



# **SPAFACON2021**

**Papers from the SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on  
SOUTHEAST ASIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND FINE ARTS**

**13 - 17 December 2021**

**Editor: Noel Hidalgo Tan**

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# INTRODUCTION

This volume contains the extended abstracts from the papers presented at the SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on Southeast Asian Archaeology and Fine Arts, which was held online from 13 to 17 December 2021. Also known as the SPAFACON2021, this conference was organised online due to the pandemic. Despite the disruption brought about by Covid-19 to our in-person events, training programmes and field research, it is heartening to see that archaeology and cultural heritage has continued under new modes of communication and collaboration.

This fourth iteration of the SPAFACON is also scheduled a year earlier than our usual triennial cycle to commemorate the 50th anniversary of SEAMEO initiating a centre dedicated towards archaeology and the fine arts. Over the past year, SPAFA has also been highlighting this legacy of international cooperation and capacity-building by sharing our photographic archives on our social media.

I am delighted by the high level of enthusiasm and intellectual curiosity brought by the participants to the conference. During our call for papers we received close to 90 submissions, but owing to the pressures of time and the online format, we were only able to accept 34 papers for the conference. The variety of papers present here, although a small set compared with our usual proceedings, reflects the breadth of the centre's ambit – covering not just archaeology, but also performing arts, visual arts, museum studies, and other aspects of Southeast Asian cultural heritage.

I would like to thank all the participants, without whom this conference would not be possible in its present form, in particular, our Governing Board members who represent every country in Southeast Asia, and to the Ministry of Culture, Thailand and the Ministry of Education, Thailand for their long-standing support of SEAMEO SPAFA and its activities.



Mrs Somlak Charoenpot

Centre Director

SEAMEO SPAFA



## Myinkaba village Bagan: The Resilience of Traditional Knowledge and Culture

ပုဂံမင်းကပါ (သို့) ယဉ်ကျေးမှု ဓလေ့ရိုးရာအသိပညာ၏ ကံ့ကြံ့ခြံနိုင်စွမ်း

10792/pqcnu8815a-21

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### Abstract

The distinct traditional knowledge and culture of Myinkaba (ancient Anuradha) village at Bagan is closely linked to its port location and ecology on the Ayeyarwaddy River. Myinkaba has smelting and production evidence from the first millennium CE in seven glass/glaze kilns, with beads traded along the river. Beads, potsherds and finger-marked bricks suggest it may be one of the earliest villages of Bagan. Its historical architecture includes the rare Nanphaya sandstone temple with images of Brahma. Other significant traits of Myinkaba include the large seasonal lake or inn gyi, silica-rich sand deposits and bamboo. Particular bamboo species are used in Myinkaba's lacquer industry with bamboo also essential for making mats, house sidings and baskets. The traditional knowledge of the lacquer arts, bamboo crafts, crop and water management, and paper puppet making and cultivation are passed on through apprenticeship informed by knowledge of the local environment. While the absence of tourists during the Covid-19 period has brought much lacquer production to a standstill, making vessels for local religious and domestic uses has continued. The bamboo products and trade market has stayed stable with local workshop owners providing free food and half-wages to the labours. Active pagodas have been secure with the donation from pilgrims and online gifting. As part of the UNESCO World Heritage site, the ancient remains are preserved by the Department of Archaeology but as this paper describes, this works together with community protection of traditional knowledge. The social identity as Myinkaba natives, the unique local and natural resources, have supported local pride and resilience for more than a thousand years.

