

Terracotta Votive Tablets from Catubhummika Hngak Twin Monastery, Thaton

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Abstract

Recent excavations from Stubhummika monastery, Thaton yielded over 2000 terracotta votive tablets, among them 1350 in good condition with others fragments. The study of these finds is based on the style of Buddha and Bodhisattava, decorative elements (stupas, *sikhara*, parasol and throne). These are compared with the contemporary tablets from Mon State, Śriksetra, Vesali and Bagan, and outside of Myanmar from India, central and peninsular Thailand and west Java to establish a comparative chronology. From this systematic approach, these tablets were divided into three groups: 1) Buddha (seated or standing Buddha, flanked by stupas), 2) Buddha Triad, and 3) Episodes of the Buddha. Their progression shows they are not be earlier than the 8th-9th century CE and not later than the 11th century CE.

Keywords: Thaton, Buddhist art, religious culture, archaeology

Introduction

An assemblage of 1350 complete and 2000 fragmentary terracotta votive tablets was unearthed during 2015 rescue excavations at Catubhummika Monastery, Thaton (16° 54'N and 97° 22'E) providing a significant addition to in situ data from Thaton (San Win 2015: 69, 85; Fig. 1). The assemblage is a significant addition to in situ data from which to understand the Buddhism of Thaton between the 8th and 11th centuries CE.

