hamsavati) following the example of Orissa in South India. (see Bago).

Amberst: Headquarter of a district in the Tanasser division of lower Myanmar (14° 56'17" 2° 9' 27" – 9° 51' E). It is called Kyauk-tha-mi in Mon with the Myanmar name the same. The city was named in honour of Lord Amberst (1773-1807 CE), the British Commissioner who first governed in Kyauk-tha-mi.

Attaran: A tributary entering the Salween (Thanlwin) at their confluence, which Mon people call “bīkatat” meaning the river where fishes spawn.

Ayettama (Ayaamsa): A village located on the north of Mt Kelāsa, Bilin township, Mon state, lower Myanmar. Ayettama and Winka are traditionally considered part of the first “Suvaṇṇabhūmi” later shifting to Thaton.

Bago: Myanmar pronunciation for Pegu which was formerly known as Hamsavati (“City of the Brahman Ducks” see Hintagyi). The Mons also called Upéko, carrying the sense of being helped by a stratagem (spjōs in Pāli means stratagem) and Usā (after Orissa in India). Thamala and Wimala, the twin sons of Thatinagaung, the legendary king of Dhañyawaddy in 592 CE, who were exiled from their father’s kingdom when it was discovered that their mother was of Aryan parentage, traditionally founded the city.

Bheng Laing: The upper reaches of Dontami river near Sanpanago are called “Bhan-hūm in Mon. There was an old town site with the same name.

Binyi: A limestone cave in the Kaw gwun group near Thaton with numerous Buddha statues inside dated to be Muttama period of the thirteenth century CE onwards.

Dhaññavaddi: In Pāli dhan’añña meaning uncooked grain, in Sanskrit dhānya meaning uncooked dhānya grain, in Sanskrit dhānya

Du’wop (Du’wopa): A short form of Mon probably derived from Dhaññawaddy, the old Muttama town site probably at Sanpanago.

Hinthagyi: A small hillrock located inside the walled site of Hanthawaddy. The word derives from “Hamsa Hill” where according to the chronicles the two Brahman ducks, male and female, rested one top of the other, at the time of Lord Buddha who foretold that on this spot Hanthawaddy city would be built.

Hlaingbye: “Hlaing” in Mon, used to designate a river and an old town site near Thaton now located in Kayin state.

Hsin Phyu Kyun: From da’ in bût in Mon meaning the island of the white elephant, located on the north-west part of the walled site of Thaton.

Lakunbyin: One of the historically documented “32 mya” towns of Mutuma which was built on the site of the Mon Sanpanago-Dhaññawaddy town of the later Mon period (thirteenth century CE).

Mayangon: The village of Mayangon (in Myanmar) means a high ground where the Mayan trees (Bouea fruticosa) grow located close to Kadaikgyi and Kadaikgale. The Pāli for Mayan is myo. The Mons call it “Maruiksabum.” In 2006, 13 Neolithic polished stone implements were documented at the village following dredging works.

Mawlamyaing: This site was known as Moulmein in English, the capital city of the Mon state. The Mons call it “Mat ma Laym” in Pāli and it is Ramñawat.

Mutuma: This site is Martaban in English, “Muh Tamo” in Mon and the Myanmar name “Mada,” meaning “Rock Shalf City.” The Chronicle of the Mon (1879) located near Muttama. It is said that King Siharja built Shwesayan to enshrine the Hair Relic and Tooth Relic for veneration (Shwe Naw 1931).

Puñjaluin: This word is a combination of Pāli, luṅg (Mon) meaning the monastery built of wood (Dipterocarpus tuberculatus) and in Pāli, luṅg (PINnya) meaning five and Mon, luiṅ meaning “Mountain of Five Rivers” (Salween) called “Bīgrān” in Mon.

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Ussā: This is one of the names of Bago (Hamsavati) following the example of Orissa in South India. (see Bago).
Within the documented ancient laterite culture of Myanmar, it is located at the southeast foot of Mt Kelāsa in which was excavated during 1975-78 by U Myint Aung. This is a town site of ancient earth elevated land in a region where the heavy lower Myanmar are located on this type of red-earth or laterite soil starting in 638 CE. Michael Aung-Thwin notes that the Myanmar name for red-earth or laterite soil is traditionally given in Myanmar or Burmese Era Cāmadevīvaṃsa for the founding of Bago by Thamala and Wimala.

A Myanmar name for red-earth or laterite soil is Zimkyaik (Zingyaik): This mountain is called “Zingyaik” in Myanmar referred to a mountain peak and a large village at the foot of it. The Mons refer to it as “Kyak brāṅ nab,” the pagoda of the female father, the hermit Tissa, built this pagoda of the female. ELizabetH h. Moore & San Win

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