

**Preservation and Conservation  
of the Ancient Myanmar Manuscripts  
at Universities' Central Library (Yangon)**

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Myanmar has valuable historical and literary materials in traditional texts and different kinds of medium used for the written records of the past.

They are:

Stone Inscriptions

Bell Inscriptions and

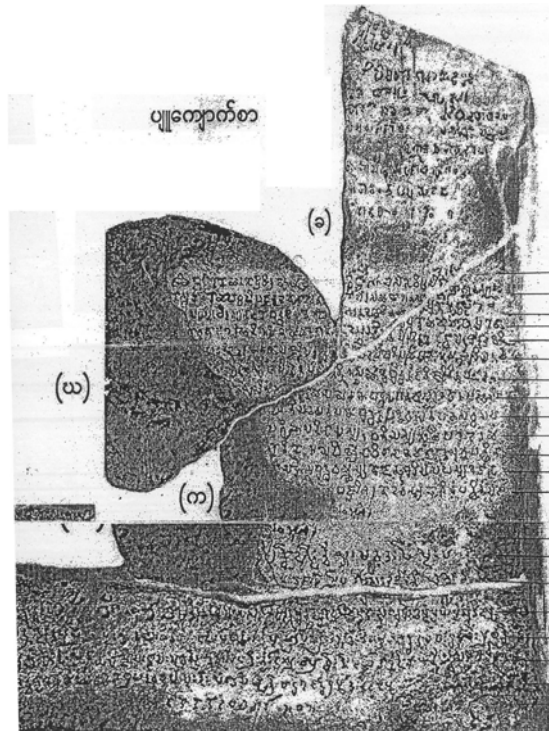
Ink or gloss Inscriptions (On the walls of the Bagan agodas)

Palm-leaf Manuscripts

Parabaiks (Handmade Paper)

## Stone Inscriptions

Stone Inscriptions are inscribed on the stone slabs.



Sawlumin Inscription (A.D 1053-54)

**King Sawlumin inscription** 1053-1054 with 5 languages. This inscription was one of the oldest surviving stone inscription of Myanmar it was discovered in Myitthar Township Mandalay region in 17 Nov, 2013. The slab size 1.75 metre (5.7 feet) in height and 1.06 metre( 3.5ft) in breadth.

**The stone inscription** will inscribe in multiple languages including Myanmar , Mon, Pyu, Pali and the Gun (Khun or Kengtung Shan ). It describe King Sawlu donation of Buddha images religious bondsmen, farmlands and rice and also include curses and wishes.

The inscription which contains 415 ME (25 march, 1053 to 1054) would promote the current understanding of the early Bagan period and the actual time of inscription can be proven.

This inscription date 60 years earlier than Myazedi inscription (c.1112/1113) one of the oldest known stone inscription in Myanmar.

