

On *Rupcumkyon*
**: Monasteries with Sculptures at Sale, Salin,
Legaing and Saku in Magway Region, Myanmar**

Khin Thidar*

I. Introduction

Rupcumkyon: means Monastery with sculptures. It is decorated with beautiful wood-carvings. There are many *Rupcumkyon*: - Monasteries with sculptures in Magway Region. But some were ruined and some are preserved and maintained still today. Most of the monasteries were built in Radanapon Period. But some are constructed in early Colonial Period. Nobilities and wealthy persons donated these monasteries to their learned Sayadaws. This paper studies on *Rupcumkyon*: at Sale, Salin, Legaing and Sagu in Magway Region.

II. *Rupcumkyon*: at Sale

Sale is situated on the eastern bank of the Ayeyawady and included in Chauk Township, Magway Region. Sale *Rupcumkyon*: lies on the right side of entrance road of town. This monastery was built in 1882 and the donors were U Bo Kyi and his wife Daw Shwe Thet (Maung

* Lecturer, Department of History, University of Yangon, Myanmar.
khinthidar255@gmail.com.

Maung Latt 1997: 3). They dedicated to give this monastery to *Suddhamma* Gainghtauk Sayadaw U Guna who presided in turn at Gainghtauk Kan Forest Monastery in Htaukchekan Village, 6 miles from southeast of Sale and Kosaung Monastery in Sale (Maung Maung Latt 1997: 3). To bear the building year in mind easily, there is a verse that “aungkyawhla win¹⁾ yoke sonekhinn – sculptures were decorated in 1244 ME”.



Figure 1 Sale Rupcumkyon

Sale *Rupcumkyon*: is also called as *Aimtoaupumkyon*: because it looks like the house of Crown Prince.²⁾ It has four stairways. In Konbaung Period, monasteries were allowed to construct with the permission of kings and the style and form of monasteries was restricted. It seems that Sale *Rupcumkyon*: as built like *Aimtoau* under the king’s permission because it is supporting for Gainghtauk Sayadaw and the donor was wealthy person. It was built in 1882 and completed in 1892. The time of construction lasted for ten years because of the

¹⁾ Myanmar alphabets have own numbers. Ah represents 1; ka, kha, ga, gha, nga represent 2; ca, cha, ja, jha, nya represent 3; ya, ra, la, wa represent 4; pa, pha, ba, bha, ma represent 5; sa (tha), ha represent 6 and ta, tha (hta), da, dha, na represent 7. Thus Aung means 1, kyaw means 2, hla and win means 4. So aungkyawhla win means 1244.

²⁾ Crown Prince’s House is called *Aimtoau* in Myanmar word.

deposing of King Theebaw.

When U Bo Kyi submitted to King Theebaw that he would build to donate *Rupcumkyon*., the King allowed him to extract teak logs from forest without tax. By Royal Order, U Bo Kyi sent wood cutters to cut down the teak at the edge of Rakhine Yoma. Then he asked to build carpenters and architects from Tanyaung Village³⁾ who were skilful in building wood monastery (Tin Chone et.al: 1-2).

Sale *Rupcumkyon*: is 152 feet in length and 76 feet in width. The architects used 154 pillars in construction. Each pillar has a circumference of about 5 feet. Among the nails which used in building monastery, the longest nail is thirteen inches in length and the shortest nail is one and half inches in length. Sale *Rupcumkyon*: is comprised of seven rooms. They are a shrine room – pyathat-saung, sanu-saung – intermediate room, saung-pu, saung-hla,⁴⁾ saung-ma⁵⁾ – main room, khone-saung and anaunk-saung – west room. In addition to these rooms, there is bhoga-saung – store room which is formed into compartment at the west of main room. There are corridors and roofless balcony around the rooms (Mg Mg Latt 1997: 4-5). Sandstone caps protect the veranda posts from the vagaries of the weather. These sandstone caps were carved as the sculptures of prince, zawgyi – the alchemist who possesses supernatural powers, gambi and kainnayi-mythical bird with human head and torso and so on. These reliefs show skilful art in stone sculpture. The ceiling was also decorated with floral arabesque.

