

Public Lecture by Prof. Dr John Miksic and Dr Goh Yian Geok, “Research at Bagan Palace, Burma”

In the context of its commitment to the preservation of tangible heritage, the Yayasan Arsari Djojohadikusumo (YAD), in cooperation with the Archaeological Department of the Faculty of Humanities of Gajah Mada University, arranged a public lecture on Thursday, 21 May, in the RM Margono Djojohadikusumo Building on the UGM Bulaksumur Campus in Yogyakarta. This lecture, which had as its title “Research at Bagan Palace, Burma” was given by two speakers, namely Professor Dr John Miksic of the National University of Singapore (NUS), and Dr Goh Yian Geok of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

This public lecture was not only of interest for archaeologists. The audience was also drawn from other UGM Departments with a number of those involved in the cultural scene in Yogyakarta likewise participating. YAD Executive Director, Catrini Kubontubuh, and the YAD Coordinator for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, Nyoman Arya Subamia, also attended this event, which was broadcast directly on the UGM livestreaming channel, media.ugm.ac.id/streaming.



Prof. Dr. John Miksic and Dr. Goh Yian Geok presented their research on Bagan Palace in Burma in front of archaeology students of Gajah Mada University and other participants from Jogjakarta.



Participants of the presentation

Researches at Bagan Palace, Burma

Bagan (pronounced Pagàn), in Burma or Myanmar as it is now called, is an ancient city in the Mandalay Division of Myanmar. This city was built between the 11th and the 13th centuries CE, and contains the remains of the kingdom of Bagan or Pagàn. Previously, the area was called **Arimaddhanapura** or **Arimiddana**, also known as **Tambadipa** or **Tassadessa**. This ancient city, which is also known as the city of a thousand pagodas, was earlier the site of the capital of a number of ancient pre-colonial kingdoms in Burma.

Bagan, now covers an area of some 42 square kilometres. This extensive area is full of thousands of pagodas, stupas, temples, ordination halls and other monuments. Bagan is one of the richest archaeological sites in Southeast Asia with some 2,230 still extant monuments and another 1,000 which are now in ruins. At the outset there were some 4,500 monuments in total, but 600 have been swept away by periodic flooding of the adjacent Ayerwaddy (Irrawaddy) river.

Bagan can now be divided into three principal zones. The first is Nyang-U, which is the heart of the current tourist trade. There are many hotels, restaurants, cafes and vehicle rental outlets in this zone. The second zone is that of the Old City of Bagan, which contains the remains of many pagodas and temples. This zone is the main tourist destination. The last zone is New Bagan, which has many modern buildings and is in fact not set up for tourism at all because it only contains the houses and dwelling places of local residents.

The Bagan Old City (?Town) complex is an area which is encircled by a wall. But only the ruins of this encircling city wall now remain. In the city complex there are stupas and temples / shrines, amongst them the **Ananda Phaya** temple which is regarded as the most holy; the **Thatbyinnyu Temple**, which is the highest in the Bagan area, and the **Gawdwapalin Temple**, which is one of the most important places for Buddhist worship in Bagan. Outside the Bagan Old City complex, there is the **Htilomino Temple**.

For lay members of the public, it is perhaps rather difficult making a distinction between temples, stupas and pagodas. Here (in Indonesia?) it is perhaps easier for people to make a distinction between temples, stupas and pagodas. A temple has an open portico (for selling offerings) and a room inside – usually decorated with a Buddha statue – for devotional purposes. A temple, on the other hand, normally does not have a prayer room. So it is just a building or a structure. A pagoda, meanwhile, is a building like a temple (candi) but with a stupa which is normally decorated with gold leaf. There are also some sites which are combinations of temples and stupas. One way of distinguishing between a pagoda considered sacred and others which are not, is to see how many local residents are sitting outside the main precinct of the temple selling their wares. The wares they sell are usually flower offerings or devotional objects for tourists. We should not be surprised if we are mobbed by traders if we enter a pagoda.

The largest temple of the **Ananda Temple** and the **Shwezigon Pagoda**. The Ananda Temple is very similar to those in Sukhothai in central Thailand or in various similar places in Cambodia like Angkor Wat. Quite apart from the larger area, there are also very large pagodas. In addition, there is also the **Shwesandaw Phaya** pagoda which is the place where the largest number of tourists come to watch the sun set. Directly in front of the pagoda building there is a long structure inside of which there is a very large scale statue of a reclining Buddha, almost as large as the building in which it is housed.



L-R: Ibu Ari (YAD), Ibu Ania (UGM), Prof. John Miksic, Dr. Goh Yian Geok and Arya Subamia (YAD)

Professor Miksic and Dr Geok have five principal questions regarding Bagan. They are: (1) where was the original site of the city or where did the city begin? (2) What sort of city is Bagan? (3) What is the nature of the connections between Pagan and other city sites? (4) What role did trade play in determining the development of the city from earlier times? And (5) What is the role of ceramics in helping us trace the evolution of cities in Burma/Myanmar?

Translated from Bahasa Indonesia Edition by Dr. Peter Carey
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