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## Textiles from Bengal in Pagan (Myanmar) from late eleventh century and onwards

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**Introduction** – Adorned with a rich painted ornamentation, the Abeyadana temple (monument 1202) in Pagan (Myanmar)<sup>1</sup> has been constructed during the reign of Kyanzittha (1084-1113/14). According to the *Glass Palace Chronicle* it owes its name to Kyanzittha's queen Abeyadana (Apeyatana, i.e. *abhaya-ratana*)<sup>2</sup> who is believed to have originated from Pattikera, a region located in the Comilla district.<sup>3</sup> Although the reading of the *Chronicle* compiled at a much later date than the eleventh-twelfth centuries requests to be cautiously done, it is not unlikely that the Burmese king developed diplomatic relationships with the kingdom of Pattikera ruled at that time by Harivarmadeva (end of eleventh-beginning of twelfth c.).<sup>4</sup>

Contacts with South Asia were not only diplomatic; they were deeply anchored in the perception of themselves which the Burmese rulers of Pagan had of themselves as protectors of the Saṃgha and as contributing through their munificent constructions to the spread of the Dharma. They also actively participated to restoration made to the Bodhi Mandir in Bodhgaya: by doing so, they positioned themselves at the very root of Buddhism and appeared as the worthy and direct heirs to the Buddha. Pagan was built as a Buddhist landscape: the extremely high number of constructions between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries extols the universal and overwhelming presence of the Buddhist Dharma not only locally, but – I would suggest – all over the universe.

The main source of inspiration for the painted ornamentation of the temples in the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth centuries is to be searched for in India. This influence played at different levels. At a general level, we can say that the iconographic compositions and the style rooted on South Asia models from Bihar and Bengal; it is, however, possible to go into a more detailed analysis of specific elements of the ornamentation which allows tracing the existence of a particular relation between Pagan and the district of Comilla or the entire Delta as shown by the following observations.

Although the transfer of decorative motifs from South Asia to Southeast Asia can have followed different ways, it is evident that textiles played a major function. Pagan imported silk from China and cotton from India as known from inscriptions<sup>5</sup> and in all Southeast Asia, traces are observed in the decoration of patterns of Indian or Chinese origins.<sup>6</sup> Fabrics were imported in Pagan not only to be transformed into garments, but also to be used as element of decoration offered to the image of the Buddha or to the shrine.<sup>7</sup> It is also very likely that the continuous checked or circular patterns covering the ceilings of most temples at Pagan were inspired from such fabrics.<sup>8</sup>

A study of the patterns seen in Pagan allows observing a strong Eastern Indian influence in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, followed by a 'Burmanisation' of the ornamentation and by a strong Chinese influence from the late twelfth to the fourteenth century. It is to the first phase, thus the 'Indian phase', which I want to devote this short paper, limiting

my observations to patterns which are actually observed in garments in Bengal and in Pagan.

The study of garments worn by royal or divine characters in the murals clearly puts into the evidence the existence of a trade between Pagan and the region of Comilla. Our main point of comparison will be the 'Baroda manuscript' dated in the regnal year 8 of Harivarmadeva, c. A.D. 1100. There, the two inner margins pierced for the rope binding the manuscript are adorned with geometric abstract motifs which repeat themselves in the narrow vertical panels and which I supposed in an earlier paper to have been inspired by the ornamentation of fabrics (Figs 4-7).<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

After the publication of this paper in 1999, I paid a closer attention to the murals of the Kubyauk-gyi at Myinkaba (monument 1323), a royal monument dated A.D. 1113,<sup>10</sup> which is situated between the Abeyadana and old Pagan. The murals of this monument contain much information on the use made with fabrics and on their origin. Thus, the seated Buddha usually leans on a cushion;<sup>11</sup> or a fabric can be spread on his throne<sup>12</sup> or stretched forming the roof of a pavilion under which the Buddha sits;<sup>13</sup> or lay people are richly dressed with garments adorned with numerous different patterns (Figs 1-3).



