The Origins of Bagan.

The archaeological landscape of Upper Burma to AD 1300.

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of requirements for admission to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
Statement.

This thesis contains no material which has been used in any other submission to any university or institution for the award of any other degree or diploma. The research involved no human or animal experimentation. To the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text. Any joint research related to any material in this thesis is explained and acknowledged in the foreword and in the body of the text.

Abstract.

The archaeological landscape of Upper Burma from the middle of the first millennium BC to the Bagan period in the 13th-14th century AD is a landscape of continuity. Finds of polished stone and bronze artifacts suggest the existence of early metal-using cultures in the Chindwin and Samon River Valleys, and along parts of the Ayeyarwady plain. Increasing technological and settlement complexity in the Samon Valley suggests that a distinctive culture whose agricultural and trade success can be read in the archaeological record of the Late Prehistoric period developed there. The appearance of the early urban “Pyu” system of walled central places during the early first millennium AD seems to have involved a spread of agricultural and management skills and population from the Samon. The leaders of the urban centres adopted Indic symbols and Sanskrit modes of kingship to enhance and extend their authority. The early urban system was subject over time to a range of stresses including siltation of water systems, external disruption and social changes as Buddhist notions of leadership eclipsed Brahmanical ones. The archaeological evidence indicates that a settlement was forming at Bagan during the last centuries of the first millennium AD. By the mid 11th century Bagan began to dominate Upper Burma, and the region began a transition from a system of largely autonomous city states to a centralised kingdom. Inscriptions of the 11th to 13th centuries indicate that as the Bagan Empire expanded it subsumed the agricultural lands that had been developed by the Pyu.
Contents.

Statement .................................................................................................................................2
Abstract .....................................................................................................................................2
Figures .....................................................................................................................................9
Tables ....................................................................................................................................12
Charts and electronic data CD-ROM. ....................................................................................12
Foreword ...................................................................................................................................13
Acknowledgements. ...........................................................................................................13
Field survey, excavations and database construction. ........................................................15
Terminology. ......................................................................................................................16
Calendrical systems............................................................................................................ 16
Radiocarbon dating conventions. .......................................................................................17
Technical notes. ...................................................................................................................17
Title page credits. ...............................................................................................................17

PART 1 ........................................................................................................................................18

Introduction. ...........................................................................................................................19

CHAPTER 1. HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY. ......................... 23

The Burmese Chronicles. ........................................................................................................23
The “model” chronicle, Hmannan Yazawin: a critical summary........................................24
Tagaung. .............................................................................................................................24
Buddha visits Burma. ...........................................................................................................25
Sriksetra (Thayekittaya). .....................................................................................................25
Bagan (Pagan). ....................................................................................................................25
Some major chronicles: outline and comment. .................................................................29
The Jatatopum Rajavan. ......................................................................................................29
The Za-bu-cha. ....................................................................................................................29
The Celebrated (Famous) Chronicle. ..................................................................................32
The Old Chronicle of Pagan. ..............................................................................................32
The Great Chronicle. ..........................................................................................................32
The Maniyadanabon of Shin Sandalanka .........................................................................33
The New Bagan Chronicle. ...............................................................................................34
A Brief History of Bagan. .................................................................................................34
Some other important chronicles. .....................................................................................34
Indigenous history and its challenge to archaeology..........................................................35
Chinese sources. ................................................................................................................36
The Western historians. .......................................................................................................36
Ethnicity and migration ................................................................. 38
The Mon and the “Mon paradigm” .................................................. 39
Bagan and after ............................................................................. 41
Summary ......................................................................................... 42

CHAPTER 2. BURMESE ARCHAEOLOGY IN CONTEXT. ................. 43
Geography ...................................................................................... 43
Resources ...................................................................................... 44
Early research .............................................................................. 45
Myanmar government research and conservation programs ......... 47
International research ................................................................. 48
The archaeology of Myanmar: a brief review up to the end of the Bagan period .................................................. 49
Palaeontology .............................................................................. 49
Anyathian (Palaeolithic) and Hoabhinian ......................................... 50
Proto-historical and early urban .................................................. 52
Bagan ......................................................................................... 53
Summary ......................................................................................... 54

PART 2.
CHAPTER 3. POLISHED STONE TECHNOLOGIES AND THE
APPEARANCE OF BRONZE. ..................................................... 58
Stone assemblages .......................................................................... 58
Stone axes and adzes .................................................................... 58
Stone rings and bracelets ............................................................. 59
Perforated stones: a problematic dataset ....................................... 60
Bronze assemblages ...................................................................... 61
Bronze axes .................................................................................. 61
Letpanchibaw ............................................................................... 61
Nyaunggan ................................................................................... 62
Summary ........................................................................................ 64

