

Bagan Metropolis

July 9-15, 2017



SOAS
University of London

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Myanmar Costume Style in the Bagan Period

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ABSTRACT

This article uses evidence from wall paintings and inscriptions to show how the costumes of the Bagan people in *circa* the 11-13th century conveyed gender and rank. This is particularly seen in the dress of the king, queens and the royal family. Both domestic cotton and fabrics and imported silk and printed cloths were used.

Introduction

Clothes can be roughly divided into outer and inner upper and nether garments for the upper and lower parts of the body. Inscriptions, mural paintings, sculptures and reliefs, show that some items of clothing in the early Bagan period are similar to Indian clothing. The vocabulary of textiles and costume, however, used Myanmar words.

The Myanmar words for cloth (or fabric) and clothing (or clothes) are *athañ* and *awat* respectively. The most commonly used textile material of the Bagan period was *phyañ*, cotton fabric. The Myanmar word *phyañ* is a generic term with several types found in inscriptions. For example, *phyañ*,¹ *khasîpwayphyañ* (cotton cloth for a sarong),² *phyañ*, *phyañmañ* (black cotton cloth)³, *phyañnî* (red cotton cloth)⁴ were produced by dyeing, while *phyañphlû* (white cotton cloth)⁵ probably bleached. There was also *phyañmun* (fine cotton cloth).⁶ *Phyañ* was variously called cotton fabric, coarse cloth, *eingyi*⁷ or upper garment.⁸ There were upper garments made of *phyañ* and nether garments, *paso*: or *khachî*: for Myanmar men made of *pukhrañphyañ*,⁹ a kind of cotton fabric.¹⁰ A painting on cotton cloth of the early Bagan period shows a variety of garments as in the different words.¹¹

¹U Nyein Maung, *Shei-haung-Myanmar Kyauk-sa-mya* (Ancient Myanmar Inscriptions), Vol. I, Yangon, Archaeological Survey Department, 1972, p.147- line 11, p.246- line 29, p. 295- line 23, p.301- line 21, p. 308-line 42- p.313- line 15 (Henceforth: NyeinMaung, 1972)

²Nyein Maung, 1972, 308, lines 42-43

³Nyein Maung, 1972, 147, line 29, 301 line 8; 1983, p.316- line 15

⁴Nyein Maung, 1972, 147, line 29

⁵Nyein Maung, 1972, 245, line 22, 301 line 28

Bagan KyaukSarmya (Stone Inscriptions of Bagan), Caw Lha Wan: Pagoda Inscription, dated AD 1236, lines 15; Copied from Department of Myanmar Literature, Mandalay University, 1955, p.15 (Henceforth: Bagan KyaukSar, 1955)

⁶Nyein Maung, 1983, 269 line 14

⁷Myanmar Abeik-dan (Myanmar Dictionary), Yangon, Government of the Union of Myanmar, Ministry of Education, 1991, p.24

⁸U Po Latt, *Myanmar ZagaAhpwintKyan* (Exposition of Myanmar Language), Vol:II, Yangon, Pyinnya Nanda Press, 1963, p.142 (Henceforth: Po Latt, 1963)

⁹NyeinMaung 1972, 301 line 8

¹⁰ U Myat Kyaw, *Bagan khit Myanmar kyaukSarAbeik-dan* (Dictionary of Myanmar Inscriptions in Bagan period), Yangon, Sarpei beikhman, 2001, p. 134

¹¹Donald M. Stadtner, "*Fragmentary Cloth Paintings from Early Bagan and their*

Analysis of the mural paintings of the Bagan period show that imported clothing and cloth such as silk, satin, velvet, patterned fabrics, etc. were also used (Photo 1,2,3). Since the Pyu period (*circa* 2-9th century), Myanmar traded with Vietnam in the east, India in the west, China in the north, Malaysia and Indonesia in the south and other Southeast Asian countries.¹² The trade included imported textiles used in ritual and costume for many centuries. In the Bagan period, articles used in the ceremony of enshrining relics in the Mingalar Zedi during the reign King Narathihapate included those made of *phai* (satin), mauyau (a type of satin with both sides having the same texture made in China)¹³ and *kattipā* (velvet).¹⁴ The word *kattipā* is derived from an Arabic word *alqatifa- qadifa*.¹⁵ Thus we see the influence of trade in inscriptions and words brought into the Myanmar vocabulary.

