



SPEAKER 4: MS OHNMAR MYO

SAFEGUARDING CULTURAL HERITAGE ACTIVITIES IN MYANMAR

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Traditional pulling up to *nats* at Tharba Gate threatens stability



Construction of hotel inside Archaeological Zone along river

**WORKSHOP ON
THE HERITAGE OF ANCIENT AND URBAN SITES:
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ABSTRACT

UNESCO Myanmar project office, Culture Unit has started working in March 2012 to support the safeguarding of heritage sites in Myanmar since the government has re-engaged with the international processes of the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. With generous funding from the Government of Italy, UNESCO has initiated the “Capacity building for safeguarding cultural heritage in Myanmar” project since 2012. We assisted the Government of Myanmar in preparing the nomination of the Pyu Ancient Cities, which was Myanmar’s first priority for World Heritage listing. In June 2014, the Pyu Ancient Cities were successfully inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 38th Session of the World Heritage Committee that took place in Doha. This inscription of Myanmar’s first World Heritage site has given strong momentum for heritage protection at all levels from the highest levels of governance to a range of local stakeholders, as well as among the public at large. Within the country, there is an increased interest in World Heritage as a vehicle for safeguarding Myanmar’s invaluable heritage, both cultural and natural heritage, as well as for sustainable development.

UNESCO has provided the assistance for the protection of cultural heritage sites in line with global standards and for the preparation of World Heritage nomination dossier including a management plan for the prioritised sites. It will continue to enhance Myanmar’s capacity to safeguard cultural heritage within the international framework and standards of the World Heritage Convention through the development of the required technical and institutional capacity to sustainably manage and develop the heritage sites.

Myanmar ratified the World Heritage Convention in April 1994 and has designated fourteen sites on the Tentative List (seven cultural sites and seven natural sites). Most of the sites are currently facing a wave of development that can threaten the heritage property that includes the following:

- (i) tourism infrastructure such as hotels, roads, and recreational facilities,
- (ii) religious facilities linked to the monuments and
- (iii) the extension and encroachment from the local community including changes in their lifestyle, living standards and activities such as farming methods.

Throughout the projects and activities, the main operational counterpart is the Department of Archaeology and National Museum under the Ministry of Culture. The staff from Ministry of Culture have received the exposure to world-class cultural heritage management and conservation standards by ICCROM, Lerici Foundation and other leading international experts in the area of archaeological site conservation, World Heritage site management, and mural conservation.

An important part of the sustainability of the heritage sites is the need to have consultations with local, state and national stakeholders, including public sector, private sector and civil society.

As the community awareness in cultural heritage sites has been raised, the Heritage Trust of Pyu cities was formed in 2014 and Bagan heritage Trust was formed in 2015 with the support of private sectors

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and local authorities. The trust members are now actively participating in the conservation of the site, the development of the livelihood of the communities and the sustainability of the heritage, together with the government organisations, international and local NGOs.

In my presentation, I would like to share the experience, focusing on the interests, responses and impacts of multi stakeholders while the activities are carried out.

BIODATA

Ohnmar Myo is currently working as a National Project Coordinator at the Culture Unit in the UNESCO Myanmar office. She is responsible for the smooth running of safeguarding cultural heritage activities focusing on the World Heritage nomination process of the distinguished sites in Myanmar under UNESCO projects, which are collaborating with Ministry of Culture. Before she joined UNESCO in 2012, she worked for the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization, Regional Centre for History and Tradition (SEAMEO CHAT) as a Senior Officer. She obtained her Master's degrees in Information Studies from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore in 2012, in Archaeology and in English from Yangon University in Myanmar in 2002 and 1998 respectively.

CONFERENCE PAPER

SAFEGUARDING CULTURAL HERITAGE ACTIVITIES IN MYANMAR

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Introduction

The participation and activities of local communities have been vital in safeguarding cultural heritage in Myanmar since the establishment of the UNESCO Cultural Office in Yangon. The task is country-wide as Myanmar has forty-six cultural zones designated by the Ministry of Culture with seven of these sites selected as Tentative Cultural Sites for the UNESCO World Heritage Committee:

- 1) Ancient cities of Upper Myanmar: Innwa, Amarapura, Sagaing, Mingun, Mandalay
- 2) Badah-lin and associated caves
- 3) Bagan Archaeological Area and Monuments
- 4) Inle Lake
- 5) Mon cities: Bago, Hanthawaddy
- 6) Myauk-U Archaeological Area and Monuments
- 7) Wooden Monasteries of Konbaung Period: Ohn Don, Sala, Pakhangyi, Pakhange, Legaing, Sagu, Shwe-Kyaung (Mandalay).