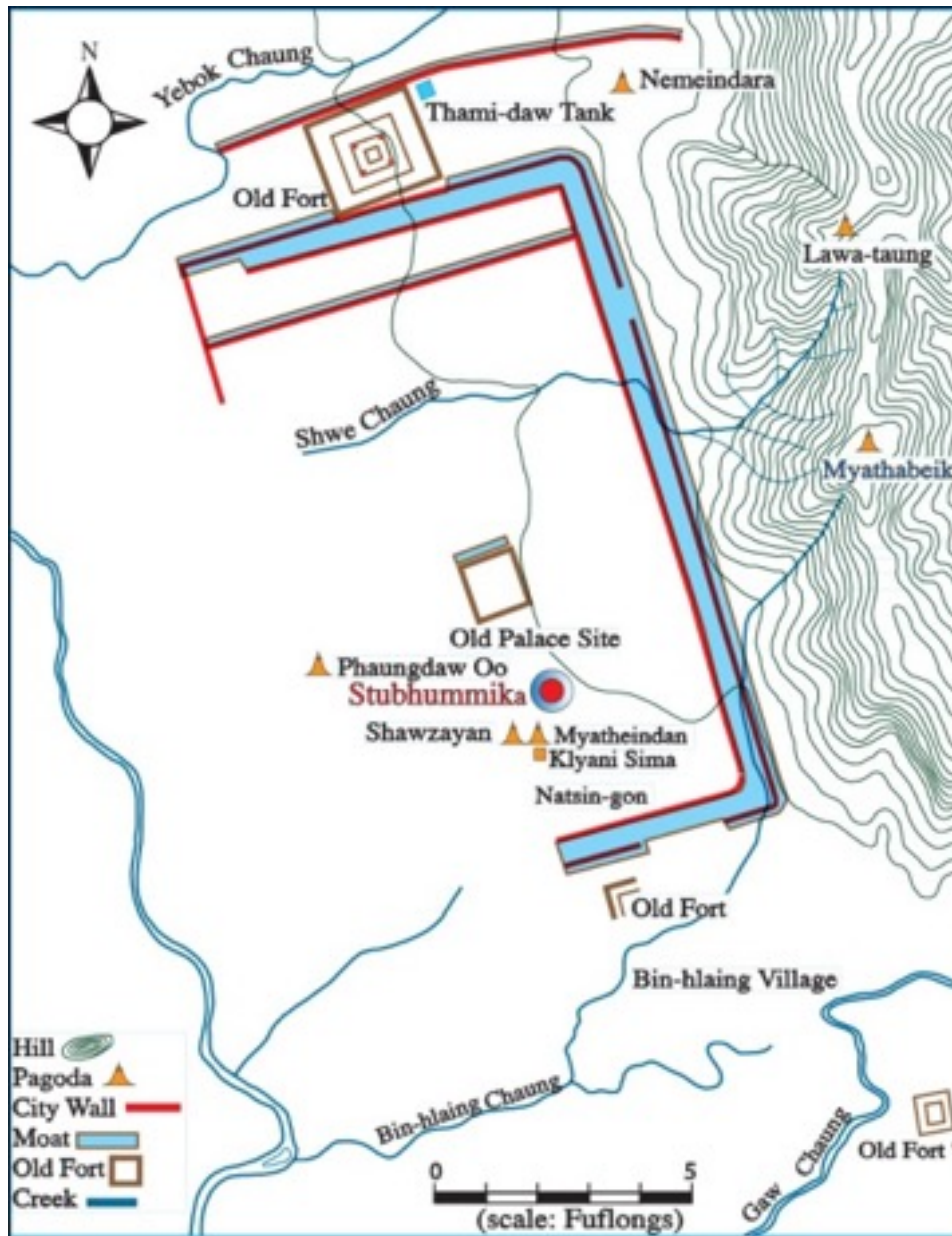


Fig. 1 Location of Catubhumikka Monastery, Thaton. Source: U San Win.

The votive tablets were discovered in 2015, when the abbot, Bhaddanta Tikkhañāna of Catubhumikka monastery decided to build a corridor around the tomb of his deceased teacher Hngak-twin Sayatawkyi who passed away in 1910¹. The corridor had an octagonal plan. A total of eight pits - CBK1 to CBK8 - were excavated under the corridor between May and November 2015. Pits CBK1, CBK2, CBK3 and CBK7 each measure 3.35 square meters while CBK2, CBK3, CBK4, CBK6 and CBK8 are 2.15 square meters. The votive tablets used in this classification came from pits CBK1, CBK2, CBK6 and CBK7. Within each pit, deposits were found at multiple

¹ Hngak-twin Sayataw kyī 'U Pandawa' (1831-1910 AD or 1193- 1272 ME) passed away in 1910 (ME 1271). His religious title was "Pañā dī pa kawi dha ja di sā pāmokkha tipitaka lañkāra" conferred respectfully by King Mindon in 1866 CE (ME 1228) during the Konbaung period.

depths but further documentation was not possible as the renovation of the tomb proceeded (Tab. 1; Fig. 2).

Date	No of Votive Tablets	Grid Square	Depth
15-Jun-15	47	CBK6-CBK7	137.16 CM
15-Jun-15	46	CBK1- CBK2	152.4 CM
15-Jul-15	190	CBK6	152.4CM – 213.36 CM
15-Jul-15	400	CBK2	152.4CM – 213.36 CM
8-Aug-15	290	CBK1	152.4CM – 213.36 CM
15-Sep-15	400	CBK2	152.4CM – 213.36 CM
23-Nov-15	377	CBK7	152.4CM – 213.36 CM

Table 1 Votive Tablets per grid square and depth.