³⁾ This village is included in Sale Township at that time.

⁴⁾ It is also called Jetawan Saung .Boxes for storing palm-leaf manuscripts and *parabaiks* are placed in this room.

⁵⁾ It is also called Yuan Saung.



Figure 2 Zawgyi



Figure 3 Nayas

Sale *Rupcumkyon*: has four stairways, two on the north side and two on the south. Handrail was decorated in the form of a pair of naya – mythical animal.

Nayas of north side opened their mouth and those of the south closed their mouth. It seems that these figures are made to distinguish from up to down of stairways. Sculptures were put on balustrades of northern side of monastery. Moreover, at the entrance, leaves of a door are also decorated with sculptures. These are illustrations of extract from 550 *Jataka* stories and *Dhammapada*.

The illustrations are:

1. *Anatapin* rich man and guardian spirit of door (*Dhammapada – Papa Vagga*),
2. *RahanUpaka* and Ma *Sapa's* family (*Dhammapada – Tanha Vagga*),
3. Corner shop in Radanapon Period,
4. Buddha staying at the stone cave of *Gijjagut* Mountain,
5. Prince and *Nagama* - Female Serpent (*BuridatJataka – 550 MahaNipatta* No. 543),
6. killing the princesses (*CulapadumaJataka – 550 DukaNipatta* No. 193),
7. Merchant and Naga King (*PakinnakaNipatta, Mahavanija Jataka* No. 493),

8. *Sivi King and Ummadanti* (550 *Pannasa Nipatta*, No. 527),
9. *Mahadhana Richman* (*Peta Vatthu*),
10. *Vidhura* (550 *Maha Niapatta* No. 546),
11. *Seducing to AshinSundarasamudda* (*Dhammapada – Brahmana Vagga*),
12. *Khadat tree - crataevareligiosa and lazy man* (550 *EkaNipatta, Varuna Jataka* No. 71),
13. *Kinnaradevi and Nga Swan – dumb man* (550 *AsitiNipatta, MahakunalaJataka* No. 536),
14. *Kilesa Cage – Cage of Passion and Evil Desire*,
15. *Upatissa and Kolita* participating in *Taunghteik Festival* (*Dhammapada – YamanaJataka*),
16. *Ma Pata and Ko Dasa* (*Dhammapada – SahassaVagga*),
17. *Jotika and Atulakayi* (*Dhammapada – BrahmanaVagga*),
18. *Wiseman and Ex-monk*,
19. *Return of Ashin Revata* after wedding ceremony (*Dhammapada – Rahanda Vagga*),
20. *Censure of committing sensuality.*



Figure 4 Anatapin



Figure 5 Rahan Upaka



Figure 6 Corner shop in Radanapon Period



Figure 7 Buddha staying at the stone cave of *Gijjaqut* Mountain



Figure 8 Prince and Nagama



Figure 9 killing the princesses



Figure 10 Merchant and Naga King



Figure 11 Sivi King and Ummadanti



Figure 12 Mahadhana Richman



Figure 13 Vidhura



Figure 14 Seducing to Ashin Sundarasamudda



Figure 15 Khadat tree



Figure 16 Kinnaradevi
and Nqa Swan



Figure 17 Kilesa Cage



Figure 18 Upatissa and Lolita



Figure 19 Ma Pata and Ko Dasa



Figure 20 Jotika and Atulakayi



Figure 21 Wiseman and Ex-monk



Figure 22 Return of Ashin Revata after wedding ceremony



Figure 23 Censure of committing sensuality

These illustrations give the knowledge on moral and religious precepts. Moreover, there are the figurines of Prince on Lotus Pedestal, Myanmar Loom and An Ape and Princess but it is difficult to identify them which *Jatakas* are referred. These sculptures depict the art of sculpture, costume and adornment, and socio-economy of Radanapon Period.



