

MYANMAR

Case Study: Bagan (Pagan)

Situated 550 kilometres northwest of Yangon (former Rangoon) capital of Myanmar, Bagan (Pagan) was the first unified Burmese dynasty from the 11th to 13th centuries. Nearly 3000 temples, stupas, monasteries, and other structures still remain – stretching over more than 100 square kilometres of land on the east bank of the Ayeyarwaddy (Irrawaddy) River. Bagan (Pagan) is on the national tentative list of World Heritage sites and one of the most important archaeological sites in Southeast Asia.

The Archaeological Department of the Myanmar Ministry of Culture is conducting a series of preservation and restoration projects in Bagan. However, due to the vast number of monuments that need immediate restoration work, some of the monuments have been suffering from severe damage caused by harsh weather and erosion of soil, let alone the impact of earthquake activity.

Located at the edge of the sand bank of the Ayeyarwaddy River, without any protection measures, Temple No. 136 lies to the northeast of Nyang Oo Town and has been damaged by severe erosion of the foundation soil. This has been caused mainly by the effect of rain and river impact. It is at risk of collapsing in the near future. Three other stupas, including Temple No. 1339 close to the massive Mingala-zedi Stupa, are said to be in the same critical situation.

Some of the structures near Temple No. 136 are also heavily damaged by a long neglect that has allowed bushes to grow over the top of half collapsing structures.

Some of the wooden monasteries of later periods are also suffering from devastating damage. Pakang gye and Pankang gyi are both located on the other side of the Ayeyarwaddy River, some 20 kilometres northeast of Bagan, and are examples of these critically endangered monuments. Pakang gye, the larger monastery consisting of 332 massive teak columns, stands with tilted columns and no roof or floor. Pakang gyi, the smaller monastery consisting of 156 huge columns, is barely standing.

According the Archaeological Department, these two monuments are now in a relatively better situation, with upright columns at Pakang gye and a restored roof and floor at Pakang gyi. However, lack of the proper maintenance and skilled carpenters may result in possible future risks to both monasteries and to similar structures.



Bagan, Pakang gyi monastery

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Bagan, Pakang gye monastery