

## International Memory of the World Register

### Maha Lawkamarazein or Kuthodaw Inscription Shrines

(Myanmar)

2012-04

#### 1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

Myanmar is one of the long lasting and rare nations for belief in Buddhism in the World. Theravada Buddhism flourished and influenced the daily life of people and community since the early days in Myanmar.

The Kuthodaw Inscriptions, collection of 729 stone slabs were inscribed the whole of Buddhist scriptures in 1868. Each stone slab was housed in a masonry shrine within the precincts of the Kuthodaw Pagoda and stands to this day.

In 1871, King Mindon convened the Fifth Great Synod, and the entire Tipitaka inscribed on 729 stone slabs was approved by the council.

In 1900, a print copy of the text came out in a set of 38 volumes, claimed that the books were "true copies of the Pitaka inscribed on stone slabs".

This collection is unique in the Buddhist world and is highly prized by all oriental scholars. It is considered a major documentary heritage of world significance because it gives valuable information on several major themes of on 19<sup>th</sup> century of Myanmar as well as Buddhist religious in world history and culture. Among the rare documentary in evidence of religious teaching, those complex of stone slabs inscriptions are revealing the history and history of its community for Myanmar. This inscription brought to light in following aspects of socio-economic, socio-political, global communication and religious morality in Buddhism and Buddhist community. The inscription also reflects to support the long tradition of human being and Buddhist devotees in the World.

Till now, Buddhist canon inscribed on 729 stone slabs, approved by the 5<sup>th</sup> Buddhist Synod is still being used for religious purpose in Myanmar.

#### 2.0 Nominator

##### 2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library,  
Ministry of Culture,  
The Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

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##### 2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

The Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library has the authority to preserve and conserve the nominated heritage. The department reviews historical documents, religious edifices and archival records of national significant collections. It also organizes activities to raise people's awareness of the value of documents, the necessity of conservation and the right to access the heritage widely. The Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library, Ministry of Culture has been undertaking the conservation and dissemination of nominated heritage.

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##### 2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

U Kyaw Oo Lwin,  
Director-General,

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Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar.  
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#### **2.4 Contact details**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Address</i>
Same as above mentioned	Same as above mentioned

  

<i>Telephone</i>	<i>Facsimile</i>	<i>Email</i>
Same as above mentioned	Same as above mentioned	Same as above mentioned

### **3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage**

#### **3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated**

##### **Maha Lawkamarazein or Kuthodaw Inscription Shrine.**

Maha Lawkamarazein or Kuthodaw Inscription Shrines locate at Kuthodaw or Maha Lawkamarazein Pagoda. The Pagoda was built in 1857 by King Mindon. All of the Maha Lawkamarazein or Kuthodaw Inscription were established and erected around the Pagoda in 1868.

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#### **3.2 Catalogue or registration details**

The name of nominated heritage is Maha Lawkamarazein or Kuthodaw Inscriptions Shrine. Kuthodaw Inscriptions laid down at Kuthodaw Pagoda where locates at Mandalay Township, Mandalay Division, and central Myanmar flat plan of arid region. The inscription was made by King Mindon. King Mindon, the second last ruler in Myanmar monarchy of Konbaung Dynasty, wishes to leave a great merit for posterity meant to last five millennia after the Buddha. Therefore, he did a great work of construction of the world's largest book, consisting of 729 large stone slabs with the Tipitaka Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism inscribed on them in gold. This monumental task was done by the monks and many skilled craftsmen, and it begun 1860 and took about 8 years to finish this work. All the stones were completed and opened to the public in 1868.

