

Burmese Buddhist Imagery of the Early Bagan Period (1044 – 1113)

2 Volumes

By

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Declaration

I declare that to the best of my knowledge, unless where cited, this thesis is my own original work.

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Abstract

Burmese Buddhist Imagery of the Early Bagan Period (1044 – 1113)

Buddhism is an integral part of Burmese culture. While Buddhism has been practiced in Burma for around 1500 years and evidence of the religion is found throughout the country, nothing surpasses the concentration of Buddhist monuments found at Bagan. Bagan represents not only the beginnings of a unified Burmese country, but also symbolises Burmese 'ownership' of Theravada Buddhism.

While there is an abundance of artistic material throughout Burma, the study of Burmese Buddhist art by western scholars remains in its infancy due to historical events. In recent years, opportunities for further research have increased, and Bagan, as the region of Buddhism's principal flowering in Burma, is the starting point for the study of Burmese Buddhist art. To date, there has been no systematic review of the stylistic or iconographic characteristics of the Buddhist images of this period. This thesis proposes, for the first time, a chronological framework for sculptural depictions of the Buddha, and identifies the characteristics of Buddha images for each identified phase. The framework and features identified should provide a valuable resource for the dating of future discoveries of Buddhist sculpture at Bagan.

As epigraphic material from this period is very scant, the reconstruction of Bagan's history has relied heavily to this point in time on non-contemporaneous accounts from Burma, and foreign chronicles. The usefulness of Bagan's visual material in broadening our understanding of the early Bagan period has been largely overlooked. This is addressed by relating the identified stylistic trends with purported historical events and it is demonstrated that, in the absence of other contemporaneous material, visual imagery is a valid and valuable resource for both supporting and refuting historical events.

Buddhist imagery of Bagan widely regarded to represent the beginnings of 'pure' Theravada practice that King Anawrahta, the first Burman ruler, actively encouraged. This simplistic view has limited the potential of the imagery to provide a greater understanding of Buddhist practice at Bagan, and subsequently, the cross-cultural interactions that may have been occurring. In

this light the narrative sculptural imagery of the period is interrogated against the principal Mahayana and Theravada texts relating to the life of Gotama Buddha. This review, along with the discussion regarding potential agencies for stylistic change, reveals that during the early Bagan period, Buddhism was an eclectic mix of both Theravada and Mahayana, which integrated with pre-existing spiritual traditions. Towards the end of the early Bagan period, trends were emerging which would lead to a distinctly Burmese form of Buddhist practice and visual expression.

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Introduction

The early Bagan period (1044 – 1113) is the key formative phase of modern day Burma's history and art history. The capital of Bagan began its transformation from a local settlement of longstanding to one of the foremost Buddhist historical sites in the world. Concomitantly, Bagan represents the foundations of a Buddhist sculptural tradition which brought together for the first time the various stylistic influences present in Burma. At Bagan, these influences would coalesce to form a distinctly Burmese visual and stylistic sculptural repertoire.

The early Bagan period therefore is arguably the most significant period in Burma's art history, yet to date there has not been a study dedicated to the Buddhist sculptures of the time. This thesis will address this art historical gap, examining iconographic and stylistic developments in the depiction of the Buddha and related sculptural images from the early Bagan period.

There are three aims, the first being to trace stylistic change and identify the various agencies which contributed to the emergence of a distinct Burmese style of Buddha image. The second aim is to describe a chronologic framework which can be used to assist the dating of Buddhist sculptural images thought to belong to the early Bagan period. Such images may be new "finds" that cannot be reliably attributed to a dated site, or sculptures that come to light in a public forum and lack reliable provenance. A final aim is more conceptual than these very specific goals, and concerns the subject matter of the sculptures that predominated at the time. As will be shown, much of the early commentary regarding Bagan's sculpture was based on a particular understanding of Theravada Buddhism. As a result, interpretation of the imagery was undertaken within a limited framework and misinterpretations regarding early Buddhist art at Bagan were made. A review of imagery in light of an expanded understanding of Buddhism demonstrates that the sculptures of the time are representative of an evolving phase of Buddhism, not just Theravada Buddhism, and this will be achieved through an analysis of narrative images.

The early Bagan period traverses the reigns of Anawrahta (r.1044–1077), his son Sawlu (r.1077–1084) and Kyanzittha (r.1084–1113).¹ Sawlu is usually linked with the Anawrahta period. Historically, Sawlu has not been credited with a distinct influence of his own, and the monuments and imagery associated with his reign are more closely linked to his father's style rather than that of his successor, Kyanzittha. For the purpose of this thesis, therefore, the Anawrahta period covers the years 1044–1084 and represents the rise of Bagan from its position as a relatively unknown town to that of the capital city of a major Southeast Asian kingdom. It also represents the formative period of Burmese Buddhism. The Kyanzittha period (1084–1113) represents the consolidation phase of the Burmese kingdom, and Buddhism's role as a historical constant in Burma was secured.

During the early Bagan period there were a number of significant interactions which contributed to the evolution of Bagan, and Burmese culture. Anawrahta and Kyanzittha engaged with India and Sri Lanka, and the Arakan region of western Burma. The Pyu and Mon people who were established in Burma long before Burman arrival also contributed to Bagan's expansion. The impact of these influences on Bagan's artistic development has not been addressed in a systematic way which integrates the effect of these interactions on the stylistic evolution of Bagan period sculpture. This thesis will consider these influences in a chronological framework.

To achieve the stated aims, following this introduction to scholarly research in Burma and the particular challenges it brings, Chapter 1 will review recent research regarding Bagan and Burma's early history, and remark on the validity of some key agencies and events of the period. A description of narrative texts relating to the Buddha's last existence from various streams of Buddhism is also included to provide a framework for later analysis of Bagan's narrative sculptures. Next, the Pyu and Pyu art are introduced, as the Pyu provide the link between Bagan's imagery and the rise of a Burman artistic form. A stylistic analysis of the principal Buddhist sculptural imagery of the early Bagan period

¹ Anawrahta is the commonly accepted contemporary spelling of his name. An earlier transliteration is Aniruddha and this form was frequently used by early scholars. The end date of Kyanzittha's reign is sometimes listed as 1112. His successor, Alaungsithu, came to the throne in 1113. The conflicting year may be due to differences in calculating calendar years which was often done according to the lunar calendar rather than the Western calendar.

follows, which includes a study of votive tablets, architectural plaques and free-standing sculptures. This comprehensive review of most known and attributable images from the period reveals shifts in the physical appearance of the images which are divided into four discernable phases. The key features of each phase are identified. The usefulness of the proposed chronology, which links contemporary views on Burma's history with stylistic change will be demonstrated by applying the criteria to some more recently discovered images, and through some examples of sculptures with uncertain provenance. Relationships between historical events and these phases are also highlighted and it will be shown how the stylistic features of the imagery can help inform our historical knowledge of the period.

Following the proposed stylistic chronology this thesis will then turn to narrative sculptures. Narrative imagery is prevalent at Bagan, in particular, in scenes depicting the last life of Gotama Buddha. As iconographic features are the principal means of identifying the presence of Theravada and Mahayana practices, one approach that can help broaden our appreciation of Bagan imagery and understanding of cultural interactions of the time is the examination of the life story of the Buddha, as told in texts associated with the Theravada and Mahayana schools. Similarities between the stories and imagery associated with the narratives can be used to demonstrate the presence of both Theravada and Mahayana influence. While this may seem an obvious approach, continued focus on the current Theravada dominance of Southeast Asian Buddhism has discouraged the study of non-Theravada textual accounts that can provide further insight into the meanings of this imagery, and a comparative study has not yet been undertaken. The presence of imagery that can be shown clearly to draw on material from both streams of Buddhism provides further insight into the nature of Buddhist practice in early Burma. The significance of this finding lies in its confirmation that Buddhism of the early Bagan period was eclectic and adaptable, and reinforces the need to look beyond a simplistic view of Theravada Buddhism when studying early Bagan period imagery.

The sculptural material reviewed in this thesis is restricted to images that have a strong provenance, that is, they were found in situ, and their 'discovery' documented. These images can be most reliably attributed to a particular time

and place, and as such allow integration into the understood historical chronology of the time. In general, the objects discussed are those made under the patronage of Bagan's ruling families and installed in the most significant Buddhist monuments of the day. There are of course numerous small sculptures found in temple grounds or in small shrines that have been attributed to this period. These are excluded due to their variable form, generally inferior quality and often uncertain attribution. While it is acknowledged that the diversity of these images provides an insight into the culture of the time, they were not part of the visual repertoire of the ruling classes. It is the latter that was the imagery being promoted to the public and showcased to the broader Buddhist world.

The focus of this art historical review is on early Bagan's sculptural material, and includes votive tablets, *jataka* plaques, relief and free-standing sculptures. The most common surviving imagery of the Buddha from the early Anawrahta period is in the form of votive tablets and *jataka* plaques and by the Kyanzittha period freestanding and relief sculptures become more numerous. An analysis of painted illustrations of the *jatakas*, the life stories of the Buddha, which are prevalent at Bagan, and other wall paintings falls outside the scope of this thesis though they are discussed in relation to their stylistic characters, and mention is made of the differing *jataka* recensions that are found in temples of the period.

Throughout this thesis, the term Theravada Buddhism refers to Buddhism of the Southern School. In this context it is synonymous with Hinayana Buddhism, meaning "little vehicle". While Theravada is in the strictest sense an early subdivision of the Hinayana, the term Theravada is more commonly used in Southeast Asia to refer to the Hinayana. The ritual language of the Theravada is Pali. Mahayana Buddhism is the Buddhism of the Northern school, the "greater vehicle" and the language of the Mahayana is Sanskrit.

The decision to use Burma throughout this study rather than Myanmar, the official country name accepted by the United Nations, is largely due to the fact that Burma remains the most commonly used term amongst Western historians and art historians. No political bias is intended. It is also a matter of convenience as Burma is the term used in nearly all quotations containing

reference to the country name. In the context of Bagan and early Burmese history, the term Burman(s) refers to the ethnic group who moved into Burma from the Himalayas and settled at Bagan some time around 9th century CE. Burmese refers to the people of Burma. While strictly correct, Mramma as a term for Burmese people has not gained widespread acceptance and is not used.

The transliteration and forms of place names used throughout are those most commonly found in art historical literature. For example, Srikshetra is now known as Thayekhittaya but the former is more widely used and known. There has, however, generally been a shift towards the use of current names, such as Bago instead of Pegu, Inwa instead of Ava. Where useful, alternative names will be noted in brackets. Most significantly Bagan replaces Pagan, except when part of a direct quotation and proper names follow the form used in Burma, for example, Aniruddha becomes Anawrahta. While this approach is inconsistent, it should be noted that even within Burma there is no overriding correct form, with the official naming of places not always being accepted in popular usage.² The same applies to the use of Sanskrit and Pali terms where there remains a high degree of inconsistency. I have chosen the most common forms, for example *nirvana* is much more recognized than *nibbana*. Diacritics are generally excluded, though will be represented if part of a direct quote.

Early Art Historical Studies and Burma – A Particular Time and Place

Buddhism has been the fundamental ethos of Burma's culture for over one thousand years. The Burmese view themselves as upholders of the Buddhist Theravada tradition, the true doctrine of Gotama Buddha. During Burma's golden age of the Bagan period (1044–1287 CE), Buddhism of the Theravada

² The dilemma of inconsistency has been a problem for all scholars of Burmese art and history. Spiro notes in his preface to *Buddhism and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972: xiii) "Unavoidably in a book on Burmese Buddhism, Pali (the sacred language of Buddhism) and Sanskrit, as well as Burmese, concepts are bound to play a prominent role...Wherever possible, therefore, foreign terms in this book are relegated to parentheses, while the concepts they express are rendered by their closest English equivalents, or approximations. In those few cases in which no suitable approximations are available, Sanskrit rather than Pali or Burmese terms are used, on the assumption that the former are best known to the Western reader." More recently, Michael Aung-Thwin, in *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998: xi), also comments on the inconsistencies associated with the transliteration of Burmese into English and remarks on his decision to retain "incorrect" spelling that he has aimed to preserve "...the integrity of the original text. However, as a result, the reader will find inconsistencies in the spelling of Old Burmese words, which is actually not undesirable since that accurately represents the written language at that time."

school was established as the preeminent orthodoxy and has remained so ever since. While Buddhism has waxed and waned in popularity throughout most of Southeast Asia since some time early in the 1st century CE, Burma has remained a stronghold for Buddhist devotees.³

Evidence of Buddhism is abundant in Burma. There are innumerable temples and *stupas*. There are monks and nuns and monasteries. Alms are collected every morning in cities and villages. People make pilgrimages to sacred Buddhist sites. This widespread devotion has ensured that visual representations of the religion are everywhere. The earliest extant Buddhist art of Burma can be reliably dated to around 5th century CE, though this date is continually being pushed further back in time as more archaeological excavations are undertaken. It is possible to construct a visual history of Buddhist art in Burma from that time through to the present day.

Bagan, recognized as one of the most important historical sites in Southeast Asia, is a virtual treasure house for art historians, with an abundance of material remaining in situ. However, while there is a wealth of material for art historians to study, Burma's Buddhist art tradition is the least known to the Western world. This situation can be attributed to two principal factors. The first is a political one which initially manifested itself during British colonial rule, with Burma being administered as a province of British India.⁴ There was little autonomy and for archaeologists and other scholars interested in the region funding was not in abundance for local initiatives, the bulk of money allocated to these fields being directed to Indian archaeological pursuits.⁵ With only modest support,

³ The terms BCE (before common era) and CE (common era) will be used throughout except when BC and AD appear in quotations.

⁴ This period of Burmese history was troubled, with the British only ever maintaining tenuous control of Burma. For an overview of the colonial period see D.G.E.Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 4th edition (London: MacMillan 1981), 625-59, 770-76. Burma was recognized by the British as a fully independent country in January 1948, though effective British control of Burma ceased during the early years of World War II.

⁵ There are frequent references to the financial allocations to the research projects undertaken by the *Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)*. The annual reports detail the spending of all monies and comments are often made regarding the need for more funding, or the limitation of work able to be undertaken due to lack of funds. Funding was also subject to dramatic change. Taw Sein Ko notes in "during the year 1907-08, R68,475 was expended, in Burma, on archaeological works, as compared with R1,25,930 in the previous year. Of this amount, R12,000 was a grant-in-aid from Imperial revenues. The reduction in expenditure was due to retrenchment, owing to drought and famine, in the Provincial Public Works Department Budget". Taw Sein Ko, "Notes on Conservation in Burma", *ASI* (1907-08), 33. With funding dependent on local conditions, there were only limited options for sourcing money for much needed conservation and excavation work.

archaeological and art historical research in Burma fell behind that of the neighbouring regions of Thailand and Cambodia. When an independent Burma effectively isolated itself from the West from the 1960s until the early 1990s, it coincided with a crucial period in the development of Southeast Asian studies in the Western world. This extended period of exile from the international scholarly community coming not long after a colonial period which, while not discouraging of historical and archaeological research was not encouraging either, saw our knowledge of Burma's history and culture only modestly enhanced over the course of nearly a century.

A second factor is less direct and the result of historical happenstance. Scholars such as Duroiselle and Forchhammer, who can be considered amongst the founders of art and archaeological research in Burma, wrote of Burma's religious art during the late 1800s and early 1900s and did so in an environment dominated by Pali Theravada Buddhism.⁶ Western interest in Buddhism was strong in the late 1800s and it has been argued that the influence of early Pali scholars such as Rhys Davids contributed to a very particular view of Theravada Buddhism being popularized. Snodgrass remarks "Since missionaries and travelers had written about Buddhism for centuries, why was it that Buddhism caught the attention of intellectuals at this time? Given all that could be said about Buddhism, all the various interpretations that could have emerged from a study of its vast literature, why were some features emphasized and others ignored?"⁷ Snodgrass asserts that Theravada scholarship had a significant impact across disciplines, and scholars such as Duroiselle were no doubt influenced by this debate. Evidence for this can be found in his paper on the Ananda temple narrative sculptures. Already, there is

⁶ Charles Duroiselle was very active in archaeological research during the early 1900s and published extensively in the *ASI*. Duroiselle's work, and that of some other early scholars will be discussed in Chapter 1. Theravada Buddhism was the dominant branch of the region in Southeast Asia at the time. The other principal stream, the Mahayana, was restricted to Himalayan regions that still supported Buddhism.

⁷ J. Snodgrass, "Colonial Constructs of Theravada Buddhism. Current Perspectives on Western Writing on Asian Tradition", in *Traditions in Current Perspective*, proceedings of the Conference on Myanmar and Southeast Asian Studies, Yangon: Universities Historical Research Centre (1995):79. This article expounds on the "formation of Western knowledge of Buddhism" with reference to the work of the Pali scholars, in particular Rhys Davids. Snodgrass states "Nineteenth century Western interest in Theravada Buddhism was intimately connected with the intellectual crises of the time, the debates arising out of the perceived conflict between orthodox Christianity and the implications of developments in natural science". Snodgrass, "Colonial Constructs", 80. Snodgrass also discusses the influence of the rise in Pali scholarship on British politics as it related to Southeast Asia.

a convention for referring to Buddhist deities in the Pali form, for example, Indra is called Sakra.⁸ His comments regarding the narrative presented in the Ananda temple are firmly based in the Theravada tradition, and this will be expanded on in Chapter 6. Duroiselle's excavations of archaeological sites at Bagan are, however, of great use to modern day scholars as many artifacts illustrated in the ASI reports have since disappeared but his interpretations regarding imagery should be treated cautiously. Snodgrass's view is supported by Karlsson who remarks in the context of early Buddhist studies in the West, during the late 19th century scholars "textualised" Buddhism. In their preoccupation with the study of Buddhist texts "what they were actually doing was putting themselves in the position of creating an ideal Buddhism of the past. This representation of the ideal Buddhism as rationalist and free of rituals was to a large part prompted by the Orientalist's expectations and wishful thinking".⁹

Burmese historical records also promote a Theravada Buddhist Burma, recounting an almost epiphany-like conversion of Bagan's populace to Theravada Buddhism during the reign of their first great king, Anawrahta (r.1044–1077) and since then Burmese chronicles have assumed a Theravada framework. The emphasis on the Theravada during the late 1800s and early 1900s was consistent with the prevailing Burmese chronicle, the *Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*.¹⁰ Acceptance of this account of Burma's history coloured subsequent writings on Bagan's Buddhist art, with later scholars continuing to favour what had become the Theravada paradigm of early Bagan. Western researchers viewed Buddhist practices in Burma principally within the confines of a particular type of Theravada tradition and hence the interpretation of Buddhist imagery was often limited, remaining within a narrow Theravada construct.

⁸ C. Duroiselle, "The Stone Sculptures in the Ananda Temple at Pagan", *ASI* (1913-14): 64. Sakra is the Pali name for Indra. Refinements in Pali scholarship have resulted in some spelling modifications and Sakra is now more correctly known as Sakka.

⁹ K.Karlsson, "Face to Face with the Absent Buddha. The Formation of Buddhist Aniconic Art", PhD diss. (Uppsala University, 1999), 28.

¹⁰ In 1829, King Bagyidaw directed the leading Burmese scholars of the day to compile a history of Burma. Called the *Glass Palace Chronicle* this work became the officially sanctioned version of Burma's history, and in particular, of Bagan. The work will be discussed in Chapter 1. Pe Maung Tin and G.H Luce, trans., *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma* 1923 (reprint Rangoon: Rangoon University Press, 1960).

Gordon Luce – The 'Founding' Historian of Bagan, and his Lasting Influence

In the field of art history, there was almost no new research from the time the renowned British historian, Gordon Luce, along with other foreigners, was forced to leave Burma in 1964, until the 1990s.¹¹ Luce is still regarded as the pre-eminent Western scholar of Burma's history, most specifically of the Bagan period, Burma's classical era. His magnum opus, *Old Burma – Early Pagan*, published in 1969, is the only major work on the subject.¹² *Old Burma – Early Pagan* was the Western world's introduction to this fascinating period in Burma's history and is still the primary art history reference for Bagan. Luce's extensive work is invaluable because of his detailed descriptions and comprehensive photographic records. It is impossible to duplicate his work today as many of the sculptural works to which he refers are now missing, and much of the original architecture has now been reconstructed. Fortunately, as well as his publications many of his personal papers and research notes are publicly available affording scholars an opportunity to examine the broad range of articles and lectures Luce wrote on other aspects of Burma's history, art and architecture.¹³ Virtually all of his work on Bagan is included within *OBEP*, which is a detailed culmination of a lifetime's research.

Luce's pioneering studies determined a chronology for the extensive architectural works at Bagan. He grouped objects into Early, Middle and Late periods, and proposed construction dates for many temples and their sculptures based principally on architectural analysis. In addition, Luce's work brought

¹¹ A notable exception is the PhD research of Pamela Gutman, "Ancient Arakan: with special reference to its cultural history between the 5th and 11th centuries" (PhD diss., Australian National University 1976).

¹² G.H. Luce, *Old Burma – Early Pagan* (New York: J.J Augustin, 1969). This book is published in three volumes, volume 1 containing text, volume 2, an index of plates, appendixes and book index, and volume 3 the illustrations. This publication will now be referred to by the abbreviation *OBEP*.

¹³ The Gordon Luce Archive is in the collection of the National Library of Australia. The collection is well described by Andrew Gosling in "Burma and Beyond. The Luce Collection at the National Library of Australia." *National Library of Australia News* 6, no.13 (October 1996), 3-5. The article, along with links to the Luce catalogue is available on line at www.nla.gov.au/nla/staffpaper/agosling1. The majority of the archives were catalogued and annotated by U Thaw Kaung in 1999. Pamela Gutman is currently researching the correspondence in the archives for incorporation into a biography of Luce. With regard to Bagan, the relevant material in the archive is comprehensively incorporated into *OBEP* and the writings in the archive do not offer any further information.

together a broad range of material from inscriptions through to sculptures. He integrated available historical source material into his text in order to create a picture of Bagan in a comprehensively broad context, something which had not previously been attempted. As alluded to earlier, Burma was not a popular place for Western scholarship and it is entirely due to Luce's passion for the country and excellent scholastic mind that there is such an enduring legacy of thorough research. Indeed, as Luce noted in his work, some of the material he used was lost during the Second World War, and his work is the only remaining reference to these sources.

Luce's study of Bagan is based on what little was known of Burma's past at the time, which was largely a history of mixed fact and fiction. Luce is not uncritical of this history, but by necessity *OBEF* centres its chronology on historical aspects which had not been fully assessed and indeed, are now subject to critical review as will be discussed in Chapter 1.¹⁴ Bagan was still known as an entity with a culture that emerged from virtually nowhere and then disappeared when Bagan ceased to be the thriving capital of the ruling Burmese in the 13th century. As the compiler of the only major comprehensive book on the art and architecture of the Bagan period, Luce's work is the foundation from which art historical research of the period must grow. This is not to suggest there were no other researchers of merit. Indeed there were a number of notable local Burmese counterparts who were his contemporaries, also educated in British research methodologies of the 1920s–1950s.¹⁵ Their writings often reveal interesting perspectives due to their own cultural familiarity with the artifacts. Than Tun's publication on Buddhist votive tablets of Burma, for example, is written in a manner which conveys complete confidence in his own knowledge and interpretation of Buddhist symbolism.¹⁶ With this, however, comes the potential to assume that the meanings and practices of Buddhism today are the same as those one thousand years before, and such contemporary knowledge

¹⁴ A major recent publication questions one of the fundamental premises of Burmese history, namely the role of the Mon at Bagan. Michael Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña. The Legend That Was Lower Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2005).

¹⁵ Luce worked collaboratively with a number of Burmese scholars including Bohmu Ba Shin, Pe Maung Tin and Than Tun. Other Burmese scholars of the 20th century who have made significant contributions to Burmese art and archaeology include Hla Pe, Htin Aung, Lu Pe Win and U Mya. Taw Sein Ko was a contemporary of Duroiselle and worked extensively during the late 19th and early 20th centuries on the translation of early inscriptions.

¹⁶ Than Tun. "History of Buddhism in Burma", *JBR* 61, pt.1 (1978):165-88.

of Buddhism and its rituals may incorrectly influence interpretations of such symbolism. Luce, as a newcomer to Buddhism and Burma, is often more interpretive and *OBEP* contains an abundance of descriptive phrases and hypotheses. As Luce notes in his opening preface "This book may be likened to a torso, without head or feet", being acknowledgement that there was still much to be known of this era.¹⁷ His decision to omit the pre-Bagan period was based on the relative paucity of historical material known at the time while the abundance and diversity of art and architecture in the post-Bagan period was too overwhelming to include.¹⁸

Apart from the works of Luce and his contemporaries most other scholarly articles on Bagan date from the early 1900s when Western researchers undertook archaeological studies and restoration projects while working under the auspices of the Archaeological Survey of India, and later, the Burma Research Society.¹⁹ These accounts are principally descriptive reporting, but there are also extended articles which in most cases are still the only monographs relating to some of Bagan's most prominent monuments. For example, Forchhammer's work on the Kyauk-ku-umin remains influential as it is the only significant paper dedicated to this temple.²⁰ Other monographs include Ba Shin's paper on the Lokahteikpan and a collaborative account of the Ku-byauk-gyi Wetki-in.²¹ While numerous articles have been published regarding specific temples, the focus has been on a particular feature, rather than an all-encompassing report.²² However, as will be shown, these articles often

¹⁷ *OBEP* 1:vii.

¹⁸ It must be noted that Luce undertook research across a wide historical period. His posthumous publication, *Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1985) which brought together much of his research on the pre-Bagan period, is also one of the few books to address this phase of Burma's history. Along with Gutman's thesis on Arakan the only other major publication on the pre-Bagan period is by Janice Stargardt, *The Ancient Pyu of Burma. Early Pyu Cities in a Man-Made Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990).

¹⁹ A number of researchers, both Burmese and European, made extensive contributions to early Burmese archaeological and art historical scholarship. The Archaeological Survey of India, sponsored by the British Government, carried out excavations and restoration in Burma. Later, the Burma Historical Commission took over this role though funding was never generous. Most of these early articles were focused on recording rather than interpreting local material.

²⁰ E. Forchhammer, *Pagan: I. The Kyauku temple* (Rangoon: Government Printing Office 1891).

²¹ Ba Shin, *Lokahteikpan, Early Burmese Culture in a Pagan Temple* (Rangoon: Burma Historical Commission, 1962). Ba Shin, K.J. Whitbread, G. Luce et al, "Pagan, Wetkyi-in Kubyauk-gyi. An Early Burmese Temples with Ink Glosses, *Artibus Asiae* 33.2 (1971), 167-91.

²² For example, E. Guillon, *L'Armée de Māra au Pied de l'Ānanda (Pagan - Birmanie)*, (Paris Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1985),

demonstrate an interpretive bias which reflects a limited understanding of Burma, Bagan and Buddhism. As noted, Luce and his contemporaries such as Than Tun, did not always concur with a narrow view of Theravada Buddhism at Bagan, but were still working within a confined knowledge base.²³ The appreciation and understanding of Bagan's visual imagery can be greatly enhanced through a reinterpretation of sculptural material in the light of an expanded Buddhist paradigm.

With improved access to Burma since the 1990s there has been a significant increase in art historical research aided by a simultaneous rise in archaeological and historical study, making it an opportune time to undertake a comprehensive study of early Bagan sculpture incorporating recent archaeological and historical findings.²⁴ The absence of a dedicated study of the period's sculpture seems an extraordinary oversight, but is understandable. No doubt many researchers consider the period to have been well covered by Luce, and there are other time periods and geographical locations which still remain neglected. Luce's work, however, is frequently speculative in its conclusions and hypotheses, based as it was by necessity on a relatively limited archaeological and historical knowledge base, and while Luce's summations and propositions are often bold, he was writing at a time when approaches to historiography were much proscribed and evidence driven, and discouraging of such speculative

²³ Than Tun writes regarding the period of 1000-1300, "There are traces of many religions besides Buddhism. Of the many types of Buddhism, which existed the type modern Burmans call the pure *Theravāda*, was the most popular. As a matter of fact, Buddhism in those days was far from pure if we insist on using the word 'pure'. Buddhism during the Buddha's lifetime would be considered in a sense pure but as time went by it was modified to suit the time and place. Burma is no exception to this rule". Than Tun, "Religion in Burma, A.D. 1000 – 1300", *JBRS* 42.2 (1959), 47.

²⁴ Some notable contemporary researchers include Tilman Frasch, Bob Hudson and Don Stadtner. Their recent writings, along with the work of other scholars, will be discussed in Chapter 1.

conclusions.²⁵ Also, with his focus on architecture, Luce did not construct a separate stylistic analysis of the sculptural remains.²⁶

These remarks aside, Luce's work remains the starting point for all subsequent research on Bagan's art history, including this thesis. The sculptural material represents the artistic expression of one of Southeast Asia's most important historical kingdoms. Bagan's position as the mainland stronghold of Buddhism, and its geographical position as the bridge between India and the rest of Southeast Asia, ensured it was a centre of diverse cultural influences, and these all contributed to the distinctive style of Bagan sculpture.

History, Art History and Southeast Asia

As well as the effects of colonisation and internal upheaval, the direction of Burma's art historical scholarship has been influenced by particular developments in historiography. Since art history is emerged as an academic discipline following the publishing of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* in the 16th century Western art history and social history have evolved side by side.²⁷ In contrast, the study of Southeast Asian art history only started to develop in the late 1800s and preceded the emergence of Southeast Asian history as a separate academic discipline by over half a century. In recent years developments in the academic field such as postmodernism have had a significant impact on historiography which has flowed through to all branches of history. As Ankersmit writes "The essence of postmodernism is precisely that we should avoid pointing out essentialist

²⁵ This view is supported by Fräsch who notes in the draft of his forthcoming publication that Luce "stayed in touch with the political, statelike orientated historiography which worked according to Ranke's demand to 'describe things as they were' and confined accounts to facts as comprehensive as possible, might they be of epigraphic or iconographic nature. This sort of predominantly descriptive account, combines with a strong predilection for epigraphic sources, can be found among his students and colleagues in the *Burma Historical Commission*, especially U Than Tun and Bohmu (Colonel) Ba Shin, later U Tin Htway as well." T. Fräsch, *Pagan. City and State*, Introduction: The State of Research, 2006. The final draft of Fräsch's book, due for release in late 2006 by Orchid Books has been kindly made available by the author. *Pagan. City and State* brings together much of Fräsch's research on the Bagan period. I thank Dr Fräsch for allowing me to cite from the manuscript. As page numbers will change in the final publication, the text will be referenced according to chapter and section headings.

²⁶ References to changes in images can be found throughout the text in *OBEP*, but there is no discrete discussion of trends associated with stylistic change. Luce's chapter on iconography relates imagery to earlier examples from, for example, India, but does not delve into internal trends. *OBEP* 1:130-227.

²⁷ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 1568 (New York: Abrams, reprint 1977).

patterns in the past".²⁸ Histories purported to be based on "facts" are no longer accepted without question. It is now acknowledged that all history is written from a particular viewpoint and based on a set of assumptions. An example noted by Chutintaranond in reference to the history of the important port cities of Mergui and Tenasserim, "The history...was reconstructed and brought to light under the preconception that throughout their history they had been inevitably ruled by the kings of either Siam or Burma before the arrival of Imperial Britain".²⁹ This assertion, made by the colonizing power, immediately labeled the two cities as age-old combatants, falling into line with more recent historical events that identify Burma and Thailand as "enemies". However, this has little historical accuracy and is just one illustration of how history can be written to serve a particular purpose.³⁰

Another development within historiography has been the identification of agencies. Agency is a term used to describe any event, person or situation that has caused change or can be identified as being a component that resulted in an identifiable change. Within the broadest context, an example of agency is Buddhism in the context of its introduction to Burma. Buddhism provided a basis from which other changes and developments flowed. This is an example of agency on a large scale, but the concept can be equally applied to smaller changes. At Bagan, for example, Shin Araham, a Mon Buddhist monk who is purported to have arrived in Bagan around 1055, can be considered an agency. A history of the early Bagan period could be written from a perspective that revolves around his arrival and subsequent influence on the development of Burmese Buddhism. The idea of agency in the study of Southeast Asian art offers many possibilities.³¹ By focusing on agencies and their subsequent

²⁸ F.R. Ankersmit, "Historiography and Post-Modernism." *History and Theory* 28(1989), 151.

²⁹ Sunait Chutintaranond, "Mergui and Tenasserim as Leading Port Cities in the Context of Autonomous History", *IAS Monographs No.053* (Bangkok: Chulalongkhorn University, 1998), 1.

³⁰ Until colonial rule Mergui and Tenasserim enjoyed relative independence from Burma and Thailand. The region fell under the control of the Mon of southern Burma and western Thailand. The notion that the Burmese and Thai have been sworn enemies since earliest times is a myth. The first Thai kingdom was Sukhothai which emerged in the mid 13th century in north central Thailand. This corresponded with the collapse of the Bagan kingdom in Burma. There were no fixed boundaries separating Thailand and Burma until the colonial period, when Burma finally succumbed to British rule in 1885/86. Asserting a long-time animosity between the Burmese and Thai served a broader political purpose with the colonizers seeking a good relationship with the Thai.

³¹ For an overview of the role of Southeast Asian agencies can have in the study of the region's history see Craig Reynolds, "A New Look at Old Southeast Asia", *Journal of Asian Studies* 54.2 (1995):430-435.

influence on artistic developments there is great potential for broadening our understanding of changes and shifts in styles, media and iconography.

Inauspicious Beginnings for Art History and Burma

As noted earlier, Burmese archaeological studies, from which art historical research evolved, were not considered a priority for the British and indeed, Burma was not the easiest of places in which to undertake research. Those who found themselves in Burma talked of great hardship and discomfort.³² Travel was difficult and the rewards, in terms of objects that could be removed to their home countries for study, sale and profit, were often considered not worthy of the intense effort required to obtain them. For those who ventured to Bagan the journey was usually considered worthwhile, but the site was still a fundamentally different to any other in Asia. Rather than finding massive structures like Angkor Wat and the Bayon in Cambodia, the Ajanta or Elephanta caves in India or Borobudur in Java, Bagan yielded a unique vision of thousands of temples, large and small, scattered over a vast plain.

Yet this sight, considered today one of the world's most significant living cultural landscapes, often failed to impress. One of the earliest British emissaries to Burma, Michael Symes, led a diplomatic mission to the court of Inwa in 1795. Traveling by boat on the Irrawaddy River he remarked when passing Bagan:

Leaving the temple at Logah-nundah, we approached the once magnificent city of Pagahm. We could see little more from the river than a few straggling houses, which have the appearance of having once been a connected street; in fact, scarcely anything remains of ancient Pagahm, except its numerous moulding temples, and the vestiges of an old brick fort, the ramparts of which are still to be traced.³³

Such an account did little to inspire intrepid explorers to Bagan. The location of the Burmese capital, whether at Bagan, Inwa, Mandalay or Yangon has always been fairly remote, and travel to any capital was arduous. Few Western

³² Many examples are noted by G. Abbott, *The Traveller's History of Burma* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 1998). While this book is not intended as an academic text interpreting the views of Europeans who traveled to Burma, Abbott draws on reports from various emissaries, missionaries and travelers, and as such his referenced narrative is an introductory overview of type of interactions that occurred between foreigners and the Burmese from the 15th to 20th centuries.

³³ Michael Symes, *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava Sent by the Governor-General of India in the Year 1795* (Reprint New Delhi: Asian Educational Series, 1995), 265.

travelers of the late 19th century found anything to capture their ongoing interest or encourage others to make the journey to Burma, let alone its ancient sites. Even Thomann, a German adventurer who cut many frescos from Bagan temples and removed Buddhist artifacts for potential sale was unable to generate much interest in these unusual works on his return to Europe in the late 1890s.³⁴

Some determined scholars did, however, make their way to remote locations in Burma and their published work formed the foundations of Southeast Asian archaeological and historical research. Descriptions of the art and architecture of Southeast Asia first occurred in the journals of the many societies established under the auspices of the colonising powers.³⁵ The *Archaeological Survey of India* included reports on sites in the Himalayas and Burma as well as India. The vast majority of articles published in these journals were archaeological – reports of site excavations, comments on architectural methods and translations of inscriptions. All of these were crucial in establishing a Western knowledge base of the region. Articles specifically concerned with art history were very rare. Indeed, it was only in the early 20th century that journals specialising in the study of Asian art were established.³⁶ Studies addressing iconographic interpretations, stylistic changes and chronologies steadily increased but the principal focus remained on the Asian region's largest countries, namely India and China. Research on Southeast Asian art remained a neglected area and in

³⁴ Some of Thomann's stolen frescos were sold to the Hamburg Volkerkunde Museum. The events were recorded by K.J. Whitbread and extracts from his notes appear in the following article. Ba Shin, K.J. Whitbread, G.H. Luce et al, "Pagan, Wetkyi-in Kubyauk-gyi, An Early Burmese Temple With Ink Glosses," 167-69.

³⁵ These included the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, *Journal of the Burma Research Society* and the *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient*. The Royal Asiatic Society was founded in 1823 under the patronage of George IV, the *Journal of the Burma Research Society* was first published in 1911 and the *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient* in 1901. Many of the early articles were concerned with India and China, rather than Southeast Asia specifically, though French scholars were also publishing on the "discovery" of Angkor Wat and the surrounding monuments. *Archaeological Survey of India* reports, which covered Burma, were first published in 1861. The *Journal of the Siam Society*, based in Bangkok, was first published in 1904 and provided a focus more directly associated with Southeast Asia.

³⁶ *Archives of Asian Art* was first published in 1945, *Marg* in 1947. Asian art did feature occasionally in *Burlington Magazine*, directed at connoisseurs, published since 1903. Societies for the study of aspects of Asian Art, such as Chinese porcelain were established and frequently produced their own newsletters and journals. For example, the *Journal of the American Ceramic Society*, first published in 1918.

these early years, art historical remarks were usually simplistic and, as can now be shown, often wrong.³⁷

While the discipline of Asian art history is an established academic field no model for a cohesive approach towards its study has yet evolved. The more conventional manner promotes the Indianisation of Southeast Asia and Indo-China models. This method focuses on India and China and their influence on the rest of Asia, suggesting that artistic and other cultural developments in the latter were fundamentally affected by these historically dominant cultures. The other approach is to start from within the country concerned, establish some type of linear development for artistic change and then assess where the impetus for this change may have come from. This second approach allows for integration of research from all disciplines and while this methodology is integral to the study of Western art history, a cross-disciplinary approach has taken some time to become a popular method for the study of Asian and more specifically, Southeast Asian art history. This model, however, is also problematic when applied to the study of Southeast Asian art history. Western art history relies heavily on the linear development of the artistic tradition, with all art movements being branches of a continuum which can trace its origins to the civilisations of Ancient Greece and Rome. This provides a firm foundation from which changes in artistic styles can happily evolve while maintaining links to a common past. Such an approach does not fit comfortably with our knowledge of Southeast Asian history and highlights the difficulties Western scholarship faces in dealing with models outside the conventional. Knowledge of Southeast Asian history is still remarkably fragmented and this influenced the way scholars approached the development of artistic traditions in Southeast Asia. When trying to study Asian art using a Western paradigm, the lack of continuity in our knowledge of Southeast Asia's history frustrates conventional approaches used to trace stylistic change.

The Burden of "Indianisation"

When Southeast Asian history emerged as an independent academic discipline during the 1950s, the majority of early writings were based around a premise

³⁷ Some of the early accounts of Bagan's art will be discussed in Chapter 1.

that Southeast Asian nation states were "Indianised".³⁸ This premise has proven very hard to shake, and has had a dramatic effect on Western understanding of Southeast Asian culture and history. The concept of Indianisation was embraced by art historians. Research focused on the links between Indian art historical periods and local styles, the inference being that Indian influence dominated artistic development rather than simply being a contributor to local change. Indianisation was very much a product of its time. During the periods of colonization in the 19th century, when academic research of Southeast Asia started in earnest, India and China were considered the most "civilized" of Asian countries. Their emergence as major powers paralleled the arrival of Western Imperial powers to the region during the 18th and 19th centuries. The organisation of power into a central controlling government, particularly in China, was a form of bureaucracy with which Western European envoys were able to relate. However, in Southeast Asia there were no such dominating powers. The region was under the control of many local rulers and this apparent fragmented control was interpreted by many Europeans as signifying a less developed form of civilisation.

As researchers started to investigate the ancient remains of Angkor in Cambodia and Bagan in Burma, their frame of reference was contemporaneous civilisation in India. The view that Indian travelers and traders helped the rulers of Bagan and Angkor develop highly organised court structures and notions of kingship that were entirely Indian-derived became the cornerstone for future research. The Indianisation of Southeast Asia was popularised by early Southeast Asian historians, most notably George Cœdès. His influential work titled *Les Etats Hindouises d'Indochine et d'Indonesie*, was translated into English as *The Indianised States of Southeast Asia*.³⁹ Cœdès' important work was immediately framed in a way that set a type of benchmark from which other academics developed their arguments.

³⁸ Cornell University was one of the first to establish a Southeast Asia program. In his forward to the department's *Data Paper no. 18* 1956, by Professor Heine-Geldern, Lauriston Sharp writes that Professor Heine-Geldern "...is clearly the doyen of all anthropologists specialising in the whole region to which he himself has helped attach the label of Southeast Asia". Even then the notion of a Southeast Asia was still developing.

³⁹ George Cœdès, *Les Etats Hindouises d'Indochine et d'Indonesie*, new edition 1964. Published as *The Indianised States of Southeast Asia*, S.B. Cowing, trans., (Honolulu: East-West Centre Press, 1968).

Another eminent scholar whose work laid the foundations for subsequent generations of scholars was D.G.E Hall. Hall's important work, *A History of South-East Asia*, was one of the first attempts to provide an integrated overview of Southeast Asian history.⁴⁰ He presents, chapter by chapter, concurrent events from Burma through to Indonesia and Vietnam, from earliest times to the nationalist periods post World War II. Hall's contribution to the knowledge of Southeast Asian history is indispensable. Drawing together innumerable sources he put forward an interrelated chronology that covered all regions and their kingdoms, along with suggestions regarding their development. Hall's approach at the time was, however, still India-centric. In his original forward of 1955 he writes "The early chapters of this book owe much to George Coédès's *Les États hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*, to which the highest tribute must be paid...".⁴¹ But approaches to Southeast Asian history were rapidly changing. Hall and Coédès based their work on an India-focused linear approach which emphasised the adoption of Indian models of kingship and social organisation by the existing cultures of Southeast Asia. As Aung-Thwin comments, Hall's work was a wonderful effort, but most students had no "contextual studies" on which to place the information.⁴²

The concept of Indianisation had a major impact on the way Southeast Asia's changing social environment was described. Mabbett used the Indian term *mandala* to describe the move away from small agrarian communities to large centralised courts.⁴³ The Sanskrit term *mandala* describes a basic concept in Buddhism and Hinduism relating to the structure of the universe.⁴⁴ The *mandala* image associated with major temples and buildings had a fixed centre but the boundaries were fluid, expanding and contracting. The centres of city *mandalas* were usually located at strategic points such as river junctions or gateways to fertile valleys. In Burma this concept of city *mandalas* has been applied to the

⁴⁰ First published in 1955, D.G.E.Hall's *A History of South-East Asia* (London: Macmillan Press), is currently in its fourth edition.

⁴¹ Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, xxviii.

⁴² M.Aung-Thwin, "Spirals in Early Southeast Asian and Burmese History", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (1991): 583.

⁴³ I.W. Mabbett, "Kingship in Angkor", *Journal of the Siam Society* 60 (1978):1-58.

⁴⁴ The meaning of *mandala* is complex. The basic form, usually a central circle surrounded by squares represents the structure of the universe. There are innumerable variations of *mandala* – in Buddhism paintings of *mandala* are objects of ritual worship and are designed to represent specific deities. Hindu belief has the *mandala* as the "mountain used by the gods for the churning of the milk ocean...", J. Knappert, *An Encyclopedia of Myth and Legend. Indian Mythology* (London: Diamond Books 1995):165.

early Pyu settlements of Srikshetra, Hmawza, Maungun and Beikthano.⁴⁵

Following this model, the greatest *mandala* could be conceived as being centred at Bagan. In the context of Southeast Asia the fluidity of the *mandala*'s boundaries can be interpreted as representing cultural changes, rather than territorial conquests or defeats. The most influential cultural change on the presence of city *mandalas* appears to be the waxing and waning of Buddhist or Hindu influence.⁴⁶ This example is an illustration of how pervasive the concept of Indianisation became, with attempts made to describe virtually all aspects of local society in an Indianised framework.

The problems of Indianisation are now well recognised. Even Hall himself later acknowledged that new approaches were needed in this field. By the time of his revised edition in 1981 Hall acknowledges that Coëdès wrote of Southeast Asia in a manner that clearly placed the origins of Southeast Asian culture and social organisation in India. Hall remarks:

...describing the periods up to 1511 as 'The Decline of the Hindu Kingdoms' and 'The end of the Hindu Kingdoms' one questions whether the use of such terms betrays a failure to observe the real nature of the political and cultural developments of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, namely, the fact that the leading peoples, not only of the Indo-Chinese peninsula, but in Indonesia also, were developing their own highly individual political systems and cultures. Their languages had long been used in inscriptions – a vast corpus – and had become the vehicles for literatures of no mean level. Indeed, what might look like an Indian superstructure was merely a façade. They were absorbing into their cultures various extraneous elements, Chinese and Indian, but at the same time adjusting them to their own requirements and outlook.... For whatever foreign cultural elements the South-East Asian peoples have adopted, they have made uniquely their own.⁴⁷

Hall's change of heart is a clear acknowledgement of the rapid change in approaches to history, and more importantly, of Western understanding of

⁴⁵ This is discussed by Stargardt, *The Ancient Pyu of Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990).

⁴⁶ Prapod Assavavirulhakarn, "The Ascendancy of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia," PhD diss. (University of California at Berkeley, 1990), 56.

⁴⁷ Hall, *History of South-East Asia*, xxiii-xxiv.

Southeast Asia's cultures. Even Coédès later conceded that the popularity of his terminology had some negative impact on subsequent historical writings.⁴⁸

By the late 20th century scholars were familiar with the implications Indianisation had on historical research and were looking for alternative ways of viewing Southeast Asia. As Ankersmit remarked in 1989, the volume of work written on the subject of historiography is so immense that it is impossible to read it all. He writes "we no longer have any texts, any past, just interpretations of them".⁴⁹ While this suggests a view that there is a negative side to this rapidly expanding field, for historians of Southeast Asia the re-investigation of history using various agencies as a central point of argument has produced a body of work that highlights the complexities of Southeast Asia. The process of Indianisation has been the first theory to be refuted in post-modernist historiography. Assavavirulhakarn, in describing the rise of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia, states that "Indianisation was never a solid, deliberate thing – it does, as a term, disregard indigenous aspects".⁵⁰ He sees Indianisation as "...the process of acculturation or rather cultural relations between India and Southeast Asia... As we observe facts in history we find out that at first Indian cultures seemed to exert strong influences in almost every fields [sic], but not before long the indigenous ones started to absorb, transform, blend both cultures into one that would show the local or regional characteristics...Indian cultures have never been felt by Southeast Asian people as something alien".⁵¹

These remarks reflect an opinion that Indian cultural elements were selectively adopted by Southeast Asian communities voluntarily and were not imposed, a view previously hinted at by Hall. Southeast Asia was never colonised by India and the adoption of Indian administrative and religious systems should be seen as a voluntary and selective process. Shaffer emphasises the impact of writing systems from India on Southeast Asia while also stressing the selective nature of the Indianisation process:

⁴⁸ Frederic Maurel, "The Work of George Coédès: Views of a Young man." *Journal of the Siam Society* 86 (1998): 235-238. Coédès was concerned with interpretation as well as translation and recognized that his use of the term Hinduisation could lead to a very narrow interpretation.

⁴⁹ Ankersmit, "Historiography and Post-Modernism," 137.

⁵⁰ Assavavirulhakarn, "The Ascendancy of Theravada Buddhism," 58.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 39, 41.

While it is true that Southeast Asian peoples were inspired by many Indian traditions, admiring them and borrowing freely from them, they remained their own masters: foreign material was usually reworked in their hands before being woven into a world of their design...Once they became acquainted with the Sanskrit writing system, with Sanskrit political terminology and texts, and with Indian religions, art and literature, they became creative participants in a larger cultural world.⁵²

These examples of more contemporary opinion regarding Indianisation all stress the selective adoption of various Indian systems by differing parts of Southeast Asia. There was indeed an Indianisation process; Brahmanic court rituals were adopted by local rulers and still play an important role in Southeast Asia today, Buddhism and Hinduism spread from India, administrative systems were adopted, design and engineering methods also spread throughout the region.⁵³

Traders were the key to the dissemination of Indian social and cultural practices, not only through their own influences, but through the religious followers who also traveled with them. Brahmanic rituals at the Khmer courts could only have been introduced by Brahmins, just as Buddhist monks spread the Buddhist doctrine. Of course, not all traders were Indian. The Malays had also mastered the monsoonal winds from as early as the first millennium BCE and traded goods from Africa through to China. The monsoon seasons meant sailors and traders would spend up to four months annually at ports in Southeast Asia – the winds moving westwards from around December to March and eastwards from around May to August.⁵⁴ By the early centuries CE, trading communities were established year-round in major ports and attracted

⁵² Lynda Shaffer, *Maritime Southeast Asia to 1500* (Armonk: E. Sharpe 1996), 25.

⁵³ Mabbett makes comment on the changing meaning of the term "Indianization", which was originally coined to describe "the result of whatever processes were responsible for the appearance outside India of Indian language and high culture. As such, the term was not the name of a theory; it was a label upon a fact. Yet in more recent writings we see that "Indianization" is no longer a datum to be accounted for; it has become a theory, or cluster of theories, that must be criticized". I.W.Mabbett, "The "Indianization" of Mainland Southeast Asia: a Reappraisal", in *Living a Life in Accord with the Dhamma: Papers in Honour of Professor Jean Boisselier on his Eightieth Birthday* (Bangkok: Silpakorn University, 1997): 343.

⁵⁴ Shaffer details the evidence for early trade between Africa, Madagascar, the Mediterranean and China in *Maritime Southeast Asia*. San Nyien discusses trade routes and early evidence of sea trade centred around the Malay archipelago in "Trans Peninsular Trade and Cross Regional Warfare Between the Maritime Kingdoms of Ayudhya and Pegu in the mid 16th century – mid 17th century," in *Port Cities and Trade in Western Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University 1998), 55-63.

permanent residents. Buddhist and Brahman priests also established permanent bases and built temples for worship, exposing the indigenous population to these rites and rituals.

In summary, Indianisation was widespread throughout Southeast Asia, but it was not the overriding Indianisation outlined by Coëdés. Rather, it was a slow acculturation brought about by traders and travelers. It does not imply a superiority of Indian culture and customs over indigenous ones. Nothing was adopted without local adaptation, and nowhere in Southeast Asia were any of these customs adopted in the same way. There were elements that were seen as useful and practical to local communities, especially in relation to ideas of kingship. Buddhist, Hindu and Brahmanic concepts of the universe endowed the king with particular powers in the physical and metaphysical worlds. These concepts were taken up to greater and lesser degrees throughout the region.⁵⁵ The impact of Indian culture on the development of Southeast Asia is always evident, from religious traditions through to architectural design. Over centuries the indigenous communities of Southeast Asia have integrated aspects of Indian culture into their own pre-existing traditions. The process has been gradual and made with the acceptance of local populations – not imposed, and not at the expense of local traditions.

Historiography and Burma – new approaches

As the field of Southeast Asian history rapidly expanded since the 1950s, specialist country scholars have emerged. With reference to Burma, one of the most prominent and often controversial historians is Aung-Thwin. Since completing his PhD dissertation *The Nature of State and Society at Pagan* in 1976, he has written a number of books and papers on Southeast Asian history, proposing a different approach to the analysis of the region's history.⁵⁶ One of Aung-Thwin's major contributions to the study of Southeast Asian history has been his development of the notion of history being a series of progressive spirals. He asserts that the use of a linear model of history, as occurs in

⁵⁵ Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*. Heine-Geldern outlines the relationship between the state and the universe. He comments on the relationships between cosmology, kingship and Buddhist, Hindu and Brahmanic rituals with specific reference to Cambodia and Burma.

⁵⁶ Michael Aung-Thwin, *The Nature of State and Society at Pagan: An Institutional History of 12th and 13th century Burma* (PhD diss., University of Michigan 1976).

Western history, is not applicable to Southeast Asia as the region has not shown continual linear progression.⁵⁷ Aung-Thwin states that the study of early Southeast Asian history "has crystallised around two central issues: the origins of Southeast Asia as a distinct cultural and political unit and the nature of state and society in Southeast Asia. The debate over these two issues has resulted in an apparently irresolvable structural and analytical 'contradictions'. Did external or internal influences shape the origins of Southeast Asia? Were the Southeast Asian states "despotic", "cellular", "*mandalas*" or "theatres" in form? Were kings perceived as gods or as men?".⁵⁸ Aung-Thwin proposes that:

...many of these "contradictions" arose because analyses were not multidisciplinary. Historians focused mainly on events and the issues of continuity and change, whereas anthropologists were concerned with function and structural relationships. Political scientists searched for loci of power, usually between rulers and the ruled. And economists and geographers stressed the role of eco-demographic environments... Western experiences of scholars (and hence their perception of the world) were consciously or subconsciously carried into the study of Southeast Asia. Most serious was the assumption that societies move in a linear, progressive manner—a belief virtually universal in nineteenth-century Europe and twentieth-century America, when our modern disciplines were created.⁵⁹

Compartmentalisation of disciplines causes additional problems for researchers due to the underlying historical patterns that have occurred in early Southeast Asia. The pattern has not been that of Western civilisation, based on an assumption of continual linear progression. The model of linear progression assumes that over time there is continual change. The effect of catastrophic events, whether natural disasters such as plagues or earthquakes or the man-made chaos of conquest and war will affect these events, causing lasting and continual change, both socioeconomic and cultural.⁶⁰ However, the end result is still essentially linked with the past and some type of forward progress and development is made.

⁵⁷ Aung-Thwin, "Spirals in Early Southeast Asian and Burmese History," 578-80.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 576-77.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 578-79.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 580.

In Southeast Asia, Aung-Thwin argues this type of linear progression has not occurred. Rather, events are more like a forward moving spiral. He suggests the use of the word "cycles" to describe the historical events of Southeast Asia provides a much more useful framework from which to analyse the past.⁶¹ Aung-Thwin provides examples to support his theory. While his examples specifically relate to economic or commercial cycles his model is equally applicable to artistic developments and change. He describes the factors which have resulted in cycles of economic prosperity and ruin, from the time of Pyu domination in Burma (from around the 3rd–9th century) to the Burman rise to power at Bagan (11th–14th centuries), followed by the change of central power from the Ava Kingdom which was overrun by the Shan in the 15th century. A pattern of gaining economic superiority and then losing control of the agrarian heartland is repeated over and over.⁶²

A linear model of history is particularly problematic when the Bagan period is viewed as the high point of cultural achievement in Burma's history. The level of central administrative control exerted during the Bagan period over most of modern-day Burma was not repeated for over 800 years, until current times. Rather, Burma's history includes long periods that revolve around the rise and fall of numerous smaller kingdoms which are not easily defined. Within the discipline of history, organised systems of administration are well understood since they are accompanied by other known signs of a developed civilisation such as irrigation systems and large scale food production methods. Historical periods that fall outside of these parameters "have been of little interest to historians".⁶³ In Burma, change was not considered the same as progress. Buddhist philosophy acknowledges that change was inevitable but not necessarily progressive or regressive, just different.⁶⁴

In summary, the historical cycles of Burma have revolved around an expansion and contraction of the same systems, rather than a linear model of change. Recovery from collapse "inevitably meant, however, the resurrection of past

⁶¹ Ibid., 583.

⁶² Ibid., 588-92.

⁶³ Ibid., 597.

⁶⁴ Even fundamental Buddhist beliefs disregard the concept of inevitable forward progression. The concepts of re-birth are not based on the notion that a being will be re-born in a form that is closer to the attainment of *nirvana*. Indeed, if one has not followed the key precepts during one existence, they may be reborn at a lower level, or remain at the same point depending on the amount of *karma* they have accumulated.

relationships, especially that between the church and the state, the quintessential form of legitimisation in Burmese history".⁶⁵ As this quotation suggests, Aung-Thwin's theories are also critically interrelated with the role of organised religion in Burma. The Buddhist *sangha*, the monkhood, is absolutely and fundamentally interwoven within Burma's culture and has been since at least the 5th century. Buddhism has been the one single continuing thread that weaves through the history of Burma in a way that parallels the role of Christianity in Western history. Nowhere else in Southeast Asia has a single religion dominated since the beginnings of the historical era. India has been Vedic, Brahmanic, Buddhist, and now Hindu. Cambodia alternated between Buddhist, Saivite and Vaisnavite beliefs, though is now principally Buddhist, while in Indonesia, one religion never dominated the whole region though at times rulers supported Buddhism and Hinduism and now the predominating religion is Islam. In Burma, Buddhism has remained the principle religious influence for over one thousand years. Regardless of the cycles of war and shifts of power, all rulers sought the legitimisation that Buddhism could give them. Each ruler demonstrated his Buddhist faith to a greater or lesser degree and this was done through the making of merit, primarily in the form of building and dedicating temples to the Buddha.

A Note on Taxonomy and Burmese Buddhist Art

With Buddhism's long-standing presence in Burma, from at least the 4th century CE, Buddhist sculptures provide the most continuous visual link between the past and the present. Western art historical methodologies suggest that patterns of social change can be identified through changes in these sculptural representations. However, for the beginning scholar, bringing this approach to Southeast Asian art and trying to gain an overview of the evolution of the Buddha image is very difficult, not only because information is scarce, but also because it is presented in a fragmented way.

The taxonomy associated with the classification of Burmese art is very confusing, related no doubt to the way in which objects have been discovered. Due to the very patchy physical evidence of society in Burma prior to the 11th century, early objects have tended to be classified by ethnic group or location.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 592-93.

For example, the Pyu artifacts found near Srikshestra and the early art of Arakan are known simply as Pyu style images or Arakan style. Such classifications, while perhaps appropriate for their time, are rendered almost useless when trying to follow changing styles. The Pyu cease to exist as a distinct ethnic group after the rise of Burman power at Bagan in the 11th century while Arakan refers to a geographic location which produced art of a distinctive style for many centuries.⁶⁶

After the Pyu style images of the 5th–9th centuries, there is an art historical void with few objects being dated to the 9th–10th centuries. The next period of identifiable artistic endeavour occurs during the Bagan period (1044–1287). The stylistic trends of the Bagan era have been characterized by Luce as falling in to three periods or phases – Early, Middle and Late. No reference is made to a cultural group, the taxonomy is based on a place and historical time frame. As such, there is no immediate connection between the preceding artistic forms associated with the Pyu, and the art of the Bagan period even though Bagan is now acknowledged to have been a Pyu site.⁶⁷ While Luce's decision to group Bagan art into phases sets up a disjunction with the past, there is some logic in his decision which reflects the complexity of Burma's history. The integration of cultural influences is the dominant feature of Bagan's development. To try and categorise artistic developments under the umbrella of one cultural group would fail to reflect the complex interactions that occurred during the period.

As the authority of Bagan weakened, and following the brief but chaotic presence of the Mongols, the Shan began their rise to prominence. One Shan ruler established Inwa as the royal city and it became the capital of Upper Burma. It was modeled on the pattern of the Burman city of Bagan and essentially became Burman in character. The Burmans also established a centre at Taungoo while the Mon at Bago controlled much of the south. The period from the fall of Bagan until the 1550s was characterised by infighting amongst the Shan and battles against the Mon in the south.⁶⁸ Sculptural

⁶⁶ See P. Gutman, *Burma's Lost Kingdoms: Splendours of Arakan* (Trumbull: Weatherhill Inc), 2001. Art historically Arakan developed largely independently from the rest of Burma. Isolated geographically by the Yoma mountain range, prior to British occupation Arakan can arguably be shown to have had closer links to India than to the rest of Burma. Indeed, the Burmese and Arakanese kingdoms were often in conflict.

⁶⁷ The history of Bagan is discussed in Chapter 1

⁶⁸ Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 171-81.

remains from this period are few, no doubt due in the most part to the destruction war caused. To place the Buddhist sculptures of this period in some sort of model which recognises that artistic developments were still occurring is to accept that history in the region is characterised by periods of unity then division. Art historically, the decline of Bagan was followed by a fragmentation of artistic styles reflecting the centres of control, namely that of the Shan in the north, the Shan and Burmese at Inwa and Taungoo and the Mon in the south at Bago. Art historical research has identified styles based on these ethnic centers with images being known as Shan style and Inwa style along with a southern identifiable Mon style.⁶⁹ Again, this has had the effect of distancing art of this era from the preceding Bagan period. The question then focuses on how to relate a late Bagan period image to, for example, a Shan style figure.⁷⁰

After the diverging artistic styles of the 14th–15th centuries, the 16th–18th centuries saw a convergence towards two fundamental forms, often referred to as a Shan style and a Burmese style. Again, these terms relate to the ethnic groups who controlled the regions from which the styles emerged and the terminology offers no chronological assistance. Even though this era was punctuated by invasion, defeat and victory, two hundred years is a significant period of history, and changes in artistic styles are poorly documented and rarely discussed in any historical literature. Reports on Buddha images made during this time tend to concentrate on descriptive details rather than on trying to incorporate the image into a broader context. The available images are usually of the smaller Buddha type found in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.⁷¹ However, it is at this point that the Buddhist art of Burma was entering its current phase.

⁶⁹ While art historians identify an Inwa style and a Mon and Bago style of image, the type of Buddha images produced by the Burmese court at Taungoo are all but unrecognized. Given that the Burmese were in control of the region from about 1347-1539, it is remarkable that so little attention has been given to the artistic developments of this period and region. This is even more extraordinary given that the Burmese went on to defeat the Mon at Bago to gain control of the Mon kingdom.

⁷⁰ The issue of taxonomy in relation to Burmese Buddhist imagery is discussed in further detail in C. Galloway in *To Be Burmese is to Be Buddhist. The Evolution of the Buddha Image in Burma* (Honours thesis, ANU, 1997) and "Changing Times – Changing Visions. The Evolution of the Buddha image in Burma", *Myanmar Two Millennia*, conference proceedings (15-17 December 1999, Universities Historical Research Centre, Yangon) 4:27-37.

⁷¹ The Pitt Rivers Museum collection includes a number of small Burmese bronzes. Original catalogue details only became publicly available in 2004. This is an on-line resource www.prm.ox.ac.uk/databases

Following the unification of the kingdom of Burma under Alaungpaya in 1752, the country entered another period of stability and strength reminiscent of the great Bagan era. One of the most noteworthy events was the sacking of the Thai capital of Ayutthaya. This led to the introduction of Thai court practices along with large numbers of Thai artisans to the Burmese kingdom. The influence of Thai style on Burmese art saw the Burmese taste move towards elaborate and intricately worked decorative effects which appeared on almost all forms of art objects, from woodcarvings to lacquerwork, and also to the Buddha images. These were now frequently highly decorated with glass mosaics, and finely wrought royal attire.

The next one hundred years again saw great upheaval. While the Burmese lost control of Thai territory after a decade, they were able to gain control of Arakan and brought the Mahamuni image to Mandalay.⁷² This victory set in motion a series of events which led to the beginnings of the Anglo-Burmese wars. An uneasy peace was in place during the reign of King Mindon (1853–1878) who oversaw a revival of the Burmese Buddhist traditions of old. It was during his reign that a new distinctive style of Buddha image emerged which has come to be known the Mandalay style. It is this style of image which can best be fully discussed in a multidisciplinary way, with concomitant knowledge on politics, economics and social history. Issues such as the use of art as a political statement or as a means of defining cultural identity can be investigated and may help explain the emergence of such a distinctive form of artistic expression.

Summary

Bagan is a major source of the world's Buddhist art. It has, however, been a neglected area of art historical study, not through lack of significance but through circumstance. The relative lack of continuity in the study of Burmese history has seen scholars across all fields grapple with material written during Burma's time as part of the British Empire while trying to pick up the threads of Burma research in earnest during the late 20th century.

For art historians the problem has been compounded by a Theravada bias which is reflected in many of the early archaeological reports. These early

⁷² The Mahamuni image is one of the most venerated in Burma. Currently housed at the Mahamuni pagoda in Mandalay, it has a checkered history. For an overview of the Mahamuni legend see P.Gutman. *Burma's Lost Kingdoms. Splendours of Arakan*, 30-33.

accounts of Burma's archaeological treasures were written by researchers heavily influenced by the rise in interest in Buddhist studies, particularly Pali studies, and this resulted in commentary that assumed a direct link between Bagan's early art and a particular view of Theravada Buddhism.⁷³ As a result, a Theravada bias is nearly always present and interpretations of imagery were based, as Snodgrass concludes, on a selective view of Theravada doctrine, which saw fundamental assumptions being made regarding Buddhist art that were simply wrong.⁷⁴ Later, the concept of Indianisation had a profound effect on historical research and this influence also extended to art history. At Bagan, the concept of Indianisation resulted in a focus on the Indian Pala dynasty (c.700–1200 CE) as the prevailing influence on Bagan's sculptural tradition. As will be shown, like a Theravada bias, this assumption saw alternative cultural influences sidelined.⁷⁵

Through a review of early Bagan's sculpture in light of an expanded view of Buddhism and a moderated effect of Indianisation, the impact of a wider range of cultural influences on Bagan's artistic expression can be considered. Through this process a number of key events that are accepted as part of Burma's history will be scrutinized and it will be shown that changes in the appearance of the Buddha image can be used to support or refute historical records that are based on non-contemporaneous accounts. The resultant stylistic chronology provides a firm foundation from which subsequent studies of Bagan period sculpture can develop.

⁷³ The Pali Text Society was founded in England in and published the works of many of these pioneering researchers. The forward and afterward to The Pali Text Society's Pali dictionary provides some fine introductory comments regarding Pali scholarship of the period. *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, T.W.Rhys Davids and W.Stede (eds.) 1921-25 (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, reprint 1998).

⁷⁴ There are complex reasons for the assertion during this important period in Burmese history that the Burmese supported and upheld the Theravada tradition and rejected Mahayana Buddhism, which concern fundamental relationships with national and cultural identity. Historically the Burmese have positioned themselves as the spiritual homeland of pure Theravada Buddhism, and this became the central focus for Burmese political unity during the later years of British rule. European scholars of the time were no doubt introduced to Burmese history by locals who were fervent followers of a strict Theravada *sangha*. See Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 770-88.

⁷⁵ While it is now recognised that the effect of Indianisation has been overstated, clearly the Buddhist and Hindu art of Asia, including Southeast Asia, originally derived from Indian models. As the home of Buddhism and Hinduism, India was the place where the religions' anthropomorphic images originated and its repertoire of symbols and iconography developed.

Chapter 1 Histories and Narratives – the Origins of Bagan and its Art

The argument of this thesis assumes there were very particular premises from which Burmese art historical scholarship has arisen. The first concerns the acceptance by many early researchers of Burmese history, particularly as it relates to Bagan, as told in various local chronicles. The chronicles provided the framework for these early Western and local scholars undertaking research and excavations in the region. The key elements of Bagan's history as told in the chronicles remained largely unquestioned until the mid 1990s. During the last decade there have been major developments in archaeological and historical research, and what is emerging is a potential major rewriting of Bagan's early history.¹ The second premise is the assumption that these early researchers were also working in an environment so dominated by the Theravada tradition that this coloured their interpretation of the Buddhist imagery found at Bagan. The terms Theravada and Mahayana were used extensively in early scholarly writing to characterize iconographic features, and this only served to narrow the interpretation of Buddhism and reinforce a Theravada paradigm. Recent studies which shall be discussed query such a division, and the use of these terms requires clarification. A Theravada bias is also closely linked to the Mon paradigm which has recently been put forward by Aung-Thwin, and must be discussed in the context of this thesis.² The third is the acceptance of a chronology of Bagan's temples which underpins the stylistic chronology proposed in Chapter 5. Prior to Luce the dating of temples had largely been through a combination of architectural assessment combined with "local knowledge", and these chronologies fed directly into the dating of Buddhist imagery.

¹ The breadth of papers presented at recent conferences has been remarkable for its diversity. The 50th Anniversary conference of the Myanmar Historical Commission, held in Yangon in January 2005 brought together scholars from across the globe. Discussions relating to Bagan included narrative art, the role of the river at Bagan, new finds of inscriptions and other artifacts, and preservation of architecture. There is a very healthy dialogue between Western and Burmese scholars at present which we can only hope will continue.

² See M. Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña*.

Along with these assumptions, this thesis draws on Bagan's narrative sculptures to conclude that Buddhist influence from both the Mahayana and Theravada streams were present during this formative phase. The dominant theme of the visual imagery of the Bagan period is one of narrative, in particular illustrations of the Buddha's life. The role of narrative in the Buddhist art of Burma is extremely strong. There has been an assumption that imagery is almost exclusively linked to the Theravada school of Buddhism, however, there are many versions of the Buddha's life story, arising from differing streams of Buddhism. The origins of these stories and their role in the art history of early Bagan are discussed.

The Glass Palace Chronicle – a Key Factor

There are many local Burmese chronicles telling of Burma's founding and history. The better known chronicles include the *Jatatopum*, written in the reign of Minye-kyadin (1673-1698), the *Maha-ya-zawin-gyi*, written by U Kala around 1730 and the *Hmannan Yazawin*, compiled during the reign of King Bagyidaw (r.1819–1837), and better known to us through translation as *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*.³ When Duroiselle was undertaking excavations at Bagan in the early 1900s under the auspices of the British government through the Archaeological Survey of India, finds were put into a very particular historical context. The prevailing Burmese history of the day drew on *The Glass Palace Chronicle* which gives an account of the Burmese dynasties from prior to the Bagan period through to the end of the Bagan era. The *GPC* draws a continuous link from Burma's great historical kings back to those of the Sakya people of northern India, Gotama Buddha's clan family. King Bagyidaw appointed a committee of learned men to write a chronicle of the Burmese kings using all available sources. More than ten local chronicles and numerous inscriptions all contributed to the final compilation:

Being convinced that a chronicle of kings should be the standard, a balance, so to speak, for all matters of religion, and not a thing full of

³ Pe Maung Tin and G. Luce, trans., *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*. Subsequent references will be noted as *GPC*. Pe Maung Tin reviews the chronicles incorporated into the *GPC*, xiii-xxi. A comprehensive overview Burmese chronicles is also given by B. Hudson, "The Origins of Bagan. The archaeological landscape of Upper Burma to AD 1300" (PhD diss., University of Sydney 2004), 23-35. The chronicles are also discussed by Frasch, *Pagan: City and State*, Chapter 1.

conflicting and false statements, he assembled his ministers and ecclesiastical teachers ... and caused the chronicle to be purified by comparing it to other chronicles and a number of inscriptions each with the other, and adopting the truth in the light of reason and the traditional books.⁴

The *GPC* was the end result of the learned scholars' endeavours. Given King Bagydwaw's often very violent disposition, however, a certain colouring of the truth may have been in the best interests of the writers.⁵ There are obvious fanciful elements throughout the accounts in the *GPC* that are all too easy to dismiss but they should be carefully considered within their cultural context along with details that can be corroborated by other sources. A mix of fact overlaid with fictitious elements is a common feature of Southeast Asian chronicles.⁶ Remarking on the early historical content of the *Mahavamsa*, the Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka, Geiger notes that while some on the content appears fanciful, overall he finds "that their statements are not absolutely untenable and are at least worthy of being tested".⁷ The *GPC* should be interpreted in a similar manner, with the reader searching for the factual threads which underpinned this version of Burmese history. The miraculous events that accompany the birth and death of all kings are, for example, a reflection of the deeply held belief that the king is not like an ordinary human, having undergone many cycles of rebirth before being reborn as an earthly ruler. Also underpinning the colourful account is a thread of historical continuity which has some basis in fact. As more physical evidence comes to light it should become

⁴ Ibid, ix.

⁵ King Bagydwaw's mental health deteriorated during his reign and he was subject to bouts of violent rage. This was a turbulent period in Burmese history, with the Burmese losing the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1825, and the Treaty of Yandabo signed with the British early in 1826. See Hall, *History of South-East Asia*, 625-41.

⁶ Throughout Southeast Asia there are many local chronicles that are embellished and superimpose an extremely positive fanciful history on top of a chronology that is fundamentally sound. For example, the Chiang Mai Chronicle, which is concerned with the history of the Chiang Mai region, traces a royal lineage from the Buddha's time. Much of the chronicle's history prior to the 13th century is difficult to authenticate, but from this point on, there are other sources that can corroborate many of the historical events outlined. See D.K. Wyatt and Aroonrut Wichienkeo, trans., *The Chiang Mai Chronicle* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1998). In Sri Lanka, their kings were also believed to be descendants of the Sakya clan, legitimising their role as upholders of the Theravada Buddhism tradition. The story of the origins of the Sri Lankan kings is detailed in the *Mahavamsa*, verses 8-10.

⁷ Geiger and Bode, trans., *The Mahavamsa or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, 1912 (reprint Colombo" Ceylon Government Information Department, 1960), xx.

possible to support some of the historical scenarios that at present appear in an exaggerated form in the *GPC*.

The impact of the *GPC* on historical research has been profound. As Stadtner notes, the *GPC* is "The single most influential source shaping our interpretations of Pagan".⁸ Being as it was the most recently written and locally accepted version of Burmese history, Duroiselle and his colleagues worked within the framework of this document. Events detailed by the *GPC* which are said to have occurred during Anawrahta's and Kyanzittha's reigns include the building of temples, the arrival of Shin Araham, abolition of the heretical Ari priests, interactions with the Sri Lankan king, and journeys to Tarop country (Yunnan) and Srikshetra, these journeys being connected to quests to obtain relics of the Buddha.

The *GPC* guided scholars in a number of directions. The narrative of the *GPC* continued to be supported by published western accounts which accepted the key events such as Anawrahta's conquest of Thaton, and his role as promoter of the Theravada religion.⁹ Anawrahta's expansionist campaigns, his sacking of cities such as Srikshetra and Thaton under the guise of bringing relics and sculptures to Bagan for the betterment of the Buddhist religion are the focus of the *GPC*'s commentary of his reign. The *GPC*'s commentary of Kyanzittha's reign concentrates on his consolidation of the religion, his temple building at Bagan and other merit making activities.¹⁰ This has resulted in scholarly research being underpinned by a few particular events, with very little evidence corroborative evidence to suggest they even occurred. The question remains, how valid are these core elements and did they unwittingly set historians along

⁸ D.Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan. Buddhist Plain of Merit* (Bangkok: River Books, 2005), 21.

⁹ There are many examples of well regarded texts that supported these views of history, for example, A. Phayre, *History of Burma including Burma Proper, Pegu, Taungu, Tenasserim, and Arakan. From Earliest Times to the End of the First War with British India* 1883 (Bangkok: Orchid Press, reprint 1998). Quaritch Wales accepts that "Aniruddha first obtained the Buddhist scriptures from Thaton", *Early Burma – Old Siam. A comparative commentary* (London: Bernard Quaritch Ltd, 1973), 18.

¹⁰ Interestingly, no mention is made of Kyanzittha sending a mission to restore the Bodhgaya temple at Benares, an event which can be corroborated and will be discussed in the context of Kyanzittha's sculptures. The only mention of this site occurs when Shin Araham was "going to worship at Mahabodhi", referring to the temple at Bodhgaya. *GPC*, 105. There is a Mahabodhi temple at Bagan but it was not built until the 13th century.

a path that is based on fiction rather than fact?¹¹ As will be shown through the forthcoming sculptural analysis, the answer may in part be found through Bagan's complex art.

Histories of Bagan

On the edge of the Irrawaddy River in the Dry Zone of Upper Burma, Bagan is now synonymous with the vast plain that is studded with more than two thousand Buddhist shrines and temples (fig.1, fig.2).¹² Through circumstances that still remain unclear, Bagan emerged as the thriving capital city of the Burmese rulers during the 11th–13th centuries. Before its rise to prominence as one of the leading Southeast Asian kingdoms of its day, Bagan was most likely a modest village inhabited for possibly centuries.

The Founding of Bagan

Prior to Luce's publication of *OBEP*, there was little to be said about Bagan's origins. Establishing a "real" history of Bagan's early days is still difficult, being hampered by the lack of inscriptions dating from Bagan's formative period, during the reign of Anawrahta. While there are many inscriptions from the Bagan period most date from the late 11th century onwards. These inscriptions are the most important source of information regarding the Bagan empire. Unfortunately, when many of the inscriptions were removed from Bagan and transferred to Amarapura under King Bodawpaya's direction in the late 18th

¹¹ Tun Aung Chain's remarks that the *GPC*'s style of translation "assumes the character of a historical romance, more to be enjoyed as literature than to be studied for the purposes of history", "Pe Maung Tin and Luce's *Glass Palace Revisited*", in *U Pe Maung Tin – a tribute* (Yangon: Universities Historical Research Centre, 1999): 60. However, the author is complimentary of the overall accuracy of the translated text noting that Pe Maung Tin was well aware of the inherent problems of dating the inscriptions and other records that were used to compile to *GPC*. It must be acknowledged also that due to financial constraints at the time of publication Pe Maung Tin was unable to include the extensive notes he made cross-referencing the various chronicles, an outcome which was very disappointing for him, as he readily acknowledged the resulting publication lacked this additional scholarly element. *GPC*, x. Key aspects of the *GPC* are critiqued by Maung Htin Aung in an extensive review, *Burmese History Before 1287: A Defence of the Chronicles* (Oxford: The Asoka Society, 1970). The author makes a number of very specific and technical remarks regarding the principal events highlighted in the *GPC*, however, there is a strong focus on criticising Luce's observations relating to Burmese chronicles which were published throughout his long career. While Maung Htin Aung makes some interesting points, these lose their impact in this article as the reader dodges the unrelenting negative tone of the comments.