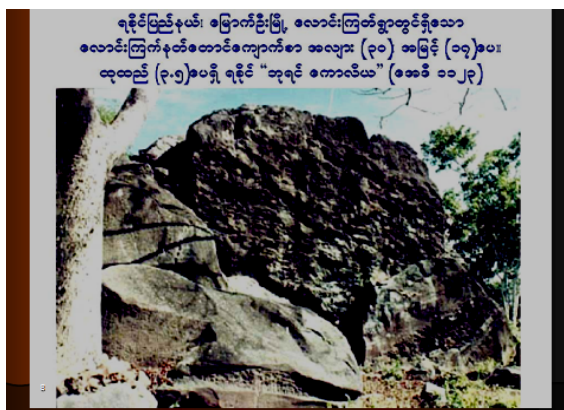


### Myazedi Inscription

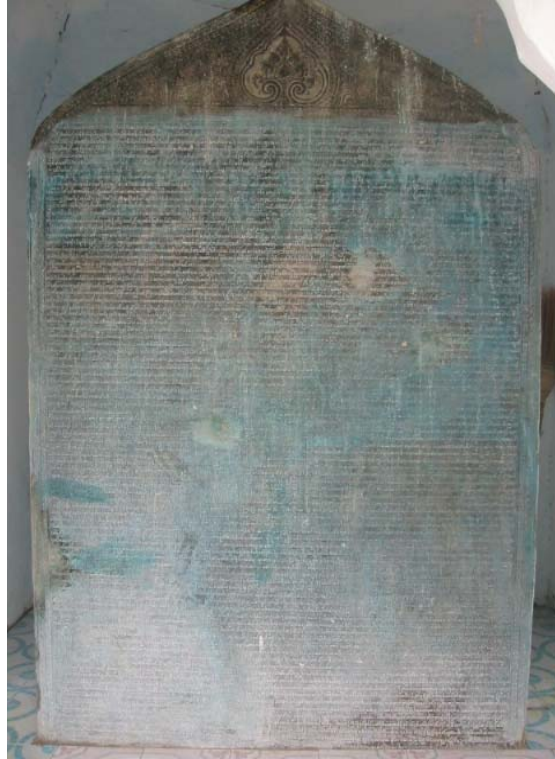
Myazedi Inscription (c.1112/1113) inscribed 4 languages Myanmar, Mon, Pyu, Pali. It describe the donation of Buddha images also include farmlands, curses and wishes Yaza Kumar son of King Kyan Sit Thar.

The Largest Stone Inscription of the world in Rakhine State (A.D 1123)  
by King Kawliya, width 65 feet, high 20 feet.

### The Largest stone inscription of Rakhine State



The Longest stone inscription Kaung Mu Taw at Sagaing Division by TaungPheLarSayadaw (High Priest) (A.D 1636).



**Kaung Mu Taw Inscription**



### Rubbing of the Stone Inscriptions



## Bell Inscription

It was inscribed on the bells of gold, silver, iron, and copper.



## Mingun Bell

**Mingun Bell** was casted by King BodawPhaya at Kaungboun dynasty of A.D 1170. It weight (55555 )viss90.52 tons.It is the third largest bell in the world.

The first largest and prominent bell weighing 200 tons is at Moscow (Russia) casted in A.D. 1833, the second largest bell weighing 108 tons is also at Moscow.



## King Dhammazedī Bell

King Dhammazedī donated an enormous bell weight 324 tons, and 12 feet cubits across and 18 feet high at Shwedagon.



King Dhammazedī Bell



## Singu Bell

King Singu also had an enormous bell cast, had it consecrated and installed it in a protective pavilion on the north – west corner of the pagoda. Weighing 25 metric tons, this bell was 11 feet 3 inches high, 7 feet 6 inches wide across the month and 1 foot 8 inches thick.

**King Singu** also had an enormous bell cast, had it consecrated and installed it in a protective pavilion on the north – west corner of the Pagoda. Weighing 25 metric tons, this bell was 11 feet 3 inches high, 7 feet 6 inches wide across the month and 1 foot 8 inches thick. At the end of the Anglo – Myanmar war the British dismantled the great Singu bell and carried it off as booty. However in ferry it to the ship that was to transport the bell the raft capsized and the bell sand to the bottom of the Yangon river. British military engineers tried everything they could think of to raise the bell, but failed to do so and finally gave up the attempt. After the war Myanmar salvage experts raised the bell successfully and the great Singu bell was proper place at Shwedagon in the year 1826. It is place up to now at the North-west corner of Shwedagon platform.



A huge bell which weight 40 tons and is called Mahatithadagaganda donated by King Tharyarwadi.

## Tharyarwady Bell

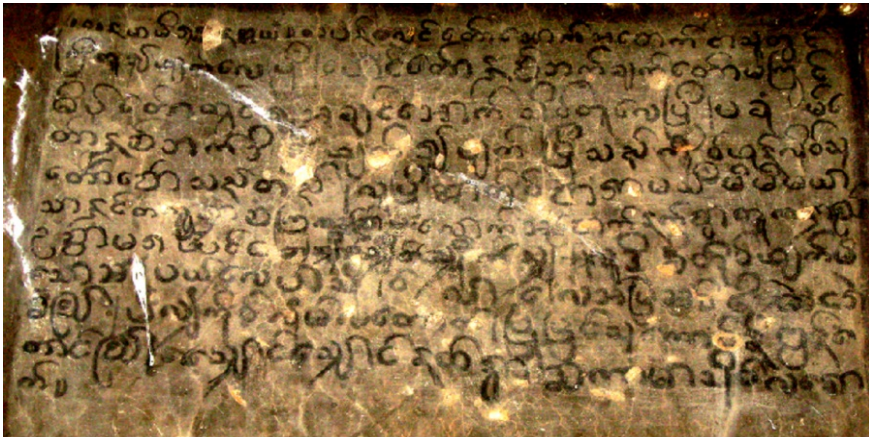
King Tharyarwady donated great bell to Shwedagon. It has weight 40 metric tons, 20 feet high, 7 feet, 6 inches at its widest casted on 19 Feb, 1843.