It took 7 years 6 months and 14 days to finishing inscribing the text of Tipitakas on 729 slabs. By chiselling it took the whole day for each scribe to finish inscribing 10 to 12 lines. The text had been meticulously edited by many senior monks and lay officials consulting the Tipitaka kept in royal libraries in the form of palm-leaf manuscripts. The stone inscription is distinctive feature and collection of 729 stone slabs in which are inscribed the whole of the Buddhist scriptures, and each of stone slab was housed in a masonry shrine within the precincts of the Kuthodaw Pagoda at the foot of Mandalay Hill where it and the so called " World's Largest Book ", stands to this day. The total number of marble slabs on which Tipitakas was inscribed amounts in 729; 410 slabs record Suttas, 111 slabs record Vinaya and 208 slabs record Abhidhamma. Each marble slab measures 5 feet and 6 inches high, 3 feet and 6 inches width and 6 inches thick, with two faces of inscription.

In 1871, King Mindon convened the Fifth Great Synod in Mandalay. The main objective of this meeting was to recite all the teachings of the Buddha and examine them systematically if any

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of them was dropped or altered. It was presided over by Senior Venerable in the company of some 2400 monks, and lasted for five months. It was also the work of this council to approve the entire Tipitaka, Buddhist scriptures inscribed for posterity on 729 marble slabs.

In 1900, a print copy of the text came out in a set of 38 volumes in Royal Octavo size of about 400 pages each in Great primer type. The publisher, Philip H. Ripley of Hanthawaddy Press, claimed that the books were “true copies of the Pitaka inscribed on stones by King Mindon”.

That is all about the story of the World’s Largest Book, and the collection of 729 stone slabs is unique in the Buddhist world and is highly prized by all oriental scholars.

1901: Pagoda and all shrine ( including the Inscription) were claimed in Antiquity and Ancient Monument in 1901.

1910: Has been declared to be “a protective monument” under section 3, clause(3), of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act, VII of 1904 ( Vida General Department Notification no.207, dated the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1910)

1921: No.31, pages 16-17: Amended List of Ancient Monuments in Burma, Mandalay Division, Classification 1(b) (Name mentioned in Kuthodaw Pagoda)

( 1. Those monuments, which from their present condition and historical and archaeological value, ought to be maintained in permanent good repair. / (b) monuments owned and maintained by private person but maintained by the owners and Government jointly or by Government exclusively)

1960: No.31, pages 16-17: Amended List of Ancient Monuments in Burma, Mandalay Division, Classification 1(b) (Name mentioned in Kuthodaw Pagoda)

( 1. Those monuments, which from their present condition and historical and archaeological value, ought to be maintained in permanent good repair. / (b) monuments owned and maintained by private person but maintained by the owners and Government jointly or by Government exclusively)

1999: No.3/99, (6.8.1999): Announcement of Notification the Ancient Monumental Zone under the implementation of “ The Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Regions Law,1998 (Amended,2009)”

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### **3.3 Visual documentation if appropriate (for example, photographs, or a DVD of the documentary heritage)**

Photographs, Video

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### **3.4 History/provenance**

The Maha Lawkamarzein or Kuthodaw Stones Inscription was inscribed by King Mindon in 1868 at Mandalay city. King Mindon, the tenth successor of Kobaung Monarchy was founder of Mandalay Ancient City and convener of the Fifth Buddhist Synod, too.

Maha Lawkamarzein or Kuthodaw stone inscription were made of marble (*crystalline lime stone*) and it is so strong and hard to deterioration. It remains as good as new after well over a century. The inscriptions contain not only the complete Pitaka but also some Pali commentaries like Netti, Milindapanda, and Petakopadesa. The script used is the Myanmar (Burmese) script.

Each stone, having one foot and a half underground, is securely held up to stand separate. A small cave-like structure of Sinhalese relic casket type is built to shelter each stone and the stones are arranged in neat rows within the three enclosures of the Kuthodaw pagoda. The first or the inner enclosure has 42 of them, the second or the middle enclosure has 168 and the third or the outer enclosure has 519, all adding up to 729.