¹² The classical name for Bagan is Arimaddanapura – the City of the Enemy Crusher. The Mon inscriptions refer to Pokām, Pukām and Bukām. See Than Tun, "History of Buddhism," 61, pt.1, 3.

century, no record was kept of their original location at Bagan and as a result some of their inherent value for historians has been lost.¹³ Indeed, there are no known inscriptions pre-dating Anawrahta's reign either.¹⁴

Phayre's history of Burma of 1883 was, by the author's own account, the first European language publication to trace the history of Burma from earliest times to the present, being the first war with British India.¹⁵ This book was the main reference source for scholars of the late 19th–early 20th century. Phayre did not make much comment on Bagan's founding, but reiterates the *GPC*'s version of Bagan's early years under Anawrahta's rule. He does not comment at all on the Burmans arrival in Bagan. Phayre recounts Anawrahta's overthrowing of Thaton, and the cleansing of the religion. He also refers at some length to Anawrahta visiting Yunnan to obtain a Buddha relic, an unsuccessful mission and his subsequent quests to Bago to demand a relic from King Dwattabaung, and then to Sri Lanka for the same purpose. These events are given in the same chronology as they appear in the *GPC*.

Ananda Coomaraswamy, whose text is relevant as probably the first "art historical" comment on Bagan, states that "In the eighth century the Talaings [Mon] of Pegu conquered Prome and a new northern capital was established at Old Pagān. The walled city, of which the southern gateway still survives, dates from 847. The eighth and ninth centuries were marked by Shān-Thai invasions from the north, bringing in a fresh influx of Tibeto-Burman blood, and introducing the Burmese proper who have gradually replaced the old Pyus and absorbed the Talaings".¹⁶ This historical version set the scene for his

¹³ T. Frisch, *Pagan: City and State*, Introduction. Stone inscriptions continue to be found in the region. On a visit to Sale in 2005 an inscription stone had recently been found and Frisch was able to translate some of the text in situ. The inscription most likely dated to the late 12th century. Pe Maung Tin also comments on the difficulties in dating these inscriptions once they were no longer in situ and moved to Amarapura. *GPC*, x.

¹⁴ Than Tun, "History of Buddhism," 4.

¹⁵ Phayre, *History of Burma*, vi. While Phayre is accurate in stating his was the first comprehensive history, Sangermano had previously published a brief account of Burmese history in 1833. He notes that his account of the kingdom's history was "faithfully copied from the Maharazaven, that is, the great history of kings". The Maharazaven refers to U Kala's chronicle of the early 18th century, known more usually as the Mahayazawin. V. Sangermano, *The Burmese Empire a Hundred Years Ago 1833* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press, reprint 1995), xxxviii.

¹⁶ A. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art 1927* (Mineola: Dover Press, reprint 1985), 169.

commentary of Bagan's art, and assumed Bagan was a longstanding settlement with Pyu and Mon connections.

Luce notes that the earliest known chronicle, written by the monk Silavamsa around 1500, suggests Bagan was founded in 156 CE, a date that currently cannot be substantiated.¹⁷ According to the *GPC* the founding of Bagan was prophesised by Gotama Buddha, who paused on Mt Tangyi during his aerial travels to the region in the company of Ananda. He announced "In the 651st year after my *parinirvana* there shall be a great kingdom in this place".¹⁸ The *GPC* sees Bagan founded as predicted, then details a chronology of kings which takes Bagan up to the reign of Anawrahta. The *GPC* relates many miraculous events in which magical beings such as *nagas* play important roles. These mythical figures are spiritually significant in the life of the Burmese, and have always featured strongly in the decorative features of Bagan's temple buildings.

The *GPC* prediction corresponds to Bagan being founded in 108 CE, being 651 years after the Buddha's death which occurred in 543/544 BCE.¹⁹ Luce comments that Silavamsa's chronicle records a founding date of 156 CE, being 700 years after the passing of the Buddha, this calculation assuming a date of *Parinirvana* of 544.²⁰ The *GPC* then becomes vague on Bagan giving no particular importance to the narrative of Bagan's founding. It is said to have occurred during the reign of Thamoddarit, a Pyu, in 107 CE. However, this date

¹⁷ *OBEP*, 1:5. Note Luce records Silavamsa's dates as 1453-1520 while Frasci writes the chronicle was written in 1530. Frasci, *Pagan: City and State*, Introduction.

¹⁸ *GPC*, 29.

¹⁹ The Buddhist Era calendar commences from the year 543 or 544 BCE, the year of the Buddha's death. Many references in Buddhist texts use this dating system. However, inscriptions from the great king Asoka of the Mauryan dynasty in India, suggest a different date. It has been calculated that he came to the throne in about 273 BCE and the coronation was 4 years later in 269 BCE. It is stated that he was crowned 218 years after the Buddha's *parinirvana*, which would make the year of the Buddha's death 487 BCE and therefore the year of birth 567 BCE, the Buddha having died in his eightieth year. The 543 BCE date for the Buddha's death is promoted by Singalese Buddhist tradition which was particularly influential in the Theravada Buddhist world from about 800-1400 CE. This period is very important in Buddhist history as Sri Lanka was, at the time, the stronghold of Theravada orthodoxy. Current research favours a later date, i.e a *Parinirvana* of 486 BCE or even 368 BCE. The subject of the Buddha's birth/death date is an area which still generates debate amongst Buddhist scholars. See H. Bechert, *When did the Buddha live?: The controversy on the dating of the Historical Buddha* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1995).

²⁰ Luce notes that according to the Silavamsa, Srikshetra was founded 100 years after the passing of the Buddha. Luce then states that the "meaning appears to be that Śrī Ksetra was founded in 444 B.C". However, this is the year of the Buddha's death so if Srikshetra was founded 100 years after the Buddha's passing, the year would be 344, or 343 BCE.

is likely a translation miscalculation, as it is noted as Year 29 in the Short Era. If the Short Era refers to the Burmese Era, the year would actually be 667 CE, the Burmese Era commencing in 638 CE. In either case, the date does not correspond to that of Gotama's prediction. Thamoddarit then became leader over the leaders of the legendary nineteen villages and resided at the newly established Bagan.²¹ This story has been tested in recent years through archaeological investigation and can be shown to have some foundation.²²

That Thamoddarit was said to be Pyu is of significance, as Bagan has long been held to have Pyu origins. Even without any real evidence to support this Luce surmised when discussing to possible founding dates of Bagan, "The underlying truth may well be that before the *Mranmā* conquerors of *Tambadīpa* built the walls of Pagān in 850 A.D., there was an older Pyu settlement there, perhaps of Pyu refugees retreating north after the fall of Śrī Ksetra. These Pyu, perhaps, were the builders of the oldest Pagān stupas, cylindrical or bulbous, such as the Būpaya on the riverbank".²³ Luce clearly had an intuitive feeling that the Pyu were the original inhabitants of Bagan, and his hypothesis can now be shown most likely correct, supported by a small number of artefacts of Pyu origins that have been found at Bagan in recent years. Aung-Thwin also comments that the early Bagan settlement "was built on what may have been the remains of an earlier Pyu village and certainly according to earlier Pyu designs".²⁴

The *GPC* then records that the city of Bagan was built in 849 during the reign of Pyinbya. Duroiselle uses this date as the historical base for his work writing that "The date of this wall is about 850 A.D., the year of the foundation of Pagan".²⁵ Luce notes this remark, but does not make comment on his views regarding Duroiselle's statement though it is likely that Bagan did start to emerge as more than a modest village around the mid 9th century.²⁶ The *GPC* suggests Bagan

²¹ *GPC*, 28-9.

²² B.Hudson, "Digging for myths: archaeological excavations and surveys of the legendary nineteen founding villages of Pagan", in *Burma Art and Archaeology*. Edited by A.Green and R.Blurton (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 9-21.

²³ *OBEP* 1:6.

²⁴ Aung-Thwin, *Pagan. The Origins of Modern Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 21.

²⁵ C.Duroiselle, "Conservation in Burma. The Nat-Hlaung-Kyaung, Pagan", *ASI* (1912-13):136.

²⁶ *OBEP* 1:6.

was an established town of some size from this time onwards. There were Brahmins, "house of the counsellor, chaplain to the king".²⁷ The king had stables and grooms, and rode for hunting. When Sawrahan become king is unusual circumstances in 931 CE, he had a palace, queens, ministers and "good clothes, good victuals in abundance, gold, silver, elephants and horses, buffaloes, oxen, goats, pigs, paddy and rice".²⁸ He built five pagodas, including one called Pahtothamya which cannot be the temple of the same name which exists at Bagan today for stylistic reasons.²⁹ However, this does raise the possibility that the existing temple may have been built on the site of an earlier monument of the same name. There is also mention of monasteries and armies, suggesting that the Burmans had already established a significant settlement at Bagan by the time Anawrahta came to the throne in 1044.³⁰ Luce states that the earliest inscriptions extant referring to Bagan are found in two Cham inscriptions which pre-date 1050, a strong indication that by the 11th century Bagan was established as a major regional centre.³¹

One avenue which is assisting with firming up these hypothetical dates and events is the increase in archaeological research and the scientific dating of material found during excavations. Luce identified the city wall as being the "oldest extant monument" at Bagan.³² While it has been assumed that Bagan existed as a walled city during the 11th century based on archaeological assessment, some recent studies have assisted in confirming through carbon dating that the walled area was constructed during the 11th century, and

²⁷ Ibid., 55.

²⁸ Ibid., 58-9.

²⁹ The Pahto-tha-mya is most usually assigned to Sawlu's reign, around 1077-1084. It will be discussed in Chapter 3.

³⁰ The *GPC* notes he reigned from 1017-1059. These regnal dates were initially adopted by scholars but it has since been determined that the regnal dates were later, from 1044-1077. The timing of events such as the Mon conquest in 1057, could not have occurred so close to the end of Anawrahta's reign and indeed, the *GPC* does not suggest dates for this event, or others associated with Anawrahta's reign.

³¹ *OBEP* 1:8. These inscriptions are on the Po-Nagar and Lom-gno pillars, and refer to a city called Pukam.

³² *OBEP*, 1:6.

possibly as early as the 10th century.³³ However, the circumstances leading to Bagan becoming the base of a great Southeast Asian empire within two hundred years remain open to speculation. It is hoped that continued excavation will enable these tantalising "gaps" in Bagan's history to be filled.

The Nanchao Invasions and the Pyu

The Nanchao invasions of the 9th century are believed to have been responsible for the collapse of the Pyu kingdom and are accepted as having a catastrophic effect on Pyu culture. The Nanchao had dominated western Yunnan for at least two hundred years and their brief incursion into Burma extended as far south as the Mon territory in Lower Burma. There is, however, still much speculation as to the nature of Nanchao occupation. Hall refers to the Nanchao as occupying Upper Burma and much of Lower Burma in the 8th–9th centuries, and to this being a period of growth and prosperity. This interpretation of historical records has not gained support and is difficult to substantiate.³⁴ The Nanchao did venture into Burma, but there is no evidence to suggest their presence resulted in mass destruction of Pyu cities. The most likely scenario is that Nanchao presence prompted a shift in alliances amongst Pyu leaders, destabilizing the kingdom.³⁵ As will be discussed in the next chapter, the Pyu were well known to the Chinese, and undertook tribute missions to the Tang Chinese court. Chinese annals record that in 832 "Man rebels", believed to mean the Nanchao, "plundered the Pyu capital and deported 3,000 captives to Yunnanfu".³⁶ The event has great significance in Burmese history as it is hypothesised that the rise of Burman power was only possible because of Pyu

³³ B.Hudson, "The founding villages and early palaces of Bagan – an exploration of some chronicle and parabaik sources via computer mapping, field survey and archaeological excavation", paper presented at *Texts and Contexts Conference*, Universities Historical Research Commission, Yangon, December 2001. Draft at <http://acl.arts.usyd.edu.au/~hudson>. Carbon dating of excavated sites indicate "there was wall-building activity some time during or after the period 1020-1300 AD, that an earthenware-lined latrine was in use just outside the present wall some time between 990 and 1210 AD, and that in the elite compound, in which a teak post a metre wide, from a tree dated to between 980 and 1250 AD was used as construction material...".

³⁴ See Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia*, 155.

³⁵ This scenario is favoured by Hudson, "The Origins of Bagan", 150-51. Frasch remarks that "neither Chinese or Burmese, Mon or Pyu sources bear upon that period [8th-10th centuries]", but notes that "the raids of the Nanchao who carried away a number of artisans" may have been disruptive. Frasch, *Pagan City and State*, chapter 1, section 2.

³⁶ Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia*, 155. See also Fan Zhou, *Man Shu: Book of the Southern Barbarians*, ed. G.P.Oey, trans. G.Luce (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, Southeast Asia program data paper No. 44, 1961).

social disintegration, and "into that demographic and political vacuum moved the Burmese speakers".³⁷ This hypothesis has been widely accepted for many years. Wales' remarks are typical of most scholars who suggest that after the invasions the Pyu "were carried off into servitude" providing the newly arrived Burmans with a place to settle.³⁸

Curiously the Burmese chronicles make virtually no mention of this tumultuous event. The *GPC* records only nominal entries for the kings who reigned from 726 – 846 CE and does not allude to the invasions at all. After this uneventful period, the *GPC* resumes its narrative with the building of Bagan in 849 CE.³⁹ Hall hypothesises that "if this date is correct, the depopulation of the Pyu capital in the north [assumed to be Halin] may have caused a movement of refugees downstream which lead to the formation of a new centre at Pagan".⁴⁰ It is likely that the routing of the Pyu was not something the chronicles wanted to focus on, being as they are full of much more positive and illustrious events. However, the date given for the building of Bagan may refer to a rebuilding of a Pyu base, following a dramatic social upheaval in the wake of the Nanchao.

The Pyu are now emerging as a much more influential group than had originally been assumed. Up until the last decade, it was widely accepted that the Pyu were a spent force when the Burmans came to prominence through Anawrahta. While little is known of Pyu origins, they have links through language with much of Southeast Asia. Luce wrote extensively of the Pyu and their settlements around modern-day Pyay. There was some early speculation that the Pyu had settled at Bagan, principally because of Rajakumar's pillar inscriptions found at Kubyauk-gyi Myinkaba. Prince Rajakumar dedicated the building of Kubyauk-gyi Myinkaba to his father in 1112, when Kyanzittha was critically ill. The dedicatory inscription, known as the Rajakumar or Myazedi inscription, is written in Pyu, Burmese, Old Mon and Pali indicating the Pyu must still have been of

³⁷ Aung-Thwin, "Lower Burma and Bago in the History of Burma", in *The Maritime Frontier of Burma*, ed. J.Gommans and J.Leider (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), 37. The same remarks are repeated in the context of Aung-Thwin's hypothesis regarding the Mon paradigm. See Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña*, 37.

³⁸ Wales. *Early Burma – Old Siam*, 5.

³⁹ *GPC*, 55.

⁴⁰ Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 156.

some influence and known as an identifiable group as late as 1112 CE.⁴¹

However, the absence of artifacts which would link the early Pyu sites of Srikshetra and Prome with Bagan were missing. Recent discoveries at Bagan are helping to form this linkage, and will be discussed in Chapter 2. These finds have the potential to markedly affect the way material is interpreted, as now there are valid reasons for looking at local indigenous sources for stylistic innovation, rather than assuming these sources were remote, and introduced.

Early Bagan and Inscriptions

"The only original inscriptions of Aniruddha are pious Buddhist sentences or prayers, signed by him, on terracotta votive tablets showing Buddha or Bodhisattvas".⁴² Without contemporaneous inscriptions referring to events of his reign, a reconstruction of the Anawrahta period (1044-1077) relies on later historical accounts or references found in non-indigenous sources. Indeed, the location of inscriptions that relate to this period are most often found at other sites. Hudson makes strong reference to inscriptions from Kyanzittha's reign found at locations as far afield as Prome, Inle, and Kyaukse, as evidence of Bagan's existence as a widespread kingdom.⁴³ In the context of Anawrahta's reign votive tablets fill the same role, and this will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

The lack of dedicatory stones associated with the major temples and stupas of the early Bagan period is a source of frustration for scholars and also a curious situation, as such dedicatory evidence would usually be expected. As Frasch notes, "the most important group of sources for the empire of Paganare stone inscriptions which mostly represent foundations to different religious institutions of the capital".⁴⁴ However, "for the first two kings of Pagan, there are indeed practically no sources besides the chronicles".⁴⁵ This absence of a

⁴¹ G.H.Luce, *Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma*. 1:62. This inscription is often referred to as the Myazedi inscription, named after a more recent temple in closest proximity to the location of the inscription.

⁴² *OBEP* 1:15.

⁴³ Hudson, "The Origins of Bagan", 183-84. Shorto drew on twenty-five Mon inscriptions attributable to Kyanzittha when compiling the *Dictionary of Mon Inscriptions*. These inscriptions were found in Bagan, Prome and Thaton. H.L.Shorto, *A Dictionary of the Mon Inscriptions From the Sixth to the Sixteenth Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), xxviii-xxix.

⁴⁴ T. Frasch, *Pagan: City and State*, Introduction. Frasch thoroughly critiques the existing publications of inscription translations, commenting in particular on their accuracy.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2.

written legacy will be discussed further in the context of the script which appears on the Hpet-leik pagoda plaques, and used as an argument in favour of the arrival of a "literate" influence being introduced to Bagan during the mid 11th century.

After the reign of Kyanzittha concluded in 1113, Bagan's history is much better known, with numerous inscriptions and ink glosses to help confirm dating of temples, and contemporaneous accounts of events. Many of these inscriptions have been translated and they are a valuable resource.⁴⁶ However, in yet another "spiral", the kingdom of Bagan collapsed in 1287 after the Mongol invasion was enough to finally topple an already disintegrating kingdom.⁴⁷ Bagan again disappears from most commentary, the once-thriving city returning to village status. The monuments remained, and while major sites such as the Ananda and Shwezigon were maintained and became pilgrimage sites, local villagers farmed all the land between temple precincts and still do so today, a humble contrast to what was once a thriving metropolis.

Two Paradigms – Theravada Buddhism and the Mon Conquest

The *GPC* establishes two particular paradigms which have shaped the field of Burmese art history. The first is a Theravada paradigm, which promoted the concept of an apocryphal move from a debased Mahayana and animist style of Buddhist practice, to a pure form of Theravada Buddhism. This was achieved due to the efforts of King Anawrahta under Shin Araham's direction. The second is the Mon paradigm which relates to the arrival of the Mon at Bagan during the early part of Anawrahta's reign. This event is held to be responsible for the establishment of a sophisticated cultural flourishing, with the Mon being credited with introducing artistic and architectural innovations previously unknown to the Burmese. These two major premises underpinned Western scholarship and

⁴⁶ Duroiselle, Taw Sein Ko, U Mya and Blagden were responsible for editing and translating many of the Mon and early Burmese inscriptions which were published by the Archaeological Society of Burma in a series. The first, edited jointly by Duroiselle and Taw Sein Ko was published in 1919 and covers a translation of the "Myazedi" inscription. Blagden translated many Mon inscriptions including one concerning the building of a great palace at Bagan. This was presumed to refer to Kyanzittha's palace, but there is no date on the inscription and the inscription cannot be reliably related to Kyanzittha's reign. C.O. Blagden, "Mon inscriptions Nos.9-11", *Epigraphia Birmanica* vol.3 part 2 (1923): 2-3.

⁴⁷ Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 170.

until most recent times, have not been critically questioned in a broad forum.⁴⁴
Both of these situations are inextricably linked, as the Mon are held by the *GPC* to be the group from whom Anawrahta sought, and ultimately took, copies of the Theravada canon which subsequently established the Theravada orthodoxy at Bagan.

The Theravada Paradigm

A Theravada paradigm has not been previously specifically identified, however, it is indisputable that this existed. Phayre's history of Burma does not discuss religion in any depth, but he reiterates the events concerning Shin Araham, and Anawrahta's conversion to Theravada Buddhism.⁴⁹ As noted previously these events became accepted as fact and subsequent scholarly research was framed around these supposed happenings. The following quote from Duroiselle relating to the Mon (Talaing) conquest in 1057 exemplifies the framework within which he, and other scholars of the time, were working:

Eventful in that the Burmese, victorious in the field, were intellectually the conquered; for it is from that period that the wonderful architectural and literary activity, which made Pagan for a time the Buddhist metropolis of Indo-China, is to be dated. Nearly three centuries of Northern and North-Eastern Indian active influences had slowly prepared the Burmese thoroughly to assimilate the Talaing civilization introduced by King Anoratha's conquest; from that time writing was adapted to common use by the adoption of a foreign alphabet to represent Burmese sounds, and inscriptions on stone or brick, in Talaing and Burmese, appeared at Pagan; the Tipitakas are transliterated into the newly adopted alphabet.

Sanskrit is definitely abandoned as a vehicle of religious teaching and, with it, the form of Mahāyānism then extant at the Burmese capital, and superseded by Pāli; the court and people receive the teaching of

⁴⁸ While there has been ongoing debate regarding the *GPC* and questions raised regarding the events it contains, these two major events have continued to influence all research relating to Bagan.

⁴⁹ Phayre is remarkably non-judgmental regarding the religious practices at Bagan. He does accept the version of history outlined in the *GPC* as it relates to Bagan, however, he does question the lineage of the kings back to Gotama Buddha's Sakya clan, referring to this aspect as a tradition. A. Phayre, *History of Burma*, 7, 34.

Hinayānism at the feet of the Talaing monks, and under Indian and Talaing supervision the most magnificent temples are built in rapid succession.⁵⁰

The Theravada paradigm sees Anawrahta credited with overseeing the establishment of a great Theravada kingdom. From the moment Anawrahta sacks the Mon city of Thaton and brings the *Tipitaka* to Bagan, Buddhism becomes doctrinally Theravada to the exclusion of all else. This event was accepted by many prominent scholars in the fields of religious studies and history. Halliday, who published the first text dedicated to Mon history, confirms a similar story is found in Mon chronicles, namely that Anawrahta sacked Thaton and took Manuha and his court to Bagan.⁵¹ Bode, a well regarded Pali scholar, did not question this version of events, reiterating it in her own text when discussing Buddhism's history in Burma concurring that the Tipitaka was introduced to Bagan via Thaton around 1058. She states that this is a "safe starting point for our history of the Pali literature".⁵² The *GPC* also stresses Anawrahta's overthrowing of the heretical Ari monks who practised a debased form of the Buddhist religion, and the promotion of a purified Theravada Buddhism. Acceptance of these events ensured that all of Bagan's edifices and Buddhist remains were constructed in support of the Theravada school of Buddhism.

Once Anawrahta's reign is established, the *GPC* relates how Shin Araham, a revered Theravada monk who lived near Thaton, came to Bagan and guided Anawrahta towards establishing Bagan as the centre of the Theravada Buddhist world. He is portrayed as having indirectly instigated the attack on Thaton by encouraging Anawrahta to seek copies of the Tipitaka from the Mon king, Manuha. Shin Araham's influence is felt through Anawrahta's and Kyanzittha's reign, and he has an integral role in Burmese Theravada history. There is strong acceptance of Shin Araham's existence as a historical personage, however, one aspect of his role has recently been questioned in the context of the Mon paradigm which will be discussed shortly. Aung-Thwin notes that the

⁵⁰ C. Duroiselle, "Pictorial Representations of Jātakas in Burma", *ASI* (1912-13): 88.

⁵¹ R. Halliday, *The Talaings*, 1917 (Bangkok: Orchid Press, reprint 1999), 5.

⁵² M. Bode, *The Pali Literature of Burma* 1909 (London: Lowe & Brydone, reprint 1966): 10-13. The story is also noted by Ray, *Brahmanical Gods in Burma* 1932 (Bangkok: Orchid Press, reprint 2001): 2.

earlier chronicles such as U Kala's history written around 1730, do not specify that Shin Arahān lived near Thaton and do not connect him with the Mon. Rather, Shin Arahān's origins are bestowed great status, with him being of immaculate birth in the tradition of great Buddhist figures.⁵³ This will be expanded on in Chapter 5.

A Theravada paradigm is also reinforced by the *GPC* through the telling of Anawrahta's interactions with Sri Lanka. While the events as described in the *GPC* are rather fanciful, there is accepted evidence of historical interaction between the Bagan kingdom and that of the Sri Lankan ruler of the day, Vijaya Bahu 1.⁵⁴ It is likely Anawrahta sent assistance to Sri Lanka to help ward off the impending Cola invasions. However, in the *GPC* context, Anawrahta's interaction with Sri Lanka revolves around his quest for a tooth relic to enshrine in a pagoda at Bagan, another manifestation of his desire to promote Theravada Buddhism.⁵⁵ While there is strong evidence of contact between the kingdom of Bagan and Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka's artistic traditions have been largely overlooked when discussing Bagan's visual expression of Buddhism. This is in contrast to the proposed impact that Sri Lanka's Theravada canon was purported to have on Bagan's religious development. Linkages between the two will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The Mon Paradigm

The *GPC*'s emphatic statements regarding Anawrahta's sacking of Thaton and transfer of the Mon court to Bagan have been reiterated almost verbatim in nearly all accounts of Bagan's history. Enriquez writes "In one magnificent and unexpected march, he [Anawrahta] swept down from Pagan, destroyed Prome, and captured the Talaing King, Manuha, in his capital of Thaton. This occurred in A.D., 1,057 – perhaps as important a date in Burmese history, as 1,066 is in our own. It marked the rise of a civilisation".⁵⁶ In 1927 the respected Indian art historian, Ananda Coomaraswamy, included a section on Burma in an art history text referring to the art of India and Indonesia. Dates were assigned to

⁵³ Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña*, 138.

⁵⁴ Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 161.

⁵⁵ *GPC*, 88-91.

Bagan temples without any corroborating evidence, and "facts" regarding Bagan's history were accepted without question. "The unification of Burma was first accomplished by Anawratā (Aniruddha) of Pagān (1040-1077). Anawratā invaded and captured Thaton, and brought back with the Talaing king (Manuha) Hīnayāna books and priests to Pāgan; he attempted to drive out the Tāntrik [sic] Arī; he established connections with foreign countries, obtained relics, and initiated a great era of building".⁵⁷ Luce also assumed the sacking of Thaton was an actual event, noting that "Thaton was conquered by Aniruddha about 1054-7 A.D".⁵⁸ Luce and Bohmu Ba Shin write in their introductory text to the *Myinkaba Kubyauk-gyi*, " Previous to this, [referring to Anawrahta's engagement with Sri Lanka around 1070] all that Pagan possessed of the Tipitaka was probably some scattered texts obtained after the capture of Thaton (c.1057 A.D.)".⁵⁹ Later scholars such as Hall also confirm that this event occurred, noting that Anawrahta's "most important achievement was the conquest of the Mon kingdom of Thaton".⁶⁰ Such examples are typical of those made by all scholars commenting on Bagan's early history, yet there was virtually no contemporaneous evidence to support that this event actually occurred.

Over the last 4 years, Aung-Thwin has progressively introduced his theories regarding a Mon paradigm to the international scholarly arena.⁶¹ He has argued that there is no evidence of Mon hegemony at Thaton, which in turn denies the possibility of Anawrahta sacking the city and bringing the Mon court and the Tipitaka back to Bagan. He presents a thorough and well referenced case to support his theory of a non-existent Mon period. However, his findings are subject to debate and his theories open to scrutiny and dispute in academic

⁵⁶ C.M. Enriquez, *Pagān. Being the first connected account in English of the 11th Century Capital of Burma, with the History of a few of its most important Pagodas* (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1914), 10.

⁵⁷ Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, 169-70.

⁵⁸ G.H.Luce, "Mons of the Pagan Dynasty", *JBRS* (1953), 8.

⁵⁹ G.H. Luce and Bohmu Ba Shin, "Pagan Myinkaba Kubyauk-gyi temple of Rājakumār (1113 A.D.) and the Old Mon Writings on the Wall", *Bulletin of the Burma Historical Commission* Vol.2:279.

⁶⁰ Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 158.

⁶¹ Aung-Thwin introduced his research to Burmese scholars in 2001, and has recently published his findings as *The Mists of Rāmañña*, which has been cited previously.

forums.⁶² If his theories are in the future accepted as representing a more accurate version of Burmese history, it will necessitate a complete revision of all art historical research of the period, which to date, is based on an acceptance of Mon presence during the formative phase of the Bagan kingdom. Certainly the focus of his research is on disproving a long accepted version of history and it can be shown to be selectively one-sided in its interpretation. One compelling factor which makes Aung-Thwin's proposals seem unlikely is the strong historical presence of Mon occupation in Lower Burma from around the late 12th century into the 13th century. Frascch cites inscriptions relating to uprising in this part of the Bagan kingdom which he states was a "predominantly Mon population".⁶³ Mon presence in Lower Burma from the 13th century on is not disputed. In the absence of evidence to suggest a major influx of the Mon to Lower Burma some time after Kyanzittha's reign and before the collapse of the Bagan kingdom, from which time a Mon centre was re-established, there are surely further flaws in Aung-Thwin's proposals.

The role of the Mon in lower Burma and in neighbouring Thailand has attracted the attention of a number of researchers over the last century.⁶⁴ Prior to Aung-Thwin's pronouncements, a Mon presence in Lower Burma had not been denied by any historians, and generations of research should not be discarded without thorough and deliberate debate. I do not believe it is time for, nor does the evidence presented warrant, such a definitive shift in approach to Bagan's art historical study. There is certainly a need to review in depth the true impact

⁶² A recent extended review summarises the general academic criticism namely "An important problem with this work is that Aung-Thwin, likely unwittingly, selectively presents part of the historical context that would support his claims, but remains silent on changing aspects of this context that would work against them" and "In sum, *Mists of Ramanna* presents an interesting journey through a particular set of indigenous source materials and is easy reading. An unconvincing analysis of the chronicles and a failure to place the current study into the broader context of research on myths in Burmese history, however, hinders the book's value." M. Charney, review of *The Mists of Rāmañña: The Legend that was Lower Burma*, by Michael Aung-Thwin, published for H-Asia@h-net.msu.edu (February 2006). Aung-Thwin is not the first to critique the Mon theory. It has been suggested by Thai art historian, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, that Anawrahta attacked Nakhon Pathom, home of the Dvaravati Mon people, rather than Thaton as stated in the Burmese chronicles. This possibility is discounted by other historians who interpret the evidence as showing the Dvaravati kingdom collapsed following the attack of the Khmer forces under the command of King Suryavarman I in the 11th century. Subhadradis Diskul, *Art in Thailand* (Bangkok: Amarin Press, 1982), 7.

⁶³ Frascch, "Coastal Peripheries During the Pagan Period", in *The Maritime Frontier of Burma*, ed. J.Gommans and J.Leider (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, and Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), 60-63.

⁶⁴ Guillon's text includes a number of references to Mon research. E.Guillon, *The Mons. A civilization of Southeast Asia*, ed. and trans. J.V.Di Crocco (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1999).

of Mon involvement at Bagan, and there has long been a question mark over the validity of Anawrahta's sacking of Thaton, an event which makes little sense, especially in light of the Mon king and entourage being given favoured status when moved to Bagan. In any case, regardless of Aung-Thwin's hypotheses relating to the Mon paradigm, what is important, and will be discussed at the appropriate stages in the following chapters, is that scholarly research to date has indeed been undertaken from the viewpoint of this Mon paradigm. This fundamental assumption has underpinned the cultural developments at Bagan, and this is indeed a subject which must be given greater consideration.

A Chronology of Bagan's Temples

When excavations first commenced at Bagan there was no framework within which to determine any chronology for the temples. Numerous temples from the 12th century onwards had dedicatory inscriptions which assisted Luce and Ba Shin with dating and this provided a starting point. Often the inscription stones refer to an earlier time. For example, when Luce reported on the Loka-nanda pagoda two inscriptions were in situ. The earliest, dated 1207, records a dedication to "the monastery of the Cakravartin *Anuradhā*", supporting local tradition that the pagoda was built by Anawrahta.⁶⁵ This is a typical example of the dedicatory stones found at the earlier Bagan temples. The absence of contemporary inscriptions may indicate natural events, such as earthquakes, may have damaged some of the early structures which were subsequently rebuilt and re-dedicated. For Luce and his fellow researchers it became a matter of combining architectural analysis with local history and hearsay in order to develop some type of meaningful dating process for the numerous temples and stupas believed to have been built during the reigns of Anawrahta and Kyanzittha.

The *GPC* establishes a chronology for a number of the most significant early monuments including the Loka-nanda, Shwe-zigon, Naga-yon, Abe-ya-dana and Ananda. This chronology has been supported by scholars such as Duroiselle and Luce through architectural analysis. Fixing proposed dates for

⁶⁵ *OBEP* 1:260.

the building of these major sites provided a basis for hypothesizing the construction dates for buildings of similar shape and form. Historic names for temples also lead to propositions for dating. For example, the Ma-nu-ha temple was assumed to relate to the Mon king Manuha, and therefore was dated to the year of his purported arrival in Bagan, as stated in the chronicles. This marked the beginnings for Mon presence which, as noted previously, launched a period of cultural advancement. Luce coins the term Mon style, to refer to a particular type of temple form though there is little to indicate that this style existed at Thaton, Manuha's city. Rather, it was a form that did not exist prior to Manuha's arrival at Bagan, and thereafter the assumption has been that it was a Mon inspired architectural method. This is not an architectural thesis, and the correctness or otherwise of the terminology will not be discussed in detail. However, it is acknowledged that the usage has more to do with a chronology rather than reflecting a definitive Mon origin for this "new" architectural style.

In *OBEF* Luce's chronology is based principally on architectural form, with consideration also given to local histories regarding temple building. Luce's chronology has not been critically questioned and his proposed dating for temples made during the early Bagan period is still the preeminent architectural study to have been published.⁶⁶ Aung-Thwin takes issue with the chronology in the context of the Mon paradigm, but his proposals suffer exactly the same limitations as those he criticizes in others. Confusingly he takes quotes by Luce which seem both to support and refute his arguments regarding Luce's use of term "Mon" to describe a particular type of Bagan temple. He overstates the assumption that the term "Mon" in this context reinforced his Mon paradigm and has influenced art historical research. While there is some simplistic truth in his assertion that the "convenient label [Mon-style] had the effect of creating an inevitable link between ethnicity and style in the evolution of the Pagan temple that helped perpetuate the Mon Paradigm in the analysis of Pagan architecture for decades more to come", he completely ignores the fact that art historians are less interested in the terminology than in assessing what they actually see.

⁶⁶ Based on his observations and interpretation of architectural features Luce consolidated much of the early archaeological studies published in the *Archaeological Survey of India* and the *Archaeological Survey of Burma*. The dating has been reviewed in recent years and while questions have been raised regarding some of Luce's interpretations, his attributions have not been seriously contested and indeed, most have been supported.

To say that Luce's chronology is fundamentally flawed because he coined the term "Mon" and grouped temples according to a particular type is to misunderstand Luce's intention. Indeed, Aung-Thwin also states that "Luce finally added a disclaimer; saying that his use of the word "Mon" to describe these prototype temples was merely a matter of convenience".⁶⁷ For Luce, the terminology was just that, "convenient", and while it may have had the unintentional effect of later being interpreted as meaning direct Mon influence Luce's chronology cannot be said to have been solely influenced by an acceptance of the story of the Mon court arriving in Bagan. The architectural styles have been assessed on their merit.

In the late 1980s–1990, Pichard, working on a major UNESCO project, undertook what is the only comprehensive survey of all of Bagan's monuments.⁶⁸ Each site, which includes complete temples as well as ruins, has been numbered using a system that evolved in the Burmese Department of Archaeology. As Pichard explains, an original list, known as the "old list" was prepared in 1901 using a numbering system that is now quite meaningless, but is still occasionally used. An updated and expanded list evolved, and this forms the basis for Pichard's numbering.⁶⁹ Pichard's catalogue of monuments provides standardised information such as floor plans, size, frescoes, paintings and images, as well as general comments regarding condition. Provisional dates are also supplied. Each temple discussed in this thesis will be titled and numbered as they appear in the UNESCO publication.

Pichard's dating is less specific than that of Luce, with most dated referring to a century rather than a specific year, however, there is agreement between the two with regard to the broader dating range. Strachan follows Luce's chronology in his publication which focuses on Bagan's art and architecture. Stadtner also concurs with the general chronology in his recent book on Bagan, though is

⁶⁷ Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña*, 209. Aung-Thwin's comments on the evolution of Bagan's temples focuses solely on architecture and completely ignores the sculptural remains, wall paintings and exterior stucco work, all of which together are considered when dating temples. As noted previously, Luce's focus was on architecture, but he did consider these additional elements.

⁶⁸ P. Pichard *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan*, 8 volumes (Paris: UNESCO, 1992-2001).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vol.1:6-7. Pichard references the "old list" to "allow easier cross reference to previous publications".

more general in his dating, following Pichard's guidelines.⁷⁰ I have used Luce's chronology as a starting point when developing a chronology for images, as there is strong acceptance of Luce's proposed dating and no strong challenges to his work have emerged.⁷¹ However, Luce acknowledges that some aspects of his chronology are based on limited access to temples. Few temples had been fully excavated when Luce was working in Bagan, and subsequent research has uncovered material which suggests a modification of the chronology may be warranted. These examples will be highlighted during the sculptural review a recommended changed to Luce's dating will be proposed.

Remarks on Theravada and Mahayana "Art"

The popular concept of naming particular imagery as "Theravadin" or "Mahayanan" is problematic. The canons do not dictate a particular style or form for a visual interpretation of the Buddha's teachings. The diversity of Buddhist imagery is indicative of the lack of a predetermined visual "canon" to accompany the written one. In Burma, as elsewhere in the Buddhist world, an artistic repertoire developed that integrated local preexisting techniques and styles with a local interpretation of the scriptures. The most commonly held misconception regarding Buddhist imagery, is that the presence of *bodhisattvas* is associated with Mahayana Buddhism. While this is in part true, the most popular *bodhisattva*, Avalokiteshvara, is well known to both the Theravada and Mahayana schools, likewise are images of the future Buddha, Maitreya.⁷² The popularity of certain images may well be associated with preexisting traditions and how Buddhism best integrates itself within these traditions. A Theravada canon superimposed upon, for example, a culture with a strong tradition of mother goddess worship, would no doubt relate more closely with female *bodhisattvas* such as Tara and Prajnaparamita, both who occur in some early Bagan imagery. Perhaps a better expression would be "imagery associated with the Theravada or Mahayana schools" rather than describing the visual

⁷⁰ P.Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture of Old Burma* (Whiting Bay: Kiscadale Publications, 1989). D.Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan. Buddhist Plain of Merit* (Bangkok: River Books, 2005).

⁷¹ All published work focusing on Bagan subsequent to Luce's *OBEP* accept this chronological framework. See Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture of Old Burma* (Whiting Bay: Kiscadale Publications, 1989) and D.Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan. Buddhist Plain of Merit* (Bangkok: River Books, 2005).

expression as being Theravadin or Mahayanan in themselves. As Skilling notes in relation to the Mon Dvaravati art of Thailand :

The study of the development of Buddhism in Dvāravatī has been distorted by fundamental misunderstandings which I can address only briefly here. First and foremost is the routine division of Buddhism into two opposing camps, "Hīnayāna" and "Mahāyāna". It is anachronistic to speak of a "Hīnayāna" period or "Hīnayāna" art – whether in Dvāravatī, India, Lanka, or anywhere else. "Hīnayāna" is a polemical term that even in Mahāyāna texts is used only in certain contexts. It is not a fundamental category, and it is not a suitable category of social or historical analysis".⁷³

Skilling is technically correct, however, it will take many years to change the commonly used terminology of Theravada and Mahayana and replace them with his preferred terms of Śrāvakayāna and Bodhisattvayāna, which refer to the different goals of Theravada and Mahayana followers – the former aspiring to become an *arhat* in a future existence, the latter in become a fully enlightened Buddha. What is significant in his article, is confirmation that Buddhist art is not imposed by a particular text or school, but is a local response.

During the text of this thesis there may be reference to Theravada or Mahayana art, and these terms are used because they are common terminology. However, it is acknowledged that these classifications are not without criticism, just as there are problems with the taxonomy associated with Burma's art, as discussed in the Introduction.

Narrative and Buddhism

The most common theme of Buddhist imagery at Bagan relates to depictions of the Buddha's life stories, *jātakas*, and his last earthly existence. There are 550

⁷² Avalokiteshvara is known in Burma as Lokanantha.

⁷³ P. Skilling, "Dvāravatī: Recent Revelations and Research," in *Dedications to Her Royal highness Princess Galyani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra on her 80th birthday* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2003), 106.

or 547 *jatakas*, depending on the local tradition.⁷⁴ They recount the cycles of rebirth which saw the future Buddha evolve from a snake through to rebirth in his last life as the Buddha-to-be. The merit earned through performing selfless deeds in each existence accumulated.⁷⁵ The *jatakas* were undoubtedly used as a popular media of instruction in ethical and moral ideas, though there are suggestions that their use was also symbolic, as well and educational.⁷⁶ Illustrations of the *jatakas* and the final life story play a prominent role in Burmese Buddhist art history.⁷⁷

The two hundred years following the Buddha's death was the formative period for Buddhism. During this time the Buddhist canon, the *Tipitaka*, was finalized,

⁷⁴ The use of *jataka* plaques to adorn the exterior of temple buildings is an architectural element associated with Burmese Buddhist temples. This method was used during the Bagan period, again during the 15th and 16th centuries at Bago, and again in the 19th century, at Mingun. See D. Stadtner, "The Glazed Tiles at Mingun," in *Études birmanes en hommage à Denise Bernot*, eds. Pierre Pichard and Françoise Robinne (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1998), 169-85.

⁷⁵ Marasinghe, *Gods in Early Buddhism. A Study in their Social and Mythological Milieu as Depicted in the Nikayas of the Pali Canon* (Kelaniya: University of Sri Lanka, Vidyalandara Press, 1974), 18.

⁷⁶ R. Brown, "Narrative as Icon: the *Jātaka* Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 64-109. Brown challenges the assertions by scholars such as Luce that depictions of the *jatakas* in temples such as the Pahto-tha-mya and Ananda were used for "instruction". Brown argues that the location of many of the illustrations being high up on interior and exterior walls where they cannot be seen clearly (both painted and in the form of terracotta plaques) makes it impossible for them to perform an educational narrative role. He separates the purpose of such illustrations into two categories, that of being a visual biography and that of a textual biography. The latter refers to the position of *jataka* depictions in the context of the monument where they are not "merely illustrations of a word text.... Considered in these terms, the *jātakas* on the monuments worked as icons, units of meaning and reverence, expressions of an aspect of the Buddha's nature and life that is (more) fully expressed by the entire monument. One might say that a story is being told on these monuments, but it is told in a different way than through a narrative as read from a word text." Brown, "Narrative as Icon," 99-100.

⁷⁷ The Buddhist imagery of Bagan, and indeed, all Buddhist imagery, can trace its origins back to ancient Vedic times. The earliest civilizations of the Indus valley, namely Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, flourished from about 2000–1000 BCE and the subject matter found on material excavated from these sites have subsequently become integral elements in both Buddhist and Hindu iconography, particularly the tree and the serpent. For discussion regarding the early imagery of the tree and the serpent see Heinrich Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 24-25. Also of interest is the early work by J. Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship* (London: India Museum, 1868, reprint Delhi: Indological Book House, 1971). The "discovery" that people of South and Southeast Asia worshipped the snake (*naga*) and the tree only served to reinforce the perception that their spiritual practices were heathen. In Christianity, a more fundamentalist view associates the tree and serpent with the devil, the snake having tempted Eve to commit the first sin by picking and eating an apple from the tree. Along with the *jatakas* imagery relating to the five Buddhas of the *kalpa* are an integral facet of the Buddhist art repertoire at Bagan. The most recent Buddha, known as Gotama or Sakyamuni, is the fourth Buddha of the current *kalpa* (a *kalpa* is a time span of tens of thousands of years, also called an eon in Buddhist texts). The three other Buddhas of this *kalpa* who have already attained Enlightenment are Kassapa, Kakusanda and Konagamanda. The fifth and final Buddha of the *kalpa* will be Maitreya.

and the two main streams of Buddhism emerged, the Mahayana and the Theravada.⁷⁸ Mahayana Buddhism is associated with Sanskrit, and gained a solid foothold in the northern areas of India, extending into the Himalayas. The Theravada followers found a strong support base in the south, including Sri Lanka, and adopted Pali as their canonical language. For the Mahayana, the focus was on the *Dharma*, then the Buddha and *Sangha*.⁷⁹ For followers of the Theravada the Buddha was the prime focus, then the *Dharma* and the *Sangha*.⁸⁰ The Buddha's life stories were formalized as part of the Theravada school.

Imagery depicting Gotama Buddha's last earthly existence has been prominent since King Kanishka, who reigned in the later phase of the Kushana dynasty (c.165 BCE–210 CE).⁸¹ Evidence of this is readily found in the imagery that appears on the great *stupa* at Sanchi in India. The extensive carvings include scenes of the important events of the Buddha's life, with Gotama represented in an aniconic form appropriate to the event illustrated.⁸² There is visual evidence

⁷⁸ Shortly after the Buddha's death, at a gathering of 500 disciples under the Venerable Mahakassapa's leadership, the discourses and doctrines of the Buddha were collated orally and formed two canonical texts, the *Vinaya Pitaka* and *Sutta Pitaka*. See Thera Nyanaponika and Hecker, Hellmuth. *Great Disciples of the Buddha: Their Lives, Their Works, Their Legacy*, Wisdom Books, Boston, 1997, pp.139-82. See Dutt, *Aspects of Mahayana Buddhism and its relation to Hinayana* (London: Luzac and Co, 1930), 3. While there are two main schools of Buddhism, each school can be divided into a number of sects. See T.W. Rhys Davids, "The Sects of the Buddhists", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1891):409-22. See also A. Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhiques du Petit Vehicule* (Saigon: Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1955).

⁷⁹ As Shukla states the "Dharma or Prajna is eternal and the highest object and Buddha is only Upaya or means of obtaining that knowledge, which is diffused into the masses through him". D.N. Shukla, *Vastu-Sastra vol.2 Hindu Canons of Iconography and Painting* (Lucknow: Shikla Printing Press, 1968), 17. From this point Shukla describes origins of Buddhist iconography in its relationship to Hinduism "of which Buddhism should be considered only a side-current like Saivism and Vaisnavism", 21. The relevance of his further comments regarding the origins of iconography is only of interest in relation to various Northern Buddhist iconographic features which may have later filtered through Tibet, northern India and into Burma. should be treated cautiously. His analyses are firmly based in the tradition of Hinduism.

⁸⁰ During this period of mixed Hinayana Buddhism there was a growth in *Abhidhamma* literature of the Theravada and Sarvastivada schools. The *jatakas* became more prominent and "were meant for inspiring in the minds of people a faith in Buddhism and popularizing the religion....The *jatakas* were only an afterthought for the Theravadins. They originally did not form part of their scriptures". Dutt, *Aspects of Mahayana Buddhism*, 4.

⁸¹ Kanishka convened the Third Buddhist Council, held in Kashmir in 100 CE.

⁸² For example, in depictions of events surrounding the Enlightenment, a tree was often used to symbolize the Buddha, while a wheel usually represented the Buddha in illustrations of the First Sermon, the Turning of the Wheel of Law. For an overview of aniconic representations of the Buddha see Karlsson, *Face to Face with the Absent Buddha*.

that the *jatakas* were known at this time as well, with relief carvings of *jatakas* dating from around 100 BCE found at Bharhut, India.⁸³

With largely illiterate populations, monks would recite the life stories of the Buddha and artisans converted these stories into a visual narrative. While core elements of the story have remained essentially the same for over 2000 years, local versions of the story emerged as Buddhism spread. These versions have incorporated specific elements that help place the story in a familiar local context. Also, the emphasis on different parts of the story changes reflecting, perhaps, the sect of Buddhism to which the local monks belonged or the integration of local beliefs into the legend. As outlined in the Introduction, the relationship between the visual representations of the Buddha's life and differing written versions of this story will be investigated in depth in Chapter 6. This will demonstrate how the prevailing Theravada bias lead to a narrow interpretation of the imagery, and further reinforced a Theravada paradigm at Bagan.

Narratives of the Buddha's Last Earthly Existence

Accounts of the Buddha's last life occur in numerous texts and these can be divided into two categories – those incorporated into the Buddhist scriptural canons and those that are independent of them. There are elements of the Buddha's life story scattered throughout the Theravada canon, the *Tipitaka*. The Pali canon is concerned primarily with the teachings of the Buddha and rules for the behavior of its *sangha*, and therefore the absence of a complete account of the Buddha's last earthly life in the *Tipitaka* should not be considered unusual. The Pali canon and the *jatakas* were known at Bagan, so these variants of the life stories should have been fairly familiar to the *sangha*.

One of the more expansive accounts of Gotama's life can be found in the *Khuddaka Nikaya* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*. Written in dialogue form, as is much of the *Tipitaka*, in the exchange of words between Mara and Gotama during his meditation under the Bodhi tree near the river Neranjara, the Buddha says:

Seeing the surrounding army ready and Māra mounted on his elephant, I am going out to fight so that he may not shift me from my position. This

⁸³ R.E. Fisher, *Buddhist Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 33-88.

army of yours which the world together with the devas is unable to subdue, that I will destroy with wisdom, like an unbaked clay bowl with a stone. Having mastered the mind and firmly established mindfulness I shall wander from country to country guiding many disciples. And they will be diligent and energetic in practising my teaching, the teaching of one without sensual desire, and they will go where, having gone, one does not grieve.

Māra : 'For seven years I followed the Lord step by step but did not find an opportunity to defeat that mindful Awakened one'. A crow flew around a stone having the colour of fat: 'Can we find even here something tender? May it be something to eat?'

Not finding anything edible the crow left that place. As the crow and the stone, we leave Gotama, having approached and become disheartened.

Overcome by sorrow his lute fell from his arm and thereupon the unhappy spirit disappeared from that place.⁸⁴

An example of the way in which elements of the Buddha's life are incorporated into the Pali canon is found in the *Mahasaccaka sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* and refers to the moment of Enlightenment. The Buddha recounts to the wandering ascetic, Saccaka, the process by which he came to attain his awakening. Obviously, the purpose of the conversation is to offer Saccaka a chance to come closer to the advanced understanding achieved by the Buddha. The listening ascetic is already aware of the importance and difficulty in achieving Enlightenment and seeks the Buddha's teachings.⁸⁵ The Buddha describes his privileged background, his renunciation and the six years spent as an ascetic. He then describes his realization of the Middle Path and his attainment of Enlightenment through the course of the night. This account makes no mention of Mara and his armies nor of the Bodhi tree, two elements which are generally considered synonymous with the imagery of the

⁸⁴ John D. Ireland, "The Discourse Collection: Selected Texts from the Sutta Nipata", *Wheel Publication* 82 (1983): vv.425–449.

⁸⁵ Thanissaro Bhikkhu describes the Dharma as "the path of practice the Buddha taught to his followers. This, in turn, is divided into three levels: the words of his teachings, the act of putting those teachings into practice, and the Attainment of Awakening as a result of that practice", <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/modern/thanissaro/refuge.html> (1997), 4.

Enlightenment.⁸⁶ Description of Mara's terrifying onslaught is, however, of little import in this case as the Buddha is already preaching to a fellow seeker of the true path. The *Mahaparinirvana sutta*, part of the *Digha nikaya*, describes the Buddha's last days and is one of the more complete references to Gotama's life found in the Pali canon.⁸⁷ However, the description of events still focuses on doctrinal concerns, and details the preparations to be made for his death, rather than expounding a visual narrative.

These examples are typical of the references to Gotama's life found in the *Tipitaka*. It is difficult to see how the *Tipitaka* could be the source of the expansive imagery that has arisen within the Buddhist world. The *Tipitaka* was the exclusive domain of the monks, written in a liturgical language, Pali. It then became the role of the monks to deliver oral recitations of the Buddha's teachings. This set the scene for later commentators and writers who composed a number of texts which were narrative and amenable to public recitation. These popular non-canonical narratives that form the second source for information regarding the life of the Buddha are rarely mentioned when discussing Buddhist iconography even though they are vividly descriptive.

The earliest known accounts dedicated to the Buddha's life story are the *Lalitavistara* and the *Buddhacarita*, both dating from around the 1st century CE. The author of the *Lalitavistara* is unknown but the text, which was written in Sanskrit, is believed to have its origins in the Mahayana school.⁸⁸ The *Buddhacarita* was the work of one of the great Buddhist poets, Asvaghosa, and was also written in classical Sanskrit. While this would suggest the work was that of a Mahayana follower, Sanskrit generally being associated with Northern

⁸⁶ E.J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1931), 66-8. Thomas states that the absence of Mara in the account indicates it was not part of the original story and such events were added later in different places "according to individual ideas of fitness". However, this is a misinterpretation. Absence of these events in texts is yet another example of local adaptation of the story and, indeed, is a later rather than earlier development. Imagery of Mara has been present from the reign of Asoka, as seen in the reliefs on the stupa at Sanci. For an overview see Pritihivi Agrawala, "The Depiction of Māra in Early Buddhist art" in *Function and Meaning in Buddhist Art*, ed. K.R. Kooij and H. van der Veera (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 125-34.

⁸⁷ C. Galloway, "Relationships Between Buddhist texts and Images of the Enlightenment During the Early Pagan Period", in *Burma Art and Archaeology*, ed. A. Green and R. Blurton (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 45-54.

⁸⁸ G. Bays, trans., *The Lalitavistara Sutra. The Voice of the Buddha. The Beauty of Compassion*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1983). A discussion on the origins of the *Lalitavistara* is undertaken in Chapter 6.

Buddhism, scholars generally agree that Asvaghosa was a Sarvastivadin hence the text has Theravada philosophical overtones.⁸⁹ The *Buddhacarita* was a popular version of the Buddha's life story. Between 671 and 695 CE the Chinese pilgrim Yijing wrote that the *Buddhacarita* was "widely read or sung throughout India and the countries of the Southern Sea".⁹⁰

The next surviving complete account of the Buddha's life is the later 6th century work called the *Nidanakatha*, attributed to the Pali commentator Buddhaghosa.⁹¹ It was written as an introduction to the final part of the *Sutta Pitaka*, the *Khuddaka Nikaya* which contains the *Jataka*, and was not part of the original Pali canon. The first cohesive version of the Buddha's life story to be written in Pali, the *Nidanakatha* could be expected to relate most closely to the imagery of Burmese Buddhism since Buddhaghosa was revered in Burma. He is the compiler of a large number of Buddhist texts and is believed by the Burmese to have lived in the Mon city of Thaton around 400 CE.⁹² Buddhaghosa is said to have travelled to Sri Lanka and to have brought back to the mainland Theravada Buddhist texts which helped consolidate the religion's foothold in the Mon regions of the country.⁹³ His account is positioned as a link between the canon and a more public audience and its language is much less poetic than that of the *Lalitavistara* and the *Buddhacarita*. While there is no direct evidence of these texts existing in written form at Bagan they were popular narratives and may have been taught through oral rather than a written tradition. Indeed, they were the only complete versions of the Buddha's last life known and as such must be considered as the possible sources for the visual representations of the Buddha's life found at Bagan.

⁸⁹ E.H. Johnston, *The Buddhacarita: or acts of the Buddha* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1936). In Johnston's introduction, he discusses the evidence which would place Asvaghosa within the Theravadin tradition, xxiv–xxxiv.

⁹⁰ Yijing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago* (A.D. 671–695), trans. J. Takakusa, 1896 (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, reprint 1966), 166.

⁹¹ N.A. Jayawickrama, trans., *The Story of Gotama Buddha (Jātaka-nidāna)* (Oxford: The Pāli Text Society, 1990), xiv. As with the *Lalitavistara*, this text will be discussed at length in Chapter 6.

⁹² GPC, 46–50.

⁹³ Niharranjan Ray, *Theravāda Buddhism in Burma* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1946), 24–6. It should be stated, however, that the legend says Buddhaghosa translated a copy of the Pali grammar and a commentary into Burmese. This is obviously a later attempt to further the claim of Buddhaghosa's Burmese origins and must be false as the Burmese written language did not appear until the 11th century. The local language of the Mon and Pyu were written in a script which was similar to the Magadha and Kadamba scripts of India.

There are numerous other texts dedicated to the story of Gotama's last earthly existence. The vast Tibetan collections, the *Bkash-Hgyur* and *Bstan-Hgyur*, while agreeing in general terms with the previously mentioned versions, contain many small but interesting differences regarding specific moments.⁹⁴ The Buddha's life acts as a sub-plot in Asvaghosa's other famous poem, the *Saundarananda* or *Nanda the Fair* which recounts the tale of Ananda, Gotama's cousin, his renunciation of earthly delights and conversion to a follower of the Buddha's teachings.⁹⁵ A text purporting to represent a Burmese version of the Buddha's life is the *Tathagatha'oudana*.⁹⁶ It provides a specific insight into the complexities of the Burmese version of Gotama Buddha's life story and is particularly interesting as it demonstrates the seamless incorporation of the indigenous Burmese *nats* into the legend.⁹⁷ While the date of its compilation is not known, it is unlikely to have been written before the 14th century CE. Another account which could reasonably be assumed to have had an influence on Burmese Buddhist imagery is the *Jinacarita* which was written in Sri Lanka in the 12th century.⁹⁸ However, it does not provide any new insights into Gotama's life and is sparse in its prose.

A final source of available information regarding the Buddha's life story which relates specifically to Burma is the Mon inscriptions. The translations of the medieval Mon inscriptions, which date from the 11th to 15th centuries, reveal that the events surrounding the Enlightenment were considered of strong enough significance to be recorded.⁹⁹ These texts could be expected to show the closest links to the visual images made during the same period. Unfortunately they are rather fragmentary and only offer glimpses into the

⁹⁴ W. Woodville Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha and the Early History of His Order* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1884, reprint 1907). Rockhill compares and contrasts this text with the works compiled by other eminent authors such as Rhys Davids, Bigandet and Beal. However, these comparisons are textual and do not extend to comments on imagery.

⁹⁵ E.H. Johnston, trans., *The Saundarananda or Nanda the Fair* (Kyoto: Rinsen Book Co, Kyoto, 1971).

⁹⁶ Rev. P. Bigandet, *The Life or Legend of Gaudama the Buddha of the Burmese*, 4th ed. (1866; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1911).

⁹⁷ For an overview of the cult of the spirit nats of Burma see Sir Richard Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats. A Phase of Spirit Worship Prevailing in Burma* (London: W. Griggs and Son, 1906).

⁹⁸ C. Duroiselle, trans., *Jinacarita or 'The Career of the Conqueror'*, 1906 (Delhi: Parimal Publications, reprint 1982). In the introduction Duroiselle places the writing of this poem in the late 12th century, during the reign of Vijayabahu II who ascended the throne in 1186 CE. It lacks the free flowing poetry of earlier works.

⁹⁹ C. Blagden, trans., "Mon Inscriptions. Section 2 The Mediaeval Mon Records Nos. 13-18," *Epigraphica Birmanica* 4, pt.1 (1934): 1-43.

popular narrative of the time. For example, one inscription refers to the *bodhisattva* sitting facing east under the fig tree. Sujata, mistaking Gotama for a *deva*, took a promised offering of milk rice in a golden bowl to the *bodhisattva* and she saw that a radiance was issuing from his body and that the whole mass of the tree was of a golden colour.¹⁰⁰ This event is the subject of what may be the earliest known narrative image in Burma. A stone relief from Arakan dating from around the 6th century has been convincingly interpreted by Gutman as representing this scene, indicating it has been a significant part of a regional visual repertoire from very early times.¹⁰¹

The events that take place during the seven weeks after Enlightenment are also prominent though interestingly, the imagery of the Buddha being sheltered under the *naga*'s hoods, while well known at Bagan, is rarely invoked in the inscriptions.¹⁰² Blagden adopts a popular version of events as he writes in his descriptive account of one inscription "The sixth week was spent under a Mucalinda tree.... where a Naga king, also named Mucalinda, sheltered him from the rain with his hood".¹⁰³ There is in fact no inscription that refers to this, as there is a section missing. He is filling in the gaps using various versions of the Buddha's life which were popular in the early 1900s, principally that published by Bigandet. By taking this approach, Blagden unwittingly reinforces the Theravada paradigm and draw an distinct but probably unintentional link between early Burmese narrative imagery and texts that have emerged from the Theravada tradition. An inscription dating from around 1476 that is also unfortunately incomplete refers to the making of images of the four most recent Buddhas, a popular subject of Bagan period art.¹⁰⁴ Intriguing fragments suggest there were figures of Mara's assault and defeat, statues of monks and nuns, male and female *devas* which would have appeared on plinths or predellas below the main Buddha image, and that objects were covered with gold and silver, all hinting at a remarkable diversity in the artisans' repertoire. This

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰¹ P.Gutman, "The Earliest Narrative Sculpture in Myanmar", Yangon: paper read at the Myanmar Historical Commission 50th Anniversary Celebration conference, 2004.

¹⁰² C.Blagden, trans., "Mon Inscriptions Nos.9-11", 35-36

¹⁰³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 57-9. Interesting is the difference in size of each Buddha. Kakusandha is 40 cubits tall, Konāgamana is 30 cubits in height, Kassapa is 20 cubits and Gotama is 18 cubits high.

inscription is also indicative of a vibrant visual culture which popularized the life story narrative.

To read the visual imagery of the Buddha's last life, it is essential to be familiar with the key elements of the narrative that are most commonly transferred to a visual form and are well known at Bagan. These include the Eight Great Events of the Buddha's life, along with some other principal happenings.¹⁰⁵ The Eight Great Events are known as:

- The Birth
- The Attainment of Enlightenment
- The First Sermon
- The Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven
- The Miracle of the Double (also called the miracle of the mango tree)
- The Taming of Nalagiri Elephant
- The Retreat to Parileyyaka Forest
- The Parinirvana (the Buddha's death)

¹⁰⁵ The role of these events may not be just educative. Another role of these scenes may be to "provide the faithful worshipper with a substitute pilgrimage." R.Wicks, "Program and Narrative in Early Buddhist Art: Some Thoughts on the Prehistory of the Astamahāprātihārya," in *Living a Life in Accord With Dhamma: Papers in Honour of Professor Jean Boisselier on his Eightieth Birthday* (Bangkok: Silpakorn University, 1997), 489. When Gotama was on his death-bed, he instructed Ananda that "there are four places in the world worthy of veneration which would inspire a faithful follower – the birthplace of the Buddha (Lumbini), the place of Enlightenment (Bodhgaya), the place where he taught the Dharma for the first time (Sarnath), and the place of his Parinibbāna (Kusinagara)." This passage is from the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta. These sites became the principal pilgrimages sites for Buddhist devotees. See Nyanaponika Thera and H.Hecker (eds), *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, 174. Soon after the Buddha's death the number of important events grew to include the Miracle of the Double (Sravasti), the Descent from Tavatimsa (Samskaya), Parileyyaka Retreat (Vaisali) and the Taming of Nalagiri Elephant (Rajagaha). For a detailed description of the appearance of the Eight Great Events and other life scenes see *OBEP* 1:148-83. Imagery of the Eight Great Events is also well covered by C. Bautze-Picron, "Between India and Burma: the Andagu Stelae", in *The Art of Burma. New Studies* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999), 37-52.

Other events which are often seen in narrative imagery at Bagan include scenes of the Buddha in Tushita heaven awaiting his final rebirth.¹⁰⁶ Imagery of his mother's immaculate conception, with Queen Mayadevi dreaming a white elephant entered her side is also popular and frequently depict the newborn son being cleansed by the four great Brahmans, led by god Indra.¹⁰⁷ In painted illustrations the imagery is much more diverse than those found in sculptural depictions, with scenes tracing all aspects of the Buddha's life story. Scenes readily recognizable by Burmese Buddhists include those showing the prince confronted with the sufferings of the earthly world, a defining moment – this is when Siddhartha determines to take the path to Enlightenment, rather than become a great ruler of men, a cakravartin or Universal Monarch. These scenes show his encounters with a weak old man, a sick man, a corpse, and finally, he sees a holy man who radiated inner peace.¹⁰⁸ From that moment, Siddhartha realised he must renounce his current life and embark on the path to Enlightenment. Two other events that are popularly depicted are the Great Departure, when Siddhartha finally leaves the palace on his horse, Kanthaka, in the company of his trusted groom, Chandaka, and the Tonsure. Another image which is known during the early Bagan period, but later loses popularity is the depiction of the emaciated Buddha.¹⁰⁹ Gotama spent six years meditating and eating almost nothing, for whatever the ascetics did, Gotama would practice more extremely. Eventually, after a forty-nine day fast Gotama had wasted so

¹⁰⁶ This scene is represented in both sculptural and painted form. For examples of the painted depictions see C. Bautze-Picron, *The Buddhist Murals of Pagan. Timeless Vistas of the Cosmos*, (Trumbull: Weatherhill, 2003), 33-67. Tushita Heaven is "the realm occupied by the *tushitas*, the 'calm' and 'joyful' gods, the fourth of the six 'domains of desire' ", J. Boisselier, *The Wisdom of the Buddha* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 36. It is the third-lowest heaven in which the *bodhisattvas* await their rebirth and is also known as Indra's or Sakka's Heaven, Sakka being the Pali name for Indra. Indra is often accompanied by his vehicle, the three-headed elephant, Erawan, and usually carries a *cakra*, or disc and a conch shell.

¹⁰⁷ Images of the birth are found in numerous temples including Temple 820 and the Ananda. Variations to the birth story include a second bathing, this time by Naga kings. See S. Khosla, *The Historical Evolution of the Buddha Legend* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1989), 17. Bhikkhu Sugandha and T.C. Majupuria, *Lumbini. The Birth Place of the Buddha*, Craftsman Press, Bangkok, n.d., ca. 1990, 4.

¹⁰⁸ These three signs – an old man, a sick man and a corpse, become a warning of death as they are Yama's messengers. Yama is the God of Death. See Phra Khantipalo, *The Splendour of Enlightenment. A Life of the Buddha* (Bangkok: Mahāmakut Rājavidyālaya Press, 1976), 39.

¹⁰⁹ These images appear in sculptural form but rarely in painting form. The best preserved sculptural examples have been found in Kyauk-ku-umin and Myin-pya-gu temples.

severely that he lost the marks of a great man.¹¹⁰ His flesh became blackened, losing its previous golden hue.¹¹¹

As noted previously, depictions of the soon-to-be Buddha receiving sustenance by the maiden Sujata who, recognising his divine nature, presented him with rice milk prepared with great devotion and served in a golden bowl, is part of the narrative as known at Bagan. The journey to the Bodhi tree, under which Gotama attains Enlightenment is a popular part of the narrative, and forms an important role in the sculpture narrative at the Ananda temple.¹¹² During

¹¹⁰ The thirty-two bodily marks of a great man have their origins in Brahmanical traditions. There are also 108 marks associated with the sole of each foot. These appear in images of the Buddha's footprint. A complete list of the thirty-two marks is given in the Appendix. The thirty-two marks are not mentioned in all texts recounting the life of the Buddha. For example, the well-known version of the Buddha's life written by Asvaghosa, the *Buddhacarita*, refers specifically only to the circle of hair on the forehead, webbed fingers and toes, wheel marks on the feet and testicles covered like an elephant's, which are mentioned in the context of the newborn Buddha being shown to the sage Asita. See I. Schotsman, trans., *Asvaghosa's Buddhacarita. The life of the Buddha* (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1995), 14, canto 1, sloka 60. Also Johnston, *The Buddhacarita*, 13. In the *Jinacarita*, the only features remarked upon are the long lotus-shaped eyes and his lotus-like feet marked with the wheel. See Duroiselle, *Jinacarita*, vs.86 and 117. Rockhill's translation of the Tibetan *Bkash-Hgyur* and *Bstan-Hgyur* refer to the prediction that a son would be born with "the thirty-two signs of a great man", but does not remark on what they are. Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha*, 15. The infant is described as being of "bold appearance" (folio.461a). The supernatural signs of the Buddha are recounted in Alabaster's translation of the Thai text, *Pathomma Somphothiyan*. The signs tend to be expounded in non-canonical texts. Henry Alabaster, *The Wheel of Law* 1871 (London: Trubner and Coreprint reprint 1972), 111-6.

¹¹¹ The image of the emaciated Gotama is rarely seen in Southeast Asian art. Brown has argued that this depiction does not refer to Gotama's period as an ascetic, rather it refers to the second fast period which followed Enlightenment. However, I do not believe his argument can be sustained. R. Brown, "The Emaciated Gandharan Buddha Images: Asceticism, Health and Body", in *Living a Life in Accord with the Dhamma: Papers in Honour of Professor Jean Boisselier on his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. N. Eilenburg, Subhadradis Diskul and R. Brown, (Bangkok: Silpakorn University, 1997), 105-15. Another reference to the blackened skin of the Buddha occurs in Alabaster, *Wheel of Law*, 92. It describes the future Buddha whom, immediately prior to his descent from Tusita Heaven for his final rebirth, five signs appeared: "First, - The flowers with which he was adorned withered. Second, - His splendid robes appeared discoloured and soiled. Third, - Sweat streamed from the pores of his body. Fourth, - His beautiful golden skin became dark and discoloured. Fifth, - he could not rest at ease on his heavenly couch." In the *Buddhacarita*, it expressly states that while the Buddha had wasted to skin and bone he still shone with the depth of his understanding (Schotsman, canto 12:98-99). The *Jinacarita* also omits any reference to Gotama's blackened and withered body except to say that he regained bodily perfection after breaking the fast (Duroiselle, *Jinacarita*, 1906, slokas 204-205). The omission of these details in such popular accounts may explain the lack of images of the fasting Buddha to be found in Southeast Asia. Interestingly, in the *Nidanakatha* the gods offer to infuse food through the pores of the skin to revive Gotama. This version has a relationship to Tibetan practices. Bhaiṣajyaguru, a Buddha in Japan and a deity in Tibet, is the "master of remedies". He is often depicted holding a myrobalan fruit in his right hand, which is in *varada mudra*. He and his 12 warriors, which include Indra, "are said to command the 80,000 pores of the skin". See L. Frédéric, *Buddhism* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), 114.

¹¹² Each Buddha has a different tree associated with their attainment of Enlightenment. This tradition may have emerged from an ancient tree cult whose origins have been traced back to the Indus valley cultures. See N. Chaudhuri, "Pre-historic Tree Cult", *Indian Historical Quarterly* 19 (1943), 318-29. This reinforces the links between pre-existing ancient beliefs and Buddhism.

Gotama's period of meditation under the bodhi tree prior to attaining Enlightenment, Mara and his armies attempt to distract Gotama from his task, to no avail. Scenes of Mara's assault are an important part of the visual repertoire at Bagan and are most prominent in the form of plaques. The best known of these are those which encircle the exterior of the Ananda temple.¹¹³

The most common scene from the Buddha's life is that depicting the moment of Enlightenment when Gotama reached his right hand to the earth, calling the Earth to witness this auspicious event. The Earth shook in acknowledgment of Gotama's previous good deeds and as testimony to Gotama's worthiness to become Buddha. The *bhumisparsa mudra* is by far the most common found in all of Burma and signifies the importance of this event for Buddhists. For the next seven weeks Gotama remained near the site of Enlightenment, practising spiritual meditations. During the sixth week, a fierce storm arose. So that the Buddha would not be disturbed from his deep thoughts the naga king, Mucalinda, arose, wrapped his coils around the Buddha and spread his hoods to shelter him, an image that is popular in both Burma and Thailand.¹¹⁴ In the seventh week two merchant brothers who passed and recognised that they were in the presence of a truly great being, offered Gotama nourishment for the first time since attaining Enlightenment.¹¹⁵ Imagery depicting the Buddha flanked by two figures is seen later in the Bagan period but the interpretation of the two figures varies. Sometimes they are identified as the two brothers when they are seen in the context of this narrative. However, imagery of Gotama's two principal monks, Sariputta and Mogallana, replace the two brothers in later configurations, in these cases the sculptures have become disassociated from Gotama's life narrative.

Imagery depicting the First Sermon, Miracle of the Double or the Miracle of the

¹¹³ E.Guillon, *L'Armée de Māra au pied de l'Ānanda (Págan – Birmanie)*.

¹¹⁴ Sculptures of the Buddha under the naga were particularly common in the Khmer influenced region of Lopburi during the 12th and 13th centuries. H.Woodward, *The Sacred Sculpture of Thailand* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 85-86.

¹¹⁵ While this order of events is consistent with the *Buddhacarita* and Buddhaghosa's account, the later text of the *Jinacarita* refers to Sakka's presentation to the Buddha of a myrobalan fruit, known for its medicinal properties, along with a tooth-cleanser. Images of the seated Buddha with a small fruit in his right hand are frequently seen in Burma but do not appear prior to the early Bagan period. See Duroiselle, *Jinacarita*, 168. Another reference to the giving of fruits appears in Bigandet, *Life or Legend of Gaudama*, 107.

Mango Tree, Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven, the Taming of Nalagiri Elephant, Retreat to Parileyyaka Forest and the Parinirvana enjoyed various degrees of popularity during the early Bagan period. The Birth, Enlightenment, First Sermon and Parinirvana are the four most popular scenes, the remaining four appearing in situations where there is room to depict an extended narrative. The sculptural depictions of these principal events will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. In particular, the specific iconography portrayed will be linked to the principal accounts of the Buddha's life known to have been in existence during the early Bagan period.

Summary

The artistic inspiration that has been drawn from Gotama's life story cannot be overestimated. The visual depictions of the Buddha's life are often interpreted as being indicative of the school of Buddhism which reached each area. In Srivijaya, for example, Mahayana Buddhism was favoured, not in its esoteric forms, but in its more mainstream form. This is clear from the dominance of images of the important *bodhisattva*, Avalokiteshvara, bedecked in jewels, which are amongst the most numerous Buddhist artifacts from this period. From the Dvaravati period in Thailand, great wheels were installed symbolizing the turning of the wheel of law. The form of Buddhism to reach this region during the 4th–7th centuries was clearly from a branch of the Theravada school which favoured the use of aniconic imagery to represent the Buddha. Following a study of the stucco reliefs at Nakhon Pathom, the largest extant Dvaravati city Woodward concluded that Dvaravati Buddhists may have been followers of a Sanskrit-using Hinayana sect, possibly the Sarvastivada.¹¹⁶

In the Theravada Buddhist traditions of Southeast Asia the visual expression of the religion relies almost exclusively on this final narrative. Rather than esoteric *mudras* which express very specific aspects of Buddhist philosophy and promote individual exercises of belief, the popular imagery associated with Gotama's life story focuses on key aspects of the narrative. The images

¹¹⁶ H. Woodward, "Studies in the Art of Central Siam", PhD diss. (Yale University, 1975), 16. As the Mahayana became the preferred Buddhist stream of the north, Sarvastivadins, who are philosophically linked to the Theravadins, may have moved into Theravada areas to gain spiritual support. The use of Sanskrit is only short lived and suggests that the Sarvastivadins readily discarded Sanskrit as their choice of language in favour of Pali.

represent the need for personal sacrifice, the importance of the study of the Buddha's teachings along with examples illustrating how steadfast belief will overcome all obstacles. The imagery also highlights the miraculous nature of the Buddha, which keeps him at arms length from ordinary men, while at the same time emphasizing that it is within everyone's grasp to become a Buddha.

At Bagan, the importance of the Buddha's life story saw illustrations of this narrative integrated into the temple architecture. Wall paintings depicting the last life and the *jatakas* often encircled the interior, frequently at heights which precluded contemplation. This supports a purpose of them being representations of the Buddha's teachings rather than having a direct educative role.¹¹⁷ The sculptural depictions of the Buddha's life scenes, however, were firmly positioned in the fabric of the building, in specially designed niches, in positions which were always prominent. These images were meant to be a focus of contemplation.

Conclusion

With contemporaneous written accounts of Bagan's early history being of variable reliability or simply absent, foundation scholars of Burmese history relied heavily on the then popular *GPC*. As a consequence the *GPC* has unwittingly been placed in a position whereby it played a major role in the formative phase of Bagan's historical and art historical studies. As has been shown, however, some of the principle events in the *GPC* are now being more closely scrutinized by current historians. Some of the foundation elements of the *GPC* no doubt have a basis in truth and these elements will be addressed during the following sculptural review. The Pyu, the sacking of Thaton and defeat of the Mon, Shin Araham, India and Sri Lanka are all agencies that influenced the development of Bagan. As the following stylistic analysis of Bagan's early sculptural material will demonstrate, Bagan's artistic heritage owes much to interactions with other cultures, but the bias presented in the *GPC* cannot always be upheld.

¹¹⁷ C. Bautze-Picron, *The Buddhist Murals of Pagan. Timeless Vistas of the Cosmos* (Trumbull: Weatherhill, 2003), 1-29. In this section Bautze-Picron discusses the general formation of temple wall paintings.

In addition, the narrative aspect of Theravada Buddhism, that is the *jatakas* and the story of the last earthly existence, came to dominate the Buddhist art of Bagan. The significance of the narrative as it appears at Bagan lies in its ability to further inform our knowledge regarding Buddhist practices at the time. The story of the last existence that emerged at Bagan was a synthesis of local and introduced traditions that included imagery which can be shown to relate to the Mahayana and Theravada schools that was layered on top of pre-existing local traditions.

Identification of visual links between early Bagan period sculpture and the sculpture of cultures in the broader region greatly enhances the understanding of the period as these linkages could only occur if there was indeed interaction between the groups identified. Art history has, therefore, a major role to play at Bagan. With a relative abundance of material which can be reliably attributed to this period, visual connections between neighbouring cultures may be the most reliable evidence for supporting or refuting the written historical records.

Chapter 2 The Pyu and the Arrival of the Burmans – a Critical Association for Burma's Art History

The Pyu

The Pyu people are associated with the earliest Buddhist artifacts in Burma. Pyu language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group and shares some commonalities with Mon and Khmer in terms relating to fundamental societal concerns such as marriage and cosmology.¹¹⁸ It is not known when the Pyu people migrated into Burma though they were grouped into substantial communities in central Burma from around the 1st century CE.¹¹⁹ Chinese records indicate that the Pyu were well recognised as a regional kingdom of some influence from quite early times. One record of particular importance written in the 4th century, but referring to the reign of Emperor Ming (58-76 CE) describes how "the Yongchang prefecture in southwestern Yunnan was established by the Piaoyue (the Pyu Kingdom) and Yuandu (India) ... This short but very important record indicates in the 1st century, China, Burma, and India maintained a very active intercourse, most likely of a commercial kind".¹²⁰

The records imply that the Pyu kingdom, India and China were part of a trading axis which passed through north and north-eastern India via Assam and Manipur, and then through Arakan to either Yunnan or to central Burma from around the 1st century CE. The trade route between India and China is well

¹¹⁸ Aung-Thwin, "Spirals in History", 597.