CHAPTER 4. WEALTH, STATUS, TRADE AND EXPANDING
TECHNOLOGIES: THE “LATE PREHISTORIC” PHASE. .............. 78
Archaeological evidence of cultural transition, c.500 BC-c.500 AD .... 78
Megalithic sites ............................................................................ 78
Bronze bracelets .......................................................................... 79
Glass Bracelets ........................................................................... 80
Bronze spears and arrowheads .................................................... 80
Iron implements .......................................................................... 80
Iron and bronze swords ................................................................ 81
Bronze wire packets ..................................................................... 81
PART 3.
CHAPTER 6. BAGAN: CITY AND STATE. .................. 181

The State of Bagan. ................................................................. 182

Distribution of epigraphs and votaries, 11th-13th century: key indicators of the extent of
state hegemony. ........................................................................... 182

The City of Bagan 1. A new context for a traditional origin story: survey and excavation in
the eastern hinterland............................................................................................................. 187

Origin myths.............................................................................. 187

Nanchao, Pyusawhti and early Bagan: from legend to hypothesis. ......................... 188

The 19 founding villages of Bagan: data and myths. ................................................ 189

Nagabo.................................................................................. 190

Nagakyit. .............................................................................. 190

Anurada................................................................................ 190

Ywasaik................................................................................ 190

Nyaung-u............................................................................. 191

Kyaussaga............................................................................. 191

Kyinlo................................................................................... 191

Taungba............................................................................... 191

Hti Ta Hsaung Pagoda.......................................................... 192

Taungba pagoda..................................................................... 192

Earthenware site. .................................................................... 192

Ruined pagoda........................................................................ 192

Yonhlut.................................................................................. 192

Yonhlut habitation site.......................................................... 193

Yonhlut monument site........................................................ 194
CHAPTER 7. NEW APPROACHES TO THE STRUCTURE AND
CHRONOLOGY OF BAGAN

The City of Bagan 3. A critical reappraisal of archaeology within the walled centre. ....220
The “Pyinbya” palace. ........................... 220
The “Anawratha” and “Kyanzittha” palaces. .......................... 222
The 1990-1994 “Kyanzittha palace” excavations and radiocarbon dating of the “palace”
and city walls. ..................................................... 223
The 2003 excavations at “Old Bagan”: report. .......................... 226
Level 1 ......................................................... 228
Level 2 ......................................................... 228
Level 2B ....................................................... 229
Level 3 ......................................................... 229
Level 4 ........................................................ 229
Distribution of Tada-u pipes as an indicator of periodisation. ....................... 229
Exotic earthenware and ceramic finds as indicators of periodisation. ................. 230
The 2003 excavation: analysis. .................................................... 232
The walled city core: analysis. ....................................................... 235
The City of Bagan 4. A critical reappraisal of the archaeology of the monument zone. .....235
The Inventory of Monuments ............................................................................................235
A new approach to dating .....................................................................................................237
Epigraphic dates from the Inventory of Monuments .........................................................237
Attributed dates: extending the timescale ..........................................................................239
Predicting the location of earlier buildings .........................................................................244
Thiripyitsaya/Kyaussaga: an early sub-settlement? .........................................................245
Temple 996. ...................................................................................................................246
The origins and periodisation of Bagan .............................................................................247
Summary .........................................................................................................................248

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION. CONTINUITY IN A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE, FROM THE SAMON VALLEY TO BAGAN. ............................259

APPENDICES..................................................................................................................266

1. Database construction .................................................................................................266
   Bagan digital database ..................................................................................................266
   Digital Myanmar ..........................................................................................................267
      Location ....................................................................................................................268
      Characterisation ......................................................................................................270
2. The Myanmar Archaeological Settlement Database ....................................................271
3. Myanmar thermoluminescence dates ..........................................................................281
4. The Za-bu-kon-cha, or Net of the Southern Islands ....................................................283
   The Za-bu-kon-cha, Part 2 ........................................................................................284
      Halin .......................................................................................................................284
      Ava (Inwa) ............................................................................................................284
      Makkhara (Hmetkaya) ..........................................................................................285
      Pinle (Maingmaw) ...............................................................................................285
      Kaungsin ...............................................................................................................286
      Allagappa .............................................................................................................286
      Legaing ................................................................................................................286
      Tagaung ...............................................................................................................287
      Sriksetra ..............................................................................................................289
      Bagan ..................................................................................................................289
      Myinzaing, Makkhara, Pinle, Ava and Pinya .........................................................289
      Sagaing ................................................................................................................290
      Ava .......................................................................................................................290
5. Glaze ware up to the Bagan period: some problematic issues ........................................291
   Observations in the colonial period .............................................................................291
   Research on early glaze wares ....................................................................................292
Figures.