Fig. 3

**The motifs: geometric patterns** – The dresses worn by royal characters forming a row at the bottom of panels depicting the Buddha preaching (Figs 1-2) are probably made in cotton printed with square or circular abstract motifs within a very strict geometric pattern.<sup>14</sup> A similar ornamentation is observed in the manuscript dated in Harivarmadeva's reign as seen on Figs 4-7 and is even peculiar to this manuscript. As a

matter of fact, the inner and outer margins often bear in other manuscripts a row of diamond-shaped and eventually circular medallions or motifs which are of a more iconographic nature, for instance *stūpas*, devotees, deities.<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 4.1 & 2

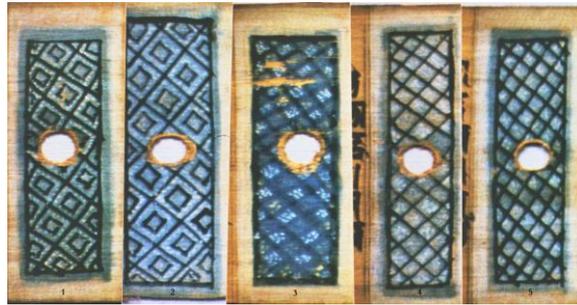


Fig. 5.1-5

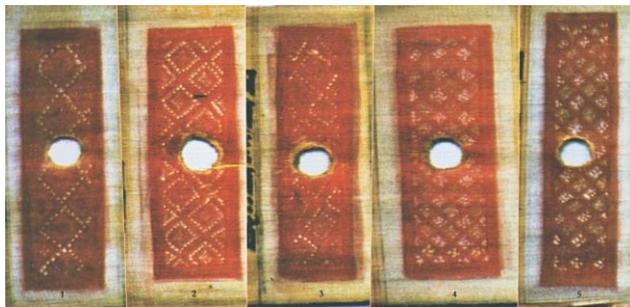


Fig. 6.1-5

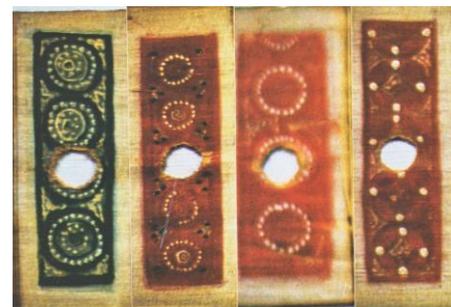


Fig. 7.1-4

The Harivarmadeva manuscript offers a rich variety of motifs which can be categorized as follows:

a. The rhombus is the main motif which occurs in various compositions (Figs 4-6). In Fig. 4, a single vertical line of diamond-shaped motifs adorns the rectangular space, either with blue and red colours alternating (Fig. 4.1) or two broad zigzag lines run vertically forming rhombi which cover the entire surface (Fig. 4.2). The same rhombi drawn with dark blue or black lines on a blue background are seen in Fig. 5 where two variations of the motif are noted: in Fig. 5.3-5, the squares are small and white dots are painted in some or all of them whereas in Fig. 5.1-2, they are larger and are adorned by a row of white dots between an inner small square and the outer line. The rhombus is also the dominant motif in a series of folios where the background is red (Fig. 6): In Fig. 6.4-5, the small rhombi are drawn in dark red with their inner space covered with white dots (compare to Fig. 5.2-3). They are much broader in Fig. 6.1-3 where white dots underline their edges.

b. Fig. 7 shows four different combinations of circles, either dark blue or more often dark red. The circles are put on each other, covering the entire rectangular space; they are drawn with thick lines or with a line of white dots.

The diamond-shaped device appears in the Pagan murals, as seen in Figs 1 & 3 where it adorns the garment covering the seat on which the Buddha sits. Likewise rhombi or circles also adorn dresses worn by royal characters in Figs 1 & 2. A further motif of imbricate hexagons is observed on these panels of the Kubyauk-gyi and, although extremely rarely, in Bengal: it covers the dress worn by the character at the extreme right in Figs 1 & 2 and is seen on the cushion behind a deity of manuscript inv. Or.12461 in the British Library (Fig. 10).

