

SINHALESE STŪPA AND ITS SPREAD TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Introduction

The shape of the Sinhalese Stūpa as a bell or bowl shape may be traced back to the Sanchi Stūpa in Madhya Pradesh, India. Senarath Paranavitana's work *Thestūpa in Sri Lanka* published as Vol. V under the *Memoirs of Archaeological Survey of Ceylon* remains a standard work in this field. Here he has traced the evolution of the Stūpa in Sri Lanka and its meaning and its functions in reference to Sinhalese and Pali literature. It also includes a comparative study of the Sri Lankan Stūpa with that of India. A.M. Hocart's *Archaeological Summaries*, published in the *Ceylon Journal of Science*, Section G. served as a forerunner to Paranavitana's work. The main sources of information for this paper are two 14th century Thai inscriptions and architectural remains in Sukhothai, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos.

Objective

An attempt is made in this paper to briefly sketch the origin of the Sinhalese Stūpa and how it inspired the architecture in Southeast Asian countries.

Findings and Discussion

The first Sinhalese Stūpa, Thūpārāma was built by King Devanampiya Tissa (250-210 BCE), as advised by the Thera Mahinda, son of Emperor Asoka (269-32 BCE), the builder of Sanchi. Thera Mahinda was born in Vidīsa, not too far from Sanchi and would have seen the Stūpa there before he left for Sri Lanka (*Mahavaṃsa*, VII 6-7). According to the 13th

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century Sinhala text, *Thūpavaṃsa*, Thūpārāma was like a heap of paddy in shape (*dhānyākāra* - that is with a conical dome), which is one of the six types of Stūpa mentioned in Sri Lanka. Paranavitana noted that it is not conical today as it has undergone several alterations, and the present form is due to the latest restoration of 1842 (p. 14). The earliest illustrations of Thūpārāma appear in two murals of the 12th century MyinkabaKubyauk-gyi Temple and the Sākyamuni Temple in Bagan, Myanmar (Goonatilake, H., 2009).

The first mention of Sinhalese influenced Stūpa in Southeast Asia is in Myanmar. The earliest five Stūpas built by King Anwrahta in 1059, are associated with a replica of the sacred Tooth Relic he received in response to a mission he sent to Sri Lanka along with a gift of a white elephant to obtain the sacred Tooth Relic from his friend Vijayabahu I (1055-1110 C.E). (*Glass Palace Chronicle* - This event is not mentioned in Sri Lankan sources). Anwrahta placed the replica of the sacred Tooth Relic in a jeweled casket on a white elephant and set it free. First, the white elephant knelt at the site where the king later built a Stūpa enshrining the relic which became known as Shwezigon. Before he enshrined the first replica, he made a vow for another replica to emerge from the first replica. When the second appeared, he enshrined it in a Stūpa on Mt. Tangyi. In a similar fashion, the third appeared and it was enshrined in a Stūpa which came to be known as Lawkānanda, an old harbour where vessels from Sri Lanka, Arakan (Rakhine) and the Mon Rāmaññadesa anchored. The fourth so replicated was enshrined in a Stūpa on Mt. Tuywin and the fifth on Mt. Pyek. These Stūpas exist up to now, and indicate that historical events were contained in the semi-mythical narration. Sinhalese influenced Stūpas built in Bagan period continued with over 200 exemplars. The last such Stūpa in Myanmar was Konimhutoau in Sagaing, built in 1648 CE, modelled after the Mahāceti in Anuradhapura.

The spread of the Sinhalese Stūpa to other parts of Southeast began later in the period following Parakramabahu I (1153-1186). His KiriVehera in Polonnaruwa inspired both Cambodia and Nakon SiThammarāt in the

Malay Peninsula in Thailand. The earliest Sinhalese Stūpa style found in Cambodia is the small stone Stūpa in the temple Prasāt Phrā Khan, built by Jayavarman VII (1181-1219), and in Nakon SīThammarāt, PhrāBoromathatCetī (Great Relic Cetī), and six other Sinhalese style Stūpas. In Thailand, in its first historical city, Sukhothai, a major transformation of Sukhothai architecture to one inspired by Sinhalese architecture occurred around 1345. A Thai monk, SīSradhā, a nephew of King Ram Khamhaeng returned in 1345 after staying ten years in Sri Lanka with two authentic relics, *kesadhātu* and *gīvādhātu* and a group of Sinhalese craftsmen, whom he settled in five villages. SīSradhā, enshrined the relics in Mahāthat, the main monument in Sukhothai and built a *makaratorana* being influenced by Lankatilaka and Gadaladeniya Temples. Large bell Stūpas and the standing elephants emerging from niches seen all over Sukho Thailand around a thousand Sinhalese style Stūpashave also been inspired by Sri Lankan architecture.

Examples of Sinhalese influence on Sukhothai predating the 14th century are the Chedī Sī Hong, Wat Ton Makham and Wat Chedī Sī Hong, and the Mahāthat lotus bud Stūpa, identified as a copy of a reliquary casket in which Buddhist relics were carried from Sri Lanka to Sukhothai. There were subsequently many Sinhalese style Stūpas in Sukhothai, prominent among them being Wat Chang Rop, Wat Chang Lom, WatSa Sī, WatSangkhawat and Wat Mum Lanka. After the shift of the Thai capital to Ayutthaya (1350 - 1767) bell-shaped Sinhalese style Stūpas continued.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the Sinhalese style Stūpa became the dominant feature of Stūpa architecture in Southeast Asia in the context of the general cultural traffic from Sri Lanka. The Gampola connection through SīSradhā helped transform the architectural landscape, not only of Sukhothai and of other kingdoms of Northern Thailand such as SīSatchanalai and Chiang Mai, but also of the later Thai capital of Ayutthaya.

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