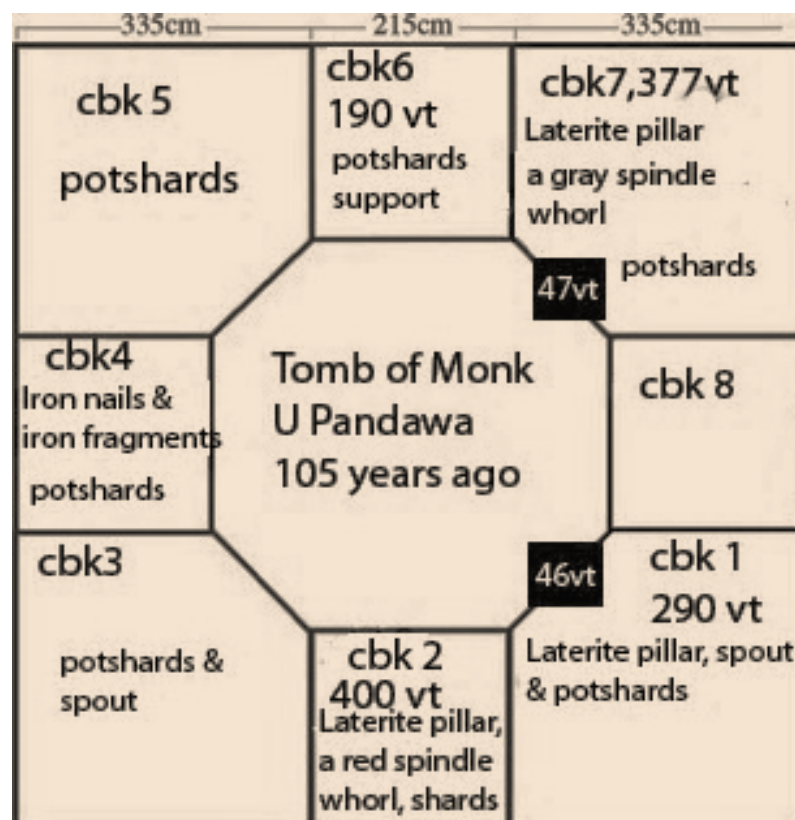


Fig. 2 Excavated finds from the Catubummika (CBK) site in octagonal layout. Source: Bhaddanta Tikkañāna.

Other excavated objects and laterite pillars

Potsherds were discovered in CBK1-4, 6 and 7, and iron nails and fragments in CBK 4 and 8. Finds from other pits include potsherds, libation jar spouts from CBK 1 and 3 and iron fragments all support the proposed 9th-11th century chronology. Another significant find was three laterite pillars excavated from CBK1, CBK2 and CBK7. The pillars which have the inner holes are associated with deposits of votive tablets. Each pillar appears to have been made to support a pile of votive tablets as the tablets were found heaped on top of, or placed in a cavity on average 10 cm deep made on top of the pillar.



Fig. 3 Left: (Pillar support from CBK1, CBK2 and CBK7). Right: Heap of votive tablets on a laterite pillar support. Source: U San Win.





No of Laterite pillar	CBK 1	CBK 2	CBK 7	CBK 7
	Inner hole			
Photograph courtesy by Bhaddanta Tikkañāna				
Measurement	Height 34.29cm, Diameter 30.48cm, Inner hole depth 11.43cm, Diameter 13.97cm	Height 35.56cm, Diameter 27.94cm, Inner hole depth 15.24cm, Diameter 10.16cm	Height 36.83cm, Diameter 26.67cm	Height 16.51cm, Diameter 10.16cm

Table 2 Laterite pillar supports found in CBK. Source: Bhaddanta Tikkañāna.

The pillars and libation jars indicate the previous use of this location for ritual purposes long before the tomb construction in 1910. The largest number of votive tablets was from CBK2 on the south with 400, CBK7 on the northeast with 377, CBK1 on the southeast with 290, CBK6 on the north with 190. An additional 47 tablets were found at the corner of CBK6 and 7 on the north, and 46 at the corner of CBK1 and 2 on the south. No tablets were recovered from any of the pits on the west or east, possibly because the image of the Buddha faced in this direction.

Votive Tablet classification

The 1350 excavated votive tablets are divided into three groups:

- 1) Buddha Triad
- 2) Single Buddha and stupas
- 3) Episodes from the life of the Buddha

These groups are described below based on the size and shape of the tablets, the *mudrā* and *asana* of the figures of the Buddha and bodhisattva and decorative details including the finial, arched pediment, stupas and the narrative scenes.

Group 1: Buddha Triad

Group 1, Type 1



Fig. 4 Left: Type 1 Buddha Triad with five Dhyāni Buddhas [13 x 7.5 x 1.5cm]. Right: Fragment of Type 1. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

Type 1 has a rectangular base and a pointed top. There are nine tablets of Type 1 in good condition and eight broken ones among the excavated finds. The Type 1 tablets have two Panels depicting the five *Dhyāni* Buddhas on the upper part, and the Buddhist Triad and the two disciples at the Buddha's feet on the lower panel. All six Buddhas bear a halo and sit on lotus throne. At the upper panel, the topmost Buddha sits in *dhyānāsana* and *bhūmiṣparśamudrā* flanked by a Buddha in *dharmacakramudrā* (*vyākhyānamudrā*) and *dhyānāsana* on each side. Under three seated Buddhas, there are two Buddhas in *dhyānāsana* and *dhyānamudrā* (*Samadhimudrā*) at the level of the halo over the main figure.