Figure 1 Myanmar and its regional neighbours...............................................................18
Figure 2 Early Myanmar capitals according to the Za-bu-kon-cha..................................30
Figure 3 Timeline: adoption of metals technology in Myanmar, 2000 BC-AD 2000...............52
Figure 4 Myanmar: regional landform............................................................................55
Figure 5 Resources, distribution....................................................................................56
Figure 6 Anyathian and Hoabinhian sites, distribution.....................................................57
Figure 7 Incised earthenware at Letpanchibaw (Win Maung)......................................61
Figure 8 Perforated stones A..........................................................................................65
Figure 9 Perforated stones B..........................................................................................65
Figure 10 Complex Chindwin region bowl, possibly distillation apparatus...............66
Figure 11 Examples of size-range, polished stone axes................................................66
Figure 12 Perforated stones, distribution.......................................................................67
Figure 13 Polished stone artifacts, distribution...............................................................68
Figure 14 Polished stone implements, Nine Banyan Trees Monastery Museum, Halin........69
Figure 15 Polished stone spear head, Padah-lin..............................................................69
Figure 16 Pointed stone implements, Win Maung collection........................................69
Figure 17 Samples of shouldered stone axes.................................................................70
Figure 18 Range of bronze axe shapes............................................................................70
Figure 19 Polished stone rings/bracelets, distribution......................................................71
Figure 20 Polished stone rings, some characteristic shapes.............................................72
Figure 21 Star-shaped marble ring, Khabo, 12.5 cm diameter. (TWM)............................72
Figure 22 Ring making: cores, reworked cores, possible polishing stone........................72
Figure 23 T-section rings A............................................................................................73
Figure 24 T-section rings B............................................................................................73
Figure 25 Stone rings drilled for repairs (above) and unusual green stone rings (below)...73
Figure 26 Socketed bronze axes, Ywahtinkon..................................................................74
Figure 27 Sandstone axe moulds, Kokkokhala.................................................................74
Figure 28 Bronze implements from Halin......................................................................74
Figure 29 Polished stone rings and axes, comparative distribution.................................75
Figure 30 Bronze axes, distribution................................................................................76
Figure 31 Polished stone and bronze artifacts, comparative distribution.........................77
Figure 32 Querns, stone mortars and bronze artifacts including gourd-shaped flutes, Myaukmigon.................................................................95
Figure 33 Bronze gourd-shaped sheng flute, Myaukmigon: detail..................................95
Figure 34 Megaliths, distribution....................................................................................96
Figure 35 Bronze bracelets, distribution.........................................................................97
Figure 36 Bronze bells, bracelets and rings, Upper Burma.............................................98
Figure 37 Coiled bronze artifacts, Halin (detail of J &K, previous figure).......................98
Figure 38 Bronze spears, arrows and swords.................................................................98
Figure 39 Glass bracelets, distribution..........................................................................99
Figure 40 Bronze spear heads and arrow heads, distribution........................................100
Figure 41 Iron hoes, adzes and spearheads, Halin monastery museum............................101
Figure 42 Iron sword with bronze handle, Myin-ooh-lee, Samon Valley..........................101
Figure 43 Bronze sword handle, Halin...........................................................................101
Figure 44 Bronze sword handle, pommel of previous figure, Halin.................................102
Figure 45 Bronze sword handles, showing decorative variation.....................................102
Figure 46 Bronze sword handles, reverse view of items in previous figure.....................102

