

Art and Architecture of Ananda Temple

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Abstract

The most artistic and graceful temple in Pagan is Ananda, which was built by King Kyansittha in 1091 A.D. The name symbolizes ‘‘ the endless wisdom ‘‘ (Ananta Panna) of the Buddha just as That-byinnu symbolizes his Omniscience. Its plan is a square of nearly 200 feet to the side-broken on each side by the projection of large gabled vestibules, which convert the plan into a perfect Greek cross. Two tiers of window in the walls of the main structure provide good lighting and ventilation. In the interior of the Temple are deep and high niches facing four cardinal directions. In each of these niches is an imposing Buddha statue in a standing posture measuring 31 feet tall. These 4 (four) statues represent 4 (four) Buddhas that had already revealed. The whole edifice is ornamented with plaster moldings, stone sculpture, wood carving, glazed plaques and terracotta tiles. They all depict the birth stories of the Buddha.

Keywords: Architectural developments, Masterpieces of Buddhist monument, Architectural prototypes

Introduction

Gleaming white and golden in the bright sunlight, the Ananda commemorates in its name one of the attributes of the Buddha, his Infinite Wisdom – Anandapyinnya in Myanmar, Anantapanna in Pali. The story is told Architectural prototypes in the chronicles that once eight saints came to the court of Kyansittha (1084-1113) from Mount Gandhamadana - in India myth, one of the four mountaing encolsing the central region of the world and the home of healing herbs. The king, full of faith, gave them a monastery and offered them food every day during the three months of Lent. In wonderment and curiosity, Kyansittha expressed a desire to see the Nandamula grotts which was in Mount Gandhamadana. And the eight saints, through their powers, conjured up Nandamula grotto before Kyansittha, and it was this which he took as a model to build the Ananda.

The Ananda temple at Pagan has long held the most outstanding monument in Myanmar and famed all over the land as one of its national glories Apart from its outstanding religious importance, it is a unique storehouse of stone sculptures and terracotta bas-reliefs of the late medieval period. The short legends in Old Mon impressed on the plaques which adorn its basement and upper terraces, are of great epigraphical and philological value. Above all, its architecture and art are of exceptional interest.

From the 8th century onwards, the Buddhist art of the Pala dynasty of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa, influenced powerfully on Myanmar. Pagan sculptures may be assigned to the ancient Magadha country, Southern Bihar in the 11th-13th century A.D. The art of the Pala School is of high technical accomplishment, elegant and fashionable in design. Kyanzittha had obvious links, through his chief queen Abeyadana, with the Tantric Mahayanists of East Bengal. Since the time of the Pala prince, Atisa, before the middle of the 11th century, the close connections of East Bengal with Tibet and Nepal had caused a Buddhist revival in those regions. Bengali-Nepalese art, both in bronze-work and painting, had its influence on that of Pagan.

The Ananda was probably the last of Kyanzittha’s temple. The modem name Ananda is derived from Nanda or Nandamula, the famous caves in the Himalaya. The prototype of the Ananda was found at Paharpur in North Bengal. A closer model, both for the Ananda and the Old Mon style of architecture generally could be found in the Mainamati excavation on

up the present statue of teak wood. Thus there have the original statues on the north and south which were carved out of a single log of wood¹.

The entrance to each of large recesses² or niches is barred with a wooden railing³ with a small wooden door. In the porch⁴ on the west face there are two Buddha-pads (Buddha's foot-prints) placed on a pedestal⁵. Each foot-print bears the traditional 108 marks in some of the Pali commentaries, but owing to the gilding and wearing away due to constant washing, some of these marks have disappeared and cannot be properly identified. They are divided into small panels, and the marks on one foot-print are identical with those on the other. However, the mark for srivatsa is a flower-bud conical⁶ in shape and the mark for svastika is altogether absent. A spiral-shaped object has taken its place. A fragment of a foot-print was found at the Lokananda pagoda. It may be considered as contemporary with those in the Ananda. The emblem for the Sun is marked by the figure of a horse at full step, while its place has been taken up by the figure of a peacock, the national emblem of Myanmar in later times⁷.

The walls of the four porches are decorated in the same arrangement as those of the main building. The two side walls are pierced with subsidiary door-openings. Window-openings are ornamented with pilasters⁸ and cusped arches⁹ of the same designs projecting from the surface of the wall. Inside, there are niches containing stone images of the Buddha and stone relief illustrating scenes from his life.

Each entrance to the main building is provided with a wooden door consisting of two leaves, and is guarded by two dvarapalas, one on each side, standing on low pedestals. Each leaf of the door swings in a stone socket buried in the flooring beneath. The upper end of door leaf is secured by an iron ring built into the jamb¹⁰. A leaf of the door found at the south entrance is not original.¹¹

Both the dvarapalas were of plaster¹² work, but the hands are of wood and subsequently added. The dress and ornaments were partly of stucco and partly painted. They are conditioned to renewal from time to time. But the original model was adhered to as much as possible. One hand of each figure is raised in the abhaya mudra and the other hand is pointing to the entrance. A nimbus¹³ in the form of a lotus-leaf with an ornamental border may be seen above the head of each figure. It is stuccoed on the wall at the back. The

¹ Khin Maung Nyunt, Dr, The pagodas and monuments of Bagan, Volume 1, 1995, June, p.7

² recess - ဝဏ္ဏဓိ ဝဏ္ဏ

³ railing - ငွေ ဝါး ဝါး

⁴ porch - ဝဏ္ဏဓိ ဝါး ဝါး

⁵ pedestal - ငွေ ဝါး ဝါး ဝါး

⁶ conical - ဂါး ဝါး ဝါး

⁷ Duroiselle, Chas, The Ananda temple at Pagan, New Delhi, 1937, P.13 (Hereafter cited as Suroiselle, the Ananda.)