The lower row is the Buddhist Triad with the Buddha (main figure) in *bhadrāsana* (*pralambapadāsana*) with the right hand in *vitarka mudrā* and left hand resting on the lap. The main figure is flanked by a pair of crownless standing Bodhisattva (Maitreya

at the right side of Buddha and Avaokokiteśvarato the left) in tribaṅgha pose with haloes. Their inner hands are raised in (?)*abhayamudrā* and outer hands are hanging down. At both sides of the Buddha's feet there are two kneeling figures in *namaskāramudrā*, probably the pre-eminent disciples Aggasāvaka Sāriputra and Moggalāna. This tablet is exactly the same as a broken tablet found in Śriksetra which is assigned to the date of 9th-10th century CE (Mya 1961: Vol. II: 28-29, Fig. 53).

Similar tablets (three seated Buddhas and Buddha Triad) were found in Vasali (Rakhine 8th century CE, see Nyunt Han and Kyaw Oo Lwin 2015: 156), Kyaikkami (8th century CE; Temple 1894), Winka (Thaton 6th-7th centuries CE, See Myint Aung 1999: 40-42, 52-53, Pl. VIII; Moore 2007: 198, Fig. on the top right, now at the Mawlamyine museum) and Kawgon (Mon State 6th-7th century CE; Mya 1961: Vol. I, Fig. 117), Thailand (8th century CE, Cœdès 1926: 166, Pl. II; Chirapravati 1997: 22, Pl. 7; Krairiksh 1980: 123, Pl. 23) and West Java (7th-8th century CE, see Manguin and Indrajaya 2006: 248-249, Figs. 23-6; Revire 2012: 110-112).

This Type 1 tablet seems to be a new sub-type which was made by emulating the previous ones mentioned above. The styles and facial appearance and the body of Buddha in *bhadrāsana* post resemble those of the Pala period in India. Type 1 tablets are probably datable to the 9th-10th century CE. The style of *bhadrāsana* position was popular until 18th century CE, and many such figures can be seen on the wall of Kawgun cave in Karan state, Myanmar.

Group 1 Type 2: Three seated Buddhas

The Type 2 votive tablet has a rectangular base and a rounded top. The Type 2 Buddha Triad tablets show three seated Buddhas. The central Buddha is in *dharmacakramudrā* and *dhyānāsana* seated on double lotus throne flanked by a *nirmāna kaya* or *nimmita* Buddha seated on double lotus throne on each side. They are probably seated in *dhyānāsana* with *dharmacakramudrā*. This episode probably represents the Episode of the Twin Miracle or the First Sermon, the latter because some votive tablets with the Eight Episodes of Buddha's life include this scene. Two sub-types are shown below with the different arrangement of figures below the throne noted in the text.

Under the throne there seems to be four or five persons. The middle one is a crowned Bodhisattva seated in *Rājājalāsana* with the left hand raised and palm upward, and the right hand resting on the knee. The person at the left corner of the tablet is probably Śakti (the consort of Bodhisattva) or a Bodhisattva kneeling on one leg and the other one is raised. The left hand is raised on the left knee with palm upward in the same *mudrā* as the Bodhisattva in the middle with the right hand bent into chest (discussion posture?). The other person is standing beside the middle Bodhisattva and the adjoining two figures also appear to be standing and sitting. There is a single lotus line at the base of votive tablet. The styles of these figures alternate in their placement between left to right (Type 2A) and in the opposite direction (Type 2B).

