

FORWORD

by Professor U Tun Aung Chain

Perhaps the best known cave in Myanmar is Badalin Cave, located near Ywangan in Shan State. It derived its fame from its wall paintings, fairly primitive sketches done in red ochre. Also found in the cave were implements belonging to the Hoabinian culture which was spread fairly extensively in mainland Southeast Asia and was associated with caves and rock shelters. The associated finds indicated the antiquity of the Badalin wall paintings and perhaps we can say that it was the earliest Myanmar art.

Cave art elsewhere in the world suggest that the paintings were not done primarily for aesthetic reasons. Although the Badalin Cave is a shallow cave and its paintings are easily accessible, many of the paintings elsewhere were done in the deep recesses of caves where there was little or no light at all. Scholars are therefore of the opinion that this early cave art had a religious or magical purpose and may have been associated with rituals for the benefit of the groups or community.

The association of caves with religion and art which started in prehistoric times continued into the historical period. Perhaps one of most prominent examples of cave art in the historical period is the art of the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra State in western India. The paintings, which stretch from the 2nd century BC to the 7th century AD and depict the life of the Buddha as a well as his previous lives as told in the Jātakas, attain to a high level of art and are part of the world's cultural heritage.

Where there were no convenient natural caves, men also created caves for their religion and art. The story of the Ananda temple in Bagan, as told in the chronicles, relates that eight *arahats* came to Bagan from Mount Gandhamādana and, welcomed by King Kyansittha, created for him with their supernatural powers a vision of Nandamula Cave on which the King modeled the Ananda temple. But it is not the Ananda alone which re-creates a cave, the inscriptions of Bagan, beginning with the Rājakumār Inscription; generally refer to temples as cave (*gū*).

Badalin Cave is at the western edge of the Shan Highlands stretch down south to the Taninthayi Range and there, too, limestone caves occur. Kawgun Cave is one of those caves. Situated not too far away from Hpa-an, the Capital of Kayin State, it is in an area which, historically was a Mon cultural area and is not too distant from Thaton and Mottama, two early centers of civilization. The center of attention and devotion for devotees through the ages, it was first brought to the attention of scholars by Taw Sein Ko and Richard Temple in the late 19th century.

Since the weather is generally unkind to the preservation of antiquities and historical artifacts in the Mon area, the caves in which a wealth of cultural artifacts are collected and preserved provide a valuable field of study for scholars. Dr. Nan Hlaing has attempted a study of the art of the Kawgun Cave in relation to art elsewhere. This is a noteworthy step in the study of Mon art of the historical period and the beliefs underlying that art. Perhaps other efforts will be made in the study of this subject to fully reveal the wealth of Myanmar culture

Abstract

The art of Kawgun Cave belongs to Buddhism. A large number of tablets, dedication to the Buddhas before the time of Gautama Buddha, are adorned on the scarp before the cave and wall on the inside of the cave. Iconographic classification is made into six parts: European fashion, seated Buddha, standing Buddha and reclining Buddha, terracotta votive tablets and stone plaques. Finger-marked bricks of Kawgun Cave belong to the early Christian centuries and also, the Môn inscription on the stone plaques in the 5th-6th centuries. The image of Buddha bearing on the votive tablets was dedicated by the Môn in the 15th-17th centuries. Although the art of the Kawgun Cave is in the Môn tradition it is not closely related to the Buddhist art in Thailand where there was Môn cultural influence. It is an image of the Môn whose deep devotion to the Buddha and their note wealthy at fine art.

Keywords: Buddhist Sculptures, Seated Buddha, Standing Buddha, *Pallambanāsana*, Bodhisattva, Viṣṇu, Môn and Thai Schools, *Kinnarā*, *Kīṭimukha*, *Vasundarī*, Finger-marked bricks, decay and vandalism