BIBLIOGRAPHY...........................................................................................................304
Figure 105 Gulf of Martaban and peninsular archaeological sites. ................................................................1 7 4
Figure 103 Sriksetra, archaeological plan. ........................................................................................................ 172
Figure 102 Characteristic "Sriksetra".................................................................................................................
Figure 101 Coin excavated near Tagaung (Win Maung 2002b). ..................................................................... 171
Figure 98 Inscribed bowl, Shagwe............................................................................................... ....................... 169
Figure 97 Burial urn, Shagwe................................................................................................... .......................... 169
Figure 94 Radiocarbon date ranges, Beikthano and Halin. ............................................................................. 166
Figure 93 Letpanywa, excavation plan (after Nyein Lwin 2002, 2003)........................................................... 165
Figure 92 Anthropomorphic bronze hilt decoration, Letpanywa.................................................................... 165
Figure 90 Brick wall and megalith, Letpanywa (Nyein Lwin)...................................................................... ... 164
Figure 89 Buddha image, Beikthano, 2003. 10 cm high (Photo: Archaeology Department)......................... 163
Figure 88 Buddha image, Kokkogwa, Beikthano 1976. 5 cm high. (Photo: Win Maung)............................. 163
Figure 86 Beikthano coin hoard, rising sun face................................................................................ ............... 162
Figure 85 Characteristic "Halin".................................................................................................................. 107
Figure 84 Beikthano coin hoard, .................................................................................................................. 107
Figure 83 Beikthano, archaeological plan. ........................................................................................................ 161
Figure 82 Beikthano and the Samon Valley, location............................................................................. .......... 160
Figure 81 Myanmar walled sites, size hierarchy: areas in hectares. ............................................................... 159
Figure 79 Coins excavated at Maingmaw (after Win Maung 2002b).............................................................. 158
Figure 78 Maingmaw and the Panlaung Valley, size hierarchy of walled settlements, in hectares.............. 158
Figure 77 Maingmaw, 1944 map with wall outline overlaid. ........................................................................... 157
Figure 76 Maingmaw, dry season aerial photo, 1953. ........................................................................................ 157
Figure 75 The Samon and Panlaung Valleys, settlement distribution. ........................................................... 156
Figure 74 Enclosed sites in proportion to their areas, Myanmar and central Thailand. ............................... 155
Figure 73 Chao Phraya basin enclosed sites, size hierarchy (after Mudar 1999)............................................ 154
Figure 72 Thailand: enclosed settlements in the Chao Phraya basin............................................................. 152
Figure 70 The "Samon Valley" culture: distribution of sites and resources.................................................. 115
Figure 69 Tubular bronze containers, Samon Valley.................................................................................. 114
Figure 68 Tubular earthenware containers, model and functional, Samon Valley....................................... 114
Figure 67 Earthenware distillation bowls, distribution. .................................................................................. 113
Figure 66 Bronze axe with cloth or cord adhering, Halin. ............................................................................. 112
Figure 65 Spindle whorls and other artifacts from Halin. ............................................................................. 112
Figure 64 Bronze horse, found by bead diggers near Pyawbwe, 2004. .......................................................... 112
Figure 63 Carnelian beads, distribution .......................................................................................................... 111
Figure 62 Carnelian tiger beads, Samon Valley............................................................................................ 110
Figure 61 Carnelian tiger, Ban Don Ta Phet, Thailand: length 7 cm (after Higham 2002). ......................... 109
Figure 60 Etched carnelian tiger, Samon Valley: detail of head. ................................................................. 109
Figure 59 Carved stone head, Samon Valley: detail of head. ........................................................................ 109
Figure 58 Bronze tally tiger, Qin Dynasty, naming Emperor Qin Shihuang Di (scale unknown: after Museum of Chinese History 1964). ................................................................. 109
Figure 57 Coins excavated at Maingmaw (after Win Maung 2002b). .............................................................. 158
Figure 56 Coins excavated at Halin (after Win Maung 2002b). ..................................................................... 158
Figure 55 Carnelian tiger beads, Samon Valley............................................................................................ 110
Figure 54 Complex bronze funerary figure, triple, Samon Valley........................................................... 108
Figure 53 Complex bronze funerary figure, double, Halin............................................................................. 106
Figure 52 Complex bronze funerary figure, single, Samon Valley............................................................... 106
Figure 51 Complex bronze funerary decorations, distribution. ....................................................................... 105
Figure 50 Bronze disc and floral funerary decorations. .................................................................................... 105
Figure 49 Bronze packets, distribution......................................................................................................... 104
Figure 48 Bronze bells, distribution.................................................................................................................. 104
Figure 47 Bronze-handled iron swords, distribution. ...................................................................................... 103
Figure 46 Bronze funerary decorations, distribution. ...................................................................................... 103
Figure 45 Coin excavated near Tagaung (Win Maung 2002b). ................................................................. 171
Figure 44 Anthropomorphic bronze hilt decoration, Letpanywa................................................................. 165
Figure 43 Letpanywa, excavation plan (after Nyein Lwin 2002, 2003). .......................................................... 165
Figure 42 Treasure deposit, Letpanywa (after Nyein Lwin 2002). ................................................................. 165
Figure 41 Burial urn, Shagwe.......................................................................................................................... 169
Figure 40 Inscribed bowl, Shagwe.................................................................................................................. 169
Figure 39 Halin, archaeological plan. ................................................................................................................ 170
Figure 38 Gold-filled teeth, Halin...................................................................................................................... 170
Figure 37 Coin excavated near Tagaung (Win Maung 2002b). ................................................................. 171
Figure 36 Characteristic "Sriksetra" srivatsa/bhadrapitha coin (Win Maung 2002b). ................................. 171
Figure 35 Sriksetra, archaeological plan. ........................................................................................................ 172
Figure 34 Tagaung, archaeological plan. ......................................................................................................... 173
Figure 33 Gulf of Martaban and peninsular archaeological sites. ................................................................. 174
Figure 106 The main early urban centres and their projected zones of influence ........................................ 175
Figure 107 Coins excavated at Sriksreta (after Win Maung 2002b) ............................................................... 176
Figure 108 Coins excavated at Kyaiikkatha (after Win Maung 2002b) .......................................................... 176
Figure 109 Fingermarked bricks from Tagaung, Winka and Bagan ............................................................... 176
Figure 110 Brick scored with elephant design, Beikthano ................................................................. 176
Figure 111 Brick scored in Pyu script, "nya-za-sri", from building 280, Bagan .................................................. 177
Figure 112 Brick stamp with stupas and heindu dot design, 5 cm diameter, building 996, Bagan .............. 177
Figure 113 Brick stamp with duck design, 5 cm diameter, building 996, Bagan ........................................... 177
Figure 114 Brick stamped with a donor's name, "King's Servant Jar-Bu", Bagan Museum ......................... 177
Figure 115 Brick stamped with the name of Salay village, Bagan Museum ................................................ 178
Figure 116 Fingermarked bricks, building 996, Bagan ............................................................................. 178
Figure 117 Fingermarked, stamped and animal-trodden bricks, building 996, Bagan ............................. 178
Figure 118 Distribution of coin groups, modified Mahlo system ............................................................... 179
Figure 119 Nanchao and Pyu sites, location ............................................................................................ 180
Figure 120 The Bagan state: inscriptions and votaries, 11th-13th century ................................................. 185
Figure 121 The Bagan state, areas of extent, 11th-13th century ................................................................. 186
Figure 122 The eastern hinterland of Bagan .............................................................................................. 201
Figure 123 Gu Gyaung temple and stupa, near Mye-thindwin ................................................................. 201
Figure 124 Gu Gyaung temple, detail of interior brickwork ................................................................. 202
Figure 125 Radiocarbon dates, Taungba (OZE 765) and Suti (OZE 766) ..................................................... 202
Figure 126 Potsherd with beaten geometric pattern, Yonhlut (Ma Onhmar Aung) ..................................... 202
Figure 127 Plan of Yonhlut excavation ........................................................................................................ 203
Figure 128 Section of east wall, Yonhlut ...................................................................................................... 203
Figure 129 Excavating shaft furnace, Zi-o ................................................................................... 203
Figure 130 Shaft furnace, Zi-o: plan ........................................................................................................... 204
Figure 131 Shaft furnace, Zi-o: section ........................................................................................................ 204
Figure 132 Shaft furnace, Zi-o: tuyeres ....................................................................................................... 205
Figure 133 Shaft furnace, Zi-o: earthenware slabs .................................................................................... 205
Figure 134 Shaft furnace, Zi-o: handprint on outer surface ...................................................................... 205
Figure 135 Modern earthenware in use at Bagan ...................................................................................... 211
Figure 136 Earthenware firing site, Taunggone ........................................................................................ 212
Figure 137 Preparing earthenware for firing on top of the Taunggone mound ............................................ 212
Figure 138 Otein Taung earthenware moulds: plan .................................................................................. 213
Figure 139 Otein Taung date OZE 769, pit in field at 1.5 metres .............................................................. 214
Figure 140 Otein Taung date OZE 767, top of ash lens, eastern mound ...................................................... 214
Figure 141 Otein Taung date OZE 768, bottom of ash lens, eastern mound ............................................... 215
Figure 142 Otein Taung date OZE 770, western mound at 1.2 metres ....................................................... 215
Figure 143 Otein Taung date OZF 136, western mound at 4.5 metres ...................................................... 216
Figure 144 Otein Taung date OZF 137, western mound at 7 metres ......................................................... 216
Figure 145 Otein Taung, complete date range ............................................................................................ 217
Figure 146 "Old Bagan" : traditional measurements and recent excavations .................................................. 222
Figure 147 Fingermarked bricks from stupa 1606 .................................................................................... 224
Figure 148 Bagan: "Kyanzittha palace", 2003 re-survey ............................................................................ 225
Figure 149 "Kyanzittha palace" excavation viewed from the Shwe-gu-gyi .................................................. 225
Figure 150 Radiocarbon dates for Bagan city (after Grave & Barbetti 2001) .............................................. 226
Figure 151 Excavation 2003: distribution of clay pipes ................................................................................ 233
Figure 152 Excavation 2003: clay pipes, depth of finds ............................................................................... 234
Figure 153 Excavation 2003: schematic section ....................................................................................... 234
Figure 154 Building cycle at Bagan 1 .......................................................................................................... 250
Figure 155 Building cycle at Bagan 2 .......................................................................................................... 250
Figure 156 Bagan: location and identification of buildings linked to the 11th century ......................... 251
Figure 157 The Tanggyi-taung donation and the tooth relic pagodas ......................................................... 252
Figure 158 Loka-nanda to Sitana, aerial photo ............................................................................................. 252
Figure 159 Bagan: Lokananada, Paw-daw-mu and southern river bank ..................................................... 253
Figure 160 Paw-daw-mu (996): plan ............................................................................................................ 254
Figure 161 Paw-daw-mu, northwest corner. Top of earlier temple is sheltered by the tin roof .................... 254
Figure 162 Paw-daw-mu, stuccoed northeast corner of inner building .................................................... 255
Figure 163 Paw-daw-mu, inner building, north face (anthropomorphic naga at top left) ....................... 255
Figure 164 Paw-daw-mu, image in niche of inner temple ....................................................................... 256
Figure 165 Paw-daw-mu, anthropomorphic naga, detail ........................................................................ 256
Tables.