Figure 24
Myanmar Loom



Figure 25
Sale Rupcumkyon at Salin

III. *Rupcumkyon*: at Salin

Salin is situated at the right side of Salin creek and distant about six miles from Ayeyawady River. Nobilities built to donate religious monuments at Salin and surrounding area. Natives said that there are twelve *Rupcumkyon*: in Salin but only one had left at present. It is called *Mroklesan Rupcumkyon*:. This monastery is located at the east of Shangone Village, Salin (Candima 2007: 82, 90-91). Daw Pu who descended from nobility built it to donate in 1868 (Nay Lin 2007: 12). *Rupcumkyon*: has lasted for 145 years.



Figure 26 Naga

Salin *Rupcumkyon*: has three rooms, viz. Pyattat Saung, Sanu Saung and Jetawun Saung. It also looked like Pakhan Kyaungtawgyi which was donated by Kyiwun U Toke in 1868. In construction, 245 pillars are used; 80 pillars in Jetawun Saung, 25 pillars in Pyattat Saung, 14 pillars in Sanu Saung and 126 pillars of balustrade. Because of weather and natural disaster, 30 pillars had ruined and 215 pillars still remain (Field Survey on 16 February 2013). The circumference of the biggest pillar is four feet ten inches and the smallest is two feet ten inches. The pillars around the bottom of monastery are decorated with naga figures. Each of the corners has two figures and there are altogether 54 figures. *Rupcumkyon*: is 178 feet in length from east to west and 90 feet in width from north to south. Pyattat Saung is 125 feet in height up to diamond bulb and 59 feet in width. Sanu Saung is 30 feet and Jetawun Saung is 60 feet in height. As Pyattat Saung is a shrine room, a Buddha image is placed in it. The style and posture of

image is sitting cross leg posture, *Bhumiphassa Mudra* and *Jana Asana*. The Buddha image including pedestal and ornamental backdrop are carved out of a single teak log. Unlike Sale *Rupcumkyon*., *Mroklesan Rupcumkyon*: has six stairways and three at the north and the other three at the south. They are made of brick and have seventeen treads in each. Each of the stairways is sixteen feet and six inches in length.

At Pyattat Saung, the doors are on the north, south and east and they are five feet nine inches in height and two feet seven inches in width. The windows have the measurement of 15x11½ inches in each. There are six windows in this monastery. Moreover, there is *kela*: -door which is hinged at the top in Sanu Saung and Jetawun Saung except Pyattat Saung. *Kela*: is eight feet four inches high and six feet eight inches long.

There are 111 sculptures in Salin *Rupcumkyon* 30 on the north, 27 on the south, 7 on the east, 15 on the west and 32 at the tier upon tier of Pyattat Saung. Among them, some cannot be clearly examined to see what stories they tell. But it can be assumed that these sculptures depict the Life of the Buddha and the scenes from extracts of 550 *Jataka*.



Figure 27 The scenes from extracting of 55 Jataka

IV. *Rupcumkyon:* at Legaing

Under surveying, *Rupcumkyon:s* existed in different parts of Magway Region. There is also a *Rupcumkyon:* in Legaing Village near Sagu. The monastery was built in 1890 by Myo Ok U An Taw and Daw Taw. It is also called *Tonū: Kyon:*. The monastery was built at a cost of 17.5 baskets of sliver (Nyo Nyo Lay 1977: 27; Ant Kyi Hein, 3).⁶⁾ Food and accommodation for workers were also provided by the donor. The headman of Ka-ni, who was a relative of U An Taw, provided a team of elephants free of charge to transport the 214 teak logs for pillars from the forests of Upper Myanmar from the river to the construction site. The donor desired the best sculptors available for this monastery, so he hired the services of the Myanmar master architect Hsaya Hmangyi of Mandalay who brought with him twenty artisans familiar with Myanmar court sculpture. These artisans were granted the fees requested and were given accommodation while the monastery was under construction. The building took nearly ten years to complete (Nyo Nyo Lay 1977: 27).