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### 3.5 Bibliography

1. *A Chronology of Myanmar History, Vol.I* . 2011. Nay Pyi Taw: Department of Historical Research.
  2. Amar,Daw,Ludu.1985. *The World Biggest Book*.Mandalay: Moe Publishing.
  3. Aung Thaw.1972. *Historical Site in Burma*. Yangon: Ministry of Culture.
  4. Htun Shein , Nat-Mauk.2009. *150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the City of Mandalay* . Mandalay: Mandalay City Development.
  5. Maung Maung Tin, U. 1905. *Konbaung Hset Maha Yazawin, Vol III*. 2004 ed. Yangon: Department of Universities History Research.
  6. *Myanmar Encyclopaedia, Vol. VIII* ,1973. “the 5<sup>th</sup> Buddha Synod”,pp.215-216.
  7. Shwe Kaing Tha. 1959. *100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the City Mandalay* , Mandalay: Kyipwayay Press.
  8. Than Tun, Dr.( trans) .1974. *World Biggest Book* by Ludu Daw Ahmar ,3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1994. Mandalay : Kyipwayay Press.
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### 4.0 Legal information

#### 4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

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Name	Address		
Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library	Building No.35, Ministry of Culture, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar		
Telephone	Facsimile	Email	
95-67-408038	95-67-408286	kyawoolwin.arch@gmail.com, m.myanmarculture@gmail.com	

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#### 4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

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Name	Address		
Same as above mentioned	Same as above mentioned		
Telephone	Facsimile	Email	
Same as above mentioned	Same as above mentioned	Same as above mentioned	

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#### 4.3 Legal status

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The nominated heritage is owned and managed by the Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library, Ministry of Culture.

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#### 4.4 Accessibility

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People can see the stone inscription (described the Buddhist Canon) at Maha Lawkamarzein Kuthodaw Pagoda. For study purpose, one must be permitted by the Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library, Ministry of Culture.

Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library is accessible for consultation and

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research.

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#### **4.5 Copyright status**

The documents and texts are not subject to copyright. It is requested that the sources of the documents be mentioned when quoted in any publication.

### **5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria**

#### **5.1 Authenticity.**

The nominated heritage dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It is unique and irreplaceable in the World. The Maha Lawkamarazein or Kuthodaw stone inscription is original establishment. The authenticity of the collections of Kuthodaw inscription is not in doubt, because these were inscribed by King and which also constructed and conserved with shrines by King and his relatives' and authorise persons. These are also an in-situ in place where is existing.

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#### **5.2 World significance**

The Maha Lawkamarazein or Kuthodaw stone inscription shows not only deep veneration in Buddhism but also regard for the King Mindon's idea that he wanted to leave a great merit for posterity meant to last five millennia/ five thousand years after the Buddha .

Moreover, there are Sixth Buddhist Councils and the Fifth and Sixth Buddhist Councils were held in Myanmar, apart from the India and Sri Lanka and recorded Buddha Canon and its commentaries. It is also significant event of the Buddhist religious and devotees in the World. Among the rare documentary in evidence of religious teaching, those complex of stone slabs inscriptions are revealing the history and history of its community for Myanmar. These stone inscriptions were created not only by the King but also community and society. King Mindon was peaceful and strongly pious king, and during his reign, religious and welfare works were undertaken. These stone inscriptions show the achievement of King Mindon .So far, he is pious king like King Asoka, and he is a model king of Buddhist Myanmar.

The Fifth Buddhist Synod was held in Mandalay in 1871, nearly two thousand years after the Fourth Synod. The main objective of this meeting was to recite all the teachings of the Buddha and examine them systematically if any of them was dropped or altered. It was presided over by Senior Venerable in the company of some 2400 monks and lasted for five months. It was also the work of this council to approve the entire Tipitaka, Buddhist scriptures inscribed for posterity on 729 marble slabs. King Mindon held a Buddhist Synod which goes down in history as the Fifth Buddhist Synod.

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#### **5.3 Comparative criteria:**

***Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)***

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## **1 Time**

The document reflects the socio-economic, technology, political situation and religion on 19th century in Myanmar. It shows how Myanmar acted the Buddhism and during the colonial period of political, social and religion in 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2 Place**

Myanmar is the only country in Southeast Asia that she has to set up Buddhism and Buddhist devotedness of her choice. Mandalay city was the capital of the last King of the last Myanmar Dynasty. Mandalay exists as its old pre-eminence, but as the centre of Myanmar culture it was outstanding in the past, it holds the stage now, and will continue to have a pride of place in the future.