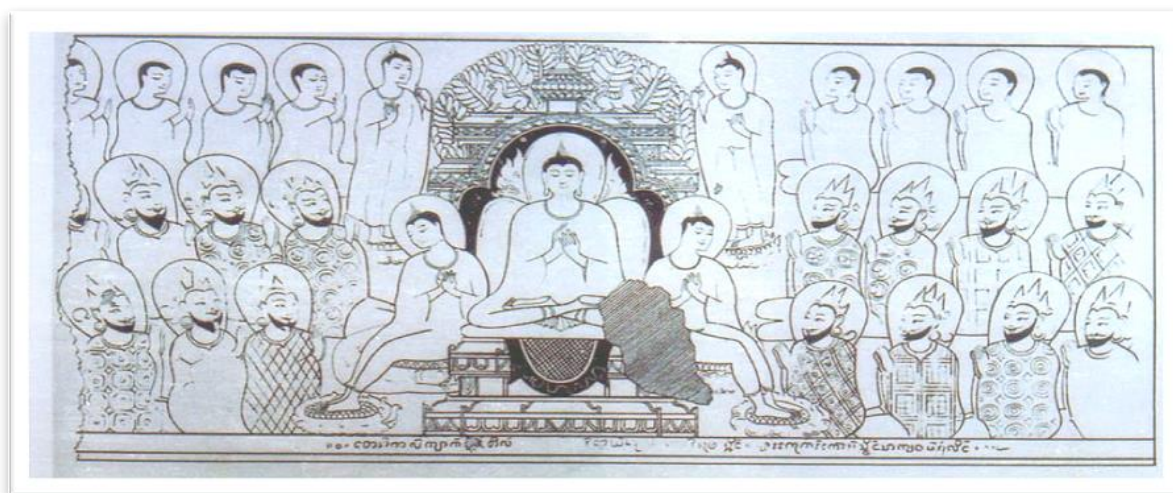


Photo 1 Kings in royal dress (after Luce 1970, plate 167b)

Relations with Indo-Tibetan Traditions for Art of Burma New Studies", Mumbai: J.J. Bhabha For Marg Publications, 1999, p.80

¹² U Yee Sein, "Pyu-khit- Myanmar-Naingngan-ei- Naing-ngan- cha- hset- hsan-ye" (Pyu relations with China), Naingngan-Themaing Thutethana Journal, Vol IV, 1979, p-35 (Hence forth: Yee Sein, 1979)

¹³Thein Hlaing, *Khithaung Myanmar ThamaiThutethanaabeik-dan*(Dictionary of historical terminology) Yangon, Tetkatho press, 2002, p.128 (Henceforth: Thein Hlaing, 2002)

¹⁴U Kala, *Maha Rajawaḍkri* (The Great Chronicle), Vol.I, Yangon, Hanthawady press, 1960, p.297 (Henceforth: Kala, 1960 a)

¹⁵ U Tha Myat, "Awut-ahte-mya-e-khit-haung-khit-thitwohara-mya", (Old and New Terms on Clothing)". Culture Journal, Vol.III, No.7 April 1960, p.83 (Henceforth ThaMyat 1960).

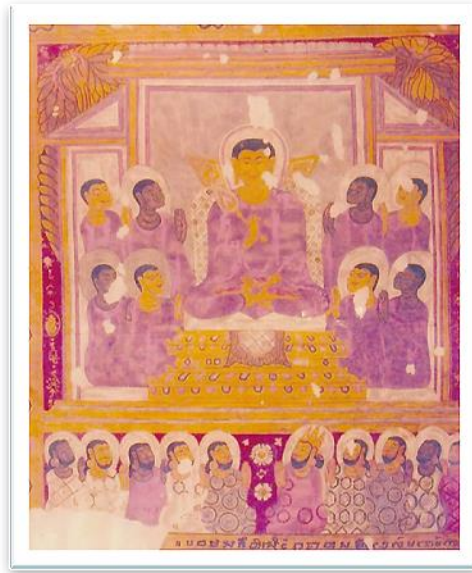


Photo 2 The King and his Ministers (after Archaeological Survey Department)



Photo 3 The King and his Ministers (after Archaeological Survey Department)

Thus, the people of Bagan period used not only local made cotton fabrics, but also imported fabrics to keep up with the times. Myanmar traditional clothing was handed down from the Bagan period to later generations. This is seen for example in wearing of an *eingyi* (upper garment/ shirt, coat, jacket). *Paso* and *htamein* (lower garments for men and women). The terms *ein-gyi*, *paso* and *htamein* might evoke a controversy over their originality in Myanmar terminology. However, the study of mural paintings of Bagan period shows the custom of wearing different costumes according to different social strata of the royal families, the royal circle, the upper class and the common people. In the history

of Myanmar, the king held absolute power and sovereignty of the kingdom. The king was the chief administrator for local and foreign affairs, as well as the crown of the kingdom. Thus the royal costume for His Majesty can be distinguished from the costumes of all the other ranks.