Legaing *Rupcumkyon:* has Pyattat Saung, Sanu Saung, Saung Magyi and Bhoga Saung. This monastery also has surrounding veranda and eight stairways, one each on the east and west sides and three each on the north and south sides. Unfortunately, intermediate room and the main hall are currently habitable. The Pyattat and Bhoga Saung have collapsed, so it is difficult to accurately gauge the size of the monastery (Field Survey on 16 February 2013 and 23 June 2013). There is also a small pavilion on the north-west side.

⁶⁾ The cost of monastery is different, some describe as 30 baskets of sliver and other describe as 45 baskets. (Taikkatho Nyo Nyo Lay described the cost as 30 baskets of sliver in his article and Ant Kyi Hein also wrote the cost as 45 baskets in his "Brief History of Legaing *Rhupcumkyon:*". Under field surveying, I interviewed many persons who had known about this monastery, they said that the cost is no more than 20 baskets of sliver.)



Figure 28 Rupcumkyon at Legaing

Much of the balustrade structure is still intact. Sections of the balustrade at the western end support segments of the original carving depicting a quarter to peacocks at the centre surrounded by exquisitely open-work vegetal scrolling finished by a band of hmaw-dan floral motifs on all sides. This panel is set within a wide band of floral scrolling set with spade-shaped lin-no-daung ornaments at the mitred corners. Just below the balustrade tenoned⁷⁾ to the corner supporting pillars are small effigies of rearing *naga* forms. Suspended from the balustrade at regular intervals are approximately thirty five tableaux of boldly carved figures both in the round and in high relief depicting a phalanx of imaginatively conceived scenes pertaining to the Life of Buddha from Conception to Enlightenment. Scene identification was originally carved in Myanmar on palm-leaf shaped markers placed below the carvings. Unfortunately, many have become detached, making identification difficult to some cases.

⁷⁾ to cut or fit for insertion in a mortise



Figure 29 Naga

The Conception series begin at the north corner with King *Suddhodana* and Queen *Maya* staying at the Palace. Then it depicted that *Maya* was praying to *Rukkhaciu*: - spirit of Banyan tree for birth of child. On that night, while she was sleeping, she dreamt that a white elephant pierces her side. On awakening, she recounted the dream to her husband King *Suddhodana*.



Figure 30
King Suddhadana and
Queen Maya staying
at the Palace



Figure 31 Maya praying to spirit of Bayan tree



Figure 32 Dreaming of Maya



Figure 33 Telling the dream

In the Nativity series, it was depicted that Maya told the King that she wished to travel to see her parents. On the way, she gave birth to the Buddha at Lumbini Grove. A quartet of *Brahmas* received the new born in a golden net. The infant Buddha took his first seven steps, proclaiming himself to the universe. Moreover, the scene from his infancy to youth were also illustrated: taking care of his step mother *Pajapati Gotami*, ploughing ceremony of King *Suddhodana*, sleeping under the *Jambu* tree, watching King *Suddhodana* exhibition of skill in archery and showing his skill in archery.



Figure 34 Maya telling her wish to the King



Figure 35 Receiving the infant Buddha by Four Brahman



Figure 36 Taking first seven steps and proclaiming to the universe



Figure 37 Ploughing ceremony of King Siddhodana

On the southern side, the Great Renunciation series include, seeing the four omens, bidding farewell to his sleeping wife and child, escaping the city and being accosted by the evil Mara, divesting himself of his princely raiment, bidding farewell to his horse and groom, severing his hair, and receiving a monk robe.



Figure 38 Building farewell to Yasodhara and Rahula



Figure 39 Seeing Four Omens



Figure 40 Offering robe and breaking heart of Khannika

The series concludes on the north-eastern and south-eastern sides with episodes leading to the Enlightenment. They include meeting the five *panccavaggi*, practicing various austerities, receiving milk from *Sujata*, grass from *Sotthiva*, meditating, attacks from the hosts of Mara, temptations of the daughters of Mara, and the appearance of *Vasundhara* – the earth goddess.