Group 1, Type 2



Fig. 5 Left: Type 2A [8.5 x 6 x 1.5 cm]. Right: Type 2B. [9 x 6.3 x 1.5 cm]. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

Their styles and postures are similar to the Bodhisattva figures of the tablets from Śrīksetra (Mya 1961: Vol II, 17, Fig. 16, 84; Duroiselle 1931: 130-131, Figs. 2, 4, 8). U Mya suggested that there might have been connections between Śrīksetra and Nalandain Bihar, India as well as Thailand and the Malay Peninsula due to the letter 'Sri nalandaya' (See Mya: Vol. II, 36-37, Fig. 85). They are presumed here to date to the 9th-10th century CE based on the same *asana* and *mudrā* of Buddha and Bodhisattva on votive tablets from Śrīksetra.

Group 1, Type 3: Crowned Sakyamuni Buddha or crowned Nirmāna Buddha



Fig. 6 Group 1, Type 3 Three Nirmāna-kāya crowned Buddhas, 9th-10th century CE [12 x 6.7 x 1.5 cm]. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

The Type 3 votive tablet has a rectangular base and pointed top. It can be compared to one with a rim from Śriksetra (9th-10th century CE) (Mya 1961: Vol. II, 33, Fig. 73). The tablet has a *htupika* (*stupika*) finial with an *amalaka* (stone disk with ridges; Myanmar call this ‘Phayon tone’) on the apex of the *śikhara*. It seems that a *ceti* is under the *śikhara*. There is a flying deity and two miniature stupas on each side of the *śikhara*. Under the flying deities on both side of *śikhara*, the Bodhi tree is depicted. Besides the pediment, each *Byāla* or lion is depicted in standing profile. At the base, under the throne, there is a deer at the both corners. A further five persons are in standing and sitting positions, probably *Māra*’s army, often seen at Catubhumikka votive tablets with the Enlightenment of the Buddha and Buddha Triad.

A crowned Buddha sits in *dharmacakramudrā* and *dhyānāsana* between two crowned *nirmāṇa* Buddha in *dharmacakramudrā* and sitting with *lalitāsana*-one leg raised and one hanging under the large trefoil arch (See Luce 1969-70: Vol. I, 174). These three Buddhas sit on the double lotus throne and are front-facing. Inside the upper *śikhara* are also miniature three seated Buddhas similar to the main three figures inside the trefoil arch. These three Buddha figures probably represent the *Nirmāna-kāya*-*Sakyamuni* Buddha. According to the Mahāyāna Buddhism, the *Tri-Kāya* or three kinds of Bodies of the Buddha are explained as follows:

...it is believed that Buddha has three kinds of body. (1) *Dharma-kāya*: This is ‘Dharma Body or Body of Reality’ which is formless, unchanging and transcendental. Its synonyms are Suchness (*Tathatā*) and Voidness (*Suññata*). (2) *Sambhoga-kāya*: *Amitābhā* Buddha etc. who presides over the Pure Land is the ‘Celestial Body of Enjoyment’. (3) *Nirmāna-kāya*: In order to benefit the world, a Buddha incarnates Himself into the human body. *Sakyamuni* Buddha and so on, who had attained Buddhahood, are the ‘Incarnated Body’ (U Nyanawara 2014:47).

Further comparisons can be made to a triad on the upper part of the Trap, an old Mon inscription of King Makuta (circa 1015 CE) found at the Shwesayan pagoda in Thaton (Luce 1969-70: Vol. I, 174) and Śriksetra as well (Mya 1961: Vol. II, 33, Fig. 73). However, the disciples flanking the Buddha from the Trap inscription are in *namaskāramudra* which are different to those from the figures of this type. Professor Luce mentioned the *mudras* of disciples in *dharmacakramudrās* follows.

...similarly shows a crowned Buddha seated crosslegged in *dharmacakramudrā*. On each side, in *pralambapanāsana*, sits sideways but face front a *nirmāna* Buddha, crownless, also in *dharmacakramudrā*. The scene should be the Twin Miracle, but below the lotus seat appears the Wheel, with Deer on each side, i.e. the First Sermon!” (Luce 1969-70: Vol. I, 174)

It is supposed to be of the episode of the First Sermon due to the inclusion of the wheel and deer. The date of the tablet as Śriksetra assigned by U Mya is 9th-10th century CE, before the reign of King Aniruddha, Bagan. The suggestion of Mahayana

patronage of the king during the 10th century CE is supported by these tablets (Mya 1961: Vol II, 33, Fig. 73).