Upper garments of the king, princes and ministers of the Bagan period

Bagan mural paintings of successive periods, represented a king, a member of the royal circle or upper class wearing a crown or a crested head-dress, a string of beads around his neck, bangles, crested cuffs, ear-drops and a stole. The king wore a long upper garment flowing down below the waist called a *wuttlon* (robe)¹⁶. As in the mural painting of the Patothamya Temples illustrating the Miracles of the Buddha, among the figures of the devotees were included monks and human figures wearing head-dresses and *wuttlon* upper garments. (Photo 1) Since all the human figures wore head-dresses, it is uncertain whether all those audiences represented kings or members of the royal family. However, the Bagan mural paintings in the Myingaba-Gupyaukgyi Temple illustrating the First and the Second Buddhist Synod, only the figure wearing the crested head-dress and *wuttlon* garment can be assumed to represent the king while the other figures wearing the *wuttlon* garments might represent princes. (Photo 2, 3) This, therefore, distinguished the king from the princes. Moreover, in the mural painting illustrating the Second Synod some figures wore *wuttlon* garments while others wore no upper garments, but ear-drops, bangles, a stole or shawl and loin clothes. The mural painting depicts a religious ceremony. According to the different complexions of those figures wearing loin clothes, they might represent Brahmins or Huyas announcing the propitious time for the consecration. In the mural painting of the Patothamya Temple, one noteworthy point about the human figure with clasped hands wearing a *wuttlon* garment is that the special flap of the upper garment round the neck might be the beginning of the design of the Round-the-Neck Flap (*lei-kwetaw*). (Photo 4) From the Bagan period, therefore, social strata determined costume with special costumes and regalia for the king and princes only.

Various patterns were found in the *wuttlon* garments of king of Bagan period. (Figure 1, 2) Since only cotton fabric or *phyañ* was woven locally, pui, *phai* and *kattipā* garments with floral motifs, spots, chequered and line patterns might have been imported. Besides these, plain *wuttlon* garments with no design were also worn. (Photo 1, 2) People of the upper class wore these garments in ceremonies; they were not woven of cotton fabric or local-made *phyañ* but plain silk and satin exported from other countries.

¹⁶ *Myanmar Abeik-dan Akyin Choke* (Concise Myanmar Dictionary) Vol.IV, Yangon, SarpayBeikman Press, 1980, p.164 (Henceforth: Abeik-danAkyin Choke, 1980).



Figure (1) Motifs on upper garments for men from Lokahteikpan temple mural paintings, Bagan (drawings by the author)