Table 1 Radiocarbon dates at Padah-lin................................................................. 50
Table 2 Thermoluminescence dates at Taungthaman (Stargardt 1990: 16)................................. 86
Table 3 Pre-urban datasets, comparing Upper Burma and the Halin/Samon Valley areas.................. 91
Table 4 Pyu homeland to Pyu "capitals": distances ................................................. 125
Table 5 Enclosure dimensions of the largest first millennium AD walled cities................................. 127
Table 6 Radiocarbon dates at Beikthano........................................................................ 129
Table 7 Radiocarbon dates at Halin.............................................................................. 134
Table 8 Dates for the ruling elite at Sriksetra 1 (after Blagden).............................................. 138
Table 9 Dates for the ruling elite at Sriksetra 2 (after San Win and Tun Aung Chain).................. 139
Table 10 Radiocarbon data, Otein Taung (Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, Sydney)......................................................... 209
Table 11 Construction at Bagan, by century, according to the modified Inventory of Monuments......... 236
Table 12 Resources committed to building at Bagan, 11th to 14th century, according to the modified Inventory of Monuments......................................................... 236
Table 13 Epigraphically dated buildings at Bagan according to the Inventory of Monuments............. 237
Table 14 Buildings at Bagan attributed to the 11th century by the Inventory of Monuments............. 243
Table 15 Some chronological markers at major urban sites, 2nd century BC to 14th century AD........ 263
Table 16 Myanmar Archaeological Settlement Database................................................. 271
Table 17 Myanmar thermoluminescence dates.............................................................. 281