The bell placed on the North–East of the pagoda platform.

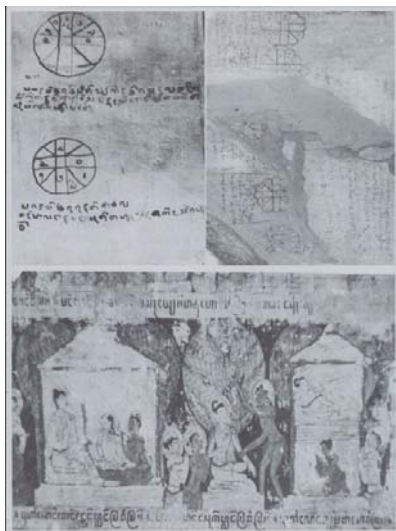
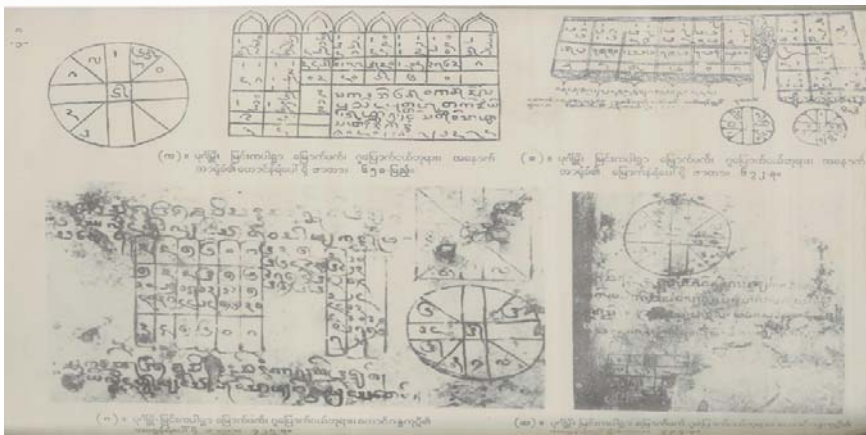


### Ink/gloss inscription(Minsa)

This inscription exists only in Myanmar ( unique). There are two kinds one is written on the wall at the cave pagoda about the horoscopes of the Kings and Queens and Royal family about donations, traditional medicine, prayers and subtitle of the mural painting about the history of the donar. There are also prose and poetry of the distinguish writers. The ink or gloss inscriptions mostly written at the wall painting (Mural Painting).



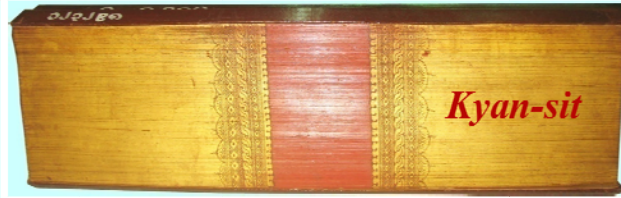
လောကဉာဏ်ပညာရားအတွင်းရှိ မင်္ဂလာ





## Palm-leaf Manuscripts

### (5) Kinds of Palm-leaf MSS. (Pe-Sar)



***Shwe-Myin***  
(Gilded on all four edges)



Palm-leaf manuscripts: They are produced from two main types of palms, palmyra as well as coryphe and talipot (or umbrella palm). Palm-leaves from coryphe provided broad leaves often fifteen feet in diameter and eighteen feet long, exclusive of the stalk. It was

Palm-leaf manuscripts: Myanmar used the palm-leaf manuscript when Buddhism was introduced to Myanmar in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. According to Myanmar tradition the life span of the palm-leaf manuscript is a thousand years, but no palm-leaf manuscript had survived older than 350 years, because of the harsh tropical climate and improper storages. The only oldest palm-leaf manuscript of 530 years is housed at the Universities' Central Library. It was about the Myanmar arithmetic written in prose form in A.D. 1493.