¹¹⁹ Stargardt suggests Pyu settlement dates back to late prehistory, from around the 5th century BCE. J. Stargardt, *The Ancient Pyu of Burma*, and Stargardt, "Historical Geography of Burma: Creation of enduring patterns in the early Pyu period", *IIAS Newsletter*, no 25 (2001). More recently Hudson reports that wood found amongst brick debris during excavations at Beikthano, a major Pyu site, has been carbon dated to 180BCE – 260CE. A full analysis of carbon dated material from the site supports that some structures were built in the 2nd-3rd century. This is the earliest dating so far available from a Pyu settlement. Hudson, "The Origins of Bagan", 129-32.

¹²⁰ Sun Laichen, "Chinese Historical Sources on Burma. A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources" *Journal of Burma Studies* 2 (1997): 11. The reference appears in *Huayang guo zhi* by Chang Qu, written around the late 4th century. A much earlier Chinese record, *Shi ji*, c.145–86 BCE, suggests the Pyu, China and India were part of a trade route from as early as the 2nd century BCE. Sun Laichen, "Chinese Sources," 9. Thorough study of these early references to the Pyu has the potential to have a marked effect on our understanding of early Burmese history. When Luce wrote his chapter on the Pyu for *Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma* in the 1970s, the earliest known Chinese record he had knowledge of was the *Huayang guo zhi*. Had he had access to the earlier records, Luce's interpretation of Burma's early history would no doubt have been somewhat different. The Pyu have been identified in historical documents as P'iao, Pru, Chu-po, T'u-lo-chu and Tircul. G. Luce, "The Ancient Pyu", reproduced in Papers of the Fiftieth Anniversary Conference *JBR* 1, p.307.

known, although the inclusion of Burma as a regular diversion is rarely mentioned. The India-China road was no doubt a Buddhist pilgrimage route taking Chinese Buddhists to major Buddhist sites in India and Indian missionaries into China.¹²¹ In light of regular communication between India, China and Burma, Buddhists must surely have found their way to Burma as well. By the 3rd century the Pyu had consolidated their position as a kingdom worthy of ongoing mention in Chinese records.¹²²

A Wide Sphere of Influence

Pyu settlements were centred around the tributaries of Burma's great rivers – the Irrawaddy, Sittang, Chindwin, Salween and Mu. These tributaries provided seasonal flooding through Burma's central dry zone. Ongoing excavations and aerial mapping are revealing evidence of related settlements from the Iron Age period along the river systems mentioned above.¹²³ These villages appear culturally connected to the Pyu. In addition to these small village sites, large Pyu towns have been found along this central geographic corridor. Art historically the most significant sites include Beikthano (Visnu City) in Central Burma; Halin, near Shwebo in Upper Burma; and Srikshetra (Tharekhittaya in Burmese, the site is also close to the village of Hmawza) located near Pyay.¹²⁴

¹²¹ There was also an active sea route between India and China, following the monsoonal trade winds through peninsular Southeast Asia. The northern overland route was less popular but was still an avenue for cultural exchange.

¹²² Sun Laichen, "Chinese Historical Sources on Burma," 9-12.

¹²³ A draft paper outlining some of these important discoveries was first presented at the *Congress of Indo-Pacific Pre-History Association*, Taipei, 9-15 September 2002 by B. Hudson, "Bronze Mother Goddess, Carnelian Tigers and Radiocarbon Dates: Some Recent Discoveries and New Research Directions in the Archaeology of Burma up to the 11th–13th Century Bagan Period". A copy of the paper is available at <http://acl.arts.usyd.edu.au/~hudson>. Hudson expands on the archaeology of early Pyu sites in his PhD thesis. Hudson, "The origins of Bagan", 125-151 and 133-138. Hudson details recent dating of finds at Halin. Skeletal remains indicate settlement at the site from as early as the beginning of the common era. Hudson's thesis is the first major research effort to fully integrate all archaeological research relating to the Pyu taking advantage of the most contemporary dating methods and interpretation of aerial surveys. Prehistoric finds have also shown links to Pyu sites with, for example, Pyu coins being found in the same vicinity. Nyunt Han, Win Maung (Tanpawady) and E. Moore, "Prehistoric grave goods from the Chindwin and Samon river regions", in *Burma Art and Archaeology* eds. A. Green and R. Burton (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 2-3.

¹²⁴ Other major sites include Maingmaw and Tagaung. Hudson notes a number of other smaller Pyu sites that have been more recently excavated. Hudson, "The Origins of Bagan", 119-146.

Most of the extant physical remains of Pyu origin, which at the primary sites are nearly all architectural or religious artifacts, show links to Indian models.¹²⁵ The artifacts indicate that there was a strong Buddhist tradition amongst the Pyu, though the Pyu were not exclusively Buddhist. At Srikshetra and Halin both Vaisnavite and Buddhist icons have been found indicating that these religions existed side by side as they did in India. Importantly, the type of Buddhist imagery at Srikshetra is also varied with large *stupa* complete with reliquary chambers, a tradition closely associated with Theravada practice, coexisting with imagery of *bodhisattvas* which are usually associated with the Mahayana school.

Whether the Pyu were already exposed to Buddhism before they moved into Burma is as yet impossible to determine. However, as archaeological evidence is now favouring a Pyu presence in Burma from the protohistoric period and there is no evidence of Buddhist practice prior to the 1st century, Buddhism was most likely introduced via overland and maritime trade routes. As the stronger and culturally more advanced powers, the kingdoms of China and India had a greater impact on Pyu culture than the other way round. As discussed previously, however, the construct of the Indianisation of Southeast Asia has led to the marginalisation of local innovation and indigenous cultural practices and the same can be said for the Sinosation of cultures. The concept of Indianisation in relation to the Pyu is on unsteady ground in light of archaeological study which suggests that, by the 1st century CE, Pyu cities were already of complex design, with extensive irrigation systems. While the use of complex irrigation systems is well known in relation to Khmer sites from the early centuries of the Common Era in Cambodia, *mandala*-like city plans integrating seasonal water supplies were already a central feature of Pyu city design and pre-date Cambodian sites.¹²⁶

Pyu culture was dynamic. Chinese records from the Tang dynasty (618–906)

¹²⁵ J. Guy, "The Art of the Pyu and the Mon", in *The Art of Burma. New Studies* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999), 13-28.

¹²⁶ Stargardt's interpretation of water usage, based on analysis of aerial survey and ground study, includes comment on the cosmology of Pyu cities. She hypothesized that the cities of Srikshetra, Halin and Beikthano were designed around the fundamental concept of Mount Meru with the surrounding tanks symbolizing the cosmic waters. Stargardt, *The Ancient Pyu*, 105-42.

describe Pyu music and dance performances, one of which was apparently given at the Tang court. The *Jiu Tang shu* (Old history of the Tang dynasty) completed in 944 or 945 writes of visits to the Tang court by envoys and musicians and gives details of Pyu territorial control and religion.¹²⁷ The group of eight figurative bronzes of entertainers unearthed at Srikshetra, dating from the 6th–8th century, supports these records (fig.3).¹²⁸ These figures demonstrate the Pyu's skill in bronze casting and their ability to craft detailed figures in realistic poses. The full and rounded facial features of the figures are distinctive and representative of many Pyu images.

The Pyu left an enduring legacy for Burma when a Pyu king initiated the calendar of the Burmese Era in 638 CE and this dating system is still in use today in most official capacities. Sun Laichen notes that the *Xin Tang shu* (New history of the Tang dynasty), contains a detailed description of the Pyu kingdom, including its religion, and the towns and settlements under Pyu control. This record was not contemporaneous however, being completed in 1060, more than 100 years after the fall of the Tang dynasty, and when the Pyu no longer had a significant presence in Burma. The last record of the Pyu to appear in Chinese sources dates from the early part of the Song dynasty (960–1279).¹²⁹

Spiritual Beliefs and the Pyu – a Multifaceted Buddhism

With maritime and overland trade routes, there were ample opportunities for cultural exchange. Outside influences can be integrated into communities in different ways and this is well demonstrated through Buddhism. During the 5th–8th century CE, Buddhism's presence in Burma was in its ascendancy. At some

¹²⁷ Sun Laichen, "Historical Sources," 15-16. Luce notes that interactions between China and the Pyu were known to historians from as early as 880, referring to mention of the Pyu in the writings of Persian authors. Luce, *Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma*, 47-8.

¹²⁸ For a general overview of significant archaeological finds at Pyu sites, see Aung Thaw, *Historical Sites in Burma* (Yangon: The Ministry of Union Culture, Government of the Union of Burma, 1972), 1-33.

¹²⁹ The demise of the Pyu coincided with a marked upheaval in Chinese dynastic history. The lack of reference in Chinese annals to the late Pyu period and early Burman kingdom at Bagan may be related to China's own internal turmoil, which saw the former great Tang dynasty fragment, and the emergent Song dynasty divide into two principal regions of control. For a period of around 150 years, the Song courts were more inward than outward looking and there was less contact with neighbouring kingdoms.

Pyu centres, notably the early capital of Srikshetra and later at Halin, Buddhism and its visual imagery flourished. It appears, however, that not all Pyu settlements embraced Buddhism in the same way or to the same extent. Even though the settlements share similarities in the form of architecture and town planning, they were not necessarily influenced by the same schools of Buddhism. At Beikthano, for example, monastic structures have been excavated and their construction pattern has been identified as sharing similarities with monasteries at Nagajunakonda in Andhra state, South India.¹³⁰ In contrast to the quantity of Buddhist figures found at Srikshetra, none had been found at Beikthano prior to around 2002. The absence of any Buddhist imagery had been interpreted as suggesting the presence of the Aparasiliya or Mahasasaka sects who shunned the use of Buddhist images. Similarly, no images have been found at Maingmaw.¹³¹ Than Tun wrote, "Like Ari Kamedu, an important Roman trading port near Madras, we assume that they were centres of Theravādins, a Buddhist sect which did not believe in the worship of icons".¹³² This statement refers to the fact that Buddhists of the Theravada school were relatively slow to embrace realistic depictions of the Buddha, preferring aniconic representations. While images of the Buddha were commonplace in Gandharan art of the 1st century CE, the southern areas of India were slower to develop a realistic visual form of the Buddha. However, it is an error to interpret this as being due to any doctrinal edict prohibiting such depictions. Indeed, there are no such prohibitions in Buddhist teachings.¹³³ Recently an image of the Buddha was found for the first time at Beikthano (fig.4). It probably indicates a later occupation phase, however, as the image is

¹³⁰ Aung Thaw, *Historical Sites in Burma*, 4.

¹³¹ Hudson, "The origins of Bagan", 127-28. He notes that finds at the site include coins, beads and burial urns plus "A ritual structure decorated with bricks bearing a *bhadrapitha* design and pictures of a horseman".

¹³² Than Tun, "Brahmanical and Buddhist Iconographs of Pyu, Mon, Rakhine and Myanma", (paper presented at the 50th Anniversary of Sanatan Dhrna Swayamseak Sangh, Rama Krishna Mission Main Hall, Yangon, 2000).

¹³³ Karlsson, "Face to Face with the Absent Buddha", 54. Karlsson's dissertation discusses the origins of depictions of the Buddha. He makes no differentiation between the two streams of Buddhism in relating to imagery. Rather, he focuses on the various impetuses that promote the use of imagery, from meditation through to the educational role of such depictions.

likely to date from around 6th – 7th centuries, sharing as it does stylistic characteristics with others attributed to this period (figs.13-15).¹³⁴

Pyu Artistic Styles

The Pyu Buddhist artifacts found at Srikshetra provide a great wealth of cultural material dating from around the 5th century through to the 7th century.

Srikshetra is very important in the legendary history of Burma. The *GPC* writes of the founding of a great kingdom named Tharekhittara (Srikshetra) which had been prophesied by the Buddha. This tale heralds the arrival of Buddhism to Burma. According to legend, while visiting the town of Lékaing during the Buddha's fifth Lent season two brothers built a monastery of fragrant sandalwood. The Buddha travelled to the summit of Mount Hpo-u and saw two omens. He prophesied that:

...in the 101st year of the religion after my entry into *parinirvana* five great signs shall be manifested in this place. The earth shall quake with a great echoing sound. At Hpo-u-maw a great lake will appear. There will arise the rivers Samon and Samyiet. Mt. Poppa [sic] will arise as a cone out of the earth. And the sea-courses will dry up around the foundations of Tharekhittara. When these signs appear, the mole will leave his present body and become a man named Dwattabaung, who shall found a great city and kingdom and set up a palace and umbrella and rule as king. Beginning from the time of this king my religion shall long be manifest in Burma.¹³⁵

If this anecdote were true, Buddhism would have been well established in Burma from 362 BCE. As yet there is no evidence to suggest Buddhism or Srikshetra were established by that time. The chronology, however, would be consistent with King Asoka (r.c.272–231 BCE) sending his missionaries from India to the Golden Land. While the story as told in the *GPC* is fanciful, it may have some basis in the actual arrival of Buddhist missionaries from India.

¹³⁴ The sculpture was found at Beikthano during an official archaeological excavation in 2003. A photograph of the object was shown to me by U Aung Kyaing, Director of Archaeology for Upper Burma. It was discovered amongst architectural ruins which were tentatively dated to the 1st century however it is unlikely this images dates from this time. No doubt further information will be made available in the near future. This is an important find and may lead to a major review of previous explorations at the site.

¹³⁵ *GPC*, 7.

The Buddhist relics found at Srikshetra attest to a hierarchical society, with inscriptions indicating Buddhism was patronised by Pyu kings and queens. Srikshetra's Buddhist imagery is very mixed, drawing on both the Theravada and Mahayana traditions, and shows links to South Indian sculpture.¹³⁶ There are clear similarities in visual construction between Pyu narrative stone relief carvings and those of the great *stupa* of Sanchi, particularly in the division of the image into separate frames (fig.5, fig.6). Imagery in a distinctly local style, such as Hindu images of Visnu and Brahmanical relics, attests not only to a multifaceted religious environment but also indicates local craftsmen were as skilled in stone carving as their Indian contemporaries (fig.7).¹³⁷ The Buddhist imagery is strongly narrative. Carved stone reliefs depicting scenes from the Buddha's life such as the Nativity, First Sermon and the Enlightenment have been unearthed (fig.5, fig.8). The presence of these narrative figures indicates that the stories associated with the Buddha's life were well-known and from this point, narrative becomes a significant feature in Burmese Buddhist art. There are also sculptural images of the Buddha in various *mudra* including *dharmacakra*, *dhyana*, *bhumisparsa* and double and single *vitarka*. A small number of standing images have been uncovered, including one depicting the Buddha with left arm pendant, right arm raised in *abhaya mudra*, and another with left hand raised to hip height and holding either the end of his robe or the grass bundles, indicating this is an image of the Buddha walking towards the *bodhi* tree where he will attain Enlightenment. A few images show a seated Buddha with right hand in *bhumisparsa mudra* with the left resting in his lap holding a spherical object. This could be an alms bowl, a jewel or even the myrobalan fruit, the latter being associated with the healing Buddha.¹³⁸ Imagery of the Buddha depicted with the *bodhisattva* Maitreya has also been found and has been interpreted as being indicative of Mahayana influence though this is

¹³⁶ South Indian Buddhist sculpture in the context of other Indian art styles is described by Pratapaditya Pal, *Indian Sculpture. A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection* (Berkeley: Los Angeles County Museum in conjunction with University of California Press Berkeley, 1988).

¹³⁷ The presence of Visnu in Burma dates from the Pyu period, and extended through to the end of the Bagan period, around the 13th century. See P. Gutman, "Vishnu in Burma," *The Art of Burma. New Studies*, ed. D. Stadtner (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999), 29-36.

¹³⁸ For more details of this type of imagery see Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1979).

not conclusive (fig.9).¹³⁹ Combined with figures of Brahma, however, their presence suggests a multifaceted form of Buddhism was adopted by the Pyu.¹⁴⁰ Also in evidence are elements of indigenous animism and naga worship.

Most of the epigraphic material uncovered at Pyu sites was written in Sanskrit. The scripts used during the Pyu period include the Kadamba script of southern India and, in the case of some Sanskrit inscriptions found at Hmawsa, in a north-eastern Indian Brahmi script.¹⁴¹ While the latter would generally indicate the presence of northern Mahayana Buddhism, the text was often doctrinally Theravadin, suggesting the presence of the Sarvastivada sect.¹⁴² The Sarvastivadins were a northern Buddhist sect but were doctrinally related to the southern Theravadins rather than the Mahayanans.¹⁴³ Hence during the height of the Pyu period it is not possible to equate Sanskrit with the Mahayana exclusively, though Pali always remained the doctrinal script of the Theravada alone. If the Sarvastivadin sect was present, it is yet more evidence to support the proposal of an active transport route between northeastern India and Burma.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ While Luce states categorically that the depiction of Maitreya and the Buddha is "plainly Mahāyānist" this is no longer considered the case. The Maitreya cult is now well identified and existed from around the second century BCE. Maitreya is revered by some sections of the Theravada school and the *bodhisattva*'s presence does not preclude Theravada Buddhism. Luce, "Phases of pre-Pagan Burma", 53. Inchang Kim, *The Future Buddha Maitreya: An Iconological Study* (New Delhi: DK Printworld, 1997).

¹⁴⁰ Hall also remarks on the syncretic religious mix at Srikshetra. He suggests that Arakan was the source of Mahayanist imagery as there was royal intermarriage between the two kingdoms. "This evidence of Pyu-Arakanese relations explains the presence in Srikshetra of Mahayana Buddhism of the type practised under the Pala dynasty in Bengal". Hall, *History of Southeast Asia*, 154-5.

¹⁴¹ D.H. Roop, *An Introduction to the Burmese Writing System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), ix-x.

¹⁴² Niharranjan Ray, *Sanskrit Buddhism in Burma* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1936), 19-22.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 21. Yijing was a Sarvastivadin. He frequently referred to the presence of the Sarvastivadin Buddhists during his travels but may have given a biased interpretation. Mahayanans were present in parts of the Indonesian archipelago, in particular in the kingdom of Srivijaya. Yijing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion*.

¹⁴⁴ A similar study of narrative images to the one undertaken later in this thesis would address the case of Sarvastivadin presence. The *Buddhacarita*, one of the major secular narrative texts recalling the life of the Buddha, was written by Asvaghosa around the 1st century and Asvaghosa was likely a Sarvastivadin. Pyu narrative imagery could be expected to draw on this version of the Buddha's life.

The influence of Gupta India (320–647) can be readily found in the architectural and sculptural remains of the early Pyu kingdoms.¹⁴⁵ The Gupta style is very distinctive: a typical example from Sarnath dating from the 5th–6th century depicts an artfully carved Buddha with a beautifully elegant form that is simultaneously slim and yet rounded (fig.10). The Buddha's chest is not yet of the large "lion-type", one of the thirty-two marks of a great man that artisans tried to interpret in their sculptures. The figure is held erect, but remains relaxed and composed. The robe is arranged over both shoulders and is almost transparent. After cascading gently over both ankles, the artist has carved a delicate row of pleats which fan out in front of the Buddha's shins. At first glance this can be easily misinterpreted as depicting the Buddha seated on a cloth, rather than the fabric being an extension of the Buddha's robe. The hands are skillfully crafted and held in *dharmacakra mudra*, a position that is almost always associated with the Buddha's robes covering both shoulders. The minimalist relief carving surrounding the Buddha has its origins in early Indian Buddhist carvings such as those seen at Sanchi. The *yakshi* figures appearing on the halo above the Buddha's head were the first anthropomorphic figures seen in Buddhist sculpture.¹⁴⁶ Images of *yakshi* are almost entirely restricted to Indian Buddhist art while *apsara* take a similar decorative role throughout Southeast Asia. The predella underneath depicts followers turning the Wheel of Law at the Buddha's First Sermon held in the Deer Park at Benares.¹⁴⁷

The Buddha is shown in the serene meditative mode, with downcast eyes and

¹⁴⁵ The Gupta period extended from 320–647 with the kingdom reaching across northern India from Mathura to Bengal and from the base of the Himalayas to the Vindhya mountains. As Pal remarks, the "two best schools of Gupta art are those developed at the Buddhist centres of Sarnath and Ajanta" even though all Gupta rulers were followers of the Hindu faith and Buddhism was already losing its position as the preeminent religion in its country of origin. Pal, *The Ideal Image. The Gupta Sculptural Tradition and its Influence* (New York: Asia Society in conjunction with Weatherhill, 1978), 35. Gupta kings were tolerant of other religions and the drive towards artistic excellence was equally strong amongst those of all faiths. See also James Harle, *Gupta Sculpture: Indian Sculpture of the Fourth to Sixth Centuries A.D* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

¹⁴⁶ *Yakshis* are female deities. Their voluptuous form is related to their role as fertility deities and also to their role as temptresses. *Yakshas* are their male counterparts and like *yakshis* have their origins in Vedic history and both were probably worshipped as a spirit cult. They are sometimes described as genies, with the ability to create magic. *Apsaras* are divine beings who are the dancers of the gods. They are believed to live in the trees with the *gandharvas*, heavenly musicians. Anna Dallapiccola, *Dictionary of Hindu Lore and Legend* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 80, 207 and Knappert, *Indian Mythology*, 275-6.

¹⁴⁷ D.L. Snellgrove, *The Image of the Buddha* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), 33.

slight smile, that later became the focus of Theravadin representations. The feet are in *padmasana*, the double lotus position with both soles upturned. The *dharmacakra mudra*, when shown in conjunction with specific imagery relating to the First Sermon and the turning of the Wheel of Law, as is indicated here by the imagery in the predella, is more correctly called *dharmacakra pravartana*, the gesture of preaching. The head is topped with a small *usnisa* covered with a regular arrangement of tight hair curls that sit quite flat against the skull. The elongated earlobes are damaged though it appears that they did not quite touch the shoulders. The face is naturalistic in form being almost heart-shaped, narrowing around the chin. The moderately arched eyebrows are formed by carving the stone into a sharp ridge. The eyebrows remain separate though they run as two parallel lines into the bridge of the nose which, unfortunately, is damaged.

The composition of the image, with the Buddha framed from behind and with a predella below, is a form that would later be favoured by Bagan-period artisans. At the Buddha's sides are two lions rampant.¹⁴⁸ Here, the lions form part of a low throne back. Immediately above each of them is the head of a *makara*, a mythical monster. The large circular nimbus resting on the backs of the *makara* is also multi-symbolic. In this circular form and in context with the rest of the imagery it is a reference to the Wheel of Law which is synonymous with the First Sermon. The scalloping of the outer edge of the nimbus is suggestive of flames or light rays; the nimbus also symbolises the rays of light that emerge from the Buddha, another sign of the Buddha's greatness. The elaborate foliage in the nimbus is a decorative element that has existed since the earliest Buddhist art, and may be an indication or extension of the animist beliefs of the pre-Vedic period. Flowers and other images of the natural world are an integral part of Buddhist literature regarding the Buddha's life, and represent bountiful beauty and joyous occasions associated with the presence of the Buddha. As

¹⁴⁸ The lion is an important Buddhist symbol with multiple meanings. The Buddha's family clan name, Sakya, means lion and the lion's roar symbolises the turning of the Wheel of Law. The *Lakkhana Sutta*, which details the symbolic physical appearance of a great man, specifically the Buddha, states that the chest is lion-like, as is the jaw. T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha* 1899 (Oxford: Pali Text Society reprint 1995, 4 vols), 3:138. R. Spence Hardy, trans., *A Manual of Buddhism in its Modern Development* 1852 (reprint Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sone Office, 1967), 368-9. There are some discrepancies between the two lists with the latter substituting strength of a lion for jaw of a lion. Both lists are detailed in the Appendix.

discussed above *apsara*, often accompanied by the celestial musicians, *gandharva*, frequently appear in Buddhist sculpture.

This Sarnath Gupta-period sculpture serves as a foundation example from which Pyu, and then Burmese artisans developed their own interpretations of ideal Buddhist representations. Some of the earliest known images which show the emergence of a Pyu style are found in the group of late 5th century repoussé reliquaries discovered in the Khinba mound near Srikshetra in 1927.¹⁴⁹ One of the objects, a gold seated figure of the Buddha, shows the slim simple lines of the torso evident in Gupta works (fig.11). The use of *makara* in the throne and the circular nimbus framing the Buddha's head also draw on Indian conventions. The sharp triangular form of the throne back is another precursor for imagery seen at Bagan.

This piece, however, shows clear differences to Indian models, most obviously in the treatment of the face. The characteristics of Pyu sculpture include heavy set features and large, plump extremities, likely reflective of Pyu physiognomy. Here, the Buddha has a rounded face with plump full broad lips and protruding eyes. Such features are also portrayed on the later set of dancing figures and musicians which were mentioned above (fig.3). The bridge of the nose is wide, each side forming a continuous line with a gently arched eyebrow. The neck is shorter than is usual for Gupta sculpture. This is a stylistic feature that is frequently seen in Pyu imagery. The hair curls, while large and spaced out, are not excessively so. Other Pyu figures display large hair curls and, while this is sometimes seen as a Pyu characteristic, it was not a standard convention.¹⁵⁰

The feet are positioned in *virasana* and form an inverted "v" on the throne base, similar to the Gupta image. The hands are in *abhaya mudra* with the thumb tips almost touching. The robe is virtually transparent, delineated by a narrow band

¹⁴⁹ A recent article by Brown refutes this early dating of the Pyu relics found at Khinba. Brown disagrees with the epigraphic assessment of the script and prefers a 7th century date. He does not, however, offer any reasons to dispute the findings of epigraphists that have upheld the 5th century dating. See Guy, "The Art of the Pyu and Mon", 13-28, and J. Stargardt, "The Oldest Known Pali Texts, 5th-6th Century", *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 21 (1995): 204. Brown also argues for a later date based on a limited stylistic comparison of imagery. The evidence for later dating is not compelling. R. Brown, "Pyu Art: Looking East and West", *Orientalism* 32, no.4: 35-41.

covering the left shoulder and bands across the left arm and both ankles. This image is seated on a square waisted throne which is only minimally adorned. The square waisted throne later became popular at Bagan.

A silver gilt reliquary from the same excavation is perhaps the most famous of all Pyu artifacts. The beautiful repoussé figures found on this superb casket, also from the Khinba mound, again display the rounded facial features and short neck associated with the Pyu, but here the head is rather small compared to the body (fig.12). The Buddha's torso is very full chested, a fine example of the "lion chest". The hands are rather oversized, a feature which develops into a Pyu image characteristic. This is also one of the earliest extant Pyu images portraying the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra*. The reliquary's imagery and form indicates that Buddhist concepts were understood at a sophisticated level. There are four Buddha images spaced evenly around the reliquary, each separated by a standing disciple. The arrangement can be interpreted as representing the four most recent Buddhas while the trunk, which extends upwards from the centre of the work and represents the *bodhi* tree, is a symbol for Maitreya, the future Buddha. Silver leaves and branches from the damaged tree were also found amongst the cache when the relic chamber was excavated in 1927.

Guy notes that the features such as minimal *usnisa*, feet in *virasana* and the spiky nimbus and *makara* "are all conventions associated with the Buddhist art of southern India", an assertion supported in part by the reliquary's inscription which has the proper names in a form used by south Indian rulers.¹⁵¹ Apart from the obvious visual connection to Indian models, the overall form is also open to a broader "religious" interpretation. The throne with side columns of *makaras*, the spoked halo shaped like a wheel and reminiscent of the rays of light emanating from the Buddha, and the disciples may represent the Three Jewels,

¹⁵⁰ Large hair curls were also a common feature of Mon Dvaravati sculpture during the same time period. While a detailed study of the relationship between the Mon and Pyu during the 5th–7th centuries is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is noted that there are close similarities in some aspects of the visual representation of the Buddha suggesting possible close interactions between the two cultures.

¹⁵¹ Guy, "The Art of the Pyu and the Mon," 19–20. Luce also notes that "At both capitals [Halin and Sriksheṭra] Pyu inscriptions in their peculiar south-west Indian script, are found". Luce, *Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma*, 1:48. In the presence of such irrefutable linkage between the two regions it is logical to assume that there would be strong connections between the visual repertoire of both kingdoms as well.

namely the *Buddha*, the *dharma* and the *sangha*. Such sophisticated rendering of these important Buddhist precepts is indicative of an educated *sangha* being present at Srikshetra, emphasising the importance of this Pyu capital as a centre of Buddhism.

Over the centuries images of the Buddha continued to evolve into a distinctly local style. A rare Pyu stone sculpture of the Buddha found near Srikshetra, dating from the 7th–8th centuries, still mimics the Gupta style in some respects, but the work would never be mistaken as being of Indian origin (fig.13a-b).¹⁵²

The shape of the torso with its smooth contours has obvious Gupta overtones, as does the transparent character of the robe though in this instance it covers one shoulder only. However, there the similarities end. The most immediate differences lie in the carving of the head and neck. The neck is noticeably shorter than either Gupta or earlier Pyu Buddha images. The face is rounded rather than heart-shaped, the *usnisa* is smaller, and the hair curls are much larger. The eyebrow arch is flatter and the eyes wider. The nose is also rather heavy, and the Buddha's lips are full and the smile wide. The ears are touching the shoulders, more as a result of the short neck which makes it difficult to portray the characteristic elongated ears than a deliberate stylistic feature. Indeed, the head is proportionally larger in relation to the rest of the body than the Sarnath image, for example. In addition, the Buddha's hands which are resting in *dhyana mudra* are large with plump fingers while the feet, in *virasana*, also appear proportionally oversized and rather crudely carved.

While feet and hands are the most difficult for any sculptor, the quality of the rest of the carving, in particular the torso, suggests that there may be other reasons for this clumsy depiction of the extremities. The artisan may simply have not been very competent in this type of carving, though the hands are of great significance in Buddhist imagery. According to the thirty-two marks of a great man, the fingers and toes are long and like a net, that is, there is webbing

between the fingers and toes.¹⁵³ While elongated is not the same as oversized, the hands are clearly singled out as being different. Also, each *mudra* is associated with events in the Buddha's life and emphasising the size of the hands may have been a deliberate device to draw the viewer's eye towards them, thereby focusing on the specific meaning of the image. As we will see, this is certainly the case in images from the Bagan period where the eye is drawn to the elongated arm and hand when positioned in *bhumisparsa mudra*.

A late 7th-century Pyu sculpture of similar style (fig.14) repeats the amorphous foot carving, but the hands are much more realistically carved and in closer proportion to the rest of the torso. Unfortunately the head has been removed from the body. There are few Pyu sculptural figures that date from the 8th-10th centuries, making it very difficult to trace iconographic and stylistic changes. A gilt bronze seated Buddha figure, which probably dates from around the 8th-9th centuries does, however, have some features that may be preludes to characteristics found in Bagan period sculpture (fig.15). While the face is still rounded, the features are not as bulbous as those seen on images made during the 5th-7th centuries. The neck is again becoming elongated, allowing the extended earlobes to clear the shoulders, and the neck rings are clearly visible. The hair curls are smaller than in earlier Pyu sculpture, and are arranged in even rows forming a cap on the Buddha's head. The *usnisa* is a gently rounded prominence. The torso remains slim, and the feet, with large toes, are crossed in *virasana*. The lower legs rest in a position almost parallel to the base, in contrast with the early inverted "v" position. The image retains its Pyu character through the enlarged hands with thick oversized fingers. Here they are held in double *vitarka mudra*, a position which appears to have been popular amongst

¹⁵² This image was cleaned some time during the 1970s. A photo of the image prior to cleaning has been provided by Dr A. Green, Denison University, and included to demonstrate the propensity for lacquering and gilding sculptures. This practice was used at Bagan during the 11th-12th centuries and is still very popular. However, it is impossible to say whether the lacquer and gilt on this Pyu image was contemporaneous with its making or applied later. Gilt and lacquer traces can be found on a number of Buddhist images, from India and Thailand, that are attributed with pre-11th century dates. One example is the beautiful standing Buddha image found in the National Museum, Bangkok. All traces of this process have now been removed from the Pyu sculpture.

¹⁵³ The overemphasis of hands and arms was not restricted to Pyu sculptures. For example an image of the Buddha purportedly from Cambodia or Vietnam in the Angkor Borei style of the 7th century displays these characters. See M. Lerner, *The Flame and the Lotus. Indian and Southeast Asian Art from the Kronos Collections* (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1984), 99. A list of the thirty-two marks is given in the Appendix.

the Pyu but not very common generally in Burmese sculpture. This *mudra* was relatively well known in the contemporaneous art of the neighboring Mon Dvaravati culture.¹⁵⁴ The Buddha is still seated on a plain slab-like base, the lotus throne not yet a usual feature. The robe crosses the left shoulder only and the edge of the robe forms a shallow sweeping "s" across the chest.

The small square temple of Lemyethna has a central square, with a stone relief carving on each side. This is not the fuller, almost in the round type carving found at Bagan that has more in common with Pala India. Rather, it is a flatter, smoother carving which is yet to be fully integrated into the building. Indeed some of these look almost like afterthoughts in terms of their placement (fig.15a). The image itself shows the right arm extended out to the side of the knee in an exaggerated manner peculiar to some Pyu images (see also fig.12, fig.18). This temple is a precursor for the Bagan style temples which Luce termed "Mon style". Possible reasons for its appearance at Bagan will be discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of Anawrahta's reign.

The images found in the small Yahanda gu are in a style which will also be shown to link to Bagan. This row of eight stone relief Buddhas, all in *bhumisparsa mudra*, are inset, albeit clumsily, into the temple wall (figs.15b-c). The faces are round and plump in a typical Pyu style, though some of the images appear to have been restored. The figures may have been in part re-carved and re-gilded over time, with some aspects of the figures showing similarities to later 15th and 16th century Burmese images. However, the overall design and form appears contemporaneous with the original structure, and this is significant in the context of sculptural developments at Bagan.

As shown, the iconography of Pyu imagery is diverse, including narrative scenes, images of Gotama with Maitreya, seated and standing figures and even

images with the Buddha seated in *pralambanasana*.¹⁵⁵ Due to the relatively small amount of imagery from this period, caution should be applied when trying to reconstruct a stylistic chronology. Notwithstanding, one trend that can be identified with confidence is the shift away from Indian-influenced models in favour of a confident and uniquely Pyu style. This is most apparent when comparing images of the Buddha, which relied on Indian prototypes, and secular images, such as those of the musicians (fig.3). The relationship between the physical appearance of secular and religious images becomes much closer over time. By the 8th–9th century it is reasonable to surmise that the Pyu Buddhist artistic style had settled into a form which merged compositional and iconographic features of Indian origin with a physical interpretation that was indigenous.

The Fall of the Pyu and Rise of the Burmans

As discussed in Chapter 1, according to historical tradition the Pyu were overrun by the Nanchao around 823–835. While the Nanchao did not stay long in Burma and did not leave any lasting identifiable presence the invasions appear to have had a profound impact.¹⁵⁶ When the Nanchao purportedly took more than three thousand Pyu captives back to China it left what Aung-Thwin refers to as "a political vacuum that the Burmans exploited. Where the Burmans came from and to what extent they might have migrated from Yunnan with the Nanchao troops is an issue still to be resolved".¹⁵⁷ Such a marked upheaval of Pyu culture resulted in a period of great uncertainty, and this is the time when the Burmans were able to make their presence felt. Burman settlement in the

¹⁵⁴ As alluded to before, similarities between Buddhist artifacts found throughout the greater region suggest there were relationships between the Pyu kingdoms and the rest of Southeast Asia. A cast bronze statuette of Avalokitesvara found near Bawbawgyi pagoda in 1911–1912 shares many characteristics of Mon Dvaravati figures of Avalokitesvara and Maitreya and those from the Indonesian-Malay kingdom of Srivijaya, all of which are contemporaneous with the Srikshetra image. The figure has a very slim torso and is adorned with necklaces and other jewellery. The torso is positioned in a *tribhanga* pose with swaying hips and the weight is concentrated over one leg. That contemporaneous images with similar form have been found at different sites in Southeast Asia also supports the presence of regular maritime and overland trading routes. The double *vitarka mudra* appears in standing images from the Mon Dvaravati kingdom from around the 7th century. According to Woodward this posture was not known in India. H. Woodward, *The Sacred Sculpture of Thailand*, 48.

¹⁵⁵ G. Luce, *Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2: pl.47d.

¹⁵⁶ A similar calamitous event resulted in the downfall of Bagan in the late 13th century when Mongols, who founded the Yuan dynasty in China, battled with the Burmese kingdom from 1271–1301. Again the invaders left as they had come without establishing a lasting presence.

¹⁵⁷ Aung-Thwin, *Pagan. The Origins of Modern Burma*, 20–1.

region of the Bagan plain previously occupied by the Pyu was the foundation for the future rise of Burman power.

The exact origins of the Burmans are still unknown. They were likely a nomadic people who made their way from the Himalayas into Yunnan and then to Burma. They, like the Pyu, form part of the Tibeto-Burman language group. It took nearly two hundred years from their arrival at the Bagan settlement on the Irrawaddy around 849 for Bagan to become a substantial kingdom. If indeed the Burmans had been nomadic, it could have taken quite some time for them to adapt to the concept of permanent settlements.¹⁵⁸ That we know so little about this period is frustrating and puzzling. The Burmans, nonetheless, showed themselves to be receptive to new ways; from a nomadic lifestyle in Yunnan they became leaders of the largest unified kingdom in Burma's history. This aspect of Burman culture, namely the ability to adapt readily to new influences, was to prove a great strength.

While the events of the first 150 years of Burman settlement remain unclear there is no suggestion of major catastrophe. Rather there was a steady growth in Burman influence as they intermingled with the Pyu. Buddhism remained the popular religion. As a nomadic people moving through the foothills of the Himalayas into Yunnan and then Burma, the Burmans would have been familiar with Buddhism. There is no suggestion that the Burmans either objected to Buddhism or openly embraced it. Over the two centuries leading up to the Bagan period, they became supporters of Buddhism and later would go on to be region's principal upholders of the Buddhist doctrine.

Bagan's physical remains from the late 8th–early 11th century are variable. After the initial incursion by the Nanchao tribes, and subsequent influx of Burmans, the region almost disappears from historical records. Aung-Thwin remarks that the vacuum caused by the Nanchao's removal of over three thousand people, resulted in the breakdown of an organised state as the former Pyu kingdom reverted to a collection of villages.¹⁵⁹ It is possible the Nanchao

¹⁵⁸ Frasch describes a likely scenario for Burman settlement in the region. He concludes "For the Burmese the contact with the Pyu and the settling in central Burma brought two fundamental changes, the shift from pastoralism to irrigation-born agriculture, which they learnt from the Pyu, and the ultimate embracement of Buddhism". It is from this foundation that Anawrahta emerged as a great warrior king. Frasch, *Pagan: City and State*, Chapter 1 section 8.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 18.

destroyed much of the existing infrastructure including Buddhist monuments since so few architectural structures remain from this period and it took nearly two hundred years for significant construction work to resume.¹⁶⁰ While artifacts do exist to indicate that the remaining Pyu continued to support Buddhism, their paucity suggests it is probable that artisans and builders were decimated in numbers.

Without the formal structure which had been provided by Pyu rulers, the type of Buddhism practised degenerated into a form that was not clearly aligned with either the Mahayana or Theravada schools. Animist rituals that were still evident during Pyu times were reinvigorated by the simultaneous arrival of the Burmans and collapse of Pyu society. There are a number of epigraphic references to tree worship in the early Bagan period. Animist spirits of the earth, such as the tree and the *naga*, were appeased during important ceremonial events like breaking the earth to build a dwelling and cutting a forest for timber.¹⁶¹ The Burmans were also *nat*-worshippers and *nat* worship became a parallel religious tradition, co-existing with Buddhism just as it does today.¹⁶² There are numerous references in the *GPC* to offerings being made to tree spirits, and king Sawrahan was said to have worshipped an image of Naga.¹⁶³

While there are *stupa* dating to the pre-Bagan period they are extremely few in number, the Bu-hpaya and Nga Kwe Na Daung being linked to Pyu models. Ongoing excavation continues to reveal more material from the 9th to early 11th centuries but there is still much work to do. So few epigraphic references to

¹⁶⁰ It should also be noted that there has been relatively little excavation at Pyu sites compared to Bagan.

¹⁶¹ Pe Maung Tin, review of *A Handbook of Old Handicrafts* by Text Publications New Series 3, *JBR* (1962): 109-116. The review highlights the rituals associated with house building including the objects that must be placed at each major support pole according to its directional position. Fraser-Lu also expands on the many rituals associated with preparing the ground and the foundation posts for building monasteries, reflecting the strong integration of these animist practices with Buddhist beliefs in Burma. Sylvia Fraser-Lu, *Splendour in Wood. The Buddhist Monasteries of Burma* (Bangkok: Weatherhill in cooperation with Orchid Press, 2001), 54-7.

¹⁶² *Nats* are mythical figures with special powers. Unexplained mishaps are often blamed on *nats* and offerings will be made to attempt to appease a spirit. Today, small shrines will be frequently seen, for example, near the entrance to a wood where offerings are placed to appease the guardian *nat* of the forest before entering thereby avoiding accidents. Since the Bagan period a hierarchy of *nats* called the 37 *Nats* has developed. All *nats* have special attributes and are based on past rulers or prominent figures in Burmese history. Details of their special roles are well documented with contemporary illustrations in R.C. Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, 1906. See also B. Brac de la Perrière, "Royal Images in Their 'Palaces': the Place of the Statues in the Cult of the 37 *Nats*", in *Burma Art and Archaeology*, edited by A.Green and T.R.Blurton (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 99-105.

Bagan exist for the 9th and 10th centuries that it must be assumed the area was of little interest to near neighbours. Apart from mention of the Pyu in *Xin Tang Shu* (New history of the Tang dynasty) which was completed in 1060, no further mention of anything to do with Burma appears in extant Chinese records until 1178. References to Burma in Song dynasty (960–1279) annals are extremely few. While there were apparently two missions sent to the Song court, in 1004 and 1102, the annal referring to the event was written some time from 1165–after 1225.¹⁶⁴ It is not possible to confirm that these missions actually took place.¹⁶⁵

Remnants of Pyu Culture at Bagan

As discussed in Chapter 1, Bagan can be considered a small Pyu village prior to the arrival of the Burmese in the 9th century. By the late 10th–early 11th centuries Bagan had developed into a town of significant size, large enough to support some substantial temple building. While there are few Pyu relics from Bagan, what has so far been found suggests that a similarly eclectic type of Buddhism to that of the earlier Pyu kingdoms had remained popular. Just as at Srikshestra, Buddhism, Brahmanism and Hinduism along with the indigenous animist beliefs existed side by side. The dearth of visual imagery that predates the reign of the Bagan empire's first great historical king, Anawrahta (1044–1077) indicates that while evidence of Indian models is still present, there are features that already mark out the paintings and sculpture as not being exact Indian "copies".

There is a frustratingly small amount of extant epigraphic material of any origin at Bagan prior to the beginning of Anawrahta's reign in 1044. The Myazedi Inscription, similar to the Rosetta stone in that it provided the key for translation of an otherwise unknown script, in this case Pyu, dates from the end of Kyanzittha's reign in the early years of the 12th century. The presence of Pyu, Mon, Pali and early Burmese script suggests that the Pyu script was still in use until the start of the Bagan period. Why there is not more epigraphic evidence

¹⁶³ GPC, 59.

¹⁶⁴ Sun Laichen, *Chinese Historical Sources*, 17.

¹⁶⁵ Anawrahta did not rule at Bagan until 1044 and prior to this there is no evidence to suggest the Burmese were in a position to send an official envoy to China. There are no extant Burmese records to confirm that envoys were sent at either time.

from the time of the Nanchao invasion until the beginnings of the Bagan period in the 11th century is a puzzle. Without inscriptional material to link the early "Pyu Bagan" to Anawrahta's "Burman Bagan" there can only be speculation regarding this formative phase in Burma's history. However, if one looks to the extant artifacts, links between the Pyu and the Burmans becomes much less speculative. Amongst the earliest imagery which can be shown to support Pyu-Burman links are votive tablets. Votive tablets dating to the Pyu period are well known, and the use of votive tablets was extremely popular under Anawrahta's rule. Stylistic comparison between the two provides insight into the evolution of Buddhism at Bagan and its subsequent emergence as the enduring religion of the Burmese.

Pyu Votive Tablets

Votive tablets are a type of *uddissana*, an object made sacred by dedication. They are also seen as an embodiment of the Buddha himself. They served a number of purposes. Votives were carried by devotees who brought them back from pilgrimage sites in India and Burma to their own villages, or by travelers who carried them as personal devotional objects. They were also a way of making merit. Donors were able to make their own tablets and earn merit through the simple act of pressing the mould into the clay. This was a method of earning *karma* that was available to all devotees, as most people could not afford to commission expensive metal, wooden or stone images for donation to a temple or did not have the skill to make the image. As Than Tun remarks, "The act of pressing clay tablets perhaps gave them a great deal of personal satisfaction because they have done something directly for the Buddha – a satisfaction which they may not have had by just building a pagoda, monastery, etc. which was done by the hands of artisans".¹⁶⁶

The imagery found on Pyu votive tablets was diverse. Those from the major Pyu cities depicted the Buddha in a variety of *mudra* including *bhumisparsa*, *dharmacakra*, *dhyana*, *varada*, *namaskara*, *abhaya*, *alingana*, *anjali* and *vitarka*. The Buddha was invariably the central image, usually flanked by deities. In addition, the Buddhist *bodhisattvas* Lokanatha, Maitreya, Tara and Sarasvati

¹⁶⁶ Than Tun, "History of Buddhism," *JBR* 61 (1978): 166.

were the subject of some tablets, indicating an early mix of Theravada and Mahayana doctrine. Lokanatha is the local name for the principal Mahayanist *bodhisattva*, Avalokiteshvara, though worship of Lokanatha, along with Maitreya is also a sub-cult of the Theravada. The tablets were often heavily decorated with flying deities such as *apsara* and *ghandarva*, elaborate throne backs, hamsa birds, and a predella with figures of worshippers, usually five in number.¹⁶⁷ Some tablets represented scenes from the Buddha's life, such as the Enlightenment and the First Sermon. No extant Pyu tablets contain the main eight life scenes in one.

As Guy notes "many of these [votive tablets] were produced from metal moulds imported from eastern India".¹⁶⁸ There are, however, also many locally made forms easily identified by their distinctive style. At first votive tablets were made locally using these imported moulds and inscribed with Pyu script on the reverse. The imagery on the tablets steadily underwent regional transformation although the decorative elements which often filled the background retained a link to Indian design. At Bagan some of these features such as garlands of beads and architectural motifs were adopted by Burmese artisans and became integral to their own design repertoire.

The numbers of Pyu-style votive tablets found at Bagan are relatively few. Anawrahta oversaw the making of vast quantities of votive tablets but most of these were Indian in style. Some examples of Pyu votive tablets have recently been excavated at Bagan but the style of these votives were not adopted by Anawrahta. One reason for Anawrahta favouring Indian prototypes may have been his desire to distance himself from the indigenous Pyu who were a defeated race. The relative lack of Pyu votive tablets must be noted in conjunction with their widespread distribution – the fragility of the plaques, often of sun-dried clay or low-fired terracotta, means they were not very durable and many may have simply perished. Also, votive tablets are frequently found encased inside stupas. As there are so few Pyu stupas extant dating from the 9th – 11th centuries it is not surprising few votive tablets remain.

¹⁶⁷ The symbolism of the number five is multiple. Five represents the number of Buddhas in the current eon. It also has cosmological origins representing the cardinal directions with earth as the centre.

¹⁶⁸ J.Guy, "The Art of the Pyu and Mon," 24.

A recently excavated votive tablet found about 3 metres below the damaged Bu-hpaya *stupa* at Bagan is distinctly Pyu and possibly dates from as early as the 9th century (fig.16).¹⁶⁹ The Bu-hpaya was completely destroyed during the 1975 earthquake and has recently been rebuilt, hence the opportunity to excavate the site. The *stupa* is one of the oldest at Bagan, dating from around 850.¹⁷⁰ It is bulbous in shape, similar to *stupa* found at the old Pyu capital, Srikshetra.¹⁷¹ The votive tablet is unfortunately very worn and its details are difficult to discern. The overall form is rectangular, with a peaked top, like a roof. The central Buddha image is clearly of Pyu origin. The Buddha's face is full and rounded, with large hair curls. He sits with hands raised in double *abhaya mudra*, the gesture of protection. Legs are crossed and the Buddha is seated on a double lotus throne. He is framed by a flame-like reredo, with a parasol on top. The central image is flanked by two other figures which are very difficult to identify. They are most likely Lokanatha and Maitreya. Both are seated on some sort of throne base and are also framed by a reredo. It is just possible to discern another smaller figure, probably a deity such as an *apsara*, outside the reredo to the right-hand side of the Buddha's head, which would have been matched on the left side. Faint outlines of a throne-like back mimicking the shape of the plaque are also visible. This form also links with early Pala stele which are minimally adorned, but start to include *apsaras* above and *nagini* below.

While the tablet is of a common shape, and the presence of a seated Buddha flanked by the two principal Mahayanist *bodhisattvas* is quite usual, this tablet is of importance as it shows the presence of the Earth Goddess, Vasudhara, in the predella below the Buddha. The Earth Goddess is rarely seen in Bagan imagery and has been popularized only in more recent centuries in Burma. Her presence at the moment of Enlightenment, wringing water from her hair that

¹⁶⁹ This information was generously provided by U Aung Kyaing, Director of Archaeology for Upper Burma in May 2001. He showed me the tablet concerned, which is illustrated in fig.16.

¹⁷⁰ Burmese chronology for this temple is inconsistent. In the official publication *Ancient Pagodas from Bagan-Nyaung U* it states that the pagoda was built by King Pyusawhti and the architecture is of the 11th century. "It was built by the third King Pyusawhti of Bagan, descendant of the first who saved Bagan from the scourges of the Giant Bat, the Giant Swine, the Giant Gourd Climbers, the Giant Tiger and the Giant Bird. Bu-hpaya meaning Gourd Pagoda was named after the place he got rid of the giant climbers." Myat Min Hlaing, *Ancient Pagodas from Bagan-Nyaung U* (Yangon: New Light of Myanmar, 2000). Luce suggests a possible date of around the 8th century, linking it to the Pyu *stupas* of Srikshetra. *OBEP* 1:258.

¹⁷¹ Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture of Old Burma*, 38 and *OBEP* 1:6.

washes away Mara's armies, is now a well recognised image.¹⁷² However, there is no mention of the Earth goddess in the main Pali version of the Buddha's life story, the *Nidanakatha*, extant before the 11th century. Only the northern text, the *Lalitavistara*, mentions the rising up of the Earth Goddess. After the earth had quaked in acknowledgment of the Buddha's past good deeds at the moment before attaining Enlightenment the Earth Goddess "revealed the upper half of her body adorned with all its ornaments, and bowing [sic] with joined palms...".¹⁷³ The *Lalitavistara* also contains another reference to the presence of a female deity at this moment. After the Earth shook, Mara's armies were vanquished and scattered in disarray saying "We have fallen into misfortune; we have no means to save ourselves!"..."The goddess of the tree of wisdom, moved with pity, takes water and sprinkles the ally of darkness...".¹⁷⁴ The Burmans and Pyu had an animist sub-culture, and tree worship was a particularly important aspect of their animist beliefs. The use of the double *abhaya mudra* is unusual, rarely seen in votive tablets. However, in relation to the onslaught of Mara's armies it is appropriate, as the Buddha remains unafraid and the gesture is also synonymous with dispelling fear.¹⁷⁵

Finding an explanation in the *Lalitavistara* for the figure in the predella, whether it is the Earth Goddess or the Goddess of the Tree of Wisdom, supports a link between the Buddhist schools of northern India and Burma. The *Lalitavistara*, while probably written by a member of the Sarvastivadin sect around the 1st century CE, was quickly adopted as the principal Mahayanist version of the Buddha's life story. This image highlights yet again the links that existed between this region of India and central Burma. Likewise, the presence of Lokanatha and Maitreya signifies a familiarity with the Mahayana tradition, emphasizing that regular contact with China, India and probably also Tibet

¹⁷² Guthrie notes that there are two identical votives in the Bagan Museum which show the earth goddess and are also purported to have been excavated from the Bu-hpaya after the earthquake in 1975. Images of Vasudhara dating to the Bagan period, while rare, can be seen in the wall paintings at the Abe-ya-dana, Bagan and at Thabinnyu-hpaya, Sale. Guthrie also remarks that earth goddess images were most likely introduced via the Le-mro kingdom in Arakan located on the land route from India to Bagan. E. Guthrie, "A study of the history and cult of the Buddhist earth deity in mainland Southeast Asia," PhD diss. University of Canterbury 2003), 33-34.

¹⁷³ *Lv*, 482. The *Lalitavistara* will now be referenced using the initials *Lv*, and refers to the translation by Bays.

¹⁷⁴ *Lv*, 509.

¹⁷⁵ This *mudra* was frequently used by the Pyu in free-standing sculptures of the Buddha, as previously illustrated in fig.15.

through the northern overland trade route was an integral factor in the development of northern Pyu and Burman culture. While this example of a Pyu votive tablet is not typical, it serves to illustrate the remarkable range of imagery that existed in the pre-Bagan period. Individual preferences for imagery of deities or the Buddha were apparently freely tolerated as part of a greater spiritual world which included animism and *nat* worship. Mya's extensive work on the votive tablets of Burma includes illustrations of many differing forms of Pyu tablets.¹⁷⁶

As well as providing an insight into the diverse forms of Buddhist practices that were followed by the Pyu, the tablets allow us some opportunity to trace the stylistic changes that led up to the Bagan period. Than Tun describes the different shapes of the tablets and suggests there is no clear reason for the variety, though they often mimic architectural forms or have direct relationships to Buddhist symbols.¹⁷⁷ The arch-topped tablets draw on Indian architectural forms that later became very popular at Bagan. Many of the tablets are tear-shaped, reminiscent of a bodhi leaf. Others are circular, probably imitating the halo seen in the Sarnath sculpture of the Buddha (fig.10), or representing the Wheel of Law.

The detailing in the tablets is often very elaborate. In an example shown by Mya (fig.17) the Buddha is seated on a double lotus throne atop an angular stepped pedestal.¹⁷⁸ The robes are clearly outlined with heavy folds in the Pala-Sena style of Northern India (fig.116c). The Buddha's face is distinctly Pyu, showing a full face with full smiling lips and bulbous downcast eyes. The hair curls are characteristically large and the *usnisa* rounded. He sits in *virasana*, a half-lotus position. The legs are positioned in a "v" form, a posture which was also common during the contemporaneous Mon period in Dvaravati.¹⁷⁹ The right hand is in *bhumisparsa mudra* while the left is resting across the Buddha's lap holding

¹⁷⁶ Mya, *Votive Tablets of Burma* (Yangon 1961) 2 volumes. Volume I is concerned with Bagan period votive tablets, volume 2 focuses on those of Pyu origin, mostly those found around Srikshetra.

¹⁷⁷ Than Tun, "History of Buddhism," 165-88. This section of the article focuses on votive tablets.

¹⁷⁸ Mya, *Votive Tablets* 2, fig.12.

¹⁷⁹ Examples are found in the National Museum, Bangkok.

an object that may be a jewel. The Buddha is framed by a flame-like reredo, with a parasol overhead. Lion-like figures, which resemble *makaras*, appear on either side of the throne and an elephant emerges from each side of the throne base. The rest of the background is filled with decorative elements such as floral designs. Unfortunately it is difficult to discern all of the features due to wear. At the bottom of the tablet are the remnants of an inscription.

Another tablet, this time circular, depicts the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra* flanked by two deities (fig.18). This figure is in a style which contrasts markedly to the previous one. The Buddha figure is much slimmer, similar to the early Pyu imagery of Sriksheṭṭra seen on the famous reliquary (fig.12). The Buddha's robes are almost transparent, unlike the clear definition of the previous form and owe more to the south Indian Sarnath tradition. The Buddha is framed by a halo shaped like a flame or lotus petal. The legs, in *virasana*, are placed quite flat on the throne which appears to be a double lotus type, though this area of the tablet is very worn. It is difficult to discern the level of background decoration, and there appear to be remnants of script below the throne.

In a further example, the Buddha is shown alone, also in a tear-shaped tablet, in *dharmacakra mudra* (fig.19). Proportionally the Buddha fills most of the frame, unlike the first figure. The architectural framework of the throne back is clearly evident, the flame-like reredo now being incorporated into the throne. The parasol appears on top and the pillars supporting the throne back are in the form of rampant lions. Features of significance on this tablet are the garlands that appear to emerge from around the parasol and the elaborate foliate decorations that are part of the throne back. These appear to be an early transitional form, straddling the move between a clear foliate decoration to the appearance of the *makara*, the monster-like figure which was to become very popular at Bagan. The Buddha sits on a conventional double lotus throne. The feet are in the full lotus position, *padmasana*, with both feet resting on opposite thighs, soles upwards.

Two other examples that further illustrate the diversity of these tablets are first, an image including multiple figures, and second, an image of the Buddha surrounded by decorative symbols. The first shows the central Buddha figure dominating the upper half of the bodhi leaf-shaped tablet (fig.20). The Buddha is

framed by a simple reredo that outlines the torso and then finishes as a point above the Buddha's head. The faint remains of a parasol can be seen. This time the Buddha is flanked by two devotees on either side who sit with their hands in a position of adoration in front of their chest. The Buddha sits on a narrow lotus throne. Below, in a separate predella, are six worshippers with a wheel in the centre. Underneath this layer are images of deer. A depiction of the First Sermon, the turning of the Wheel of Law, this particular scene was more popular during the Pyu and contemporaneous Mon Dvaravati period of the 5-7th centuries than in later times, when symbols relating to Buddhist teachings were important educational vehicles.

The second image is another unusual variant (fig.21). The Buddha, featuring the now familiar Pyu-style rounded face and prominent hair curls, is positioned in *bhumisparsa mudra* with feet in *virasana*. The right arm is elongated and the wrist crosses the shin near the knee. The folds in the robes are clearly defined in the Pala style. The throne is very unusual, curling up around the Buddha's knees. Possibly this is an attempt at perspectival representation of the top surface of the seat. While the plaque on the Buddha's left side is damaged, it is clear that the sides were symmetrically arranged. The Buddha is again surrounded by a throne back, but this time the vertical supports fall almost outside the line of the Buddha's knee, whereas on previous plaques this line clearly falls inside the line of the Buddha's knee. The flame-like form around the Buddha's head is virtually circular, in the Gupta style, not peaking above the Buddha's head as is more common in these votive depictions. The parasol above is evident. The predella below the throne appears to have images of the lotus flower with petals tightly bunched together, repeated over three even panels. On the Buddha's right side is a very clear depiction of a blooming lotus flower, with a parasol emerging from its centre. Images of open flowers appear on either side of the top part of the tablet.

A type of votive tablet which appears restricted to the Pyu depicts nine scenes from the Buddha's life. Sculptures of the Eight Great Events were popular during the Pala dynasty and this configuration was introduced into Bagan (fig.116b). Luce notes that while based on Indian models of the Eight Great Events, at Bagan the Pyu included an additional scene of Sujata's offering

underneath the earth-touching Buddha or an image of the Buddha with an alms bowl.¹⁸⁰ The suggestion that the female figure represents Sujata is questionable. If interpreting the scenes through the eyes of a Theravadin, Sujata's presence would have validity: within the *Nidanakatha* Sujata is given a prominent role. Her presentation to Gotama of his last food before attaining Enlightenment symbolises the important of earning *karma* through performing good deeds. However, the *Lalitavistara*'s description of the Earth Goddess's presence at the time of Enlightenment is also of great importance and this is another plausible explanation for depicting a female image beneath the Buddha.

Additional evidence to support Bagan being an early Pyu settlement lies in the basic structure of the many *gu*, which translates as "cave" but refers to the innumerable small square temples that are found at Bagan and Srikshetra. While a study of Bagan's architecture is outside the focus of the thesis, the basic building forms are of note as they were the principal vehicles for artistic expression. The earliest known *gu* in Burma are found at Pyu sites, and were based on north Indian models.¹⁸¹ *Gu* were clearly favoured over solid *stupa*, possibly because they allow a more intimate and reverential interaction when worshipping.¹⁸² The devotee enters the small structure, which traditionally houses a Buddha image on each side with a solid central core containing relics or religious artifacts given by the temple donor and built into the fundamental structure of the *gu*. The all embracing atmosphere of the *gu* completely enveloped the devotee. This experience was very different to that offered by a *stupa* which excludes such intimacy. The predilection for *gu* encouraged a burgeoning of the arts as the interiors of these small temples became vehicles for artistic expression. Along with the four Buddha images depicting the Buddhas of the current eon, which faced the four cardinal directions, the walls

¹⁸⁰ *OBEP*, 1:151.

¹⁸¹ Lemyethna, Srikshetra, is an early example of a Pyu *gu*.

¹⁸² While *gu* outnumber *stupa* at Bagan, *stupa* were probably more revered. The two preeminent pilgrimage sites in Burma are both *stupa*: the Shwe-dagon in Yangon and the Shwe-zigon at Bagan. The structure of the *stupa* embodies the key teachings of Buddhism. At Bagan the exteriors of the major *stupa* were inset with plaques depicting scenes from the *jatakas*. For the devotee who circumambulates around the exterior they are reminded of the multitude of good deeds required to be done before Buddhahood can be attained. This also emphasises the importance of accumulating *karma*, a particular feature of Burmese Buddhism. For a thorough overview of the significance of *stupa* architecture see A. Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Cornell University, 1988). For a discussion on the *stupa* at Bagan see S. Soni, *Evolution of Stupas in Burma. Pagan Period: 11th to 13th Centuries A.D.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991).

and ceilings were often richly painted with Buddhist symbols with any spare surface given over to decorative elements. The exterior was also subject to dramatic imagery. Elaborately carved pediments that accentuated the height of the door arch and decorative friezes were all part of the early Bagan architecture.

The Pyu votive tablets discussed above are chosen to demonstrate the diversity of Buddhist imagery, and Buddhist practice, which existed in the pre-Bagan period. It is from this position that the development of Burmese Buddhist art at Bagan originates.

Religion at Bagan Prior to Anawrahta

As discussed, in the 200 year period prior to the reign of Anwaratha, Bagan was relatively isolated from the rest of Asia and undergoing a period of transformation. After the collapse of the Pyu there was no significant kingdom to send envoys to neighbouring states, nor was there a trading imperative bringing people to central Burma. It was also a period of crisis for Buddhism. In India, Buddhism was steadily losing favour. The Pallava kings were Hindu, as were their successors, the Colas. The Pala kingdom of Bihar was invaded in 1036, and Muslim raiders were making continued incursions from the West, eventually overrunning Benares in 1033-34. In China, although the Tang emperors had supported Buddhism, towards the end of the dynasty (906) the religion was losing popular support. The Song rulers abandoned Buddhism in favour of neo-Confucian revivalism. In Tibet, the fragmentation of Buddhism into sects was accelerating with Padmasambhava, the leader of the Red Cap sect, overseeing the popular acceptance of Tantric Buddhism. In Southeast Asia, the Saivite Khmers gained control of Mon territory in Thailand, interrupting Buddhism's dominance, although the religion would later reassert itself. Likewise, Indian Cola conquest in Sri Lanka greatly affected the extended history of Buddhist practice in this country.¹⁸³ As Luce remarks with respect to the demise of Buddhism, by 1025 "Of all that great Buddhist kingdom I-tsing [Yijing] had

¹⁸³ *OBEP*, 1:13-14.

admired so much in the 7th century, little remained except *Nagara Śrī Dharmarāja* (Ligor) on the east coast, just south of Kra".¹⁸⁴

It is if little wonder then that Buddhism around Bagan developed its own character. After the Nanchao invasions organised religious practice was decimated, and Buddhism was in a crisis phase in the wider region. Over time a new priesthood emerged but with little formal doctrinal education. Buddhism became a religion that integrated local animist beliefs and superstitions with Brahmanic and Buddhist ritual. At Bagan the local priests of this period became known in later sources as the Ari and in Burmese traditional history the Ari are infamous for their debasement of true Buddhism and their corruption of Buddhist doctrine. The Ari have risen to prominence in Burmese history as the "enemy" that Anawrahta overthrew when reinstating "pure" Buddhism at Bagan. The Ari are mentioned in the *GPC* in conjunction with the reign of Sawrahan (r.931–964) but little is really known about their role.¹⁸⁵

The portrayal of the Ari as corrupters of Buddhism is entrenched in early Western scholarship. Duroiselle's paper, "The Ari of Burma and Tantric Buddhism", sees the Ari described as "the priests of some kind of Nāga worship as well as Shamans who presided over the ceremonies of the indigenous Nat-

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 1:14.

¹⁸⁵ *GPC*, 59. The *GPC* records that Sawrahan and Kunhsaw Kyaunbyu were Anawrahta's two immediate predecessors. While *The GPC* recounts the lives of Burmese kings from earliest times, the only kings prior to Anawrahta for whom any inscriptional evidence exists to support their position as historical figures are Sawrahan and Kunhsaw Kyaunbyu. Legend has it that Nyaung-u Sawrahan (known to the Burmese as King Thugyi) was a simple farmer, elevated to the position of king after he killed the reigning king for stealing a cucumber from his garden. The new king worshipped an image of the *naga*, and after consulting with the "heretical Ari monks" built five pagodas. These are listed as Pahtogyi, Pahtongé, Patho-tha-mya, Thinlinpahto and Seittipahto. The *GPC* asserts that all were consecrated but not with images of the Buddha or spirit images.

worship and the animal sacrifices and drinking-bouts associated therewith".¹⁸⁶

He associates the Ari with a form of Mayahana Buddhism which was present at Bagan, and introduced via the overland trade routes. Duroiselle refers to the *GPC* which states that "for an undetermined period, up to the VIth century A.D., some form of Buddhism existed at Pagan, which, from that time, gradually deteriorated almost past recognition up to the beginning of the Xth century, the period at which the execrated Ari worship had become absolutely supreme in the land".¹⁸⁷ This remark highlights the traditional role of the Ari in Burmese history, namely that of turning Buddhists away from the true doctrine.

The association of the Ari with a degraded and debased religion was promoted to reinforce the precept that Theravada Buddhism was the spiritual saviour of the Burmese. This supported not only the desired position of Burmese history, but also suited the prevailing Theravada bias favoured by Western scholars. The tantric images of the Nanda-ma-nya, are not illustrated by Duroiselle because they "are of a character so vulgarly erotic and revolting, that they can neither be reproduced or described".¹⁸⁸

However, this position serves to overstate the influence of the Ari and his zealous views have not been supported by any other writers on Bagan's religious history. Bischoff downplays the significance of the Ari who he categorises as following a type of Mahayana Buddhism. He observes that the Ari "are described in later chronicles of Myanmar, as the most shameless bogus ascetics imaginable" but concludes that "the religion prevailing among the

¹⁸⁶ C. Duroiselle, "The Āri of Burma and Tāntric Buddhism," *ASJ* (1915-1916): 79-93. The term "tantric" was frequently used to describe erotic imagery. As most Buddhist scholarship of the late 1800s and early 1900s emanated from a Theravada position, the dynamic and indeed often erotic Buddhist art of the Northern traditions was viewed with great suspicion and evoked varying degrees of moral outrage, such as that expressed by Duroiselle. Phayre describes the tantra system "a mixture of magic and witchcraft and Siva-worship [which] was in the Punjab incorporated into the corrupted Buddhism". Arthur P. Phayre, *History of Burma* (1883, reprint Bangkok: Orchid Press, 1998), 33. All of these comments are based on non-contemporaneous material. Indeed, the "discovery" of the temples mentioned in Duroiselle's article represent the first archaeological find "which might help in deciding whether or no these Arī were Buddhists and what was the character of their cultus". Duroiselle, "The Ari of Burma," 82. Commentators such as Phayre did not think the Ari had any relationship with Buddhism at all. Phayre writes "The priests of this religion, who were called Ari, lived in monasteries like Buddhist monks, but their practices resembles those attributed to the votaries of the sect of Vāmāchāris in Bengal". Phayre, *History of Burma*, 33.

¹⁸⁷ Duroiselle "The Āri of Burma", 85.

Myanmar before and during the early reign of Anawrahta was some form of Mahayana Buddhism, which had probably found its way into the region from the Pala kingdom in Bengal".¹⁸⁹ Likewise, Luce reports "the scandals told in the Chornicles about the "Ari" heretics in the time of Aniruddha, are not supported by any evidence of value".¹⁹⁰ The most recent commentary relating to the Ari sees Fräsch confirm the view that the Ari have been used as historical scapegoats. He describes Duroiselle's Ari that settled near Min-nan-thu simply as "a group of monks trying to wean from secular influence and thus lived in monasteries bearing a certain distance to the next settlement".¹⁹¹ They were forest dwelling monks who did not conform strictly to the mainstream Buddhist code of practice for monks.

Duroiselle goes on to make many pronouncements about the Ari's disturbing religious practices that serve no purpose other than to reinforce the Theravada paradigm. He uses the imagery to support the preferred position regarding Ari practices, but also uses their presence to conclude that "as in India and elsewhere, Mahāyānism and Hīnayānism, at that period and probably long after, lived peaceably side by side".¹⁹² In the context of this thesis, the interest of this material lies in the conclusions drawn by Duroiselle regarding the Ari and their presence at Bagan, and his approach that sees Theravada and Mahayana practices as being separate entities. Although Duroiselle draws a number of damning conclusions about the Ari based on very little information, and his views are not supported by contemporary scholars, it can be concluded that the Buddhist practices at Bagan prior to Anawrahta's reign were certainly eclectic. There is no evidence of an established *sangha* or of a religious building program. This is consistent with the religious needs of a small fragmented community which had few resources to expend on an elaborate display of religious devotion.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 82. Duroiselle repeats his disgust later in the article writing "there are some frescos of so vulgar and grossly immoral a nature as to preclude any description", 87. Even when considering the sensibilities of the early 1900s, one must be wary of Duroiselle's personal views which seem to override scholarship on this occasion.

¹⁸⁹ R.Bischoff, *Buddhism in Myanmar. A short history* (Kandy: The Wheel Publication 1995), no.399-401.

¹⁹⁰ *OBEF*, 1:43.

¹⁹¹ Fräsch, *Pagan. City and State*, draft text Chapter 6: Monasteries and Monastic Life, section 7.

¹⁹² Duroiselle, "The Ari of Burma," 84. Duroiselle also refers to Yijing and Taranatha who had both made similar observations.

While Duroiselle's analysis of the Ari may be rather zealous, he does raise some pertinent points about the Ari's form of worship which are relevant to art historical developments. *Naga* or snake worship is prevalent in Indian religion and has its roots in the ancient pre-Vedic period. The *Naga* is intimately associated with water and the earth.¹⁹³ The *naga* became a very popular symbol at Bagan, incorporated into architectural reliefs and wall frescos. *Naga* worship had a strong hold over the early Burmese people, and this belief continues today. The rituals surrounding any activities that break the earth were taken very seriously.¹⁹⁴ The presence of the *naga* in temple 998 supports the presence of a complex spiritual life at Bagan.

Brahmanism – Another Link to the Pyu?

One significant factor that is often overlooked when discussing "non-Theravada" imagery is the presence of Indian Brahmanical beliefs at Bagan. Duroiselle downplays the influence of Brahmanism at Bagan stating "there is no evidence whatsoever, in the monuments, the inscriptions or the literature, to warrant the assumption that the worship of Visnu ever struck root among the people or that it was popular in Burma. It was only the faith of Indian traders and settlers and of some of the Indian royal astrologers at the court".¹⁹⁵ Even when faced with

¹⁹³ The *naga* is associated with Visnu, supporting Visnu during sleep. The *naga* also "swallows up the waters of the world", and is symbolised in the "Churning of the Ocean". *Nagas* are also closely associated with the earth, and must be appeased before the ground is broken. S.Jumsai, *Naga. Cultural Origins in Siam and the West Pacific* 1988 (Bangkok: Chalermnit Press & DD Books, Reprint 1997), 1, 16-21.

¹⁹⁴ Pe Maung Tin, "A Handbook of Old Handicrafts," 109-116. Pe Maung Tin discusses the ritual of house building, which also has reference in a Bagan inscription. "The worship of tree-spirits must have been one of the earliest phases of Burmese animism. The early Burman in his long migration from the China border to the Northern border of Burma had come to believe that there was a spirit in every tree. After offerings to the spirits, the *naga* as lord of the earth must be fed in the holes dug for planting the six posts". At each post the following offerings had to be made:
Center posts – north: kumbi (white copper), south: rawe (lead)
Frontposts – NE: kyangon (red copper) woman's dress should be kept there, SE: uru (silver) man's dress should be kept there
Rear posts – NW: thabye (ruby), SW: nyaungyan (iron)
Prosperity was only assured when liquid gold and silver was poured into the holes. This detailed description of the rituals associated with the house building ceremony indicates the strength of animism amongst the Burmese. These rituals still exist today though not in full detail. Even when building monasteries, the wooden beams had animist significance. The chopping down of trees was not a random act with offerings made to local spirits prior to commencing the logging. Similar rituals are found throughout the world amongst indigenous communities. This type of animism imbues all aspects of the natural world with some form of innate spirit that is respected and must be appeased.

¹⁹⁵ Duroiselle, "The Ari of Burma," 85-86.

evidence of Hindu imagery, such as that found at Nat-hlaung-kyaung, Duroiselle continued to promote the notion that only Buddhism was practised by Burmans, and Hinduism was the religion of foreigners.¹⁹⁶

As mentioned earlier, remains of Hindu sculptures have been found at the early Pyu settlements. These were principally Vaisnavite (fig.7). Beikthano translates as "city of Visnu" indicating a strong link to the Vaisnavite religion at some stage of its occupation. In addition Visnu imagery has been found in Arakan, the earliest dating from the 6th century.¹⁹⁷ At Bagan, evidence of Hindu worship is found at the Nat-hlaung-kyaung, a temple that is traditionally dated to King Thugyi's reign in the late 10th century (fig.22, fig.23).¹⁹⁸ This date is generally thought too early and it is more likely to belong to Anawratha's reign, or even a little later in the 11th century.¹⁹⁹ The temple's title translates as "Shrine Containing the Devas", although an older title is Nat-daw-kyaung, translated as "Shrine of the Sacred Devas". The seemingly minor name change is highly symbolic as the latter term turns the temple into a representation of the successful confinement of non-Buddhist worship.²⁰⁰ Strachan notes a third title of Nat-hlé-kyaung, meaning "Shrine of the Reclining Deva". While this title is no longer used it may be closer to the original name given the nature of the imagery the temple contains.

The central image of the temple was Visnu reclining on the serpent and the remaining imagery focuses on depictions of Visnu's *avatars*. The temple was designed to hold images of ten *avatars* but only seven remain. The original image of the reclining Visnu and other reliefs were removed from the temple in the 1890s and are now in the Berlin Völkerkunde Museum.²⁰¹ Luce's

¹⁹⁶ The temple was discussed by Duroiselle, "Conservation in Burma. The Nat-Hlaung-Kyaung, Pagan," *ASI* (1912-13): 136-9.

¹⁹⁷ Gutman, "Vishnu in Burma", 30-36.

¹⁹⁸ Nat-hlaung-kyaung is temple no.1600. See Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan* (Paris: UNESCO and Kiscadale, 1992-2000). As noted above, tradition places the construction of the Nat-hlaung-kyaung during the reign of King Thugyi (r.931-964) but this is most unlikely. Duroiselle notes that a Tamil inscription that was at the Bagan Museum refers to a Hindu temple being built during Anawrahta's reign, after the conquest of Thaton in 1057. While there is nothing to directly relate the inscription to this temple, the dating is a feasible one and in the absence of any other excavated Brahmanical temples, may refer to the Nat-hlaung-kyaung.

¹⁹⁹ Maung Mya, "Exploration during 1932-33. Wall paintings in the Pathothamya and Nat-hlaung-kyaung Temples, Pagan", *ASI* (1932-33): 192-3.

²⁰⁰ Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture*, 39-40.

²⁰¹ Fritz von Nöetling, a German oil expert, reportedly removed this and other reliefs from the temple in the late 1890s during regular visits to Bagan. Strachan, 4.

photograph shows the damaged form of one *avatar* (fig.24) while the recent image depicts the reconstructed image in situ (fig.25).²⁰² The relief of Visnu reclining has also been reconstructed in the last decade (fig.26). The rebuilt images purportedly follow the style of the originals. Made from brick, stone and stucco the images fill the niches that contain them (fig.27, fig.28). They are centrally placed within the niche and tower over the devotee, reinforcing their role as representations of superior beings.

Photographs in *OBEP* provide a good record of the statues as they were in the early 1900s. The reconstructions are far more crudely executed with less detailed attention while retaining the essence of the original iconography and proportions. Although the originals are extensively damaged, from Luce's illustrations a number of stylistic conventions can be identified. First, the use of the double lotus as a pedestal was preferred, an iconographic element that is common to most Bagan sculpture in this period. There is variety in the depiction of the lotus petals with some having a well-defined shape that closely resembles the blooming lotus, and others are more stylised. The *avatars* wear attire that reflects the costume worn by the royal courts. This is supported by jewelry from the period which is of the same style and includes anklets, jeweled belts, armlets and elaborate necklaces. The human-form *avatars* sport large circular earrings which rest on their shoulders. Jeweled hair adornments are standard features and include wing-like extensions that flare upwards. Some images wear a three-pointed crown, a style that was popular in the early Bagan period, and also a feature of many Pala period sculptures.

The images in the temple and the temple itself are surely the work of Indian artisans. The iconographic details could only have been constructed by those intimately experienced in Brahmanical imagery, which excludes local Pyu and Burman input. Even if local artisans had access to *silpa sastras* describing these images, the interpretation is not consistent with the stylistic features of Bagan's Buddhist imagery of the same period. Brahmanical rituals were essentially similar in both Hindu and Buddhist courts, and imagery was more closely associated with Hindu rather than Buddhist iconography. This is not to suggest that local Burman and Pyu artisans were unable able to produce finely

²⁰² Ibid., 40

crafted sculptures. The level of sophistication and iconographic correctness of the imagery, however, in the absence of any other similar extant sculptural objects from the period indicates that the people who made the reliefs and stucco figures were particularly familiar with this type of material. There are virtually no stylistic links between the elaborately adorned almost lifesize figures found in the Nat-hlaung-kyauung and the simple Pyu Buddha images crafted in the Gupta style that preceded the Burmans' arrival. On balance, however, one would favour the artisans being of Pala origin, not only knowledgeable about Brahmanical imagery but also familiar with Buddhist art.