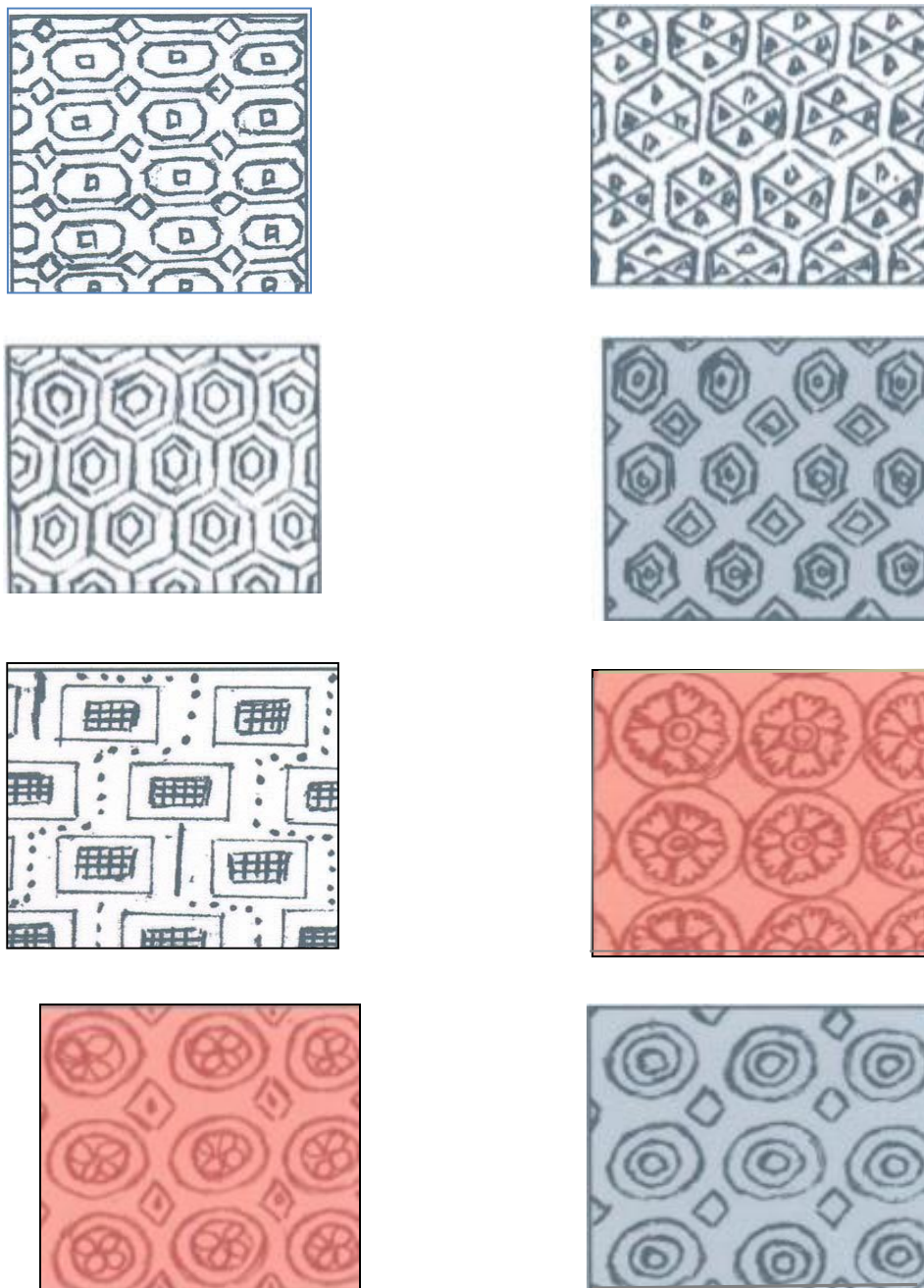


Figure (2) Motifs on upper garments for men, Patothamya temple mural paintings, Bagan (drawings by the author)

Wuttlon was mostly worn at special religious ceremonies in the Bagan and Post-Bagan period. These included the coronation, the patronage-accepting ceremony, the obeisance-paying ceremony, the laying of foundation for a new palace, entertainment and burial services. In the Patothamya Temple murals, a figure wearing a long robe with floral pattern was depicted. (Photo 5) The figure is of significance because even though it did not bear a caption, it clearly shows the king wearing a head-dress, round pendant earrings with the long robes and

crested cuffs of the *wuttlon*. The garment had crests over the shoulders illustrating what may be the beginning of the flame-like epaulette ceremonial jacket for kings and princes from the Bagan period. An inscription of the *Gava Temple* (A.D 1058) includes an expression, *duyin-ta-hte* (one epaulette)¹⁷ whereas an Inscription of *Na Rok Sa and wife*, dated in (A.D 1296) includes *Duyin Thone-hte* (three epaulettes)¹⁸. One record dating to the reign of king Narathu states that a *duyin* garment, or epaulette, with a front opening could be worn.¹⁹ Hence, kings of Bagan period wore two types of *duyin* (a kind of official frockcoat), a pullover or a front-opening type. Since the word *duyin* dates to A.D 1058, a new type different from the *wuttlon* garment may have come into existence as a special garment for king and people of the upper class. Although the designs of costumes worn by the king and the princes might be similar, the king's royal costume could have been a superior quality fabric.

In the reign of king Hti-lai, when a new palace was founded on 11 November 1101, officers of high and low ranks attending the auspicious ceremony wore inner short garment and long jacket.²⁰ The inner short garment refers to an inner vest or straight jacket while the long jacket refers to a *thoyin* or ceremonial robe worn by princes and ministers with loose, long-sleeved ceremonial robe flowing down below the waist.²¹ This suggests that the *thoyin* robe was worn by ministers even in the Bagan period.

The term *ein-gyi* in Myanmar derived from the Hindi word *angiya*.²² The *in-gi* was first seen on two faces of an inscription of A.D 1341.²³ The Bagan mural paintings illustrating figures of the Buddha, Bodhisattva, monks and celestial being or guardians, the king and people of the upper class all wore loose, long-sleeved garments and robes (Photo 6, Figure 3) and a short-sleeved vest or straight jacket (Photo 7, Figure 4). The patterned cotton fabrics were worn in short sleeved vests (Photo 8, Figure 5). In summary, from the Bagan period, the garments of the king and upper class people included *wuttlon*, *duyin*, *thoyin* (Figure 6) and *eingyi*. One can assume that the short-sleeved blouse and long- sleeved garments were referred to as *eingyi* in Bagan period. It was in the later periods

¹⁷NyeinMaung, 1972, 32, line 54

¹⁸NyeinMaung, 1983, 184, line 14

¹⁹Daw Saw Hmon Nyin, *Myanmar-amyo-thami-Hsin-yin-htone-phwe-hmu*("costumes and styles of Myanmar women") Yangon, SarpayBeikman Press, 1989, p.24 (Henceforth: Saw HmonNyin, 1989)

²⁰Dr. Than Tun, "Hti-Lai-min", (Hti-Lai II), Kalyar Magazine, No.151 September 1997,p.20 (Henceforth: Than Tun, Htilaimin, 1997)

²¹Thein Hlaing, 2002, 189

²²ThaMyat, 1960,84

²³U NyeinMaung, *Shei-haung-Myanmar Kyauk-sa-mya*(Ancient Myanmar Inscriptions), Vol. IV, Yangon, Archaeological Survey Department, 1998 a, p.34- line 12 (Henceforth: NyeinMaung, 1998 a)