Figure 1 Traditional agricultural practice between the monuments at Bagan

This paper focuses on the safeguarding cultural heritage and World Heritage related activities that have been carried out by UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture Myanmar at the Pyu Ancient Cities, the first UNESCO World Heritage List site of Myanmar inscribed in 2012, and the Tentative List site of Bagan. The Pyu Ancient Cities consist of Sri Ksetra in Pyay District, Bago region; Beikthano in Taungdwingyi District, Magwe Region and Halin in Shwebo District, Sagaing Region. Bagan is in Nyaung U District, Mandalay Region.

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Pyu Ancient Cities

The Pyu Ancient Cities were the first urban formations of Southeast Asia, introduced and sustained from the second century to the ninth century CE. The existing ancient monuments are clear evidence of the Pyu Ancient Cities as the initial flourishing of Buddhism adapted from South Asia to Southeast Asia nearly two thousand years ago.

In order to implement the process of the World Heritage nomination, the UNESCO Myanmar project office, Culture Unit with the supervision of Bangkok regional office, started working in 2012 within the initial project "Capacity Building for Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in Myanmar" with the generous funding from the Government of Italy. The UNESCO Myanmar project office, Culture Unit has supported the safeguarding of heritage sites in Myanmar since the government re-engaged with the international processes of the 1972 Convention concerning the protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage ratified in April 1994. The project assisted the Government of Myanmar in preparing the nomination of the Pyu Ancient Cities, Myanmar's first priority for World Heritage listing. In June 2014, the Pyu Ancient Cities were successfully inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 38th Session of the World Heritage Committee that took place in Doha. This inscription has given a new and solid force to heritage protection at all levels of Myanmar society from the highest levels of governance to a range of local stakeholders, as well as among the public at large. Within the country, the inscription has greatly increased interest in World Heritage as a vehicle for safeguarding Myanmar's invaluable heritage, for both cultural and natural heritage preservation, as well as for the sustainable development of heritage sites.

For safeguarding cultural heritage activities, the protection of outstanding universal values and their attributes, heritage conservation and management the sites have been the primary concerns of the UNESCO Myanmar project office, Culture Unit and its main operational counterpart, the Department of Archaeology and National Museum under the Ministry of Culture. Through numerous capacity building trainings and workshops since 2012, the staff from Ministry of Culture have been exposed to international standard cultural heritage management and conservation standards by ICCROM, Leric Foundation and other leading international experts in the area of archaeological site conservation, World Heritage site management, and mural conservation.

Archaeological and conservation Activities

Archaeological conservation activities carried out by the Leric Foundation have focused on on-the-job training in urn conservation and brick restoration at Sri Ksetra, in Pyay Township. These were two major concerns of ICOMOS and the World Heritage Committee in its assessment of the Pyu Ancient Cities World Heritage nomination dossier. Archaeological and architectural conservation capacity building for Pyu Ancient Cities facilitated by Leric Foundation experts included field activities for urn cemetery conservation; archaeological ground survey; non-invasive investigations; risk assessment; mapping ancient hydrology; and conservation laboratories. The finest works of conservation can now be seen at Sri Ksetra's HMA 53, an urn burial site, at Khin Ba mound and the massive royal stone urns displayed in Mhaw Zar (Hmawza) site museum inside the ancient city. Ongoing practice has also changed. For example, the Department of Archaeology conservators are now fully aware of using traditional lime plaster and avoiding cement for structure conservation.

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Figure 2 Structural conservation training

Since early 2014, the Lerici Foundation has undertaken archaeological excavations at burial urn sites and has developed the on-the-job training in archaeological conservation and brick monument restoration. These activities have enabled Myanmar archaeologists, surveyors and draftsmen to polish their skills and knowledge. In addition, capacity building training is regularly provided for archaeological field survey using non-invasive techniques such as remote sensing, archaeological ground survey, and geophysical prospecting. The trainees of the Department of Archaeology staff have used these methods to identify a suitable urn burial site for conservation at Sri Ksetra, characterized by burial urn sites within and beyond its ancient walls.