Strachan states the temple would have used by Indian traders and the Brahman priests who served the Bagan rulers. He also places the building's construction in the 10th century, an assertion which has not been supported by other researchers. This early date conflicts with the available knowledge on Bagan's development. Even if some Indian traders had settled at Bagan it is highly unlikely that they would have built such a substantial monument, especially in the absence of any major Buddhist structures from that time. The reliefs appear to be completely integrated into the primary structure, dispelling the possibility that the temple may have been built at the earlier date and the imagery added later. Stadtner suggests the temple was built in the 11th or 12th centuries, noting the importance of Visnu to Kyanzittha, though it is possible it was built late in Anwrahta's reign when Bagan's status as a major city was growing rapidly.²⁰³ As Anwrahta's role as king became accepted it would have been fitting and politically astute for him to have court Brahmans to oversee all the rituals necessary for any royal court of the age in Indianised regions of South and Southeast Asia. Brahmanical rituals have been an integral part of Indian and Southeast Asian royal ceremonies since they were recorded in the *Vedas* around 1000 BCE. Brahmans were to fulfill an active role at court until the demise of the Burmese monarchy, when they were expelled to India by the British in 1886.²⁰⁴ Interestingly, Yule reported in 1855 that the Brahmans at the Burmese court were from India, and from the Vaisnavite sect but did not

²⁰³ Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 142.

²⁰⁴ Henry Yule reported on courtly Brahmanical rituals during his visit to the court of Ava in 1855. Yule, *A Narrative of the Mission to the Court of Ava in 1855* (reprint Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1968). There are many references to Brahmanical rituals in *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D 1598-1885*, trans. Than Tun (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1990).

substantiate this statement.²⁰⁵ In the absence of any Saivite Brahmanical remains at Bagan this suggests a centuries-long tradition of Brahmanism and the worship of Visnu which began under the Pyu, and was revived by the Pyu as Bagan developed a major court structure.

While knowledge of Brahmanism and the Vaisnavite sect may own its continuum in Burma to the Pyu, it is very likely that Indian artisans also had a significant role in reestablishing a physical presence of these concepts. The timing of Bagan's emergence as the centre of a powerful kingdom coincided with a period where aesthetics favoured the elaborate and highly decorative. The changing and evolving nature of life and religion during this formative period of Bagan's development was like a bundle of different patchwork pieces, waiting to be sewn together to form a diverse yet harmonious whole.

The Pyu – Burman Link : New Findings

The key to tracing the origins of Luce's Early Bagan period sculptural imagery may lie with a recent temple excavation. This site has yielded some very exciting finds which further strengthen a Pyu-Burman continuum.

Paw-daw-mu (no.996)

This temple was partially excavated in the late 1990s. Located south of Lokananda in the Lokananda Garden, remnants of stucco and Buddha images have been found. The temple was tentatively dated to the 11th century by Pichard, no doubt based on the exposed part of the temple which can be readily identified with this period. However, since excavation it is apparent that the exterior structure was built around a much earlier temple. The significance of this site lies in the fragments of fascinating and vibrant stucco reliefs and remnants of Buddha images, which demonstrate an irrefutable link to the Pyu sites around Srikshetra (fig.28a, fig.28b, fig.28c, fig.28d, fig.28e, fig.28f).²⁰⁶

A number of smaller Buddha images have been found at the site, though many are damaged. It is of note that virtually all known sculptural imagery belonging

²⁰⁵ Yule, *Mission to Ava*, 87.

²⁰⁶ The first description of the temple and analysis of the stucco has only recently been published. See P. Gutman and B. Hudson, "Pyu stucco at Pagan", *TAASA* 14, no.4 (2005):20-22.

to Pyu sites is made of stone, clay or stucco. Paw-daw-mu's interior structure is consistent with this. The images found are either free-standing small sandstone figures or stucco images. When entering the tunnel excavated by earlier treasure hunters, it is just possible to discern an intact Buddha image in a niche off to one side (fig.28d). It is difficult to determine definitively if this image is also freestanding as direct access is not possible. In contrast, the images in the exposed niches of the outer temple are constructed using a method that was very common at Bagan, namely the form of the image is made of brick, and then covered with stucco (fig.28e). This differentiation between manufacturing methods, along with the close stylistic links of the imagery associated with the earlier temple and Pyu images, adds further support to the conclusions drawn by Gutman and Hudson that there is a distinct cultural divide between the two structures. Yet this divide also provides a definitive connection.

Conclusions

There is a growing body of evidence to support the long suggested theory that the Pyu were the founding ethnic group at Bagan. The original settlement was inhabited by the Pyu and was subject to a major upheaval in the mid 9th century. The Nanchao invasions may well have decimated the local population, but in the absence of archaeological evidence to suggest a sacking of the city with destructions of buildings, this can only be a hypothesis. All that can be summarised to date is that the Pyu occupied a widespread area of central Burma. There were major city sites which probably operated as a loose federation as there are no known single rulers who controlled this vast region. The gradual demise of the Pyu kingdom, which was once strong enough to warrant tributary status with the Chinese Tang court, may have been the result of a number of factors – it could have been a result of the Nanchao invasions, perhaps the most powerful Pyu leaders were affected by this and without a central leadership, the kingdom disintegrated. There may have been a natural disaster or epidemic, or a series of corrupt or inadequate leaders leading to a gradual decline in the kingdom's regional significance. Perhaps the Pyu demise was just another spiral in the annals of Southeast Asian history, part of the cycle of integration and fragmentation which characterizes the social and cultural history of much of Southeast Asia.

Also unclear is the relationship between the Pyu and the incoming Burmese. If the Burmese did fill a political vacuum which appeared after the Nanchao invasions, then we must consider how these two cultural groups coexisted. If the Burmese arrived at Bagan in the 9th century, then there was a nearly 200 year period whereby Pyu culture was slowly subsumed by the Burmese before Burman culture emerged under King Anawrahta's rule. But this does not sit comfortably with the recent archaeological finds which are likely to be of Pyu origin and date from the 10th and 11th centuries. This suggests that the Pyu maintained a strong cultural influence and that the Burmese readily accepted Pyu culture and learnt from it.

This was a period of great cultural readjustment – the dominant ethnic group of the previous 1000 years, the group who had established major walled cities with complex irrigation systems, just quietly disappeared from view. The Burmans, newly arrived, grasp the tail end of organised Pyu society and emerge as a newly established urban race, the product of the integration of a Pyu culture which was already in decline, and a nomadic group familiar with the cultural traditions of the Himalayas and the Yunnan region of China. The Burmans abandon their nomadic past, perhaps because this was the first region they had come across with local inhabitants who were not in a position of such strength that they could actively drive out the Burmans. More importantly though, the Bagan plain also offered a sustainable environment whereby competition for food and water was not a mitigating factor.

Once settled, the Burmans integrated into Pyu culture and eventually dominate the original inhabitants of Bagan. However, during the process they adopt Buddhism and the Pyu Buddhist traditions of *stupa* and small temple building along with the merit making activities of producing votive tablets. A natural consequence of an increasingly stable local environment with a steadily rising population inevitably led to the reemergence of a hierarchical social system, with leaders and followers. Anawrahta eventually emerges as the first significant ruler, confident enough in the stability of his own role as leader of the city of Bagan, to enable him to travel widely and for extensive periods to expand the influence of his rule. There is no suggestion that force was used to bring these widespread communities under his patronage, indicating that most settlements

were smaller sites, unable to resist any invader and also that these smaller towns were not adverse to the notion of securing a protector. The inevitable result of Anawrahta's kingdom building was the need to represent a distinct social structure and identity. The Burmans built on the Pyu tradition, and the Buddhist religion provided the key social foundation, just as it had during the Pyu period. Bagan became a walled city in the Pyu tradition. Monasteries were built, as they had been in the major Pyu cities of Srikshetra and Beikthano. Brahmanical practices underpinned courtly ritual, and religious diversity was tolerated. In this way, Pyu influence continued to be felt at Bagan even after the local script disappeared from use, and visual links to a Pyu past had also vanished. There was no need for the Burmans to overthrow the Pyu, or make a concerted effort to display dominance. Through a patient integration over 200 years, the Burmans succeeded in emerging as the ethnic victors, a position which is retained through to the present day.

Chapter 3 **Anawrahta, King of the Burmans**

Anawrahta (r.1044–1077) is the historical founder of the Bagan Empire. How he rose to this position remains a mystery and the legendary story of his life as told in the *GPC* remains the most comprehensive source for clues to the life of this first ruler of the Burmese kingdom. With no extant epigraphic material at Bagan contemporaneous with his reign apart from votive tablets the reconstruction of the early Bagan period relies on pieces of evidence being brought together from different sources – votive tablets, sculpture, architecture and foreign chronicles.¹

The *GPC* tells that Anawrahta was the youngest son of King Kyaughpyu who was deposed from his throne by his two eldest sons, Kyizo and Sokkate. Kyizo took the throne but was killed by a hunter's arrow. Sokkate was next to reign but Anawrahta, on hearing Sokkate's wish to consort with his mother, killed him. Anawrahta tried to convince his father to take the throne again, but he refused, saying his time has passed. Anawrahta then became king. There is no way of assessing whether this was indeed the way Anawrahta came to the throne, truth sometimes being stranger than fiction. As king, however, Anawrahta firmly consolidated Burman rule and the position of Bagan as the capital of the Burmese Empire which lasted until 1287, when King Narathihapate was defeated by the force of Kublai Khan's armies.²

Anawrahta traveled the length of Burma, and according to the *GPC* he also journeyed to India and Sri Lanka.³ The two major events associated with his reign which have been discussed in Chapter 1, and which would have had a lasting effect on the development of Buddhism and Buddhist art, were the relocation of the Mon court to Bagan in 1057, and the presence of Shin Arahán, who became Anawrahta's principal spiritual guide. Burmese histories tell how Shin Arahán,

¹ Than Tun, "History of Buddhism," 4.

² Narathihapate apparently misjudged the power of Kublai Khan. After twice refusing to pay tributes to Kublai Khan, Narathihapate summarily executed Kublai Khan's envoys. Not surprisingly, Kublai Khan ordered retaliation and was successful in decimating the Bagan army. Narathihapate did offer to submit, but it was too late, and he was later murdered by one of his own sons. See Hall, *History of South-East Asia*, 169-70.

³ *GPC*, 95, 88.

originally from Thaton, arrived at Bagan to help restore spiritual order to the growing capital and disband the corrupt Ari priests. Shin Araham's role as a historical personage is supported by Kyanzittha's palace inscription which mentions his role in the dedication ceremony.⁴ According to the *GPC*, it was at Shin Araham's suggestion that Anawrahta approached Manuha, to obtain a copy of the *Tipitaka*, the Buddhist religious texts. When Manuha refused to comply Anawrahta raised his armies against the recalcitrant king, and eventually subdued the city. He took the *Tipitaka* and the Mon king and his court, along with Mon artisans, back to Bagan. The *Tipitaka* was housed in the Pitakat-taik, Anawrahta's library. These events will be discussed further in some detail in Chapter 5, in the context of their influence on the development of Buddhist art.

Anawrahta promoted Buddhism through the making of Buddhist artifacts such as votive tablets and sculpture and oversaw the construction of the earliest major temples at Bagan, setting in train a tradition of merit-making activities that lasted throughout the Bagan era. The following study of the Buddhist artifacts that can be reliably attributed to his reign highlights the eclectic nature of Buddhist practice during the mid 11th century.

Anawrahta became a devout proponent of Buddhism, but what form of Buddhism? As has been outlined in the previous chapter, following the Nanchao incursions that destabilized the Pyu kingdom, the Bagan region was left ostensibly to its own devices. The arrival of the Burmans, who assimilated Pyu culture and the structure of agrarian society, expanded the spiritual repertoire of the region. As stability returned to the Bagan region, local fiefdoms gained strength. The emergence of a strong society based around Buddhist ideas of kingship saw Indian notions of court life such as the Brahmanic rituals become integrated into Burman court life. No doubt word was spread about Bagan's increasing importance through traders and travelers. Foreigners would have been attracted to Bagan, seeking work and riches. With Buddhism rapidly losing ground in India, Buddhist monks also moved to areas that were still upholding Buddhist traditions, such as Tibet, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. Bagan would have quickly gained a reputation as a Buddhist sanctuary.

⁴ C.O. Blagden, "Mon Inscriptions Nos.9-11", 35.

There is ample evidence to show that spiritual life at Bagan, while embracing Buddhism, remained extremely eclectic. Animism was the fundamental populist belief.⁵ The Burmese *nats*, a hierarchy of gods and goddesses, played an important role as they were considered the founders of the region, even in the GPC. Mt Popa, which rises from the flat Bagan plain like an enormous monolith and is the spiritual home of the *nats* was imbued with spiritual mystery that would not be overturned by Buddhism's rising popularity.⁶ Brahmanism secured its role in court life and no doubt many Indian traders and workers were Hindu. The consecration rituals which are documented in a number of Bagan inscriptions confirm the ritual and superstitious nature of spiritual beliefs.⁷

Anawrahta was a highly committed and driven personality. His expansionist zeal was matched only by his enthusiasm for Buddhism. During the early phase of his reign, Anawrahta was concerned with Buddhism in its broadest sense, not with any particular sect. As Luce comments "It is probably quite wrong to regard Aniruddha as Theravādin. He had as yet no access to the sea, and little contact, it seems, with the half-Buddhist Mons of Rāmaññadesa".⁸ Luce notes, however, "There is ample evidence to prove that he and his successors had close relations, religious, cultural and matrimonial, with *Patikkarā* (west of Comilla) in East Bengal. There Mahāyānism, Tāntrism, and various forms of Brahmanism flourished".⁹ Perhaps Anawrahta's enthusiasm for Buddhism was sparked by some personal contact with Buddhists during his travels, or with Buddhist devotees who came to Bagan. Perhaps Anawrahta, as the earthly king, realized a need to take on the role of spiritual leader as well in order to secure his regnal legitimacy, and Buddhism became his vehicle for this. While nothing is recorded

⁵ Recent archaeological finds in Burma include some intriguing bronze artifacts of bronze earth goddesses which are likely to have been associated with some form of animist religion. Found at sites along the Chindwin and Samon rivers some of the material has been dated to the 1st century CE. The authors hypothesise that these regions are pre-Pyu or early Pyu settlements. Nyunt Han, Win Maung and E. Moore, "Prehistoric Grave Goods from the Chindwin and Samon River Regions," 1-8.

⁶ See Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, and B. Brac de la Perrière, "Royal Images in Their 'Palaces': The Place of the Statues in the Cult of the 37 Nats," 99-105.

⁷ Kyanzittha's palace inscription which is thought to refer to the dedication of his new palace is a very good example of the importance of ritual, religion and auspicious signs at Bagan. Blagden, "Mon Inscriptions Nos.9-11". An inscription from 1207-08 attributed to Ming Nadaungmya is also an example of the interconnection between Buddhism, earning of merit through the commissioning of religious buildings and the rituals associated with their dedication and consecration. Frasch, "King Nadaungmya's Great Gift", *Études birmanes en hommage à Denise Bernot* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1998):27-35.

⁸ *OBEF*, 1:16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

about the origins of his Buddhist faith, Anawrahta promoted Buddhism and as will be shown, during his reign Buddhism at Bagan changed dramatically.

Anawrahta's Votive Tablets

Anawrahta commissioned innumerable votive tablets which were distributed throughout the regions he conquered, just as King Asoka had done in India over 1000 years before. As noted in Chapter 2 the tradition of making votive tablets to earn merit and show devotion had previously been taken up by the Pyu. Anawrahta's votive tablets are identified by the writing of his name on the reverse of the tablet. Called the "seals of Anawrahta" they have been found in great numbers at sites scattered throughout Burma. The manner of the tablets' distribution throughout such a large area of Burma is assumed to have been through a combination of direct distribution by Anawrahta himself during his many expansionist campaigns and by the dispatching of others sent by his command to far reaches of the country. Their purpose was not only to promote Buddhism but to promote Anawrahta himself and Bagan.

In addition to Anawrahta's seal the tablets were frequently inscribed with the *ye dhamma* stanza, which was a symbol of conversion and the power of the *sangha*.¹⁰ This phrase is well known to Buddhists but there is no evidence to show it was used for proselytising purposes prior to Anawrahta's reign, suggesting again some outside influence had sparked his Buddhist zeal. As well as being a source of epigraphic material, Anawrahta's votive tablets are the most abundant source of images associated with this formative period of Bagan's dynastic history. As with the earlier Pyu tablets Anawrahta's plaques come in a great variety of styles with differing imagery. Luce grouped Anawrahta's tablets into five main types:

- Single image of the Buddha. The Buddha is seated or standing and the hands are placed in a variety of *mudras* including *bhumisparsa* and *dhyana*.

¹⁰ The *ye dhamma* stanza is translated as "Of all those things that from a cause arise, Tathāgatha the cause thereof has told, And how they cease to be, that too he tells, This is the doctrine of the great Recluse". After hearing this phrase spoken by the Elder Assaji, two of the Buddha's most popular disciples, Sariputta and Mogallana, passed through the stage of stream-enterers and became stream-winners. The phrase became a symbol of conversion and the power of the *dhamma*. See Nyanaponika Thera. "The Life of Sāriputta", *Wheel Publication* 5, no.90-92 (1966):1-112.

- Five figures. Found at and around Bagan the central Buddha is flanked by Lokanatha, always on his right and Maitreya on his left. Two earth-touching Buddhas are above.
- Ten figure tablets. Found at Bagan, Chantha village northwest of Shwébo and the deserted village site of Hwa-te Nywa-haung (Nwatélè), about 1.5 kilometres north of Nga-o. (in the far north of Möng Mit state, 25 kilometres from Katha)¹¹ The central Buddha image is sitting within a replica of the Bodhgaya temple, with two small Buddha images each side, and a row of five Buddhas below.
- Thirty-one figure tablets. The central Buddha is flanked by Lokanatha and Maitreya and the previous 28 Buddhas appear around them arranged in five rows.
- Fifty figure tablets. These have been found at Shwe-hsan-daw pagoda, Bagan, Minbu and inside the Bawbawgyi *stupa* at Srikshetra. The earth-touching Buddhas are all of the same size, cover the face of the tablets and are arranged in six rows with small *stupa* shapes between their heads.

This eclectic form of imagery illustrates the complex nature of Buddhism during the early part of Anawrahta's reign, which favoured the Mahayana tradition. Many of Anawrahta's votives are identical to those of Pala origin and as it is very unlikely that Anawrahta travelled to India himself, the votives must have been introduced to Bagan. As Guy notes in relation to the most common form of Anawrahta votive, which features the Bodhgaya Mahabodhi temple, "in all probability the Pagan examples were made from imported moulds".¹² Many tablets do not bear Anawrahta's name and therefore cannot be directly attributed to him even though the tablets are identical. Tablets have been found inscribed with different names, obviously that of the donor, and some examples include names of monks and a chief queen, Cipe, possibly Anawrahta's consort.¹³ Given the quantity of tablets that exist, the practice of making devotional plaques must have been very popular and one assumes the wider

¹¹ While Luce's place names are in brackets, those of Than Tun, the Myanmar form, are used throughout.

¹² J.Guy, "Offering up a rare jewel: Buddhist merit-making and votive tablets in early Burma" in *Burma Art and Archaeology*, ed. A.Green and R.T.Blurton (London: The British Museum Press, 2001), 30.

¹³ Than Tun, "History of Buddhism", 183.

public not only made tablets in support of Buddhism but also as a means of showing support for Anawrahta.

The language that appears on Anawrahta's tablets is primarily Sanskrit, written in the Nagari script of the 9th–13th centuries.¹⁴ The Burmans lacked a writing system of their own during Anawrahta's reign. Pyu script is only rarely found at Bagan, whereas Mon was the first script to be used by the Burmans for personal inscriptions. Indian scripts never gained any foothold in Bagan beyond their use on votive tablets. Anawrahta simply inscribed his name onto the back of the tablets to claim them and the merit derived from making them as his own.

Anawrahta's earliest votive tablets were in the Pala style. They were simply appropriated by Anawrahta and Pala Indian prototypes strongly influenced the iconographic development of Bagan period Buddhist art. An example of a votive tablet from around the 9th-10th century found at Bodhgaya is clearly a model for those dating to Anawrahta's reign, over a century later (fig.29). Shaped like a lotus petal and with a clean edge, the tablet shows Gotama Buddha seated in *bhumisparsa mudra*. The Buddha is depicted simply with a slim torso, and the edge of his robe is clearly defined. The neck rings are prominent and the elongated earlobes are clear of the shoulders. The hair curls are raised, appearing like a cap, with a gentle wave above the forehead. The *usnisha* is prominent and rounded. He is seated on a double lotus throne and the image is contained within a niche that follows the Buddha's contours. Extending from the top of the niche is a structure that is based on the famous *stupa* at Bodhgaya and atop of this is a parasol from which garlands extend. The background around Gotama Buddha is covered with symmetrically arranged *stupas* in relief – there appear to be twenty. Below the lotus throne are two lines of script.

The moulds for the tablets were made of bronze, stone and terracotta and some moulds for votive tablets have been found at Bagan. One very fine example of a bronze mould is in the collection of the Bagan museum (fig.30). Virtually the entire surface of the plaque is covered with imagery ranging from *apsaras* to Buddhas while lions are incorporated into the throne base and *makara* flank the Buddha image. The *stupa* at the top of the tablet is capped with a parasol, with garlands attached. These bronze moulds are very robust and innumerable clay

¹⁴ Ray, *Sanskrit Buddhism*, 31.

tablets could have been pressed. Another example which shows a handle-like plug on the rear is illustrated by Mya (fig.31).¹⁵ This is made of baked clay and was not as durable. Within a decade of Anawrahta's coming to the throne local variants started to appear. These tablets were often inscribed with a mix of Pali and Sanskrit, indicating the early influence of a Theravada sect. As Pali is confined to those following the Theravada doctrine the combination of both scripts shows that during Anawrahta's reign Theravada doctrine arrived or was reinvigorated at Bagan. This is one of the major signs that this was a transitional period in the history of Burmese Buddhism, which saw Mahayana practices slowly superseded by and also integrated with those of the Theravada tradition.

When comparing the Indian tablet to a tablet from Anawrahta's reign (fig.32) the similarities are obvious. Again, the Buddha is seated in *bhumisparsa mudra* though the hand now crosses the thigh over the shin rather than closer to the knee as in the Pala tablet. The hair curls form a point on the forehead rather than a wave. The Buddha is seated in a niche with the Bodhgaya-like *stupa* overhead topped with a parasol. The side pillars of the niche are different – changing from a simple turned support to a more formalised decorative upright, reflecting architectural preferences of the day. A string of beads hangs down on the outside of the pillars in both tablets. Again the background is covered with *stupas*, in this case 10 rather than 20. While the tablet has a raised edge, the edge of the mould features a row of raised circles, the same as those found on the rim of the Indian tablet.

Once Bagan artisans started to develop their own designs, links to Pyu style is evident in the physical depictions of the Buddha. A selection of the "five figure" type of votive tablets, as described by Luce, shows some significant departures from the more formal Pala style. The first examples depict two rimless tablets, each shaped rather like a stele, with flat base and sides that curve inwards to form a pointed arch (fig.33a-b). They show the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra* seated on a double lotus throne that is now placed on top of a stepped pedestal throne decorated with a geometric zigzag pattern. The Buddha is contained within a double niche, the inner framing his head and torso with raised bead-like surround. This is then surrounded by an architectural framework in high relief

¹⁵ Mya, *Votive Tablets of Burma*, pt.1.

similar to the earlier Pala style tablet. The throne supports are spindle shaped and draped with beads. The Bodhgaya-shaped *stupa* above the Buddha's head is treated in a different way from before, the interior of the space being filled with a foliate type motif, while the parasol is now transformed into a *stupa*. The Buddha has defined neck rings and the hair curls tend to form a point across the forehead again. Now, there is a flame-like protuberance extending from the *usnisha*, an iconographic feature that is not associated with Pala sculpture.¹⁶ The torso is rather soft, full and rounded. The Buddha's face, and those of the flanking *bodhisattvas* are fuller than those of Pala India and may draw on the earlier Pyu styles. The top of the shoulder robe is clearly seen across the left shoulder and chest.

Flanking the Buddha are two symmetrically arranged figures assumed to represent Lokanatha and Maitreya. Both appear to be wearing crowns and are seated on a lotus throne which is supported by stems rising from the base of the plaque: the figures are depicted in "royal ease", a pose associated with *bodhisattvas*. The decorative headdresses are treated differently for each image indicating their separate identities. They are loosely surrounded by an architectural frame. Luce notes that the depiction of the two *bodhisattvas* contravenes normal protocol. Lokanatha, seated on the Buddha's right is holding a lotus flower. Maitreya is shown in a mirror image pose. The conventions for portraying gods and *bodhisattvas* was clearly laid down in Mahayan and Hindu texts which describe in detail the ideal forms of each god. Luce notes that each figure should be carrying a different flower, Lokanatha the lotus and Maitreya the *nagakesara*, and it does appear that both figures are indeed carrying different flowers indicating the Bagan artisans' knowledge of these conventions. Their portrayal of Maitreya as a mirror image of Lokanatha, instead of him holding the flower in the right hand is most likely an act of individual artistic expression, as the symmetry of the composition in this case overrides doctrinal details.¹⁷ This could be expected during this early phase of Buddhist development when detailed information regarding iconographic conventions may not have been available.

¹⁶ A flame-like *usnisha* may be a feature introduced via Sri Lanka, as this a common element of Sri Lankan sculptures of the time. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

¹⁷ OBEP 1:192-3

Along the base of the tablet are two rows of Sanskrit inscription in Nagari script which have been translated as "This pious donor of truth, the great king Sri Aniruddha the divine".¹⁸ Above each *bodhisattva* is a small image of a Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra* seated on a single lotus throne and enclosed within a niche-like framework. The number five has some significance as it is the number of Buddhas of the current eon, yet in this case the five figures are not representing them, this being a "five figure" rather than a "five Buddha" tablet. It is possible that the two additional Buddhas represent the Buddhas of the past, and conveniently bring the total of figures on the plaque to the number five. Of course, the five Buddhas are also a key element associated with Mahayana Buddhism.¹⁹ The background is ornately decorated with *stupas* and garlands, while branches of the pipal tree extend outwards from the central Buddha's surround. Other floral motifs are scattered over the background leaving very little unadorned space. This excessive adornment is a characteristic of Anawrahta's votive tablets. Very rarely is there any vacant space on the tablet. This is in contrast with the developments in Pala India where plaques were generally less complex during the 11th century.²⁰ The Pala tablets usually featured a single central image set within some type of architectural or floral element. The decoration did cover much of the background but was much less detailed.

Anawrahta appears to have been more concerned at this stage with spreading Buddhism as a concept rather than worrying too much about doctrinal correctness. He was popularising Buddhism against a fragmented background comprising remnants of Buddhism as practised by the Pyu, animism and Nat worship, and whatever Mahayana influences the Burmans had absorbed during their move into Burma.

¹⁸ *OBEP*, 3:5, pl.8a.

¹⁹ In Mahayana Buddhism there are five Buddhas who represent five families. "The concept of the five families of Vajrayana, those of the Wheel, the Crossed Vajra, the Jewel, the Vajra, and the Lotus, developed after the fourth and fifth centuries. The Transcendent Buddhas who head these five families, and their directions, are, respectively, Vairocana (centre), Amoghasiddhi (north), Ratnasambha (south), Akshobhya (east) and Amitabha (west)". David Templeman, "The Five Transcendent Buddhas", in *Buddha: Radiant Awakening*, ed. J.Menzies (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2001), 86-9.

²⁰ For an example, see S. and J. Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree* (Seattle: Dayton Art Institute in association with the University of Washington Press, 1990), fig.56.

Apart from the conventional figures of the Buddha, and the inclusion of Lokanatha and Maitreya in a scene, some tablets feature Lokanatha as the central image, and even Tara. Lokanatha and Tara are the preeminent *bodhisattvas* of the Mahayana tradition, and early scholars interpreted their presence as representing Mahayana Buddhism. However, as is now known, within Theravada practice there are branches which do embrace these preeminent *bodhisattvas*. In the Bagan context their presence shows that while originally introduced through the Mahayana Buddhism of Pala India, these deities were incorporated into the form of Theravada Buddhism that was evolving under Anawrahta's rule.

It is curious that even though local models for votive tablets were available in the form of Pyu prototypes, Anawrahta favoured Indian styles. The tablets do not represent the imagery of the pure Theravada Buddhism Anawrahta is credited with establishing in Burma but favour the Mahayana concepts such as *bodhisattvas*, Maitreya and multiple Buddhas. There are a number of possible explanations for this. First, if the legends surrounding the Ari have foundation and their Buddhist practice was degenerate, Anawrahta may have chosen to dissociate himself from all aspects of their practice, including the endorsement of their style of votive tablets. Second, through contact with northern India via the overland trade route, Anawrahta would have become aware of Pala imagery which was connected with a successful and well respected dynasty. In the absence of any written scriptures and with a supposedly debased local monkhood, the Indian votive tablets may have represented "authentic" Buddhism which was no longer present at Bagan. Third, as a young ruler intent on asserting his authority, adopting the successful religious model of his influential neighbours would have helped endorse his regnal authority. It is also feasible that Pala Indian monks, leaving India as the tide of religious favour turned against them, came to Bagan and were able to influence the fledgling king to act in favour of Mahayana practices and imagery.

Many of the Indian style votive tablets may date from the early part of his reign, before the arrival of the Theravada *Tipitaka* at Bagan in 1057. By the time Anawrahta relocated the Mon court of Thaton to Bagan, he had established a strong army and extensive kingdom. The great variety found in these tablets makes it very difficult to establish a firm chronology, although there are some

features which can be used to hypothesise some linear visual developments. The first is, of course, the script appearing on the tablets. Tablets with only Nagari script must stylistically predate those with Pali and Mon script. The Nagari script has been identified by Luce as falling into two main categories – those with finely incised and raised writing, and those with a close elongated style which is more difficult to read.²¹ Once the Mon arrived at Bagan, Mon script and Pali appeared. Most of Anawrahta's plaques include Sanskrit Nagari script but later both Pali and Sanskrit were incorporated in his plaques. Many Indian moulds were obviously used for at least 50 years – they still incorporated the Nagari script along the base of the tablet that was integral to the mould, but Pali text written in Mon script was inscribed along the bottom or obverse.²²

Once the Theravada canon arrived in Bagan, and Shin Arahán became a major figure in the reinvigoration of the *sangha*, Buddhist imagery entered a new phase. With a greater understanding of Theravadin teachings the visual accoutrements of Buddhism changed. As Buddhism at Bagan became *karmatic*, that is, focused on merit-earning and the future, the rate of temple building escalated. It is likely that some type of edict regarding the type and form of images which could be placed in the temples was in place. Earth touching Buddhas dominated as the main temple images. The four main scenes - the Buddha's Birth, his Enlightenment, the First Sermon, and his Death are repeated over and over again. An expanded repertoire of imagery relating to his last earthly existence is also common.

As well as being distributed throughout the expanding Burmese kingdom many tablets were set into *stupas*. Made specifically for this purpose they were usually larger and less portable than the usual devotional tablets, and were contemporaneous with the construction date of the *stupa*. A large tablet found at the Maung Di pagoda (fig.34a, fig.34b), between Twanté and Yangon, has a Pali inscription in Mon script "This Blessed One was made by the great king, Śrī Aniruddha the divine, with his own hands, for the sake of Deliverance".²³ The date given by Luce for the pagoda's construction is c.1050, prior to the Mon

²¹ *OBEP*, 1:98.

²² As noted in Chapter 2, Sanskrit inscriptions may indicate the influence of the Sarvastivadin sect which was doctrinally related to the Theravada but retained Sanskrit as their written language.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2:12.

court's relocation to Bagan. This suggests that during his extensive forays in Burma, Anawrahta must have engaged local artisans, in this case Mon people, to make devotional plaques in situ. Maung Di is similar in style to the Lok-ananda, and a number of these large plaques are housed within the temple grounds (fig.34c, fig.34d).

The stylistic similarities between the tablets and their smaller counterparts of Indian origin are clear. There are some features, however, which are atypical. The tablets depict a single image of the Buddha seated on a waisted stepped throne, in a style that became very popular at Bagan. This style of throne base is characteristic of Indian style plaques though generally Anawrahta's plaques show a taller throne. The height of the *sikhara* is reduced and topped with a parasol and streamers. Bell-shaped *stupas* with elongated finials flank the central earth-touching image. The right hand extends past the lower leg and touches the throne base in the manner of most early tablets. In addition, the head to body proportion has altered, with the head appearing small. This harks back to some early Pyu sculpture, such as the images that appear on the famous silver gilt reliquary, which show a similar proportion (fig.12). Given the location of the pagoda, near Yangon, it is not surprising that Mon and Pyu style is incorporated into this image. These seemingly minor stylistic points are significant as they show that Anawrahta was exposed to different cultural influences early in his reign.

Another example which shows evidence of local design is a five figure tablet with Anawrahta's inscription (fig.35), found at Bagan. The writing is still Sanskrit text written in Nagari script, following Indian prototypes but the plaque also displays distinctly local characteristics. The central earth-touching Buddha is seated on a double lotus throne atop a waisted pedestal. The legs are crossed in a marked "v", compared to the more usual flat line formed when the lower legs cross. The Buddha is flanked by two *bodhisattvas*, probably Maitreya and Lokanatha, who sit in mirror image poses, one with the right leg resting on a lotus-like form and right hand on knee, the other with the left leg pendant and left hand on knee. As noted in relation to an earlier example (fig.33a-b) this symmetry compromises the iconographic integrity of the image, no deities usually seated with the left leg and hand pendant. The Mahabodhi-type *stupa* above the Buddha's head is shortened, in favour of allowing more room for an

elongated finial topped with a parasol. Two additional earth-touching Buddhas are placed above the *bodhisattvas* and rest in shrine-like niches. The striking difference in this work which marks it as a local rather than imported tablet is the appearance of the faces. They bear little resemblance to the fine, well-defined faces of the Indian style. Instead, they are more oval, with a lower forehead. The hair is cap-like, extending in an almost straight line across the forehead while Indian models more classically depict figures with a hairline that parallels the eyebrow arch. The *usnisha* is also more triangular in form, rather than rounded. These tend to be features more closely associated with the Pyu (for example fig.16, fig.21), and the Mon (fig.190, fig.193) suggesting the plaque was probably made after 1057 when Mon artisans were active at Bagan. The writing does not appear to be as neat and regular as those in other plaques also suggesting the maker was perhaps copying rather than being fluent in the use of Nagari script. Perhaps the script was incised by local Burman artisans who were copying Mon-introduced designs. Guy notes that another type of early Bagan votive which depicts the Buddha seated in *pralambapadasana* with hands in *vitarka mudra* follows Mon convention, further evidence in support of strong Mon influence during this period.²⁴

There are many other examples of local innovation within votive tablets. It is difficult, however, to place the tablets within a stylistic progression along side temple imagery. The main purpose of producing plaques was for merit making. The long-term use of some moulds saw plaques with Indian script still being used during Kyanzittha's reign. Those inscribed with Pali written in Mon script were made later in Anawrahta's reign, after Mon culture was integrated at Bagan, but the plaques do not assist in tracking iconographic change. Indeed, the repeated use of plaques that portray *bodhisattvas* should not be taken as evidence for the type of Buddhism practised at Bagan: rather it may just have been expedient for the maker and donor of the tablet to use whatever moulds were available.

While the eclectic nature of the tablets and their seemingly endless types make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions regarding the development of Bagan period Buddha imagery from this source alone, they provide a significant insight

²⁴ Guy, "Offering up a rare jewel", 30.

into this formative phase of Buddhism. In the absence of more monumental Buddhist sculptures that can be reliably dated to the first half of the 11th century, the tablets provide us with the foundation from which later Buddhist imagery evolved. It was without doubt a hybrid form, embracing imagery which is associated with both the Theravada and Mahayana schools.

Anawrahta's Temples

Anawrahta's reign marked the beginning of major temple and *stupa* construction at Bagan. As discussed in Chapter 1 the chronological framework first presented by Luce has to date been unchallenged. Although Luce discusses *stupa* and temples separately, here they will be combined to facilitate the stylistic and iconographic comparisons of imagery. Comments regarding the appropriate chronology of each temple will be made where disagreement between Luce's opinions and more recent studies arise.

The *GPC* outlines Anawrahta's building of a number of temples and *stupa*.²⁵ The first mention of Anawrahta building monuments at Bagan arises after he had obtained the sacred frontlet relic from Srikshetra and the tooth relic from Sri Lanka, a journey made early in his reign. On returning with the frontlet relic, he sought a sign for the site of enshrinement. He attached the relic to the back of a white elephant and declared that wherever the elephant should kneel, the relic would be enshrined. The elephant first knelt at the site of the Shwe-zigon and the temple was duly built. Later, when he returned with the tooth relic, the procedure was repeated. The elephant again knelt at the Shwe-zigon and the tooth relic was also housed in the *stupa*. Miraculously, another tooth relic appeared and the elephant proceeded to Mt Tangyi, where a *zedi* was built to house the additional tooth. Yet another appeared, and this routine was repeated

²⁵ Here, the term temple refers to a monument that one can enter for devotional purposes. *Stupas* are closed buildings, and it is not possible to enter. However, they are still used for devotion. Images are frequently inserted into the exterior of *stupa*, and these provide a focus for making offerings and for prayer. For example, the Shwe-zigon is referred to as a pagoda, even though the building is a *stupa*. A *stupa* is also called a *zedi*. In Burma, the term pagoda is used fairly loosely today to refer to either. Taw Sein Ko wrote in 1912 that a pagoda "rests on five receding terraces, because the sides of Mount Meru...are divided into five regions, each of which is inhabited by a separate order of beings stands...In later buildings the number of terraces is reduced from five to three, because apparently the Buddha is revered of the 'three worlds of Brahmas, devas, and men'. Then comes an octagon." He notes that in India, pagodas are called *topes* and in Sri Lanka, *dagobas*. In Burma, pagodas are also called *zedis*. They house either relics of the Buddha, Buddha images or scripture. Taw Sein Ko, "The Origin, Meaning and Symbolism of the Word 'Pagoda'," *JBR* (1912):16-17.

at Loka-nanda, Mt Tuywin and Mt Pyek. As the elephant had stood on Mt Thalyaung and Hkaywe during this miraculous journey *zedis* were also built at these sites and Anawrahta "enshrined many relics of the sacred body" in each *zedi*. "Thus desiring that the religion might endure full five thousand years for the benefit of all creatures, he built *zedi* to contain five holy teeth and with great honour and reverence called his blessing upon them".²⁶

The Mahapeinné pagoda, now called the Shwe-hsan-daw, was built to contain the sacred hair relic obtained from the Ussa king (king of Bago). The *GPC* states that Anawrahta traveled to the "Kala country of Bengal [where] he left human images of stone. Thence going throughout all parts of Burma he built in every quarter pagodas, *gu*, monasteries, *tazaung*, and rest-houses, and returned to Pugarama".²⁷ Anawrahta's religious zeal is ever present in the *GPC*. References to his temple building, collecting of relics, and copying of the Tipitaka dominate the narrative which traces his rise in power. His battles were all fought with religious goals in mind – no questions are ever raised about the suitability of a Buddhist king slaying his enemies to gain these religious remains.

While the *GPC* refers specifically only to the Shwe-zigon, Shwe-hsan-daw and Loka-nanda at Bagan, a number of other monuments have been determined to date from Anawrahta's reign. Luce covers most of these, such as the Hpet-leik temples and the less well-known, though large, Pa-tha-da-gu. Since Luce completed his work, a number of temples have undergone further excavation and reconstruction. In addition, there have been some notable recent discoveries, such as temple no.820, that can now be assessed against monuments of more certain provenance.²⁸

²⁶ *GPC*, 91-2.

²⁷ *GPC*, 95-6.

²⁸ Caution must sometimes be exercised when accepting dates for temples. I was advised by staff at the Archaeology Department in Bagan that Temple 1845 in the Hpya-hga-zu group located between Hti-lo-min-lo and Ananda, dates to the Anawrahta period. The temple houses an interesting cloth-covered and painted central image. While some of the cloth, for example that covering the throne base, may be of an early date, the Buddha images have been extensively repaired and are not consistent with imagery of the period, neither is the architecture. Until the cloth can be dated by scientific methods, it is unwise to give a firm chronological attribution to the imagery. Very few examples of painting on cloth remain from the Bagan period, and these have been tentatively dated to the mid 12th century on stylistic grounds. P.Pal, "Fragmentary Cloth Paintings from Early Pagan and their Relations with Indo-Tibetan Traditions," in *The Art of Burma New Studies*, ed. D.Stadtner (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999), 79-88.

Mon Influence

While Luce's chronology has not been subject to criticism, as mentioned in Chapter 1 there is some debate regarding Luce's use of the term "Mon style" to describe a particular temple form which appeared early, coinciding with the generally accepted arrival date of the Mon in Bagan in 1057.²⁹ The temple style consists of an entrance vestibule, then a main hall with an external ambulatory corridor, and a central column (for example, fig.71). The central column houses the main image which faces the entrance hall. This column is often encircled with niches containing images of the three other immediate past Buddhas or sometimes there are depictions of scenes of the Buddha's last earthly existence. The windows are usually of perforated stone. This temple form was later modified during Kyanzittha's reign to include four entrances, each facing the cardinal directions. The term "Mon style" is questioned as there is little evidence to determine what a Mon style temple may have looked like. Luce coined the term principally because this architectural style was unlike others from neighbouring regions and the emergence of this building form appears associated with the arrival of the Mon at Bagan. Luce did not draw close links between this Mon style and what we now know was a style present at Srikshetra and the design may owe more to Pyu origins than the Mon.³⁰ Whatever the case, this particular form is without doubt associated with the earlier Bagan temples and emerged at a time consistent with the Mon court's arrival.

While the moniker may be criticised, it should be viewed as a then convenient term used to refer to this particular temple form. Interestingly, the term has not been attached so readily to an artistic style for sculptural or painted artifacts. Rather, these artifacts which are associated with "Mon style" temples are more loosely linked to Mon art under the term "Mon influence". As discussed in Chapter 1, with the exception of Aung-Thwin it has long been held that the Mon court of Manuha relocated to Bagan and this newly arrived Mon cultural

²⁹ *OBEP* 1:299-302.

³⁰ Some of the *gu* at Srikshetra have only been excavated and reconstructed in more recent years. Luce may not have had the opportunity to fully assess the architectural style of these early Pyu temples in the context of Bagan's architectural development.

influence was the catalyst for the start of an intense period of temple building. While imagery of the period is said to be of Mon influence or style, there is little Mon material to compare and thus substantiate these claims. Mon artifacts found around Thaton have been few in number.

The Mon are an ethnic group that established centres in lower Burma and in Thailand, the kingdom of Dvaravati being the best known Mon polity, emerging in the 7th century. The Mon from this region are well known artistically for stone carvings, particularly of the Wheel of Law, for stucco work in two and three dimensional forms, and terracotta plaques with relief figures of both secular and religious nature.³¹ The principal city was Nakhon Pathom and this site has yielded an array of Buddhist artifacts. While the Mon of Thaton were purported by the chronicles to be followers of the Theravada tradition, the remaining artifacts suggest that Buddhism was not homogeneous. Images of Visnu have been found along with stone reliefs of the Buddha and stucco relief plaques (fig.191a-192b). The number of artifacts found at Thaton is relatively small but there are strong similarities with those found at Nakhon Pathom suggesting that there were links between the two groups. It is reasonable to infer that similar Buddhist practices would have existed at both sites. As Woodward remarks "Dvāravatī Buddhism was not uniformly Theravāda or Hīnayāna, however. Around a brick stūpa in Nakhon Pathom, stucco-relief panels depicted previous lives of the Buddha preserved in Sanskrit texts but not Palī. And the existence of Mahāyāna Buddhism with its Sanskrit texts.....is attested by the presence of images of bodhisattvas...".³² The mixed imagery of the Dvaravati kingdom is repeated at Thaton, with images of the Buddha, life scenes and *jataka* reliefs, along with depictions of Visnu. The examples illustrated are indicative of the principal styles of Mon imagery from Thaton. The stucco plaque depicting musicians shows a high degree of competence in figure moulding, and the beaded surround is a frequently seen feature of Bagan stucco work (fig.193). The figures on the stone stele which depict *jataka* narratives are closely aligned stylistically with the type of figures found on the Hpet-leik pagoda *jataka* plaques

³¹ Brown has written a comprehensive study on artifacts of the Dvaravati kingdom, on particular the large stone wheels which appear unique to this culture. See R.Brown, *The Dvāravatī Wheels of Law and the Indianisation of Southeast Asia* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1997).

³² H.Woodward, *The Sacred Sculpture of Thailand*, 45-46.

which will be discussed shortly (fig.191a, fig.191b). The well-known standing image of the Buddha attests to a high level of competency amongst Mon artisans in stone carving (fig.190). These examples of Mon "art" will be referred to in the context of proposing origins for stylistic change at Bagan.

East Hpet-leik (no.1030) and West Hpet-leik (no.1031)

Two relatively modest *stupa*-shaped temples, East and West Hpet-leik are located in Thiripyitsaya village near New Bagan (fig.36, fig.37, fig.38). Their original construction is believed to pre-date Anawrahta's reign, though he was involved with restoring them, perhaps because of their close proximity to the Loka-nanda. As noted above the Loka-nanda was purportedly built by Anawrahta to house a tooth relic. Today the *stupa*, located near the steep bank of the Irrawaddy River, has been restored and is completely gilded (fig.42, fig.43). While not mentioned in the *GPC*, the Hpet-leik temples are considered amongst the first religious buildings to show the hand of Anawrahta's patronage. East and West Hpet-leik were originally *stupa* and the surrounding internal ambulatory with both internal and external walls inset with niches was a later addition. The significance of these temples lies in the extensive array of terracotta *jataka* plaques which Anawrahta commissioned to fill the niches of the corridor in both pagodas. These are the earliest known representations of the *jatakas* at Bagan. While there are no sculptures of the Buddha extant at either of the Hpet-leik pagodas, the plaques cannot be ignored as they represent some of the earliest known locally designed figurative imagery of the Bagan period.

In the late 1950s Luce commented on the already collapsing repair work that had been carried out under Government supervision in the 1910s. Aside from the poor reconstruction efforts, many *jataka* plaques were apparently re-adhered to the walls with little thought of the correct positioning. Luce's reconstruction of the *jataka* sequences was a mammoth task, particularly as nearly half the plaques were missing.³³ By utilising the existing plaques, which numbered 446 out of a combined total of over 1100, Luce was able to propose a probable layout for the *jataka* illustrations in each pagoda.

³³ On my most recent visit to the Hpet-leik pagodas, in December 2003, it appeared that more plaques had disappeared, while others have been damaged. Many of the heads of figures in high relief have been chiseled off.

At West Hpet-leik, the plaques were arranged in three tiers while at East Hpet-leik there were four tiers on the inner corridor wall. The plaques in the bottom rows were mostly intact and in situ, as plaques falling or dislodged from the upper walls were inclined to break and many fragments were found during the early official archaeological excavations of the temples in the 1910s, though equally many were missing.³⁴ Luce's interpretation of the *jatakas* series concludes that they represent an early recension of the *jatakas* numbering 550. The conventional number of *jatakas* is 547, but in Burma, three additional tales have been added bringing the number to 550. At West Hpet-leik, Anawrahta added another series of plaques illustrating *jatakas* 493–550, on the eastern wall of the pagoda. When Luce examined the plaques, some of the original Old Mon writings remained.³⁵

The plaques at East and West Hpet-leik are all of similar style and size. They are quite large, measuring approximately 38 x 36 x 7cm, with a reasonable degree of variation. This suggests that the wooden frames used as the template for the clay plaques were irregular. Given the intricate detailing of the architectural elements constructed during Anawrahta's rule, the lack of precision given to the mass production of these plaques is puzzling. Perhaps numerous small kilns were commissioned to make the plaques, and the templates differed in dimension. No large kilns have yet been uncovered at Bagan. Even though bricks were made in great quantities, they were apparently made at numerous smaller kilns scattered over the Bagan plain.³⁶

³⁴ *OBEP*, 1:262-5.

³⁵ The common term used for the painted writings on the wall of the temples is "glosses".

³⁶ Kilns sites have been recent discoveries at Bagan. In 2001, the 8th kiln site was excavated. It is located just outside of the Abeyadana temple grounds on the edge of the main road between Old and New Bagan. The kiln was a simple cylinder, about 1m deep and in diameter. Numerous sherds lay on the ground. Personal discussion with Dr Don Hein, an expert on kiln sites and technology in Thailand and Myanmar, and one of the first to identify potential kiln sites for excavation, confirms that this small kiln is typical of those used in the region. Sherds from this kiln include pieces with turquoise glazing as well as parts of durable earthenware vessels. There is discussion regarding the use of some of the kilns which may have been used as glass furnaces rather than pottery kilns. Since 2000, with the assistance of Don Hein, simple mounds scattered over the Bagan plain were identified as potential kiln sites, and excavations have confirmed this. Now, many potential kiln sites have been identified for future excavation.

The plaques feature relief images of the *jataka* narratives. The stories are identified by the careful engraving of the Pali name and number of each *jataka* along the top of each plaque, written in early Mon script. The use of Pali and old Mon script on the Hpet-leik plaques would suggest they were made after Anawrahta had brought the Mon king and his entourage, including artisans and builders, to Bagan. Mon script may have been introduced a little earlier, when Shin Arahan arrived at Bagan. As a Mon monk, he may have deliberately encouraged Anawrahta to use Mon instead of Nagari script on his votive tablets. Removing Indian references and replacing them with Pali Mon script would have facilitated a reorientation of Burmese Buddhism to the southern Theravada tradition. Even the act of illustrating the *jatakas* is indicative of a clear shift towards the Theravada.

The *jatakas* have a popular role in Theravada Buddhism. They illustrate the sacrifices the future Buddha made in each earthly life which enabled him to accumulate enough *karma* to be eventually reborn as the next Buddha. According to Lu Pe Win, Burmese Buddhists believe "these Jātakas represent the Buddha Himself in many of His previous existences" giving the depictions of these scenes a more reverent overtone.³⁷ The accumulation of *karma* through good deeds is essential to Theravada Buddhism, and earning *karma* by donating religious artifacts, from simple votive tablets through to massive temples was clearly a defining element of Buddhist practice at Bagan. Hence the extraordinary efforts that were harnessed in the construction of the more than 2000 temples and shrines that were built at Bagan, all designed to earn merit for the donor.³⁸ No doubt the inclusion of the *jataka* plaques served to reinforce the merit-making aspect of the donor's generosity. For Anawrahta, having left votive tablets all over Burma to spread Buddhism and gain merit as well as to assert his position as a great ruler and future Buddha, the inclusion of the *jatakas* in his temples was a logical step. Once knowledge of the *jatakas* reached Bagan, they were used extensively by subsequent rulers to adorn

³⁷ Lu Pe Win, "The Jātakas in Burma," *Artibus Asiae*, 2 (1966):94.

³⁸ While the official number of monuments as documented by Pichard, including ruins, numbers over 2800, by December 2003 further mounds had been identified and the number of potential structures had risen to 3312. Personal communication with the U Aung Kyaing, then Director of Archaeology for Upper Burma, in December 2003.

temples, both in the form of plaques and paintings, as a means of publicising their dedication to Buddhism.³⁹

Luce was very taken with the plaques at East and West Hpet-leik. "To young ceramists at Pagán, the making of these Jātaka plaques meant good discipline in narrative art. To extract the gist of a long story in a foreign tongue, and then reduce and reproduce it on a panel 15 inches square, was a feat in itself. Of course they often failed. The wonder is how often they succeeded. And there is a simple beauty in many of those which fail as narrative. One would call them realistic, but for their constant simple dignity and grace. Calm, not dramatic nor theatrical, they tell their story and have done".⁴⁰

His lyrical description of some of the plaques confirms Luce's fondness for this style. Luce hypothesises on the possible origin of this artistic endeavour. He writes:

Where did this delightful art originate? – It is seen in embryo in the Shwéhsandaw plaques at Pagán Museum; and is generally supposed (I think rightly) to have come with coastal Mon artists, after the capture of Thatōn. It has little in common with the coarse vigour of Paharpur plaques in N.E. Bengal, and little or nothing with the highly sophisticated terracottas of West Bengal. Is it a native Mon art, based on early wood-carving? Or is it rather, or also, a legacy from the Andhra artists of Kalinga, who seem to have taught the coastal people their early sculpture, and spread their noble three-dimensional art as far as Barabudur?⁴¹

In the first quotation above, Luce assumes that first, the makers were local Burmans and second, they were acting alone in devising the imagery on the *jataka* plaques. This is rather at odds with the subsequent quotation where Luce favours the Mon as the source for this style of imagery.⁴² Anawrahta would not

³⁹ Bautze-Picron's recent publication highlights the significant role of the *jatakas* in the wall paintings of Bagan temples. C. Bautze-Picron, *The Buddhist Murals of Pagan. Timeless vistas of the cosmos* (Trumbull: Weatherhill, 2003).

⁴⁰ *OBEP*, 1:266.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1:267.

⁴² Woodward notes strong stylistic links between some terracotta images from the Mon Haripunjaya kingdom dating to the 12th century and Bagan's Hpetleik plaques, suggesting Haripunjaya was directly influenced by Bagan rather than the other way around. H.Woodward, *The Sacred Sculpture of Thailand*, 116-117, 128.

have brought Mon artisans to Bagan if he had not planned in utilising their expertise. He must have observed their artistic repertoire during his battle at, or defense of, Thaton. A more likely scenario is that Anawrahta commissioned the plaques and their manufacture was supervised by Mon artisans. The careful placement of images on each plaque, allowing adequate room for inscriptions across the top of each tile, suggests a well ordered and planned approach was taken. It is likely the scenes were drawn by Mon craftsmen prior to commencing work.

Luce's other remarks regarding the "failure" of some scenes to portray the narrative were based on his assumption that the work was made by young inexperienced Burman artisans. This is probably true but should not be read as excluding the input of experienced Mon craftsmen. An examination of the images which are clearly made by a less-skilled hand show that they portray the less important *jataka* stories. Obviously the overseers allowed, or were perhaps forced to include Burman artisans in this project. They were only allowed to work on figures which were less prominent so as not to compromise the quality and visual harmony of the finished product. As Luce rightly observed, there are many delicate and delightful elements on these tiles. The *jatakas* are numbered according to the Singalese recension, up until *jataka* 497. After this, until the final series of plaques numbered 550, the 550th being the Vessantara *jataka*, there is no direct correlation with the Singalese recension.

The origin of this different order of the *jatakas* is unknown. The imagery is often very cleverly depicted. The Godha *jataka* (no.138) shows Gotama as a lizard (fig.39).⁴³ He would regularly pay homage to a good ascetic. When the good ascetic left he was replaced with a bad one. One day, a villager presented the bad ascetic with some lizard meat to eat. Finding it very tasty, he decided to kill the lizard who came to pay homage. The lizard, divining the ascetic's intentions, told the villagers, who had the bad ascetic expelled.

The good ascetic is seen on the left side, sitting on a stool under a tree. The lizard extends across the bottom of the plaque, illustrating his obeisance to the ascetic. In the centre, the bad ascetic is shown marching towards the lizard,

⁴³ There are a number of *jatakas* with the same title, all involving lizards. For more details of this story and the related *jatakas* see G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, 1938 (reprint, Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1997), 1:813-5.

now crouched defensively under a tree near the centre of the right side. The ascetic wields a sword, indicating his intention to kill the lizard. The delicate decorative details in the ascetic's stool are matched by the lively sinuous depiction of the bad ascetic. Each ascetic's skeletal frame and cavernous stomach are well crafted and both ascetics wear their hair up and are bearded in the traditional manner.

Even though these images are skillfully executed, there is still a degree of imbalance in the positioning of the figures. The composition is crowded into the left of the tile, leaving a visually distracting empty space on the other side. The addition of a tree on the right helps balance the scene but there is a strong folk-like element to the imagery, the figures looking rather like modern-day cartoons. The stiffness of the tree, with its balloon-like canopy, is a stark contrast to the liveliness of the story's characters. Both ascetics are the same size and there is no way to determine if one is in front of the other. There are multiple viewing points – the seated ascetic is clearly placed side on to the viewer, the lower lizard is viewed as if from above, the running ascetic is almost in a three-quarter position, facing front.

Another interesting example is an illustration of the Vinathuna *jataka* (no.232) when the *bodhisattva* was reborn as a rich merchant (fig.40).⁴⁴ A marriage was arranged between his daughter and a fellow merchant's son. At her parent's house she saw honour being offered to a bull. On seeing a hunchback in the street on the day of her marriage she decided he was worthy of honour, due to his hunch which was similar to that of the Brahmin bull, and went away with him in disguise. She was seen by friends and persuaded to return to her parents. Here, the composition is well spaced over the plaque. The *bodhisattva* is depicted on the right, elevated over the other characters. He is kneeling, with a decorative wheel shape with incising to look like a flower, and the bull beneath him. The hunchback is on the left, his deformity clearly visible, and the merchant's daughter follows behind him. This plaque is rather worn, with only traces of fine detailing remaining. It is possible, however, to discern the careful outlining of the *bodhisattva*'s skirt cloth and the hunchback's hair. Two trees dominate the background. Again they are the weakest elements in the

⁴⁴ Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, 3:909-10.

composition, bulbous in form with absolutely none of the dynamic qualities portrayed by the rest of the figures. A feature of note is the manner in which the hands of the figures are shown. They are clearly oversized, out of proportion with the rest of the body. The daughter and *bodhisattva* both have their hands raised and their position in the spacial plane is awkward, particularly their left hands which are twisted up and inwards. The oversized hands and positioning is reminiscent of early Pyu stone carving (eg. fig.13). This characteristic is not uniform across the plaques as others show a skillful execution of the hands in detail and proportion. It is a feature on a number of them, however, again suggesting that various artisans from differing traditions were involved in their manufacture.

The illustration of the Mittamitta *jataka* (no.473) is another finely executed example (fig.41).⁴⁵ The *bodhisattva* was a minister for king Brahmadatta of Benares. The other ministers were slandering an innocent courtier. The *bodhisattva* proved the courtier's loyalty by showing the king the marks of a friend as opposed to those of a foe. This is a very successful composition. The king kneels on a simple pedestal, slightly elevated above the *bodhisattva* who faces him, with the courtier behind. All wear decorated skirt cloths, which have been marked with simple circular patterns.⁴⁶ All have circular earrings that rest on the shoulders, in the style that was also fashionable in Pala India. The king wears a pointed crown, and his torso is covered with decorative cloth – what appears to be a necklace is just visible. The *bodhisattva* wears a headdress, and the courtier is clearly identified by her coiffured hair style, obvious breasts and jewellery. While their faces look outwards, their eyes are focused on the king. There is no spare space on the plaque, the script filling the otherwise vacant space above the *bodhisattva* and courtier, while the king is framed by a throne canopy.

⁴⁵ There are two Mittamitta *jatakas*, no.197 and no.473. See Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, 2:634.

⁴⁶ Circular marks are a characteristic decorative motif of Burmese terracottas. They appear on early Pyu terracottas, as seen on examples found at the Sriksheṭra Museum, and are also a common feature of the plaques found at Bago, made during the 15th century under the direction of King Dhammaceti.

The use of Mon script on the Hpet-leik plaques is significant. Luce's assertion regarding the principal involvement of Burmese artisans in the making of the plaques is difficult to sustain. These plaques represent possibly the first extensive use of Mon script at Bagan. During the Bagan period there was a rapid advance in the use of written language. The appearance of written ink glosses in temples and the widespread use of script on votive tablets and temple plaques indicate a substantial increase in literacy levels. Mon culture "settles" at Bagan after the installation of the Mon court in 1057 and the Hpet-leik plaques were made shortly afterwards. The idea that local Burmese artisans could have gone from almost no experience in writing to producing the elegant even inscriptions written on the plaques in possibly less than three years is difficult to imagine. Rather, it indicates that the Mon artisans took the positions of principle artisans, while the local Burmese rapidly absorbed new styles and techniques.

Shwe-zigon (no.1)

The Shwe-zigon is one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Burma (fig.128, fig.129). According to the *GPC* the Shwe-zigon was built to house the sacred hair relic which Anawrahta took by force from Srikshestra. He destroyed the city and the pagoda housing the relic and returned with it to Bagan. The relic was placed on the back of a white elephant and at the site where the elephant knelt the Shwe-zigon was built. The *GPC* says:

When the relic-chamber was ready, the Lord's frontlet-relic adorned itself with the greater and lesser signs and the six rays, and rose all-glorious with grace transcendent, and shouldering the eight priestly requisites ascended the sky and prophesied, saying, In the days of yore this king was a Pulali elephant, and during the three months of rains once ministered to me. Now also he has exalted my religion. In time to come he shall be Lord like me!⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *GPC*, 87.

At Shin Araham's behest, Anawrahta cast a golden image which was enshrined in the relic chamber.⁴⁸

The Shwe-zigon was not completed during Anawrahta's reign. The *GPC* refers to the enshrining of the relics and building of three terraces. The temple was completed during Kyanzittha's reign. Why Anawrahta did not continue building works at this site is puzzling, given it was the place of the prophecy that he would eventually be reborn a Buddha, surely the most important event to have occurred in his lifetime. It appears, however, that only the octagonal terraced bases were constructed before the building focus shifted to the Shwe-hsan-daw. Perhaps the scope of the construction was beyond the capabilities of the available builders.

The Shwe-zigon is mentioned here as part of the chronology of monuments built by Anawrahta. There are, however, no figurative images within the Shwe-zigon compound that can be reliably attributed to Anawrahta's reign.

Shwe-hsan-daw (no.1568)

According to the *GPC* the Shwe-hsan-daw pagoda was built to enshrine the sacred hair relic. The site for constructing the Shwe-hsan-daw was divined through the interpretation of signs under the direction of Shin Araham – as with the Shwe-zigon the relic was attached to a white elephant, and where it came to rest, the temple was built.⁴⁹ The hair relic was presented to Anawrahta by the king of Ussa (Bago) who also sent his daughter, Princess Manisanda, to Anawrahta as a gift. The gift was supposedly made after Kyanzittha's army successfully repelled the Cambojan invaders, and saved Bago. This event occurred around 1050.⁵⁰ During the journey back to Bagan, Kyanzittha "lay with her".⁵¹ Once discovered he had to flee from Anawrahta's wrath and from this time Kyanzittha was effectively an enemy of Anawrahta.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 88.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 86-7.

⁵⁰ Cambojan refers to the Khmer people, and is the term used in the *GPC*. The Khmer armies were under the command of Suryavarman I, who died in 1050. The invasion must have started before this date. See Hall, *History of Southeast Asia*, 158-60.

⁵¹ *GPC*, 93.

Strachan states "The Shwe-hsan-daw is not only a giant reliquary, built to hold a prize. But a monument to a successfully completed military campaign and symbol of Pagan's transition from the parochial to the imperial".⁵² Perhaps it also represented a personal achievement for Anawrahta. After not finishing the Shwe-zigon and having been cuckolded by Kyanzittha, the construction of the Shwe-hsan-daw may have been Anawrahta's way of reasserting his authority amongst his followers. Kyanzittha had great support amongst the people and the military and was recognised as a great leader of men. Another clue which may assist in determining the reason for the Shwe-hsan-daw's construction lies in the timing. The Shwe-hsan-daw is dated to around 1060, three years after the Mon court arrived in Bagan. The successful completion of this grand edifice, probably with the assistance of Mon workers, would have served to assert Anawrahta's leadership position as a Buddhist king who was as worthy as the relocated Mon king of Thaton, Manuha.

The Shwe-hsan-daw was the largest monument of its time (fig.44, fig.45). A pyramidal terraced *stupa*, it has a concave *anda*, perhaps the first built at Bagan, and this form was thereafter popular.⁵³ The lotus bud form to which the *hti* is fixed tapers upwards. What inspired these new architectural shapes has not been ascertained. Earlier *stupas* such as the Loka-nanda and East and West Hpet-leik were closely associated with Pyu architectural styles, being more bulbous in form. The use of *jataka* plaques, first appearing at the Hpet-leik pagodas as an addition to the original structure, took on a slightly different form at the Shwe-hsan-daw. The *stupa* was surrounded by an exterior ambulatory which encircled the *stupa*'s base. Plaques depicting the *jakas* were installed on the *stupa* walls and acted as educational tools for Buddhist followers while circumambulating during devotions. This format is recognised as a distinctly Burmese architectural form. Sadly the plaques have all been removed.

While local Burmese styles dominate the architecture, aspects of the Shwe-hsan-daw's adornment indicate that elements of Hindu India and Mahayana Buddhism were still popular. The Shwe-hsan-daw was first known as

⁵² Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture*, 42.

⁵³ The *anda* or bell, is the bulbous section of the temple, rising from the stepped terraces. The bell tapers inwards and ends with an *amlaka*, a banana-bud form. This supports the *hti*, the umbrella. See Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts*, 48-9.

Mahapeinné or Ganesha temple, and figures of Ganesha were purportedly placed on the corners (fig.46).⁵⁴ Ganesha is a protector and overcomes obstacles but why images of this distinctly Hindu god would have been used in the building of this Buddhist monument is a mystery.⁵⁵ There is no extant evidence elsewhere at Bagan that Ganesha was adopted and adapted to fulfill a role in Burmese Buddhism. Strachan states, however, that "Hindu deities that had been incorporated into Pagan's Buddhism were strategically placed on the terrace corners in a protective role".⁵⁶ The images of Brahma, remnants of which have also been found in the Shwe-hsan-daw compound, are well understood. The three-faced Brahma, along with Indra, has specific roles in Buddhism as the principal gods of the heavens. Other Hindu deities were also placed at corner points of the five terraces.⁵⁷

The corners of the temple base are protected by temple lions. They are bifurcate, with one head and two front paws while the body and hindquarters are split and fit around the temple corners. There is no precedence for the use of protective lions in this form at Bagan, yet the skill of execution indicates that workmen building the temple were very familiar with this complex construction (fig.47). The temple is cosmologically consistent with ancient Indian traditions which show the different levels of the universe radiating outwards from each other, with the central *hti* representing Mount Meru, the central point of the universe.

The imagery is made more complex by approximately 288 *jataka* plaques housed on the lower terrace, possibly the first time they were used as exterior temple decoration at Bagan. Luce remarks that the plaques were unglazed and

⁵⁴ GPC, 94.

⁵⁵ Aung-Thwin notes that Ganesha is the patron deity of traders and merchants. Aung-Thwin, *Pagan, Origins of Modern Burma*, 35. Ganesha may well have been a familiar Hindu deity to Anawrahta, brought to Bagan by Indians.

⁵⁶ Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture*, 42-43.

⁵⁷ For an overview of Hindu and Brahmanical practice at Bagan with particular reference to the Shwe-hsan-daw, see Than Tun, "Brahmanical and Buddhist Iconographs of Pyu, Mon, Paper read at 50th anniversary of Sanatan Dhrna Swayamseak Sangh, 2000), 1-19.

"they are almost the first extant specimens of Pagán art".⁵⁸ While Luce was only able to locate around 20 plaques, he was obviously impressed with their form.⁵⁹ Made in terracotta relief, the plaques measure around 26 x 28.5 x 3cm. Luce writes "they are the work of artists, who could put grace into all their handiwork, even conventional poses".⁶⁰ Perhaps his lyrical comments are coloured by their position as some of the earliest examples of local Burmese art. Compared to the remains of the Ganesha, Brahma and other deity figures, the imagery on the plaques is frequently clumsy and the spatial arrangements uneven (fig.48). The best preserved image illustrated by Luce appears to portray the scene of King Suddhodana presenting the new-born prince Siddharta to the sage Asita and does indeed indicate some skill in its execution (fig.49). As Luce notes, however, this image, while reported to have been found at the Shwe-hsan-daw, is most likely from Hpet-leik pagoda, built shortly before the Shwe-hsan-daw.

This chronology should be questioned. As argued above, the plaques at the Hpet-leik pagodas, being of fine form and covered with script, suggest that experienced artisans, presumably the Mon, oversaw their making.⁶¹ This is most likely to have happened soon after the Mon arrival in Bagan, knowledge of the *jatakas* appearing to coincide with this event. Adding the plaques to existing structures would have been an expedient method of earning merit. Perhaps this was an initiative of the Mon, a demonstration of respect to Anawrahta. The Shwe-hsan-daw, being Anawrahta's first large commission, was also a show of independence, a coming of age. Its eclectic form, combined with advance

⁵⁸ *OBEP*, 1:261. There is some confusion over the glazing on the plaques. Strachan notes the Shwe-hsan-daw plaques are the earliest extant glazed plaques, while those from East and West Hpet-leik pagodas were unglazed, plaques from the two pagodas having become "mixed up" since their discovery by archaeologists. Glazed temple plaques became a distinctly Burmese feature from this point on, not used to decorate every temple, but a consistent feature throughout the following centuries which was favoured in Burma more than any other country. One of the most common glaze colours was an iridescent turquoise blue, a colour now readily associated with Burmese temple plaques.

⁵⁹ These are in possession of the Bagan Museum, none remain in situ.

⁶⁰ *OBEP*, 1:261.

⁶¹ The emergence of *jataka* depictions at a time linked to the arrival of a large Mon contingent does not automatically mean the tradition of making visual depictions of the *jatakas* was unknown at Bagan. It may be that decorated temples had been known at Bagan, and these skilled artisans were asked by the local Burmans to create images of the *jatakas* for temple adornment, in line with a resurgence of Theravada doctrine. Temple 820, identified as a Pyu period temple, displays many remnants of highly decorative stucco in a Pyu style indicating that there had been a tradition of skilled craftsmanship which, for an as yet undetermined reason, appears to have been lost for a period from the late 10th – early 11th centuries. See Chapter 5.

construction skills, does not conform to any particular style. It appears more logical that having received instruction on the construction of *jataka* plaques from the Mon, the Burmese artisans, with assistance from Indian builders, then went it alone. As his own preeminent temple, Anawrahta may have preferred it to have as little direct relationship with the Mon as possible.⁶²

Indian influences are strong at the Shwe-hsan-daw while Mon influence, apart from the rather crude *jataka* plaques, is minimal. The Ganesha images from Shwe-hsan-daw have not been positively identified in situ, remnants having been found in the temple precinct. Their position as corner guardians, however, is a reasonable proposition. The remnants of Hindu deity figures are all very well modeled (fig.50). They are made in a style that draws on Pala-Sena India, with the figures having long pendant earrings finishing with a disc-shape that curls upwards and rest on the images' shoulders. There is some suggestion that local changes have occurred. The face and noses are broad, unlike the sharper features usually associated with Pala sculpture, namely the pointed chin, parrot-like nose and heart-shaped face associated of the Buddha images (fig.116c). By the 11th century, however, Buddha images from Bihar tend to portray these more ponderous characteristics suggesting again that Indian artisans were responsible for these figures.⁶³ In addition, a recent renovation of one of the small temples within the Shwe-hsan-daw compound has uncovered what appears to be a large stone used for ritual lustration (fig.51).⁶⁴ It is the earliest stone of this type found at Bagan and gives further insight into the religious practices of the time.⁶⁵

⁶² Stadtner also remarks on the difference in quality between the Hpetleik plaques and those of the Shwe-san-daw noting "their rather crude figural style is in sharp contrast to the magnificent unglazed examples from the Hpetleik stupas, a difference in quality that remains unexplained". Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 235.

⁶³ For further examples see S. Huntington, *The Pāla-Sena Schools of Sculpture* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1984), figs.107, 108, 112, 119, 120.

⁶⁴ I photographed this in December 2003 and it is part of a recent excavation and restoration within the temple compound. An interesting note is found in Enriquez' account of his travels to Bagan. He remarks "Anawrahta soon became afraid of his royal prisoner. He summoned Manu-ha to the Shwe-hsan-daw Pagoda, and during a ceremony, suddenly poured water over his hands, thus dedicating him a slave of the pagoda." C. M. Enriquez, *Pagān. Being the first connected account in English of the 11th Century Capital of Burma*, 11. The ceremonial pouring of water is an integral part of Buddhist ritual. Monks' feet are bathed, water is poured over images, and as noted, over hands.

⁶⁵ Similar stones have been found in Sri Lanka and a number are on display in the Colombo Museum, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

There are no free standing images of the Buddha associated with the 11th century remaining on site though a number of beautiful bronzes were excavated from the relic chamber in the Shwe-hsan-daw compound in 1937.⁶⁶ The first is a standing image (fig.52). The Buddha has an oval shaped face. The lips are pursed upwards in a slight smile. The nostrils extend to the width of the lips. The curved eyebrow line is continuous and dips down in a "v" across the bridge of the nose. The eyelids are carefully incised in the elegant Pala style, moving upwards and outwards (fig.116b, fig.116c). The hair curls on this figure are relatively large and the *usnisha* moulded as a clearly rounded protuberance topped with a small flame extension. The earlobes remain clear of the shoulders which slope downwards. The Buddha's torso is very slim with a narrow waist while the thighs are more rounded as is typical of images from this early Bagan period. The robe clings to the body. There is a clear line across the front of the neck that indicates the robe covers both shoulders. The lower border of the robe has two rows of wavy folds along the edge. The lowest row crosses the front of the lower leg then extends upwards and outwards. The Buddha's left arm is bent at right angles and he holds the edge of his robe in his hand. The right hand is raised in *abhaya mudra*, the gesture of reassurance and protection. Each finger is separate and of uneven length. Both feet are placed together on a small round base.

Two lovely seated images were found in the same chamber. Both are approximately 35cm in height and each image depicts the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra*. There are a number of stylistic differences between the figures (fig.53, fig.54). Both have slim torsos and modest lion chests though the first is more elongated. The end of the robe which crosses the right shoulder finishes above the nipple line on fig.53 and finishes in a narrow simple pleat. The line of the robe across the chest is almost "s" shaped, weaving gracefully from the left side of the neck and disappearing around the right side of the torso mid way between the waist and underarm. In fig.54 the waist is narrower and the torso shorter. The robe end is formed into a wide pleat extending past the nipple line. The line of the robe across the chest is more "j" shaped and disappears just below the underarm on the right. The ear lobes are clear of the shoulders in both images. Fig.53 has an oval face, the lips are full but are not

⁶⁶ Duroiselle, *ASI* 1937, p.78.

pursed upwards as in fig.54. The contouring of the cheeks is more prominent in the second figure. In addition the eyebrow line is a simple curve on the first image, both running into the nose to form the bridge. On the second figure the eyebrow line is formed by two parallel incisions that kick up and out. Both images have an *urna*. The head shape of fig.53 is rounded with small round hair curls while the second figure has a squarer head and the curls are more pointed. The *usnisha* is elongated in the first and topped with a small flame in teardrop shape while the other figure's smaller *usnisha* is finished with a stepped flame.

Hand positioning is similar for both figures though the first figure's hand is more elongated with the finger tips extending past the lower leg. Both show the robe crossing over the ankles. It falls in a simple fold in the first figure and folds into an elaborate pleat on the second figure. While both images probably date from later in Anawrahta's reign, the second figure in particular demonstrating the formal more masculine Buddha images favoured by Anawrahta, they are clearly made by different artisans. The first image can be loosely linked to a Mon style and would support a date post 1057, after the Mon court relocated to Bagan (compare with fig.190). The second is associated with Indian prototypes, being very similar to the Buddha figures on many of Anawrahta's votive tablets that were also inscribed with Nagari script and were of Indian origin. One can only speculate whether the choice of artisan was deliberate, Anawrahta wanting representations from both his own Indian prototypes and that of the Manuha, the other "king" now at Bagan. Any works enshrined in the Shwe-hsan-daw enclosure must surely have been donated by important personages as this was Anawrahta's preeminent religious edifice.

While the images that appear in the smaller temple structures around the perimeter of the Shwe-hsan-daw are purported locally to date from this period, it is highly unlikely. Stylistically the figures are clearly later works, from the mid-to late 12th century and feature the characteristic shortened neck and squat torso (fig.55, fig.56).

According to Strachan it is possible to navigate the interior of the Shwe-hsan-daw *stupa* to some degree. The complex passageways which led to the principal relic chamber has apparently been looted. The walls were inset with

Anawrahta's votive tablets placed horizontally, radiating outwards. One votive tablet from Shwe-hsan-daw illustrated in *OBEF* (fig.57) measures approximately 11 x 8.5cm. This small petal or bodhi leaf-shaped tablet depicts a central Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra*. He is seated on a double lotus throne and framed within an architectural niche with side columns, topped with a *sikhara*. Faint remnants of an umbrella can be seen from which garlands emerge. Pipal leaves are also faintly visible. The Buddha is flanked by two *stupas*, with three additional smaller *stupas* arranged symmetrically bringing the total to eight. There are three indecipherable lines of Nagari script beneath the lotus throne.⁶⁷ Of interest is the *sikhara* which has unusual horizontal lines traversing across it. Just as many votive tablets have *sikhara* shaped in the image of the Mahabodhi temple it is possible that moulds with this unusual *sikhara* were deliberately made for the Shwe-hsan-daw. The Shwe-hsan-daw's exterior terraces are stepped, in the same manner seen on the tablets.

Another tear-shaped votive tablet found in the Shwe-hsan-daw relic chamber displays the conventional imagery associated with Anawrahta's votive tablets (fig.58). The central Buddha, in *bhumisparsa mudra*, dominates the scene and is framed by a niche. Here it is topped with a parasol rather than a *stupa*, with pipal leaves and branches emerging from the parasol. On each side of the Buddha is a large *stupa* with a smaller one above. Of note in this example is the elongated right arm, a feature that would become prominent in Bagan images. The *usnisha* is quite bulbous (this style would change) and the ears of the Buddha remain clear of the shoulders. The Nagari inscription has been translated as "By me Aniruddha the divine [Anawrahta] has been made this mould of the Blessed One. By this, may I obtain the path to nirvana when Maitreya is fully enlightened".⁶⁸ One interesting feature of the plaque is the treatment of the robes. Unlike most plaques, here the robe is shown in folds across the right shoulder and the lower limbs, more in the style of the linear robe patterns seen on Pala school and Kashmir Buddhas from a similar time

⁶⁷ In 1926, these votive tablets were found *in situ* by Duroiselle, in the relic chamber which had been looted of the more important offerings. C. Duroiselle, "Excavations at Pagan," *ASI* (1926–27): 161–66. Remnants of tablets were found bearing inscriptions in differing scripts – Nagari, Pyu and Mon. The absence of tablets inscribed with archaic Burmese script leads Duroiselle to conclude that this form of script had not developed by the time of the Shwe-hsan-daw's foundation, around 1057.