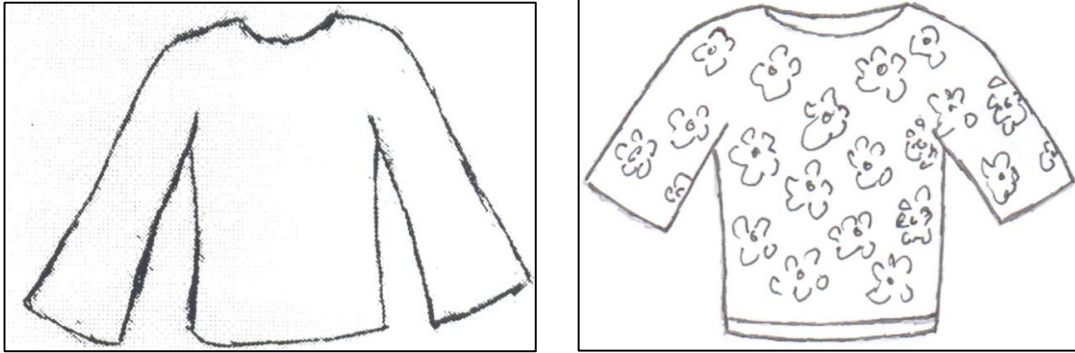
that all upper garments were called *eingyi*. Moreover, it is assumed that the king and people of upper class wore sleeveless vest or strait jackets.



Photo (4) Buddhist devotee (after Luce, *Old Burma Early Bagan*, 1970, Plate-166); Photo (5) A King, Patothamya Temple (after Than Tun, 2002, p.139)



Photo (6) Buddhist monks, Abeyatana (after Luce, 1970, Plate 239b); Photo (7) Celestial Beings, Abeyatana (after Luce, 1970, Plate 234e)



Styles of upper garments for men

Figure (3) loose-long sleeved garment; Figure (4) short- sleeved vest

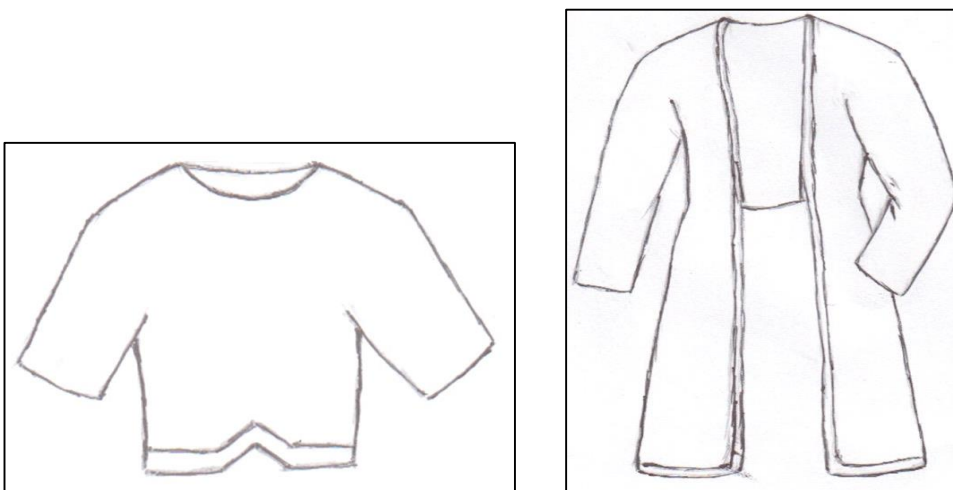


Figure (5) short- sleeved vest; Figure (6) Thoyin or ceremonial robe worn by princes and ministers (drawings by the author)

Lower garments of the king, princes and persons in royal service in the Bagan period

As lower garments of the Bagan period, the most common from the king to the common people was the *khaci* or lower garment/ girdle cloth²⁴ and *paso* or lower garments for men²⁵. The words *khaci* and *paso* are for fabrics or clothes wrapped around the waist.²⁶ According to evidence from inscriptions, the principal lower garment for Bagan, ranging from the king to those of the Upper class, was *paso*. No exact evidence has yet been discovered, showing the origin of this term, first seen in the Bagan period. *Paso* may have been derived from *Pukhrañ*²⁷, which often occurs in inscriptions.

²⁴Bagan KyaukSar, 1955, 15; Nyein Maung, 1972, 301 line 19

²⁵Nyein Maung, 1972, 77 line 17, 147 line 32

²⁶Po Latt, 1963, 58

²⁷Nyein Maung, 1972, 245, line 22

There is a Myanmar expression to "men in the royal service wearing the twenty-cubit-long cloth", referring to the lower garment worn by king, princes and men in royal service in former times. It is uncertain when that expression was first used. However, the term suggests that the type of *Paso* worn by king and people of the upper class was not sewn, but wrapped around the waist. As such, it was a kind of *Taungshe Paso* or double length men's longyi. Since Indian men wear the dhoti and the costumes of the Bagan period were influenced by Indian styles, Myanmar people may have worn the *paso* as the dhoti is worn, wrapped around their waist. Mural paintings in the Ngamyet-*hna* Temple illustrate the lower garment of the Bodhisattva seated in a temple as wearing a dhoti, the lower garment of Indian men. (Figure 9). According to a saying that "The Loincloth of a king is solely woven with silk," the *paso* of His Majesty can be assumed to mostly be made of silk. Although there is no exact date for this saying, since there had been a close relationship between China and Myanmar even in the Pyu period, it is reasonable to propose that kings of Bagan wore a silk *paso*. The price of *paso* were recorded on the obverse and two faces of an Inscription near the *Lawka Shwebonthar Pagoda* dated AD 1319, reading "*paso* that cost fifteen kyats, *paso* that cost five kyats".²⁸ These prices showed that different qualities of *Paso* were sold.