မင်းကပါရွာ(သို့) ရှေးအနုရာခရဲ့ သီးခြားတမူထူးခြားတဲ့ ဓလေ့ရိုးရာအသိပညာနဲ့ ယဉ်ကျေးမှုတွဲ တည်ရှိနေတာဟာ ၎င်း၏ ဆိပ်ကမ်းရယ်နဲ့ ဧရာဝတီမြစ်ကနီရဲ့ ဝန်းကျင်ဂဟစနစ်တွဲရယ်နဲ့ ဆက်နွှယ် နေပါတယ်။

မင်းကပါမှာ အဒေါ် ပထမထောင်စုနှစ်ကတည်းက သတုတုကမြှောက်ထုတ်လုပ်နိုင်ခဲ့တယ် ဆိုတဲ့အထောက်အထားတွေနဲ့ ဖန်ချက်ဖို/စဉ်ဖို (၇) ခုကို ဖေါထုတ်တွဲရှုထားပေးဖို့ ပါတယ်။

မင်းကပါမှထွက်ရှိသော ဖန်ပုတီးတွင်ကိုလဲ မကြိုက်ခြင်းတစ်လျှောက် ကုန်သွယ်ခဲ့ပုံ ရပါတယ်။  
ရှေးပုတီးစုတွေ၊ အိုးခမြီးကွဲတွေ၊ လက်စင်းရာပါအုတ်တွဲက မင်းကပါရွာဟာ ပုဂံမှာ ရှေးအကျဆုံး  
ရွာတရွာဖြစ်တယ်ဆိုတာ သက်သေပေးနေခြင်းဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

သူရဲရှေးဗိသုကာလက်ရာတွေထဲမှာ အရှားပါးဆုံးလက်ရာတစ်ခုဖြစ်တဲ့ သဲကျောက်နဲ့  
တည်ဆောက်ထားပြီး ဗုဒ္ဓဗျာဓိကဏ္ဍီရုပ်ကျွဲငွေထွင်းထုထားတဲ့ နန်းဘုရား ဂူပုထိုးတော် လည်း  
တစ်ခုအပါအဝင်ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

မင်းကပါရဲ့ တခြားထင်ရှားတဲ့ ဝိသသေတွဲထဲမှာ ရာသီလိုက် အင်းကဏ္ဍီ ကန်ကဏ္ဍီတွဲ ရယ်  
ဆီလီကာဒြေကျယ်တဲ့ မြေလွှာရယ်နဲ့ ဝါးထွက်ရှိမှုတွေလဲ ပါပါတယ်။

ယွန်းလက်မှုလုပ်ငန်းမှာ လိုအပ်တဲ့ အထူးဝါးမျိုးစိတ်တွေ ထွက်ရှိသလို ဒီ ဝါးကုန်းကမြီး တွေဟာ ဝါးဖျာ  
ထရုံ၊ ခြေးတောင်းရက်လုပ်ရာမှာလဲ မရှိမဖြစ်ပါ။

ပန်းယွန်းအနုပညာ၊ ဝါးလက်မှုပညာ၊ စက္ကူရုပ်ချိုးပညာ၊ စိုက်ပျိုးရေးနဲ့ ရစေမိခန့်ခွဲမှု စနစ် တွေဟာ  
ဒေသ သဘာဝပတ်ဝန်းကျင်ဆီက အရင်းခံတဲ့ အသိပညာတွေကို အခြေပြုပြီးလက်ဆင့်ကမ်းလေ့ကျင့်  
သင်ကြားလာခဲ့ကြတာ ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

COVID-19 ကပ်ရောဂါကာလအတွင်း ကမ္ဘာလှည့်ခရီးသွားတွေ မလာကြတာကြောင့်  
ယွန်းထည်ထုတ်လုပ်မှုလုပ်ငန်း အများစုဟာ ရပ်ဆိုင်းသွားခဲ့ သော်လည်း ဒေသတွင်းအတွက်  
ဘာသာရေးသုံးနဲ့ အိမ်သုံး ယွန်းထည်တွေကတော့ ဆက်လက်ထုတ်လုပ် နေခဲ့ကြပြီ တယ်။  
ဒေသခံ ဝါးထွက်ကုန်လုပ်ငန်းရှင်တွေကတော့ လုပ်သားတွေကို အခမဲ့ရိက္ခာ ထောက်ပံ့  
ပေးတာ၊ လုပ်အားခ တဝက်ပေးတာတွေနဲ့ ဝါးထွက်ကုန်လုပ်ငန်းနဲ့ ဈေးကွက် တည်ငြိမ် အောင်  
ကျင့်ကြံထားခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။