Figure 3 Burial urns and pot sherds conservation training

As the Department of Archaeology did not have a Geographic Information System (GIS) to manage the Pyu Ancient Cities, UNESCO prioritized this training since the beginning of the project with the aim of producing multi-layered maps for site management. One of the demonstrations of the success of this training at the Ancient Pyu Cities has been the initiation of mapping of previously non-documented Pyu period hydrological features sustained for more than a thousand years by the Department of Archaeology (DoA) staff.

ICOMOS and the World Heritage Committee requested additional documentation on risk assessment of standing monuments and underground archaeology, and the establishment of and capacity building in the use of field conservation laboratories. DoA allocated an existing building within the Field School of Archaeology at Sri Ksetra to be upgraded so as to accommodate the Sri Ksetra Field Conservation Laboratory. Laboratory equipment, ranging from simple tools to sophisticated microscopes were provided by UNESCO projects both for the Sri Ksetra lab as well as the emergency labs at Beikthano and Halin. This has enabled artefacts such as broken funeral urns and bronze images now to be well treated by skilled DoA technicians in the labs. Another request of the World Heritage Committee was the development of a Disaster Risk Preparedness plan for the Pyu Ancient Cities World Heritage property. To implement this, an interdisciplinary group of participants from the Department of Archaeology joined together with related government agencies and stakeholder groups with the technical assistance from the Institute of Disaster Mitigation for Urban Cultural Heritage, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto.

Bagan Archaeological Area and Monuments

Bagan was the capital of the first Union of Myanmar, built on the east bank of the Ayeyarwaddy River in AD 1044. The prosperous Theravada Buddhism together with the flourishing economy endowed the area with more than three thousand monuments of the ninth to thirteenth century CE Bagan period. These have survived until today, with each monument having its own unique beauty in the architecture, murals and stuccos.

Over four hundred temples in Bagan have original mural paintings, an outstanding characteristic of the site of Bagan. The mural paintings depict the life of the Lord Buddha with Jataka stories, Buddha footprints, horoscope and scenes of the Buddha's life, cosmological maps of the universe, Mount Meru, the 28 Buddhas, and other subjects. The mural paintings are framed by geometrical and floral patterns and various celestial beings. The Department of Archaeology staff and skilled workers were trained by an expert conservator-restorer in recording and undertaking rapid condition assessments of decorative works at Bagan monuments since 2014. After the training, the Department of Archaeology staff continued with the recording and condition assessment of all 34 Grade I monuments for emergency conservation interventions. A recording system for murals and decorative works is one part of an overall inventory system for Bagan now being developed to insure overall consistency and compatibility with *in situ* remains. After several training sessions, the expert DoA team can now complete and update recording cards for condition assessment and inventory of monuments, mural paintings and decorative works. One issue for the mural conservation, however, is the necessity of using imported chemicals which are not easily available in Myanmar.

Multi-stakeholders' participation

An important part of the sustainability of the heritage sites has been consultations with local, state and national stakeholders, including those from the public sector, private sector and civil society. As the community awareness in cultural heritage sites has been raised with the inscription of the Pyu Ancient Cities, the Heritage Trust of Pyu Cities was formed in 2014 and the Bagan Heritage Trust in 2015 with the cooperative support of private sectors and local authorities. The trust members are now actively participating in the conservation of the site, the development of the

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livelihood of the communities and the sustainability of the heritage, together with the government organizations, international and local NGOs, institutions and individuals.

At the national level, there is the Central Committee for Myanmar National Heritage and the Myanmar National Committee for World Heritage work. At the site level, the Department of Archaeology and National Museum takes the leading role at the Pyu Ancient Cities Coordinating Committee (PyuCom) and the Bagan Heritage City Coordinating Committee (Bagan Com). Their function is to ensure a balance between the protection and management of the heritage sites and local community livelihood and urban development. At each site, the coordinating committee collaborates with local consultative groups including multiple stakeholders such as regional authorities, local government, village administrators and the *Sangha* (monk society) to manage the site with international standards adaptable to local traditional ways.