⁶⁸ Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts Past and Present* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), 195.

(fig.116b-c). This style was not a usual feature at Bagan and again is indicative of the many stylistic features in use during this early Bagan period.

The variety of imagery found at this site also shows that during the building of the Shwe-hsan-daw there were no standardisations or conventions relating to the building of religious edifices. At this stage in Anawrahta's career he had still not formed a clear attachment to the Theravada tradition, being content to earn merit and to assert his rule by building monuments in the service of Buddhism. His attentions were not focused on Bagan, intent as he was on expanding his kingdom, and it is unlikely he took time to oversee the architectural details of all monuments built in his name. Indeed, the building of a Buddhist temple that clearly had Hindu overtones would have flouted the purported Theravada orthodoxy of the newly arrived Mon court from Thaton under the leadership of King Manuha. By retaining some distance from the Mon court's own religious practices, Anawrahta's authority was not in question.

There is also the conundrum posed by Shin Araham who was very influential in directing Anawrahta in spiritual matters. As a purported proponent of the Theravada tradition, it is difficult to understand how he would have allowed such imagery to be included in the fabric of a *stupa* which housed relics of the Buddha. It is possible, however, that the use of Hindu deities as protectors of the Buddha was deliberate. By using them in this manner the Hindu gods were relegated to a status of subservience. Placing them in such a prominent position on the exterior of the preeminent temple of the day Anawrahta, perhaps under Shin Araham's guidance, may have very cleverly and deliberately used them to his own advantage. The message was clear, the Buddha was the holder of ultimate spiritual truth and the Hindu gods served the Buddha. If this was the case, then clearly there were people at Bagan who recognised Hindu imagery and followed Hinduism, otherwise the use of Hindu deities would have been lost on the general population.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Local *nats*, and spirits such as the *naga*, also played support roles in adorning temples at Bagan. The remnants of exterior stucco decorations frequently incorporate *naga* motifs, female deities, *kinnara* and *kinnari* etc. *Kinnara* are mythical creatures, with the lower torso and legs of a bird, and upper torso and head of a male. The female form is called a *kinnari*. See Chaturachinda et al., *Dictionary of South and Southeast Asian Art* (Bangkok: Silksworm Books, 2000), 78.

Shin-bin-thalyaung (no.1570)

This rectangular brick building has been attributed to Anawrahta and is set into the perimeter wall of the Shwe-hsan-daw enclosure. It houses a large recumbent image of the Buddha, around 21 metres long (fig.59). The image is possibly from the same period but it is not characteristic of early Bagan period Buddha figures. Possibly the original image was of the same type, though centuries of repainting and probable repair have rendered the portrayal, of the face in particular, stiff and plain.⁷⁰ While the scale of the image poses challenges of its own for construction and detailing, it is difficult to assimilate the figure into the early Bagan period.⁷¹ Other monolithic images do tend to demonstrate similar traits and these will be discussed in relation to others from this time.

The Buddha is lying on his right side, the correct iconographic position. The head, however, is pointing to the south instead of the north, perhaps to face the nearby Shwe-hsan-daw pagoda. The depiction is very stiff with the figure being devoid of the detailing so evident in the bronzes found on site. Does this imply other craftsmen were responsible? Luce traces monolithic depictions of the *parinirvana* back to the Ajanta caves of the early 7th century.⁷² The Shin-bin-tha-hlaung image is possibly the earliest prototype extant in Burma. Depictions of the *parinirvana* are found on the "eight scene" tablets, but otherwise are not very common. They are, however, one of the three most common choices for monolith sculptures, the others being seated images in *bhumisparsa mudra* and standing images. Stylistically the image bears some similarities to the tall standing Buddhas at Shwe-zigon and Ananda temples. However, the place of this image in the art history of the early Bagan period must be questioned. It is noted here as it is the primary image in an early temple and is an example of a monolithic image which has virtually no precedent at Bagan: Luce places the

⁷⁰ In 1855 Yule noted that "a finger of the hand, from which the plaster had been knocked off, was seen to be of sandstone gilt, as if some part at least of the colossus had belonged to a former image of more splendid material". Yule, *Mission to the Court of Ava*, 52.

⁷¹ Pichard, 1:188. Pichard queries whether the image dates to the 11th century. There has been some recent debate regarding the dating of this image. Stadtner favours a much later construction date, around the 18th-early 19th centuries. He argues that its location, interrupting the original compound wall, suggests it was built when the wall was in disrepair. Stadtner also favours a similar construction date for the reclining image at Ma-nu-ha temple. Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 237.

⁷² OBEP, 1:181. Luce identifies Cave 26 at Ajanta as housing such an image.

construction of this image prior to those of the Ma-nu-ha temple, but this seems unlikely for reasons outlined below.

Ma-nu-ha-hpaya (no. 1240)

Ma-nu-ha temple occupies a strange position in the architectural development of Bagan. A very austere building, in contrast to other temples an *stupa* of the time it is rectangular, with three colossal images facing the entrance side, and another monolithic image of the *parinirvana* on the opposite side (fig.60, fig.61). Ma-nu-ha temple was purported to have been built by the Mon king, Manuha, shortly after his arrival in Bagan, in 1057. The monolithic images almost completely fill the space in which they are housed making it almost impossible for the visitor to negotiate the temple. "The architecture of the building is plain, and its design chaste, as becomes a temple erected by a captive king".⁷³

Burmese history is firm in its account of the transferring of the Mon court to Bagan. Burmese legend recalls how Anawrahta's siege was broken after the gathering of body parts of a Kala man who had been "put to death long ago and buried with diverse rites and charms".⁷⁴ Once the charm had been broken and the city captured, the *GPC* relates how the Mon court and "men as were skilled in carving, turning and painting; masons, moulders of plaster and flower-patterns; blacksmiths, silversmiths, braziers, founders of gongs and symbols, filagree flower workers; doctors and trainers of elephants and horses..." and many others were taken to Bagan.⁷⁵ The *GPC* also states that Anawrahta asked the local monks if he might take the *pitakas*, and having been granted permission, dutifully took them, and the Mon entourage, back to Bagan.

There are many inexplicable events in this story. It is said the Manuha's heart "was rancorous and evilly disposed" yet he was clearly a devout Buddhist.⁷⁶ Anawrahta, instead of slaying his enemies as was his wont, brought everyone to Bagan. Once there, Manuha was relocated with his entourage to Myinkaba. The *GPC* continues with a fanciful account including an episode describing how a radiant wheel emerged from Manuha's mouth every time he spoke, much to

⁷³ Taw Sein Ko, "Some Conservation Works in Burma", *ASI* (1904-05): 72.

⁷⁴ *GPC*, 77-80. The text continues with "Thou canst not win victory until thou hast taken and destroyed his head and hands and thighs". Once the body parts had been gathered and destroyed, Anawrahta's troops were able to enter the city.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 78. This list includes makers of weapons, bakers, and those skilled in perfume making.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

Anawrahta's annoyance. Anawrahta made this disappear by evoking Buddhism's power. This, of course, led to Manuha being "stricken with remorse" and he begged permission to build a temple, which is known as Ma-nu-ha-hpaya.⁷⁷

Ma-nu-ha-hpaya may indeed be a "Mon" structure. The date for construction is estimated at around 1060, three years after the arrival of the Mon court. There is a small entrance hall, and the pagoda is angular and relatively plain with terraces running on the roofs over each shrine, and *stupa* placed evenly on the roof structure. The central section is higher to accommodate the monolithic earth touching Buddha, approximately 14.5m tall, which confronts the viewer on entering (fig.62). It is flanked by two slightly smaller figures. All are set into niches. Behind, in a separate chamber, is the large reclining Buddha approximately 22m long representing the *parinirvana*.⁷⁸ These figures are similar in style to the image at Shin-bin-thalyaung. Their massive scale, built as they are from bricks covered in stucco, then lacquered and painted, made it very difficult for the craftsmen to include extensive detail. Of most interest is the treatment of the faces. Due to their size, the challenge for the artisans lay in how the viewer would be able to see the Buddha's face from such close distance and height. To achieve an appropriate result, the neck was made shorter. Then, the chin receded so as not to obscure the face from below. The upper lip becomes more prominent as does the nose, which in profile just extends past the upper lip. The central lip line is in profile markedly angled upwards. From below, the effect is a gentle smile. The eyes are markedly downcast, and are shaped in a curve that moves upwards away from the nose bridge. For the viewer, this has the effect of enhancing the size of the eyes. The eyebrow arch forms a continuous line that crosses most of the forehead, and forms a "v" shape running into the bridge of the nose. From below the chin is just visible while the devices used by the artisan imbue the image with serenity, strength and all-knowing wisdom. The lion-type chest is more enhanced in this monolithic image than in small images of the period such as those seen in the Shwe-hsan-daw votives, and the torso dominates the viewer's upward gaze.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 79-80.

⁷⁸ GPC, 80. According to the GPC Manuha built "a colossal Buddha seated with legs crossed, and a dying Buddha as it were making *parinirvana*".

The two smaller images are of the same style. The reclining image is less successful, being stiff and formalised. The feet and legs are rigidly placed in parallel, the soles of the feet facing squarely at right angles to the line of the body. Stylistically the face is similar to the seated images but it is difficult to engage with the figure, no viewpoint capturing clear eye contact with the image. This is problematic with all images representing the *parinirvana*. Continuous over-painting and restoration also make it difficult to determine the true effect of the original image.

It is likely these were the first monolithic Buddha images at Bagan. It was a form that was later used in the most significant temples, namely the Shwe-zigon and Ananda, built during Kyanzittha's reign. It would be logical to place the Shinbin-thalyaung image after the Manuha pagoda images. As there are no earlier prototypes, it is most likely that Anawrahta's commission came after seeing Manuha's own temple. As king, it would have been essential that Anawrahta did not appear to let the Mon king gain supremacy over him on any level. The immediate construction of the Shin-bin-thalyaung reclining image, in the style of the Ma-nu-ha image and virtually the same size, near the site of Anawrahta's principal monument, kept both rulers on the same footing. This apparent haste would also help explain the incorrect iconographic placing of the image, and reinforces the conjecture that at this time, Anawrahta was still a novice when it came to understanding iconographic correctness. While stylistically the images as they appear today are not consistent with others from Anawrahta's reign, the possibility of the sites being home to earlier images which deteriorated over the centuries and were later rebuilt must not be discounted.

Nan-hpaya (no.1239)

The Nan-hpaya, located about 100m south of Manuha, is a very well preserved mid-size single storey temple (fig.63, fig.64). Dating of this temple has been various over the last century. Taw Sein Ko stated the temple was "erected in 1059 A.D., by Manuha, the last king of the Talaings".⁷⁹ Some thirty years later, Mya writes "According to one tradition the Nanpaya was thus used by Manuha as his palace when he was captive at Pagan about the middle of the 11th century A.D. and must have been built a little earlier. According to another

⁷⁹ Taw Sein Ko, "Notes on Conservation in Burma", *ASI* (1907-08): 34.

current tradition, however, the Nanpaya was a temple built on the site of Manuha's residence by one of his descendents during the same time as King Narapatisithu (1173-1210 A.D.) so as to perpetuate the memory of King Manuha and the site of his residence".⁸⁰ The proposed 12th century date has been roundly rejected in favour of the earlier dating based on the architectural features, the iconography contained therein and the medium used to create the carved reliefs, namely stone. Luce suggests it may have been Manuha's own private chapel, being "the earliest masterpiece of 'Mon' temple architecture".⁸¹ The Nan-hpaya is constructed as a square which houses the principal images, with a rectangular entrance vestibule. The central shrine is surrounded by four pillars faced with sandstone that is beautifully carved in low relief (fig.65, fig.66). Each pillar features two images of Brahma and two floral panels. It is one of the best preserved temples at Bagan, retaining around 70% of the stone carving, both interior and exterior. Pichard makes special note that the use of stone facing on the brick walls is only found at the Nan-hpaya and Kyauk-ku-umin. They are also the only two pagodas that enclose the central shrine with pillars rather than a brick enclosure.⁸²

The Nan-hpaya temple is unusual in style and the skill with which the building is made indicates the builders and architects were intimately familiar with this type of construction. Likewise, the beautiful execution of the Brahma figures and floral motifs shows that the artisans were highly competent in relief carving techniques. The technical mastery demonstrated in this temple could only have been achieved by experienced artisans, and in the absence of other evidence, they were the very competent Mon artisans of Manuha's court.⁸³

Luce suggests that the central pedestal may have housed a bronze image of the standing Buddha. Unfortunately no image has been found in situ and his theory cannot be confirmed. Mya's remarks regarding the traditions surrounding the use of the temple cannot be substantiated without epigraphic proof. The imagery of Brahma led early researchers to favour the temple as being Hindu,

⁸⁰ Mya, "A Note on the Nanpaya Temple and Images of Brahmā Carved on the Pillars Inside It, Myinpagan, Pagan", *ASI* (1934-35): 102.

⁸¹ *OBEP*, 1:286.

⁸² Pichard no.1239, 143.

⁸³ Taw Sein Ko described the architectural features of the temple in 1907. *ASI* (1907-08), pp.34-5.

yet as we saw in the discussion of the Shwe-hsan-daw, Brahma is well known in Theravada Buddhism: along with Indra they are the two principal gods who appear at the most significant moments of the Buddha's life. As examples, according to the *Nidanakatha* the four great Brahmas received the new-born Buddha in a golden net.⁸⁴ Indra and Brahma flanked the Buddha on the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven. Mya notes that miniature *stupas* appear as pediments above the arches which connect the four pillars, and suggests this reinforces the Buddhist nature of the temple, rather than the temple having Hindu origins.⁸⁵ Brahma also has specific relevance to an earthly king. Brahmins were integral to court life as overseers of rites and rituals. As their name suggests, Brahmins and the god Brahma are closely connected. Their appearance in a temple built for a former king is entirely consistent with Buddhist court practice of the time, and need not indicate Hindu beliefs. Indeed, Manuha's inclusion of Brahma figures may have been a deliberate act designed to remind those around him that he had ruled over a kingdom in his own right prior to relocating at Bagan.

The relief figures are beautifully carved. Brahma is shown with a face not dissimilar to that of Buddha images assigned to the same period (fig.66). From the front view, the face is ovoid and full, with rounded cheeks. The eyebrow arch is similar to that seen on the colossal images, arching above the eyes then curving upwards again at the outer edge. The downcast eyes follow the same line. The eyebrows join at the centre and form the line of the nose bridge. The lips are rounded but very tight, the mouth only extending outwards as far as the line of the nostrils. The chin is rounded and slightly bulbous, though small. In profile, the faces could be mistaken for an image of the Buddha, excluding the hair. The extended ear lobes remain clear of the shoulders while Brahma also has neck rings, a sign of a great man, not only of the Buddha.

The entire interior of the temple was decorated with carved stone facing and remnants of wall painting are also found. The images of Brahma that appear on two sides of the internal pillars are complemented by elaborate foliate motifs that appear on the opposite two sides. The alternating pattern of a *kirtimukha* face disgorging intricately carved foliage and pendant bead-like motifs

⁸⁴ *Nk*: 70.

⁸⁵ Mya, "A Note on the Nanpaya Temple", 104.

expanding into hanging flowers is a precursor to the elaborate stucco work that rapidly became very popular as exterior decoration of many temples. The pattern is also a precursor for the decorative reredos seen in the Ananda temple images 30 years later. Each window pediment features a central figure of the goddess Sri, adding to the complexity of the imagery. Luce describes the extensive ornamentation inside the Nan-paya in some detail and concludes "Such architectural splendours cannot be seen or matched, except for an occasional moment, outside the drier tropics".⁸⁶

The Nan-hpaya is the earliest surviving temple built to allow internal circumambulation. A variation of this form, with a central solid core rather than a platform and columns, would become the most popular temple type at Bagan. The Nan-hpaya offers valuable information regarding the development of architectural decoration and confirms the cultural richness of the early Bagan period. Mon arrival at the fledgling capital heralded the beginnings of an extensive practice that saw donors seek merit through the building of Buddhist temples. The *stupa* favoured by the Pyu at Bagan and then by Anawrahta, rapidly faded in popularity. Temple building became the dominant expression of the Buddhist faith.

Paung-ku-hpaya (no. 1339)

Paung-ku-hpaya is located on the north bank of Myinkaba Kyaung at the junction with the Irrawaddy (fig.67). It was already badly eroded in 1916 when Taw Sein Ko reported that 11 stone and 2 bronze figures had been acquired from the site by U Tin for the Bagan museum.⁸⁷ Duroiselle commented that the white stone slabs were carved with "beautifully sculptured musicians, animals, ghandarvas and other mythical beings, the technique of some of which is easily traceable to the old school of Indian sculpture from which they have probably been copied...".⁸⁸ Duroiselle placed a tentative date for the temple as belonging to Kyanzittha's reign. Luce preferred to allocate the temple to an earlier period based on stylistic conventions of some Pyu type bronzes and a Dvaravati type Buddha found on the site.⁸⁹ While the architecture of the pagoda may place the

⁸⁶ *OBEP*, 1:288.

⁸⁷ Taw Sein Ko, "Paung-ku-hpaya," *ASB* (1916), 37.

⁸⁸ Duroiselle, "Excavations at pagan", *ASI* (1926-27):161-6.

⁸⁹ *OBEP*, 1:295.

figures within this time frame, there is every indication the images may pre-date Anawrahta or date from the very beginning of his reign. The image of Maitreya (fig.68) and the stone figures (fig.69) stylistically relate to the early Pyu figures of Srikshetra, sharing the similarities of plump ovoid face, broad nose and bulging eyes, and may belong to the 10th century or even early 11th century.⁹⁰ They may have been re-installed in a slightly newer pagoda. The continuum between the beautiful Pyu bronze dancing figures and these quirky and whimsical stone reliefs is clear. Until the excavation of Paw-daw-mu there were no other such Pyu-style relief carvings known at Bagan. It is even possible that they date back to the 9th century, before the Nanchao incursions. The technique of stone carving, which is found only at two other locations, the Nanhpaya and Kyauk-ku-umin, must surely place the construction date at around 1060.

Mon-gu (no.2013)

The Mon-gu temple was described by Luce as another Mon-style temple with large Buddha images, being noteworthy for paintings of the *jatakas*. Luce remarks that it is not possible to determine which *jataka* recension was used. There are no known published photographs of the temple interior as described by Luce, and today, it has been restored (fig.70, fig.71).⁹¹ There is a central column and on the centre of each side is a deep niche. Luce refers to each niche housing a single colossal earth-touching Buddha seated on a lotus throne. They represent the Buddhas of the current eon that have already been. This pattern of placing images centrally on each side of the column, instead of having a single central image became the architectural norm from Kyainzitha's reign onwards.

Today, heavily restored images sit in these niches and two examples are shown, along with some of the wall paintings and interior architectural features (fig.72, fig.73). The original images were either badly damaged, or removed. The images may have been constructed over the remains of the original sculptures as the *mudras* are unusual, not the common type used for reconstruction. Thus, stylistically, while they may bear some relationship to the

⁹⁰ Stone relief carving is restricted to this temple, the Kyauk-ku-umin and Nanhpaya. Further study of the links between these temples is warranted.

⁹¹ Ibid., 1:297-8 and 2:pl.156-57.

original images they are not associated with any particular mainstream type of Bagan image. One seated image shows the right hand extended across the shin, with palm facing forwards in *varada* (or *vara*) *mudra* rather than in *bhumisparsa mudra*. This unusual variant is not, to my knowledge, seen elsewhere at Bagan.⁹² Luce refers to the presence of monolithic images, but since these sculptures are about 2m tall, they hardly compare to the colossal image in Ma-nu-ha-hpaya or others from this period. Another unidentified *mudra* is seen in the second image. The left hand is raised, palm inwards, and placed centrally on the upper chest. The right hand is close to the lap, and palm faces forward in *abhaya mudra*. The meaning of this combination is unclear.

A significant feature of the temple is the appearance of niches around the exterior wall of the ambulatory. New images have been placed in some of these niches in a style that replicates those found at the Ananda temple (fig.74). This temple may represent one of the earliest examples of this important development which would see these external niches housing narrative images of the Buddha's life.

Kyauk-ku-umin (no.154)

First described by Forchhammer in 1891 the Kyauk-ku-umin, located in a remote gully north-east of Nyaung-u, is a large temple also built in the Mon style, with an entrance vestibule, central column and ambulatory (fig.75, fig.76, fig.77).⁹³ This fascinating temple has been largely overlooked, perhaps because of its unusual form and location on the fringe of Bagan's region of main temple concentration. Forchhammer observed:

A sense of indescribably loneliness overcomes on here; the green fields to the north down below hugged by the Irrawaddy appear in faint outlines of a dreamy land; to the southwest the gigantic temples of Pagan cut dim triangles and squares against the sky and the distant Tanggyi hills; the mysterious Popa mountain is a mere huge spot in the landscape; nothing

⁹² Matics presents some Thai images in a similar form. The *mudra* is associated with boon giving or blessing. K.I. Matics, *Gestures of the Buddha* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1998), 17, 246.

⁹³ Forchhammer's first report was published in 1891. Emil Forchhammer *Report on the Kyaukku Temple at Pagan* (Rangoon: Government Press, reprint 1964).

near whereon the eye could rest; no sound seems to reach this sequestered region.⁹⁴

The same description could be written today, as the temple is rarely visited, and the silence engulfs those who do make the effort to see the Kyauk-ku-umin. The location, set as it is into a difficult to access ravine, was designed for access by river though vehicle access is now very straightforward. A stone inscription found inside the temple dates to 1188 but Luce argues convincingly that it was not original.⁹⁵ The challenge offered by this temple is that it has been added to over time and it is hard to determine the original structure.

Complex architectural features, such as an upper ambulatory that sits atop of the main temple, have been incorporated into the structure. The walls are covered in niches that may have contained Buddha images – all have been removed and only occasional remnants remain. Light shafts pass through the roof of this upper terrace to the floor, to provide light to the main temple structure below (fig.78). The logistics of the construction – transporting bricks, stone and other building materials to the site – required considerable resources which could only be harnessed as Bagan became a more established city.

The low stepped roof terraces are topped by a small *sikhara*, probably a later addition, most likely a repair following earthquake damage. Luce's dating of the temple after Ma-nu-ha-hpaya, to around 1060, seems convincing. The plainness of the exterior walls and general simplicity of the exterior structure have much in common with the Ma-nu-ha. However, the temple also has strong similarities with Nan-hpaya, most notably in the extensive use of stone facing and the placement of four-sided columns in the interior. There are also many niches on the exterior wall of the ambulatory corridor.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁵ *OBEP*, 1:289-90. Luce also remarks on the lack of any Sanskrit, Brahmanical or Mahayana influences at the Kyauk-ku-umin and notes that "like all the art of Central Burma, derive mainly from Northern India." Local legend has it that during the reign of King Narapatisithu, a woman spread the rumour that the sage Asin Pandita had an affair with her. To prove his innocence he placed a knife and sharpening stone in the river and they floated upstream. Taken as a sign of sanctity, the sage made the king to build Kyauk-ku-umin. Myat Min Hlaing, *Ancient Pagodas*, 115-116. Forchhammer states that around this time "the Burmese priests of the old school lived after they had been excommunicated by the zealous Talaing priest Chapada, who has returned from Ceylon, where he received the Upasampada ordination from the priests of the Mahavihara". Forchhammer, *Kyaukku Temple*, 2-3. The dedication stone may have symbolized a re-dedication by this group of outlawed priests.

While dating has been made principally on architectural assessment, this temple offers iconographic information that also places the temple at a later date than Ma-nu-ha, but certainly earlier than the legendary late 12th century date. Today, only one original image remains in the ambulatory niches and this is a scene from the Buddha's last life. Others were noted by Luce, and these are now in the Bagan Museum. The sculptures of scenes from the Buddha's life found in the Kyauk-ku-umin are probably the oldest at Bagan that have been found in situ.

The central Buddha image is enormous, seated in *bhumisparsa mudra* on a lotus throne approximately 2.8 x 5.5 x 3.8m. The image itself is 6.8 x 4.9m. The present image could not have been the original as it is made in the style of the late 12th century (fig.79). Perhaps this was part of a restoration that coincided with the 1188 inscription found in situ. The Buddha has the characteristic short neck and smooth hair curls of later figures, a marked contrast to the style of the other free standing sculptures. As is the trend at Bagan, this image has been recently restored. While this image is in a later style, it is in the monolithic form seen at Ma-nu-ha, yet another similarity with that early temple.

The outer walls of the internal corridor have three rows of niches which held stone reliefs (fig.80). While many are lost, the images represented the life story of Gotama Buddha in a similar way to those found later in the Naga-yon and Ananda temples. Images still in moderate repair include scenes of the Nativity, Plowing Festival, Tonsure, Fast, Descent from Tavatimsa and the Taming of the Nalagiri Elephant. There are also images of Gotama eating alms, seated with alms bowl and seated and standing in *dharmacakra mudra*.⁹⁶ All except the scene of the Plowing Festival are in the Bagan Museum, while accurate cast reproductions of some sculptures take their place in the temple. When first recorded by Forchhammer in 1890, the presence of 12 wooden carved figures was noted but these went missing not long after his report, along with a stone image of the Nativity.

The temple's decorative elements are largely executed in stone, just like the Nan-hpayā. What remains of the exterior decorative features are all crafted in stone and include guardian figures, *kinṇaras* and elaborate foliate motifs. The

⁹⁶ OBEP, 1:288-291, 2:91-92, 3:pl.141-142.

interior columns also show the remnants of large scale stone carving of decorative motifs. Luce noted that the interior also contained extensive wall paintings and stucco reliefs which include Buddha images. The latter were mis-identified, as they are actually stone plaques, affixed to the ceiling vault.⁹⁷ They are very difficult to see clearly due to the high ceiling and darkness (fig.81). They would have once covered the entire ceiling vault and about 50% are still in place. These figurative plaques are moulded and carry traces of painting. Those remaining are images of the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra*.

The freestanding reliefs are carved in stone. Their poor to fair condition makes it difficult to assess the detailing which may once have been present. The images are carved from single rectangular blocks that have been shaped to give them rounded tops. The scene of the nativity shows Maya with her left arm around her sister's shoulder, right arm raised, to hold the tree branch which is no longer present (fig.82). Maya's torso is in the *tribhanga* position, her head tilted to the right, and her right hip prominent. Her hair is up in the asymmetrical fashion typical of these sculptures, and closely resembles Indian models. Faint remnants of the decorative jewels on her clinging skirt cloth can still be seen. Maya's sister also has a similar hairstyle, and both have circular earrings. There is what appears to be a standing deity near the left hand of the image with hands held in prayer. This figure is much smaller than the central players. In the classic convention of birth scene images, the seated Buddha emerges from Maya's right side. A small standing image of the Buddha is seen lower on the left side of the scene – the Buddha, fully formed when born, immediately stands and takes seven steps. As the bottom of the slab is missing it is unclear whether another image would have been visible, or if the Buddha is standing on a lotus throne, which would be expected.

The scene of the Plowing Festival shows the future Buddha seated in a cradle shown as a square enclosure suspended under a tree (fig.83). According to the life of the Buddha, the scene depicts the baby prince's attendance at the annual Plowing Festival when he is placed in his cradle under the shade of a tree. Left by his attendants, they return to find that the shadow of the tree has remained constant during the day protecting the prince from the sun. An attendant on

⁹⁷ Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 230-31. Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments*, 1:250-51.

each side kneels with hands held high in prayer, in recognition of the wondrous event that has occurred. The treatment of the tree is a typically Bagan feature. The canopy is formed like a cylinder that has been bent into the form of an arch. Unfortunately the bottom section of the slab has been damaged.

The scene of the Tonsure is in slightly better condition (fig.84). Now in the Bagan Museum the figure shows the prince divested of most of his princely robes, his left hand holding out his long hair with the right hand holds his sword as is about to sever his topknot. The prince is seated on a double lotus throne, his legs crossed, both soles pointing upwards.⁹⁸ The prince is shown in the manner of Pala Indian sculpture, with slender waist and hips and a fuller chest. The neck rings are visible and the earlobes barely touch the shoulders. Faint remnants of his outer robe can be seen crossing the ankles. What remains of the gently arched eyebrows suggests that, as in the monolithic image at Ma-nu-ha, the line of the eyebrows runs into the straight central line of the nose. The line of the hair curls is a gentle curve, dipping in the centre towards the nose forming a heart-shaped face. The *usnisha* is triangular and clearly prominent as Siddhartha is about to cut his hair. The lips are tightly pursed and gently upturned at the corners. The background is completely sparse, with no decoration. Whether this is the original condition is unclear, but is consistent with the other remaining figures.

The scene of the fasting *bodhisattva* is particularly interesting (fig.85). The seated figure, with ribs clearly visible and shrunken stomach, sits rigidly under a tree. His neck sinews and collarbones are prominent, the arms skeletal and angular, his hands rest in *dhyana mudra*. The face shape is also thinner, though the artisans at Bagan obviously struggled in depicting the *bodhisattva* as starving, unlike the Gandharan prototypes.⁹⁹ Here the eyebrow arch and line of the hair appear to parallel each other, though this effect is largely due to the paint which remains on the face, accentuating these lines. The image was lacquered and gilded and the paint remnants are black and red, typical of the

⁹⁸ The double lotus throne is badly damaged, almost as if deliberately hacked off. Perhaps it was not finished or the stone sheared easily, making this area vulnerable.

⁹⁹ Images of the emaciated Buddha have never been very popular in the scheme of Buddhist art. Gandharan artists depicted this scene with great skill, and so did Thai artisans during the 18–19th centuries. Otherwise, these images are relatively rare.

pigments used to create lacquer. The *usnisha* is low and triangular and is now topped with a flame-like extension. Given the damaged reredo, it is likely this is a repair made in the style of the Ananda images, as this type of *usnisha* does not appear on other early sculpture. The prince is flanked by two *devas* who are inserting ambrosia into his ears to keep him alive. Again the prince is seated on what appears to be the vestiges of a double lotus throne which was either never completed or has been damaged. The remains of the tree behind the future Buddha is again in the typical Bagan style, shown as a simple raised ovoid shape with patterning to indicate leaves and branches. The upper third of the reredo is missing but from the remains it would seem that the background was again unadorned.

The next scene shows, according to Luce, the Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven (fig.86). The standing figure has lost its head and the upper portion of the reredo is missing. The Buddha has the left hand raised to the chest, possibly holding the end of his robe, as in the images from the Ananda. The right arm is pendant, palm facing forward. The form of the image is classical early Bagan style, with rounded hips, narrow waist and triangular chest. The robes cling to the body as if wet. The outer edge of the lower border of the robe is frilled. The Buddha is flanked by Brahma on his left holding the parasol, and Indra on the right with hands at chest, holding a conch shell. The Buddha appears to be standing on a waisted pedestal throne. Atypical of the earlier figures, the background is clearly carved with architectural details including *hamsa* birds and beads cascading from the shrine-like structure that surrounds the Buddha.

This feature is seen in another standing image that Luce describes as representing the Taming of the Nalagiri Elephant (fig.87). The Buddha stands in an almost direct copy of the previous one. Now he is flanked by two *devas* with halos. Presumably the damaged figure to his lower right is the remains of the elephant bowing at the Buddha's feet. Here the waisted pedestal throne is in good condition. Again the reredo has been carved to form an architectural niche that surrounds the Buddha, complete with halo.

The remains of architectural features are seen on the other images illustrated by Luce (figs.88-92). The figures are essentially similar, with only minor differences, such as the petal shape of the double lotus thrones, though it is

difficult to determine how much of each image is original. The figure of the Buddha with alms has half of the reredo missing, yet the head and *usnisha* are intact and well preserved compared to the rest of the sculpture (fig.88). The depiction of the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra* appears mostly to be in original condition, with fairly even surface wear (fig.89). There is less definition between the head, *usnisha* and finial than in the former example.

Of significance is the position of the right arm extending towards the earth. The elongation of the arm, which exaggerates the strength of the action, is a style seen more commonly during Kyanzittha's reign, and raises some concern over the dating of these sculptures. While sculptures of Anawrahta's period also demonstrate this tendency, the arm tends to cross the leg at mid shin rather than out towards the knee as seen here. The face, however, still has the slight fullness favoured during the earlier period, with tight pursed lips. In addition, the general high quality of the carving is in the style of the Nan-hpaya figures, lending weight to a date a few years after Nan-hpaya, perhaps around 1065–1070. The extensive use of illustrative sculptures of the Buddha's life story, a feature of major temples built in Kyanzittha's reign, indicates that the life story of the Buddha was now widely known. Again, this would support the suggested dating, as it allows a few years for the level of artistic skills and iconographic knowledge to have developed.

A final image for analysis is the figure of Buddha sheltered by Mucalinda (fig.93).¹⁰⁰ Holding an alms bowl, the Buddha is seated with the snake hoods spread out overhead. The treatment of the snake is very unusual — a bulbous wave-like form engraved with scales rises up from the lotus base and extends underneath the Buddha, giving the impression he is seated on the *naga*.¹⁰¹ This form of snake curls also serves to act as columns that frame the Buddha, the hoods forming the top of the structure. Of the five separate hoods only one is in fair condition, the others having been damaged. The remaining snake head juts forward against a plain reredo. The face of the Buddha is damaged though the

¹⁰⁰ There are a few images of Buddha under the *naga* from the early Bagan period. There is one in Myin-pya-gu (*OBEP*, 3:pl.152c) and also in the Naga-yon and Ananda temples of Kyanzittha's reign. Wall paintings of the scene are more common as painting slowly took the place of narrative sculptural reliefs.

¹⁰¹ The Buddha seated on a curled *naga* was particularly popular in Thailand during the Lopburi period. For examples see H. Woodward, *Sacred Sculpture*, 95, 96, 98.

hair and *usnisha* are intact. This sculpture is in the same style as the aforementioned earth-touching Buddha and is likely to be the original form. It is hard to determine if there are seven kinks in the snake, which would correspond to the narrative found in the texts relating to the Buddha's life which usually state the *naga* coiled around the Buddha seven times.¹⁰²

The sculptural images from Kyauk-ku-umin are probably the earliest known sculptures at Bagan illustrating the Buddha's life. Analysis of these images against other figures that also illustrate the Buddha's life is further developed in Chapter 6.

Gu-bi-za-gyi (no.1662)

The Gu-bi-za-gyi is also of the older Mon type (fig.94, fig.95) and probably dates to around 1065-1075. The interior corridor is lined with niches.¹⁰³ Now empty, apart from a restored central image and remnants of wall paintings, it can be assumed with a high degree of certainty that the images placed in the niches were representations of scenes from the Buddha's life story, as seen in temples of similar construction such as the Naga-yon, Ananda and Kyauk-ku-umin. The niches vary in size to accommodate differing scenes such as Maya's dream and the *parinirvana*, which require horizontal rather than vertical formats (fig.96).

Pa-tha-da-gu (no.1476)

Luce describes the Pa-tha-da-gu, which was a large ruined temple, as having four central recesses which once contained colossal Buddha images.¹⁰⁴ Today, the temple is undergoing extensive renovation (fig.97, fig.98). The front west face remains completely missing, revealing the interior wall which housed the central Buddha image, surrounded with other niches which undoubtedly contained sculptures of the Buddha. Luce noted the presence of wall paintings and neatly written glosses in Old Mon which relate to the *jatakas*.

The remains of one earth-touching Buddha which was still present when Luce recorded the site have now been restored (fig.99), while the bases of some of the niche sculptures remain discernable. Even though the original image has

¹⁰² See A. Foucher, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Ancient texts and Monuments of India*, trans. S. Boas (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1963), 128-9.

¹⁰³ *OBEP*, 1:296, 3:pl.154.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:296.

been extensively repaired, the form is still recognizable as characteristic of the Anawrahta period (fig.100). The slim waisted torso with lion chest is consistent with images from this period, and this style remained the favoured type during Kyanzittha's reign. The hair curls, however, are spiky and this is more commonly associated with earlier images. Other details have been interfered with to such an extent that it is no longer possible to comment reliably on what may have been original. It is the current trend to restore images in a style that is roughly consistent with the purported time period of the temple.

Myin-pya-gu (no.1493)

Myin-pya-gu has been attributed either to the end of Anawrahta's reign or the beginning of his son Sawlu's reign (r.1077–1084). Votive tablets bearing the seals of both kings have been found in this large temple, sited south of the old city wall (fig.101, fig.102). The quadrilateral structure rises in the shape of a *stupa* yet it has wide internal corridors. A single entrance faces west. The walls are lined with niches housing lifesize images of the Buddha and the interior was extensively decorated with scenes from the *jatakas*. Luce notes that the niches are arranged fourteen on each side, totalling 28 in each half of the temple. The number of niches is no doubt related to the 28 former Buddhas. However, at the Myin-pya-gu, these niches do not all contain images of seated Buddhas. Most of the seated images are in *bhumisparsa mudra* and, according to Luce, "of the 'Aniruddha type', with long torso, conical *uṣṇīṣa* and flame-niche (this last generally lost). Ears touch shoulders".¹⁰⁵ The faces are a little less rounded than those typical of Anawrahta's reign, a feature that supports the proposed dating of these sculptures (fig.103). The torsos are slightly elongated and very upright. Some features, however, are not typical and suggest either later repairs or damage. A number of the earth-touching hands have even fingers. This is not a characteristic of images in the early Bagan period but developed later in the 12th century. The hair caps are smooth on a number of the sculptures. This is also a feature that is associated with images of the later Bagan period. Perhaps the original stucco curls had fallen off and repairs were made in the style of the day.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1:292.

As well as housing repetitive images of the earth-touching Buddha there are life scenes including the Buddha sheltered by Mucalinda (fig.104) and the Fasting *bodhisattva* (fig.105). While both are badly damaged the overall composition is consistent with a date of around 1075-1084. Seven separate *naga* heads frame the Buddha's head and shoulders. Rounded hair curls are still visible on this sculpture. The right hand and lower arm has been repaired, the hand has fingers of equal length and the arm is close to the body, crossing the shin in an almost central position. The fasting image is similar to the figure in Kyauk-ku-umin (fig.85) although, in this temple, the Buddha is on his own without any *devas* in attendance.

The stone head of a standing image which was found by Luce on the floor of the temple, and is still in situ, belongs to a standing figure of the Buddha housed in the central niche on the southern side of the building (fig.106). It was constructed in the usual manner using a tenon to fix it into the temple wall, the rest of the figure being made of stucco and brick. The head is stylistically linked to this period. The face is rounded though the chin is slightly pointed, a precursor to images of Kyanzittha's reign. The eyebrow arch kicks up and outwards, as does the line of the eyelids. The hairline appears to follow that of the eyebrows, which dip in the centre and run into the bridge of the nose. The earlobes are damaged and it is not possible to know if they rested on the shoulders of the image.

The seated image in the western recess is also damaged but still retains some stylistic characters of note (fig.107). The torso is slim and long, the waist rather high. The chest is not very broad. The neck rings are still visible and the earlobes extend to touch the shoulders. The face is full and ovoid though the chin tapers more than, for example, the earlier images seen in Kyauk-ku-umin.

Pahto-tha-mya (no.1605)

The Pahto-tha-mya lies inside the old city walls, west of Nat-hlaung-kyaing. Mya assigned the temple to Sawlu's reign and this is supported by both the type of

wall paintings and the stylistic features of the remaining sculptural images.¹⁰⁶

The Pahto-tha-mya is a beautiful building, essentially a square with a smaller square portico attached to the front (fig.108, fig.109). The centre of each exterior wall contains an alcove that juts outwards and stone lattice windows are evenly spaced along the walls. Access to the roof reveals a series of terraces, the lower terrace containing four roof shrines, one at the centre of each side.

The interior of the temple is richly adorned with paintings illustrating the life of Gotama Buddha and accompanying glosses (fig.110, fig.111).¹⁰⁷ Luce writes "It is evident that the painters of Pahto-tha-mya used a text strictly corresponding (apart from minor differences in spelling) with the modern Singalese and Burmese Vinaya: The 13 chapters of *Samghādisesa Kanda* are followed by the 2 chapters of the *Aniyata Kanda*; then the 30 of *Nissaggiya Kanda*; and the 92 of *Pācittaya Kanda* (offences involving "Expiation")".¹⁰⁸ Luce refers to the Pahto-tha-mya as "the Mother of Theravāda temples" and the "Pioneer in spreading the gospel of Singalese Buddhism".¹⁰⁹ The doctrinal correctness of the glosses appears to be his main reason for these assertions. It would be equally valid, however, to draw the same conclusion from the sophistication of the renderings and the complex building structure which shows that understanding of Buddhist teachings was now a more cohesive entity, rather than a fragmented mix of Mahayana and Theravada teachings. While earlier temples included images of the *jātakas* and life scenes of Gotama Buddha, there was no additional material to indicate these images represented more than a fundamental understanding of Buddhist stories. The inclusion of glosses which appear to have been taken directly from religious texts is indicative of written scriptures now being located at Bagan. There was probably now an organised *sangha* and this signals that Theravada Buddhism was in its ascendancy.

¹⁰⁶ Mya, *ASI* (1930-34) no.1:192-3, pl.109e. The Pahto-tha-mya has also been attributed to Sawlu's reign in official Burmese publications. See, for example, *Architectural Drawings of Temples in Pagan* (Rangoon: Ministry of Education, 1989), 3. "The Pahto-tha-mya, traditionally attributed to Sawrahan of the 10th century although actually constructed by Sawlu (1077 – 1084)...". Stadtnr suggests it may have been built closer to the end of Kyanzittha's reign, around the time of Ku-byauk-gyi's construction in 1113. I prefer an earlier date as the sculptural imagery does not relate closely to that from the end of the Kyanzittha period. Stadtnr, *Ancient Pagan*, 134.

¹⁰⁷ The wall paintings of Bagan are the subject of a recent book. See Bautze-Picron, *The Buddhist Murals of Pagan*. For information on the paintings in the Pahto-tha-mya, see pp.158-161.

¹⁰⁸ *OBEP*, 1:307.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:309, 304.

The paintings are wonderfully detailed and designed. Their relevance to sculpture lies in their apparent role as alternatives for sculptural depictions. Their composition and size compares favourably with the temple niches found in Myin-pya-gu, Gu-bi-za-gyi and Kyauk-ku-umin. Painting allows for greater detailing than relief carving but there are close connections between the two mediums, particularly in the portrayal of the architectural structures and reredos that frame the central characters in each scene. An example of this at the Pahto-tha-mya is shown in the illustration of the Tonsure (fig.111).

The Buddha images in the roof shrines are today in fair to poor condition. They are made of brick and covered with stucco. Stylistically they differ from the earlier images described, such as those in Kyauk-ku-umin. Of the four brick and stucco images of the Buddha only one is relatively intact (fig.112). This image depicts the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra*. Both hands are damaged and some rudimentary repairs have been made. The figure is a transitional form between the fuller faced images typical of Anawrahta's reign, and the slimmer heart-shaped faces which typify the images of the Ananda temple, built towards the end of Kyanzittha's reign. The Buddha is seated with the feet in *padmasana*, both soles pointing upwards. The feet are realistically moulded with elongated toes rather than portrayed as flat slabs as was common in the later Bagan period. The torso is slim-waisted, expanding into a fuller lion-chest. The neck rings are clearly visible and the elongated ears now rest on the shoulder. As the face is narrower than those typical of the Anawrahta type, the ears closely follow the contour of the face and neck. The chin is small and rounded. The tightly pursed lips do not extend past the exterior line of the chin, again a slight departure from the earlier images. The nose is even narrower, the outside edge of the nostrils falling within the vertical lines drawn from the lips and chin. The bridge of the nose is flat, formed by separate lines that are continuous with the eyebrows. The eyebrows are gently arched, kicking up at the outer edge. The forehead is fairly shallow and the hair curls follow a line parallel to that formed by the eyebrows. The neatly arranged curls appear as simple spheres, rather than as the snail shell curls frequently seen on Anawrahta period figures.

The development of the *usnisha* is towards the style which would typify the majority of images of the Kyanzittha type. The *usnisha* is rounded, with a flame-like extension on top. This is quite short, about the same height as the *usnisha*,

and fairly flat at the front but rounded at the back. This would suggest a deliberate act by the artisans who were more concerned with what the viewer would see. The back of the flame is plain, while the front often has some simple incising that adds to the flame-like effect (fig.113).

The images in the Pahto-tha-mya show a stylistic change from those of the early Anawrahta period and are precursors to the distinctive imagery of Kyanzittha's reign. The glosses that accompany the wall paintings indicate that there was now an organised *sangha* at Bagan that was familiar with the texts of the Theravada school. Ink glosses of such specific theological detail have not yet been associated with temples dating to Anawrahta's time. A construction date of around 1078–1084, during the reign of Sawlu, is proposed for this transitional temple.

Other Anawrahta-Period Images

A number of interesting images have been excavated from confirmed sites or are recent discoveries, post-dating Luce's work. Some remarkable bronze images attributable to the early Bagan period were published by Luce.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately the archaeological details surrounding their discovery and original locations are often unclear. Early Bagan-period bronzes are remarkably uniform in their appearance and depict the Buddha seated or standing. The size of some images, which can exceed one metre, indicates the artisans were highly skilled in their craft.¹¹¹

Luce draws attention to two images that can be reliably dated to Anawrahta's reign (fig.114, fig.115) which were found in the Chitsagon mound north of Ananda temple along with numerous Anawrahta-period votive tablets. The images are almost identical. Their dating to Anawrahta's reign is stylistically consistent with sculptures of the period, in particular, the characteristics of a strong parrot-type nose, prominent chin and pursed lips. The flame finial is tipped forward with a plain back in a style that is carried through to Kyanzittha's reign. The only significant differences are the hem on one robe is more horizontal and one image has an *urna* while the other does not. The spiky hair

¹¹⁰ *OBEP*, 3:pls.429-432.

¹¹¹ Unfortunately the current location of a number of these works that have been previously published is unknown.

curls are of Indian rather than Mon origin. Luce remarks "Note the squarer face answering the squarer hang of the robes. This is closer to the Indian model but lacks its mobile grace".¹¹² This mobile grace to which Luce refers is that of the Sultanganj image dating from the Gupta period (fig.116).¹¹³ While Luce's statement is accurate, he prefers this link over the trend of Pala Indian sculpture which, by the 11th and 12th centuries, was becoming rigid and less dynamic, though still expertly carved.¹¹⁴ This was the style of art that was being introduced to Bagan and it should be expected that the images produced at Bagan after a period of relative artistic inactivity should closely mirror the contemporaneous art of India rather than that of 700 years before.

Summary

This overview of sculptural images associated with the reigns of Anawrahta (1044-1077) and Sawlu (1077-1084) reveals that this was an eclectic artistic phase. While there is diversity in the imagery, by the end of this period certain trends are emerging, not only in stylistic terms but also in the repertoire of imagery. From Anawrahta's early votive tablets there was a move towards narrative illustrations, first in the *jataka* terracotta plaques, then in stone sculptures depicting scenes from the Buddha's last earthly existence. From the middle of Anawrahta's reign, as the program of temple building expanded, multiple images of the Buddha appear in temples. These images become more standardized throughout the period. The mixed Mahayana and Theravada images found during the early Bagan period, such as those at the Shwe-hsan-daw, rapidly give way to a uniformity that can be associated with a growing religious conformity. Therefore, these images are not only significant for tracing the development of Buddhist art at Bagan but also reflect Bagan's growing confidence and support of the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

Anawrahta was purportedly influenced by the Theravada tradition, introduced to Bagan via the Mon and Shin Arahán, a Theravada monk whose influence spanned the rule of at least three kings. The *GPC* documents Anawrahta's Buddhist zeal and once Shin Arahán arrives in Bagan, Buddhism becomes

¹¹² *OBEF*, 2:195.

¹¹³ This sculpture is in the Birmingham Art Museum, England.

¹¹⁴ For further examples, see S. and J. Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, cat.nos.15 and 19.

defined whereas prior to this it had a tenuous hold. Shin Arahán gave structure to religious practice, and Anawrahta's court took on an Indian Buddhist ruler's guise. Anawrahta's empire expanded and Bagan became a large city, complete with an extended royal family and retinue. Brahmanical rituals were integrated into court practice but the syncretic mix of religious beliefs at Bagan was not discarded. Rather, each was compartmentalised and their relationship to Buddhism formalised. The many spirits, known colloquially as *nats*, became *devas*, while the 32 *Nats* of Mount Popa existed in parallel with Buddhism - they were *devas* in the heavens. The earth-dwelling *nagas* were incorporated into Brahmanical rituals, appeased whenever the earth was broken for the building of a temple or royal building. None of these beings were discarded, but instead were placed into a hierarchy in relation to Buddhism. Their presence was always close as their images decorated the exterior of temples as stucco reliefs, guaranteeing that the populace would see them. What remains today, though a pitifully small amount, shows that there was a vibrant culture that connected strongly with nature and which integrated smoothly with the less tangible ideals of Buddhism.

Chapter 4 Kyanzittha, Unifier of Burma

Kyanzittha is known as the “Unifier of Burma”, the king who consolidated Burman power at Bagan. As with the legendary tales associated with Anawrahta's rise to the throne, the *GPC* is generous in its accounts of Kyanzittha's elevation to greatness. Kyanzittha is first mentioned in the context of being a leading warrior during Anawrahta's reign. Kyanzittha was not without human failings, however, and he incurred Anawrahta's wrath on a number of occasions, and was eventually banished. After Anawrahta's death, Kyanzittha was recalled by his successor, Sawlu, on the advice of Shin Araham and the court ministers. Although Sawlu's relationship with Kyanzittha was also troubled, Kyanzittha retained the respect of the courtiers and local leaders. Sawlu died at the hands of an usurper, who was subsequently killed by Kyanzittha. Kyanzittha was then installed on the throne with great popular support and reigned from 1084-1113.¹¹⁵ Kyanzittha the warrior is mentioned frequently in the *GPC* in the context of the reigns of Anawrahta and Sawlu. Interestingly, once he is king, the emphasis in the *GPC* is principally on his dedication to the Buddhist religion, his family and birth of his heir, his grandson Alaungsithu. Luce writes "The keynote of Kyanzittha's reign was clearly his love of the Mons whom he had conquered, and his statesmanlike resolve not so much to conquer Burma as Anirudha had done, as to unite it".¹¹⁶

Unlike Anawrahta, Kyanzittha left a number of inscriptions. These inscriptions, all written in Mon script, provide insight into court ritual as discussed in Chapter 1.¹¹⁷ He was influenced by Hinduism and Visnu is frequently invoked during the Brahmanical ceremony to dedicate his palace.¹¹⁸ Kyanzittha was not a direct descendent of Anawrahta, and indeed, Luce notes that Kyanzittha claims descent for the Pyu of Srikshetra "as an Avatār of Visnu".¹¹⁹ This relationship with the Pyu and the Indian origins of Brahmanism and Hinduism are indicative

¹¹⁵ *GPC*, 100-111.

¹¹⁶ Luce, "Mons of the Pagan Dynasty", *JBR* (1953): 12.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Blagden, "Mon Inscriptions", 35. The name Nārāyana which appears in the translation is synonymous with Visnu. See also *OBEP* 1:41. The palace inscription is also reviewed by Kyaw Nyien, "The Palace of King Kyanzittha, known from His Inscription", in *Study on Pagan Research Report*, seminar proceedings (1989, Department of Archaeology, Rangoon and Institute of Asian Cultures Sophia University, Tokyo): 44-50.

¹¹⁹ *OBEP* 1:41.

of the hybrid nature of culture at Bagan, and is also reflected in the artistic creations of the day.

Kyanzittha's Temples

Kyanzittha oversaw the building of some of Bagan's most famous monuments. While temple building had not reached the frantic rate it would achieve later in the 12th century, temples attributed to Kyanzittha's reign are amongst the most architecturally elegant of the entire Bagan period. Notably, a more uniform approach to the form of construction started to emerge. Whereas the monuments of the Anawrahta period are diverse and eclectic – including stupas, Hindu influences, early Mon type temples and the first *jataka* plaques – Kyanzittha's religious buildings took on a sophisticated appearance and symbolised, more and more, Theravada Buddhism.

First and foremost Kyanzittha oversaw the completion of the Shwe-zigon pagoda which had been started by Anawrahta.¹²⁰ In addition he built the Naga-yon, Abe-ya-dana, Ananda, Kubyauk-nge Wetkyi-in and possibly the Kubyauk-gyi Myinkaba temples.¹²¹ The *GPC* outlines numerous other temples, *stupas*, monasteries and rest houses built throughout Kyanzittha's kingdom. In addition Luce himself attributes a group of damaged monuments to Kyanzittha's period, including the Mye-bon-tha-hpaya-hla (no.1512), Mon Gu and Hlaing-she-hpaya (no.369). The dating of this latter group is based primarily on stylistic grounds. Pichard's review of these temples recommends construction dates from 1084 to the mid 12th century. Few of these temples have intact sculptural images and the material does not offer any significant detail to stylistic change, hence they will not be discussed further.

Even though Kyanzittha was a devout Buddhist, animism remained integral to everyday beliefs in his kingdom. The *GPC* makes much of Kyanzittha being assisted along the path to kingship by the Mahagiri spirit who, in a former life

¹²⁰ Kyanzittha's predecessor, Sawlu, is not treated favourably by the *GPC*. His inability or unwillingness to complete the Shwe-zigon was singled out as his great failing. "King Sawlu had the power neither to devise a thing nor to perform it. It was his wont to act so as to grieve the hearts of his ministers and councilors. The Shwezigon, which his father left unfinished, he builded not." *GPC*, 104-5.

¹²¹ Kubyauk-gyi Myinkaba was dedicated by Kyanzittha's son, Prince Rajakumar and was possibly completed shortly after Kyanzittha's death in 1113. See *OBEP*, 1:373. The *GPC* refers to Kyanzittha building a monument called Minochantha to house nine sacred relics sent by the King of Sri Lanka but the location of this temple is not known. *GPC*, 110.

had been a friend of the future King Kyanzittha. Shin Arahan is also involved in this story, which saw him as a Brahman in a former life.¹²²

Shwe-zigon (no.1)

The Shwe-zigon pagoda is one of the principal Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Burma (fig.128, fig.129).¹²³ The foundations and lower terraces were laid under Anawrahta's patronage to house the tooth and frontlet relics. The attribution of the Shwe-zigon is heavily dependent on two pillars installed within the compound which are inscribed on all four sides with Mon script and tell of Kyanzittha's move to his new palace, and recount other events of his reign.¹²⁴ Luce notes that Kyanzittha's original name for the *stupa* was prefixed with the word, *nirvana*, "implying (I imagine) that he was no longer in the Mahāyanist fold (which regarded Nirvāna as a sort of opium for the masses), but a Theravārdin with Nirvāna as his declared goal. If this is right, the Shwézigôn marks the final break with Mahāyānism, and stands as the first great monument of the Reformed Church in Burma".¹²⁵

Since the Shwe-zigon is a *stupa*, there are no central shrine images. There is still an abundance of imagery, however, within the Shwe-zigon compound, some of which is attributable to Kyanzittha's reign. These images are housed in

¹²² GPC, 107.

¹²³ The Shwe-dagon in Yangon, the Mahabodhi Temple in Mandalay, and the Shwe-zigon in Bagan are the most important Buddhist temples in Burma. Pilgrimages have always been a part of Burmese Buddhist life. A delightful contemporary account of the Burmese Buddhist pilgrimage is given by Ma Thanegi, *The Native Tourist: In Search of Turtle Eggs* (Yangon: Swiftwinds Books, 2000).

¹²⁴ OBEF, 1:57,268.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 1:268. The concept of *nirvana* holds a special place in Burmese Buddhism. Lu Pe Win writes "Words fail absolutely to give a comprehensive idea of Nibbāna. But my father, in his book of Buddhist Catechism in Burmese, the first of its kind ever written by a Burman Buddhist, elucidates in briefly thus:- Nibbāna, whose meaning can never be adequately expressed in any language, may be somewhat satisfactorily understood by means of concert cases of perfect personages who now and then entered Nirvāna temporarily for seven solid days. In such a case of an arahant, he is said to be absorbed in such sweet and deep meditation known as *Nirodha Samāpatti* in Pāli, the nearest English expression for which is, possibly, attainment of a state where sensation, both physical and mental, cease completely. In other words, he is in Nirvāna.... Therefore, should, nowadays, there be anyone who has progressed from the primary stage of *Sotāpatti magga*, as well as the third stage, known as *Anāgāmi magga*, he would finally reach the fourth and final stage, known as the *Arahatta magga* and *phala* in Pāli, which means the path and fruition of full freedom from evil fires. At that stage, he realizes like the Buddha that he has become fully enlightened, that he has become spiritually emancipated, that this is the last and final existence for him, and that there is no more rebirth for him. Like the Buddha Himself, he would be, off and on, demonstrating to his fellow men the beautiful and boundless bliss of Nirvāna. Last but not least, he would, like the Buddha Himself, willingly await the day to die and pass away into complete Nirvāna". Lu Pe Win, "The Jatakas in Burma", 94-95

shrines which are scattered throughout the large walled compound.¹²⁶ The lower terraces of the *stupa* are decorated with glazed plaques illustrating scenes of the 550 *jatakas*. As they follow neither the 550 *jataka* recension found at the Hpet-leik temples, or the Sri Lankan version of 547 which was used at the Ananda temple, it is likely the plaques were made before the building of the Ananda around 1105. Luce suggests the use of the Sri Lankan version came after Kyanzittha had overseen the revision of the *Tipitaka* which resulted in a substantial shift towards the Sri Lankan Pali tradition.¹²⁷ This occurred early in Kyanzittha's reign and would date the Shwe-zigon to around 1084–1087.

Most of the glazed *jataka* plaques were made of clay, though some were made of stone to which glaze was applied. The images are more crudely modeled than those from the Hpet-leik pagodas and appear to have been hurriedly constructed. This is consistent with the *GPC* account that states the massive building was completed in seven months and seven days.¹²⁸ The few well-preserved plaques that remain also differ stylistically from the competently crafted Hpet-leik plaques. Perhaps the Shwe-zigon tiles represent the first attempt by Burman artisans to craft such plaques without assistance. The figurative images on the plaques are more closely associated with Pyu style, the torsos being squatter than those found on the Hpet-leik plaques and the faces are quite round (fig.130, fig.131). The plaques are rectangular and framed with a border of raised circles, similar to the beads that often hang from the edges of the Buddha's throne, and also found on the earlier Mon style plaque (fig.193). There is little else to associate these images stylistically with the Mon Hpet-leik plaques suggesting that, having initially instructed local Burmans in the manner of their crafts, they no longer had an influential role.

Within the large compound surrounding the central stupa are numerous shrines housing Buddha images. In the tradition of Anawrahta, there are four colossal Buddha figures, each housed in separate shrines, centred on each of the four sides of the central stupa, not reclining as at the Shwe-hsan-daw or Ma-nu-ha,

¹²⁶ An overview of the Shwe-zigon including a summary of its numerous supplementary buildings can be found in the official publication *A Guide to Shwezigon Pagoda Pagan-Nyaung-Oo Myanmar*, 1993. Written by the Shwe-zigon Pagoda Trustees, the booklet outlines the history of the pagoda, including the "nine wonders of the Shwezigon". These include such miraculous phenomena as the fact that "the shadows of the precinct walls do not change position" and "regardless of heavy rainfall, no rain water remains in the compound".

¹²⁷ *OBEP*, 1:269.

but standing (fig.132, fig.133, fig.134, fig.135). They represent the four Buddhas of the current eon – Kassapa (facing south), Kakusanda (north), Konagamana (east) and Gotama (west).¹²⁹ They stand approximately 4m tall excluding their lotus pedestals. Made of bronze sheets (they are not cast) Luce remarks that they are modeled on the Gupta image of Sultanganj, now held by the Birmingham Museum, United Kingdom (fig.116).¹³⁰ While there are obvious similarities, Luce's statement has significant implications, primarily that it suggests the artisans must have either seen this image or replicas of it.¹³¹ This infers the artisans were either Indian themselves, or Burmans who had traveled to India at some stage to see the image or, most likely, replicas found their way to Bagan.

Each image is depicted in the same pose, with right hand in *abhaya mudra* and the left raised to waist height, holding the end of the robe. This gesture is generally associated with dispelling fear and is a popular iconographic image during this period. All of the images are almost identical except, again, for the faces. This is to be expected as each figure represents one of the four Buddhas of the current *kalpa* and hence should look different, as they do at other sites such as the Ananda temple. The faces differ from those of the earlier Anawrahta period. Now the visage is soft and elegant. The face shape is less ovoid than earlier figures, and is becoming more heart-shaped. The chin is small but rounded and the ears are clear of the shoulders. The appearance of each Buddha is one of youthful compassion. This simple yet effective portrayal is very appealing and clearly would encourage devotees to engage with the image. The torsos are similar in style to those found at the Shwe-hsan-daw and Chitsagon mound (fig.52, fig.114, fig.115), with full rounded thighs, a narrow waist and modest lion chest. The contours are rounded but less distinctly so in

¹²⁸ *GPC*, 109.

¹²⁹ The four Buddhas are integral images in many Bagan temples – both large and small. While they may all look similar, they can often be identified by their tree, each Buddha attaining Enlightenment under a particular type of tree. The trees are usually painted behind the Buddha image and display different leaf shapes: Konagamana – *apocynum aureum*, Kakusanda – *figus glomerata*, Kassapa – *figus bengalensis* and Gotama – *figus religiosus*. See Than Tun, "Brahmanical and Buddhist Iconographs," 5.

¹³⁰ *OBEP*, 1:274.

¹³¹ I query whether Luce may have mistakenly identified the Sultanganj image. Apart from its colossal size, there is nothing to specifically connect it to Burma. However, in Coomaraswamy's text, the preceding figure (no.159), a Gupta period bronze of a standing Buddha, ht:50cm, is "said to have been found in Burma". Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, 240, fig.159.

comparison with earlier images. Overall, there is a slight thickening of the waist, while the curvature of the thighs and hips is less pronounced. There is also a subtle rigidity in each image which was not present in the earlier figures.

If these figures are modeled on the Sultanganj image then, aside from the similarities, differences between the two types of image must be highlighted. The Gupta figure stands in the contrapuntal pose with weight over the left leg, the right knee slightly bent. The robe crosses over the ankles at two levels and clings to the torso. In comparison, the Shwe-zigon Buddhas stand rigidly on both feet with both legs straight. Only one image shows the hem of the robe being continuous across the ankles (fig.135). The other figures show a shortened robe, with the hem roughly parallel with the ground (fig.132, fig.133, fig.134). The lines that delineate the robe crossing the lower leg are disassociated from the robe and fall below the hemline of the robe. This suggests the images have undergone repairs, though as they are continuously re-gilded it is difficult to tell what repairs have occurred. The form of the Sultanganj image was common across northern India from around the 9th century. There are numerous smaller portable figures in existence and any of these could just as readily be the model for Bagan images. The Sultanganj sculpture may well be the prototype for this form of standing Buddha. However, it is impossible to know all of the images in existence during the Gupta, or indeed, any time period. In the absence of historical evidence to draw a connection between the Sultanganj Buddha and Kyanzittha's reign it is impossible to determine a specific prototype for the Shwe-zigon sculptures. Given that the images from the Shwe-hsan-daw are closer stylistically to Gupta-period sculpture it is highly unlikely that there is a direct relationship between the Sultanganj Buddha and those at the Shwe-zigon, built later, and during a period when contemporaneous images of Pala India offer close connections to Burmese art at Bagan.¹³²

¹³² There are other features associated with the four Shwe-zigon Buddhas that suggest extensive repairs have taken place over the centuries. The plain rounded elongated flame-like finial that tops the usnisha on two of the figures is not characteristic of the period (fig.133, fig.134). When compared to the other images the left arm of fig.133 appears heavily restored, with sharp delineation between the robe and the arm suggestive of a later recasting. The eyebrow arch is higher than that of the other images and there is an obvious "v" peak where the inner robe crosses the lower abdomen.

Naga-yon-hpaya (no.1192)

Constructed around 1090, the Naga-yon-hpaya is the first substantial temple built under Kyanzittha's patronage (fig.136, fig.137). It is prominently positioned on top of a rise south of Myinkaba village. According to the *GPC* the site was a former grazing ground for horses. When King Sawlu had taken away Kyanzittha's worldly goods in a fit of pique, Kyanzittha was forced to find a place to sleep, "and while he slept a young Naga came and watched over him. At that place, when he became king, he built the Nagayon pagoda".¹³³

The main entrance of the Naga-yon faces north, towards old Bagan.

Constructed in the Mon style it has a rectangular main temple structure and a smaller rectangular entrance portico, also referred to as a hall, with side entrances.¹³⁴ The building is centred within a large walled enclosure. The temple originally housed up to seventy-one images. The external ambulatory corridor is inset with niches – eight on each external wall, eight on three internal walls with four niches on the wall facing the main entrance. This wall also houses the doorway leading to the large central shrine image. The internal wall has twenty-eight niches, one for each of the twenty-eight previous Buddhas.

The ten entrance vestibule niches housed narrative images of the Buddha's life.¹³⁵ Luce recorded their arrangement, from the north-west section clockwise, as follows:¹³⁶

1. First Sermon
2. Parileyyaka Retreat
3. Gotama throwing the alms bowl into the river
4. Defeat of the Heretics
5. Descent from Tavatimsa Heaven
6. *Parinirvana* and the bier
7. Conception – Maya's dream
8. Buddha in *dhyana mudra*
9. missing

¹³³ *GPC*, 108.

¹³⁴ Luce preferred to call these large porticos "halls", probably because their function was also one of devotion, rather than being simply a gathering space.

¹³⁵ Most of the original images are now at the Bagan Museum. Competent replicas have been made out of lightweight material, coloured to look like stone.

¹³⁶ *OBEP*, 1:313.

10. Gotama seated under the bodhi tree

On the outer wall of the internal corridor the stone images of the Buddha are arranged in a repeating pattern – Buddha images seated in *dhyana mudra* with a predella below are interspersed with other images which vary little and do not have a predella. The images housed in the inner wall also sit in *dhyana mudra* and have predellas. These twenty-eight Buddhas represent Gotama and the previous twenty-seven Buddhas. The predellas contains a scene that "show(s) the future Gotama in his previous lives, receiving from them [kings, monks, ascetics or nagas] the prophecy of Buddhahood. The illustrations follow pretty closely the *Buddhavamsa*, *Khuddaka Nikāya*".¹³⁷ The latter contains an account of the previous Buddhas. Luce also notes some other images of life scenes which were present in the north-west corner of the outer corridor. These include the walking Buddha and the carrying of grass bundles to the bodhi tree.

The Naga-yon temple was richly decorated with wall paintings and glosses written in old Mon. As with the Pahto-tha-mya the paintings reflect an ever growing knowledge of the Theravada canon. Here the glosses have been translated and identified as representing the thirty-four *suttas* of the *Digha Nikaya*, followed by the *Majjhima Nikaya*. While the doctrinal accuracy of these *suttas* can be confirmed, other paintings which illustrate life events are, according to Luce, muddled. He takes this as an indication that while Kyanzitttha's revision of the *Tipitaka* had made good progress with the early *nikayas*, the later events of the Buddha's life were still not widely known.¹³⁸

The general appearance of the stone images is clearly different from the earlier Anawrahta type. As seen in the Pahto-tha-mya figures, there is a shift away from the stern austerity of images made during Anawrahta's reign. Now, the overall appearance is one of strength accompanied by softness, reflecting the Buddha's compassionate nature. Some of the figures can be identified as later replacements due to their stylistic associations. The narrative figures in the entrance vestibule are in varying degrees of disrepair. Of the nine images, seven have predellas while the standing Buddha rests on a stepped pedestal throne and one seated image sits on a double lotus throne. There is enough

¹³⁷ *OBEP*, 1:314.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:315.

significant variation in depictions of the Buddha to suggest that not all are original images.

The scene of the First Sermon is stylistically of the period (fig.138). The Buddha sits in *dharmacakra mudra*. The robe is, as is always the case in Bagan when depicting the teaching *mudra*, over both shoulders. The hem of the robe cascades over the wrists and folds around the ankles. A sharp delineation along the underside of the forearm accentuates the cloth which also falls from the elbow to the thighs. The feet are crossed in *padmasana*. The crossed legs form a flattened "v" above the predella. The soles are rounded with gently projecting heels while the toes are splayed outwards, the big toe prominent. The line of the robe across the neck runs parallel to the neck rings. The ears touch the shoulders between the lowest neck ring and the line of the robe. Following the trend set by images at Pahto-tha-mya, the face is heart-shaped with a small chin and short, full pursed lips curled up in a gentle smile. Again the nostrils and outer edge of the lips fall within the same parallel vertical lines. The lines of the gently arched eyebrows remain continuous with the bridge of the nose which has a flattened top. The downcast eyes are slightly bulbous, the lower lid drawing up and out. The curve of the hair line is sharper than earlier examples, coming to a point in the centre of the forehead. However, this may be a later repair as half of the reredo is damaged. The *usnisha* and flame extension are stylistically in character with the image but are rather sharp in comparison with the majority of figures and may also have been a later repair. The hands meet at chest height over a softly rounded torso. The stomach is very gently rounded and a single incised line tracing the curve of the pelvis accentuates the translucency of the clothing.

The reredo features an architectural frame with *hamsa* birds disgorging strings of beads or floral garlands.¹³⁹ Behind this are remnants of a foliate structure that could be the bodhi tree. The rim of the reredo remains perfectly plain. The predella has a simple rim and contains relief carvings of two deer and four kneeling figures. The two figures on the right of the Buddha have their right hands across their chests and their left hands raised. They are identified by

¹³⁹ The *hamsa* bird is a sacred goose. The *hamsa* is the symbol for the kingdom of Bago, and a pair of *hamsa* are associated with Bago's founding legend. The *hamsa* is also associated with Hindu lore, being the vehicle of Brahma.

Luce as *Pancavaggiya*. *Pancavaggiya* is the name given to the five monks with whom Gotama had practised austerities. The monks, who left Gotama after he broke his extreme fasting, rejoined him after the attainment of Buddhahood.¹⁴⁰ They face two figures of Mahabrahma, identified by their three faces.¹⁴¹ The presence of Brahmas at the First Sermon relates to the story when Gotama hesitated to preach his doctrine after attaining Enlightenment, Brahma Sahampati visited him and begged him to become a teaching Buddha "for the welfare of the world".¹⁴² This scene is well crafted: the monks have smooth hair caps and the three faces of Brahma clearly visible, likewise the deer which have raised up their heads to look at the Buddha.

The depiction of the Buddha at Parileyyaka Forest is in standard form with the Buddha seated in *pralambanasana*, an elephant at his right foot and a monkey at his left (fig.139). Unusually there is also a figure of a monk placed above the elephant. While the other side is damaged, in the equivalent image at the Ananda temple there is a monk on each side of Gotama (see fig.170). Perhaps this is meant to depict the asking of forgiveness by the monks who could not resolve their petty squabbles and were the reason for the Buddha retreating to the forest. The face of the Buddha has been obliterated and the reredo is bare and appears repaired. What remains of the Buddha shows him seated with his outer robes clinging around the ankles in simple gentle folds. The fold of the robe across his chest is also visible. The torso is again slightly thicker than those of Anawrahta's time, the waist wider and the body proportionally a little shorter.

The scene of Gotama throwing the golden bowl into the river heralding his arrival to the naga king is a later addition (fig.140). The Buddha displays the typical shortened squat characteristics of late 12th–early 13th century figures. There are other images in this style at the Naga-yon suggesting that there was an incident, probably an earthquake, in the late 1100s that necessitated the replacement of a number of sculptures. The next image, showing the Defeat of the Heretics, is stylistically very similar to the scene of the First Sermon but may

¹⁴⁰ The monks' names are Koṇḍanna (Anna-Kondanna), Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji. See Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, 2:104.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 2:336-7. Mahabrahmas live in the highest level of the 20 Brahmaloḥa heavens, the highest of the celestial worlds.

¹⁴² Ibid., 2:338.

also be a later addition (fig.141). The proportions differ, with the elbows almost touching the knees and a much squarer face.

The *usnisha* and flame are also more rigid than in the first image, and the hands are larger and not as well moulded. The feet are more slab-like, lacking the rounding seen earlier. The relief carving in the reredo is almost identical to the first figure – perhaps the Buddha image in this sculpture was repaired at some stage in a style to imitate the original images. The scene in the predella appears consistent with the first image and is probably original. It depicts an animated illustration of the naked ascetics trying to fly, with Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, and two others, possibly Mallika, the king's chief consort, and her maid with their hands in prayer. Pasenadi was a fervent follower of the Buddha and defended any criticisms towards the teachings, hence his ardent efforts to convert those who did not believe the Buddha's position as an Enlightened being. The figures of the heretics are lively, with two trying to fly, and the third looking downcast as if recognising his inferiority to Gotama.

Of the remaining entrance vestibule images, perhaps only the depictions identified as Brahma Sahampati's request and Gotama seated under the bodhi tree are original (fig.142, fig.143). The image of the descent from Tavatimsa heaven is most likely a later reproduction (fig.144). The exaggerated contours of the body, with very narrow waist, full hips and thighs and clinging transparent robe is in the general style of early Bagan figures, but overdone. The image of Brahma Sahampati's request has had repairs to the flame and possibly *usnisha* as well. Otherwise the image is typical of the serene gently rounded Buddha figures of the period. The scene has been identified through the figures in the predella where six Brahmas hold their hands high in prayer, beseeching the Buddha to teach his doctrine. The presence of six Brahmas, rather than Sahampati alone, emphasises the association of the image with the Brahmaloaka realm.

The remaining two images show Maya's Dream and the *Parinirvana* (fig.145, fig.146). Both images depict the central figure lying on its right side, the head propped up by the right hand. The basic arrangement is the same in each image. Maya and Gotama are both lying on a flat bed, their bodies curved in identical poses. They are framed within a rectangular relief which expands to

form a halo around the head. The scene of Maya's dream is damaged, with only patchy traces of Maya's costume visible. The predella is also damaged but it is possible to discern the figures of the four maharajas, each with a sword on their shoulders. Above her is the depiction of her dream where the elephant enters her right side. The animal is supported by the queens of the four mahārājas who carry lotus buds.¹⁴³ Overhead, in the predella, is a canopy to protect her.

In the scene of the *Parinirvana* the four Malla princes are seen below the death bed, between the two ornately carved legs of the bed (fig.146). Above are five monks and at each end of the bed there is a bodhi tree. The architectural structure behind represents the funeral pyre, and there are *stupas* at each corner. Two lions and a *stupa* are placed at the very top of the predella.

Although these images represent most of the Eight Great Events, missing is the Taming of Nalagiri elephant, and the Miracle of the Double. As a number of these images have undergone repair and one is missing, it is possible that the set would have originally consisted of ten out of fifteen scenes taken from an expanded set as seen in the Ananda temple halls. These scenes are repeated in each of the Ananda vestibules and depict the following:

1. Defeat of the heretics
2. Buddha in *dhyana* or *bhumisparsa mudra*
3. Descent from Tavatimsa
4. Nativity

5. Parinirvana
6. First Sermon
7. First sitting under the bodhi tree
8. Buddha at Ratanagara
9. Maya's Dream
10. Standing Buddha
11. Walking Buddha
12. Sujana, Punna and goat – offering of rice milk

¹⁴³ *OBEP*, 1:156.

13. Buddha in *dharmacakra mudra*
14. Bimbisara donates Veluvana
15. Tonsure, Parileyyaka, Naligiri, Alavaka Yakkha (one of each)

At the Naga-yon, images of life scenes were also displayed in niches along the outer wall of the ambulatory corridor. Of the four images of life scenes remaining, only the scene of the future Buddha seated with Sujata and two goats in the predella, is clearly contemporary with the building (fig.147). The remaining three figures all of which depict the standing Buddha, are either in the squatter style of the late Bagan period, or have been repaired in a similar style to the original. One image, which is a mix of original and repair displays exceptional fine carving of the robe, asymmetrically arranged to indicate that the Buddha is walking while the feet are firmly fixed to the ground. This section is original while the face appears to have been repaired (fig.148). The robe clings to the Buddha's legs and falls gracefully in curves. Later figures tend to portray the robe without this additional feeling of movement: the asymmetry remains but the clothing uniformly lacks any other dynamic qualities which are present here. The pendant right arm hangs down almost reaching the knee. The fingers are rather plump and splayed a little, in the same fashion as the toes and feet. This is possibly the artisan's interpretation of webbed fingers and toes which are two of the marks of the great man (see Appendix).¹⁴⁴

The remaining sculptures in the Naga-yon are those of the twenty-eight Buddhas. As mentioned above, each Buddha is identified by the accompanying imagery, most of which appears in the predella. Apart from one image, which shows Buddha Dipankara standing with the future Gotama Buddha prostrate at his feet, all of the figures depict a seated Buddha in *dhyana mudra* with reredo behind and predella below. The Buddhas are made distinct by differing reredos. While each Buddha is associated with a different tree, here the architectural framework is different for each Buddha. Examination of the images also shows that while there is uniformity in the sculpting of the torso each face is individual. This is clearly a deliberate intention. The face shape varies from the "heart-shaped" type (fig.149) through to a rounder, broader style (fig.150). The wave of

¹⁴⁴ See also Jitendra Nath Banerjee, "The Webbed Fingers of the Buddha," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 6, no.4 (1930):717-727.

the hair curls across the forehead also range from pointed (fig.151) to an almost straight line (fig.152).

The Naga-yon narrative sculptures exhibit a more complete and sophisticated rendering of the life scenes than those at the Kyauk-ku-umin which predate the Naga-yon images by about fifteen years. The inclusion of the twenty-eight Buddhas indicates that knowledge of the *Tipitaka* was rapidly expanding and supports the legendary belief that Kyanzittha actively encouraged a review of the Pali canon during his reign. These figures show a stylistic shift away from the austere Anawrahta type Buddha images, the trend now moving towards a softer, more compassionate image. This trend continues throughout Kyanzittha's reign.