Charts and electronic data CD-ROM.

A sleeve inside the back cover of this volume contains a CD-ROM and seven charts. On the CD, the folder called Databases contains two text files that can be opened in any mapping program such as MapInfo or ArcGIS, or in a spreadsheet program such as Excel.

bagan.txt is based on Inventory of Monuments at Pagan (Pichard 1992-2002) with extra data and modifications (as outlined in Chapter 7). myanmar.txt is the complete Myanmar Archaeological Settlement Database.
Foreword.

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This study grew out of a GIS (Geographical Information Systems) spatial analysis project, for which Pierre Pichard of L’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient generously provided some then-unpublished data from the Inventory of Monuments at Pagan, which effectively made all the archaeological data from this monumental work available for study. M. Pichard also kindly sent copies of his UNESCO survey maps, and back issues of the Pagan Newsletter, which had previously been unavailable in Australia.

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Roland Fletcher’s commitment of time, energy and ideas as supervisor of my thesis at the University of Sydney was both inspiring and challenging. It is significant that after digressions on my part that I have been assured often tend to accompany the early stages of a thesis, the thrust of the research came firmly back within the framework of study that Roland had initially suggested. Co-supervisor Mike Barbetti provided advice on the interpretation of radiocarbon dates, suggested essential research directions, and was constantly encouraging. The computer component has been aided greatly by advice from Ian Johnson and Andrew Wilson of the Archaeological Computing Laboratory/Spatial Science Innovation Unit. Formal seminar presentations of my research design to the Archaeology Department at the University of Sydney brought a wealth of useful suggestions, and I have benefited from informal discussions with Penelope Allison, Alison Betts, John Clegg and fellow postgraduates. Pamela Gutman has been a regular source of information, encouragement and proposals for avenues of research, and has supplied copies of aerial photographs of Bagan and the other major urban sites for stereoscopic analysis. She also kindly authorised my use in this thesis of unpublished thermoluminescence dates she had commissioned for a past project (see Appendix, page 281). David Price of the University of Wollongong supplied the thermoluminescence data from his laboratory files.