To learn the strengths and the weaknesses of the site management of neighbouring countries, study trips to Thailand and Cambodia cultural heritage sites were arranged for Department of Archaeology staff and local administrators, Heritage Trust members. The trips enabled comparison of (i) various approaches to landscape management, including park landscape, agricultural fields setting and other methods; (ii) community based tourism and opportunities for cultural industries associated with heritage sites; (iii) site interpretation including site museums, trails, visitor centres, and other aspects of public information.

Challenges of site management

Most of the cultural heritage sites in Myanmar are now facing a tendency for development that can threaten the heritage property. This includes (i) urban development and tourism infrastructure such as hotels, roads, and recreational facilities, (ii) religious facilities linked to the monuments and (iii) the extension and encroachment from the local community including changes in their lifestyle, living standards and activities such as farming methods.

(i) Urban development and Tourism infrastructure

Bagan is the most popular tourist destination in Myanmar and thus has many issues related to urban development and tourism infrastructure. The outstanding universal values and their attributes of Bagan are found in archaeology of old palaces and other potential archaeological sites, its water management and agriculture, the fortifications, the architecture of monuments, and the living heritage with festivals, rituals, processions, monastic life, handicrafts and special food dishes and snacks. Tourism accommodation has been a critical issue especially in the famous heritage sites. In Bagan, hotels, restaurants, major roads, stalls, and toilets have been constructed in town areas and in the monument and archaeological zone. These occupy prime locations along the Ayeyarwaddy River without any regard for the monuments and the archaeology. There are two urban areas, Nyaung-U and New Bagan. Nyaung-U is one of the original settlement areas in Bagan and development of Nyaung-U into an urban area has evolved organically and naturally. Nyaung-U is the administrative centre of Nyaung-U Township and the location of most local government department buildings. New Bagan, on the other hand, was built in 1990 for the relocation of residents of Old Bagan. Nyaung-U is located within the Archaeological Zone and New Bagan includes the Monument Zone along the Ayeyarwaddy riverfront and Archaeological Zone areas. Both urban areas have the potential to contain archaeological resources; any construction will

destroy any material through excavation. The urban areas also include monuments and cluster of monuments, but the setting of the monuments has been affected by ongoing urban development. These circumstances required the Heritage Impact Assessments on some areas to understand the threats and to prevent the negative impacts on the site.



Figure 1 Traditional practice: a novice to be and his parents have to pay respect to the guardians in the Tharaba gate of Bagan

In the Pyu Ancient Cities, the authorities have had plans to extend and upgrade road network and irrigation canal network, to build telecommunication and electricity towers and tree planting along the roads in the World Heritage area with the intention of the upgrading the site as it is inscribed in the World Heritage List. A pro-active role was undertaken by the Heritage Trusts in conducting heritage impact assessments. Members of the Pyu Heritage Trusts at each of the three sites have been included in training and capacity-building sessions provided by UNESCO.

There is not yet a legal decree for the obligatory application of heritage impact assessment to evaluate the impact of any and all proposed development projects with the boundaries and buffer zones of the heritage site. However, the related authorities and communities have willingly cooperated in protecting at both sites by following the suggestions provided by HIA outcomes. Based on the experience of accessing constructions by the Department of Archaeology itself, an important lesson learned was that heritage impact assessment methodology (HIA) must be applied equally to infrastructure development projects proposed and executed by the Department of Archaeology itself, whose contractors are not informed about the importance of safeguarding the site's heritage, nor knowledgeable about the types of impact their work has on heritage attributes. Furthermore, when a heritage site is inscribed on the World Heritage List, land prices rise due to tourism related business investors. Local communities will be changed. The more non-resident people that are accommodated, the more local people leave and the less traditional practices will be alive. In order to avoid, the practical rules and regulations for urban control urgently need to be established.

(ii) *Religious facilities linked to the monuments*

Bagan Archaeological Area and Monuments is directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal

significance. In addition, this has continuity and bonds between the community and the religious monuments through festivals and monastic life sustained since the Bagan period. The tradition of merit-making was essential to the creation and development of the site of Bagan. This continues up to today, seen in the scale of religious monuments and continued merit-making practices, ongoing religious use of the site, large temple festivals and monasteries in contemporary use.