Mention should be made of some further geometric motifs observed in India. The first one shows a checked pattern with a deep red colour forming a thick line around each square (Figs 8-9) and is related to the covering checked motif noted in Figs 5-6 and in some dresses painted in the Kubyauk-gyi murals (Fig. 3).<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

**The motifs: stripes** – The second rarely encountered motif shows parallel stripes of different – usually two – colours forming concentric rows on the legs of the deity. In Pagan, the motif is mainly encountered in the Kubyauk-gyi and the Abeyadana (Fig. 11-13).<sup>17</sup> In South or East Bengal, it is noted in the manuscript inv. Or.13940 preserved in the British Library (Fig. 14).<sup>18</sup> Similar stripes of different abstract motifs and different colours can be printed on a diaphanous garment as in Fig. 15 where bands with scrolls and grids alternate, a motif which occurs also in Burma (Fig. 13).<sup>19</sup> The same type of garment is observed on twelfth-century images from Bangladesh as seen in Fig. 25 where the bands are covered with a great variation of motifs, for instance scrolls, half or full circles with a lotus or abstract device.<sup>20</sup> Stripes constitute a simple motif in comparison with circles or scrolls, and this would account for the fact that in the depiction of the Birth of the Buddha, Māyā's female attendant garment is adorned with them whereas the skirt of the queen has the more elaborate second motif (Figs 23-24).<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 11

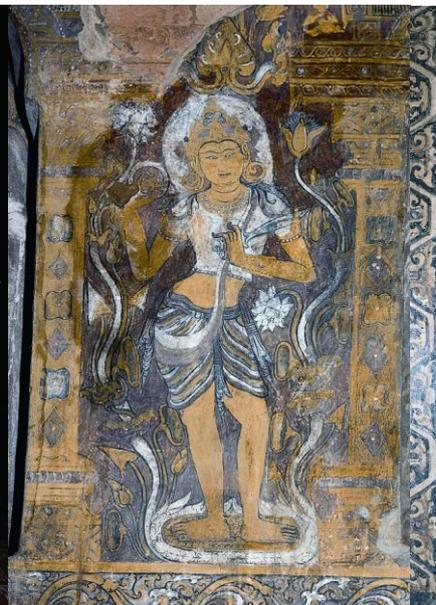


Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

**The motifs: circles & scrolls** – Circular devices were favoured in the ornamentation of textiles. Medallions adorned with different motifs, combined in various manners, constitute the most often encountered pattern on diaphanous garments worn by deities (Fig. 16)<sup>22</sup> or eventually on the textile of the cushion on which the deity leans – elaborated scrolls adorn, however, often the cushion. Simple circles were also noted above on some folios of the Harvamideva manuscript (Fig. 7): similar ones appear on a mural in the thirteenth-century Nandamanyā-hpaya (monument 577) where they adorn the skirt worn by Māyā (Fig. 24).



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

Another ornamental motif noted in twelfth-century Indian book-covers or in the margins of the manuscripts is the single continuous tendril which runs forming a sequence of perfect circles.<sup>23</sup> Musicians, dancers or running animals, for instance gazelles, are here vividly depicted among scrolls (Figs 19-20). The motif was most probably basically used in architectural ornamentation – as seen in the twelfth-century So-min-gyi-hpaya (monument 1145) in Pagan for instance,<sup>24</sup> which would explain why it forms a very ornamental frame behind images of the Buddha in probably north Bengali or east Bihari manuscripts from the second half of the twelfth century.<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22