Figure 41 Meeting five panccavaggi Figure 42 The Enlightenment

Most of the carvings on the doors had already been stolen and the abbot of monastery told that the pilfering of carvings had been a problem and it is needed to support for preserving and long lasting of these carving.

V. *Tumthap Rupcumkyon*: at Saku

At present, two *Rupcumkyon*: are still left at Saku: *Tumthapkyon*: and *Mhankan: kyon*:. *Tumthapkyon*: was built by Myo Ok U Thaik and his wife Daw Yoe (Hmu 2009: 39). It is located within the compound of *Maha Dhammika Rama Pariyatti Sarthin Teik* at Saku. Unfortunately, when this monastery was constructed, who sculptured the wood carvings and who built this monastery were unknown. According to field study, this monastery has three rooms, viz., a shrine

room, an intermediate room and a main hall. It has four stairways in former time but now only two were left. 172 pillars were used under construction. At present, the brick wall is built around the pillars at the bottom for long-lasting. The blusters are decorated with floral design and the art of turnery. The figures of Devas are carved on the doors.



Figure 43
Tumthap Rupcumkyon at Saku



Figure 44 The art of turnery



Figure 45 The figure of Deva

The 44 scenes of sculptures are still left and there can be studied and examined. A scene represents the figures of *Deva*, *Kainnara*, *Kainnari*, King, Queen, Child and Nobles. Others are also illustrated with the figure of *Deva*, *Naga*, *Garuna*, drummer and etc. Moreover, the presiding Sayadaw showed the figures which were maintained at

shrine room. They include the figures of *Deva*, *Garuna*, *Kainnara*, *Kainnari*, *Naga*, Horse, Nobel, Prince, Princess and *Rakkha*.



Figure 46 The Scene represents the various figures



Figure 47 *Garuna*

Figure 48 *Rakkha*

It is difficult to identify what sculptor meant about the scenes of wood carvings. It could be the sculptor's imaginations related with *Jatakas* or *Dhammapada*. Nevertheless, these sculptures show the high standard of traditional arts and crafts.

VI. *Mhankan:Rupcumkyon:* at Saku



Figure 49
Mhankan Rucumkyon
at Saku

Wun Min U Saing and his wife Daw Ngwe built this monastery to donate in 1881 (Anauk Takhahmu Mg Hmu 2009: 39). *Mhankan:Rupcumkyon:* is supported by 136 pillars resting on concrete blocks, and comprises a shrine room in the east followed by an intermediate area and main room. Flanking the Sanu Saung on either side, are two separate right and left side apartments we-saung and ya-saung which seemed to be used mainly for storage. Access to the surrounding veranda is by way of three masonry staircases, two on the north side and one on the south. The staircases on the north side incorporate



Figure 50 Kinnari



Figure 51 Carrying princes by
Rakkha



Figure 52 Suvannasama
Jataka

differing stucco-decorated motifs in the form of pair of reptilian *naya* on one staircase and curling vegetal volutes on the other, which is unusual. Sandstone caps carved like pumpkin protect the veranda posts from the vagaries of the weather. The three sets of pivot doors that open onto the monastery are flanked by the usual *Kinnari*.

The figure of *Rakkha* who carries a prince on his shoulder is carved on the front door. Moreover, the panels and lower jamb areas on some of the doors are depicted with the scenes from some of the *Jataka*⁸⁾ and legends.

The episodes extracted from Nat Stories and *Jataka* are also depicted on the surrounding balustrades. Among these episodes, it can be evaluated that some episodes describe the story of *Utena Nat*, *Shwe Phyin Gyi Nat*, *Shwe Phyin Lay Nat* and *Sulapaduma Jataka* (No. 193). There are other sculptures but could not be evaluated what particular story they represent but surely they are somehow related with Nat stories.



Figure 53 Utena Nat



Figure 54 Shwe Phyin Gyi Nat, Shwe Phyin Lay Nat



Figure 56 Sulapaduma Jataka

⁸⁾ I can evaluate some scenes such as *Suvannasama Jataka* (No. 540).