On the other hand, the construction, extension or upgrading of existing and new monasteries or *dhamma* halls near the temples or stupas create an issue which can impact the use, care and state of the monuments. Religious fervor actually led to the construction of the monuments during the Bagan period. The tradition of merit-making must still be considered an important part of the culture. Although some new temples, monasteries and reservoirs seem small units alongside stupas, the visibility between monuments are impaired. Furthermore, the pagoda festivals which have been practiced since ancient times have changed from traditional ways to modernity such as rock performances and western style shops around pagodas and gilding of monuments with gold coated steel plaques. To be able to sustain the traditions along with the monuments, it is essential to provide the public awareness to make a balance between the conservation of the ancient monuments and the safeguarding of the religious culture and practices in adjustable and acceptable ways.

(iii) The extension and encroachment from the local community including changes in their lifestyle, living standards and activities such as farming methods

At present, villages and village life at Bagan includes agricultural activities which are linked to the surrounding landscape. They are part of the identity of present Bagan and historically how Bagan functioned as a centre for trade from the more fertile areas. For example, the festivals and rituals that are being carried out today might be a direct continuation from the Bagan period. One of the most exceptional features of Bagan is the spread of cultivated fields scattered between the ancient brick monuments. The cultivated fields create the setting for the monuments. There are numerous factors which are impacting the agriculture that include natural phenomena as well as changing human activities. It is mainly due to the lack of funds that the local community has not been able to cultivate more profitable crops and use machines, irrigation systems and modern technology. On the other hand, these absences are giving positive impacts for preserving the cultural landscape of Bagan. All in all, the significance of the agricultural fields which is giving the value to the heritage site must be conserved. The ways of conserving this landscape need to be developed accordingly. At present, the issues facing the site include the migration of workers to the foreign countries for better incomes and the sale of lands to hotel investors as the land price is now high. By ways such as these, the agricultural lands have been converted to other uses which causes the unintentional destruction of the beautiful Bagan cultural landscape.

Moreover, the handicrafts and the artisans are closely linked to the construction and ornamentation of the buildings. They are needed for maintenance and restoration of the monuments as well as a continuation of traditional practices. There are a number of villages in Ancient Monument Zone where those artisans and traditional practitioners live and work there. Though there are not any records of their settlement date, these are traditional villages with communities supporting the monuments and participating in festivals, processions and religious holidays. The major income for villages are coming from agricultural activities, handicrafts and employment by the tourism sector. The villages include Wetkyi-Inn, Taung Bi/Leya, MyinKaba and

Minanthu. In order not to lose the traditional landscape and culture, these villages are important to keep as they are, with the cooperation of villagers and authorities concerned.

Conclusion

During the four years of implementing safeguarding cultural heritage activities collaborated by the Department of Archaeology and UNESCO, there are many achievements for the sustainability of the heritage sites. These include are increased conservation awareness within DOA staff along with skills upgrading from training. Local pride in heritage has risen and communities now have more rights to be involved in heritage management. Other related authorities and organizations have shown their keen interests in cooperating with the Department of Archaeology to manage the cultural heritage sites.

At the same time, community concern about restrictions on development and livelihoods has increased, so it is crucial to educate responsible authorities not just within Department of Archaeology. Regarding the conservation of the site, it needs to be ensured that it is looked at in a comprehensive manner. It will be important to target related authorities as well as involving local communities, especially youth, for shaping the heritage site as they would like it to be in future. The Heritage Trusts should be more strengthened and should have more exposure and experience dealing with local and international organizations. The Government will need to secure resources for heritage conservation and growing visitor management challenges. The management systems need to establish immediately including institutional framework, legal and resource framework to create sustainable heritage sites.

The ongoing and upcoming activities are supporting Myanmar to strengthen capacity for conservation, management and sustainable development of cultural heritage sites as well as for the preparation of nomination dossier of Bagan, which is the next national priority for nomination to the World Heritage List. This includes the development of an interim management framework, in response to accelerated development pressures faced in Bagan from tourism and urbanization. As explained in this paper, the past four years have brought many achievements and also many increased challenges for safeguarding cultural heritage activities in Myanmar.