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FOREWORD

by

Dr. Min Nwe Soe, State Minister of Mon State

Suvāṇṇabhūmi is a prominent region in Pāli Buddhist scriptures, and historical accounts in Mon and Myanmar because it was a place journeyed by the Buddha in the eighth year of his ministry after attaining his Enlightenment. The Buddha stayed in the region for a week and preached the people and celestial beings or devas. When Asoka sent his missions to nine foreign countries, Soṇathera and Uttrathera were sent to the Mon Country which was also called Suvāṇṇabhūmi. The two Buddhist monks established the Religion in Suvāṇṇabhūmi and attained parinibbāna or Great Decease there. Moreover, Suvāṇṇabhūmi was a native town of learned Mahābuddhaghosa who translated the Sinhalese Pīṭaka into Mon.

Therefore, Thaton (Suvāṇṇabhūmi) was a centre of Theravāda Buddhism in Myanmar chronicles. With the advise of Shin Arahān, a Mon Buddhist Monk who became a Preceptor of King Anawratha and resided in Bagan for propagation of Buddhism, as King Anawratha established the Religion in Bagan in the eleventh century A.D, Theravāda Buddhism flourished in Upper Myanmar. The king sent his troops, occupied Thaton, and brought Pali Pīṭaka cannons to his kingdom. From that time, Suvāṇṇabhūmi came to an end.

Although archaeological excavations were carried out in Mon state, there is no sufficient attempt to provide the evidences, which indicate Suvāṇṇabhūmi. Fortunately, thousands of votive tablets were uncovered at the Catubhummika Hnāc Twin monastery in Thaton. Many scholars and journalists were interested in the artifacts and interpreted them according to their knowledge.

Among them, Dr. Nan Hlaing, historian and assistant lecturer of history department, East Yangon University, also took part. He presented his study on the votive tablets of Thaton at Research Conference and Workshop on Suvāṇṇabhūmi of the Mons which was held at Computer University in Goh village, Thaton. His research on this work which can be published provides cultural heritages of the ones who love Suvāṇṇabhūmi.

From the new findings, we will continue to do research on Suvāṇṇabhūmi.

Dr. Min Nwe Soe
19 March 2016

PREFACE

History is the study of events, which happened in the past. If you ask the question, Why do we study history? The answer is that history is a subject to be studied for the understanding of humanity. It is a major key to understand human beings at present time and lives in every person, every race, and every nation.

History cannot be built on conjecture or on the myths, legends, distortion, hagiography or hearsay. Only scientific evidences can reveal history. In a study of the sources, the acid taste is historicity (the truth of history). Accordingly, if a certain people want to reveal their history, the evidences must stand up to the acid test of historicity. Furthermore, we have to accept the history based on the evidence. Whether we accept history or not, the impact of history is always with us. As humankind developed from barbarism once in early civilization, no one needs to feel pride, which leads to discrimination.

In Myanmar, there are over a hundred ethnic peoples migrating into the land now called Myanmar and now settled all over the country settling scatterly since pre-history. The main stocks are the Kachin, the Kayah, the Kayin, the Chin, the Bamar, the Mon, the Rakhine and the Shan. Only the peoples settled along the river valleys and coasts were all to develop their civilization, based on influences coming from the eastern part of South India. This began no more than two millennium BP with developing in Southeast Asia with the stimulus of cultural influence based on the sea voyage in the early Christian era.

When I do research, the view is the most important theme and leads to my studies. This work is made up of two parts: the first deals with the coming of culture to Myanmar and the second with the

terracotta votive tablets: recently found at Catubhummika Hngak Twin monastery in Thaton and votive tablets excavated at Winka in 2012. Attempt is made in the Part I to trace the coming of culture from India to Myanmar by sea and land routes. This knowledge is fundamental to the studies of early Southeast Asia, including Mon studies. However, I confess that I believe my studies done by other scholars.

Part II forms the major portion of my study, which is of the votive tablets unearthed from Catubhummika Hngak Twin monastery in Thaton in 2015 and I reproduce the votive tablets excavated at Winka, near Thaton in 2012. In this Part II of two research papers, which I completed recently, my main task has been iconographic study and epigraphic decipherment. I provide a relative dating and cultural significance of the votive tablets. An attempt has been made of correlational studies with artifacts from Śrīkṣetra, Bagan, and Tagaung in Upper Myanmar, Kawgun in Lower Myanmar as well as motifs in India, Thailand and Indonesia. As epigraphs provide the best evidence, I have attempted to decipher inscriptions stamped on the votive tablets as much as I can. Giving attention to the learned scholars' in this field, I took care to avoid bias in my work. This work is merely to be cover a preliminary study of the terracotta votive tablets found at Catubhummika Hngak Twin monastery, northwest of the Shwesaryan pagoda in Thaton. The plethora of votive tablets found at the monastery helps to establish Thaton as the major seat of the Old Mons in Myanmar. Much more needs to be done in early Mon studies and I look forward to further investigation and research in the field.

For the work on this book, I am placed under the gratitudes of Pañca Ananta Guṇa: the Buddha, the Dhamma (His Teachings), the Saṅgha (His Disciples), My Parents and Teachers.

Nan Hlaing

Yangon, January 29, 2016