Access to resources has been greatly helped by the staff at Fisher Library at the University of Sydney, notably the team at the inter-library loans department, and also the staff at the library of the Archaeology Department in Yangon. Inch-to-the-mile maps supplied by the University of Western Australia were invaluable. I have had the benefit of regular correspondence and a field trip to Arakan with Michael Aung-Thwin, of the University of Hawai‘i. I am particularly grateful to him for providing a manuscript copy of his forthcoming book, The Mists of Ramanna, which has been a vital theoretical source. Shah Alam Mohammed Zaini, who has been researching early Sriksetra, has been a regular correspondent, a source of data and ideas and a participant in field trips to the Bagan hinterland. I have also had the benefit of exchanging and comparing site data with Ermelle Berliet, a fellow PhD candidate working on early Myanmar urbanism. Dietrich Mahlo shared his extensive knowledge of coins as we undertook field trips together to Maingmaw and some of the more obscure corners of Bagan. Janice Stargardt, Don Stadtner, Elizabeth Moore and Guy Lubeigt have regularly exchanged ideas with me by e-mail and at conferences. During the final stages of thesis preparation, Elizabeth Moore kindly read and commented in detail on a draft
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Field survey, excavations and database construction.

The research for this thesis began in 1998, after I had completed my B. A. (Honours) thesis which was essentially an analysis of the data from the Inventory of Monuments at Pagan (Pichard 1992-2002) using maps, aerial photographs, and field survey. This had involved using MapInfo, a computer-based GIS (Geographical Information Systems) method of creating analytical tools, including maps or graphs, from a relational database. During field trips I initiated the excavation of three sites in conjunction with colleagues from the Archaeology Department at Bagan, and was invited to participate in a fourth excavation. These were

- Yon Hlut Kyun, which resulted in the discovery of a rectangular brick compound and associated structural ruins in the eastern hinterland of Bagan (Hudson & Nyein Lwin 1999; Hudson, Nyein Lwin & Win Maung 2002; Hudson 2003b),
- Otein Taung, where a pottery production site within the Bagan monument zone was characterised and dated, and identified as having been active from the 9th century AD (Hudson, Nyein Lwin & Win Maung 2001), and
- Zi-o, where a furnace for producing bloom iron in an area that contained the remains of hundreds of furnaces was identified and studied structurally.

- In 2003, I was invited by the Bagan Archaeology Department to join in the excavation of a complex of structures within the walled centre of Bagan. My role included the production and analysis of a digital plan, and artifact analysis. The latter two excavations, hitherto unpublished, are dealt with in this thesis.

As my interest in the broader issues of the origins of Bagan grew, and I began to explore the notion that the history of the city was interwoven with earlier urban sites, some of which showed evidence of continuity from Late Prehistoric predecessors (Hudson 2001b, 2003c; Gutman & Hudson 2004), I visited the major Pyu sites of Halin, Maingmaw (Mongmao), Beikthano and Sriksetra, and a number of pre-urban cemetery sites in the Samon Valley, as well as conducting field surveys in the hinterland of Bagan, the Panlaung Valley, western Shan State and the lower Mu/Chindwin area. The major research tool for work in the macro scale, looking at sites within the Upper Burma region, and into neighbouring areas where appropriate, is an archaeological settlement database (Hudson 2001a, 2002), while the database used in my BA (Hons) thesis (Hudson 1997) has been
refined and expanded for analytical work at Bagan (see Electronic Data CD-ROM). Database compilation is discussed in detail in Appendix 1 (page 266).

**Terminology.**

There is no intention in this thesis either to use terminology that supports any political ideology, or conversely, to offend adherents of particular views on usage, although there is always the risk that in trying to please all, one ends up pleasing none. Myanmar and Burma, the country’s current and historical names, are generally used here relative to references in which the terms appear, as are all names that refer to documentary sources. Recent changes to placenames in Myanmar, which reflect an old tradition of multiple naming, renaming (Maung 1956) or duplicate naming, perhaps in Pali or Sanskrit as well as indigenous languages (ASB 1917 p.35), are dealt with by initially quoting both (or several) names, but relying in the main on the names that are most familiar from academic literature and/or maps. Some recently changed names that have become common international currency will be used in their new form. Bagan will generally be used instead of Pagan. The Burmese letter used to spell this word appears to transliterate more as a $B$ than a $P$, and it is useful to distinguish the placename from the English word “pagan”. Similarly, using Yangon for Rangoon reflects the phonetic shift from $r$ to $y$ that is seen in a number of Burmese words. The shift from *Mranma* to *Myanmar* is another instance.

