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Introduction

Historical evidences leave no room for doubt that Bagan was the Capital of the first Myanmar Empire. As it had been the Capital, Bagan has several religious monuments such as pagodas, temples, shrines, monasteries, caves and spires. Any direction you point at with your forefinger, you will never miss the ancient building of Bagan.

There is a saying in Myanmar : " For every deed of merit there is a stone inscription to record it". This saying is true in regard to the builders of religious monuments in Bagan, because they set up stone pillars on which their works of merit were inscribed. Usually the first part of stone inscription mentions the date of building and the name of the builder. Then the intention of the builder in doing the good deed such as to attain Nivirna, and to become Buddha himself, is mentioned. Next follows the list of donations, agricultural lands, gardens of toddy palm trees for the maintenance of the building so that the building would last for the Buddha Sasana period of 5000 years, and pagoda slaves to sweep the sacred precinct and to take care of the building.

In the final part of the inscription we find the builder's prayer and curse. The builder prayed that " those who take good care of my work of merit, may they get equal share of merit with me", but he cursed that " those who destroy my work of merit, may they be cast into the hell of Awizi".

Temples and pagodas of immense size in Bagan were built by kings and they were usually double walled. The medium size structures were the works of ministers, generals, and commanders. Wealthy men and commanders built monuments of medium and small sizes.

If you circumambulate in the corridors of Thatbyinyu Temple which is the tallest building in Bagan you will see all pagodas and monuments in and around Bagan. Any direction you turn to, you are sure to catch sight of pagodas. The pagoda infested area of Bagan stretches from the Ayeyarwaddy River to the Tu Yin Taung Hill, in the south to the Twin Ywa village and in the east to Kyauk Gu U Min, a pagoda land of 19 square miles.

Regarding the number of pagodas and monuments in Bagan, there is the traditional figure which was composed like a rhymed couplet for memorization, it runs thus:

*"Hle Win Yoe Than, Ta Nyan Nyan,
Bagan Paya Paung"*

We should translate into figures only the four words in the first line, because the remaining two lines are meant for rhyming with the first line. The four words in the first line give us the figure 4446. If we include in our translation the words in the other two lines, we will get an astronomical figure of pagodas which Bagan area could not accommodate.

The calculated number of Bagan pagodas registered in the reign of King Mo Hnyin Mintara of Inwa Period was "Win Win Htein Hlyan" which if converted into figure is 4474. This figure is quite close to the above mentioned traditional

figure. There is yet another rhyme of later time which composed the total number of Bagan pagodas, It is as follows:

*"Myat Paya Su Ye, Hpyu Shwe Lo Win
Bagan Pyi, Bei Taing Hta Ni Hma
San Ma Hmi Lum Htin Sha, Saw Mu Ni Mya."*

If you translate the second line of this rhyme in a reverse order you will get the figure 4445 which has the difference of only one less than the traditional figure.

According to the Inventory of Bagan Pagodas compiled by the Archaeology Department the total number is "Kyaung Kyi Oak Ni" which means 2217.

In spite of such multitude, no two pagodas are identically alike. There are variations and differences and every pagoda has its own uniqueness. Few exceptions are groups of three or four which are seemingly similar. Pagodas in Bagan are principally of two types -- solid type and hollow type. They may be sub-divided into nine categories. They are as follows:

1. Solid Zedi
2. Zedi of Ceylonese type
3. One storey structure
4. Double, triple, and quadruple storey structures
5. Underground Caves
6. Kala Kyaung or single structure
7. Big monasteries
8. Pitaka-taik or library of religious literature
9. Sima or Ordination Hall.

Since the dwellings of the people were built of wood and bamboo, not a single remnant survived. Even Palace Buildings had disappeared except their brick foundations. In 1990 the big brick mound locally called "Aung Myey Kon"

near Shwe Gu Gyi Pagoda was excavated and it was suggested that it was the site of an old palace. In the stone inscription set up by King Kyanzitha, recording the building of his palace, the name of the palace was given as "Zeyabon Yazahtan" which in Myanmar means "Aung Myey (the land of victory), the place of the king", so the excavated "Aung Myey Kon" could have been the site of King Kyanzitha's Palace.

Many holes were discovered in row, with stone sockets in which huge teak pillars must have been fixed up. Some holes and brick walls belong to the extensions by kings of later period. In some holes were discovered pieces of decayed teak wood.

At Bagan, immense structures like Thatbyinyu and Dhammayan Gyi were built. It may be assumed that Bagan Palaces must have been much larger and more splendid than these monuments. But it seems that top priority was given to the religious buildings and in order to differentiate them from secular dwellings, brick and stone were used in religious monuments, and wood and bamboo in secular buildings.

There are very few stone structures left at Bagan. Out of the present total figure of over two thousand monuments and pagodas, only four are found to be built of stone. They are :

1. Shwezigon
2. Nan paya
3. Kyauk Gu U Min and
4. Pitaka building commonly known as Set-Ku Taik at the foot of Tu-Yin Taung Hill near Mya Kan Lake.