

Day 3, Part 2b Bagan, the rest of the day:



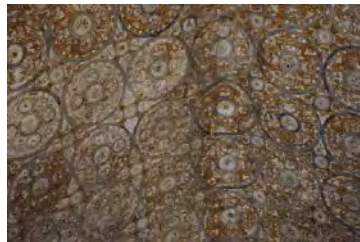
The rest of the morning was spent at one temple after another. We stopped at Bhaya Thon Zu Phaya. This is an unusual temple as it is a triad of temples with narrow, vaulted aisles. It is believed that these temples were built in the late 13th century, but this is just a guess. All three of the temples have the same shape, looking like triplets. All are square on the bottom, tapering up into a stupa spire. While these shapes are not unusual, what is unusual the fact that it is a triad makes it different. Two of the temples are covered with murals but the third is completely empty, suggesting the temple was never completed.

And then it was off to the Htilominlo Temple. On the way we passed a temple surrounded by goats. Not a usual sight.



Htilominlo Temple is a large temple built by King Nantaungmya in 1218. It is the last temple built in Bagan in the Myanmar Style. The name is a misreading of the Pali word for 'Blessings of the Three Worlds'. King Nantaungmya erected the temple on this spot because it was here that he was chosen, from among five brothers, to be the crown prince. The selection of the heir to the throne had a tradition, which was to erect a white umbrella and the future ruler would be chosen when the white umbrella tilts in his position. So some people say Htilominlo means "favored by the king and the white umbrella as well".

There are four Buddhas inside the temple. There are traces of old murals on the walls but the best ones are on the ceiling. There are plaster carvings, or at least fragments of them, and glazed sandstone decorations on the outside walls.





As in many of the temples, the entire pathway was lined with vendors selling colorful items. And on the way out we passed some long-necked women.

There are several tribes of long-necked women mostly in Myanmar but also in Northern Thailand just on the border with Myanmar

(where Andy and I visited them a few years ago). Girls first start to wear rings around their necks when they are around 5 years old. Over the years the coil is replaced by a longer one and more turns are added. The weight of the brass pushes the collar bone down and compresses the rib cage. The neck itself is not lengthened. The coil, once on, is seldom removed, as the coiling and uncoiling is a lengthy procedure. It is usually only removed to be replaced by a new or longer coil. There is much discussion about whether they wear the coils at this point for the tourists. While it may be partly true, it is also part of their culture.



Then it was lunch time and we headed back to the Eden BBB restaurant where we ate yesterday. Right next door were some oxen...



On way to the next temple, Nanpaya, we stopped to see the outside of the largest temple, Thatbyinnyu. It towers the other pagodas in Bagan. And it is a magnificent white. The name, Thatbyinnyu, comes from the Omniscience of the Buddha or "knowing thoroughly and seeing widely." It was built between the years of 1113-1163. It was one of the first to be built with two stories.

Nanpaya is more of a shrine than a temple. It is said that it was once used as a prison to hold the Mon King, Manuha, who had been captured. It is made of sandstone masonry block facings integrated over a brick core. The stone windows were perforated, which let light inside, and were topped with intricate arches. But it was still rather dark inside.

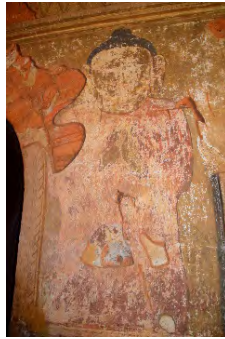


The main sanctuary has four stone pillars with finely carved sandstone bas-relief figures of four-faced Brahma. Some were



easier to see than others as they were worn. The creator deity is holding lotus flowers, thought to be offerings to a free-standing Buddha image once situated in

the shrine's center, but now gone. The sides of the pillars bear ogre-like heads with open mouths streaming with flowers. According to the Myanmar legend, the face of the orge represents the guardian and eats flowers instead of meat.



Our next stop was a lacquer workshop. We got to see how lacquer items are made and as much as Andy and I dislike visiting “factories,” this was a small family operated workshop, and I must admit it was very interesting. We saw all the different steps and finished, of course, in their shop. The items were beautiful and unbelievably inexpensive. But for the larger items, shipping was very expensive. Phyllis and I told Toe that they should raise the prices and include shipping for free.

The tradition of lacquerware began in Bagan in the 12th-13th century. In Myanmar the resin for the lacquer comes from the Thit-si tree which grows all over the country. The resin is removed via notches at the base of tree and small bowls are placed there to collect the sap. But the body of the lacquerware is made of bamboo, which is cut, softened and then worked into the same of the object such as bowls, dishes, vases, plates, boxes etc. As you might expect, the most popular are boxes to hold betel leaves and nuts. Ah, addiction. Some objects are also made from horse hair.

Once the object is formed from the bamboo and/or horse hair, the resin paste, often mixed with ashes, is very gently applied. This is what distinguishes the different quality of lacquer ware – the number of layers of resin. The more expensive ones have at least seven layers. Each layer is applied by hand to make sure it is smooth.

The next step is the drying which takes place in a dark, wet area and lasts for about a week. It is then time to polish the object with sandpaper or ash of ox bone. The next layer of lacquer is placed and the whole process is repeated. Once all the layers have been placed, washed and dried, color is applied, usually red, green, blue or yellow and the engraving begins. Engraving is done by hand without any patterns or models to copy.



And when we finally finished our shopping, it was time for our sunset “cruise.” The beach along the river was filled with people playing, relaxing, washing and of course, selling their wares. And lots and lots of large ceramic pots. The boats were all lined up which itself made for a beautiful sight as they were very colorful. Our boat was steered by a single young man with one long pole. We sailed up the river, saw temples, saw wildlife, watched the sun set, and sailed back down again. Along the way we again saw lots of people washing their clothes or bathing. We would see this over and over again anytime we were near a body of water. With no running water in many of the villages, this is the only way to bath. The women wrapped in their longyi are washing their clothes and themselves. Since there is no privacy, this is how they bath.

Our boat had a long green deck and could seat many more people than the five of us. We had the luxury of being able to wander around, sit in different spots, relax and just enjoy the views. There are many wonderful reasons to travel with Ben and Phyllis, and one of them is that I end up with unexpected pictures of me. Thanks Ben and Phyllis!