It is also as architectural ornament that this continuous scroll is encountered in the Abeyadana where all roundels are in fact lotus,<sup>26</sup> or in the windows of the Kubauyk-gyi Myinkaba where two symmetric scrolls spread on either side of a vertical stalk and where the circular spaces are filled with various motifs, such as *nāgas*, dancers, ascetics, etc. (Figs 17-18).<sup>27</sup> Garments adorned with such elaborated composition are very rarely

depicted, which lets surmise that they were a luxury good, perhaps offered to images of gods and goddesses. This would explain the elegant shawl with intricate volutes adorning an image of Mañjuśrī from Noakhali District (Fig. 26)<sup>28</sup> or the richly ornamented shawl and skirt covering the body of a eleventh or twelfth-century Bodhisattva which was perhaps cast in north Bengal (Figs 21-22): the tendril is here drawn with silver and copper inlay and different characters and animals are incised in the inner circular space which entirely cover the shawl and the skirt.<sup>29</sup> The style is extremely vivid, the line nervous, the motifs all different, revealing a high degree of creativity which finds its echo in the murals painted in the Abeyadana and the Kubyauk-gyi (Figs 17-18). In the Lokahteikpan (monument 1580) which can be ascribed to the early twelfth century, Māyā wears a skirt with roundels alternatively adorned with flowers and *haṃsas* (Fig. 23) – a motif thus related to this extremely intricate ornament seen on the Bodhisattva from Bengal and which will reappear, simplified in the later Nandamanya-hpaya mural mentioned above (Fig. 24).



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

**Conclusion** – We thus encounter in Pagan, mainly in the Kubyauk-gyi, three different types of ornamentation also met with in Bengal, i.e. 1° the strict geometric patterns mainly noted in the depiction of garments in Pagan, in the ornamentation of the margins in the Harivarmadeva manuscript, and in some depictions of garments in Bengali manuscripts; 2° the stripes adorning the skirt and also the shawl in eastern India; 3° the vigorous scroll which is mainly introduced as architectural motif.

Later murals of the site reflect a simplification in the choice of iconographic motifs as well as transformation of the decorative devices. Elaborated compositions such as those seen on the walls of the Kubyauk-gyi disappear and one observes altogether a simplification in the ornamentation, the various abstract motifs of the garments observed in this monument are then no more to be seen. The taste for scrolls did not disappear but underwent a profound change in the course of the twelfth century, with the introduction of the ‘spiked lobed leaf’ which traces its origin back to China. Intertwined scrolls interspersed with characters or animals can then cover ceilings and walls, but the motif loses its relief and becomes flat while becoming monochromatic.



Fig. 25a

Fig. 25b

Fig. 26

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## Illustrations

Unless mentioned, all photos are courtesy Joachim K. Bautze

1. Kubauk-gyi, Pagan
2. Kubauk-gyi, Pagan
3. Kubauk-gyi, Pagan
4. Baroda Museum, photo courtesy Brigit Breitkopf
5. Baroda Museum, photo courtesy Brigit Breitkopf
6. Baroda Museum, photo courtesy Brigit Breitkopf
7. Baroda Museum, photo courtesy Brigit Breitkopf
8. The British Library, London, Or.12461, folio 221
9. Asia Society, New York
10. The British Library, London, Or.12461, folio 165
11. Kubauk-gyi, Pagan
12. Abeyadana, Pagan
13. Monument 99, Salay
14. The British Library, London, Or.13940, folio 12 recto
15. The British Library, London, Or.12461, folio 261
16. Asia Society, New York, 1987.1
17. Kubauk-gyi, Pagan
18. Kubauk-gyi, Pagan
19. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.77.19.2a-b

20. Private Collection, New York, after PAL/MEECH-PEKARIK 1988, pl. 19.d
21. Private collection, London
22. Private collection, London
23. Lokahteikpan, Pagan
24. Nandamanya-hpaya, Pagan
- 25a. Paharpur site Museum inv. S-284.
- 25b. Paharpur site Museum inv. S-284.
26. Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, inv. 78.245

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<sup>1</sup> The temple is open towards the north, i.e. towards the old city; for the murals see BAUTZE-PICRON 2003, pp. 170-179 & *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> FRASCH 1996, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> LUCE/BA SHIN 1961, p. 280.

<sup>4</sup> BAUTZE-PICRON 1999, p. 188.

<sup>5</sup> FRASCH 1996, pp. 281-283.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed study of imported textile patterns in Cambodia, see GREEN 2000 & 2007.