**Calendrical systems.**

Dates for early Burma derive from several calendars, and all have been converted here to years BC or AD. Original dates may come from:

- The Buddhist or *sasana* (religion) calendar, which starts in 544 BC, the year in which Buddha is believed to have died.
- The *Saka* calendar of Gandhara, which starts in AD 78. This is called the *dodorasa* era in Myanmar, a mnemonic for 622, the number of years deducted in the *sasana* year 624 to introduce the new era, which for astrological/numerological reasons meant the era began in the year 2.
- The calendar of the North Indian *Gupta* dynastic era (c. AD 319-550), beginning in AD 319.
- The Burmese *Myanmar Era* calendar which starts in AD 638. This is known as the *khachapanca* era, a mnemonic for 560, as it was supposedly introduced by eliminating 560 years from the Saka era in AD 640 so the new era would begin, as had the *dodorasa*, in the year 2 (ASB 1911: 16, 1915: 20; Maung Hla 1923: 84).

There is also what some Burmese sources call the “short” era, commencing in 798 of the Myanmar Era, or AD 1436, which was used as a mode of reckoning in the 15th and 16th centuries. This has recently been dubbed the “Mohnyin Era”, which refers to a traditional story surrounding the adoption of the calendar (Eade 1995: 17). The English translators of the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (see page 24) at times used the term “short era”, somewhat confusingly, for what appears to be the Saka (Gandhara) calendar. They describe the founding of the first royal residence near Bagan as occurring “in the year 29, Short Era”, or AD 107 (Pe Maung Tin & Luce 1923: 28). The calendric eras commencing in AD 78 and AD 638 were used in Thailand, where they were known as the Mahasakaraja (Greater Era) and the Culasakaraja (Lesser Era) respectively (Wyatt 1976: 113). Culasakaraja is abbreviated to “sak” in “virtually all inscriptions of Pagan” (Aung-Thwin 2004
Chapter 8). The Gandharan Saka era remained standard in the Cambodian record, and is still in use in Sri Lanka where, for example, the program for the AD 2003 Kandy Esala Perahera festival was dated 2547 Buddhist Era and 1925 Saka Era (Neranjani Priyadarshana Dullewa Wijeyeratne 2003). The Mahasakaraja (Gandhara) calendar was effectively replaced in Burma and Thailand after the adoption of the Myanmar-Culasakaraja era. The south-east Asian calendrical system was a powerful and effective tool for recording historical events and predicting seasonal or astronomical cycles, and has at times provided valuable information on days and dates in inscriptions (Eade 1994: 1-19; Than Tun 2003a). The Myanmar calendar was part of a regional system of calendars for which Indian or Indianised astronomer/astrologers have generally been given the credit (Soni 1955: 58-70).

**Radiocarbon dating conventions.**

Radiocarbon dates, in which the base year of 1950 is taken as “present”, are quoted as “years BP ± error”, and then converted to a calibrated (cal) range of years AD (or BC) using current calibration data. The calibration program used is *OxCal* 3.9 (Bronk Ramsey 1995, 2001, 2002) and the calibration data is from INTCAL 98 (Stuiver, Reimer, Bard *et al.* 1998). Radiocarbon dates from Myanmar, including those for my own samples, have been recalibrated for this thesis using current calibration data, but the original laboratory dates and references are also provided.

**Technical notes.**

This thesis was produced using Microsoft Office 2003, the bibliographical program Endnote 7, and the GIS program MapInfo 7 on computers using Windows XP Professional. The location of archaeological sites is given in decimal longitude and latitude, the conventional form for GIS. Longitude and latitude of sites mentioned in the text is provided in an appendix (page 271) and in files on the accompanying CD-ROM. Sites at Bagan are located on the metric survey grid that was established for the *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan* (Pichard 1992-2002). Buildings at Bagan are described by their traditional names with transliterated English spellings according to the *Inventory*, and the *Inventory* number is given in parentheses. All measurements are metric unless specifically quoting imperial or traditional measurements from early documents. Photographs and drawings use a centimetre scale. Larger views may be shown against a one-metre ruler or a metric ranging post. All illustrations, maps and photographs are by the author unless credited otherwise.

**Title page credits.**

The three repoussé bronze artifacts on the title page, from left to right, are a Late Prehistoric coffin decoration from the Samon Valley (now in the Win Maung collection), a figure from the Pyu-era Khin Ba reliquary at Srikssetra (from Luce 1985) and a gilded Buddhist votary plaque of the Bagan period (now in the Bagan museum).