**Writing on the palm-leaf**

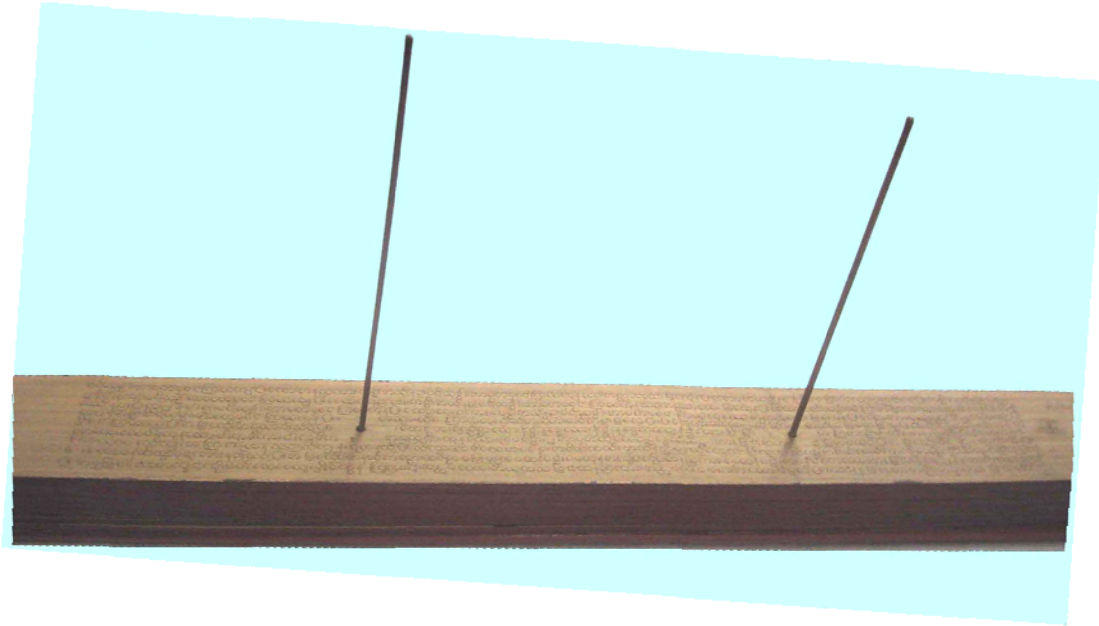
In the olden days there were professional scribes known as Kyaung-Sa-Ye (monastic scribe). The scribes used a writing table about two feet in height with a cloth cushion knob on the writing table. The letters were engraved on the palm-leaves by using a pointed iron or stylus pen.



**Pagination on Palm-leaf Mss**

Pagination of palm-leaf manuscript bundles is not numerical. It is alphabetical according to the Myanmar alphabet, consonant letters in conjunction with twelve Myanmar

vowels. Twelve leaves make one set/ and is known as on Anga(one chapter). Palm-leaf bundles are counted by these sets. Palm-leaf manuscripts are also classified by the number of lines on each leaf. Ranging from 8 to 12.



Two small holes were made in all the leaves called **Palin Bauk** though which two small bamboo-sticks known as **Palin Taing** were inserted to hold the manuscripts bundle in placed, preventing the leaves from falling out.



**Cover for Palm-leaf mss.**

The manuscripts bundle was then placed between two wooden covers **KyanBhone**. The first and last pages of a palm-leaf manuscripts bundle had extra blank leaves sown in,



usually ten in front and ten at the back. These extra palm-leaves were intended to be used for repairing and replacing those which will get broken or damaged.



**Wrapping Cloths**



**Wrapping Tape**

The palm-leaf manuscripts bundle was wrapped with a square piece of cloth, or silk with colourful designs. After that, the bundle was tied with the riband about 2 inches in breadth and a yard in length. It is called *Pe-Si-Kyo*. This riband was hand woven with colours and contained useful biographical information of the donor.