Abe-ya-dana-hpaya (no.1202)

The *GPC* refers to Kyanzittha's four wives – Abe-ya-dana, Hkin-u, Hkintan and Thambula.¹⁴⁵ The practice of keeping four chief consorts along with numerous concubines was part of the court system at Bagan. Abe-ya-dana's daughter, Shweinthei, who was favoured by Kyanzittha, gave birth to the next king, Alaungsithu.¹⁴⁶ Abe-ya-dana was Kyanzittha's chief queen. Her influence is often hinted at, and her origins are a source of legends.¹⁴⁷ One theory, favoured by Luce, identified her as a princess from East Bengal.¹⁴⁸ He supports his theory by drawing on the *GPC* which tells how, after his flight to Kyaukse, before becoming king and while still considered a rebel against Anawrahta, Kyanzittha was in a rather desperate situation. Before committing his troops to further battle he ordered magical rites be performed, evoking the god Revatna, son of Surya the sun god. The description in the *GPC* suggests it was the Patikkara purification ritual which has its origins in India. This act is at odds with Kyanzittha being a devout Buddhist. However, Luce explains it as being a

¹⁴⁵ *GPC*, 105.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 105. Shwe-einthei was seduced by the prince of Pateikkara. Kyanzittha had put Shwe-einthei in a separate palace "with a single post". The prince came to her, magically flying through the air with a gem held between his teeth. Once Kyanzittha heard of the illicit liaison he was torn between betrothing his daughter to the prince, who was of their enemy, the Kala people, or Sawyun, King Anawrahta's grandson. He chose the latter, making him his heir. However, after the birth of his grandson, Alaungsithu, Kyanzittha by-passed Sawyun and declared Alaunsithu would be his heir.

¹⁴⁷ This topic was the subject of my unpublished paper, "Queen Abeyadana and her Temple" presented at the *International Women in Asia Conference*, held at the Australian National University in 2000.

¹⁴⁸ *OBEP*, 1:61.

suggestion from Abe-ya-dana who was herself familiar with these rites and recognised it as a means of uniting the troops who were themselves still not converted Buddhists but believed in the power of such magic. This would concur with her being of East Bengali origin. There is other evidence of Kyanzittha having attachments to India as he is believed to have sent money and probably workers as well, to help restore the Vajrasana temple at Bodhgaya in India.

The Abe-ya-dana temple was built around the same time or immediately after the Naga-yon (c.1090). It is situated to the north-west of the Naga-yon, the two temples now separated by the road linking Old Bagan and New Bagan (fig.153, fig.154).¹⁴⁹ A 15th-16th century text states the temple was the good work of the great queen, beloved wife of *Kyancacsā* [Kyanzittha]" and suggests a long-standing tradition surrounds the origins of this unique temple.¹⁵⁰ The Abe-ya-dana holds a crucial role in the art historical development of Bagan principally because of its extraordinary frescoes, the likes of which are not seen elsewhere. The Abe-ya-dana temple is believed to have been built under Queen Abe-ya-dana's patronage. It is of the style of early Bagan temples, with perforated stone windows that allow little light to penetrate the interior. It has a portico, ambulatory corridor and central shrine. It is similar in floor plan to the Naga-yon

and shares the same orientation, but overall is smaller. The temple is surrounded by a low stone wall. Strachan suggests that the Abe-ya-dana may predate the Naga-yon, because of the style of the exterior stucco decorations and the presence of overt Brahmanical and tantric imagery on the interior. He assumes that the absence of highly decorative external frescoes on the Abe-ya-dana indicates it was made at a "less advanced" architectural stage. The premise that decoration becomes more elaborate with time before reaching a period of excess from which it deteriorates has been used to develop chronological frameworks for Buddhist art in Thailand and Cambodia, but it is a theory which is controversial.¹⁵¹ In fact, Strachan appears to contradict himself

¹⁴⁹ Pichard no.1202.

¹⁵⁰ *OBEP* 1:321. Luce also notes references to Abeyadana and a temple being built in her name in U Kala's chronicle.

¹⁵¹ For a good example of this methodology see Subhadradis Diskul, *Hindu Gods at Sukhodaya* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1990).

as he acknowledges the interior temple paintings are far more elaborate than those found in the Naga-yon but does not see this as a reason for dating it later. On one hand he places the Abe-ya-dana before the Naga-yon as the Abe-ya-dana does not have such extensive stucco works on the exterior. On the other he acknowledges that the interior frescoes in the Abe-ya-dana are far more elaborate than those in the Naga-yon, but because of their subject matter suggests they were earlier as they are "less" Theravadin.¹⁵²

Luce places the temple date as slightly after the Naga-yon. His reaction to the remarkable paintings found on the interior walls of the temple was to suggest that someone who was familiar with a different religious tradition, namely Queen Abe-ya-dana herself, commissioned them. The tantric Mahayana emphasis clearly seen in the interior frescos and decorations indicates the temple was not built for use by a devout follower of the Theravada school. It is consistent, however, with imagery favoured by a follower of Mahayana Buddhism. Again, the high level of workmanship and iconographic correctness of the imagery could only have been achieved by workmen familiar with this style, in this case, these workmen may have been from East Bengal, Abe-ya-dana's proposed place of origin.

The Mahayana connection was determined through study of the wall paintings which are unlike any others at Bagan. There are many images of Mahayana gods arranged in bands that extend around the exterior walls of the temple's internal corridor. Maung Mya describes the first row of paintings as follows:

...non-tāntric in form; each have one face and two arms, and the attributes they carry in their hands are lances, clubs, *chakras*, daggers in various shapes, *vajras*, swords and books. The images in the middle row are seated in the *lalita-mudrā* on double lotuses with right leg pendant and the foot resting on a lotus the stem of which is attached to the seat. They are also in non-tāntric form with two arms and a face.In the upper row the images are standing on lotuses with their left hands raised and holding a ring. The other hand is brought to the breast and is holding either a spear, a *khadga*, or a double trident. They are devoid of any legend and, in the absence of local tradition, it is difficult to identify them. If, however, we

¹⁵² Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture*, 59-60.

judge by the attributes in their hands they may be identified with *Vajrapāṇi*, *Padmapāṇi*, *Avalokitesvara* and *Mañjuśrī* though it is quite possible that all of them represent Avalokitesvara in his various forms.¹⁵³

Other images are tantric in nature and include a six-armed goddess seated on a lotus, another goddess holding snakes, a god with fangs, another holding a human skin, and figures of Ganesha, Siva, Brahma and Visnu. However, as well as Mahayana imagery, Theravada orthodoxy is presented in the form of wall paintings illustrating the *jatakas*. The entrance vestibule has no niches to house images. Rather, the entire area was originally painted with *jataka* scenes painted in eight tiers.¹⁵⁴ On the other hand the internal corridor has seventy niches that would have contained images of the Buddha. The two niches that flank the central shrine image are designed to house a scene of the *Parinirvana* and Maya's Dream in a horizontal format. Unfortunately, nearly all of the original imagery has been lost.

It is likely the seventy niches housed life scenes similar to those found at the Naga-yon, as well as scenes of the Buddha in *dhyana* and *dharmacakra mudra*. Luce remarks that, of the few remaining images, most are "small, modern and conventional".¹⁵⁵ He illustrates two earth-touching Buddhas which are probably original (fig.155, fig.156). While the overall appearance is similar to those found at the Naga-yon, the quality of the carving, particularly that seen on the lotus throne bases, is stiff. Likewise, the torsos are not as rounded and narrow-waisted as those at the Naga-yon, and the shoulders are not as proportionally wide or strong while the neck is also shorter. The decorative treatment of the shoulder robe (fig.156) is very stiffly carved although it bears similarity to an example in the Naga-yon (fig.157). The Buddha's hand is in the style of contemporaneous figures, being plump fingered with a distinct thumb and uneven fingers, the middle digit touching the lotus throne. In the other example (fig.155) the depiction is less fluid, although, given the damage to the reredo, it is possible most of this image has been restored.

While these two sculptures are "in the style of" Kyanzitha's reign, the two central shrine figures at the Abe-ya-dana are more problematic. Luce does not

¹⁵³ Maung Mya, "Excavations in Burma", *ASI* (1930-31):181-182.

¹⁵⁴ For a complete listing see *OBEP*, 1:323-4.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:324.

question their authenticity as the original images. There are a number of stylistic conventions, however, that suggest these are later figures. The trend towards squatter forms which characterise later Buddha images of the 11th century is apparent in these two sculptures. This is seen in the main image and a figure that is assumed to represent the queen (fig.158, fig.159). The figure kneels at the left side of the Buddha with hands held together in prayer. Made of brick and plaster the detailing of the sculpture has been lost. However, it is possible to discern shortening of the neck and rounding of the face. The face displays a gentle countenance with downcast eyes and lips curved upwards in a beatific smile. As befitting a royal personage the reredo is throne-like, similar to those that surround the Buddha images. A figure hovers over the right shoulder of the queen. The rounded hair cap is, again, usually associated with later Bagan period images. Another figure was placed on the right side of the central images but only traces remain.¹⁵⁶ Perhaps it was a figure of the king, whose image does appear in the Ananda temple. If so, these are the only known images of royal personages at Bagan.

The central Buddha image is seated on a waisted throne which has animal figures, probably lions, carved into the horizontal bands (fig.158). The Buddha is seated in *bhumisparsa mudra* on a slim double lotus throne. The feet have both soles facing upwards. The soles are more slab-like than other images on the period which are contoured. There is only a minimal "v" formed by the crossed legs but this is similar to some of the figures in the Naga-yon and is a development of the period. The torso lacks dynamism. It is flatly moulded with only a minimally tapered waist. The robe end which falls across the left shoulder extends down to the hand. Typically, images of the period show the robe end extending no further than about half way down the front of the chest. Also, the line of the robe crosses the chest in a single curve rather than sweeping in a dynamic movement as is a feature of Naga-yon imagery (for example, fig.151). The upper arms are bulky. The left hand is in *dhyana mudra* and is, like the feet, quite slab-like. One of the obvious differences from other figures of the period is the appearance of even-length fingers on the right earth-touching hand. This

has not yet been observed in the early Bagan period. The hand is very ponderous and disproportionably large, a device often used to emphasise the earth-touching action. In this example, however, the effect is very obvious, rather than the more subtle lengthening of the arm seen in the Anawrahta images.

Even if the hand had been repaired at a later date, the face also displays characteristics that are not generally associated with Kyanzitha-type images. While the neck rings are still visible, there is definite shortening. The ears rest on the shoulders rather than just touching them. The face is square rather than rounded and the line of the hair curls across the forehead forms an even curve, rather than dipping in the centre. The lips, while still slightly pursed, extend past the outer edges of the nose. The arched eyebrows are incised rather than being carved in relief as is seen in the images at the Naga-yon. There is a solidity across the upper chest and shoulders which conveys a heaviness to the image, a contrast to the more elegant images of the Naga-yon.

The absence of most of the original sculptural imagery is puzzling. Perhaps a later ruler decided the tantric frescoes were not compatible with Theravada Buddhist worship and had the sculptures removed, but they may have been replaced at a later date. Perhaps they were considered stylistically too close to those of Pala and Mahayana imagery and removed. Intriguingly, the niches are of a size that would house some of the bronze images of the Buddha which occasionally appear for sale in the western market. These bronze figures, including life scenes and images of the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra*, are not recorded in Luce's work and their origins are a mystery. Most substantial bronze images extant have been found in relic chambers but these do not include sculptures illustrating life scenes. Works of this type would have been made to be visible inside temples. They would also have been sought after by early western visitors to Bagan and may have been removed late in the 1800s though there are no references to them. It is possible many were melted down for their

¹⁵⁶ Strachan hypothesises that the two figures were meant to represent Mogallana and Sariputta, the Buddha's chief disciples due to the "monk-like" appearance of the figures. However, this triad does not appear until later in Burmese art. It is also possible the other figure may have been Kyanzitha – an image of the king is placed in the Ananda temple. Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture*, 61.

metal and replaced by stone figures. All in all, the nature of the original Buddhist sculptures housed in the Abe-ya-dana remains largely a mystery.

Ananda-gu-hpaya-gyi (no.2171)

While the Abe-ya-dana raises many questions regarding its Buddhist imagery, the Ananda temple provides an abundance of images to the point of excess. The Ananda is Kyaukse's masterpiece (fig.160, fig.161).¹⁵⁷ While not the largest temple at Bagan it is the most visited and venerated by Buddhists, and without doubt the most impressive.¹⁵⁸ Kept relatively intact over the centuries the Ananda is also the major storehouse of Bagan period Buddhist sculpture, containing over 1500 images. The Ananda was built late in Kyaukse's reign and completed around 1105 CE. Situated within a large compound, the temple has four entrances, the main entrance facing west towards the old city gates. On entering from any direction visitors find themselves in a large vestibule or hall. In each hall there are sixteen sculptures illustrating scenes from the Buddha's life.

As well as the Eight Scenes there are images showing Sujata's offering of rice milk, the Buddha attended by Brahma and Indra, the Tonsure, the Buddha standing with hands raised to his chest, the Buddha preaching (not the first sermon) and possibly a scene of week four under the Bodhi tree after Enlightenment, one of the Visit to King Bimbisara and possibly an image of the Defeat of the Heretics under the mango tree.¹⁵⁹

Two large images of *bodhisattvas* flank the entrance to each central shrine corridor (fig.162). There are two internal corridors each with niches containing images extending from floor to ceiling on both the internal and external walls. Each central shrine has niches extending towards the ceiling on both the left and right sides of each Buddha. As at the Shwe-zigon, there are colossal images of the four Buddhas of the current *kalpa* starting from Gotama on the

¹⁵⁷ Coëdes suggests that the Ananda may have been modeled on the temple of Udayagiri in Orissa or perhaps the temple of Paharpur in northern Bengal. He also states that the architect and a child were buried alive in the Ananda to act as guardian spirits, in 1090. However, this is not referred to in other sources and must be treated with skepticism. Buddhism valued life and burying subjects alive within the structure would have been totally against the religion's tenets. See Coëdes, *Indianised States*, chapter 10.

¹⁵⁸ This opinion was shared by Yule who wrote during his visit in 1855, "In some respects the most remarkable of the great temples, and that which is still the most frequented as a place of worship, is the Ananda." Yule, *Mission to Ava*, 36.

¹⁵⁹ *OBEP*, 1:365. These descriptions are based on Luce's interpretations of the scenes.

western side (fig.163), Kakusanda in the north (fig.164), Konagamana in the east (fig.165) and Kassapa in the south (fig.166).¹⁶⁰ Each is flanked by figures of their respective disciples, except the image of Gotama which is flanked by sculptures of Kyanzittha and Shin Arahan (fig.167).

After passing through the entrance hall, the devotee turns left into the first ambulatory corridor. The lower two rows of images on the external wall of the internal corridor contain sculptures that depict the narrative of the Gotama Buddha's last life on earth. They start from the time in Tushita heaven when the gods asked Gotama to be born on earth for the last time, and finish with the attainment of Enlightenment. These images are arranged in niches, five on each side of the four central Buddha images which are placed facing north, south, east and west, a total of eighty narrative scenes. Two ambulations are required to read the imagery. The niches on the internal wall house images of the Buddha in *bhumisparsa*, *abhaya* and *dharmacakra mudra*, with a few unusual images as well, such as the Buddha with no *usnisha* and another with the left hand in *bhumisparsa mudra* and the right hand held up to the breast. Extending almost to the ceiling above the lower two rows of sculptures on both the internal and external walls are multiple niches containing images of the Buddha in the classic three *mudras* listed above. On entering the internal corridor, the lower two rows of niches house more devotional images with the Buddha in either *bhumisparsa* or *dharmacakra mudra* with the odd exception. There are smaller niches in the cross passages, some containing damaged sculptures while others are empty, and it is now difficult to be certain what the original figures for these spaces were.

Stylistically, all figures are of a similar type, with the exception of the large central shrine images which will be discussed separately. Of the remaining sculptures, those in the entrance halls are the largest, measuring over one metre in height. Those in the internal corridors range in height from approximately one metre, and decrease in size as they are placed in higher niches. The smaller images are approximately thirty centimetres tall. Almost all

of the stone sculptures have been lacquered and gilded, some have been resurfaced very recently (fig.168). Of his visit to Bagan in 1855, Yule noted in his diary that "in the galleries or corridors running round the building, disposed in niches along the massive walls, at regular distances apart, are numerous images of Gautama, and sculptured groups of figures illustrating particular events of his life. These have been covered over with a substance resembling *thitsee* (black gum resin) and vermillion".¹⁶¹ This remains a common technique of lacquering the images, and they are usually gilded afterwards. The figures in the Ananda halls are generally beautifully crafted and the exceptions are probably later additions.¹⁶²

A typical example of one of the many images seated in *dharmacakra mudra* in the internal corridor depicts the Buddha with his hands raised to chest height, his robe covering both shoulders (fig.169). The robe is clearly delineated where it crosses the neck, wrists and ankles, and where it falls down the side of the body. Its translucent character is enhanced by the visibility of the nipples, umbilicus and gentle swelling of the stomach. The legs are crossed with both soles facing upwards, the toes individually crafted. The torso is slim waisted with a strong chest and broad shoulders. The neck is of average length and the ears just touch the shoulders. The face falls between "heart-shaped" and "oval". The hair curl line dips into a modest peak in the centre of the forehead. The rounded *usnisha* is topped with a small flame extension which is flat at the front and rounded forwards from the back. Each eyebrow line is continuous with the nose where they form two parallel lines outlining the nose bridge. The full lips are gently pursed and curled upwards in a slight smile.

The Buddha is seated on a narrow double lotus throne.¹⁶³ The predella, which appeared in sculptures at the Naga-yon, is divided evenly into two halves with each half showing a pair of devotees. The reredo behind the Buddha is carved

¹⁶⁰ Yule notes that when Phayre reported on the images in the mid 1800s he misidentified their position. "The image to the east is the Buddha *Kankathan* [Kakusanda], made of a sweet scented wood called Dan-tsa-goo. To the west is *Ka-thaba* [Kassapa], made of brass. To the north *Gautama* [Gotama], of fir; to the south *Ganno-goon* [Konagamana], of jasmine wood. Whatever the original material of these images may have been, it appears now that the outer coating of each is of plaster, richly gilt over." Yule, *Mission to Ava*, 39.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶² As many of the sculptures are now protected by metal grills it is difficult to obtain good photographs though I have photographed some without this intrusion and these are included.

in low relief. The Buddha is framed by a temple-like surround with a halo extension that tapers upwards in a shape resembling a bodhi leaf. More expertly crafted than the Naga-yon temple images, the overall appearance is lighter and less cumbersome than the earlier sculptures, a trend which extends throughout the Ananda temple. Clearly the artisans were either more practised by the time the Ananda was commissioned, or perhaps Kyanzittha was also more demanding, having gained greater knowledge of Buddhism and possibly of Buddhist temple architecture in other places. This image is typical of the many that line the interior wall of the exterior corridor, as well as both walls of the interior corridor.

The larger images in the halls have similar characteristics though the background carving is usually more elaborate. The Buddha is always framed within a low relief architectural surround with the bodhi tree above. This is demonstrated in a depiction of the Buddha in Parileyyaka forest (fig.170). Scenes relating to the Enlightenment show the Buddha on a stepped pedestal throne without the lotus base. He sits on a carpet which extends over the front of the pedestal (fig.171) – this should not be confused with an extension of the Buddha's robe. In this example the right hand crosses the lower leg over the upper third of the shin. The webbed fingers are of uneven length and the middle finger touches the pedestal throne.¹⁶⁴ Unlike the figures of Anawrahta's reign the earth-touching arm does not dominate the sculpture. The four sculptures representing this same scene, with the Buddha flanked by Indra and Brahma, were crafted by different artisans (fig.171, fig.172, fig.173, fig.174). While the fundamental construction of the scene remains constant – that is, the earth touching Buddha sits with legs crossed and both soles facing upwards, flanked by Indra and Brahma and with decorative reredo and bodhi tree behind – each sculpture is different. Indra and Brahma are placed in slightly different attitudes in each image. Indra's robes and hand position holding the conch is slightly altered in each figure. Likewise Brahma's hand position on the umbrella shows four variations, and the top of the umbrella is also shown in four different ways. The throne backs, attitude of the *hamsa* birds and the bodhi tree are also

¹⁶³ The lower band of the lotus base is barely visible due to the angle of the photograph. This image is located in a niche positioned above eye level.

variables. The pattern of the robe as it crosses the Buddha's shoulder is different in each case.

This also applies to each set of four figures that represent the same scene and comparisons and contrasts can be made for all of the images found in the entrance halls. While all figures ostensibly appear to look the same, they are, in fact, all different. Accurate assessment is complicated by the number of repairs made to a number of sculptures. In particular many sections of the reredos have been repaired as have some of the sculpture's faces and limb extremities. Indeed, others may well be complete replacements. For example, the crudeness of the carving in fig.173 is clearly out of step with the majority of the sculptures.

The same dilemma applies when undertaking an analysis of the images found within the temple proper. Amongst the repetitive devotional scenes no two images are identical and the hands of individual artisans are clearly visible. This is not to suggest that there were as many artisans as sculptures. Rather, it reveals an atmosphere where artisans had control over their work. As long as the sculptures were of a basic similar composition the artisan could work their own individual elements. The carving of the reredos and predellas would have provided excellent training opportunities for apprentice stonemasons who were to be kept very busy in the ensuing years as the building program at Bagan expanded rapidly. This diversity also shows that it was still a learning period for the Burmans. Standardisation of Buddhist imagery was not yet a formalised concept. The Ananda images were the first large scale attempt at Buddhist education for the local populace who visited the temple. A detailed analysis of the Ananda imagery in the context of its religious origins follows in Chapter 6.

While there is great individuality in the Ananda sculptures, only the most skilled artisans were responsible for creating the eighty narrative scenes. Within these sculptures the facial appearance of the Buddha remains fairly constant, the exceptions being some images that are clearly later replacements (see figs.194-233). Some trends emerge but key incongruencies are also highlighted. The robe end draped over the Buddha's shoulder is crafted in many different ways.

¹⁶⁴ Another example illustrated by Luce has had repairs to the right hand, and the fingers are now of even length, a characteristic that became popular later in the Bagan period and remains

There is absolutely no consistency in this element. Likewise, some images have an obvious *urna* and others do not. The patterning along the lower borders of the robe in standing images also varies substantially. The shape of the lotus throne changes as does the manner in which the bodhi tree is depicted. The detailing in the reredo is extremely variable as is the size of the predella when present.

In contrast, the consistencies include the shape of the hairline across the forehead and the form of the *usnisha* and flame finial. The ear lobes touch the shoulders, both nipples are always visible as are the neck rings. The robe of each seated figure has a gather of the lower edge that fans out from the point where the robe crosses the ankles. In earth touching images the fall of the hand over the shin is in the same position, across the upper third of the tibia. Fingers are of unequal length and reach down to touch whatever pedestal the Buddha is seated on. Generally the images are very successful in capturing the qualities of strength and compassion which are essential elements of Buddhist teachings.

Apart from some images of narrative scenes that may be later inclusions, housed in the niches around each central shrine and in the cross passages, most of the remaining sculptures are devotional. The quality of these figures is more variable than those of the narrative series. Still well crafted they do not always convey the same level of gravitas as do the narrative scenes. The main differences occur in the depiction of the faces. There are subtle differences between each image and one must wonder if this is deliberate and whether each represents a past Buddha.¹⁶⁵

There are thirty-two seated sculptures of the Buddha evenly spaced in each of the lower two rows of niches lining the inner wall of the outer corridor making a total of sixty-four. Of these, thirty-three depict the Buddha in *dharmacakra mudra* and twenty-six in *bhumisparsa mudra*. There are three which show the left hand earth touching while the right is held across the chest.¹⁶⁶ Another two figures show the left hand resting in the lap in a single *dhyana mudra* with the

the usual depiction today. *OBEP*, 3:pl.304b.

¹⁶⁵ The images are repetitive, the lower two rows of the internal walls of the external corridor the both walls of the internal corridor containing the principal images, these being in clear line of sight. The upper images are smaller and of variable quality though it is virtually impossible to view those in the uppermost niches.

right hand elevated to the chest and fingers curled possibly in a manner similar to a single *dharmacakra mudra*. Their placement appears random and one cannot be certain that their current positions are the original ones. However, the two images with left hand earth touching and right placed across the chest are both in parallel positions, placed in the north and south corridors, in the third niche from the eastern corner. The other "pair" is placed in the second row of images in the western corridor, one nearest the southern end, the other in the niche nearest Gotama Buddha's right hand. These images have no *usnisha* and their role in the scheme of the whole series is unclear.

All but two other images have a predella below. The scenes in the predella are also repetitive, varying from four monks to depictions of kings and devas, all kneeling with their hands in prayer. No doubt they reflect the educative role of the Ananda, reinforcing the importance of the Buddha as venerated monks, gods and kings all bow to the Buddha's superior knowledge. Some contain figures of monks and women, one possibly represents a king and queen or royal personages. The scene may have been chosen by an individual donor.

A similar pattern is seen in the images found in the internal corridor though there are no aberrant scenes. The two lower rows of images on the external wall of the inner corridor include twenty-five images in *bhumisparsa mudra*, twenty-two in *dharmacakra mudra* and one damaged sculpture. The sculptures are symmetrically arranged with six niches in each row in each corridor, divided by the central shrine. The inner walls have the same number of niches in the lower two rows – thirty-eight figures are in *bhumisparsa mudra*, two in *dharmacakra mudra* (one is a substitute sculpture), one in *dhyana mudra* and seven are missing from the second row. These sculptures do not have predellas.

The remaining sculptures are housed within the walls on either side of each central shrine. They are a mix of narrative scenes and devotional images including sculptures of the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra* accompanied by a predella containing images of the donors. As the scenes are so eclectic, ranging from the Tonsure through to images of the Buddha walking, it might be suggested that they are not all in their original location. However, the sculptures

¹⁶⁶ A third image in this position is located in the third row of the eastern corridor and in niche

are in hard-to-access locations at some height and it would be very difficult to replace them. Perhaps the donors chose the subject matter of these sculptures with a specific purpose in mind – they focus on symbols of renouncing royal status (Siddharta in his finery in his royal chariot, and the Tonsure) or accumulating merit (Sujata giving rice milk to the Buddha), both key aspects of the Buddha's life stories.

The four colossal central shrine images depicting a standing Buddha are around 9.4m tall. The image of Gotama which faces west was extensively repaired during the 18th century (fig.163). He is depicted with the right hand raised in *abhaya mudra* and the left held out with palm facing the ceiling, the elbow bent to form a right angle. This may not have been the original pose. The image of Konagamana was also rebuilt in the 18th century (fig.165). Presumably both images suffered damage from earthquake. Konagamana is shown with both arms pendant, an unusual posture. Luce only illustrates the Buddhas of the north, Kakusanda, and the south, Kassapa, presumably because they are largely original and in the style of the early Bagan period (fig.164, fig.166). Both figures display the slim waisted torso, small stomach bulge and broad rounded hips which are typical of the period. The robe clings to the body and the frilled hem crosses over the ankles. The hemline dips towards the centre. The feet are firmly placed symmetrically on a small double lotus throne. Each throne base is different as is the patterning along the hemline. The earlobes are clear of the shoulders in contrast to most of the smaller sculptures. The face of Kassapa Buddha is a delicate heart shape. The facial features are beautifully crafted giving the image a youthful compassionate expression. The face of Kakusanda Buddha is rounder and less engaging, the eyes being more sharply curved and broader. The large scale of the sculptures means they lose subtlety in their execution. The surfaces have been repeatedly re-gilded and lacquered over the centuries resulting in a flatness which detracts from the overall appearance of the image.

Two other sculptures of note are portraits of Kyanzitha and Shin Araham which flank Gotama Buddha (fig.167). Portrait sculptures are extremely rare and the images provide our only insight into the physical appearance of these two

closest to the northern end.

influential figures. Their sculptures take the place of Gotama's chief disciples, the other Buddhas being flanked by their respective chief monks.¹⁶⁷ The king is dressed in royal robes while Shin Arahan, with shaven head, wears a simple robe. Their facial features have been obscured over the centuries due to repeated gilding. However it is still possible to glimpse their individual characters, namely the haughtiness of the king and the quiet confidence of the monk. Their appearance together serves to strengthen the close relationship between the two most powerful and influential men of their day.

Kubyauk-nge Wetkyi-in (no.285)

Another large temple built in the Mon style, Kubyauk-nge Wetkyi-in is one of the earliest constructions to demonstrate a direct link between India and Bagan (fig.176, fig.177).¹⁶⁸ Kyanzittha had dispatched workers to help repair the Sri Vajrasana temple at Bodhgaya, the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment. Inscriptional evidence of Kyanzittha's great meritorious acts places this event some time around 1095.¹⁶⁹ On their return the artisans incorporated the Bodhgaya *sikhara* or spire into their own architectural designs. Temples became topped with a *sikhara* that consisted of multiple carved horizontal rows. Even though the Bodhgaya stupa shape had been known through its appearance on votive tablets since Anawrahta's time, it was not until the artisans had seen it for themselves that it apparently became integrated into Bagan architecture.

As became typical during Kyanzittha's reign the interior walls are decorated with a *jataka* series. Luce suggests that the absence of other glosses, except those referring to the *jatakas*, indicates a date in Kyanzittha's reign "before

¹⁶⁷ Gautama's chief disciples are Sariputta and Mogallana, Kakusanda – Vidhura and Sanjiva, Konagamana – Bhiyya and Uttara, Kassapa – Tissa and Bharadvaja. See *OBEP*, 1:371.

¹⁶⁸ Luce refers to this temple as Shwe Chaung Ku-byauk-ngé as it is on the east bank of Shwe Chaung river. It is located near the Wetkyi-in village, near Nyaung-U.

¹⁶⁹ Pichard tentatively dates the temple to the 12th century indicating it is possibly late 11th century or early 12th century, but he favours the 12th century. Strachan concurs with Luce and suggests a late 11th century date. Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture*, 76. There is ample evidence to support Kyanzittha's contact with Bodhgaya. Brown links the imagery of Bodhgaya to that of Burma and Thailand, noting that "The first record we have of an official South-East Asian contact with Bodhgaya was in the reign of the Pagan king Kyanzittha (r.c.1085-1113)". Brown, "Bodhgaya and South-East Asia" in *Bodhgaya: the site of Enlightenment* (Bombay: Marg Publications 1988): 106. Leoshko also describes the inscriptional references at Bodhgaya which link Kyanzittha to the site. Leoshko, "The Iconography of Buddhist Sculptures of the Pala and Sena Periods from Bodhgaya," PhD diss. (The Ohio State University, 1987), 53-56.

Kyanzittha's publishing of the Tipitaka had taken much effect".¹⁷⁰ There are remains of wonderfully decorative external friezes with a guardian god at each corner. Unfortunately most of the original interior images have been damaged or removed. Placed at the corners of the inner corridor were sculptures of the eight scenes. There are two large standing images near the entrance with "hands raised before the breast (Kyanzittha's favourite *mudra*)".¹⁷¹ Two large images of bodhisattvas placed in niches in the inner corridor flank the central image.

An earth-touching Buddha is found on the south of the main entrance, which face east, and on the north side of the inner wall of the corridor is a Buddha seated in *dharmacakra mudra*. The central shrine image, which was in badly damaged condition when Luce photographed it in the 1950s, is now fully rebuilt. It is flanked by two small figures identified by Luce as Sariputta and Mogallana.¹⁷² The only figurative illustration in Luce's tome from the Kubyauk-nge, a large standing Buddha flanked by two standing monks with hands held together across their abdomen, is consistent with images from this period (fig.178). The torso of the Buddha is slim waisted with a clinging robe which highlights the contours of the thighs. The robe crosses the front of the ankles in two bands indicating the under and outer robes. The feet are firmly fixed to the ground in parallel. The monks have smooth hair caps, representing shaven heads, and are, like the Buddha, framed within a halo carved into the reredo. All three figures appear to stand on small lotus bases. The only face remaining in reasonable repair is that of one of the monks. It is still heart-shaped though the neck appears to be slightly shortened and the ears touch the shoulders. The hairline curves gently across the forehead dipping down a little above the nose.

The outer walls on the north and south sides have five tiers of Buddha images extending towards the ceiling, a scaled down version of the Ananda temple. The corners of each wall are inset with niches that contained images of the eight life

¹⁷⁰ *OBEP*, 1:347.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1:349. While this is a popular *mudra* during Kyanzittha's reign, *dhyana* and *bhumisparsa* mudra were more commonly represented. Perhaps Luce infers *dharmacakra* mudra was Kyanzittha's favourite since it was never so popular after this time

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 1:349.

scenes, though even when Luce was recording his observations they were all in poor repair.¹⁷³

While outside the parameters of this study, it is noted that both the interior and exterior of the temple were ornately decorated. Only remnants remain but the interior walls were apparently completely covered in paintings of Buddha images, *jataka* stories and decorative motifs. On the exterior there are remains of elaborate and beautifully crafted stucco mouldings. This ornate style of decoration has a direct link to the extensive adornment of the Abe-ya-dana and suggests that the concept of complete temple decoration rapidly gained popular support after Abe-ya-dana was completed.

Kubyauk-gyi Myinkaba (no.1323)

The last major temple associated with Kyanzittha's reign is the Kubyauk-gyi Myinkaba. Completed in 1113, the year of Kyanzittha's death, the elaborate nature of the building indicates that construction must have started well in advance of his demise. Inscriptional evidence suggests the temple was built under the patronage of Kyanzittha's son, Prince Rajakumar who dedicated the temple to his father when Kyanzittha "fell sick unto death".¹⁷⁴ Kubyauk-gyi is a fitting edifice with which to conclude the stylistic overview of this period. The temple is located to the north of Myinkaba village, on the eastern side of the road between Old and New Bagan.¹⁷⁵

The temple shows some departure from the classic Mon type described by Luce. The structure is still fundamentally a central square with a rectangular entrance vestibule (fig.179, fig.180). Now, some more elaborate architectural features appear such as dominant corner stupas on the roof and an additional entrance porch. The Kubyauk-gyi Myinkaba features a tiered *sikhara* which from this time on became the preferred style at Bagan. The remains of stucco decoration on the temple's exterior show it was originally heavily adorned with expertly crafted designs, in particular the arches, corners and doorways. These stucco elements are amongst the best preserved at Bagan, along with those at

¹⁷³ *OBEP*, 1:349.

¹⁷⁴ Aung Thaw, *Historical Sites*, 62. See also *OBEP*, 1:373. The temple's origins and study of the interior *jataka* illustrations has been well documented. See Luce and Ba Shin, "Pagan Myinkaba Kubyauk-gyi Temple of Rājakumār 1113 AD," 271-416.

¹⁷⁵ Myinkaba is attached to the title to distinguish the temple from Kubyauk-gyi Wetkyi-in, located near Wetkyi-in village, near Nyaung-u. The name is also spelt Gubyauk-gyi.

the adjacent temple, Kubyauk-nge Myinkaba. The interior is extensively covered with wall paintings including panels of at least 496 *jatakas*. The paintings were conserved in the 1980s and are in relatively good repair. There are also numerous ink glosses which "show the great advance in Buddhist scholarship that had been in progress before and during Kyanzittha's reign".¹⁷⁶

There were originally thirty-five sculptural representations of the Buddha along with two standing door guardian figures or *bodhisattvas*. Only the renovated central shrine image remains (fig.181).¹⁷⁷ This image bears no relationship to the original and is one of a standard type of image that has proliferated at Bagan as more reconstruction work takes place. The guardian figures flanking the entrance to the central shrine are badly damaged. These original images represent the last of early Bagan period sculptures. While essentially of the "Kyanzittha type", a new style is starting to develop. Just as at the Ananda, the "repetitive" sculptures show that the hands of many artisans were involved as they are all a little different. Most are in either *bhumisparsa* or *dharmacakra mudra* and are seated on double lotus bases. Three typical figures portray the Buddha seated in the double lotus position (fig.182, fig.183, fig.184). The soles of the feet are still contoured and the legs form a shallow "v" against the base. The robe falls in folds across the ankles and rests on the centre of the base. The facial characteristics of each image differ slightly. The first image depicts Gotama with a heart shaped face (fig.182). The lips are small and pursed. The nose is elegant and has a flattened bridge. The eyebrows are gently arched while the hairline curves gently across the forehead. The *usnisha* blends well with the hair curls, which are small. The torso is slim-waisted with proportionally wide shoulders. The edge of the robe is carved to form a pleat that finishes midway between the nipple and waist. The left arm is positioned palm upwards almost centrally over the crossed feet. The right arm is elongated to emphasise the earth-touching moment, the hand crosses the shin close to the knee, the fingers are of uneven length and rest on the lotus throne.

Another earth-touching image is essentially the same but there are subtle differences (fig.184). Here the face is squarer. The lips are tightly pursed and

¹⁷⁶ *OBEP*, 1:375.

¹⁷⁷ There are twenty gypsum casts of original sculptures in situ while the originals are housed in the Bagan Museum.

the eyebrow arch kicks up and outwards. The transition between skull and *usnisha* is subtle and the latter is topped with small plain flame-like extension. There is an apparent shortening of the neck, due in part to the squarer face. The ears touch the shoulders. The torso is proportionally shorter than the first image and the waist a little thicker. The right hand is large and reaches to the top of the lotus petals. The fingers are still of uneven length and the thumb remains prominent. A third image depicts the Buddha in *dharmacakra mudra*. The face shape falls between the two images described, being less heart-shaped but not as square as the second (fig.183). The line of the neck and shoulders more closely resembles the first image. The hands are raised to centre chest height.

Summary

The main difference between these sculptures and those crafted earlier in Kyanzittha's reign is the reduction in surface detail. Here, the surfaces are cleanly cut with less creativity. The lotus throne petals are very uniform and formulaic. Also notable is the carving of the reredos. The elaborate imagery seen in the Ananda sculptures is replaced by a more rigid and flattened design. The exterior line of the halo is shaped like a bodhi leaf or lotus petal while the interior is delineated by a simple curved line. The gap between the two is perfectly plain and flat. All of the sculptural elements of the reredo are in very low relief. This move towards simplicity in the depictions of Buddha carried forward into the 12th and 13th centuries. The contrast between the simplicity of the often massive central shrine images and the ever increasing elaborate nature of the surrounds, usually in the form of painting, highlighted the serenity and spiritual focus of the Buddha.

This concludes the stylistic overview of the principal Buddha images from the reigns of Anawrahta and Kyanzittha.

Chapter 5 Chronology and Change – Internal Integration of External Ideas

Tracing Iconographic Changes

In Chapters 3 and 4 Buddhist sculptural material that can be reliably dated to the reigns of Anawrahta and Kyanzittha, from 1044–1113, has been reviewed. It is proposed that this study of stylistic features reveals changes in the appearance of the images that can be separated into two periods based on their physical characteristics. The first group is called the Anawrahta Period (1044–1084) and the second is named the Kyanzittha Period (1084–1113).¹ Each period is further divided into two phases, the differences between each phase being more subtle than those between each period.

The sculptures of the early Anawrahta period are less cohesive as a group as there are relatively few sculptures extant, making it difficult to come to firm conclusions regarding the level of impact various influences may have had on the developing Burman aesthetic. The iconography of the Anawrahta period is also quite varied, with a number of different *mudras* appearing on votives and sculptural images. By the later phase of the Kyanzittha period there is an overall stylistic consistency in sculptural figures. The iconographic choices at the Ananda temple, for example, of the three principal *mudras* – *dharmacakra*, *dhyana* and *bhumisparsa* – reflect the active promotion of Buddhist philosophy during this time. These *mudras* represent Buddhist teachings (*dharmacakra*), the meditative component of Buddhism which is also synonymous with the monkhood (*dhyana*), and the ultimate goal of all Buddhists, namely the attainment of Enlightenment (*bhumisparsa*). The shift towards a more limited repertoire of *mudras* is consistent with the generally accepted chronology of events promoted in the chronicles, namely that Anawrahta supported a move to the Theravada at the expense of Mahayana Buddhism, and Kyanzittha consolidated the Theravada presence. Events such as the arrival of Shin

¹ Sawlu is not credited with a significant contribution to the early phase of Bagan's development and is grouped with Anawrahta for the purpose of this chronology.

Arahan and the relocation of the Mon court can also be linked to this move towards a type of imagery that is closely linked to Theravada practices.

In addition to the impact Theravada Buddhism had on iconography, there were other influences which, while lacking local contemporaneous corroboration, can be shown to be supported by some of the stylistic features which appear at various times. In particular, it can be hypothesized that the effect of Mon and Pyu culture is seen in some imagery, likewise Sri Lankan and Indian contact can also be surmised through the use of particular iconographic elements. The relationship between these events and stylistic change is elaborated on below.

The following tables outline the principal features of images from each period and phase. The use of these stylistic and iconographic guides will be demonstrated later in this chapter when considering a number of more recently found images from Bagan. Of course, there are as many subtle variations as there are images. This is in itself important as it demonstrates that there was no rigid iconometric code associated with the making of Buddha images during this time.

Anawrahta Period (1044–1084)

Covering the reign of both Anawrahta and Sawlu these images are difficult to standardize though the following features are consistent with most depictions of the Buddha from this time. The images from the Early Anawrahta Phase (1044–c.1065) are typically austere. They include illustrations of the Buddha on votive tablets and sculptural works from East and West Hpet-leik (figs.39-41), Shwe-hsan-daw (figs.52-55) and Ma-nu-ha (fig.62).²

Early Anawrahta Phase (1044–c.1065):

Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ovoid • Expression stern and lacking animation • Chin prominent • Lips are full and wider than the breadth of the nose • Nose is beak-like • Eyes are hooded
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² The Nan-hpaya and Paung-ku-hpaya are also associated with this period but there are no known Buddha images currently associated with these temples. The imagery that does exist, such as the Brahma figures from the Nan-hpaya, do have other stylistic links to the period as has been discussed in Chapter 3.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaze is directed more forwards than downwards • Eyebrow arch is moderate, each brow continuous with the bridge of the nose
Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hair curls are raised and often spiky • Hairline dips in the middle of the forehead • The small rounded <i>usnisha</i> is topped with a single flame-like extension approximately the same height as the <i>usnisha</i> • Neck rings clearly visible • Ears sit close to head and either clear or just touch the shoulders outside the line of the lowest neck ring
Torso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Torso is of the lion type – narrow waisted and broad shouldered with a full chest • Clothing is transparent, clinging closely to the body • Navel is well defined • End pleat of robe usually stops above prominent nipples • When the robe covers both shoulders the end usually wraps across the front of the body and rests over the back of the left shoulder • In <i>bhumisparsa mudra</i> the right shoulder is always exposed. The robe falls across the left shoulder and makes a shallow 's' shape across the torso
Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Buddha is usually seated in <i>padmasana</i> on a narrow double lotus throne • <i>bhumisparsa mudra</i> is the most common hand position followed by <i>dhyana mudra</i> • in <i>bhumisparsa mudra</i> the right arm dominated the image, the strength and focus being the earth-touching gesture by the fingers • When in <i>bhumisparsa mudra</i> the right arm is accentuated by its elongation, the forearm crosses the upper third of the tibia, near the knee. In <i>dharmacakra mudra</i> the highest point of the hands is approximately in line with the armpit.

Late Anawrahta–Sawlu Phase (c.1065–1084)

During the late Anawrahta period, which includes the reign of Sawlu, there was a shift towards a softer, more engaging image. This period includes images from Kyauk-ku-umin (figs.79-93), Myin-pya-gu (fig.103-107) and Pahto-tha-mya temples (figs.112-113). Typical features of sculptures from this phase are as follows.

Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • face is rounder, moving towards a heart shape • expression soft • rounded chin • lips are full and pursed, the breadth of the mouth reduces • nose remains beak-like • eyelids become fuller • gaze is directed downwards • eyebrow arch tends to move upwards at the outer corner
Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hair curls are less spiky and more rounded • hairline remains same • <i>usnisha</i> more subtle, forming a more seamless transition from the head • flame-like extension becomes broader at its base blending with the <i>usnisha</i>
Torso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fingers are of uneven length • torso slim waisted and broad shouldered though chest less full • neck rings visible though neck is shortening slightly • robe clings to torso • standing figures have rounded full hips and upper thighs • end pleat of robe becomes more elaborate • navel and nipples well defined • clear definition of robe covering both shoulders with end of robe crossing the left shoulder
Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Buddha is still usually depicted seated in <i>padmasana</i> on a double lotus base • <i>bhumisparsa mudra</i> remains the most common mudra though variety increases as narrative scenes begin to appear • standing images become more common, usually with the right hand raised in <i>abhaya mudra</i>, the left raised to waist height, clasping the end of the robe

Kyanzittha Period (1084–1113)

Kyanzittha period images also show a stylistic transition that can be divided into two phases. Imagery steadily becomes more uniform throughout the period.

Early Kyanzittha Phase (1084–c.1095):

The Early Kyanzittha Phase dates from 1084–c.1095. It includes sculptures from the Shwe-zigon (figs.132-135) and Naga-yon (figs.138-152). The Abe-ya-dana temple also dates to this period but no sculptural figures remain.

Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • face shape shifting from round to heart-shaped • expression flat • chin becoming more rounded • ears touch shoulders and face slightly forwards • lips are full and pursed, the breadth of the mouth reduces further • nose remains beak-like • eyelids increase in vertical width and the outer edge curls up and out • gaze is directed downwards • eyebrow arch heightens and outer line curls up and out
Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • head sits heavily on thickened neck, neck rings visible • hair curls are arranged in even rows of rounded curls • hairline across forehead trends towards dipping in a central peak • usnisha remains as a rounded bump which is continuous with the head • flame-like extension remains broad and short, tapering to a point
Torso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fingers remain of uneven length • torso slim waisted and broad shouldered, chest area becoming fuller and broader • robe clings to torso • end pleat of robe curves across upper chest in a "c" shape • navel and nipples less prominent • clear definition of robe covering both shoulders with end of robe crossing the left shoulder
Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when seated, the Buddha is usually in <i>padmasana</i>, on a very narrow double lotus throne • sometimes the lotus throne is absent altogether, particularly when a predella is present • <i>bhumisparsa</i> and <i>dhyana mudras</i> dominate, <i>dharmacakra mudra</i> starts to become more popular • standing figures have rounded full hips and upper thighs • In <i>bhumisparsa mudra</i> the upper arm reaches forwards, the fingers cross the upper third of the tibia.

Late Kyanzittha Phase (c.1095 –1113)

The Late Kyanzittha Phase covers images dating from c.1095–1113 and includes sculptures from the Ananda (figs.163-175, figs.196-238), Kubyauk-gne Wetki-yin (fig.178) and Kubyauk-gyi Myinkaba (figs.181-184). By the Late Kyanzittha period sculptural images of the Buddha have developed a very distinct form.

Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • face is heart-shaped • expression warm and serene • chin now rounded "like a lime" • ears face slightly forwards and rest on shoulders • lips are full and pursed with outer edges curled up in a gentle smile • nose slim, elongated and beak-like • eyelids less heavy • gaze is almost directly downwards • eyebrow arch slim and tends to move upwards at the outer corner
Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hair curls are small and tightly packed in rows • hairline gently waves across forehead, dipping slightly in the centre • usnisha broadens, at times giving the skull an almost pyramidal shape though height remains the same • flame-like extension broadens at base, flat on front, curved forwards from behind
Torso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fingers are of uneven length • torso becomes slimmer at waist accentuating small stomach bulge above waist robe, full upper chest and broad shoulders – the overall shape is that of an inverted triangle • neck is narrower, neck rings clearly visible, head and neck sit into upper torso • robe clings to torso with minimal outlining – a narrow raised band across the wrist(s) and ankles • standing figures have narrow waist accentuating the rounded hips and upper thighs • end pleat of robe across right shoulder extends past nipple and is elaborately pleated • navel and nipples again well defined • clear definition of robe when covering both shoulders with end of robe crossing left shoulder • soles of feet in seated images become flatter though toes are still realistically carved

Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>bhumisparsa mudra</i> remains most common, but <i>dhyana</i> and <i>dharmacakra mudras</i> are also very popular • all five poses of the Buddha now well utilized due to increased use of narrative imagery – seated in <i>padmasana</i>, seated in <i>pralambapadasana</i>, standing, walking and recumbent • the Buddha rests on a narrow double lotus base though this may be absent if a predella is used • square, stepped throne base becomes more common • in <i>dharmacakra mudra</i> the tops of the fingers are below the line of the armpits.
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Agencies for Change

The two periods and four phases have been proposed based on gradual stylistic shifts. While the changes are subtle, when looked at in a linear manner there are distinct differences between the sculptures produced at the beginning and end of each period. The question then arises, what were the reasons for these changes? As has been shown, Bagan was a rapidly developing centre, and this was a period of great expansion. Now, having identified both the major historical happenings of the period that are often poorly supported by contemporaneous records, and a stylistic chronology, combining the two offers further insight into the events of the time.

Shin Arahana and a Theravada Shift – Principal Agents for Iconographic Change

It has already been established that during the early phase of Anawrahta's reign Buddhism as it was known at Bagan underwent significant change. There was a shift from an eclectic Mahayana type of Buddhism to one with clearer links to the Theravada. Evidence for this can be found in the sudden appearance of *jataka* imagery which was previously unknown at Bagan. The Hpet-leik temples and the Shwe-hsan-daw have *jataka* plaques integrated into the architecture of the building and this supports the arrival of an external force which introduced this aspect of Buddhist teachings. The Theravada origins of the *jakas* are indisputable, yet during the same time Anawrahta willingly adopted the votives of the Indian Pala kings who were followers of the Mahayana. This Indian

influence dominated the stylistic appearances of Buddhist imagery but the iconography was changing in favour of the Theravada. It might be surmised that the initial phase of Buddhism's blossoming occurred under the influence of Buddhism as practised at Bagan by followers relocating from India where Buddhism had lost the support of local rulers.³

In these formative years of the Bagan period Anawrahta spent a great deal of time away from the city, as evidenced through the wide distribution of his votive tablets. As he was away from Bagan he would not have had the time or at this stage, the resources, to concentrate on the development of Bagan's religious affairs. *Stupas* associated with the earliest part of his reign are modest and there are no temples that date to this early period, again indicating that state-sponsored Buddhism was still in its formative stage. Anawrahta did have time later in his reign, however, to devote to the commissioning of significant religious edifices that were constructed in both Indian and Mon style. Indian influence is seen most clearly in the Shwe-hsan-daw, with its extensive use of Hindu imagery in conjunction with Buddhist references.

The devolution of Bagan's earlier Pyu culture included the gradual loss of their own script and as discussed in Chapter 2 the Rajakumar inscription of 1113 is the only Pyu inscription extant from the early Bagan period.⁴ Anawrahta must have felt some ambivalence towards the Pyu as he did not overtly adopt any of their visual cultural customs. Indian monks and artisans were certainly responsible for the script found on Anawrahta's votive tablets and along with some traders, were probably the only groups of people with writing skills. Anawrahta had no script other than Indian-derived versions until the arrival of the Mon in 1057. Burmese script emerged later in the 11th century but its use was not widespread until the 12th century.⁵ Monks possibly taught Anawrahta

³ Frasch, T. "The World of Buddhism in the Year 1000", *Proceedings of the Myanmar Two Millenia Conference* (Yangon: Universities Historical Research Centre, 2000), Part 3, 39-41. Frasch discusses the state of Buddhism in India, and notes the shift to Hinduism and the expense of Buddhism in India.

⁴ As discussed in Chapter 2 the Pyu were a vibrant cultural group whose demise is still surrounded in mystery. The Pyu wrote in both Sanskrit and Pali, though the Sanskrit inscriptions were probably later than those in Pali, and are much less common. See Assavavirulhakarn, *Ascendency of Theravada Buddhism*, 131.

⁵ Sein Maung Oo, "The Development of Burmese Writing and Monastic Education in Pagan Period," in *Study on Pagan Research Report*, eds. Organising Committee, Pagan Symposium and Yoshiaki Ishizawa and Yasushi Kono (Tokyo Department of Archaeology, Rangoon, and Institute of Asian Cultures, Sophia University Tokyo, 1989), 138-144.

how to inscribe the tablets with his own hand, or did so on his behalf. It is unlikely he would have allowed the artisans to do it for him as this would have diminished the merit-making significance attached to the commissioning of the tablets. By involving monks he was further legitimizing his role as a great Buddhist ruler. The volume of votive plaques produced suggest Anawrahta could not have pressed them all himself, or signed each one. This task would surely have only been delegated to members of the religious order, for the same reason outlined above.

As Anawrahta's success consolidated he was able to return his focus to his home city. The Indianised court structures that also developed throughout much of Southeast Asia may have been introduced to Bagan by the Mon court from Thaton.⁶ The large Vaisnavite sculptures found at Thaton are evidence that Brahmanism was well established there. This Brahman presence is almost certainly indicative of Thaton being a well established kingdom and the Brahmins provided the requisite spiritual support for court rituals.⁷ Hindu gods became integrated into the Buddhist hierarchy, in particular Sakka and Brahma were popularised as Gotama Buddha's principal presiding deities. Images of Ganesha in his role as protector adorned the exterior of the Shwe-hsan-daw. The Nat-hlaung-kyaung was in all likelihood built as a devotional temple for the court Brahmins. However, the overt influence of Indian style and iconography was short-lived. Just over a decade into Anawrahta's reign, Theravada Buddhism "arrived" at Bagan in the guise of the now revered monk, Shin Arahan.

Just as mankind having been in the darkness for so long yearned for light, the true faith of Theravada Buddhism propagated by Mahā Thera

⁶ The structure of the Indian court system was adopted and adapted throughout Southeast Asia. The courts of Indonesia, the Malay courts, Thai and Khmer kingdoms, Burmese and Sri Lankan courts, all structured themselves on Indian models of kingship. References to the Indianisation of Southeast Asia were noted in the Introduction.

⁷ Brahmanic ritual played an integral role in court life through to the end of the monarchy in the late 19th century. The Royal Orders of Burma contain many references to the court Brahmins. As Than Tun notes regarding an order of 1574, "The kings always insisted these ceremonies were done strictly as prescribed in the Brahmanical texts several of which were imported quite often from India,". Than Tun, *Royal Orders*, 10:35. Note that while the title of the translation series states a starting date of 1598, there are also references to a small number of orders which pre-date 1598.

Shin Araham had brought light to the Kingdom of Bagan which was then overshadowed by the debased teachings of the Ari-priests.

Due to the spiritual leadership of Mahā Thera Shin Araham and royal patronage of King Anawrahta, Theravada Buddhism flourished and shone like the ray of the sun and the moon. Mahā Thera Shin Araham and King Anawrahta laid the foundation for the establishment of Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar.⁸

This account is the beginning of a recent text and demonstrates the veneration felt towards Shin Araham amongst Burmese today. Shin Araham became Anawrahta's chief spiritual advisor and is credited throughout Burmese chronicles with vitalising Theravada Buddhism in Burma. Shin Araham's influence extended through the reign of Kyanzittha, traversing the formative years of Burman establishment at Bagan.

Shin Araham is believed to have been a Mon. According to the *GPC* Shin Araham was living in Thaton when Indra "prevailed upon a certain hunter to see Shin Araham. And when the hunter saw him he said, 'Here is a reverend man and an amiable. He must be eminent and noble. I will take him to the capital and present him before the king.' So he took him, and Shin Araham followed with the eight things needful". On arrival at Anawrahta's palace, "Shin Araham, wishing to show how truly great he was, ascended the high royal throne and sate [sic] there".⁹ Shin Araham preached to the king and:

...when Anawrahtminsaw heard the words of Ashin Araham, he was seized with an ecstasy of faith unbounded, and he said, 'Master, we have no other refuge than thee! From this day forth, my master, we dedicate our body and our life to thee! And, master, from thee I take my doctrine!' And he built and offered him a monastery in the forest, adorned with nought [sic] but gems, exceedingly pleasant. Moreover he rejected the doctrines of the Ari heretics.¹⁰

⁸ Khin Maung Nyunt. *Hagiography of Maha Thera Shin Araham and an Account of the Reconstruction of Shin Araham's Brick Monastery* (Yangon: Ministry of Culture, 1997), i.

⁹ *GPC*, 72.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

According to the *GPC* Shin Araham told Anawrahta that the King of Thaton had copies of the *Tipitaka* in his possession and he should seek to obtain a set of these texts. Without them, Buddhism would never flourish at Bagan. When the Mon king, Manuha, refused to hand over the books, Anawrahta attacked the city and brought the royal court, retainers and Buddhist scriptures to Bagan. This is said to have resulted in a harmonious resettling of the Mon at Bagan and the flourishing of Buddhism. As discussed in Chapter 1, this is the account promulgated in all Burmese chronicles and legendary histories, but is without firm foundation.¹¹ Why would Anawrahta capture a city, and then take all of the court to his own capital and comfortably ensconce them amongst the locals? Opinion now favours a different version of events.¹² As more evidence comes to light it seems more likely that the Mon court moved to Bagan voluntarily. The Khmer (Cambodians) were known to have been advancing into Mon territory around this time, having reached the Mon centre of Haripunjaya in northern Thailand. It is likely that King Manuha asked Anawrahta for help to protect the city. Anawrahta did this, and even though much of the city was supposedly destroyed, the Khmer were repelled and Anawrahta was rewarded with the city's riches. However, perhaps it was thought to be only a temporary victory, since the Mon still relocated to Bagan. Or perhaps Anawrahta, as victor, wanted the Mon displaced. Thaton continued to exist as an inhabited town, but the removal of the Mon court ensured Thaton never became a threat to Anawrahta's rule over vast regions of Burma.

By bringing the king and his entourage, along with skilled workers to Bagan, Anawrahta benefited greatly. If the Mon had indeed been captives, such an act would have been out of character with Anawrahta's behaviour as told in the rest

¹¹ According to the *Chronicle*, "Now Shin Araham spake to Anawrahtaminsaw: 'There are three elements of the Lord's religion: without the scriptures there can be no study, without study there can be no intuition. The scriptures, the Three Pitakas, thou hast not yet. Only when thou hast obtained them, sending gifts and presents and entreating them of divers countries which have relics of the Lord's body and the books of the Pitakas, may the religion last long'. Anawrahtaminsaw answered and said: "'In what country must I seek and find them?' Said Shin Araham, 'In the country of the Thaton there are thirty sets, the Three Pitakas in each set. There are also many sacred relics'. When he returned to Bagan with the relics, they were placed in a pyatthad richly fraught with gems and caused the noble Order to give instructions therein". *GPC*, 77.

¹² Guillon outlines a number of inconsistencies and improbabilities in the Burmese version of events, and Hall also discusses the Khmer expansionist campaigns which were happening at the same time. E. Guillon, *The Mons. A Civilization of Southeast Asia*, 110-113. Hall, *History of Southeast Asia*, 158-160.

of the Chronicle, which saw him have little time for his enemies. In addition, once at Bagan his "captives" were hardly treated as such. Rather, Mon culture was readily adopted by the local Burmans and Pyu. Architecture flourished in the form of pagodas and stupas which now incorporated Mon influences.¹³ The use of *jataka* plaques, as shown in Chapter 3, rapidly became popular and can be traced back to the Mon. Perhaps the Hpet-leik plaques were a Mon "thank you" to Anawrahta for saving them all from the Khmer armies. This would help explain why the sections with the plaques were additions to the preexisting structure. It would have been relatively straightforward to build the smaller corridors and make the plaques quickly. It would also explain why the structure has not survived very well, construction being done in haste. Thus, a more feasible version of this event would have the city of Thaton under threat of attack from the Khmers who had already passed through Thailand. Manuha sought Anawrahta's assistance, which he gave. As most of the city was destroyed, the Mon relocated to Bagan under Anawrahta's patronage while Anawrahta continued with his expansionist strategies. It is also doubtful that sets of the *Tipitaka* were taken to Bagan. There is no indication during the ensuing decade that religious practices changed significantly. Luce suggests that the only texts brought by the Mon to Bagan were *jataka* commentaries.¹⁴ His conclusion is based on his study of religious remains from the period which show that the *jatakas* were introduced, as seen in the Hpet-leik pagodas, but there were no other significant shifts in the visual representation of the religion until the building of the Pahto-tha-mya, under either Anawrahta's patronage or that of his son, Sawlu (r.1077-1085).

Shin Araham clearly possessed charismatic qualities which enabled him to exert substantial influence over Anawrahta and, later, Kyanzittha. He indoctrinated Anawrahta in the ways of the Theravada. The impact of this timely conversion cannot be overestimated. The *karmatic* nature of Theravada Buddhism relies on the accumulation of merit over cycles of rebirth in order to move closer to

¹³ The role of the Mon at Bagan is indeed complex. Stadtner recently noted that the Shwe-sandaw, which includes a mix of Buddhist and Hindu imagery in the form of Ganesha, is "somewhat similar in design [to] the early Mon Thagya Stupa in Lower Burma in the town of Thaton, probably from the 11th or 12th century and originally adorned with unglazed and uninscribed *jataka* plaques which are much larger and more sophisticated than those from the Shwe-sandaw". Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 234.

¹⁴ *OBEP*, 1:26.

attaining Buddhahood. Shin Araham promoted this particular aspect of Buddhist practice and encouraged merit-making activities. This provided an achievable focus to the newly invigorated followers, the result being an extensive monument-building and image-making program.

During Anawrahta's frequent absences, Shin Araham, as the favoured "expert" on Buddhist matters, must have taken on the role of supervisor of the Buddhist building programs. With little archaeological evidence of previous monumental buildings predating Anawrahta's time, the structurally sophisticated temples of his reign could only have been built with a rapid influx of skilled workers who were intimately familiar with Buddhist practices. As a Mon, Shin Araham would have utilised the skills of the newly arrived Mon artisans to establish a visual presence of Buddhism aimed at enhancing the religion's standing amongst the local populace.

As a Theravadin, Shin Araham introduced a new range of literary traditions to Bagan. One of the main surviving buildings from Anawrahta's time is the Pitakat-taik (no.1587), a substantial library. Its presence indicates that there was a large collection of sacred texts at Bagan, though as outlined above, the arrival of the Tipitaka may not have coincided with the Mon court's relocation but with the return of Anawrahta's monks from Sri Lanka. The three sections of the Tipitaka are the *Vinaya*, *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma Pitaka*.¹⁵ The arrival of a complete set of the *Tipitaka* would have been a very powerful symbol, as was housing them in the prominent library specially built for the purpose.

Establishing Theravada Buddhism and promoting merit-making activities required the presence of a *sangha*. There is no mention in any chronicles or epigraphs of Shin Araham and his monks. However, monks must surely have followed the *Tipitaka* to Bagan. While there are few monasteries that can be dated to the early Bagan period there is a long history of wooden monasteries in Burma and perhaps many of the earliest monasteries no longer exist.¹⁶ Housing

¹⁵ For an overview of the *Tipitaka* see *Guide to the Tipitaka. Introduction to the Buddhist Canon*, (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1993).

¹⁶ *OBEP*, 1:250. A comprehensive study of Burma's wooden monasteries has recently been published. See Fraser-Lu, *Splendour in Wood*, 26-30. See also B.Sinclair, "The Monasteries of Pagan," *Journal Burma Research Society*, 10 pt.1 (1920):1-4.

for monks was integral to any large religious building, often taking the form of wooden or brick constructions located adjacent to the main temple.¹⁷

The principal role of the *sangha* at this early stage would no doubt have been to spread the Buddha's teachings and establish a firm foundation for a revitalized Buddhism. The most effective way of achieving this was through recitation of the Buddha's discourses, and perhaps more importantly in this phase, by ensuring all people knew of the Buddha's life stories. The 550 *jatakas* are integral to Theravada Buddhism and illustrate to the lay population how the Buddha achieved Enlightenment only after eons of rebirths and the accumulation of merit through self sacrifice.¹⁸ The *jatakas* are essentially the "friendly face" of Theravada Buddhism.

There are no known extensive illustrations of the *jatakas* extant in Burma that predate the Hpet-leik plaques. The *jatakas* are linked to the Mon, with *jataka* stories being illustrated on plaques from the 11th-12th century Thagya temple at Thaton, and the *sima* boundary stones were also carved with *jataka* scenes (fig.191a, fig.191b).¹⁹ The Mon characters evident in the plaques demonstrate the important role that Mon teaching had during this formative period. The plaques represent an important phase in Theravada history in the region being the first visual affirmation of Theravada authority at Bagan.

Shin Arahán guided the development of Theravada Buddhism to a point which saw a particular Burmese type of Buddhist practice become entrenched in Burmese culture. There has been little deviation in Buddhist theology from the Bagan period until today. The introduction of the *jatakas* in their educative role helped establish *karmatic* Buddhism in Burma and the *jatakas* became the principal source of inspiration for the embellishment of Buddhist edifices. The incorporation of the *jatakas* into the architecture of Bagan, whether in the form of plaques, sculpture or wall paintings, was the beginning of a particularly

¹⁷ There is an abundance of brick monastery remains at Bagan, most dating from the later Bagan period.

¹⁸ The number of *jatakas* varies between Theravada traditions. In Burma, a sequence of 550 *jatakas* was adopted in the early Bagan period and remains in use. See Duroiselle, "Pictorial Representations of Jatakas in Burma", *ASI* (1912-13): 87-116, and "The Talaing Plaques on the Ananda," *Epigraphica Birmanica* 2, pt.1 (1920).

¹⁹ As noted in footnote 12, Stadtner draws the link between the Thagya *jataka* plaques and those of the Shwe-hsan-daw. Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 234.

Burmese form of Buddhist visual imagery. Illustrations of the *jatakas*, in particular scenes from the last *jatakas*, the story of Prince Vessantara and Gotama Buddha, are a fundamental part of Burmese Buddhism and continue to adorn temples throughout the country.

The shift towards the Theravada doctrine can also be seen in epigraphic remains. Inscriptions of Theravada Pali scriptures have been found at the early Pyu city of Hmawza and date from around the sixth century. Pali writings have also been found at Prome. These findings link the religion as practised by at least a proportion of the inhabitants to southern India, through script form and doctrine.²⁰ The dominance of Theravada Buddhism at this point coincides with the emergence of the monk Buddhaghosa as Burma's Theravada champion. Another wave of Indian influence followed and Brahmanism became a part of religious practice in the Pyu settlements, usually with Visnu as the principal deity. The wave of Mahayana Buddhism which swept into the Malay archipelago in the 6th–7th centuries also made its presence felt in Burma. Mahayana Buddhism brought Sanskrit to Burma and there are a number of Pyu period inscriptions written in Sanskrit.

Perhaps the most influential form of Buddhism in this early period, however, was that of the Sarvastivadins. The Sarvastivadins were a sect of the Theravada school but emerged in northern India, where Mahayana Buddhism predominated. They followed the Theravada *vinaya* but retained Sanskrit as their religious language, rather than Pali. Ray's analysis of the Sanskrit inscriptions found at early Pyu settlements places the material in the Theravada tradition of the Sarvastivadins. There is suggestion that this sect also spread through the Malay and Indonesian archipelago.²¹ The Sarvastivadins also spread into Central Asia, preceding the Mahayanists whose doctrines would eventually prevail.²² Therefore, in Burma the presence of Sanskrit cannot be used emphatically to indicate the practice of Mahayana. In addition, as the sect

²⁰ While Pali developed as Buddhism evolved, the term Pali did not appear until around the 6th century. At this point the term applied to the original Buddhist texts and not the commentaries. B. Law, *A History of Pāli Literature* (Varanasi: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1932), viii.

²¹ Ray, *Sanskrit Buddhism*, 7-8. The use of Sanskrit to write Theravadin texts can cause confusion that only a scholar of Buddhist studies can untangle. Ray provides some insight into this complex matter.

²² P. Karetzky, "Sarvastivadin Buddhists and Scenes from the Life of the Buddha from Qizil (Xinjiang)," *Oriental Art* 56 (2000):48-57.

developed in northern India, the imagery associated with this branch of Buddhism drew on prevailing Mahayana influences, complicating the understanding of what a Theravada or Mahayana image may be.

Anawrahta's votive tablets were frequently inscribed in Sanskrit using Nagari or Bengali script from Bengal and Bihar, confirming the link with northern India. However, Ray notes that the content of the inscriptions is no longer of Sarvastivadin Theravadin origin but is "the language of those Mahāyānists who constantly poured into Burma and brought with them small votive tablets, representing sacred shrines or images and inscribed with the Buddhist formula".²³ Sanskrit was the dominant written language, used not only by monks but also by the court Brahmins, and its use continued well after Pali became the entrenched language of Buddhism at Bagan. The influence of Sarvastivadin Buddhism, however, must have been felt at Bagan and this will be demonstrated in the next chapter through the analysis of narrative sculpture and its relationship to Buddhist texts from differing sects. The complexity of relationships between Buddhist sects and the accompanying imagery warrants extensive study.

Apart from votive tablets, epigraphic material from Bagan is found in the form of ink glosses. Glosses identified as excerpts from the Pali canon at the Naga-yon have been linked to Sri Lankan texts.²⁴ This provides additional historical evidence supporting the interactions between Sri Lanka and Bagan which started during Anawrahta's reign. It is likely there was ongoing interchange between the *sangha* of both countries, with the Sri Lankan copies of the *Tipitaka* being introduced to Bagan from around 1080.²⁵

Inscriptions from Kyanzittha's reign do exist, such as the dedication of the Shew-zigon pagoda. Mon remained the official court language under Kyanzittha but by the end of his reign the archaic Burmese alphabet developed and was closely related to Mon script.²⁶ The best known Bagan period inscription is the Rajakumar or Myazedi inscription of c.1113 which provided the key for

²³ Ray, *Sanskrit Buddhism*, 89.

²⁴ *OBEP*, 1:311. Luce also notes the Abe-ya-dana temple is illustrated with *jataka* scenes based on the Singalese recension. *OBEP*, 1:323.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 1:38-40.

²⁶ For an overview of the history of writing in the Bagan period see Sein Maung Oo "The Development of Burmese Writing," 138-44.

understanding Pyu script. It contains valuable information regarding the regnal dates of Kyanzittha, some information about one queen and their son, and refers to the donation of a golden image of the Buddha to earn merit.²⁷ This and Kyanzittha's palace inscription of c.1102 are the most important epigraphic remains of his reign.²⁸ The latter is a detailed account of the palace's dedication ceremony and shows how important ritual was in courtly life. The ceremony was presided over by Shin Araham. He oversaw the ritual associated with the digging of the crucial support posts for the palace. The Brahmins "drew water for the reciting of the *paritta*".²⁹ Shin Araham recited the *paritta* in the presence of 4,108 monks. The ceremony lasted several days with the Brahmins worshipping at each site the house posts were installed. Usually this is assumed to be part of a ritual that appeases the earth-dwelling *nagas*. In this inscription, however, reference is made to honouring Narayana, which is another name for Visnu.³⁰ This is also consistent with the imagery of the Nat-hlaung-kyau, which has Visnu as the principal deity and supports the theory that this temple was built for the court Brahmins' use.

The ceremonial details are lengthy and repetitive. However, one segment does conjure up an image that is extremely popular in art of this period. "(Two?) golden figures of *byāl* (stood on?) both sides. Above the *byāl* (were) two golden figures of *makaras*; above the two golden *makaras*, two golden figures of geese holding stalks (and) leaves made of shining gold; above the (trunks?) of the two golden *makaras*, two golden scrolls forming the apex (of an arch?). In the middle (a golden?) waterlily flower...".³¹ The description is a classic decorative form used to frame an image of the Buddha in many Bagan sculptures. It is a style that has earlier origins in Pala India, and depictions of *makaras* flanking throne backs (or crafted in stucco decorating the exterior of temples), or pairs of geese holding branches or strings of beads is ever present (see fig.168). This example is a rare link between the written text and visual imagery of the time. Where possible architectural and artistic remains should be "read" in

²⁷ Taw Sein Ko and Duroiselle, eds. *Epigraphica Birmanica being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Burma* (Rangoon: Archaeological Survey of Burma, 1919), 1, pt.1.

²⁸ Duroiselle, ed. *Epigraphica Birmanica* 3, pt.1, and Kyaw Nyein. "The Palace of King Kyanzittha, known from His Inscription", *Study on Pagan Research Report* (1989):44-50.

²⁹ Blagden, "Mon Inscriptions Nos.9-11," *EB* (1923), 3.1, and "Mon Inscriptions Section 2," *EB* (1934), 4.1.

³⁰ Blagden, "Mon Inscriptions Nos.9-11," 35.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

conjunction with available text. Such a cross-disciplinary approach places the works in a broader context and has the potential to strengthen or weaken arguments regarding the occurrence of otherwise unsubstantiated "historical" events.

Sri Lanka and Bagan – Art Historical Links

Anawrahta's contact with Sri Lanka is often overlooked in the context of Bagan's artistic development at Bagan. Sri Lankan and Burmese chronicles both mention contact between the two countries but in different contexts. The *GPC* recounts a long story concerning Anawrahta's desire to obtain the tooth relic from Sri Lanka. Indra, perceiving that should Anawrahta sail to Sri Lanka and try to take the tooth by force a great war would break out, convinced Anawrahta to send a peaceful mission. Anawrahta presented the Sri Lankan king with a white elephant and the tooth was dispatched to Bagan. This was of course accompanied by many miraculous events such as the "holy tooth adorned itself with the thirty-two greater and eighty lesser signs and the six rays of noble men...".³²

The Sri Lankan chronicle presents a very different version. Around 1067 King Vijaya Bahu I was fighting the Indian Cola invasion. He sent word to Anawrahta that he required urgent assistance. Anawrahta dispatched ships laden with supplies and probably soldiers. The Sri Lankans were successful and turned back the Cola onslaught. After fifty years of Cola Hindu rule, the Buddhist order was in disarray, and Anawrahta sent monks to Sri Lanka to undertake a "purification of the Buddhist Order".³³ After a number of years spent copying the Sri Lankan *Tipitaka*, believed to be the exact words of the Buddha, the monks returned to Bagan armed with a complete set of the Theravada Buddhist doctrine.³⁴ This version certainly has more historical weight than the Burmese-inspired legend of Thaton's sacking. This would place the arrival of the *Tipitaka* in Bagan at the very end of Anawrahta's reign or during Sawlu's reign, possibly around 1077.

³² *GPC*, 90.

³³ Hall, *History of South-East Asia*, 161.

³⁴ Bode's study of the Pali tradition in Burma also notes part of this version, namely that "a common canon for Burma and Ceylon was arranged by Anawrata and Vijayabāhu the Great." M.Bode, *The Pali Literature of Burma*, 15.

There is also a good visual reason to accept that the end of Anawrahta's reign coincided with the return of Burmese monks with the Sri Lankan *Tipitaka*. The Pahto-tha-mya, built around 1080, is extravagantly decorated both inside and out. The interior walls are painted with scenes from the life of the Buddha and, according to Luce, illustrations of the Sri Lankan *vinaya* identifiable by the accompanying ink glosses.³⁵ The temple was certainly built in celebration of something special, its elaborate form arguably surpasses that of nearly all other Bagan temples. The arrival of an invigorated group of monks bearing a complete set of the Theravada *Tipitaka* from Sri Lanka would no doubt have provided the impetus for the construction of this extraordinary temple. Shin Arahan was still the presiding monk and having done without copies of the canon during his years at Bagan, would have embraced the incorporation of doctrinal texts within temple decoration rather than restricting the repertoire of imagery to the *jatakas*.

During Kyanzittha's reign the *jatakas* came to follow the Singalese recension as well, further linking the return of monks who followed Sri Lankan Buddhist teaching. There is also some stylistic relationship between Sri Lankan images of the Buddha and those from Bagan, but it is fleeting. The link is most keenly seen in the flame-like finial atop of the *usnisha* which appears in three bronzes. The first is an image found at the Shwe-hsan-daw and dates to around 1060-65 (fig.54). The others are two later images from the Shwe-zi-gon dating to 1085-90 (fig.187, fig.188, fig.189). The first image has the characteristic flame-like finial which is closely associated with Sri Lankan figures (fig.195a). This feature is not seen on other Anawrahta period figures, and its appearance at this time would be consistent with interaction relating to Anawrahta sending troops to Sri Lanka and monks returning. Likewise, the images from the Shwe-zi-gon have links to Sri Lankan models through the flame-like finial (fig.187) and prominently rounded cheeks and face (fig.189). These share some similarities with Sri Lankan figures (fig.195, fig.195a) which are not so readily seen in other images of the period. However, Sri Lankan sculptural models did not gain popular support, and the Burmese forged ahead in developing their own distinctive styles.

³⁵ *OBEP*, 1:304-5.

Media as an Indicator of External Influence

While Shin Arahan had control over the doctrinal development of Burmese Buddhism, it would appear that he did not have overriding control of its visual representation. Indian prototypes dominated, and links with India were expanding not contracting.³⁶ Anawrahta was Burman, not Mon, and had no intention of the Burmans becoming a subsidiary Mon culture. The Burmans had traditional links northwards, to the region of their origins. Essentially Mahayanist, Anawrahta's stylistic preference favoured Indian models rather than Mon, and while Mon artisans provided innovative ideas in the form of illustrative *jatakas*, Anawrahta was not completely swayed in the direction of Theravada Buddhism. In addition, while Mon artisans brought skills of their own, they were not of the type offered by their Indian counterparts. Hence a dichotomy developed between the stylistic representation of Buddhist imagery and its iconographic content, with the general appearance of images favouring a northern Indian style, while the content became more overtly Theravadin, particularly once narrative imagery became popular.

The Mon had developed artistic traditions that featured the use of stucco and terracotta, as well as stone carving (figs.190-193). At Bagan, stucco and terracotta became prominent artistic mediums, with stucco featuring as an integral part of exterior temple decoration (for example, fig.179).³⁷ Terracotta plaques were used extensively and the adorning of temples with illustrative glazed plaques is now synonymous with Burma. A combination of brick and stucco became the most commonly used method for constructing temple images. The Buddha's basic form was constructed from brick. To increase the sculpture's stability at head height, bricks were turned sideways so they extended outwards from the temple wall and formed part of the framework for the Buddha's head (fig.194). In some instances, the head was made from a piece of stone and the rear section was shaped to form a tenon that fitted into

³⁶ This becomes even closer in Kyanzittha's reign, and one must assume there was a continuity in the interactions with India.