သာသနိကအဆောက်အအုံတွေကတော့ အလည်အပတ်လာတဲ့ ဘုရားဖူးတွေရဲ့ အလှူငွေတွေ၊  
အွန်လိုင်းကတစ်ဆင့် လှူဒါန်းတာတွေနဲ့ ဆက်ပံ့ရှုပ်တည်နေကြပါတယ်။

ယူနက်စကိုကမ္ဘာ့အမွေအနှစ်နရာတစ်ခုပီပီ ရှေးဟောင်းအဆောက်အအုံတွေကို  
ရှေးဟောင်းသုတေသနဌာနက စောင့်ရှောက်ထားတယ်လို့ ဆိုကြပါတယ်။ သို့ပေမဲ့ ဓလေ့စဉ်လာ  
အသိပညာတွေနဲ့ လူထုက အတူတကွ ကာကွယ်စောင့်ရှောက်ထား တာကသာ အခရာဆိုတာ  
ဒီစာတမ်းမှာ ဖော်ပြထား ပါတယ်။

မင်းကပါဇာတိ/ မင်းကပါသားတွေရဲ့ လူမှုဝိသေသလက္ခဏာတွေ၊ တမူထူးတဲ့ ဒေသဓလေ့တွေ၊  
သဘာဝရင်းမြစ်တွေဟာ ဒေသရဲ့ဂုဏ်ဒြပ်ဖြစ်သလို နှစ်ထောင်ချီ တည်တဲ့ နေခဲ့ပုံလဲ ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

## Keywords

Myinkaba; Traditional knowledge; Traditional productions; Bagan  
မင်းကပါ၊ ဓလေ့ရိုးရာ အသိပညာ၊ ဓလေ့ရိုးရာ ထုတ်ကုန်များ၊ ပုဂံ



Fig. 1 Naga nat shrine near Myinkaba stream, Myinkaba. Photo by the author.

## Introduction

Myinkaba is an ancient village, which was named Anuradha. It is located between Old Bagan and New Bagan. Myinkaba has for thousands of years been full of secrets with the earliest evidence, including Buddhist monuments, port, ancient glass production, ancient beads practice. Myazadi Stupa with the *Rajakumar* inscription, Myinkaba Gubuyaukkyi, Manuha, Nanphaya and Abeyadana temples are celebrated places for pilgrims and tourists. Amay Shwe Nabay Nat shrine lies north of Myinkaba stream. She is also known as Naga Medaw. Especially at the Novitiation ceremony, local people often come to pay respect to her for sharing the merit with them. It has a distinctive cultural sector with its own traditional lacquer handicraft, bamboo craft, cloth painting and festival with paper puppet and special foods. Local people respect and have still been using their traditional knowledge and long-term experience for their livelihoods. Thus, there is a strong connection between customary knowledge and livelihood. The majority of the local community are involved in the traditional lacquer industry, bamboo craft, painting and cultivation so their livelihoods are related to the cultural traditions. In addition, Myinkaba has active pagodas with unique festivals, foods and over-life-size paper puppet performances. Protecting and promoting cultural traditions such as this is important for every community. This paper addresses the resilience of traditional knowledge even in difficult times.

### **The historical background of Myinkaba**

Myinkaba has ancient productions, ports, traditional handicrafts and religious buildings. Myinkaba port is located on the south west of Myinkaba village, on the east bank of Ayeyarwaddy River. Pyu finger-marks show Pyu Bagan; and the earliest evidence of Pyu style earthenware was discovered in Myinkaba. (Moore and Aung Myint, 1993) (Hudson and Lwin, 2001). It is possible that Pyu artisans settled in Myinkaba, making it one of the earliest villages in Bagan.