<sup>7</sup> FRASCH 1996, p. 283 note 195, mentions inscriptions where one reads that devotees covered the upper part of a temple with a cloth adorned with golden printed motifs or that a royal robe and a garment adorned with a checked motif were offered to a Buddha image whereas a black fabric was spread over the wall (like in the palace ?).

<sup>8</sup> For a study of such ceilings, see PICHARD 1993.

<sup>9</sup> BAUTZE-PICRON 1999, fig. 13.2 & p. 160.

<sup>10</sup> BAUTZE-PICRON 2003, pp. 161-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, figs 24-26, 38, 53-55. Cushions painted behind the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas on book-covers dated in the second half of the twelfth century show a very rich ornamentation such as scrolls, circles, intersecting circles, or rhombi with various motifs which can be observed in the ceiling and wall decoration of Pagan in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. See BAUTZE-PICRON 2009, plates 1.7 & 8 and p. 7 for further references to these book-covers which are preserved in the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Varanasi. For another set, probably earlier, showing a similar ornamentation and preserved in the Collège de France in Paris, see BAUTZE-PICRON 2008, figs 16-18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, figs 24-26, 38.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, fig. 38.

<sup>14</sup> BAUTZE-PICRON 2003, figs 24-26 for complete panels; the characters depicted here are from figs 25 & 26.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, see PAL/MEECH-PEKARIK 1988, figs 20, 24, 29, plate 13 p. 81 or ALLINGER 2008, figs 8, 11, 14, 27-28, 34-35, 39-40, 46 & p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> BAUTZE-PICRON 2003, fig. 38 where the edges of the squares are indicated by a wide white border with the inner space coloured - thus reversing what is observed in the illumination of the New York manuscript or in a twelfth-century manuscript, probably from Bengal, the whereabouts of which are unknown (ALLINGER 2001, plates 9.2, 3 & 11; Allinger 2008).

<sup>17</sup> BAUTZE-PICRON 2003, figs 105 (here Fig. 11)-106, 109-111, 115.

<sup>18</sup> On folios 3 verso, and 4, 8, 12 & 36 recto. Most folios illustrate Avalokiteśvara; folio 12recto is reproduced here on Fig. 14. Such stripes appear also drawn on a diaphanous garment worn by a Tārā in the Harivarmadeva manuscript dated regnal year 8 (BAUTZE-PICRON 1999, pl. 13.36; PAL/MEECH-PEKARIK 1988, pl. 16 p. 84).

<sup>19</sup> Salay, Monument 99: BAUTZE-PICRON 2003, fig. 116, see also fig. 115.

<sup>20</sup> For a full view of the Tārā, see HAQUE/GAIL 2008, plate 538 & p. 240.

<sup>21</sup> For a full view of these scenes, see Luce 1969/70, pl. 355.c & BAUTZE-PICRON 2003, fig. 29.

<sup>22</sup> From a manuscript preserved in the Asia Society (New York) and dated between the reigns of Vighrahapāla and Gopāla IV, thus toward the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century (HUNTINGTON/HUNTINGTON 1990, # 58 pp. 185-9). I do not want to enter into the discussion concerning

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the dating of this manuscript, this matter being irrelevant to our present topic. All what matters is to note that the manuscript was written and illuminated during a period contemporary of Harivarmadeva's reign and of the Pagan monuments.

<sup>23</sup> PAL/MEECH-PEKARIK 1988, pl. 19.c-d p. 86.

<sup>24</sup> LUCE 1969/70, plates 260-262bis; PICHARD 1995, p.10.

<sup>25</sup> For instance PAL/MEECH-PEKARIK 1988, fig. 18 or ALLINGER 2008, passim.

<sup>26</sup> BAUTZE-PICRON 2003, fig. 183.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, figs 184-185.

<sup>28</sup> For a full view of the Mañjuśrī, see HAQUE/GAIL 2008, plate 490 & p. 130.

<sup>29</sup> See CHRISTIE'S 2000, # 45 pp. 50-51 for further details, a full view of the image and further references (let us mention that this image has been heretofore considered to be Tibetan by the scholars having published it).