³⁷ Many of the exteriors illustrated in Vol.2 of this thesis show remnants of stucco work, though the vast majority have been reduced to bare brick.

the brickwork (fig.106). Stucco was applied to the brick sections to form the smooth finished shape which was then lacquered and gilded.³⁸

Grey sandstone was available from the Tuwin-daing Hills about 10km from Bagan but stone carving was not a popular medium before the Anawrahta period and there are virtually no known Burmese stone sculptures predating this time. Excavation of Pyu cities dating from the 6th–9th centuries, such as Srikshetra and Halin, have uncovered many stone carvings of great finesse but, with the exception of Temple 996 there are no stone images of the Buddha extant at Bagan that pre-date Anawrahta's reign.³⁹ The use of stone was popularized during the early Bagan period, no doubt by Mon and Indian artisans. Architecturally, stone was used briefly as a veneer in two major temples, the Nan-hpaya and Kyauk-ku-umin, and stone was also used to carve freestanding sculptures for larger temples, most notably the Naga-yon and Ananda temples. There are clear similarities between the stone Brahma figures of the Nan-hpaya (figs.65-66) and that of the Thaton relief carving (fig.192). The leg posture is imitated, the feet show the same curved treatment, the rounded contours of the shoulders and soft curved nature of the limbs are common characteristics not seen in other imagery of the period. Overall, however, stone carvings of the Buddha have a much closer connection to the great sculptural traditions of Pala India.

While metal was used by both Mon and Indian artisans, the stylistic links between prestigious Bagan bronzes and the stone and metal sculptures of Pala India indicates bronze casting was overseen by Indian craftsmen.⁴⁰ As Huntington remarks "it is likely that metal images were highly instrumental in the transmission of the Pāla style abroad. Much more easily transportable than the vast majority of stone pieces, numerous portable metal sculptures must have found their way to other regions of Asia with monks, travelers and lay devotees traveling from India to these other places".⁴¹ An example of such a figure is an

³⁸ The damaged images in the roof shrines of the Pahto-tha-mya display this construction method. Restored or reconstructed images today are often simply painted

³⁹ Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts*, 45-48.

⁴⁰ Recent archaeological excavations at Bagan have uncovered an extensive array of metal furnaces revealing metalwork was a large scale industry. As yet it has not been determined if any sites were used for bronze casting. For a preliminary report see Hudson, B. <http://acl.arts.usyd.edu.au/~hudson/bobhpage.htm>, 2003.

⁴¹ S and J Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 94.

11th century standing bronze (fig.116d). This image shows the rigid upright posture of Bagan period sculptures, and the narrow waist, slightly bulging stomach and robe clinging to rounded thighs and all features that came to typify Bagan figures (see fig.114). The technique of using sheet metal to produce images in the repoussé technique, however, may have been a Mon introduction. Repoussé figures of the Buddha were made by the Mon in Haripunjaya and this technique is still in use in mainland Southeast Asia, principally in the form of covering a wooden image with fine sheet metal.⁴²

As seen from the examples discussed, there was great variety in the form of the imagery during the late Anawrahta period, reflecting the eclectic cultural influences present during this early phase of Bagan's development. Shin Araham successfully introduced Theravada doctrine at Bagan and it rapidly came to be reflected in Buddhist imagery. By the end of this period the Pali Theravada texts had arrived at Bagan heralding a new phase in Burmese Buddhism. The introduction of traditional Theravada doctrine influenced Bagan's Buddhist visual repertoire, resulting in a shift to a more standardized approach to iconography. The *mudras* of *bhumisparsa* and *dhyana* became most popular, reflecting a preoccupation with the concept of attaining Buddhahood, and the practice of meditation and internal reflection of Buddhist teachings. Images of *bodhisattvas*, frequently seen on Anawrahta's early votive tablets, have all but vanished by the end of the late Anawrahta period, as the influence of Mahayana Buddhism diminishes.

Shin Araham and Kyanzittha

Shin Araham was most influential during Kyanzittha's reign. While he was important in promoting Buddhism under Anawrahta, regnal support had not been absolute. With Kyanzittha, Shin Araham found a true patron and Theravada Buddhism flourished. One of the first tasks of religious merit undertaken at Shin Araham's behest was the completion of the Shwe-zigon, which had been partially built by Anawrahta. In contrast with the Shwe-hsan-

⁴² See P. Krairiksh, "The Repoussé Buddha Images at the Maha That, Lamphun," *Artibus Asiae* 49 pt.3-4:351-69. For an example of an early Bagan period plaques see *OBEF*, 2:frontispiece. The paucity of examples, and the lack of information regarding the site of their discovery, has excluded these images from this thesis.

daw which was an amalgam of Buddhist and Hindu iconography, the Shwe-zigon reveals overt Theravada influence.

The central *stupa*'s three lower terraces are inset with tiles illustrating the *jatakas*. Like the Shwe-hsan-daw, lions guard the four corners and, as described in Chapter 4, on each side of the *stupa* there is a small square temple housing a colossal image of one of the four Buddhas of the current eon. Their appearance in the Burmese Theravada context is of great importance. To devotees they represent the past, present and future. In most temples the future Buddha, Maitreya, is symbolized by a central column. In the case of the Shwe-zigon the *stupa* itself is representative of the future, surrounded as it is by the four immediate past Buddhas. Maitreya is also symbolised by a *bodhi* tree or a crowned image, indicating he is still in Tushita heaven awaiting his final rebirth.

Overt Mon and Indian influence is less obvious in this setting. The *jataka* plaques are rendered in a more consistent manner than those of the Hpet-leik temples. Each plaque has a simple decorative border and the writing is placed in a band along the bottom of the plaque whereas the Hpet-leik plaques are inscribed along the upper border and the script often extends into the figurative elements (fig.41, fig.131). While the scenes are more uniformly produced at the Shwe-zigon the relief figures are less elegant and lack their predecessor's freshness and often elegant characteristics. Instead, the figures are squatter and more rounded. Still lively, their form is related more closely to Pyu style rather than the Mon Hpet-leik type. This indicates a reclaiming of artistic control by the Burmans who had previously absorbed Pyu style when settling in the region.

As noted in Chapter 3, the plaques have been analysed by Luce in relation to both the 550 *jataka* recension which the Hpet-leik plaques closely follow, and the Singhalese 547 *jataka* recension. Luce explains these anomalies as stemming "less from carelessness or neglect on the king's part, than from sheer ignorance of the *Jāta* Canon".⁴³ While this is probably true, it is also possible that the Mon *jatakas* were inaccurate in this matter, a fault that would be corrected. There are a number of inaccuracies or variants which Luce identifies,

⁴³ Ibid., 1:273.

often relating to spelling or plaques being out of sequence. His explanation for these errors is simply that the Theravada canon was in disarray. It should also be considered, however, that the canon was correct, as written in the *Tipitaka* by then known at Bagan, but that the artisans were not yet fully versed in the correct doctrine. Their role was to produce *jataka* plaques, and the builders were to attach them to the building. Perhaps the explanation for these inconsistencies may be that the workers attaching the plaques were illiterate and were handed bundles of plaques at a time to fix into the terrace, and they were simply muddled up. Whatever the true explanation there is a clear shift towards the depiction of the *jatakas* as they are described in the Pali Tipitaka of the Sri Lankan school. This again is consistent with an arrival of the Sri Lankan canon in Bagan around 1077.

As discussed previously the colossal images at the Shwe-zigon have undergone extensive repairs and it is thus difficult to use them for building a chronology of Buddha styles. The extensions on the *usnisas* are later additions, being bulb-like with a long tapering stalk, rather than being small and flame-like (fig.131, fig.132, fig.133, fig.134). There is also a youthfulness in the faces of the images which is a characteristic that became more popular later in the Bagan period. These anomalies aside, the images are of significance for their representation of changing theology. All four images show the standing Buddha with the left hand holding the edge of the outer robe, and the right raised in *abhaya mudra*. This gesture is infrequently seen at Bagan and is virtually the exclusive domain of bronze standing images. It is the gesture of reassurance. Perhaps this was deliberately chosen in the context of the Shwe-zigon to reassure the populace that the "new" Theravada practices that would supercede pre-existing Mahayana tendencies were benevolent and just. This gesture is also seen in bronze standing images from Sri Lanka dating from the 10th–11th centuries. As the timing of the Shwe-zigon's construction corresponded to the establishment of a *sangha* intimately familiar with the Sri Lankan tradition, the use of this *mudra* in the context of standing images may have been the direct result of the newly introduced Sri Lankan tradition

(fig.195).⁴⁴ The images otherwise do not draw on Sri Lankan stylistic characteristics, but *mudras* are a doctrinal, not stylistic, choice.

Other major monuments constructed in this period include the Naga-yon and Abe-ya-dana temples. Built around 1090, the Naga-yon is decorated inside with sculptures and wall paintings illustrating the life of Gotama Buddha. The narrative sculptures in the entrance vestibule cover significant events in Gotama's life including the Conception, First Sermon, the Descent from Tavatimsa and the *Parinirvana*. According to Luce, the multiple and almost identical images of the Buddha in *dhyana mudra* with a predella below, which are placed between other Buddha images, represent the twenty-seven past Buddhas as listed in the *Buddhavamsa* of the *Khuddaka nikaya*.⁴⁵ Luce identifies series of wall paintings as representing the *suttas* of the *Digha* and *Majjhima nikayas*. If this interpretation is accepted then it indicates there was a zealous pursuit of spreading the newly established Theravada scriptures with an intensity that only the newly converted can muster.

The uniformity of the Naga-yon sculptures suggests the establishment of a customary repertoire coinciding with the acceptance of a standard Theravada doctrine. The message is clearly a Theravadin one and these illustrative sculptures represent the first major attempt to visually articulate the Theravada doctrine to the populace of Bagan. Elements of the Buddha's last life were presented at Kyauk-ku-umin but the extensive use of devotional images that supported the purified doctrine had not been attempted.⁴⁶

The overt display of imagery that was identified by archaeologists and theologians of the 19th century as Theravadin in style was unhesitatingly interpreted as being evidence of Bagan's Theravadin focus. While this is true in the broadest sense, remnants of Mahayanan influence remained, but these became lost in the face of this overt Theravadin presence. Duroiselle noted a

⁴⁴ This image, while dating to the 9th century, is in a style which persisted for around 200 years. The Hindu Cola invasion temporarily reduced the amount of Buddhist imagery that was produced in Sri Lanka, and resulted in the destruction of temples and associated images. See A. Snodgrass, "Introduction", in *Sacred Images of Sri Lanka* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1994), 10.

⁴⁵ The *Khuddaka nikaya* is one of the five *nikayas* of the *Sutta Pitaka*. See *Guide to the Tipitaka*.

⁴⁶ This remark deliberately excludes the multiple relief figures of the Buddha that adorn the ceiling vault of the Kyauk-ku-umin. These images are later replaced by painted versions. Multiple images of the Buddha frequently adorn the ceilings of Bagan temples.

shift from the influence of northern Buddhism after the arrival of the Sri Lankan canon, to that of the southern school, however, he then proceeded to focus almost exclusively on southern Theravada doctrine when analysing both *jataka* illustrations and the Ananda temple imagery.⁴⁷ Conclusions were no doubt influenced by the assumption that the use and meaning of imagery in 11th century Bagan was the same as that in 19th century Burma. Researching in a Theravada environment, their interpretations were instrumental in establishing the paradigm of Bagan's Theravada bias. The Naga-yon and Ananda held the most extensive array of sculptural images and readily distracted early scholars from a more even-handed study of Bagan's offerings. Material not conforming to Theravada orthodoxy did not get the attention it deserved. Bagan's strong Mahayanist beginnings were considered in a cursory way, as were later constructions that did not fit the Theravada model. The most important of these is the Abe-ya-dana temple, built around 1094.

Queen Abe-ya-dana – Another Agency for Change?

The Abe-ya-dana is an intriguing temple containing imagery that is associated with both Theravadin and Mahayanan Buddhism, but any importance it may have had in shaping Bagan's artistic heritage has been overlooked. Just as Shin Arahana was greatly influential, so was Queen Abe-ya-dana. If she was a Bengali princess as legend has it, the Buddhist tradition Abe-ya-dana brought to Bagan would have been essentially the Mahayana type of Pala India, which boasted a rich and complex visual repertoire.⁴⁸ During Anawrahta's reign there was a trend towards repetitive imagery without excessive adornment. The Mon may well have arrested this trend when they brought the skills of stucco work to the city. The visual imagery, however, still drew more on the elaborate images and carvings of India and the Himalayas than of the southern schools.

The interior of the Abe-ya-dana was originally completely covered with paintings and sculptures. There are *jataka* scenes and images of *bodhisattvas* and tantric

⁴⁷ C. Duroiselle, "Pictorial representations of the Jātakas in Burma", 87-9, and "The stone sculptures in the Ananda temple at Pagan," 70.

⁴⁸ Inscriptions suggest that great importance was attached to Brahmanical Vaisnavite rituals at this time when Buddhism in its pure form was supposed to be thriving. This supports the proposition that there was a sudden resurgence of Indian influence at the court. Than Tun, "History of Buddhism," 9.

deities. The seventy niches built into the temple's structure would have housed sculptures of the Buddha though there are virtually no remains.⁴⁹ Were these images arranged as at the Naga-yon, with the twenty-seven Buddhas interspaced with life scenes? Were they devotional images, or a mixture of both? If the twenty-four niches which are evenly spaced around the outer wall of the corridor are counted with the central image of Gotama, then perhaps the niches housed images of the twenty-four previous Buddhas plus Gotama, as listed in the *Buddhavamsa Pali* and *Jataka Pali* of the *Khuddaka nikaya*. This would have been a departure from the twenty-eight Buddha plaques of Anawrahta and the twenty-eight Buddha sculptures found in the Nagayon but would represent an adherence to the "new" Pali canon. The twenty-seven Buddhas (Gotama is the twenty-eighth) are listed in the Pali text but the first three Buddhas did not offer predictions of Gotama's future Buddhahood during any of his rebirths, and hence are not mentioned in the context of his life stories.⁵⁰

The eclectic mix of imagery serves to indicate that religious diversity was accepted and that Theravada doctrine was not imposed on the populace to the exclusion of all other spiritual beliefs. Abe-ya-dana does not appear to have been under pressure from Kyanzittha to follow the Sri Lankan Theravada canon, even though the decoration of his own temple, the Naga-yon, was overtly Theravadin. The ability of the queen to direct the decoration of the temple in a style that reflected a religious preference different from that of the court is testimony to the powerful position Abe-ya-dana must have held, and her influence extended beyond the Abe-ya-dana temple. The trend at the Naga-yon, which was carried further in the Ananda temple, was to reduce the amount of accessory visual material and focus on the Buddha himself and his life scenes. Even though supported by the king and religious leaders, this trend did not find

⁴⁹ Luce remarks that the sculptures in situ in the 1950s were either modern with the possible exception of two which are illustrated in *OBEP*, 3:pl.215b,c. The author is of the opinion that these are also later replacements. *OBEP*, 1:321-344. Ray notes that "In the niches disposed around the walls of the corridor of this temple one can still see some beautiful stone images of the Buddha seated in conventional *mudrās*." Ray, *Sanskrit Buddhism*, 57. One presumes both authors refer to different sculptures indicating some disappeared in the intervening years.

⁵⁰ "Herein, our Bodhisatta spent four *asañkheyyas* and a hundred thousand æons making his resolutions under twenty-four Buddhas commencing with Dīpaṅkara". Jayawickrama, *Story of Gotama Buddha*, 57. Further references to the Nidana-katha are listed as *Nk*, followed by the page number. The three Buddhas not mentioned in the *jatakas* preceded Dipankara.

great popular support. Abe-ya-dana's obvious interest in her own religious practices and her respected position ensured that rich decoration and adornment became an acceptable accompaniment to Theravada orthodoxy. Her temple decoration further integrated gods and deities into the Theravada hierarchy serving as an example to others. In a culture that was rich in animist beliefs and nat worship, she set an example that was followed by future kings and temple donors who continued to embrace the elaborately decorated interiors which had been popularised by Abe-ya-dana and her own temple. Without the Abe-ya-dana there is little to account for the elaborate Buddhist imagery that subsequently developed at Bagan.

Art historically the timing of Queen Abeyadana's influence should be seen as critical. Theravada Buddhism was still new to the populace and there was no expectation regarding the supposedly acceptable forms of decoration that should accompany religious structures. The rich form of visual expression evident at the Abe-ya-dana grew in parallel to Theravada Buddhism. With the Abe-ya-dana temple the move towards a more austere form of imagery in conjunction with Theravada tradition was interrupted.

An Emerging Burmese Visual Canon

Alongside the highly decorative accessory imagery that appears on the inside and outside of temple walls, the final phase of the Kyanzittha period saw the emergence of a distinctly Burmese style of image as a uniformity in the depiction of the Buddha was established. Within this uniformity, however, there is still evidence of multicultural influence. The sculptures made for the Ananda temple provide insight into both of these elements.

At first, the Buddha images in the Ananda temple appear visually to be essentially the same. The iconography is generally consistent and the temple is filled with repetitive images of the Buddha in a limited variety of *mudras*. Even the life scenes take on a similar appearance to each other. The shift towards a standardised representation of the Buddha is clear. Closer examination of the images reveals, however, that there is still a great deal of diversity. No two figures are exactly the same with each face being individually crafted and every reredo and throne base being slightly different as well. The drape of the robe on

each standing or walking image is also individual. There was still no standard code for the making of a Buddha image.

Canons of proportion do not appear to have been of great influence.⁵¹ The Sri Lankan canon of proportions was revived in 1165, after their own restoration of the Theravada tradition, but there is no evidence to suggest Sri Lankan models had a significant impact during the early Bagan period.⁵² Copies of the *Bimbamāna*, a canon of proportions for making a Buddha image have been found in Sri Lanka but its relationship to images is inconsistent.⁵³ When Indian artisans first came to Bagan they would have brought their own canon with them. Each canon is largely dependent on lengths of measurement based on the human body, such as finger width, therefore it is little wonder variations occurred. As Than Tun succinctly states "In type they all confirm [sic] to the concept of *uttamapurisa lakkhana* that simply means the Buddha should not look like an ordinary man".⁵⁴

Images at the Ananda temple are essentially of an Indian type; the lion style torso with its broad chest and shoulders and narrow waist are complemented by a smooth rendering of the skin. A departure from Indian models is reflected in the gentle demeanor of the facial expression. The downcast eyes encourage the devotees to look within themselves, not to the Buddha, to achieve the goals

⁵¹ Canons of proportion, or iconometry, have had little impact on standardising Buddha images, as is evident by the great diversity and continuing change in their appearance across the Buddhist world. For detailed discussion on iconometry in relation to Buddhism see J.C. Huntington, "The Origin of the Buddha Image: Early Image Traditions and the Concept of Buddhadarasanapunya," in *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia* (New Delhi: Kanak Publications, 1985). Iconography of the Buddha is also detailed in Hindu texts, as the Buddha is an *avatar* of Vishnu. Iconometry is still very important in Hinduism. Canons of proportion for images are still taught as part of formal art training. See D.N. Shukla, *Vastu-Sastra Vol. II Hindu Canons of Iconography and Painting*, 15-38. Woodward notes that Thai writings on the subject are few and do not bear much relationship to imagery. Woodward, *The Sacred Sculpture of Thailand*, 22-23. There are *mahapurusa-laksanas* (iconometric details) for specific feature of deities. For example, the iconometric origins of the *usnisa* is examined by Banerjea, "Usnisa-siraskata (a *mahapurusa-laksana*) in the early Buddha images of India", *Indian Historical Quarterly* 7:3 (1931), 499-514. Another source of information regarding to iconography is P. Bose, *Pratima-Mana-Laksanam* (Lahore: Motilal Barnarsidass, 1929). A Burmese iconometric study by Win Maung reviews the principal stylistic characteristics of Burmese Buddha images from the Bagan period through to the Mandalay period. As a master craftsman himself, he has a strong interest in iconometry and stylistic change.

⁵² A. Coomaraswamy, *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1908), 151-2.

⁵³ E.W. Marasinghe, *The Bimbamāna of Gautamīyaśāstra as Heard by Śāriputra* (Delhi: Sri Satara Publications, 1994). The *Bimbamāna* provides proportions for sitting, standing and reclining figures. As the author notes, there are many differences between known iconometric texts, which also include the *Citrakarmasāstra* and the *Pratimāna-laksana*. See pp.xv-xxi.

⁵⁴ Than Tun. "Brahmanical and Buddhist Iconographs",

of Buddhist teachings. It is difficult to engage with any image directly. This is a marked contrast to Hindu religious practice where interaction with an image through eye contact is a significant element. It is also a departure from aspects of Mahayana Buddhism which depend on interaction with the visual image. This reduced eye contact is more overt at Bagan than at any other time or place in the Theravada Buddhist history. Models for this downcast expression, however, can be found in the Mon sculpture of Thaton and Dvaravati which pre-date the Bagan period by around two centuries. It is possible that prototypes came to Bagan once Kyaukse had control over lower Burma. However, it is more likely that personal preference dictated this form along with doctrinal considerations.

A Further Note on Indian Influence

The effect of Indian artistic styles has been mentioned throughout this thesis. The influence of traveling monks and traders from India can be found throughout Burma's art history, and indeed, the art history of Southeast Asia. That Indian artistic developments provided a foundation for Burmese art is without question, from early Pyu art through to the art of the early Bagan period. As indicated, however, as with the Indianisation process itself, the adoption of Indian styles has been selective and has rapidly undergone local transformation. At Bagan, Pala India influence is readily seen, but within a period of 50 to 70 years, this has evolved into a more distinct Burmese style. It is difficult to find evidence that the changes that occurred in Pala art during the late 11th and 12th centuries had any influence at Bagan. The Burmese had already embarked on their own stylistic changes. In some ways the "obvious" similarities between the art of Pala India and that of the early Bagan period has led to a lack of definitive scholarship examining the links between the two artistic schools.

A Comment on China

The influence of China, which we know had links with Burma, is less

obvious.⁵⁵ As Le May remarks, Indian art was introduced by peaceful means and accompanied by a religious message and became well accepted throughout

Southeast Asia. Chinese art was also introduced by traders but lacked a religious connection and royal patronage and therefore did not have great influence.⁵⁶ By the Bagan period Buddhism in China had lost the regnal support it had enjoyed under the Tang dynasty (618-907). The Song dynasty rulers (960-1279) had revived Confucian ideals and Daoism enjoyed a resurgence.⁵⁷ The imagery associated with these religions had little to offer a staunchly Buddhist kingdom. Even during the Pyu period, with Chinese records to indicate cultural interactions between the two kingdoms occurred, there is little to suggest a strong influence of Chinese art on Pyu art. However, there have been suggestions that Chinese influence can be found at Bagan in some early temples. Taw Sein Ko draws comparisons between Bagan temples such as East and West Pet-leik, and Chinese symbolism, namely the similarities between the central square housing the four Buddhas of the current eon which form the centre of many of Bagan's temples, and the Four Guardians of Chinese Daoism.⁵⁸

Following the Nanchao invasions and collapse of the Tang dynasty, connections with China appear to have ceased. While the overland trade route between India and China was active during the Bagan period, Chinese influences on the artistic developments of Bagan are hard to discover.

⁵⁵ Interactions between China and Burma have not been subjected to extensive research. As noted in Chapter 2, there are many references to Burma in Chinese records. The same cannot be said of the reverse. There are some mentions of China in Burmese records but these are few. H. Burney, "Some account of the Wars between Burmah and China," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 6 (1837):121-49, and E.H. Parker, *Burma with Special Reference to her Relations with China* (Rangoon Gazette Press, 1893). References to Burma are also recorded in F. Hirth and W. Rockhill, trans., *Chau Ju-Kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, Entitled Chu-fan-chi* (St Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1911),

⁵⁶ R. Le May, *A Concise History of Buddhist Art in Siam* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle and Company, 1962), 1.

⁵⁷ C. Galloway, *Life in the Emperor's Tomb*, (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2002), 16-27.

⁵⁸ Taw Sein Ko, "Chinese Antiquities at Bagan," *JBR* 1, pt.2 (1911): 1-5.

A Summary of Stylistic Change

Anawrahta's images tend to be severe and impart power and confidence, encouraging a link between the image and the viewer, a Mahayanist characteristic. Kyanzittha chose a style that highlighted humility towards the Buddha's teachings. Again, the hand of Shin Araham appears. Theravada doctrine promotes the three jewels – the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *Sangha*. The Buddha's word is paramount and, as the ultimate example of self sacrifice, he stood alone. This style of figure discourages active engagement with the image. Instead, it supports personal meditation and reflection on the Buddha's teachings. Promoting this aspect of Buddhism would surely have encouraged devotees to turn to the *sangha* for instruction. The importance of the *sangha* and support for it by the local community was assured.

By the end of Kyanzittha's reign there is virtually no evidence of Mon or Pyu influences in the Buddhist sculpture at Bagan. Changes in Indian models meant the artistic similarities between the two countries were widening. Court-sponsored Buddhist sculpture took on a uniformity that supported Theravada doctrine as introduced from Sri Lanka. This overt appearance of Theravada theology, however, made it easy to overlook the continuing influences of Buddhist teachings from other areas. Mahayana influences that had existed prior to and during Anawrahta's reign were still present. Anawrahta's votive tablets often included imagery of Lokanatha, the Mahayanist's principal *bodhisattva*, and Maitreya, and similar plaques continued to be used after Kyanzittha's reign. The influence of Pala India, so prominent in the imagery, extended to doctrinal concerns. Pala Buddhism itself was a complex entity being neither Mahayanist nor Theravadin exclusively.

Application of the Proposed Classifications

The identification of two periods and four phases based on stylistic change provides a significant tool to assist in proposing dating for both newly found images, and previously known images of unknown provenance. Temples are usually dated based on architectural elements or, in the absence of definitive design features, the relationship of the remains to nearby structures. However, using the proposed visual chronology to undertake a thoughtful analysis of any

sculptural material found in situ can add to our knowledge and interpretation of the site. Of course, any images contained therein may not always be contemporaneous with the building, and reasons for contradictions between imagery and architecture should always be considered. The following examples of four temples, which contain images that have only more recently come to light and have not been subject to in-depth analysis, readily demonstrate how the proposed chronology is able to add significantly in furthering our understanding of early Bagan. In addition, a review of some sculptures of unconfirmed provenance also demonstrates how the classification system can help confirm, or refute, proposed chronology.

Paw-daw-mu (no.996)

As discussed in Chapter 2 Paw-daw-mu temple has only been recently excavated. With an interior structure providing strong links to the Pyu and likely to date from the 10th century, the outer structure's date is less clear. The outer images are in poor condition being in most cases little more than brick outlines – it is likely the outer temple corridor collapsed possibly centuries earlier exposing the inner corridor's images to the weather. Using the proposed chronology, however, characteristics can be discerned which are consistent with the Late Kyanzittha phase. Two of the better preserved remains have intact torsos. The profiles of the torsos show the images to have very broad and full chest, with a narrow, waist, narrower than that of the earlier smaller stone images found at the site. The brick framework is quite consistent with the finished form, as an even layer of stucco was later applied to complete the Buddha image.⁵⁹ However, there are inconsistencies. The factor which favours a construction period of late in Kyanzittha's reign is the apparent downward angle of the right arm and heaviness of the upper arm, which is similar to the Buddha images from the Ananda temple. The remains of the double lotus throne, while usually indicating an earlier date, is not unknown in later images. Some images from Kyauk-ku-umin, for example (figs.89,93) have a similarly wide double lotus base, however, this feature is also found in images from the

⁵⁹ There are a number of damaged images at Bagan which make it possible to see the stucco layer that covers the brick framework. The stucco layer is remarkably uniform across all the images I have observed, and is about 1 cm in most mid-sized images.

late 11th- early 12th century (see fig.183). While it is clear further study is necessary to understand this complex temple and determine its construction date, it is likely that the later exterior temple will be associated with the later phase of Kyanzittha's rule.⁶⁰

Temple 820

The excavation and restoration of Temple 820 in 1999–2000 uncovered two remarkable sculptures which are stylistically consistent with images from Anawrahta's reign and possibly the early part of Kyanzittha's reign. The temple had been tentatively assigned to the 12th century by Pichard based on the remains of what was then a heavily overgrown ruin. Pichard had noted the unusual appearance of one window arch which is of a type otherwise unknown at Bagan. However, the style of images found support an earlier date, during the 11th century. This earlier date may also help explain the unusual window feature as it was a time of experimentation and the introduction of many new building techniques. During the 12th century architectural methods were much more uniform. The temple has a rectangular entrance vestibule which opens onto the central square of the main chamber (fig.117, fig.118).

A single large stone image of the Buddha is the primary focus of worship while side niches contained some life scenes. The excavated remains of the central Buddha image reveal a beautifully modeled sculpture (fig.119). While there has been some restoration many of the original features remain. Loose stucco curls have been found at the site and the spiked hair curls are stylistically similar to those of the bronze standing Buddhas attributed to Anawrahta's reign. The gentle swelling of the stomach above the line of the inner robe, narrow waist, elongated torso and modest lion chest are typical of Anawrahta period sculptures. Likewise, the face shape also has much in common with Anawrahta-period images. The lips are held tightly pursed and are only as wide as the

⁶⁰ As most evidence of Pyu culture had vanished by the end of Kyanzittha's rule, I would prefer a date associated with Anawrahta. Given the good condition of the interior temple, it is more likely that it was overbuilt early in the Bagan period, as were the Hpet-leik pagodas. Also, the location of this temple, being near both the Hpet-leik and Loka-nanda pagodas increases the likelihood that the building took place at the same time Anawrahta was associated with other significant building works in the area. Kyanzittha is not connected to significant temple construction in this vicinity.

nostrils. The chin is prominent, the eyebrow line curves upwards and outwards and the hair curls line across the forehead is almost straight.

Implementing the stylistic features outlined above the most obvious features consistent with the period are:

- lips full and wider than breadth of nose
- moderate eyebrow arch, each joining the nose bridge
- small rounded usnisha (the small flame-like finial is consistent but this is not original)
- spiky hair curls used
- eyes are hooded

Characteristics which work against a later date are face shape, which becomes more heart-shaped during the Kyanzittha period and the width of neck and waist, which become slimmer.

This image also shares some elements with Sri Lankan styles. As noted above, there is little evidence that Sri Lanka had a significant influence of the art of Bagan, however, if present it should relate to the Anawrahta period. Here, the relative plumpness of the face, prominent neck rings, raised hair curls and relatively broad forehead are all links to Sri Lankan sculptures of the period (fig.195, fig.195a). These features are not enduring, and only appear for a limited period.

Kyauk-sa-ga-gyi (no.1029) – Another Sawlu Temple?

Kyauk-sa-ga-gyi is located near the Loka-nanda (fig.122, fig.123). It was given a provisional date of the 12th century by Pichard but the sculptural remains, which were only excavated around 1990 suggest the temple has links to the Sawlu period, from 1077-1084. Pichard recorded the presence of a scene of the Nativity, and a reclining image, amongst others. A total of eleven images were

removed to the Bagan Museum in 1993, and the temple has been completely restored.⁶¹

There are three images in fair to average repair that remain in situ. The best preserved is a seated image of the Buddha in *dharmacakra mudra* (fig.124). The freestanding stone image has a simple reredo back, a precursor to the style used more decoratively at the Naga-yon and then at the Ananda temple. The sculpture retains the rounded character of the Anawrahta period but is less plump. The lines of the eyes and eyelids are very similar to the head from Myin-pya-gu (fig.106). While the hair cap is smooth it would no doubt have been covered with stucco hair curls, as in fig.119. Later stone images from the Naga-yon and Ananda incorporated the curls into the stone carving. The torso is shorter than those of the early Anawrahta period, but not squat, a characteristic of mid 12th century images. Likewise, the chest is only of a modest lion-type, again pre-dating Kyanzittha's early temple images. The soles of the feet are almost flat, and the robe and lotus base are simply crafted. The second seated image, this time in *bhumisparsa mudra*, shares similar characteristics though is in poor condition (fig.125).

Another image, this time of a standing Buddha with an attendant on his left, also has stylistic characters consistent with this proposed dating (fig.126). The remains of the torso are curved, but less so than, for example, the full hipped bronze sculpture associated with the Shwe-hsan-daw (fig.52). The central shrine image is in the tradition of monolithic figures (fig.127). The areas of restoration are obvious but enough of the original remains to make some comments on the stylistic characters. The chest is of modest proportions, and the waist is typically slim. The face is similar to that of the seated image, though the overall elegance of this form is diminished when transferred to such a large scale.

Based on stylistic comparison, these images hold a transitional position, between the earlier Anawrahta images and those of Kyanzittha's reign. A later 12th century date cannot be substantiated by the images contained within the structure. The resemblance to Gupta period images is quite pronounced, and

⁶¹ Pichard, 4:260-2.

local researchers refer to these figures as being in Gupta style, which is likely to have been mediated through the Pyu.⁶² Certainly a resemblance to the Sultanganj image (fig.116) and the seated Sarnath figure (fig.10) is apparent. There may well have been an introduced prototype at Bagan which attracted Sawlu's favour, but overall the differences in detail outweigh the similarities. These include the slab-like representation of the feet, and a rigidity in the Bagan images compared to the wonderfully controlled postures of the Indian images. Also, the Bagan images show the earlobes resting on the shoulders, which are much squarer than the Indian images.

Sculptures Attributed to the Kyanzittha Period

The influence of Pala India is found in a head and upper torso from an image of the Buddha (fig.185). The image is said to have been found at Mi-nien-kon, a temple dating to the 13th century though this purported origin must be questioned as this expertly carved more than life-size limestone image can be placed stylistically in the latter period of Kyanzittha's reign, when the facial expression was soft, but also tightly executed (fig.185). The pursed lips, chin contour and nose are consistent with imagery from this time. This image also has an *urna*, a feature which appears inconsistently during the early Bagan period. The face is wonderfully expressive and masterfully created. The similarity between this image and those of Pala India reinforces the theory that Indian craftsmen were responsible for most of the early sculptural and architectural works at Bagan. Based on the proposed stylistic chronology, this image is placed firmly within the Kyanzittha phase, most likely in the later period. The construction of the Mi-nien-kon temple (no.1499), however, is estimated as end of the 12th century and the architectural support for this is strong. As the stone head is not at all connected stylistically with this period, two possibilities must be considered. The first, that the head was not found at Mi-nien-kon, and the cataloguing of the head is incorrect – a strong possibility. Alternatively the head may belong to the temple, but from an earlier time.

⁶² Personal communication with U Aung Kyaing, Director of Archaeology for Upper Burma. While visiting in December 2003, U Aung Kyaing drew my attention to these images referring to them as Gupta style figures.

Possibly the Mi-nien-kon has already been rebuilt in the late 12th century, and the stone head re-used.⁶³

A standing bronze figure of the Buddha found on the northwest side of Ananda Kyaungdaik (fig.186) is dated by Luce to around 1100. This superb bronze is closely related to the stone images found in the Ananda temple, though as with the bronzes of Anawrahta's reign the figures remain fuller and more contoured than stone sculptures of the same period. The end of the Buddha's robe is clearly seen in the left hand. As with all standing bronze images extant from the early Bagan period, the right hand is raised in *abhaya mudra*. This image is in exceptionally fine condition. The lines across the palms of the hands are clearly visible as is the delicate crafting of the robe, with wavy long edge on the left and figure-eight type pleat on the right. The lower edge again slopes downwards towards the centre. While the image is likely to have been consecrated with the temple, being found outside the temple wall calls the provenance into question. The characteristics of very full thighs and a slim waist, the lime-like chin and tightly packed rounded hair curls all support a late Kyanzittha phase date, confirming the likely provenance.

A seated bronze described by Luce as being of the "Aniruddha" type was reportedly found in the relic-chamber of the middle casing of the encased *stupa* at Shwe-zigon pagoda, Yamethin (fig.187). The figure, however, should not be considered of the typical "Aniruddha" type. Rather, it is showing a shift towards the characters of Kyanzittha's bronzes and probably dates from early in his reign, when the Shwe-zigon was completed. The face is broader and the chin and nose less pronounced than typical Anawrahta figures. The torso is more relaxed and the overall appearance shows some similarities to an image found at the Shwe-hsan-daw (fig.115). The side view shows the wonderful curves of each finger, the middle finger extending towards the earth (fig.188). Another image from the same site has a very similar torso but the face is quite different (fig.189). Luce refers to it as having "a similar, but rounder Burmese face".⁶⁴ The image also shares some similarities with earlier Pyu images which have broad

⁶³ A third speculative possibility also exists. While unlikely given the quality of the carving etc, perhaps this stone head was made much later in the 'Kyanzittha style' and installed in the temple to implement a significant repair.

⁶⁴ *OBEP*, 3:201.

features. Characteristics such as the eyebrow arch and shift towards a heart-shaped face are more often associated with the early Kyauzitha phase. This is consistent with the view that Kyauzitha was responsible for the completion of the Shwe-zigon temple.

Conclusion

These examples of temples and sculptures with strong provenance linking them to the early Bagan period, demonstrate the ability of the periods and styles proposed to assist with the dating of images from this era. There will always be exceptions and contradictions. Not all images will display all identified characteristics, however, where a majority of features fall into one of the proposed phases, linkage with this period is very probable. As the examples show, there was no fixed template for the style of a Buddha image. Images which appear to belong to an earlier period may appear in a later construction. Consideration must be given to the possibilities that temples were renewed and rebuilt, often following natural disasters, and the architecture and sculptures may not be contemporaneous with each other. For images found outside of their original context, the proposed framework can help provide a stylistic date, but of course this does not guarantee authenticity.

For "original" artifacts, the importance of establishing a possible chronology is the first step in searching for the potential origins of the image. With the innumerable empty niches at Bagan, the ability to narrow the time frame of an image's likely creation date will assist greatly in assessing its possible original site. The stylistic chronology, which cannot include all possibilities and variations, becomes stronger when viewed in conjunction with specific agencies for change and the time period in which these influences were present as the recognition of a stylistic element that is particularly associated with images from another culture, can assist in further refining its proposed dating.

Chapter 6 Text and Image

In the previous chapter the effects of newly introduced cultural influences on artistic expression at Bagan were discussed. This is one method which can be used to facilitate an understanding of the causes for stylistic and iconographic change in the absence of substantial inscriptional material. Another approach can be posited which offers further insight into the origins of iconographic features that prevailed during this period. A close analysis of the relationship between imagery and the Buddhist texts that were known to have existed at the time can offer valuable insights into the type of Buddhism practised during the formative years of the Bagan Empire. The origins of these Buddhist texts allow for extrapolation into the artistic sphere, namely that the visual traditions of the regions associated with the texts must also have been known at Bagan.

Luce and Duroiselle consistently took this type of approach when analysing the numerous *jataka* illustrations, both paintings and terracotta plaques.⁶⁵ The order of the *jatakas*, particularly the last ten, and the total number, whether 547 or 550, were well described by both scholars. Their analysis invariably drew them towards the conclusion that the shift from a recension of 547 to a Sri Lankan recension, then to what has become known as the Burmese recension of 550 *jatakas* coincided with the arrival of the Pali Sri Lankan texts at Bagan. This event has been cited by both scholars as providing evidence of the time of the literature's arrival in Bagan. When illustrations of the *jatakas* were present, the recension followed most closely was one of Luce's principal arguments for determining a chronology of temples at Bagan.

In their enthusiasm for finding links between the *jatakas* and the relevant parts of the Theravada Pali canon, however, both Luce and Duroiselle neglected to pursue links between texts of Mahayana or northern origin and imagery. Mentioned in passing, the presence of Mahayanan deities or inconsistencies

⁶⁵ *Jataka* sequences are described in *OBEP* vol.1 in a number of sections. Luce and Ba Shin detailed the *jatakas* in Kubyauk-gyi Myinkaba in the comprehensive article "Pagan Myinkaba Kubyauk-gyi", 277-416. See specifically 321-30. See also Duroiselle, "Pictorial Representations of Jātakas in Burma", 87-116, and Lu Pe Win, "The Jātakas in Burma", 2:94-108, and Luce, "The 550 Jātakas in Old Burma", *Artibus Asiae* 19 (1956):291-307, see 3-4.

between Pali texts and visual interpretations were treated as insignificant. They were regarded as "leftovers" in the shift towards Theravada orthodoxy.

The detailed art historical study of Theravada Buddhist philosophy and its relationship to iconography is still in its infancy. This subject has been more thoroughly developed in relation to Indian and Himalayan art and Mahayana Buddhism. Shukla's overview of Buddhist iconography is an example of this, being written from a Mahayana perspective.⁶⁶ Some of his references are relevant to this thesis inasmuch as they relate to Mahayana traditions that may have filtered through to Burma. The emergence of the Adi Buddha in iconography at Nalanda during the 10th century is of note, particularly reference to his appearance as a flame.⁶⁷ There may be a link between this philosophical context and the appearance of the flame-like finial on top of the Buddha images of the early Bagan period. Shukla describes Nalanda as a centre for the development of Vajrayana and Tantrayana from the 7th century. The promulgation of these sects and their associated imagery, which also included the Buddhist pantheon, must have wielded considerable influence on the surrounding region.

A useful distinction made by Shukla, which directly relates to the differences in the Mahayana and Theravadin schools, is the appearance of two types of images – one group that is "general" and does not develop into a hierarchy, and one that is "sectarian".⁶⁸ This division is highlighted when contrasting the role images play within the Theravada and Mahayana schools. Within the Mahayana Vajrayana tradition, there is a clear hierarchy amongst the Buddhist pantheon, whose numbers expanded greatly when Vajrayana Buddhism became so popular in north India from the 6th century. In contrast Theravadins do not share this hierarchy, and the Buddha image remains the principal figure of veneration.

The transition from Mahayana to Theravada was rapid in terms of the activities of the *sangha*. Mahayan supporters, however, may have continued to exist

⁶⁶ D.N. Shukla, *Vastu-Sastra*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 20-1.

as a separate doctrinal group well into the 13th century.⁶⁹ Epigraphic evidence of Mahayana is scant at Bagan, however, the visual narratives found in temple wall paintings and sculptures continued to draw on Mahayanist imagery.⁷⁰ While the multitude of paintings of northern Buddhism's gods and goddesses are excluded from the scope of this thesis, evidence of Mahayana influence can, however, be found in the narrative sculptures at Bagan, in particular those of the Ananda temple. The narrative of Gotama Buddha's last earthly existence, popularised at Bagan under Shin Araham's tutelage, was an excellent educational vehicle for spreading the teachings of the Buddha. Series of images depicting these events appeared in the Pahto-tha-mya, Naga-yon, Ananda and possibly the Abe-ya-dana. These images complemented the use of illustrated *jataka* stories, as first seen at Bagan in the Hpet-leik pagodas. While the *jatakas* showed how good deeds would eventually enable devotees to attain Buddhahood after many cycles of rebirth, the story of the last earthly life humanised the Buddha, allowing followers a more personal involvement with the religion. While the *jatakas* are almost exclusively the domain of the Theravada, the story of Gotama Buddha's final earthly existence exists in both the Theravada and Mahayana traditions.

As the only complete series extant that details the life of Gotama Buddha, and with an almost complete set of *jataka* plaques adorning the exterior, the Ananda temple images have been relatively well documented compared to most of Bagan's figurative Buddhist remains.⁷¹ However, most reviews of this extraordinary imagery occurred within an environment dominated by the Pali Theravada dominated environment outlined in the Introduction and Chapter 1. A critical review of the Ananda narrative sculptures in the context of both Theravada and Mahayana traditions reveals the imagery draws on both

⁶⁹ Duroiselle stressed that a Mahayanan sect was active at Min-nan-thu, which is a short distance from New Bagan, based on his interpretation of the wall paintings. The three temples, Hpaya-thon-zu centre (no.478), east (no.477) and west (no.479), are dated to the mid 12th century, well after Kyanzittha's review of the Theravada canon. C. Duroiselle, "The Āri of Burma," 79-93.

⁷⁰ For example, Mahayana imagery is present at the Abe-ya-dana as well as at Min-nan-thu.

⁷¹ See C. Duroiselle, "The Stone Sculptures in the Ananda Temple at Pagan," 63-97 and "The Talaing plaques on the Ānanda," *OBEF*, 1:357-73. Also see H.L. Shorto, "The Devatā Plaques of the Ananda Basement", *Artibus Asiae* 2 (1966):156-165 and E. Guillon, *L'Armée du Māra au Pied de l'Ānanda (Pagan-Birmanie)* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1985).

sources.⁷² This provides further evidence to support the ongoing presence of Mahayana influences even after the Pali *Tipitaka* had been adopted by the *sangha*.

As outlined in Chapter 1, there are many versions of the Buddha's life story, and this thesis is concerned with accounts that are known to have been in existence prior to the Bagan period.⁷³ These include the *Buddhacarita*, *Lalitavistara* and the *Nidanakatha*. Of these three the *Buddhacarita*, while being a work of great prose and elegance, offers little when undertaking a visual analysis of the narrative sculptures. The work's focus is directed more on the philosophical path to attaining Enlightenment rather than dwelling on the earthly details of the journey. The prose lends itself to recitation and one can understand why Yijing found the work so extensively known.⁷⁴ In contrast, the *Lalitavistara* and *Nidanakatha* have powerfully descriptive narratives and appear to have offered much to inspire artisans. The role of the *Lalitavistara* at Bagan has been under-represented in favour of the *Nidanakatha* which originated in the Pali tradition. Close analysis of narrative sculptures in relation to each text shows that both provide explanations for the imagery seen in these early Bagan temples.

The *Lalitavistara*

By the beginning of the Christian era the division of Buddhism into the two main streams of the northern Mahayana and southern Theravada schools was entrenched. It is from the northern tradition that the earliest extant account of the Buddha's life story emerged. The *Lalitavistara* (Lv) was "the first important Buddhist Sanskrit text to become known in the West" and, therefore, the first

⁷² Guillon, in his study of the Ananda plaques illustrating Mara's army which encircle the exterior of the temple's base, included some comparative analysis between texts of Theravada and Mahayana origin and their relationship to the imagery. However, it was not the focus of his work, and the analysis was confined to this imagery exclusively. E. Guillon, *L'Armée de Māra au Pied de l'Ānanda*.

⁷³ As well as works mentioned in Chapter 1, there have been a number of more "recent" publications regarding the life of the Buddha. These include translations of Buddhist manuscripts and "new" compilations. Examples include P. Herbert, *The Life of the Buddha* (London: British Library, 1992), Nanamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pali Canon* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1992), M. Edwardes, *A Life of the Buddha from a Burmese Manuscript* (London: The Folio Society, 1959) and Khosla, *The Historical Evolution of the Buddha Legend*, (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1989).

⁷⁴ Johnston, *The Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha*.

version of the Buddha's life story to be readily accessible to Western scholars.⁷⁵ An analysis of the *Lalitavistara* was published in 1836 based on a manuscript copied in 1803. The first translation, albeit incomplete, was published in French in 1847 and was based on a Tibetan text. This was published in Sanskrit in 1877-78 and contained passages written in verse and prose. The first English translation was by Mitra who, during the years 1881-1886 published chapters 1-14 from a Sanskrit manuscript.⁷⁶ Some of the *Lalitavistara* passages were translated by Beal in 1875.⁷⁷ While there has been much written about the *Lalitavistara* since then it has been primarily in the context of Sanskrit or Buddhist studies where the discussion has centered on philological debate.

The *Lalitavistara*'s importance and popularity can be inferred by its widespread presence throughout much of the Buddhist world from early times. A Chinese translation of the *Lalitavistara* was made in 318 by Fahou, and another by Divakara in 683.⁷⁸ Around 590, Jnanagupta included part of the *Lalitavistara* in a collection of biographies of the Buddha. The *Lalitavistara* also found its way to the Middle East and forms the basis of an Ethiopian legend.⁷⁹ De Jong notes that additions were frequently made to the original *Lalitavistara*, determined by philological changes. Dutt also comments on this, as the text in some versions often appears interrupted. His assessment of the text's origin falls in line with that of early scholars who promoted the *Lalitavistara*'s Sarvastivada origins. Some of the prose passages are believed to have their origins in Sarvastivadin scriptures, and "it contains passages as old as anything in Pali" placing it amongst the earliest Buddhist writings.⁸⁰ However, he believes that the later additions, still early in the Common Era, of dialogues between Ananda and the

⁷⁵ Jan Willem De Jong, "Recent Japanese Studies on the *Lalitavistara*", *Indologica Taurinensia* 23-24 (1997-98):247-55.

⁷⁶ R. Mitra, trans., *Lalita-vistara* (London: University of London, 1877).

⁷⁷ S. Beal, *The Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King. A Life of the Buddha by Asvaghosa Bodhisattva, translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Dharmaraksha 420 AD*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1883).

⁷⁸ De Jong, "Recent Japanese Studies," 250.

⁷⁹ See *Baralam and Yewasef, being the Ethiopic version of a Christianised recension of the Buddhist legend of the Buddha and Bodhisattva*, translated by E.A.W. Budge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923). The story of Baralam and Yewasef (more contemporary spelling, Barlaam and Joasaph) has been known to the Western world from at least the 15th century.

⁸⁰ E.J. Thomas, "The *Lalitavistara* and Sarvastivada", *Indian Historical Quarterly* vol.16 pt.2, 1940, 239-45.

Buddha, were deliberately designed to make the text appear more Mahayanian than Theravadin.⁸¹ The text deifies the Buddha as superhuman, a concept not embraced by the Theravada schools.

Whether the *Lalitavistara* arose from the teachings of the Sarvastivada or Mahasamghika sects is of little import here except to reinforce the point that early Buddhist scholarship by Western scholars occurred within a Pali Theravada bias.⁸² If it did originate in the Theravada Sarvastivada tradition of northern India, this story was adopted early on by Mahayana devotees as their version of the Buddha's life story. De Jong's summary of more current research places the *Lalitavistara* in the Mahayana tradition, possibly connected to the Mahasamghika school rather than in the Sarvastivada sect as is often mentioned in introductions to the *Lalitavistara*. Dutt notes that the last chapter, where the Buddha's attributes are praised at length, is probably not part of the original verse.⁸³ "As this chapter is very likely a Mahayana addition, we may reasonably say the *Lalitavistara* in its general form as a treatise of the Sarvastivadins who viewed the Buddha as a human being with superhuman attributes".⁸⁴ De Jong's assessment that the original text appears better preserved in the Tibetan translations than in the surviving Sanskrit manuscripts and Chinese translations is significant.⁸⁵ It is on a Tibetan manuscript that the only complete English translation has been made, the 1983 translation by Bays.⁸⁶ That it is based on an 8th century Tibetan text is particularly pertinent to

⁸¹ S. Dutt, *The Buddha and After Five Centuries*, (London: Luzac, 1957), 248.

⁸² Thomas, "The *Lalitavistara* and Sarvastivada," 239-245. In this article he comments on Rhys Davids' assessment, made some fifty years before, that the *Lalitavistara* is a "poem of unknown date and authorship, but probably composed in Nepal, and by some Buddhist poet whom lived sometime between six hundred and a thousand years after the birth of the Buddha." Thomas's response was "this illustrates the extraordinary misconceptions then prevailing, as well as the attitude of the Pali school, which sought to reconstruct the early history of Buddhism from Pali sources alone," 239.

⁸³ The final chapter describes the Turning of the Wheel of Law, and includes a long discourse on the Buddha's intellectual and spiritual superiority. See Bays, trans., *The Lalitavistara Sūtra*, 2:611-63.

⁸⁴ Dutt, *The Buddha*, 150. The relationship between the *Lalitavistara* and the Mahayana and Theravada are discussed by S. Khosla, *Lalitavistara and the Evolution of the Buddha Legend* (New Delhi: Galaxy Publications, 1991), 81-116.

⁸⁵ De Jong, "Recent Japanese Studies," 254.

⁸⁶ Bays, trans., *The Lalitavistara Sūtra*. In the introductory forward, the sources for this translation are given as Edouard Foucaux's translation of a Sanskrit text to French, and the translation made during the 8th century of a Sanskrit manuscript into Tibetan by Jinamitra, Danaśīla, Munivarman and Ye-shes sde. While acknowledging the inability to re-check each word of translation, the publisher is confident the translation reflects closely the early texts from which they worked.

its comparative use in this study. The text has changed very little since that time and it can be assumed that during the 11th and 12th centuries, the period with which this thesis is primarily concerned, this version was virtually the "standard".⁸⁷

The *Lalitavistara* and Buddhist Imagery

The use of texts which describe the life of Gotama Buddha as a means of understanding Buddhist imagery has rarely been pursued in a scholarly and sustained way. The *Lalitavistara* was drawn to the attention of art historians through its proposed association with one of the world's most significant Buddhist monuments, Borobodur. At Borobodur, the enormous *stupa* is adorned with extensive narrative life scenes of Gotama's last earthly existence. In the late 1800s Wilsen noted the relationship between the reliefs at Borobodur and the *Lalitavistara*. In 1901 Pleyte wrote further on this relationship.⁸⁸ The context in which these comparisons were made, however, was in the study of religious texts, not in art history. Scholars used the relationship between the imagery and text as evidence that, in the absence of written manuscripts, this literature had indeed been present in Java. For example, Klokke based her study of the reliefs on ancient Javanese temples entirely on the premise that the close association of imagery to text was evidence that certain texts, and their associated religious schools, were well known in Java.⁸⁹

The relationship between the *Lalitavistara* and early Indian art, particularly concerning images of the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra* and the presence of the earth-goddess was explored by Leoshko in 1988.⁹⁰ In this case the author used Bays' translation as the basis for a visual analysis of early Indian images. The relationship between the text and image was the supporting argument for identifying the female figures which often appear in the predella of early

⁸⁷ A comparison between Mitra's translation and Bays' work reveals only minor differences, related more to the use of English language rather than the content. Even though Mitra did not translate the latter half of the document, the similarities between the sections he completed and Bays' completed work helps confirm the accuracy of the latter's translation.

⁸⁸ C.M. Pleyte, *Die Buddha-Legende in den Skulturen des Tempels von Bôrô-Budur* (Amsterdam: De Bussy, 1901).

⁸⁹ Marijke Klokke, *The Tantric Reliefs on Ancient Javanese Candi* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1993), 7-54.

⁹⁰ Janice Leoshko, "The Case of the Two Witnesses to the Buddha's Enlightenment," in *A Pot-Pourri of Indian Art*, edited by Pratapaditya Pal (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1988), 41-52.

Buddhist sculpture. A more recent article by Vajracharya takes a similar approach.⁹¹ The author relates the imagery found on the Asokan pillars with the *Rig-veda* and offers comment on the transformation of some in this imagery in later times. The textual references to imagery, such as the concept of a rain cloud being a heavenly ocean, are traced from their origins in Vedic writings through to legends dating to the Asokan period. The author then compares the textual shifts in the legends with the corresponding changes in the visual interpretation. By identifying early imagery and its meaning, it is possible to track change and the evolution of visual representations of prevailing Buddhist thought at a particular time.

The *Nidanakatha*

Another account of significance for understanding imagery at Bagan sits firmly in the Theravada tradition. The *Nidanakatha*, literally "the story of the origins", is positioned in the Pali canon as the introduction to the *Jataka*, the collection of stories recalling the past lives of the Buddha Gotama. The *Jataka* is one of 18 suttas in the *Khuddaka nikaya* of the *Sutta pitaka*.⁹² While the *Jataka* stories were in existence during the Buddha's lifetime the *Nidanakatha* is a later addition and not part of the original Pali canon. It is therefore not part of the canonical literature. As noted in Chapter 1 the text is attributed to the well-known Buddhist commentator, Buddhaghosa, who lived in the 6th century.

The story is divided into three sections. The first is the Distant Epoch. The focus is on Buddha Dipankara's prediction that Sumedha, a Brahman by birth, will become the future Buddha, Gotama. Following this is a recitation of the lives of the former Buddhas. The Intermediate Epoch deals with the final rebirth of Gotama Buddha from his preparation for birth while in Tushita Heaven, until his attainment of Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. The Recent Epoch tells of the time immediately after attaining Enlightenment, including the seven weeks under and around the Bodhi tree, until the dedication of the monastery at

⁹¹ Gautama Vajracharya, "Symbolism of Ashokan Pillars. A reappraisal in the light of textual and visual evidence," *Marg* 5 pt.2 (1999):53-78. The author makes sound comment on the relationship between symbolism in the Vedas, and Buddhist imagery. However, the argument is less sound when reversed, that is, when drawing relationships between early imagery and later Buddhist texts such as the *Nidanakatha*.

⁹² This is based on the *Guide to the Tipitaka. Introduction to the Buddhist Canon*. The format of the canon is that ratified by the Sixth Buddhist Council convened in Yangon in 1957.

Jevatana. As with the *Lalitavistara*, the *Nidanakatha* was a vehicle to popularise the religion. It does not dwell on doctrinal points but promotes the ideal of being Buddha. It demonstrates key fundamental principles of the religion outside of a canonical discourse. The story is highly amenable to recitation, and is very engaging. As most of the populace was illiterate during the early Bagan period, promulgation of Buddhism occurred through visual and oral experiences.

There are currently two English translations of the *Nidanakatha*. The first was completed by T.W. Rhys Davids in 1880 and a minimally revised edition by C. Rhys Davids was subsequently published in 1929.⁹³ This account was based on their translation of the Pali text as edited by Fausboll.⁹⁴ The second translation, by Jayawickrama, was published in 1990 by the Pali Text Society and the publications of this organisation are considered the academic standard.⁹⁵ There are subtle differences between Rhys David's translation and Jayawickrama's. This is not surprising as the study and understanding of Pali language has progressed substantially since the pioneering work performed by European scholars in the mid to late 1800s. Jayawickrama's translation has been undertaken in an environment that is far more understanding of cultural nuances.

The differences between the two translations, while appearing minor in the context of the narrative, do expose inconsistencies which become significant when studying the visual representation of the story. In general, the Pali Text Society version is more specific and literal than Rhys Davids' work. Jayawickrama translates part of the *Nidanakatha*'s final paragraph as "In this manner, wherever the Blessed One lived, from the time of his attainment of Enlightenment at the foot of the great Bodhi-tree up to his death-bed at the Great

⁹³ C.A.F. Rhys Davids, trans., *Stories of the Buddha Being Selections of the Jataka* (New York: F.A. Stokes and Co, 1929).

⁹⁴ Fausboll's *jataka* editions are still considered the "gold standard" by Pali scholars. V. Fausboll, *The Jataka, Together With Its Commentary, Being the Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha*. 7 vols. (reprint London: Luzac, 1962-64). First published London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1877-97.

⁹⁵ N.A. Jayawickrama, trans., *The Story of Gotama Buddha, Jātaka-nidāna* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1990).

Parinibbāna is included in the Recent Epoch".⁹⁶ This differs from Rhys Davids' translation which concludes "And so the Blessed One lived in that spot from the attainment of all-knowledge under the Bo-tree till his death" (*RD*:232). This is not what happened, as we know Gotama Buddha regularly travelled from place to place after the dedication of Jevatana. It would appear that Rhys Davids has chosen an interpretation which favours prose at the expense of strict accuracy. Another example, relevant to the imagery associated with the life story, occurs when Channa saddles Kanthaka, prior to the Great Departure.⁹⁷ Jayawickrama's translation states "This carparisoning is very elaborate; it is quite unlike that on other days such as that on the visits to the park for pleasure" (*Nk*:83). Rhys Davids translates the passage as "He is saddling me so tightly and not as on other days for rides such as those to the pleasure grounds" (*RD*:172). The significance lies in the reference to the elaborate saddling, which bears a close resemblance to the imagery.

Rhys Davids, however, frequently footnotes more literal versions of translation that she has discarded or altered to make the verse more comprehensible. In the next paragraph she writes "The mother of Rahula was asleep on a bed strewn with many jasmine flowers, and resting her hand on the head of her son" (*RD*:173). The Pali Text Society version states "the bed was strewn with an ammana of flowers such as the large jasmine and the Arabian jasmine: and she was resting her hand on her son" (*Nk*:83). Rhys Davids footnotes this passage as "Lit., about an ammana (i.e five or six bushels) of the large jasmine and the Arabian jasmine", which is in agreement with Jayawickrama's translation. Both translations refer to the prince's departure as being on the full moon day of Asalhi under the descendant asterism of Asalha. Rhys Davids comments it was July 1st (*RD*:175). These details are significant as the relevant image in the Ananda temple can be interpreted as showing the full moon.

After Gotama cuts his hair, Rhys Davids' translation states he "threw the hair and diadem together as he held them towards the sky. The plaited hair and jewelled turban went a league off and stopped in the air. Sakka, the deva-king,

⁹⁶ Ibid.,127. For ease of comparison between the two texts, and avoid excessive footnoting, references will be placed within the body of the text. For example, references to the translation of the *Nidanakatha* by Jayawickrama are given as (*Nk*:pg.no). Similarly, references to Rhys Davids' translation will be noted as (*RD*:pg.no).

⁹⁷ Channa is the Pali equivalent of Chandaka, the Sanskrit version of the name.

caught sight of it with his deva-eye, and receiving it into a jewel casket, a league high, he placed it in Tavatimsa, in the Dagaba of the diadem" (*RD*:177-178). Jayawickrama states "The Bodhisatta took his top-knot together with the diadem and threw it into the air.....the top-knot, which was plaited with gems, rose to the height of a yojana and remained in mid-air. Sakka, the king of the deities, beheld this with his divine eye and received it in a jewel casket the size of a yojana and founded the Cūḷāmani (Crest Gem) shrine in Tāvātimsa heaven" (*Nk*:86).⁹⁸ Whether the jewelled top-knot and the diadem or turban were treated as two objects or one is significant in the Ananda temple images. Jayawickrama's translation is ambiguous as to whether the two items are treated as a single object.

There are numerous examples where the two translations differ to some degree. In Rhys Davids' version of the departure of Channa the text simply refers to Channa paying "homage to the Bodhisat" whereas Jayawickrama provides the more literal translation of "Channa saluted the Bodhisatta, went round him reverentially and departed". Rhys Davids' reference to paying homage does not suggest Channa circumambulated around the *bodhisattva*. This is a reverential practice and is significant as it shows Channa recognised the prince's impending ascent to greatness.

Concepts of time are often ambiguous. After Channa's departure and Kanthaka's death, the *bodhisattva* spends one week under the mango tree at Anupiya. He then travels "30 yojanas on foot to reach Rājagaha in one day" (*Nk*:87). Rhys Davids' notes that the *bodhisattva* has travelled 60 yojanas since he left the palace, roughly 450 miles, which would seem impossible. However, she then refers to the *Lalitavistara* account which states Gotama went to Rājagaha via Vesali, a journey which would be almost exactly 60 yojanas, though no time frame is given (*RD*:179). The *Lalitavistara* simply states "...traveling by stages, the Bodhisattva finally arrived at the great city of Vaiśālī". (*Lv*:361) and "...after dwelling in Vaiśālī as long as I needed, I traveled to the land of Magadha..." (*Lv*:363) and reached the city of Rajagṛha.

⁹⁸ A yojana is equivalent to one league, as translated in Rhys Davids' version. A league is approximately 4.8 km.

Both translations of the *Nidanakatha* are essentially the same from this point until the description of the great fast. Each text refers to Gotama meditating in a building called a cell or hermitage during the period of practising austerities. The *Nidanakatha* recounts that as the *bodhisattva* became weaker he collapsed and "he fell down unconscious at the edge of the cloister" (*Nk*:89). The reference to a building is significant when analysing the Ananda temple images. One iconographic discrepancy occurs during the Great Fast. As the *bodhisattva* nears total exhaustion Rhys Davids' account states "but devas gathered the sap of life and infused it into him through the pores of his skin" (*RD*:182). The *Nidanakatha* states "He dissuaded the deities from infusing divine energy through the pores of his skin" (*Nk*:89). On the occasion of Sujata presenting the milk rice to Gotama, Rhys Davids refers to Gotama's alms bowl as the one "given to him by the deva Ghatikāra" (*RD*:186) while Jayawickrama refers to "the great Brahmā Ghatikāra" (*Nk*:92).⁹⁹ When describing Gotama's circumambulation around the Bodhi tree while he determines the best place to sit, Rhys Davids appears to have made an error, probably typographical. She repeats the western side of the tree and omits the eastern side. Gotama eventually determines that he should sit on the eastern side of the Bodhi tree facing east.

There is another discrepancy in numbers with Rhys Davids referring to the place on the bank of the Neranajara river as the place "so many thousand bodhisats had gone" (*RD*:187) whereas the *Nidanakatha* states "many hundred thousands of Bodhisattas" (*Nk*:92). This is a consistent variance between the two versions indicating a fundamental difference in translation. In the next passage Rhys Davids states that Indra's trumpet was 120 cubits long while the *Nidanakatha* states the conch shell was 2000 cubits in diameter (*Nk*:95). Rhys Davids often uses words which were no doubt more readily understood by her audience at the time. She refers to the Snakes, Genii and winged Creatures

⁹⁹ Rhys Davids comments that the reference to the Buddha dividing the rice milk into forty-nine portions, each the size of a single seeded palmyra fruit is odd as the palmyra fruit always has three seeds, and she cannot understand the significance of this (*RD*:187). It may be an allusion to the Buddhist trinity of the current Buddha, Avalokiteshvara, the prevailing *bodhisattva*, and Maitreya the future Buddha, who at the time a "new" Buddha is enlightened, really do not exist, but emerge as three again.

(RD:188). The *Nidanakatha* simply calls them *Nagas*, *yakkhas* and *Supannas*. Rhys Davids footnotes the correct titles and explains their meanings.¹⁰⁰

When Mara and his armies prepare their assault on Gotama, Rhys Davids states that Mara was "mounted on his elephant, two hundred and fifty leagues high, named 'Girded with mountains'," (RD:191). Jayawickrama translates the passage as "mounted on the elephant called Girimekhala which was one hundred and fifty yohanas in height" (Nk:95). Such differences again highlight the more populist audience Rhys Davids appears to have been writing for, where translations of nouns can only have the purpose of educating a less knowledgeable audience. It was this translation that scholars such as Duroiselle and Luce were drawing from when drawing their conclusions regarding possible sources for the imagery found in Bagan's temples, such as the Ananda.

Both texts provide similar accounts of Mara's onslaught. They tell of Mara's final attempt to dislodge the soon-to-be Buddha by throwing his javelin which had a razor sharp disc on the end at the meditating figure, only to see it turn into a garland of flowers (RD:194, Nk:97). When calling the Earth to witness, both versions state that the Buddha asks the Earth to witness "my having given the seven hundredfold alms in my birth as Vessantara" (Nk:98).¹⁰¹ Both accounts state he reached out with his right hand to the Earth and the Earth responded in voice, but was not physically present.

The accounts of the next seven weeks after Enlightenment are quite consistent. Gotama performed the Miracle of the Double at the end of the first week. He spent the second week staring at the place of Enlightenment, the third week walking along a jewelled cloister between the East and West, while during the fourth week the deities made a house of gems to the north-east of the Bodhi tree and the Buddha meditated there. In the fifth week he moved away from the

¹⁰⁰ Perhaps reflecting both revulsion and fascination with aspects of Buddhist teachings, Rhys David's describes the Yakkhas as being "characterised throughout the *Jataka* stories by their cannibalism; the female Yakkhas as sirens luring men on to destruction. They are invisible till they assume human shape; but even then can be recognised by their red eyes" (RD:188). The nagas were "superhuman snakes", and the Supannas winged creatures who were supposed, "like the gods or angels, to be able to assume the appearance of men" (RD:179).

¹⁰¹ This is an interesting point as other life versions recall that the Earth quakes, or wrings water to wash away Mara's armies as testament to all of the meritorious acts performed by Gotama in all past existences, not just the one prior to his final rebirth.

Bodhi tree and sat underneath the Ajapāla tree. During this week Gotama was tempted by Mara's three daughters, each assuming the form of hundreds of women of all ages and attributes. The Buddha then settled under the Mucalinda tree.¹⁰² There is a slight deviation here. Rhys Davids' states "Muchalinda, the snake-king, when a storm arose, shielding him with seven folds of his hood" (*RD*:204) whereas the *Nidanakatha* states "Mucalinda who wound his coils round him seven times" (*Nk*:107). Both conjure up different visual images. The seventh week was spent under the Rajayatana tree. At the end of the seven weeks Indra came with a myrobalan fruit, a tooth stick and water to wash Gotama's face. The two merchants, Tapassu and Bhalluka arrived and gave the Buddha his first alms in a bowl with distinct lines at its rim, made from four bowls presented by the four Guardian deities (*Nk*:107). Tapassu and Bhalluka became his first disciples, and Gotama was entreated to teach the dhamma by Brahma.

These examples of the small differences in translation between Rhys Davids' text and that of the Pali Text Society do have some bearing on the interpretation of the visual representation of the story. The *Nidanakatha* is a more specific translation whereas Rhys David's work aims to present a coherent narrative that would be understood by readers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While Rhys David's does often provide literal translation in her footnotes, it is not consistently done. Hence, Jayawickrama's translation of Buddhaghosa's *Nidanakatha* is chosen to represent the Pali Theravada version of the Buddha's life story which was known at Bagan. This text, along with Bays' translation of the *Lalitavistara*, which represents a northern Mahayana tradition, are the two accounts used to undertake the following comparative study of texts and early Bagan's narrative sculptures.

Visual Narrative of the Last Earthly Life of Gotama Buddha

At Bagan the earliest known illustrations of Gotama Buddha's last earthly life are the narrative sculptures of the Kyauk-ku-umin, dated to around 1060. Only a handful of sculptures remain, but given the subject matter of the remaining images, which range from a scene of the child prince at the Plowing Festival

¹⁰² According to Jayawickrama, the *naga* king, Mucalinda, took the name from the Mucalinda tree. *Nk*:107, footnote.

through to the taming of Nalagiri elephant, the original series was extensive. Narrative images have been found in the Nagayon temple, but no complete sets of this narrative remain, except at the Ananda temple. To best interpret the fragmentary series, found in the Kyauk-ku-umin and Naga-yon, the Ananda will be discussed in detail first, then remarks relating to other narrative images of the Buddha's last existence from the early Bagan period will be made.

The imagery in the Ananda temple has been used to support the argument for the dominance of Theravada Buddhism at Bagan and to reinforce the notion that the Burmese kings stamped out the "impure" forms of Buddhist practice. The exterior of the temple was originally covered with glazed tiles illustrating all of the *Jataka* stories of the previous lives of the Buddha. The interior contains more than thousand sculptures. Many of them illustrate the last earthly existence of the Buddha and scenes from his life after attaining Enlightenment. As well, there are hundreds of images of the Buddha in the teaching, meditation and Enlightenment *mudras*. In brief, the Ananda served as a vehicle for the promulgation of the Buddhist faith.

As early as 1914, Duroiselle remarked that the narrative images in the Ananda temple were "based on the *Nidānakathā*".¹⁰³ Likewise, in *Old Burma - Early Pagan*, Luce wrote "The story is strictly *Theravāda*, based mainly on the *Nidanakatha*, the introductory chapter of the *Jātaka* commentary (*Avidūre Nidāna*). Pagan scholars' study of the Singalese Tipitaka has now had time to arrest the trend towards Mahāyānism, evident in Anirrudha, and still more so in Kyanzittha's own queen, Abèyadana. The marvellous element in the *Mahāvastu* and *Lalitavistara* is greatly reduced in the life of Gotama as shown in the Nanda sculptures".¹⁰⁴

Hence, the two scholars to have written extensively on the Ananda temple placed the Ananda images firmly in the Theravada tradition. Any imagery which did not neatly fit the *Nidanakatha* narrative was dismissed as an aberration or later replacement. Neither author sought alternative explanations for these supposed intrusions. This is rather contradictory of Luce who clearly recognised

¹⁰³ Duroiselle, "The Stone Sculptures in the Ananda Temple", 70.

¹⁰⁴ *OBEP*, 1:367.

the presence of Mahayana influences at Bagan. When describing the four entrances to the Ananda he states:

No less than Aniruddha, he [Kyanzitha] was a devotee of Buddhism. But he knew that his common people still illiterate and animist, were only skin-deep Buddhists. Many passages in his inscriptions prove that both he and his *mahāthera Araham* made popular religious education their prime concern....The older villagers were encouraged, I believe, to spend their four fast days a month at the pagoda, where the king found by experience (like the Indo-Greeks of Gandhāra) that the most effective way to teach them Buddhism was to give them a large number of images to worship.¹⁰⁵

These statements are a clear acknowledgement by Luce that Buddhism, and in particular Theravada Buddhism, was by no means the people's religion in early Bagan.

As well as ignoring other options for the source of the Ananda sculptural narratives, Luce is also rather dismissive of the detailed elements that appear in the reredos of the many sculptures. He states "One must not be surprised to find a palace set just behind or under the peepal, banyan, ironwood or *sāla* tree, on the banks of the river Anomā, or in Pārileyya or Migadāvana forests. They serve a purely artistic purpose, and have no relevance to the story".¹⁰⁶ Such comments do not consider the details of the texts which provided the inspiration for the narrative sculptures.

The main narrative images at the Ananda temple are placed in each foyer or entrance hall and around the outer wall of the outer corridor. The images currently positioned in the outer corridor's interior wall show the Buddha in *dharmacakra* or *bhumisparsa mudra*. Both sides of the internal corridor are filled with images of the Buddha teaching or in meditation. Luce draws relationships between form and function and divides the Ananda images into four groups. He refers to the images in the four halls as educational, the eighty sculptures in the lower two tiers of the outer corridor are narrative and recall the life of Gotama

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1:361.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1:363.

up until Enlightenment, the other corridor images are devotional and the cross passage images which are a mix of narrative and devotional scenes are miscellaneous.¹⁰⁷ He suggests that while the *Jataka* plaques on the outside of the Ananda would have attracted villagers, there was little to connect them with the Buddha. Luce paints a picture of Bagan's Buddhist followers entering the halls and being given an explanatory tour of Gotama Buddha's principal life scenes by a monk. Devotees then would enter into the outer passage and, through two ambulatory circuits, would see images of Gotama's last life, before proceeding to the dim inner passage that was filled with suitably reverent devotional images.

The extravagance of having four entrances and filling each with educational scenes is directly related to the scale and deliberate purpose behind the construction – namely that Ananda was to be the preeminent pagoda of its day, the four entrances encouraging all passers-by to enter (as at Shwe-dagon). On entering all would first see the great events of the Buddha's life. One must also wonder if indeed the public had completely free access to the interior corridors. If access was restricted to special days, visitors would still have been able to circumambulate around the Halls, passing the sculptural illustrations of the most important events in the Buddha's life, and retaining a clear view of the main images which are visible from each Hall.

The following analysis compares the details of the second row of narrative scenes with the *Nidanakatha* and *Lalitavistara*. While both texts tell of the early life of Gotama Buddha, it is the later narrative, from the time of the prince's departure from the palace until he attains Enlightenment that is most popular. Starting from the Western side, which is the main entrance, the narrative scenes are read in a clockwise direction, that is, on entering the external corridor, one turns to the left and walks around the corridor. The bottom row of images recalls the events leading up to the Buddha's departure from the palace.¹⁰⁸ The second tier of images starts with a series of images telling the story of the Great Departure. This event is allocated five scenes out of the total

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 1:364.

¹⁰⁸ It is impossible to photograph these works nowadays due to their protective metal grills. Illustrations are probably the most recent complete set of photographs available and my descriptions of the scenes match his images, indicating they have remained in the same place at least since the 1950s.

of forty images. An additional five scenes covers the hair cutting and donning of the Buddha's first robes – all in all one quarter of the scenes features the horse Kanthaka and the palace departure. These appear on the West side and first part of the North corridor. As a proportion of the *Nidanakatha* narrative this is a gross overemphasis. The *Lalitavistara* is much more expansive about this episode. However, the scenes can be shown to draw on both narratives in different ways.¹⁰⁹

The first scene (W6) shows the *bodhisattva*, Prince Siddharta, about to mount his horse, Kanthaka, while his faithful servant, Chandaka, kneels behind him in prayer (fig.196).¹¹⁰ As with all of the images, the device of presenting the most important personages as much larger than others in the scene is followed throughout. The *Nidanakatha* and *Lalitavistara* recount this part similarly but with greater or lesser emphasis. The *Nk* makes reference to Kanthaka's elaborate caparisoning as does the *Lv* (*Lv*:317), when Siddharta asks Chandaka "Bring me the king of horses decorated with his ornaments". Many verses in the *Lv* are given over to Chandaka beseeching the prince not to leave, and the prince's steadfast refusal to change his course. Perhaps this is indicated in the first scene as Chandaka is shown kneeling with his hands held high in supplication. In the *Nk* there is no particular explanation for this scene. Gotama orders Chandaka to prepare Kanthaka for his departure which he dutifully does. There is no entreaty by Chandaka to coerce the *bodhisattva* into staying at the palace. Rather, he is an eager participant in the events.

The second scene (W7) is problematic (fig.197). The *Nk* tells of Chandaka being taken along by holding onto Kanthaka's tail, which is clear in images W2-W5 (*Nk*:83). But the elaborate imagery in the scene is glossed over by the *Nk*. It does state that "the deities by their supernatural power muffled the sound of his neighing so that none could hear it and placed under his hooves, at each step, the palms of their hands". However, no mention is made of other deities appearing in the sky. In contrast to the more austere narrative of the *Nk*, the *Lv*

¹⁰⁹ As repeated comparisons will be made from now on, the *Lalitavistara* and *Nidanakatha* will now be abbreviated to *Lv* and *Nk* respectively in the body of the text. Also, each image is identified by its position. W6 is on the western side, in the 6th niche. Counting commences in the south-west corner and continues in a clockwise direction. Page references are abbreviated as *Lv* and *Nk*.

¹¹⁰ Channa (Pali) or Chandaka (Sanskrit) is the name of Prince Siddharta's manservant. Chandaka will be used from this point.

describes the scene in great details. When the *Bodhisattva* makes his final decision to leave after refusing Chandaka's entreaties to remain, "The Bodhisattva had no sooner uttered these words than the four guardians of the World, who had been listening, arrived from their dwellings to pay him homage" (*Lv*:327). The Guardians were accompanied by *gandharvas* "playing sweet music and songs of sorts", *kumbhandas* "holding garlands and necklaces of pearls and diamonds and vases filled with all kinds of scented water", *nagas*, "holding garlands and necklaces of pearls and diamonds, raining down flowers and perfumed powders", and *yaksas*, "holding in their hands jeweled lamps, butter lamps, and lighted torches.... The *yaksas* were armed with weapons of all kinds...". Indra arrived with the thirty-two gods, "holding heavenly flowers, incense, ointments perfumes, garlands, perfumed powders, and clothing, parasols, standards, banners, earrings of flowers and other ornaments" (*Lv*:328-329). Such a description would certainly help explain the appearance of the deities in the sky.