There is also a lake (*Inn-Gyi*) near the port. Seven excavated kiln sites are located in the Myinkaba area. Many ancient coloured beads were found near the kiln sites, port, Inn gyi and east of Shwe-U-Min monastery. The pieces of glass beads can be found when villagers sluice gold from the ground. According to the interviews with the villagers Ko Myint Naing, Ko Zaw Lin Maung and U Kyi - they spotted ancient beads in different colours near the river and ancient kiln sites when digging in the ground searching for pieces of gold. In 2020, they also found many ancient beads east of Shwe U Min monastery (Naing, Maung, Kyi, 2020, pers comm, 23 August 2020). All this suggests there was ancient production of beads in Myinkaba (Lewis, 2020).

### **The traditional handicraft productions of Myinkaba**

Myinkaba livelihoods of local people are centred on production of traditional handicrafts, arts and cultivation. Myinkaba became one of the major ports for trading bamboo from the Upper part of Burma to Myinkaba. The Myinkaba native bamboo distributor who is U Mya Maung, in an interview on his 80 years experiences with bamboo, says that the source of Myinkaba bamboo is from Bahamo, Kalaywa, Homalin and that it is being shipped along Chindwin and Ayeyarwaddy rivers (Maung, 2021, pers, Comm, 25 June 2021). Myinkaba has become a bamboo market and bamboo products have been distributed to other villages. The port is also still active for villagers coming to work from the west bank of the Ayeyarwaddy River to Bagan. In terms of bamboo, the craft plays an essential role as a natural resource for weaving bamboo mats and making bamboo frames to use as a base for lacquer objects in the Myinkaba area.

Bamboo craft and lacquerware are the main business of Myinkaba communities. Bamboo strip-making is being used for household items such as house-roofs, ceiling decoration with traditional patterns, bamboo crafts, mat and enclosure sheets by the old customary way. Around twenty-five households engage in bamboo-strip making with income from sale of household items. Interestingly, the large paper puppets are made on bamboo frames for performing in the pagoda festival. Bamboo makers are talented and continuously

innovate the puppets with excellent skill. Neighbouring villages visit to see talent of Myinkaba bamboo craft makers for puppets during festival days. They are confident in their living with great respect for their heritage. In addition, sometimes, making bamboo map and enclosure sheets for domestic houses can seem boring work for the young generation of bamboo production. However, the youth are looking for tourist markets and hotel decorations as a new strategy to innovate designs and shapes using traditional ways. They produce creative household items such as bamboo lamps, baskets, hats, cups, chairs, and phone stands.

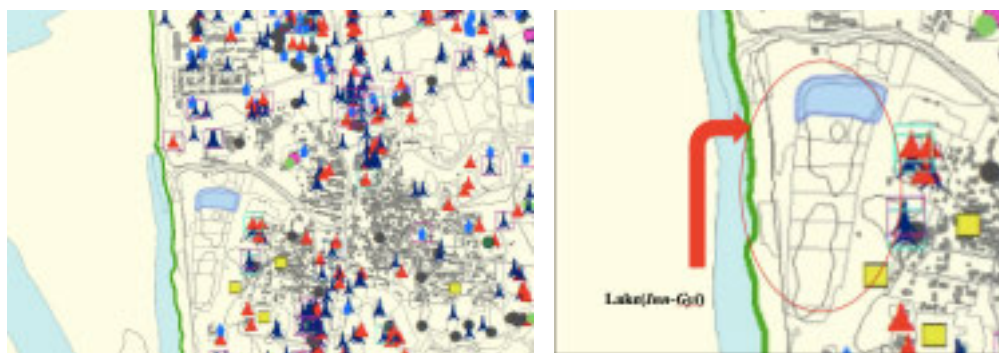


Fig. 2 Showing Myinkaba location (Bagan World Heritage Nomination Dossier, 2017-18).



Fig. 3 Bamboo strip-making for house-roof in Myinkaba. (Photo by the author.)

In historical terms, the practice of lacquer art possibly started in the Bagan period. It seems that the lacquer sap was used for Buddha statues in ancient times. The earliest example of lacquered Buddha statues (12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century CE) is displayed in the British Museum and the Cleveland Museum. Even though the ancient bead and glaze production disappeared, the lacquer art still survives in Myinkaba. As a result, traditional knowledge and skill have been protected through the awareness of villagers and their livelihoods.