Sr.	Name	Location	Building Year	Name of Donors	Ranks of Donors	Used Pillars	Stairways	Rooms
1	<i>Aimtoaupmkyon:</i>	Sale	1882	U Bo Kyi, Daw Shwe Thet	Rich Man & Merchant	154	4	7
2	<i>Mrokle:sankyon:</i>	Salin	1868	Daw Pu	Spinster (nobility)	245	6	3
3	Tonū: Kyon:	Legaing	1890	U An Taw, Daw Taw	Myo Ok	214	8	4
4	<i>Tumthapkyon:</i>	Saku	?	U Theik, Daw Yoe	Myo Ok	172	4	3
5	<i>Mhankan:kyon:</i>	Saku	1881	U Saing, Daw Ngwe	Wun Min	136	4	5

From the study, it was observed that Salin *Rupcumkyon:* was built earlier than others and used more pillars in construction. Legaing *Rupcumkyon:* was constructed during the early period after the annexation of Upper Myanmar. Moreover, it has eight stairways. If Pyattat Saung and Bhoga Saung of this monastery were not collapsed, it seemed that it would be more splendid and glorious than others.

VII. Conclusion

Under surveying, the tradition of the construction of *Rupcumkyon:* had flourished in Magway Region in *Radanapon* Period and early Colonial Period. Monasteries were built with timber and wood but stairways were made of brick. According to the rank of Sayadaws and donors, the grand of monasteries are different but the style and appearance are similar. If the donor was richer, he or she hired skilful architects, sculptors and built the monastery magnificently and decorated with many sculptures and wood-carvings than others. The architect used a lot of logs in construction. Some monasteries have six or eight stairways but other has four stairways. At these monasteries,

sculptures were put on blusters. These were illustrations of extract from 547 *Jataka* stories and *Dhammapada*. Illustrations give the people the knowledge on the Life of the Buddha and attract to become a good Buddhist. Moreover, they admonish the people not to do excessive craving and passion. These sculptures depict the art of sculpture, costume and adornment, and socio-economy of that Period under survey. At present, most of the *Rupcumkyon*: were ruined and destroyed because of physical and natural disasters. A few *Rupcumkyon*: are still remain in Magway Region. Sale and Salin *Rupcumkyon*: are under the preservation of Archaeology Department and others are preserved and maintained by Presiding Sayadaws. It is needed to support finance and other supplies to protect from ruining and stealing wood-carvings. Anyway, by studying these *Rupcumkyon*:.s, the arts and crafts of Radanapon period and early Colonial Period can be guessed and the charity and merit of the people to preserve and perpetuate the Buddha Sāsana can be evaluated.

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Interviewees

- U *Sunanda*, Presiding Sayadaw, *Tonū: Rupcumkyon.*, Legaing
- U *Uttara*, Presiding Sayadaw, *Maha Dhammika Rama Pahtama Pariyatti Sarthin Teik*, Saku
- U *Sandavamsa*, *TumthapRupcumkyon.*, Saku
- U Than Tun (Rtd. SAT), State High School, Saku
- U Soe Tint, Author, Salin
- U Than Tun, Author, Saku

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Khin Thidar

University of Yangon, Myanmar

There are many *Rupcumkyon*: - Monasteries with sculptures in Magway Region. But some were ruined and some are preserved and maintained still today. Most of the monasteries are built in Radanapon Period. But some are built in early Colonial Period. Nobilities and wealthy persons donated these monasteries to their learned Sayadaws. The architect used a lot of log in construction. Some monasteries have six stairways but other has four stairways. At these monasteries, sculptures were put on blusters. These were illustrations of extract from 547 *Jataka* stories and *Dhammapada*. Illustrations admonish the people not to do excessive craving and passion. These sculptures depict the art of sculpture, costume and adornment, and socio-economy of that Period under survey. This paper is to reveal and to explore the significant features in building monasteries and to compare each of the monasteries with sculptures at Sale, Salin, Legaing and Sagu in Magway Region.

Key words : *Rupcumkyon*, monasteries, sculptures, illustrations, Jataka