An interesting reference is made in the *Lv* to the appearance of Candra, god of the moon and Surya, god of the sun who also appeared at the time the bodhisattva announced his renunciation (*Lv*:316). The two figures at the top of the reredo are shown emerging from what initially appear to be clouds. However, closer inspection reveals that each cloud form is treated separately and may well be symbolic of the moon and the sun. Also, in the *Lv* verse describing the departure "Sakra and Brahma go before him to show the best route, a pure and brilliant light illuminates the earth". In this scene the two figures leading the departure appear to be holding torches. The *Nk* describes the scene similarly, but in less detail. It does mention that the deities surrounded the *Bodhisattva* and lit the way carrying torches and other deities followed with "heavenly perfumes, garlands, powders and incense" (*Nk*:85). Particular emphasis is placed on the density of the flowers and garlands that pave his way and slow his progress yet no imagery specifically relating to this is seen. However, the scene appears after the temptation by Mara which is Luce's interpretation of the next scene, which would place these two images in the wrong sequence. This suggests they may have been moved over the centuries.

The next scene (W8) is also problematic (fig.198). The *Bodhisattva* with Chandaka holding onto Kanthaka's tail is shown again with two figures above. In the *Lv*, after all the *devas* have appeared, the principal god of the city appears "his spirit dejected, approaches the Great man just as he is leaving" (*Lv*:334) which would fit well with the scene shown here. Alternatively, also in the narrative of the *Lv*, it may be a depiction of Indra and Brahma in the heavens leading the way out of the city (*Lv*:334).

Another explanation of the scene is found in the *Nk* but, as mentioned above, if this was the correct interpretation, the sequence is wrong for the *Nk* narrative. The *Nk* (*Nk*:84) describes the appearance of Mara, just as Gotama is leaving the city, and his attempt to deter Gotama from giving up his princely life. Mara appears in the sky and pretends to be Vasavatti, king of the *devas* of the Pairinimmita-vassavatti world.¹¹¹ Luce suggests that the figure above Kanthaka's head is Mara who, according to the *Nk* "came there with the intention of making the bodhisattva turn back" and remained in the sky "like his shadow without going away from his side, waiting for an opportunity to seize him". Mara's disguise is immediately uncovered by Gotama. If the figure is Mara, the other crowned *deva* remains unexplained. It may be an attempt to represent Mara before and after his true identity was uncovered, although the representation of continuous narrative within one scene is not very well done, or often attempted.¹¹² Rather, to illustrate the passage of time or movement, repeating a scene is a more usual device. Also, this explanation is not very plausible as the deity, which is probably in front of the moon, is almost an exact copy of the deity in the previous image. Again, if the intention of the two scenes was to show Mara as Vasavatti shadowing Gotama, the sequence of events is not that described in the *Nk*. Luce does not consider this possibility and simply interprets the two figures in the first scene as *devas* "riding the sky with lotuses".¹¹³

The next two images (W9, W10) show the equestrian trio making their way to the edge of the river Anoma (fig.199, fig.200). The *Nk* describes their progress

¹¹¹ Vasavatti is also a name given to Mara in the *Jatakas*. Mara also ruled over Parinimmita-vassavatti world. See Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, 3:844.

¹¹² An exception to this is the birth of Gotama where the descent of the future Buddha from his mother's side to the ground is shown by repeating the images.

¹¹³ *OBEP*, 1:162.

as "greatly impeded by having his having to extricate himself and cut his way through the tangled mass of perfumes and garlands which rose to the height of his flanks as a result of the deities, Nāgas and Supannas and others who remained in the sky showering down perfumes and garlands" (*Nk*:85). The text refers to them covering a distance of 30 yojanas and crossing three kingdoms. The *Lv* emphasises the journey by being explicit about the three kingdoms they passed through during the night before arriving at the city of Anumaineaya, in the land of the Maineyas. But no mention is made of the river and unfortunately the river is not shown in any of the imagery. At a stretch of the imagination, the grooving on the base of the fourth image may be an attempt to indicate water, in which case this scene relates to the *Nk* when the horse leaps the river in a single stride and comes to rest on the other side. This would help explain the number of images devoted to the scene. The only significant comment which might relate the imagery to the *Lv* is the dismissal of the gods by the *Bodhisattva* on his arrival at Anumaineaya, which was apparently only six yojanas away (*Lv*:344).

Perhaps the emphasis on the journey is also due to the scene layout in the Ananda temple. In the second tier, the niches are grouped on lots of five, that is, there are ten on each side separated into two groups by the central Buddha. By including two scenes of the *Bodhisattva*'s journey, it concludes this part of the story at a convenient spacial divide. The next group of five images is devoted to removal of his princely trappings and the receiving of his first robes.

The first image on the northern side (N1) depicts a single standing image of the *Bodhisattva* is placed centrally in the image and dominates his surroundings (fig.201). From this moment, the future Buddha is shown centre stage in all but two images, which can be readily explained. Fully clothed in his princely robes, he hands his jewels to his servant while Kanthaka watches on. This is the scene described in the *Lv* where "He gives the finest of horses and the ornaments to Chandaka, saying: 'Take them and return to the city of Kapila'," (*Lv*:344). The same scene is described in the *Nk* (*Nk*:86) when, after alighting from his horse the *Bodhisattva* says "Channa my friend, you go back taking with you my ornaments and Kanthaka".

Next he cuts off his hair (N2, fig.202). Both versions describe this event similarly, although the *Nk* specifically refers to his diadem and top-knot (*Nk*:86). At this point he is still wearing his royal clothes and his jewelled belt is clearly visible. The imagery is more closely related to the *Nk* than the *Lv*. The *Lv* simply refers to the *Bodhisattva* throwing his hair into the sky where "the thirty three gods gathered the *Bodhisattva*'s hair to do it honour" (*Lv*:339). The *Nk* is more specific – the future Buddha throws his hair into the sky where Indra "received it in a jewelled casket" (*Nk*:86). This is confusing as there are two deities in the reredo, one with the golden casket with what appears to be the topknot and diadem, the other with a garland-like bundle in his hands. In the *Nk* Indra sees Gotama throw the topknot and diadem into the air and "received it in a jewelled casket the size of a yojana and founded the Cūḷāmaṇi (Crest Gem) shrine in Tāvātimsa heaven" (*Nk*:86). In the *Lv* Gotama throws his hair to the wind and the "thirty-three gods gathered the Bodhisattva's hair to do it honour...There also a caitya stands, which is still known today as Cūdāpratigrahaṇa, The Collected Locks of Hair" (*Lv*:339).

Next the *Bodhisattva* discards his royal robes (N3, fig.203). In the *Nk* there is no specific reference to him disposing of his clothes. Rather, the emphasis is with him receiving the requisites of a monk. "Then the Great Brahmā Ghatikāra, his erstwhile companion in Kassapa Buddha's time, with his friendship not grown cold during one whole Buddha-period, thought, 'To-day my friend has gone forth in the Great Renunciation. I will go to him taking with me the requisites of a monk'," (*Nk*:87). Brahma Ghatikara gives Gotama the three robes, bowl, razor, needle, girdle and water strainer. Gotama dons his new yellow robes and dismisses Chandaka, telling him to return to the palace, taking his royal ornaments and Kanthaka with him.

Luce explains this scene (in fig.203) as Indra catching the hair and enshrining it in Tāvātimsa heaven, with Chandaka kneeling in worship accompanied by Kanthaka in the predella below. If the figure above Gotama's right side is an image of Indra catching the hair, and the other a figure a representation of it being enshrined, this constitutes a continuous narrative in one image, which is not a usual device used by Bagan artisans. A problem lies in the depiction of the object held by the figure on the top right. The *Bodhisattva* is holding his hair

with diadem in his hands. The exact form appears atop the casket, but it is not the same object held by the opposite figure. It is possible the second figure holds the *Bodhisattva's* robes which, in the *Lv* were taken to the world of the gods by the *devaputra* who, in the guise of a hunter wearing saffron coloured robes, exchanged clothes with Gotama, then returned with them to the heavens. While the *Lv* may offer a better explanation of the heavenly figures, the images in the predella are more closely connected with the *Nk*.

The next sculpture along the north wall (N4) is perhaps one of the few images which is not ambiguous (fig.204). The prince now discards his royal robes. Below, the three-faced god, Brahma, holds up a container, which, presumably, contains the folded robes, and perhaps the other requisites of a monk. The *Nk* states "The Great Brahmā Ghatikāra, his erstwhile companion in Kassapa Buddha's time....thought, Today my friend has gone forth in the Great Renunciation. I will go with him taking with me the requisites of a monk".¹¹⁴

The *Bodhisattva* is now depicted dressed in monk's robes for the first time. Brahma is making obeisance on his right while Channa is receiving his final instructions to return to the palace (N5, fig.205). Kanthaka is shown separately below, in keeping with the *Nk* whereby "Kanthaka who stood nearby listening to the Bodhisattva's conversation with Channa, was unable to endure the grief at the thought that he would no longer be able to see his master. And going out of their sight he died broken-hearted and was reborn in Tavatimsa heaven as the deity Kanthaka" (*Nk*:87). The *Lv* does not have a comparable explanation. Both Channa and Kanthaka return to the palace carrying the princely ornaments. This completes the Bodhisattva's transformation from prince to monk.

This review of sculptures illustrating the Great Departure shows that neither the *Nk* or *Lv* narratives firmly fit the imagery of the Great Departure seen at Ananda. It is a mixed story, incorporating elements of both stories, with changing emphases. There are some other details, however, which should be noted. In the reredos, outside scenes are devoid of any architectural motifs. Instead, the background is decorated with trees or is left plain. At the point where Gotama starts to divest himself of his princely trappings, a shrine-like

¹¹⁴ The eight requisites are three robes, bowl, razor, needle, girdle and water strainer.

structure appears in the background. This can be explained by the texts which describe how, at the places where Gotama disposes of his hair, robes and

ornaments, shrines were built. However, it is only the *Lv* that tells of shrines being built in the earthly realm. First, at the point where he hands over the ornaments to Chandaka and Chandaka goes to return to the palace, the Chandakanivartana *caitya*, the Return of Chandaka shrine, was built. Secondly, at the place of the tonsure the Collected Locks of Hair *caitya* was built. And thirdly, at the place where Gotama donned his monk's robes is the Kāsāyagrahana *caitya*, the Taking of the Princely Garments. In contrast, the *Nk* only refers to a *caitya* being built in Tavatimsa heaven, the Crest Gem Shrine, which contains the jewel casket holding the hair and diadem. This confuses the interpretation of the imagery even further as the sculptures include shrines in all of these images. Yet in the *Nk* narrative, no shrine is mentioned until the golden casket is taken to Tavatimsa heaven, which is the third sculpture.

Another feature of note is the appearance of the double lotus throne base. From now on Gotama is shown seated on a lotus throne or, if standing and walking, on a simple raised base. Standing images are supported by a square pedestal-like throne which is the base structure for nearly all later Bagan Buddha images. The appearance of the lotus throne during the tonsure scene suggests that this is symbolically the turning point from Gotama's life as a prince, towards the path which would eventually lead him to Buddhahood. The cutting off of his hair is the most significant physical change that Gotama ever undergoes – it is not just a changing of clothes, but a permanent and clear change that removes any visual reference of his royal origins to the world. Immediately, the topknot is replaced by the gentle *usnisha*, which is presented as a clear continuance of the head, and in the Ananda images, is topped with a small flame-like extension.

Following on from the imagery of the Renunciation, the next group of five figures on the northern side depicts the narrative leading up to Gotama's period of austerities. Luce refers to image N6 (fig.206) as "lovely, but clearly intrusive,

filling a gap".¹¹⁵ This is a strange comment as in the tradition of the *Nk*, Gotama spent one week at the mango grove called Anupiya "enjoying the bliss of renunciation" (*Nk*:87). There is no reason for whoever planned the series of images to have a gap. The week at the mango tree before heading to the nearby city of Rajagaha is a valid piece of text to include in the narrative. It also visually provides a clear break between the episode of the Renunciation and his future life as a monk. Interestingly, the image here is shown in *bhumisparsa mudra*, on a single lotus throne with a small reredo and no base or predella. While the iconography is not appropriate for its position within the narrative, the use of *bhumisparsa mudra* occurs five more times before the actual Enlightenment events. When looking closely at these figures, there are stylistic characters which suggest that these figures may not have been part of the original series and this will be discussed later. The disproportionate fit of the overall image within the niche suggests that this was not the original image for the space although there is room for a single contemplative image.

To continue with the circumambulation of the corridor, the narrative of the *Nk* tells that after one week, "covering a distance of thirty yojanas on foot he reached Rājagaha in one day". The next image, which depicts the walking Buddha, expresses this moment (*N7*, fig.207). He then went begging for alms and "The whole city was thrown into a state of excitement at the very sight of the Bodhisatta", which is illustrated here by the inclusion of two figures dressed as townsfolk, their hands raised as if offering alms (*N8*, fig.208). The Buddha stands with hands folded, carrying a small bowl.

The next scene (*N9*, fig.209) shows the Buddha after he has left the city and "sitting himself with his face towards the East, began to eat his food" (*Nk*:88). The significance of the moment is that he became very ill after eating the food, as it was the first time in his life that he had eaten the ordinary food of men, rather than the specially prepared dishes offered to him as prince and the incident becomes yet another symbol of his Renunciation. According to the *Nk*, Gotama was disgusted with himself at his initial repulsion at the food and admonished himself out loud. He was overheard by the local king's guards who had followed Gotama into the woods. Reporting back to the king what the

¹¹⁵ *OBEP*, 1:164.

travelling mendicant had said, the king, recognising Gotama as a superior being, went to him and said "Assuredly you will become a Buddha. After your Enlightenment do visit my kingdom first" (*Nk*:88). In the predella of the next image (*N*10, fig.210), along with his entourage, the king is clearly seen, identified by his crown, making obeisance to the future Buddha.

This event is also known as the Visit with Bimbisara. The king's name is not specifically referred to in the *Nk* but is in the *Lv* (*Lv*:361-369). There are some differences in the narrative. In the *Lv* Gotama received alms at the abodes of different hermits, prior to his entry into the city of Vaisali where he met monks and learnt their teachings. He then travelled to the outskirts of Rajagrha and lived alone on the slope of a mountain. It is only from this point that the imagery parallels the *Lv* narrative. As in the *Nk*, Gotama enters the city seeking alms. "Crowds of men and women behold the one who is like pure gold. His self-mastery is complete: he is marked with the thirty-two signs and no-one tires of gazing upon him" (*Lv*:364). The text then describes how all the townspeople stop their work to watch his progress. King Bimbisara, on hearing of the *Bodhisattva*'s arrival, goes to his dwelling place on the mountain where he finds Gotama "steadfast as Mount Meru, sitting cross-legged on a cushion of grass" (*Lv*:365). Surrounded by his entourage he bows at the feet of the *Bodhisattva*, and also entreats Gotama to return to Rajagrha after he has become Buddha. The *Lv* particularly refers to the presence of the king's entourage which the *Nk* does not. However, the presence of the image of Gotama eating his alms at his abode on the mountainside does not have a place in the *Lv* version.

There are some stylistic characteristics of interest here. As mentioned earlier, the first image in this group (*N*6, fig.206) appears to be either a later replacement or from another niche in the temple. Very few images have the single lotus base since there is nearly always a narrow second row of lotus petals. The narrow reredo is also questionable being one of only three figures in this style – all are in *bhumisparsa mudra* but there are many small differences between them. Each of these five images has architectural elements in the reredo. This is consistent with Gotama walking into the city through the city gates, and possibly living in a small hermitage in the mountains. However, the niches are virtually all the same at this point, with garlands of pearls and flowers

hanging down from the corner projections of the niche, below shoulder height. The halo framing the future Buddha has a raised bead-like framework containing Gotama's torso but this does not restrict the dynamism of any of the images. The hands and robe frequently fall outside the frame as, of course, do Gotama's knees when sitting. The main purpose of the framing device appears to be the enclosure of the head and shoulders which are clearly highlighted in these works. This is probably intended as a means of illustrating the radiance or aura that emanated from the Buddha. The additional flat, arch-like space which extends upwards to a point in the shape of a lotus bud may be an attempt to emphasise the golden light which emanated from the *Bodhisattva*, a part of the narrative that is particularly associated with the *Lv*.

One particularly interesting feature in this group is the treatment of the robe on the standing Buddha (N8, fig.208). The hem is symmetrical, indicating it is a standing figure, but it is very heavily folded. It is also very wide, splaying out from the waist, and very deep at the hem, giving it a very heavy appearance. This is in sharp contrast to the preceding figure of the walking Gotama which is much lighter and has fewer folds in the hemline (N7, fig.207). In this first walking image, the right foot is elevated on a narrow platform, a device no doubt used to try and convey the walking movement. The artisan has tried hard to present a body in motion. While the upper torso is quite symmetrical, with both shoulders parallel to the ground, as is the waist line, the lines delineating the fall of the robe across his hips and groin is asymmetrical, being lower on the right. The right knee is a little higher than the left, and the lower leg is shorter. Interestingly, the hemline across both ankles remains even.

The treatment of the reredos is also of note. In the first five scenes of the *Bodhisattva* leaving the palace, the reredos are very plain – simple stone carvings with reliefs highlighted in gold. It is not until the *Bodhisattva* removes his princely robes and cuts his hair that the reredo takes on a more elaborate appearance, adorned with floral motifs, birds and jewels. Strings of pearls hang from the *hamsa* birds' mouths or dangle down from the edges of the shrine.

The next series of five images illustrate the six years Gotama spent learning the teachings of all the leading ascetics of his time. In the first scene (E1, fig.211) Gotama is seated facing a sage. He is placed on a platform to keep him higher

than the sage. Three other sages raise their hands in obeisance in the predella below. These images relate to the *Nk* narrative which states that the *Bodhisattva* first went to Alara Kalama and then Uttara Ramaputta to learn their teachings. One presumes the figures in the predellas are each ascetic's followers. Gotama quickly masters their teachings and realised theirs were not the paths to Enlightenment. He went to Uruvela, "and took up his residence there, saying that indeed it was a delightful spot, and began practising his exertion" (*Nk*:89). Gotama attracted his own five followers who remained with him for six years as he fasted and meditated.

While this may appear to be a straightforward representation of this part of the narrative, there are aspects which are puzzling. In the second scene (E2, fig.212), both central figures are shown facing the front rather than looking at each other as they are in the first scene, and so are the figures in the predella. An explanation for this lies in the *Lv* narrative. Here, one of the leading teachers is Rudraka, who resided in Rājagṛha with his large number of followers. Gotama says "This Rudraka, the guide of the assembly, the preceptor of multitudes, is known, sought after, venerated and esteemed by scholars. If I do not approach him myself, if I do not deliver myself over to austerities and ascetic practices, he will not respect me, or consider me as different from his other disciples. Unless I manifest this knowledge, I will not be able to refute his teachings" (*Lv*:373). So Gotama approached Rudraka and asked "May I obtain from you this precept, the rule and the way of this meditation". Rudraka replied "Let it be so I will give you the teaching as you have asked". Gotama then sat on his own and almost instantaneously masters Rudraka's meditation. He returned to Rudraka and said he now fully understood this doctrine. Rudraka then said "Well then. Come. You and I will together teach this assembly' And for the benefit of all he proclaimed the bodhisattva as a teacher" (*Lv*:375). This narrative can explain these two scenes, the first being their personal exchange, the second being the moment Gotama is proclaimed teacher and they both teach the gathered assembly who likewise are facing forward. This is an appealing interpretation as it enforces the higher capabilities of Gotama, and acknowledges his future role as teacher.

The third image (E3, fig.213) is adequately explained in the *Nk*. It shows Gotama flanked by two monks, with three in the predella below, the sum representing his 5 companions. In this scene the reredo is clearly architectural and the *Nk* specifically refers to the five ascetics cleaning Gotama's cell suggesting his meditation was taking place indoors. Luce states that this is the clearly the intention of the series, and is consistent with the *Nk* narrative.¹¹⁶

The *Lv* narrative offers another explanation. After leaving Rajagrha with his five followers, the group spent some time at the peak of Mount Gaya "where he stayed for a time practicing renunciation" (*Lv*:376). The scene is important as the *Bodhisattva* gains insight into human desire, one of the many emotions from which he eventually frees himself. The *Lv* devotes a chapter to this event. The focus is on the intellectual struggles of Gotama and his eventual realisation that severe self-torture is a hindrance to higher levels of understanding. Once he masters Rudraka's teachings, he leaves, accompanied by the five ascetics. He commenced his years of meditation in the company of these five and this scene would therefore represent the beginning of the period known as the Practice of Austerities. After the time at Mount Gaya, the entourage moves to the River Nairanjana, near the village of Uruvilva. "Near this village he caught sight of the river Nairañjanā with its pure water and beautiful waterfalls, its shores lined with branching trees and pleasant woods, surrounded on all sides by pastures lands and villages. There the mind of the Bodhisattva was extremely content" (*Lv*:378-79). Gotama, "sat with crossed legs on the unswept earth; and having seated himself, he put his body and mind under great torment" (*Lv*:383).

Gotama commences an extraordinary fast and becomes skeletally thin, an event shown in the next figure (E4, fig.214). Both the *Nk* and *Lv* describe the Fast. In the *Nk* Gotama subsists on as little as one grain of sesame or rice a day before denying himself sustenance completely. He refuses the attempts of the gods, shown here flanking him, to infuse food through the pores of his skin, a possible interpretation of the image, but little else is said. The *Lv* is much more expansive. During the six years of fasting, as Gotama's body became weaker, "The gods, the nāgas, the yaksas, the ghandarvas, the asuras, the garudas, the kinnaras, and the mahoragas were witnesses to the virtues of the

¹¹⁶ *OBEP*, 1:165.

bodhisattva. They remained near him day and night, giving homage to the bodhisattva and praying" (*Lv*:390). Then, when the *Bodhisattva* came to realise that complete starvation was not the right path to Enlightenment, the gods offered to insert food through the pores of his skin but, as in the *Nk*, he refused saying it would be deceitful to his followers. A later Burmese manuscript of the life of the Buddha recounts that the gods inserted food into the pores of Gotama's skin during the Fast, which would be an appropriate interpretation of this image. While still emaciated, the *Bodhisattva*, "when he was walking in a much enfeebled state, on [sic] a sudden he felt an extreme weakness, similar to that caused by a dire starvation. Unable to stand up any longer, he fainted and fell to the ground".¹¹⁷ He falls down from weakness "in the place where he was walking". Some of the gods thought he was dead, others thought that he was alive. As the story of Gotama's life changed in Burma over time, any replacement figure would reflect the current narrative rather than the original one. Perhaps this is indeed a later replacement, made at a time when the story of Gotama Buddha's life had undergone local transformation and included this "new" narrative. Or perhaps it is a composite image, reflecting both a traditional and more contemporary version.

While the scene therefore could represent either version of the narrative, there are aspects of the image which have overt links with the *Lv* narrative. As mentioned earlier, there is inference in the *Nk* that the Buddha is inside during this period, as his followers are said to have cleaned out his cell. This is reinforced by a later phrase, at the end of the fasting period, when "one day overcome by severe pain whilst engaged in the *jhāna* of the suppression of breath he fell down unconscious at the edge of the cloister" (*Nk*:89). There is a complete absence of any architectural elements in this scene that would help support the *Nk* narrative. The *Lv* offers an alternative – "The Bodhisattva, having crossed his legs, remains seated on the exposed earth, demonstrating the method of nourishing the body with only a juniper berry, a sesame seed, a grain of rice...For six years he applies himself to the great contemplation, the

¹¹⁷ Bigandet, *The Life or Legend of Gaudama*, 73. Bigandet does not elaborate on the source of the manuscript used to produce this translation. A similar version of events is also found in another more recent translation of a Burmese manuscript recalling the life of the Buddha "taken from a translation made in the mid-nineteenth century by an American Baptist missionary, the Reverend Chester Bennett, and published in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* in 1851". Edwardes, *A Life of the Buddha from a Burmese Manuscript*, 13.

āsphanānaka... And he does not move from sun to shade or from the shade into the sun...He does not rise, nor does he lie down; he makes no effort to shield himself" (*Lv*:392-393). Therefore, while the central imagery has links with both texts, the setting favours the *Lv* narrative.

The fifth and final scene from this group is more problematic (*E5*, fig.215). Gotama is shown sleeping. The five figures in the predella could possibly represent the five mendicants who are his companions. There is a proportionally quite large figure with hands raised in prayer at Gotama's feet. Luce describes the scene without offering explanation beyond "he falls in hieratic swoon under a tree; a Deva kneels at his feet; the Pancavaggiyā sit in prayer below".¹¹⁸ The *Nk* specifically mentions that, during a prolonged session of breath suspension towards the end of his fast, Gotama was overcome by severe pain and fell down unconscious. The deities, seeing this, went to his father, King Suddhodana and announces "your son is dead" (*Nk*:89) to which the king replied that he could not be dead since he would not die before he attained Enlightenment. Gotama subsequently woke with the realisation that such extreme methods were not the right path to Enlightenment. He gathered alms from the city and regained the thirty-two marks of a great man, including his golden hue.

This narrative does not offer a clear explanation for the figure at his feet, however, one can be found in the *Lv*. The gods, on seeing the *Bodhisattva's* near-death condition, travelled to Tavatimsa Heaven and told Queen Mahadevi of her son's terrible state. "At midnight Māyādevī, surrounded by a host of apsaras [sic], went to the bank of the river Nairāñjanā, where she saw the Bodhisattva, his body wasted. On seeing him thus like a corpse, she began to weep. Choked by sobs, she recited these verses:..." (*Lv*:385). While there is no specific reference to the *Bodhisattva* collapsing, his prostrate position could certainly be interpreted as appearing "like a corpse". This scene may therefore be a direct representation of the *Lv* narrative, with the figures in the predella representing the *apsaras*, rather than the five mendicants. The *Lv* then tells that, after hearing his mother's cries, Gotama wakes and assures her that he will live and attain Enlightenment. Maya then circumambulates him three times

¹¹⁸ *OBEP*, 1:165.

showering him with flowers, before ascending to the heavens. One problem with this interpretation is that the *Lv* chronology of the gods who surround Gotama during this period, and the scene with Maya is reversed. However, the former scene (E5, fig.215) may represent the gods' concern at Gotama's state, before telling Maya of his plight. King Suddhodana is mentioned in the *Lv* but only in the context of sending a messenger to his son every day (*Lv*:389).¹¹⁹

There are a number of significant iconographic features in this series. The first image (E1, fig.211) has characteristics which are commonly used in early Bagan carving. The tree arches behind both figures are in high relief, extending forwards, almost past the front of their heads. Of note are the leaves of each tree, as they differ – those over Gotama are in the form of the Bodhi tree, while those over Alara are longer and thinner. This would be intentional as different types of trees are mentioned throughout the story. Trees hold special significance in Buddhism, with each of the previous twenty-eight Buddhas being associated with a particular tree, the best known, of course, being the *bodhi* tree of Gotama Buddha, *ficus religiosa*, the fig or pipal tree.¹²⁰ This can be clearly seen in some temples at Bagan where each of the four Buddhas of the current eon or *kalpa* are portrayed in *bhumisparsa mudra*, sheltered under their individual trees, which are usually painted on the wall around each Buddha. In this scene, depicting Alara and the *Bodhisattva* at almost the same size reflects the relative importance of each person. Alara was known far and wide for his great reputation as a sage, while the *Bodhisattva* was, of course, already marked as a superhuman being. While the *Bodhisattva* has not yet reached Buddhahood, his superior status is confirmed by placing him on a higher platform.

The second figure must be a replacement work since it is much more crudely carved and certainly would not have passed what Luce refers to as Kyanzitha's watchful eye. The face is quite rounded compared to the heart-shaped faces of the other images and the hair curls are absent. Gotama's head may even be

¹¹⁹ Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha*, 28, refers to the king sending 250 messengers every day to report on Gotama's activities. There is also specific reference to Gotama lying down to sleep and recover – Gotama had eaten some food and then lay down in a cemetery next to a corpse and slept.

¹²⁰ Each Buddha-tree is a *bodhi* tree. A list of botanical names of *bodhi* trees, and others plants mentioned in the context of Bagan is found in *OBEP*, 3:317-26.

unfinished as hair curls were usually added in the form of coiled cone-shaped pieces of stucco, attached to the head. The absence of curls and *usnisha*, and the almost horizontal line that separates the forehead and hair would support such an interpretation. The trees are much more coarsely depicted though they are still in relief and the leaves are the same for each tree. This may suggest the sculpture was completed by someone with only basic knowledge of the usual "conventions".¹²¹

The third scene is in keeping with the majority of the Ananda images. The architectural form of the reredo is consistent with palace scenes depicting the life of Gotama as prince, which are seen in the lowest tier of images. However, no other sculptures in the second tier have a backdrop in this form. Again, this may be a later repair, with the sculptor choosing a more standard background. The fourth scene appears to be in original form but the back of the sculpture and part of the figure on the Buddha's right side may have been repaired at a later date. The semicircular top of the reredo is not consistent with other images, which usually have a pointed arch. The tree is also crudely formed, very much in the manner of the second image. The figure on Gotama's right is not as well defined as the one on the left. It also differs stylistically, being plumper, wearing different clothes, and having a shorter neck, a characteristic of later Bagan figures from about the 13th century. According to chronicles and other material such as inscriptions, there were significant earthquakes at Bagan in 1286, 1298 and 1380.¹²² In 1298 the earth's crust was said to have broken and in 1380 there were broken images.

The fifth scene is problematic, not only because of the lack of framing of the predella, and its slightly too small size, but also because of the difficulty in placing the scene sequentially within either of the *Lv* or *Nk* narratives. However,

¹²¹ There is any number of possibilities why this might have occurred. Perhaps the carving was made at a time when Bagan was not such a prominent Buddhist centre, possibly after the collapse of Bagan in the 13th century. Perhaps skilled artisans had left Bagan, to work in more prominent centres, such as at Bago during the 15th–16th centuries, leaving behind a few people with only basic skills and iconographic knowledge. If a replacement image was made following damage due to earthquake, again, it may be the case that experienced stone masons were killed, leaving only inexperienced craftsmen behind. All of these scenarios are, of course, speculative.

¹²² Thawbita, "Chronology – Earthquakes of Burma," *JBR* 59, pt.1-2, (1976):97-100. While the extent of damage at the time of each major earthquake is not known, we know from the 1995 earthquake that significant losses may have occurred.

as noted, later versions of the Buddha's life story offer a clearer explanation for this sculpture, but this would only support the theory that the image was made long after the Ananda's completion.

Following on from this series, which is principally concerned with the period of the Fast, after passing the east entrance the next group of five sculptures offers more narrative incongruencies. When Gotama broke his fast the five mendicants left him, believing he was not strong enough to attain the highest mental state: they did not believe that a moderate path could be the right way to achieve Enlightenment. They travelled to Varanasi and lived in the woods of the deer park. The five reappear later in the Buddha's life and are converted. Gotama, having restored his health and golden hue, seated himself under the bodhi tree awaiting the time to collect alms (E6, fig.216). Gotama's journey to the bodhi tree is described in great length in the *Lv*. Indeed, a whole chapter is dedicated to "the walk toward Bodhimanda" (*Lv*:415-439). The *Nk* is much less effusive (*Nk*:90-91).

It is here, according to the *Nk*, that the maiden called Sujata makes her appearance. Being of marriageable age, Sujata had made a pledge at a banyan tree, "If I marry a member of a family of equal rank and succeed in obtaining a son as my first child I will make an annual sacrifice to you..." (*Nk*:90), referring to the spirit of the tree. Her wish was fulfilled. On the day her annual offering was made she prepared milk-rice. The *Nk* narrative places great emphasis on the miraculous events that occurred during the making of the milk-rice, from the milk leaving the cows' udders spontaneously the moment the bowls were placed underneath them, to no smoke rising from the fire as the milk-rice was prepared. Brahma and Indra, in the company of the four Guardian deities, presided over the hearth. Sujata summoned her maidservant Uttara to go and "prepare the seat of the divinity" (*Nk*:91).¹²³

At the same time, Gotama, who that night had had five dreams, awoke to the realisation that on this day he would become Buddha. He sat "illuminating the whole tree with his bodily radiance, awaiting the time of setting out for alms" (E6, fig.216). In this scene the *Bodhisattva* is shown fully recovered from the

¹²³ Uttara is the Sanskrit name of Sujata's servant. In the *Nk*, the Pali version of Punna is used.

Fast. He is seated on a double lotus throne, and holds an alms bowl in his left hand. Uttara, having gone to prepare a seat under the tree for the tree spirit, found the tree glowing, as was the *Bodhisattva*. This narrative adequately explains the next scene (E7, fig.217). Gotama is seated under the tree with a single female figure below with hands held high in supplication. Not recognising the *Bodhisattva* she returned to Sujata and said the tree god had appeared to receive the offering himself. Overjoyed by the news, Sujata vows to elevate Uttara to the status of her daughter. She adorns herself with ornaments and takes the offering to the soon-to-be Buddha in a golden bowl. This is the moment illustrated in the following sculpture (E8, fig.218), with Sujata in the predella offering the golden bowl filled with milk-rice, accompanied by Uttara. Sujata is overjoyed and makes Uttara her daughter, giving her ornaments. Thus, if scenes E7 and E8 represent these events, the figure in the first predella would be Uttara, when she sees Gotama at the base of the tree and the second predella would depict Sujata offering the milk-rice while Uttara looks on, or alternatively, may represent Sujata handing over her ornaments to Uttara, a symbol of her adoption, and also a symbol of generosity important in Buddhism.

The *Lv* offers an alternative explanation. The narrative says that during the practice of austerities, ten village girls regularly came to see Gotama, bringing him his meager food. One of the girls was named Sujata. In the *Lv* she is singled out as having prayed for the *Bodhisattva* throughout his six-year ordeal. The night before Enlightenment, the gods spoke to her and said "Sujātā, the one for whom you have made many offerings has ceased the practice of mortifications, and is now ready to receive pure and abundant food. Formerly you prayed: 'After partaking of the food prepared by me may the Bodhisattva attain perfect, supreme, and complete Enlightenment.' Now do what must be done" (*Lv*:407). After preparing the meal of milk-rice she sent her servant girl, Uttara, to Gotama and "going to the Bodhisattva, she bowed to his feet and extended an invitation to him in the name of Sujātā" (*Lv*:408). That this is a more appropriate interpretation for the imagery depicted is given weight by the next scene.

The following scene (E9, fig.219) is rather incongruous. Gotama is seated with hands in *dhyana mudra*. There is no tree behind. While the image of Gotama

appears contemporary with the other images, the background may have been replaced. The following image (E10, fig.220) shows Gotama with his alms bowl upturned in his lap. According to the *Nk*, when Sujata approached the Bodhi tree, the *Bodhisattva*'s alms bowl disappeared. "Not being able to find the bowl the Bodhisatta stretched out his right hand" and Sujata presented him with the milk-rice offering in the golden bowl. The *Bodhisattva* then walked to the river and bathed. He divided the milk-rice into 49 portions "the size of a single-seed palmyra fruit" (*Nk*:93). He spent time in meditation then set the bowl adrift in the river where it traveled upstream before a whirlpool took it down to the home of the *naga* king. Making a noise as it banged against the bowls of the three previous Buddhas of the eon, this was taken as a sign that Gotama would shortly attain Buddhahood.

It is interesting that none of the images depict the *naga* king or the passage of the bowl in the river. These key elements of the story are omitted here. Perhaps E9 may have originally included a more specific reference to this event. This event is also important as it represents the importance of earning merit and stresses the good of giving – in this case not only food but also a golden bowl. Another possibility is the need to break the scenes, as the worshipper circumambulating the corridor, now turns into the southern hall. They would finish the sequence at the event of upturning the alms bowl, signifying the last food Gotama would eat before attaining Enlightenment.

This section of the narrative is completed by image S1 (fig.221) and S2 (fig.222). S1 shows Gotama seated holding a small bowl while S2 is an image of Gotama in *bhumisparsa mudra*. Following the *Nk* narrative, it is possible that these images may be in the wrong order. To conform more closely to the narrative one would place S2, the scene of Gotama with no bowl and his right hand reaching to the earth, in the position of S1. The scenes would then correspond to the narrative when the bowl disappears, after Uttara sees the *Bodhisattva* under the tree (E7). Next would be Gotama with the bowl in his lap (currently S1), then the image with the upturned bowl (currently E10) and finally, Gotama in *dhyana mudra* (currently E9) as he meditates near the river.

On the other hand, the *Lv* narrative recounts a short and fanciful incident regarding the bowl. After eating Gotama throws the bowl into the river where it

is picked up by Sagara, the *naga* king who takes it to his abode. However, Indra, in the guise of a *garuda*, descends and tries to steal the bowl. When the god fails, he returns to his normal form and respectfully asks Sagara for the bowl which is duly handed over. Indra takes the bowl to the realm of the thirty-three Gods where a *caitya* is built and the Feast of the Begging Bowl is established (Lv:409-10). The *naga* princess then took the throne away and also built a *caitya* in honour of this event. The decorative reredo of S1 is more suggestive of the *Lv* narrative, though the *Nk* makes significant reference to the *devas* filling the ten-thousand world systems with perfumes and garlands (*Nk*:93) which may be another explanation for the elaborate backdrop. The outer edge of the reredo in E10 is of interest as it is fluted around the edge, a feature absent from the preceding scenes, and many of the other images in Ananda. Whether this is indicative of the group of images being original, or later additions, or the work of one particular artisan will be discussed later. The upside down bowl would indicate the finishing of the meal – important as Gotama does not eat again until after becoming Buddha – and the throwing of the alms bowl into the river. However, the next image also shows Gotama with a bowl (S1). By elongating this scene, the narrative stresses the importance of finishing the food, contemplation of the empty bowl while Gotama proclaims his intentions to throw it away, and then, in S2 (fig.222), Gotama has proclaimed that he will attain Enlightenment, indicated by *bhumisparsa mudra*.

The *Lv* recounts, that after taking the food bowl from Sujata, the *Bodhisattva* bathed in the river Nairanjana and after emerging from the water, "a daughter of the *nāgas* who resided in the Nairanjanā river came from deep below and offered him a resplendent lion throne" (Lv:409). One image, E10 (fig.220), may represent the *Lv* narrative, with Gotama sitting on the special throne, as illustrated in the reredo, and the eating of the milk-rice. No specific mention of a special throne is made in the *Nk*.

Other elements of the sculptures would support the suggested change in order of the sculptures. The images of the Buddha with his right shoulder uncovered would be grouped together in this reorganisation. Images which show Gotama with the right hand pointing to the earth are always accompanied by a bare right shoulder. When in *dhyana mudra* or *dharmacakra mudra*, both shoulders are

covered. The only exception to this is scene N4, where the *Bodhisattva* prepares to receive his monk's robes. Image S2 lacks a *bodhi* tree backdrop, present in images E6-8. Moreover, the reredo is reduced in form, that is, the throne back appears as a cut-out, not the usual arch-shape of the other images. This may indicate the image back was damaged, and the complete structure was unable to be repaired. The reredo of E8 may be the only original remaining, with its arched top and high relief tree. The simplistic rendering of the tree in E6 and E7 is similar to that of E2 and E5 suggesting they were all damaged then repaired at the same time.

Regardless of the order, this section of the narrative can be more closely associated with the *Nk* narrative. There are no comparable passages in the *Lv* to account for such scenes. The *Lv* does not mention Sujata or Uttara, or indeed, the throwing of the bowl into the river, a popular element of the story as told in the Theravada tradition.¹²⁴

If the scenes could be rearranged, the first images on the southern side would show Gotama with the upturned bowl, then in meditation. Currently, the images show Gotama with a bowl, then in *bhumisparsa mudra*. The next image (S3, fig.223) shows Gotama making his way to the bodhi tree. He is flanked by two *devas* carrying flags. The *Nk* describes the passage of Gotama to the bodhi tree as "[he] wended his way in the direction of the Bodhi-tree at eventide, the time flowers drop off from their stems, along the path which was eight usabhas wide and decorated by the deities, like a lion shaking off his drowsiness. Nāgas, yakkhas, Supannas and others honoured him with heavenly perfumes, flowers and so forth, playing divine music" (*Nk*:93). However, there are some phrases which relate specifically to the imagery seen in S3 which are not found in the *Nk*. The *Lv* states "thousands of floating banners were waving in the breeze..", and "... the wife of Kālīka, king of the nāgas, now came forward and circumambulated the Bodhisattva, surrounded and preceded by a multitude of daughters of the nāgas. They carried jewelled parasols..." (*Lv*:431). The figures in S3 are bearing banners, in accordance with the specific references to the

¹²⁴ The *Buddhacarita* does mention the giving of milk rice by Nandabala, daughter of a cowherd chief. However, it is only a brief part of the narrative. This narrative tells that the naga king was awakened by the sound of the bodhisattva's footsteps as he approached the bodhi tree. Johnston, *Buddhacarita*, 185-186.

presence of banners and figures who flanked Gotama's journey. The presence of deities lining Gotama's path is a common feature of both the *Lv* and the *Nk*, but in the latter the description is much less specific. Another section of the *Lv* offers an explanation for the parasol over Gotama's head, an element which has not previously appeared. The *Lv* specifically discusses the presence of Brahma at this time. "The Bodhisattva, appearing like the great Brahmā, advances to Bodhimanda to assume the perfect and complete Enlightenment of a Buddha, to overcome completely the army of Māra" (*Lv*:419). As the parasol is a symbol associated with Brahma, there may be a direct association with the *Lv* text.

The following scene (S4, fig.224) shows Gotama receiving eight grass bundles from Sotthiya, a grass-seller, grass being the seat of all former *Tathagathas* as they attained Enlightenment. This is reported in both the *Nk* and *Lv*. Much is made, in the *Lv*, of Gotama's discourse to the grass cutter whereas it is only a short part of the *Nk* narrative (*Lv*:433-437, *Nk*:93). The next four images (S5-S8, fig.225, fig.226, fig.227, fig.228) show Gotama carrying the grass bundles, either walking or standing. The *Nk* describes how Gotama took the grass bundles, then proceeded to walk around and face each side of the *bodhi* tree before settling on the eastern side. These figures can be interpreted as representing his passage to each side of the tree, and his pause as he realised this was not the place to be seated (*Nk*:93-94). The *Lv* narrative does not fit these scenes so well. On approaching the *bodhi* tree with the grass bundles "eighty thousand Bodhi trees were adorned by the devaputras and the Bodhisattvas" (*Lv*:437). The *Bodhisattva* miraculously appeared to seat himself under each tree simultaneously. After this display, Gotama carried the grass bundles to the true bodhi tree and circumambulated it seven times. He then placed the grass on the ground and "sat down on the mat of kuśa grass, holding his body erect in the cross-legged posture, his face towards the east" (*Lv*:438-439).

The imagery is more closely related to the *Nk* than the *Lv*. Even though two of the standing images are walking, as indicated by the sway of their robes, the number of images corresponds to the four directions faced by Gotama before settling on the eastern side of the tree. An explanation for the changing hand

position is not readily apparent, but perhaps the group of three scenes, S5, S6 and S7, represent Gotama walking to each direction. In the first image (S5), the *Bodhisattva* walks to the southern side of the tree. He then pauses to place down the bundle (S6), and realises this is not the correct place, at which point both hands are extended downwards as if he is pondering the next move. S7 and S8 would then show the *Bodhisattva* walking to the western and northern sides of the tree, where he extends the grass bundles towards the earth, only to realise neither place will be his site of Enlightenment.

Finally (S9) he arrives at the eastern side of the tree and, recognising he has arrived at the appropriate location, places the grass bundles on the ground and the soon-to-be-Buddha sits down (fig.229). This imagery is not clearly portrayed in the Ananda sculptural narrative. In this image Gotama is seated under the *bodhi* tree, which is detailed in the predella. He sits on a waisted throne for the first time. Previous use of a waisted throne was only for scenes where the *Bodhisattva* is standing or riding his horse.¹²⁵ However, the *Nk* specifically refers to "a seat fourteen cubits in extent" miraculously appearing the moment the *Bodhisattva* places the grass bundles on the ground (*Nk*:94), and this may be the reason for the style of throne that appears in the scene. A mat cascades over the front of the throne, a stylistic feature seen infrequently in the narrative images of the Ananda. At the base of the throne a female figure kneels and lifts up a vessel towards Gotama's extended right hand. No narrative can explain this scene which surely must represent Sujata's offering. This is also Luce's opinion, and given the already confused series relating to this event this image may well have originally been placed with the others which illustrate this part of the narrative (E7 and E8).

The remaining images all show a seated Gotama with his right hand reaching downwards, consistent with the events of the Enlightenment. The next scene (S10, fig.230) has Gotama flanked by Indra, holding a conch, and Brahma with his parasol. The reredo shows, in high relief, the *bodhi* tree in the shape of an upturned garland. This style is seen in many of the image in the entrance halls. Both the *Lv* and *Nk* refer to the presence of Indra and Brahma though the event

¹²⁵ This feature is consistent with the images in the entrance halls, where Gotama is only shown on a waisted throne when seated under the *bodhi* tree.

is more specific in the *Nk* (*Nk*:95). In the *Lv* the gods are in the company of all heavenly devas (*Lv*:450-451).

Turning into the western corridor, the final series of images, the *Bodhisattva* is shown seated in *bhumisparsa mudra* (W1, fig.231). This is the time before Mara's onslaught. The *Nk* specifically notes that all the deities flee when they see Mara and his armies approaching and "the great being sat there all alone" (*Nk*:95). The *Lv* narrative differs somewhat. Instead of Mara initiating the attacks it is Gotama who summons Mara by emitting "from the tuft of hair between his eyebrows a ray called Sarvamāra-mandalavidhvamsanakarī, That Which Destroys All the Domains of the Demon" (*Lv*:458). Here the *urna* is clearly visible whereas it is less prominent in other scenes.

Mara appears in the next scene (W2, fig.232), although he is not accompanied by any demons or entourage. Instead, Mara and Gotama engage in a dialogue alone. There are few distinguishing features to confirm that the figure on Gotama's right side is Mara. The small halo around the figure's head clearly indicates he is a god, and he wears a crown. In the absence of his armies, or the bow and arrow that he sometimes carries, he is identified entirely by the context of the scene.¹²⁶ Since the assault of Mara's armies is vividly described in both narratives (*Nk*:95-98, *Lv*:458-511), the solitary representation of Mara is unexpected in this position. A predella including imagery of Mara's armies would have been in keeping with other narrative events.

The following sculpture (W3, fig.233) depicts the temptation by Mara's daughters. The *Nk* specifically refers to Mara's three daughters as does the *Lv* but they are present at different times in each narrative. Duroiselle described this scene as a depiction of Mara's three daughters who, during the period after Enlightenment, try to distract the Buddha, followed by an image of two of them representing the next moment when they return defeated and bow down to the Buddha.¹²⁷ However, while difficult to assess, the two women appear to be stroking their hair, not bowing and there was no explanation why the three other

¹²⁶ Agrawala notes that in the *Mara-samyutta* there are at least twenty references to incidents involving Mara and Gotama. The four most common are at Renunciation, Enlightenment, the First Sermon and at the Parinirvana. Mara sometimes has a crocodile banner and, from around 400-600 CE in Indian art, he was often portrayed carrying a bow and arrow while an attendant holds a makara standard. Agrawala "Depictions of Māra," 125-134.

¹²⁷ Duroiselle, "The Stone Sculptures in the Ananda Temple," 63-97 and pls.31-39.

women were not shown twice. More importantly, placing this scene at a point after Enlightenment is inconsistent with the narrative. The *Nk* makes no reference at all to Mara's daughters until they appear in the fifth week after Enlightenment (*Nk*:105-106).¹²⁸

The *Lv* refers to Mara calling his daughters on two occasions. The first is prior to the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment, as part of the onslaught to distract him. They appear in great numbers, "and manifested the thirty-two kinds of feminine wiles...", "some were dancing and singing...some flirted shamelessly, some were moving their hips like palm trees shaken in the wind, some were displaying their arms, rubbed with perfumed ointments..." (*Lv*:484). This narrative corresponds with the imagery, showing as it does five women, symbolising many more, tempting the Buddha.¹²⁹ On the second occasion Mara specifically calls three of his daughters during the fourth week after the Enlightenment and, in the guise of young beauties, they try again to distract the Buddha (*Lv*:571-572). However, the Buddha blesses them and they turn into old women, which is clearly not apparent in this depiction. Thus, it is most likely that this image is not drawn from the *Nk* but represents the initial onslaught of Mara and his armies prior to the attainment of Enlightenment.

The question arises as to whether W2 (fig.232) and W3 (fig.233) have been reversed.¹³⁰ In the context of defeating Mara, both texts highlight the dialogue between Mara and Gotama which occurs after Mara's armies have retreated. The moment of calling the Earth to witness is important in both narratives and would appear to warrant a single scene of its own. Such an image would be better placed after Gotama has been tempted by Mara's daughters in the context of the *Lv*, while, as discussed above, it does not correspond well with

¹²⁸ Luce overlooks the *Lv* narrative when describing the use of the Eight Scenes in India. He refers to the "incongruous" inclusion of a scene of Mara's daughters with Mara's assault and the Enlightenment in a series at Mathura, even though the temptation by the daughters "occurred under a different tree, several weeks later". *OBEF*, 1:148. Luce draws only on the *Nk* narrative when discussing these events, even though the *Lv* had been in existence at least 500 years before the *Nk*.

¹²⁹ Blagden notes that in the Mon tradition, as shown in the 14th century plaques on the Shwegu-gyi pagoda, the daughters of Mara attempt to attack Gotama in various forms – as young girls, women with one child, women with two children, women of medium age and older women. The assault is made by a company of 300 at a time. After six attacks in their varying shapes, they retire discomfited. Blagden "Epigraphical Notes. The Daughters of Māra in Mon Tradition," *JBRs* 4(1914):97-98.

¹³⁰ Again there is a possibility the statues have been moved or replaced since their original construction. However, the current positioning matches that first described by Duroiselle.

the *Nk* narrative. If the images in the predella were demons from Mara's armies, the scene would be appropriate. The *Nk* recalls that, when Mara asked Gotama who would bear witness to his past good deeds and worthiness to attain Buddhahood, Gotama called the Earth as witness. "Extricating his right hand from underneath the folds of his robe he stretched it out towards the earth saying, 'are you or are you not witness to my having given seven hundredfold alms in my birth as Vessantara?' And the great earth resounded with a hundred, a thousand or a hundred thousand echoes as tough to overwhelm the forces of Māra, and saying as it were, 'I was your witness to it then'," (*Nk*:98).

The *Lv* recounts a much closer one-on-one account of Mara and his attempt to deter Gotama. In the end, when Mara was unable to break through Gotama's resolve, he asks "In a previous existence I freely made an irreproachable offering; to this you are witness; but you have no witness to offer evidence in your support, and so you will be conquered!" (*Lv*:481). In reply Gotama says "Here is the guarantee that there is no deception: take the earth as my witness...Then the goddess of the earth....shook the whole great earth. Not far from the bodhisattva, she revealed the upper half of her body adorned with all its ornaments" (*Lv*:482).¹³¹ This important event can only be related to the scene of Gotama and Mara alone.

The following scene represents Mara's defeat. The base shows a number of *devas*, or gods, making obeisance to the Buddha (W4, fig.234). This event is narrated in both the *Nk* and the *Lv*, the latter telling how, after the defeat of Mara and attainment of Enlightenment, "the Four Great Kings together with the gods of their realm praised greatly the Tathāgata seated at Bodhimanda" (*Lv*:552). The *Nk* tells how, after the Buddha's victory over Mara, "the hosts of Brahmās overcome with joy, then proclaimed, at the foot of the Bodhi-tree, the victory of the Steadfast Sage" (*Nk*:99).

¹³¹ Depictions of Vasundari, the earth goddess, are almost unknown at Bagan. Her appearance in imagery does not become widespread until around the 19th century. "According to popular story that is current among us, it seems that when Gautama was attacked.. Vasundari, the Earth goddess appeared wringing out her hair the water that had been poured on her each time the Buddha made an offering during his previous existences. That water flowed off in five great streams and drowned Mara's host." Maung Mya, "Our Museum", 219-224. There is no mention of the earth goddess in the *Apadāna pāli* of the *Khuddaka nikaya*. Neither is Vasundari mentioned in *The Legend of Gaudama, the Buddha of the Burmese*, compiled by Bigandet in 1879. Bigandet, 89-90.

The final image in this narrative sequence at the Ananda shows the solitary Buddha in the Enlightenment position (W5, fig.235), which corresponds closely with the *Lv*. The *Lv* tells how the gods bowed to the *Bodhisattva* "and then stood to one side" (*Lv*:555) leaving Gotama alone under the bodhi tree. The *Nk* narrative suggests that Gotama remained, surrounded by deities, while he attained Enlightenment. This brings to a close Gotama's life as a mortal being.

The narrative imagery at the Ananda temple can be shown to draw strongly on both the *Lalitavistara* and *Nidanakatha* narratives. At a time when the Theravada canon was being promoted, such an obvious visual association with northern Buddhism is unexpected. Rather, it might be expected that the work of Buddhaghosa should dominate as a source for imagery. Even the *Tatha'oudana*, which is distinctly Burmese, owes more to the *Lalitavistara* than to any other account of the life story of the Buddha. That the artisans had knowledge of the *Nidanakatha* during the Bagan period is supported by the *Jataka* friezes at Ananda yet it should not be assumed it was the only tradition followed at Bagan.

The Ananda temple series incorporates most of the best known events of Gotama's life. The period from before his birth until the Great Departure can be subjected to the same analysis and yield similar conclusions. The events after Enlightenment such as those found in the Ananda Halls, however, which include images of the retreat to Parileyyaka Forest, the First Sermon, Parinirvana and the Miracle of the Double suggest another influence is at play. The *Lalitavistara* concludes with the First Sermon and the turning of the Wheel of Law and the *Nidanakatha* concludes shortly thereafter when the Buddha preaches to his father.¹³² As suggested in the conclusion to this chapter, the imagery at the Ananda is indicative of a multi-faceted phase of Buddhism at Bagan, drawing on both Mahayana and Theravada traditions.

¹³² Like the *Lv* the *Buddhacarita* concludes with this the First Sermon. Johnston, trans., *The Buddhacarita*, 217.

A Review of Selected Imagery and Narrative Scenes of the Early Bagan Period

This review of the Ananda temple imagery and its relationship to two popular Buddhist texts has shown how narrative scenes can be utilized to help identify the possible textual origins of the imagery. Bringing the text to the images, rather than the images to the text, offers further possibilities for the interpretation of the iconography, enabling a greater understanding of the Buddhist traditions that were present at the time. With this approach in mind, a review of other narrative imagery from the early Bagan period reveals additional levels of meaning in early Bagan period Buddhist figures.

Anawrahta's Votive Tablets

As has been demonstrated in Chapter 3, Anawrahta's votive tablets are closely linked to Pala India, based on stylistic comparison. Can this stylistic relationship be reinforced by comparing and contrasting the *Lv* and the *Nk* against the imagery that appears on some of the plaques? While there are a number of different styles of votive tablet, by far the most prolific are plaques that show a central figure of the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra*.

Two examples previously reviewed in Chapter 3 are particularly valuable for this hypothesis (fig.33a-b). The Buddha is flanked by the *bodhisattva* Lokanatha, on his right, and Maitreya to the left, which immediately suggests a Mahayana influence. Luce comments on this link with the Mahayana yet only describes the imagery in relation to similar images from other sites and countries.¹³³ However, Lokanatha is not just a *bodhisattva*, but is the pre-eminent *bodhisattva*, whose presence is strong after the death of Gotama and will remain so until the arrival of Maitreya. Therefore, his appearance on the votive tablets is also consistent with the practice of *karmatic* Buddhism, that is, it reinforces a focus on future rebirths and serves as a guide along the path to Enlightenment. The Buddha, depicted at the moment of Enlightenment, is seated on a double lotus throne raised on a pedestal. He is framed by a niche draped with beads. There are *stupas* above the central image interspersed with flowers. The leaves of the *bodhi* tree under which the Buddha sits are prominent, the tree symbol having been an important motif in Buddhism since earliest times when it was an

¹³³ *OBEP*, 1:16-17.

aniconic symbol for the Buddha. Lotuses spring from the ground and support Lokanatha and Maitreya.

When viewed in parallel with the various life stories of the Buddha, the selection of elements for inclusion in these votive tablets suggests a strong link with the

Lv. That account makes particular mention of the displays which occurred at the site of Enlightenment. Once Gotama was seated under the bodhi tree, he was approached by the *bodhisattvas* of all ten directions who were attracted by the light emanating from the Buddha-to-be. Mahasattva, from the south, "gave shelter to the entire assembly with a single jeweled parasol", and certainly, other votive tablets have a definite parasol shape at the top of the stupa (fig.35). From the west came Indrajali "who gave shelter to the whole assembly with a single jeweled net". From the southwest came Ratnasambhava who "manifested within the circle of the assembly immeasurable and innumerable celestial temples". Hemajalamkṛta "caused figures of bodhisattvas completely adorned with the thirty-two signs to appear in all of the storied palaces and temples, each figure holding garlands of divine and human flowers". From the lower region, Mahāsattva Ratnagarbha caused "golden lotuses which grows [sic] in the water of Jambu to appear within the circle of lapis lazuli" (*Lv.*444-51). Some other gifts are not so readily converted into imagery such as the manifestation of a cloud of balm and sandalwood dust.

With these descriptive images in mind, the visual elements on the tablets become more than just decorative. Each can be seen as representing part of the narrative of the Enlightenment as told in the *Lv.* *Stupas* in the form of the temple of Bodhgaya, a place very few if any of the local Burmese artisans would have seen, symbolize not only the site of Enlightenment but also the ideal form for any *stupas* mentioned in the context of this important event. The lightly incised wavy line surrounding the Buddha is not just for decoration but takes on a particular meaning, that is, it becomes Indrajali's jeweled net. The flowers under the *bodhisattvas'* seats are not just symbolic lotuses, but part of a greater narrative. The strings of pearls and the flowers are also part of the *Lv* story. Similarly the other elements, such as the bodhi leaves, are not random, put into the image to make it more pleasing, but deliberately included to represent a particular narrative.

Shwe-hsan-daw

Luce notes that the Shwe-hsan-daw was built to "copy the Cūḷāmaṇi cetiya of Tāvātimsa, built by Sakka at the top of Mt. Sineru to enshrine the Hairknot cut by Gotama on his becoming a monk. The five square terraces, therefore, represent the five *ālinda* [terraces] of that sacred mountain, guarded by stone Devas".¹³⁴ Luce draws on the *Nk* narrative of Gotama's life story for his explanation, where Gotama's hair locks and diadem are thrown heavenwards and enshrined in the "Cūḷāmaṇi (Crest Gem) shrine in Tāvātimsa heaven" (*Nk*:86). Yet Luce does not consider the possibility that the Shwe-hsan-daw was built to represent the Cūdāpratigrahaṇa, the Collected Locks of Hair *caitya* that was built at the site of the tonsure, as told in the *Lv* (*Lv*:339). While it will probably never be known which, if any, of these narratives was Anawrahta's inspiration for the stupa's construction it is impossible to give one preference over the other with any real certainty.

Kyauk-ku-umin and the Naga-yon

There are only fragmentary remains of life scene images at the Kyauk-ku-umin and Naga-yon temples. Luce notes that when he saw the Kyauk-ku-umin there were images of the Nativity, Plowing festival, Tonsure, Fast, Mucalinda Nāga, the Descent from Tāvātimsa and Nalagiri elephant.¹³⁵ There are three tiers of niches though it is uncertain how many of these would have contained images of life scenes. The remaining images at the Naga-yon include scenes of the Maya's dream, the Parinirvana, the Descent from Tāvātimsa, the First Sermon and Parileyyaka Retreat.¹³⁶ Moreover, the use of scenes such as the Defeat of the Heretics and the Request of Sahampati, suggests the complete set of images was detailed and covered the complete chronology of Gotama's life.

The *Lv* narrative concludes with the turning of the Wheel of Law, the preaching of the First Sermon. The *Nk* continues a little longer, and includes Gotama preaching to his father, and Gotama's son, Rahula, becoming a monk. Details

¹³⁴ This cosmological interpretation is overlooked by Soni who reduces the significance of five terraces to aesthetics. Soni notes that the early convention of having three tier terraces was not followed when building the Shwe-hsan-daw, which has five terraces. "But as this did not fit into the Burmese sense of proportion and beauty, a return to three is seen in the later examples, for example in Rhwecañ:khum [Shwezigon] and Maṅgalāceti [Mingalazedi]." Soni, *Evolution of Stupas*, 18.

¹³⁵ Strachan records that images had gone missing from the temple since his visits in 1986 and 1987. Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture*, 52. Most are now in the Bagan Museum.

of events such as the Descent from Tavatimsa and the Taming of Nalagiri Elephant are not covered by either version. The pictorial representation of these events closely mimics those of Pala India and one assumes this is the source for such imagery. These scenes are only included in the halls of the Ananda temple. Images in the halls represent the major life events of the Buddha, from conception to death. The remaining sculptures of these scenes were probably similarly positioned in the Kyauk-ku-umin and Naga-yon.

Scenes of the conception, or Maya's Dream, are extant at Kyauk-ku-umin, Naga-yon and Ananda temples. The *Nk* recalls that during Maya's dream, the four guardian deities lifted her bed and took her to the Himalaya mountain, placing her under a *sala* tree. The heavenly consorts prepared a couch for her, with its head facing east. After lying on the couch the *Bodhisattva*, in the form of a white elephant and carrying a lotus in his trunk, circumambulated Maya's bed three times before entering her right side (*Nk*:67). The *Lv* account is, for once, less extravagant. At the correct astrological moment, the *Bodhisattva*, in the form of a six-tusked white elephant, descended from Tushita Heaven and entered Maya's womb where he remained on the right side (*Nk*:95-99).

The Naga-yon image (fig.145) shows Maya sleeping on a couch. There are four *devas* above which would correspond to the consorts of the four guardian kings. The elephant is clearly depicted above their heads. This closely follows the *Nk* narrative. The images in the Ananda Halls also appear to depict this version. The four consorts are evident, though the elephant is relegated to a much less prominent position (fig.236, fig.237) appearing as a small figure above Maya's head.

Images of The Birth have been found in Kyauk-ku-umin, the Ananda and at Temple 820. At Kyauk-ku-umin the sculpture shows Maya with her right hand raised to grasp the branch of the *sala* tree (fig.82). Her left hand is around the neck of her sister. A *deva* appears on her left, and the perfectly formed Buddha on her right as he descends from his mother's side. Neither the *Nk* nor *Lv* specifically mentions the presence of Maya's sister at this moment. The *Lv* narrative tells how "sixty thousand apsaras drew near to serve her and form an

¹³⁶ These sculptures are now on display at the Bagan Museum.

honor guard around her" (*Lv*:130). The *Nk* only refers to people drawing a curtain around Maya before they withdrew (*Nk*:70). Hence the origins of this scene do not lie overtly with either written narrative, though the presence of the *deva* has a closer relationship with the *Lv*.

The depictions of the birth in the Ananda temple draw more on the *Lv* than the *Nk* (fig.236, fig.237). The first image (fig.236) is part of the narrative series found in the ambulatory corridor. There are two *devas* in this scene. The figure on the right of the Buddha holds some form of musical instrument while the other, on the Buddha's left, holds a fly whisk. A scene portrayed in one of the entrance halls (fig.237) shows *devas* supporting the Buddha as he descends to earth. In addition there are two figures enveloped in a cloud, pouring water over the future Buddha. This event is mentioned in the *Lv* when "the nāga kings Nanda and Upananda, showing the upper half of their bodies in the expanse of the sky caused two streams of cool and warm water to flow forth to bathe the Bodhisattva; then Sakra and Brahmā, the Guardians of the world, and hundreds and thousands of devaputras sprinkled the Bodhisattva with perfumed waters and flower essences" (*Lv*:131). The *Nk* also makes specific reference to streams of water falling from the sky, but no mention is made of who was pouring the water (*Nk*:70). While this imagery is not apparent in the other sculpture (fig.236), close examination suggests that this side has been repaired without the reconstruction of the original detail.

At Temple 820 another reconstructed image is very similar to the image in the Ananda hall (fig.120). Maya clasps a branch of the *sala* tree with her right hand, supported on her left side by her sister, with another female figure to her left. The Buddha emerges from Maya's right side and is supported by gods as he descends to the earth. Again, the extensive repairs make it impossible to know if the imagery included an illustration of the pouring of lustral waters from the heavens. Stylistically the sculptures are similar though the Kyauk-ku-umin image portrays Maya without a crown. At Temple 820 Maya has a large three-pointed crown, while the attendant figures have smaller three-pointed crowns. All images depict the women adorned with jewelry.

The scenes of the Plowing Festival which appear at the Kyauk-ku-umin and Ananda temples are quite different. In the Kyauk-ku-umin image the

Bodhisattva is placed in a cradle under the tree whose shadow does not move all day (fig.83). The *Nk* states "the king had a couch spread for the prince under it, a canopy decorated with golden stars set up above it, and an enclosure of curtains made around it" (*Nk*:77). The prince was placed in the enclosure, and neglected by his nurses who desired to see the Plowing Festival. When they returned to their charge, they found him seated in meditation, still protected by shadow. The *Lv* narrative is very different. Here, the prince wanders off on his own and sits under a tree at the end of a field that has been ploughed. He falls into deep meditation. When discovered by the king, the miraculous event of the shadow of the tree remaining still to protect the prince is observed by all (*Lv*:199-208). The imagery of the Kyauk-ku-umin relief relates more closely to the *Nk* narrative as it mentions an enclosure, though neither narrative refers to a cradle.

The corresponding image in the Ananda (fig.238) is perhaps more closely aligned with the *Lv* version. Two images are given over to the event. In the first, the young prince is shown lying under a tree, and while not depicting the prince in meditation, this scene does draw more on the *Lv* than the *Nk* in that the *Lv* refers to the event happening to the prince when he was older (fig.C272). The Ananda imagery is much more easily interpreted as representing a young child, rather than an infant in the company of his nurses (*Nk*:76-77). However, both texts adequately account for the image of the king and, presumably, the prince's aunt, flanking the prince, with an entourage in the predella below (fig.C). The *Lv* refers to the prince addressing his father and his followers "with great authority" after being discovered in retreat under the tree (*Lv*:203-204).

The Kyauk-ku-umin image of the Fast is an unusual work (fig.85). Badly damaged, it is still possible to determine the central details. An emaciated Gotama is seated under a tree flanked by two deities. The deities are holding two straws which are inserted into Gotama's ears. As stated earlier, according to the *Nk* Gotama refused to allow the gods to insert food through his pores even though this would appear to be the scene represented here. The *Lv*, however, recounts that when he was seated under the tree fasting, local boys and girls would taunt him. "When they put grass and cotton in the openings of his ears, it came out through his nostrils; when they put stuff in his nostrils it

came out through his ears..." (Lv:390). Gotama remained unmoved, too weak to respond. Perhaps this imagery was used to reinforce the terrible suffering Gotama endured on his path to Enlightenment. The later Ananda image is more comforting, showing the *devas* supporting Gotama, and focuses on Gotama's personal effort, rather than emphasising the crueler side of human existence (fig.214). There is also an image of this scene in the Myin-pya-gu temple, but it is much damaged and it is impossible to discern any of the accessory detailing.¹³⁷

Two final images for discussion show the Buddha sheltered under the *naga* hoods. Both, however, represent very different narrative events. The first image is from Kyauk-ku-umin and depicts Gotama seated under the *naga* hoods holding his alms bowl (fig.93). This is a direct reference to the *Nk* narrative when Gotama casts the golden bowl into the river and awakens the *naga* king. It is the only image of this scene extant at Bagan. The second image is from the Myin-pya-gu temple and shows Gotama in *bhumisparsa mudra* sheltered by a multi-headed *naga*, an image more closely connected with the *Lv* narrative (fig.104). The Buddha seated under the *naga* is usually associated with one of the seven weeks after Enlightenment when the Buddha is meditating under the bodhi tree and the *naga* king spreads his hoods over the Buddha to protect him. This occurs in the seventh week in the *Nk* (*Nk*:106-107). The imagery evoked by the *Lv* narrative is different. During the fifth week after Enlightenment, the *naga* king Mucalinda protects Gotama by winding his coils around him seven times. Then, the *naga* kings of all directions come to assist and all curl themselves around the Buddha (*Lv*:574). This version of the narrative assists in explaining why seven separate *naga* heads appear during this scene which is clearly associated with the events of the Enlightenment.¹³⁸

Summary

These few extant images of Gotama's life story remaining in the early temples at Bagan also reveal that inspiration was drawn from more than one narrative.

¹³⁷ *OBEP*, 3:pl.152e.

¹³⁸ The presence of multitudes of *nagas* also has links to the *Buddhacarita*. During the onslaught of Mara's armies "the earth-eating Nāgas, devoted to *dharma*, did not brook obstruction to the great sage and, turning their eyes wrathfully on Māra, they hissed and unwound their coils" Johnston, *Buddhacarita*, 194. For further analysis of this aspect of the Enlightenment imagery see Galloway, "Relationships Between Buddhist Texts," 51.

The only detailed narrative relief at Myin-pya-gu favours the *Lv* narrative concerning the *nagas*. Moreover, other imagery in Myin-pya-gu further suggests a relationship with northern Buddhism. The temple's twenty-eight niches, which Luce proposes were designed to house images of the twenty-eight Buddhas, also support a Mahayana bias, as the Pali or Theravada tradition favours representations of the twenty-five Buddhas.

On the other hand, the Kyauk-ku-umin reliefs tend to favour the *Nk* narrative. This is consistent with the estimated time of the temple's construction, in the late Anawrahta period, not long after the Pali *Tipitaka* had arrived from Sri Lanka. The sculptures are more crudely formed than those of the Myin-pya-gu temple. The depiction of the Plowing Festival is certainly closer to the *Nk* narrative while the fasting image draws on both the *Nk* and *Lv*. Doctrinally and stylistically they should post-date the Myin-pya-gu images.

As reviewed in Chapter 5, the images of the Buddha at Myin-pya-gu are strong and masculine, favouring an earlier date than the Kyauk-ku-umin reliefs which are of the later phase of the Late Anawrahta-Sawlu period. As votive tablets attributable to both Anawrahta and Sawlu have been found within the temple, perhaps it was the last temple constructed under Anawrahta's patronage and his son continued to hold it in reverence.

The crudeness of the Kyauk-ku-umin imagery should not automatically place the carvings in an earlier chronological phase. More important is the doctrinal change. It is reasonable to expect the arrival of the *Tipitaka* would have sparked renewed interest in Buddhism and have resulted in a flurry of merit-earning building activity. The site of the temple, away from the centre of the city, suggests that while substantial, it was not a temple that would be visited frequently by the local populace or would draw attention to itself and its patron like the Shwe-hsan-daw or Shwe-zigon. It is also possible that Sawlu himself was the temple's patron. Sawlu is treated unfavourably in the *GPC*, portrayed as a wastrel. However, it is apparent that he, like his father, spread votive tablets throughout the expanding kingdom and there is no historical evidence to suggest he was not a devout follower of Buddhism. The unusual site of the temple suggests the site may have been decided under the direction of either Buddhist or Brahman priests who divined the best location for its construction.

Any dissent over the decision would have been enough to ensure legendary history would not look favourably on Sawlu. Apart from these more fanciful remarks, the reliefs in this temple are amongst the earliest made in stone, a medium little used to this point in Bagan. The Myin-pya-gu figures are of brick and stucco, a technique more familiar to Mon artisans.

From the fragmentary narrative sculptures antedating the Ananda images it can be hypothesised that the two narrative traditions were known as separate entities – the Myin-pya-gu favouring the Mahayana version, the Kyauk-ku-umin favouring the Theravada account. By the time the Ananda temple sculptures were carved, these two traditions had clearly coalesced into one "new" narrative which drew on the legends of both the Mahayana and Theravada schools. The imagery is neither a direct representation of the *Lalitavistara's* vivid narrative, which focuses on the Buddha's miraculous characteristics, nor a true interpretation of the *Nidanakatha's* more austere account of the Buddha's last earthly existence. Rather, the result is a narrative that highlights merit-earning events, such as the Renunciation, and the extraordinary challenges which must be overcome before a future Buddha is able to achieve the final goal of attaining Enlightenment. The Ananda imagery, therefore, represents a coming-of-age of Buddhism at Bagan, as the Burmans move forward towards developing their own distinctive Buddhist traditions.

Conclusion

The Buddhist sculpture of Burma is a neglected area of art historical research. Moreover, the artistic expressions of early Bagan, one of the most significant cultural centres of its age, represent the first emergence of a Burmese artistic style and yet this is the first study to specifically focus on the sculptural works from this region. To date, researchers have relied almost exclusively on the work of the foremost western scholar of Burmese history, Gordon Luce, along with the early archaeological work of those associated with the Archaeological Survey of India, such as Duroiselle and a handful of others. As elucidated in the Introduction, Luce's enthusiasm for all things Burmese and his extensive scholarly output, traversing as it did many academic fields, formed the foundations for all of us who follow. He collated much of the architectural and sculptural works then extant and proposed a history of the era which incorporated a daunting array of source material. Luce put together what he willing acknowledged was a starting point for future scholars, based on various hypotheses which were yet to be tested.

No doubt Luce expected there would be a steady following of scholars who would build on his work, filling the gaps and testing his assumptions and ideas. However, circumstances conspired to see what in other countries became an ongoing evolution of similar pioneering research, come to halt. A world war and a civil war effectively saw his foundation work sit idle for decades. The result was an intermittent ongoing use of these early concepts and ideas without a concomitant critical evaluation. In the last decade the history of Burma has become an active area of research internationally, and the work of Luce and others is now the subject of review and commentary. This thesis forms part of these reinvigorated academic research studies and aims to question and review some of the early commentary of scholars, while consolidating art historical knowledge of the period.

The emergence of the Theravada paradigm which has been identified in this thesis can be considered as the factor which has most limited art historical progress in Burma. When Duroiselle and others embarked on their studies their

interpretive bias, which has been demonstrated to firmly favour a Theravada presence, this set the course for later colleagues. The sculptural traditions of Burma were readily identified with the Theravada and this association has remained strong. As reiterated throughout this thesis, such an interpretation can not be sustained. The art of the early Bagan period does not represent Theravada Buddhism. Indeed, it was incorrect to assume that Buddhism dictates any particular visual canon. As Skilling explains, there is no direct link between the doctrine of a Buddhist school and the imagery that may accompany it. Rather, the preferred visual repertoire appears to evolve locally, incorporating indigenous and introduced imagery. This is a most important factor when trying to understand and interpret iconography.

Another major factor which influenced research on the art of the period was the reliance of many scholars on the popularised version of Burmese history, particularly that promoted by the *Glass Palace Chronicle*. As has been shown, non-contemporaneous histories have shaped subsequent scholarship as it related to Bagan and it has only been in the last decade that significant research has been undertaken which has shed new light on the region's history. As well as the assertion that Anawrahta was a zealous Theravada convert and Kyanzittha an ardent follower, a number of the other events mentioned in the chronicles such as the sacking of Thaton, visits to India and Sri Lanka, a Bengali queen and a prominent monk have all contributed to a particular interpretation of the art history during this time.

In light of recent research, this thesis has reviewed these principal assumptions and interpretations, with the aim of reassessing the sculptural material in an integrated historical context. The accepted chronologies associated with known sculptures with good provenance have been shown to be largely sustainable, based on visual analysis. There are visual connections, for example between the Mon art of Thaton and that of the early Anawrahta period, supporting interaction between the two cultural groups. This link also refutes the recent controversial work of Aung-Thwin who strongly questions such interaction. Some form of cross-cultural exchange did occur between Sri Lanka and Bagan, though the influence was more in a doctrinal context than an art historical one. India was very influential in the stylistic development of early Bagan, and the

links between Kyanzittha and Bodhgaya are seen in the sculptural works from most of his reign.

One aspect of this thesis which emerged somewhat unexpectedly was the association between the Pyu and early Bagan. The research by Hudson at Pyu sites and on Bagan's origins, based on archaeological finds, has connected directly with this thesis. This is the first time strong connections between the art of the Pyu and that of early Bagan has been explored. Hudson and Gutman's article on the Paw-daw-mu temple brought to light the potential for such interactions, and this has been expanded. Now there appears little doubt that the Pyu were well established at Bagan before the arrival of the Burmans, and the associations highlighted in Chapter 2 provide a basis for a further analysis of pre-Anawrahta material.

As noted, Luce's chronology for temples is mostly upheld though some amendments to his propositions have been proposed, such as dating Kyauk-sa-gyi temple to the reign of Sawlu. The review has resulted in the development of a specific chronological framework for sculptures crafted from 1044-1113 based on the physical characteristics of the images. This chronology has integrated updated historical information and the subsequent influence of external visual models on the developing Burmese style. When tested on some of the recent archaeological finds, such as those at Temple 820 and Paw-daw-mu, this methodology is very useful in developing proposals for the dating of works. The portability of sculptures ensures that they are often not found in their original context, and in the absence of direct inscriptional evidence, this tool for dating images complements other situational clues such as architecture. This is demonstrated in the case of the Mi-nien-kon, where the head of the image found on site is completely at odds stylistically with the architectural dating of the temple. The former is directly linked to the late Kyanzittha period, but the temple is linked to the later part of the 12th century.

Another approach used in this thesis has been the linkage between narrative imagery and text. The aim of this approach has been to demonstrate that there are many interpretations that can be made when viewing imagery. In the case of early Bagan, there was no linkage drawn between the *Lalitavistara* and the narrative in the Ananda temple, as scholars immediately saw the expected

connections with the Pali *Nidana-katha*. Close examination, however, shows that such linkages can be seen, if one chooses to see them. The overt Theravada bias discouraged an inclusive assessment of a broader repertoire of material, and thereby restricted the ability of scholars to integrate other sources within a construct that made it very difficult to accommodate alternative views.

This specific evaluation of early Bagan period sculpture is necessary for further scholarship to develop. The review only covers the first phase of Bagan's history. Most of the building activity at Bagan belongs to the 12th century, during the reign of Alaungsithu. There has been no study devoted to any of the later Bagan sculpture, however, it would be difficult to undertake such a project without a thorough study of what came before, and this is what this thesis has aimed to do. By providing a new assessment of early Bagan art, one which incorporates recent historical debate, the stage is set for the next phase of scholarly research. As noted at the beginning, Luce remarks in the forward of *Old Burma – Early Pagan* "This book may be likened to a torso, without head or feet".¹ He had intended that the "head would be the history of Burma until Bagan and the "feet", the later history of Bagan. It is hoped this thesis will assist in the completion of Luce's analogy.

¹ *OBEP* 1:vii.

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Abbreviations:

Archaeological Survey of India.....ASI

Journal of the Burma Research Society.....JBRS

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