When the king and princes wore a short robe (or) *wuttlon* they wore *khaci* or waist cloth as an inner lower garment. (Figure 10). One mural painting found inside the *Phayathonzu* Temple illustrates the Bodhisattva wearing a loincloth as lower garment and a thin cloth with floral patterns to cover the body. (Figure 11) The obverse of an inscription of Maha Tenapati Anandathu Maung-nan dated AD 1223, included the expression, "*Kriy Khrañ khak é*" or woven in kye-chi-cotton.²⁹ Therefore it seems that there existed craftsmen for gold, silver, copper and iron filigree thread work. Since Bagan period people knew the art of embroidery, the *pasos* bore gold embroidered floral patterns. Valuable *pasos* of high quality were to be worn by the king and the people of the upper class. In AD. 1101, in the reign of king *Hti-lai*, officers of high and low ranks engaged in the service of constructing a new palace wore white *pasos*, with the white colour implying auspiciousness.³⁰ It can be assumed, that the king and the people of the upper class mostly wore a gold embroidered white cotton fabric.

Upper garments for the queen and upper class ladies of the Bagan period

In the early Bagan period, the queen and ladies of the upper class generally wore *yinsi*, a strapless bodice worn under a chemise. According to the mural paintings, two types of *yinsi* can be found in the Bagan period. In the Loka-hteik-pan

²⁸ Nyein Maung, 1983, 280, line 15, 16, 17

²⁹ Nyein Maung, 1972, 152, line 12

³⁰ Than Tun, 1997, 20

Temple, mural paintings include figures of women going down to fetch water at river-side wearing no jacket but a *yinsi* which resembled a modern strapless bra.



Photo (8) Celestial Being, Abeyatana Temple (after Luce, 1970, Plate 239a);
Photo (9) Bodhist-Sattva, Ngamyet-hna (after Archaeological Survey Department, Yangon)



Photo (10) Buddhist Devotee, Patothamya Temple (after Luce, 1970, Plate- 166);
Photo (11) Bodhisattva and Retinue, Phaya-thone-zu (after Shei Yo Pachi, 1966, p.37)

In another mural painting, the figure of the Queen *Yathodaya* wore a head-dress and a *yinsi* which was just a piece of cloth wrapped around the breasts.(Figure 13) The bodice had spotted and striped patterns and may refer to that of the

queen. The term *eingyi* came into use in the late Bagan period, with the mural paintings of this period depicting short-sleeved, strait jackets. In other words, the wearing of a variety of *yinsi* was replaced by the *ko-kyat* or tightly fitted body garments. According to mural painting of the Abeyadana temple, some *ko-kyat* reached to the waist while others were above the waist level. (Photo 14, Figure 7). It can be assumed that it was waist-level and body-tight. In another mural painting found in this temple, a Hindu goddess wore short-sleeved-jacket above waist level (Photo 15, Figure 8). Some costumes had patterns, while others were plain. Some upper garments had gold embroidery. In the reign of king Narathu, the courtiers, as well as dramatic art performers, wore open-fronted *duyin eingyis*.³¹ While women wore *yinsi* and pullover *ko-kyat* in the early Bagan period, open-fronted jackets gained popularity in the late Bagan period. Women of those days might also have worn *Duyin* and loose, long-sleeved *eingyi* like men.

Lower garments for the queen and upper class ladies of the Bagan period

Women of the Bagan period mostly wore a *Sari* similar to the lower garment for Indian women with girdles of various designs worn around the waist. Besides, some women tied scarves hanging down from the shoulder. Women wore not only the *Sari* but also trousers with a thin cloth over it, like a long skirt. (Figure 16)

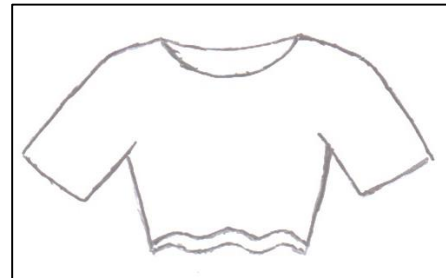
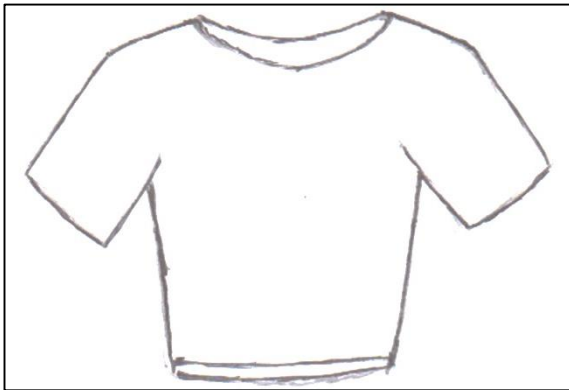