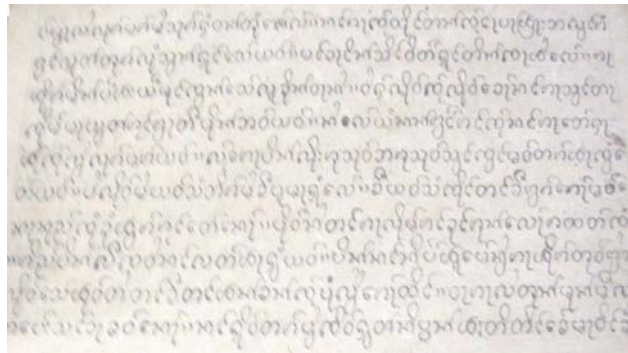
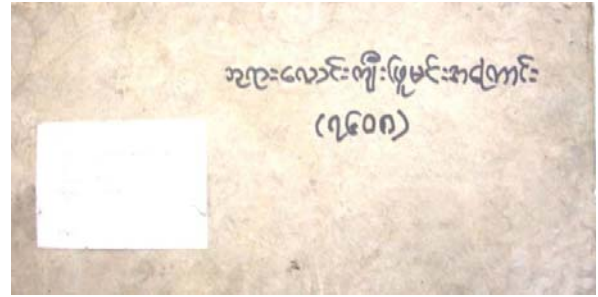
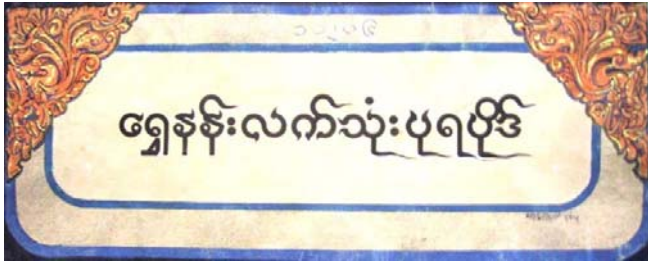
### **Parabaik-paper manuscript**

Parabaik were produced from the hand-made paper and usually called a **folding-book**. They were made from the MaingKaing paper, a kind of paper made from mulberry pulp in MaingKaing town in the Shan States, Myanmar. The bigger parabaiks were usually made from bamboo pulp. They were classified according to the number of folds which range from single fold to 64 folds.



**Black Parabaik**





White Parabaik

Parabaiks were of two kinds, the black and the white. The black parabaiks were mainly used as a note book and writing drafts which were later transferred to either white parabaiks or palm-leaves manuscripts. Black parabaiks were commonly used by the people and they were the rich source of social and economic history for the researchers. Black parabaiks were records kept by individuals and families. They were financial transactions, agricultural records, day to day accounts, diaries, traditional medicine, traditional law, astrology, astronomy, alchemy and census. Over thirty to forty subjects of topics can be found in these black parabaiks.



Soap Stone

The soap stone or steatite is used as a writing material.

The white parabaik was for royal use such as royal orders. Illustrated coloured works made called YaungzonParabaik. Ink from the soot of crude oil or vegetable oil is used for the white parabaik. For illustrated, colouredparabaik, the colours were natural colours without use of any chemical.



ColourParabaik

The neem gum was added with all these paints to make the colour fast. Gall (Gall Juice) of animals like, python, peacock, and hamilton's carp were often mixed with ink to give the paint a shining effects and it also conserved the colour for years.

**Inscribe label for mss.**



Inscribed label for mss.



Using inscribed label for mss



The Orders of Royal (*tha-gyaungsar-gyon-daw*)



### Traditional Methods of Preservation and Conservation of the Ancient Manuscripts



**Applying lemon grass oil from left to right not from bottom to top**

Simply clean the dust from the palm-leaves with a soft paint-brush from left to right and right to left (not up wards or down wards). The palm-leaves can be washed with water and soap or with a very mild detergent to remove the stains and spots and dry in the air. Applying crude oil and turmeric powder was used before, but now lemon grass oil, citronella

oil, camphor oil are applied on the surface of the palm-leaf (by applying these oils it brings back the flexibility and protection from insects). Wrapping the manuscripts bundles with cloth or handmade MaingKaing paper (acid free) is also one of the methods for conservation. Now we use MaingKaing paper (hand-made) to wrap the palm-leaves bundles. **Trying to clean the dirt and dust of the Palm-leaf**



### Applying Lemon Grass Oil to Prevent the Insects



### Repairing palm-leaf mss and Replacing with Blank Palm-leaf



### Repairing the broken edges



Patching up the broken edges with tapioca glue *Thargu*



## Conclusion

Ancient Myanmar Manuscripts & Inscriptions are the reflection of History and culture heritage. The Manuscripts have greater impact on social and economic development of Myanmar and the languages standard. Regarding these manuscripts young people will not know or see such valuable artifacts that they should cherish and take pride. These manuscripts are the documents and evidences of Myanmar History. We also have these evidences aside from learned monks and men that emerged women writers and poets. This is these evidence Myanmar are literate since the time of first century AD, and also the women have equal rights with the men since that time. We all should cherish and value our cultural heritage.

**1947 Octennial Report on Education, 1700 – Venetian Merchant – Manucci.**

**" The Kingdom governed by the pen, for not a single person can go from one village into another without a black book and writing"**