

UNESCO: Myanmar's first site inscribed to World Heritage List

By Aung Khin

Yangon, 22 June—The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's World Heritage Committee on Sunday has given green light to Myanmar for its entry of Pyu Ancient Cities onto the World Heritage List.

The three old cities of Hanlin, Beikthano and Sri Kestra with brick walls and moats were inscribed on the list during the 38th Session of the World Heritage Committee held in Doha of Qatar, according to an official announcement by the Committee.

The Myanmar Department of Archaeology and National Museum under the Ministry of Culture submitted an application to the World Heritage Committee for Pyu cities to enter the World Heritage List under the category of culture on October 1996. These ancient cities are located in vast irrigated landscapes in the dry zone of the Ayeyawady River basin, and reflect the Pyu Kingdom that were prosperous for over 1,000 years between 200 B.C and 900 A.D.

The three cities have been partly excavated archaeological sites, and more excavation works remain for excavated palace citadels, burial grounds and early industrial production sites, as well as monumental brick Buddhist stupas, partly standing walls and water management features —some still in use—that underpinned the organized intensive agriculture.

Hanlin, excavated in 1904, 1929-30 and 1962- 67, had a rectangular city wall in brick of 3 by 1.5 km with a palace site at the centre. Beikthano with a site of 3 km quadrangular city walls and gateways was excavated in 1959-63. Sri Kestra, the largest Pyu City, was enclosed by a circular city wall in brick with a diameter of 4.4 km.

The cultural relics and religious buildings, located in Natma Taung National park, are now under consideration by UNESCO to be designated as world heritage sites, according to UNESCO.

Ancient Pyu people spoke a language closely related to Myanmar, with the stone inscriptions found in some of their monuments providing the only knowledge of this language.

The Pyu culture is characterized by specific artifacts of coins, ceramic and metalware. Archaeological evidence confirms the emergence of Buddhism in Myanmar during the Pyu period.