Photo (12) Women and Their dress style, Loka Hteik Pan, Bagan (after Archaeological Survey Department, Yangon)

³¹Saw Hmon Nyin, 1989, 24



Photo (13) Queen Yathodaya, Loka Hteik Pan (after Luce, 1970, Plate-353c);
 Photo (14) Queen and Maids of Honour, Abeyatana, Bagan (after Luce, 1970, Plate-217d)



Styles of Upper Garment for Women

Figure (7) waist level body tight; Figure (8) above waist level body tight
 (drawings by the Author)



Photo (15) Hindu goddess (after Luce, *Old Burma Early Bagan*, 1970, Plate-232j)



Photo (16) A group of Women in Procession, Nadamanya Pagoda (after Shei Yo Pachi, 1966, p.38)

In the two-face inscription of *Miñ: MatU diñsKrī* monastery dated AD 1288, the reverse bore an expression "*taphi*".³² From this it can be assumed that the Myanmar term *hta-mein* or woman's skirt came into use in A.D 1288 as in the expression "*taphikanlon 2 Hte*"³³, which can be interpreted as the lower garment or *lon-gwin* that women wear. Moreover, there was a lower garment for Bagan period women called *htamein-nan-gwe*, a type of *htamein* to be wrapped around the waist.³⁴ It appeared that the long Sari was adapted to what was called *thone tone-wut* or three-cubit-long *htamein* according to Myanmar culture and the style of Myanmar women.

Today Myanmar women wear a lower garment or sewn *htamein* of four cubits or six inches short of four cubits in length. In the Bagan period, women mostly wore a *tanbima* ordark-coloured *htamein*, or for ladies of the upper class,

³²Nyein Maung, 1998 a, 14, line 14

³³Nyein Maung, 1998 a, 273, line 10

³⁴Saw Hmon Nyin, 1989, 24

a good quality *tanbibumon*³⁵ or white htamein with gold embroidery. Bagan period wore the *Sari* or long skirt, the *pat-htamein*, skirt to be wrapped around the body and the *gwin htamein* or stitched htamein female loincloth and trousers. The ladies of the upper class wore not only spotted patterns but a double-layered triangle with a coloured spot between two horizontal lines, circular spots, various designs inside circles, and large wavy pattern called *kyogyi-cheik* and wavy pattern, but also modern wavy patterns. (Figure 9, 10) The term "*cheik*" was not used to refer to the costume of the Bagan period, but the wavy pattern that already existed in that time. The mural painting of *Mahayan-gang* inside the *Abeyatana Temple* illustrates the *htamein* worn by a goddess, which had the *kyogyicheik* pattern (Photo 17) while the *htamein* of another goddess also had wavy patterns of *cheik* (photo 15). Moreover, a mural painting found in the *Pathothamyia temple* depicts a scene in which people paid obeisance to the *Royal Hermit*, the *Bodhisattva*.



Photo (17) Hindu Goddess (after Luce, *Old Burma Early Bagan*, 1970, Plate-231i)

³⁵Nyein Maung, 1998 a, 273, line 10,



Photo (18) King Suddhodana and Royal Hermit, Patothamya Temple, Bagan
(after Luce, Old Burma Early Bagan, 1970, Plate-167a)