Mandalay was founded by King Mindon in 1857, and the majority of the monuments there including the palace, the city walls, pagodas and monasteries were built in that year or soon after. The city took its name from the Mandalay Hill which is situated at the north-east corner of the present Town. The hill has for long been a holy mount, and tradition has it that the Buddha on his visit with his disciple Ananda had prophesied that in the 2400th year of his religion a great city, metropolis of Buddhism, would be founded at its foot. The classical name of the city is Ratanapunja.

Mandalay is a rich city that is rich in historical memories as the last capital before the British annexes the whole country and also rich in monuments relating to Buddhism, perhaps the richest next to Bagan. Mandalay city lies as a near-perfect geometrical pattern, the roads cutting at right angles-physically, a well-laid out city. Toward the east there are Shan Plateau and to the west there is Myanmar's life-stream, the mighty Ayeyarwaddy, flowing by.

## **3 People**

King Mindon was born in 1814. He was a son of King Tharwaddy who was seventh successor of Konbaung Dynasty which was the last monarchy in Myanmar. He had only younger brother who was a crown prince and very advanced and modernized person of Myanmar monarchy. The King Mindon throned in February 17, 1853. During his reign, the country was so terrible in political condition. Lower Myanmar was annexed by the British and there were also conflict and crisis of political affair in Myanmar. The King was disable and irrespective in his government. Most of socio-political was uncertain and imbalance. After getting the throne, the King Mindon reformed the all sectors in social, political and foreign relation. The documents reveal the King's interest in intellectual pursuits in history, religion and the arts. He was a popular and well-known personality in Myanmar and Europe.

The conduct to public of King Mindon was innovative, and that is granted until now. A personality cult has developed after annexing the British colonial rule when he became a King of identity in religion, technology and socio-economic in Upper Myanmar. In recent years, more than one and half century after his death he has been much revered in Myanmar as a great and beloved king who laid the foundation for the country in all areas concerned. This spiritual bonding is a unique phenomenon, arising from the Buddhist tradition they gained from the study of history what kind of a person he was and how he cared for his subjects.

## **4 Subject and theme**

The transformation and modernization of Myanmar, these inscription are indicated to sustainable in Buddhist religion and political and socio-economic status of during the colonial regime with Myanmar monarchy to modern world.

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The documents cover following themes :

- 1) Respect of religion and traditional Buddhist culture of Myanmar
- 2) Promotion of religion and education for all, regardless of society and community
- 3) Development of religious sector and political unification of the whole Myanmar.
- 4) Language and Literature in Myanmar

## **5 Form and style**

The script used is the Myanmar (Burmese) script and letter is in rounded characters. It is well maintained the Pali Language and Buddhist Teaching. The documents were expressed to conserve the original description and text of Buddha / Buddha's discourses in two thousand and five hundred years ago. Moreover, some commentaries of Buddha Canon which were deciphered in late period of respective time. It is also recognized the language and linguistic of Myanmar in 19<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

## **6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:**

### **6.0 Contextual information**

#### **6.1 Rarity**

There is only one complete document of Buddha's Teaching in stone material form in Myanmar, compared with other countries such as Korea, India, Tibet and Thailand. Myanmar has been invented stone material.

There are other documents related to Buddhist Canon of Tipitaka in the archives in Korea, India, Tibet, Japan, Sri Lanka that are different material, such as, wooden, palm-leaf, paper but the documents nominated here are the indigenous records of an Asian state that was free to deliberate and carry out measures independently and judiciously. For that reason they are indeed very rare in the world and should be made known for further study widely. Those related to the abolition of slavery by peaceful means over several years are particularly valuable.

#### **6.2 Integrity**

The Maha Lawkamarazein or Kuthodaw Inscription Shrine is intact, completeness and wholeness in their entirely existing remains.

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