

Criteria under which the property is nominated

(Criterion ii): Over a prolonged period of interaction between indigenous societies with Indic cultures to the west starting after the 2nd century BCE, Buddhism achieved its first permanent foothold in Southeast Asia among the Pyu cities, where it was embraced by all classes of society. The development of Pyu Buddhist urban culture had widespread and enduring impact, following the onward transmission of Buddhist teaching and monastic practice into other parts of mainland Southeast Asia.

(Criterion iii): The Pyu Ancient Cities marked the emergence of the first historically-documented Buddhist urban civilization in Southeast Asia. The establishment of literate Buddhist monastic communities arose in tandem with the re-organization of agricultural production, the specialized production of manufactured goods, the construction of religious monuments in brick, and the development of unique mortuary practices.

(Criterion iv): Technological innovations in resource management, hydraulic engineering, agriculture and manufacturing of brick and iron at the Pyu Ancient Cities created the preconditions leading to significant advances in city planning and building construction, resulting in the creation of urban prototypes which later proved critically influential for later city formation in Southeast Asia.

Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

The three Pyu Ancient Cities of Halin, Beikthano, and Sri Ksetra developed and flourished over a period of more than 1,000 years between ca. 200 BCE and 900 CE in the Dry Zone of the middle Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River basin within the territory of what is today modern Myanmar. Covering a combined area of over 5,000 hectares, located within buffer zones of a combined additional area of almost 7,000 hectares, the highly-intact moated-and-walled urban settlements, set within a vast irrigated landscape, contain the remains of monumental brick Buddhist stupas (reliquaries), other ritual structures, palace-citadels, burial grounds, water management features and early industrial production sites.

The Pyu Ancient Cities provide exceptional testimony of the introduction of Buddhism into Southeast Asia two thousand years ago and the attendant economic, socio-political and cultural transformations which resulted in the rise of the first, largest, and longest-lived urbanized settlements of the region up until the 9th century. The Pyu showed a striking capacity to assimilate the Indic influences and swiftly move into a significant degree of re-invention. They created a special form of urbanization, the city of extended urban format, which subsequently influenced urbanization in most of mainland Southeast Asia. These earliest Buddhist city-states played a seminal role in the process of transmitting the literary, architectural and ritual traditions of Pali-based Buddhism to other societies in the sub-region where they continue to be practiced up to the present.

Together, the three cities provide material evidence of the early, mature and late stages of the Pyu civilization, characterized by the emergence of literacy using Indic Brahmi-based script to transcribe Buddhist texts into Pyu vernacular languages, the establishment of Buddhist monastic communities, distinctive mortuary practices, skilful water management which enhanced agricultural productivity and ensured food security, sophisticated metal- and stone-working, and long-distance trade in manufactured goods. Stable conditions brought about by prolonged economic prosperity and enduring social order fostered innovative developments in construction technologies, city planning, agriculture and industrial production. The model of urban culture established by the Pyu Ancient Cities in the first millennium continued to influence subsequent cities throughout Myanmar and in a wider area of mainland Southeast Asia for the next one thousand years.