Fig. 4 (a) 12<sup>th</sup> Century CE of Seated Buddha statue from Cleveland Museum, Fig.4. (b) 13<sup>th</sup> Century CE of Crowned Buddha in wood, lacquered and gilded from British Museum (British Museum, accession number 1981,0611.1)

Myinkaba is illustrious as one of the largest lacquer industries in Bagan until present time. The lacquer art is exquisite with different traditional techniques making it a well-known spot for thousands of pilgrims and tourists with the renowned temples, temple festivals, traditional handicrafts and cloth painting and hand paintings. Traditional lacquerware has become a highly demanded product as a souvenir also for pilgrims. Pilgrims prefer to buy lacquerware as a traditional Burmese handicraft with its long history. Thus the lacquer industry has significantly contributed to the average incomes of local people with a large number engaged in its production. Lacquerware cannot be finished by one artist. It needs many artists as a collaborative work with particular skills including bamboo frame, coating lacquer for many layers, etching designs, and colour filling and teak powder polishing (UNIDO 2014).

Craftsmen, artists and parents give training to the young in lacquerware workshops, traditional cloth painting, and bamboo craft workshops in their annual summer holiday. Some workshop owners give a training programme offering daily wages, which depend on skill level. They thus intend to protect traditional handicrafts and to sustain local livelihood (UNIDO, 2014). The preference of the young generation is to engage in lacquerware workshops and traditional cloth painting but there are few in bamboo crafts. Every member of families has their preferences and particular talent in the engagement of different industries. Parents encourage their children's interest as production of handicrafts promote local identity, develop the intangible cultural heritage and help it to be resilient in itself and in relation to other parts of the world.

Myinkaba artists also received income from selling cloth paintings to tourists. Artists paint Buddhist religious scenes from the mural paintings of Buddhist temples. The Buddhist *Jataka*, the life of Buddha and landscape of Bagan scenes are very popular for cloth paintings with high demand. Young generations have shown interest in cloth paintings



and while inspired from ancient mural painting, they have created innovative designs and shapes based on traditional ways. Thus, inherited practice of traditional knowledge and skill has contributed to building this livelihood from generation to generation.

Another livelihood of Myinkaba locals is cultivation, although a minor sector with little engagement in traditional ways. They nonetheless receive an income from the cultivation on agricultural land from their ancestors. Even though there is a lack of youth engagement in this cultivation, it is still sustained.



Fig. 5 Crop cultivation in Myinkaba Area. Source: Photo by the author.

### **The situation of Myinkaba in Covid Time**

An interview with the local artisans showed that their livelihood is threatened with numerous challenges during the pandemic. The main target of the local economy is tourism so its restriction has had a significantly negative impact on the livelihood of artisans and workshop owners. International demand decreased considerably and the production has stopped completely in the workshops of handicrafts distributors, though some artisans accept a modest ordering from domestic demand. Even though farmers receive regular income from agriculture, artisans spend their saved money for their healthcare and daily consumption. In the case of unemployed households, families with the highest income provide to the poor families. And at active Buddhist monuments such as the Myazadi Stupa and the Manuha, the pagoda trustees have opened secure bank saving accounts for donations from local people as well as online contributions.

### **Conclusion**

Myinkaba artisan and craftsmen have successfully sustained their livelihoods by understanding traditional knowledge and skill. It is one of the active villages among the ancient cities of Burma with traditional production, inherited cultivation and active ancient temples. Although Myinkaba is facing difficulties and challenges, it is still surviving with incredible strength from the first millennium CE to the present time. The livelihoods of Myinkaba support the religious and economic life of this village. The main aspects described in this brief paper include pagoda festivals such as puppet-making, offerings and

tourism with the varied lacquerware production, basic cultivation, and bamboo products providing an essential product for housing, fencing and containers. The livelihoods are balanced between genders and age groups. This combination of factors provides flexibility allowing change alongside continuity in the years to come. In summary, the Myinkaba community has slowly developed strategies to respond to numerous challenges even during this pandemic time.

Local artisans enhance and protect traditional knowledge and individual and community resilience.

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