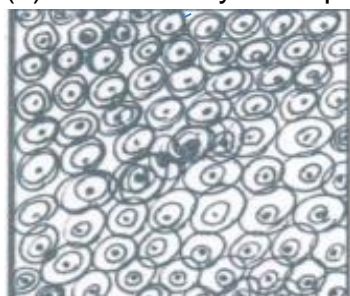
Textile Patterns



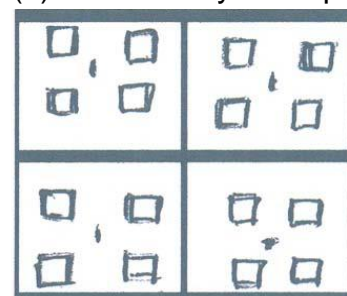
(a) Nandamanya Temple



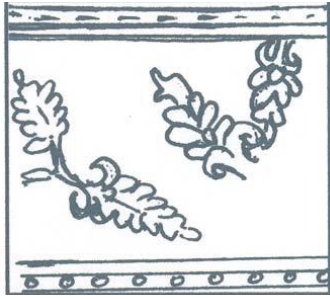
(b) Nandamanya Temple



(c) Nandamanya Temple



(d) Nandamanya Temple



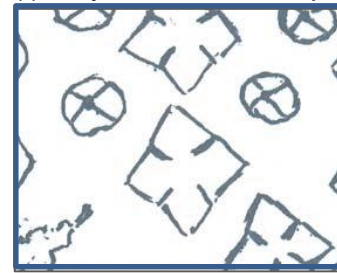
(e) Payathonezu Temple



(f) Payathonezu Temple

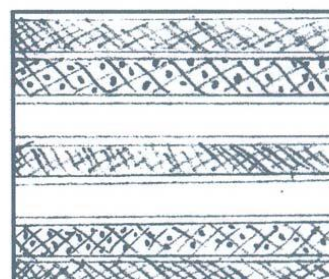
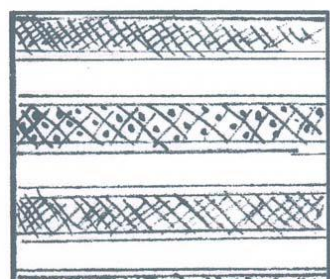
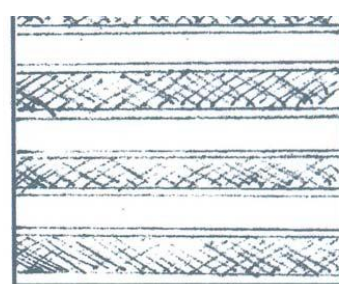
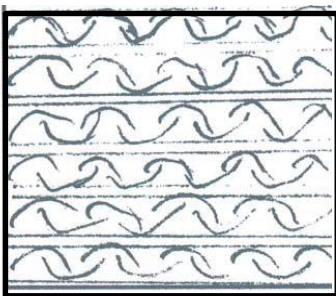
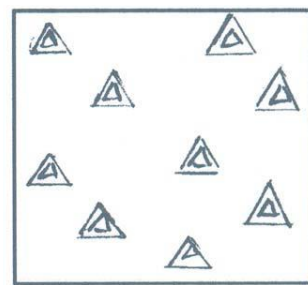
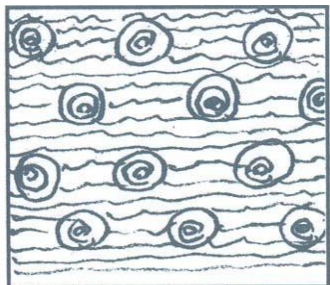


(g) Payathonezu Temple



(h) Payathonezu Temple

Figure (9 a, b, c, d) lower Garments for women, NandamanyaTemples, Bagan;
(9e, f, g, h) PayathonezuTemples, Bagan (drawings by the Author)



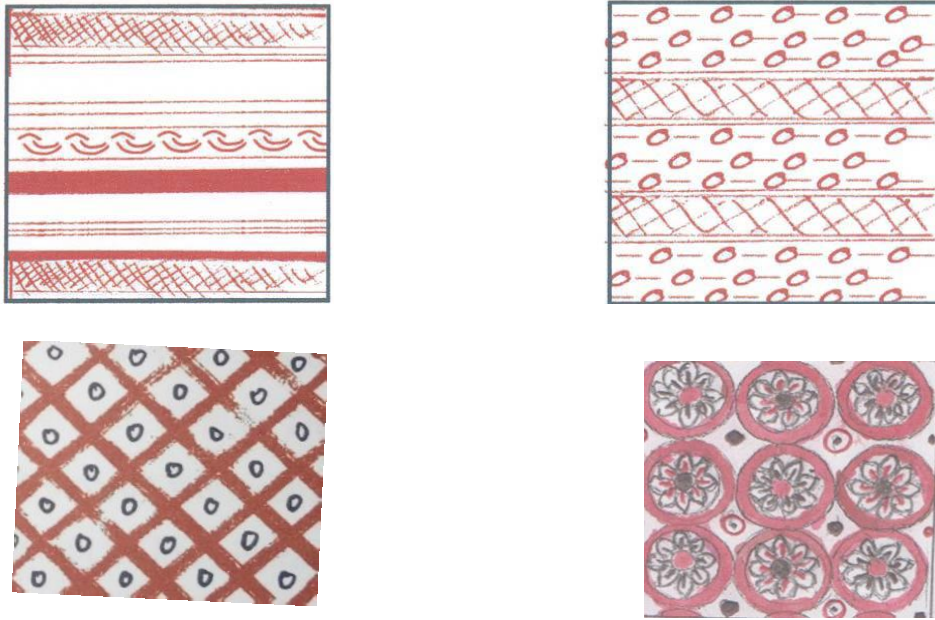


Figure (10) Lower Garments for Women found in Abeyadana temple, Bagan

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Bagan period king and princes wore *wuttlon*, *duyin* and *tho-yin* as upper garments. The most common *wuttlon* had with a hole in the neck, resembling an umbrella or poncho. As lower garments, the most common were the *khaci* or waist cloth or loincloth and *dohti* similar to the lower garment for Indian men. The queen and ladies of the upper class wore a strapless bodice as upper garments and then in the later period, a straight-jacket and loose body garments, reflecting the evolving of the culture. In other words, they wore the *Yinsi* or strapless bodices and *ko-kyat* or body-tight upper garment. Women began to wear long garments resembling *sari*, long skirt, short skirt, trousers, *pat-htamein* and *gwin-htamein*. The royal costumes of the king, the queen and ladies, the royal family, royal service men and the people of the upper class were distinguished according to the gold and silver embroidery patterns. The costumes of good quality in a variety of colours with floral design belonged only to the king and the people of the upper class.

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