⁸ pilasters - ဝါး ဝါး ဝါး ဝါး

⁹ arch - ဝါး

¹⁰ jamb - ဝါး ဝါး ဝါး

¹¹ Duroiselle, the Ananda, p. 14

¹² plaster - ဝါး ဝါး

¹³ nimbus - ဂါး ဝါး ဝါး

entrance to each porch is guarded, on the outside by another set of dvarapalas. They seated on pedestals in arched niches crowned with miniature spires.

The porches, corridors, and four great recesses in the central block are covered with vaults containing pointed or semi-pointed arches. Each recess in the central block is roofed over with a pointed vault with gable¹ ends. The arches rise 35 feet and 5 inches above the floor level and 18 feet wide. A small opening with a similar pointed arch turned over cut line in the outer gable, so as to admit light coming in through a dormer²-window above to the corridors and recesses below.

The coverings over the corridors are semi-pointed vaults strengthened at the corners and entrances with flying buttresses³ resting on pointed arches, while the four passages leading from the porches to the sanctum⁴ or central pile have pointed vaults over them. The naves⁵ of the porches are roofed over with pointed vaults, with the arches having each 22 feet and 8 inches wide and 24 feet high. The side⁶ aisles have semi-pointed vaults.

The external effect of the Ananda is as imposing as the internal details are the most interesting monument in Myanmar. The superimposed roofs and terraces, receding towards the spire⁷ give the main shrine a pyramidal form. The numerous subsidiary ringed pagodas and sikharas⁸ rising over the arched roofs of the porches. At the corners of the two roofs as well as of the first terrace above them ranged round the main spire of Sikhara itself surmounted by a high ringed pagoda in place of an Amalaka. The large vestibules with their characteristic arched openings and pediments, casting deep shadows around the building add to its magnificence.

Ananda Temple is the best architectural accomplishment in Pagan. The earthquake of 1975 damaged only the finial⁹ and top Zedi above the Sikhara, and surrounding slim and small zedis. No crack was caused to the main structure. As a result of that earthquake one architectural secret was brought to light. The system of brick lying with stone bricks wedged in between them. The arch span was formed by laying the baked bricks in a radiating pattern and placing stone bricks as wedges between them. Similarly key stones cut with precision were used in the corners of the wall. They were wedged in at an interval of 4 or 5 feet. This technique was a kind of strengthening the whole structure for longer durability. The earthquake of 1975 brought down the topmost stupa and the finials of the surrounding stupas. The quake also caused some cracks in the upper portion of the Sikhara. The Government spent 90000 kyats to repair these damages. To reduce the weight by 200 tons the solid Sikhara was hollowed out and diaframers were inserted into it. Iron frames with cement concrete were placed at the corners to strengthen the upper structure¹⁰.

In conclusion, Pagan has developed her own architectural dialect from a combination of indigenous prototypes and the latest of North Indian artistic fashions. Architectural prototypes exist in Bengal, at Paharpur, according to Duroiselle¹¹, and at the Lai Mai ridge, west of Comilla, in Bengal, according to Luce. However, architectural developments at

¹ gable	-	ဖခွေ ဝါးခွေ ချွေ ဝါးခွေ
² domer	-	ခွေ ချွေ - ချွေ ဝါးခွေ
³ flying buttress	-	ခွေ ဝါးခွေ
⁴ sanctum	-	ဖခွေ ချွေ ချွေ ချွေ ချွေ ချွေ
⁵ naves	-	ဖခွေ ချွေ ချွေ ချွေ
⁶ side	-	ခွေ ချွေ ချွေ ချွေ
⁷ spire	-	ဖခွေ ချွေ
⁸ sikharass	-	ခွေ ချွေ - ချွေ
⁹ finial	-	ခွေ ချွေ ချွေ

¹⁰ Khin Maung Nyunt, Dr., The pagoda and Monuments of Bagan, Volume 1, 1995 June, PP.4-7

¹¹ Duroiselle, Chas, The Ananda temple at Pagan, New Delhi, 1937, p.15

Pagan, based on Pyu prototypes and brought in new ideas such as the square based Sikhara crown from India, brought about the Ananda temple. For example, the Greek cross plan of the Ananda clearly originates from the Myin-pya-gu where the Lei-myet-hna or four face type of the Pyu temple is redeveloped. The Ananda represents the highest development of architecture in early Pagan and is not a direct imitation of a North Indian model.

Kyanzittha was patron of Theravada Buddhism and the art. The chief function of Kyanzittha was to maintain order and support the Buddha faith which his predecessor king Anawrahta founded in Pagan. Kyanzittha ruled over 28 years (1084 - 1112A. D). During his reign, Ananda was one of his masterpieces of Buddhist monument in Pagan. Many Mon artisans, Pali literate Mon monks and many other intellectuals were among the captives from Thaton Kingdom. Kyanzittha not only inherited Pagan kingship from Anawrahta but also the most invaluable language literature, art and architecture from the Mon peoples.

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