Group 1, Type 4: Enlightenment (4A) and First Sermon(4B)



Fig. 7 Left: Type 4A [11x6 x 2.5 cm]. Right: Type 4B [8 x 4.5 x 2 cm]. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

The Type 4 votive tablet has a rectangular base and an almost pointed top. Type 4A shows the Enlightenment of Buddha and 4B depicts the First Sermon. Both Type 4A and 4B depict the Mahayanist Buddha Triad. Another difference between the two types is the depiction of the daughters of Māra under the double lotus throne of Buddha and Bodhisattva in Type 4A and the *dharmacakrā* wheel under the double lotus throne of Type 4B. The main Buddha image of both Type 4A and 4B sits in *dhyānāsana* and *bhūmiṣparśamudrā* inside the trefoil arch with three receding roofs surmounted by a Bodhi *śikhara* and a stupa finial. Type 4A has a longer finial than type 4B.

At each side of the Buddha is a Bodhisattva possibly, Maitreya and Avaokokiteśvara (Lokanātha), in *virāsana* (one knee raised and the foot locked in the bend of the other, see Than Tun 1978: 173, Fig. 18) with the right or left hand raised on the knee in an unclear *mudra* with the other hand bending onto chest. On the sides of the *śikhara* are the branches and leaves of the Bodhi tree. A harmika (square shaped relic chamber of the Sri Lankan type) is surmounted by a *śikhara* and a top finial. Type 4A has a curving of floral pattern around the sides of *śikhara*. According to the style of the

Maha Bodhi *śikhara* and Bodhisattvas the tablet may be dated to the 9th-10th century CE.

Group 1, Type 5: Buddha on Khou nan: gjou: throne flanked by Bodhisattva



Fig. 8 [7.5 x 4.5 x 2 cm]. Source: U San Win.

The shape of Type 5 is a rectangular base and almost pointed top. The votive tablet seems to have not been baked well due to the irregularity of its coloration. The Buddha is seated in *dhyānāsana* and *bhūmiṣparśamudrā* on a Khou nan: gjou: throne (the projecting corners on throne). The type is unlike other thrones of votive tablets found in Catubhummika monastery. The Buddha is inside the niche surmounted by a *śikhara* and top finial. The Buddha is flanked by two standing Bodhisattva facing inwards with outer hand in (?)*mahākārunikamudrā* and the inner one hanging. Comparing the throne and *śikhara* to that of Bagan, this style is probably dated to the 9th-10th century CE before King Aniruddha of Bagan.

Group 2: Buddha and stupas

Group 2 is described first in relation to the Buddha image and second by the finial and type of *calac* (pediment). There are three types of finial on the niche of the *Tamkai* (rear section of the throne of the Buddha): umbrella, stupa and *śikhara*-type.

1. Umbrella (*chattravali*) finial
 - 1.1. Umbrella finial supported by a long pole, 9th-11th century CE in Myanmar, Group 2, Type 4.1
 - 1.2. Umbrella as the top finial, 7th-8th century CE in India, 9th-12th century CE in Myanmar, Group2, Type 4.2
2. Stupa finial on harmika (Relic chamber type), (?)9th-11th century CE, (Group 2, Type 5)
3. *Śikhara* finial with amalaka
 - 3.1. *Śikhara* on stupa (Group 1, Buddha Triad, Type 3; another example from Sriksetra 9th-10th century CE, see Mya 1961: Vol. II, 33, Fig. 73)

3.2. *Śikhara* finial with amalaka; *śikhara* or spire on the arch pediment with amalaka between the *śikhara* and top finial of Bodhi *calac*; 10th-11th century CE (Group 2, Type 6.1 to 6.5)

Group 2, Type 1: Seated Buddha



Fig. 9 [9x6.5 x 1cm]. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

A single image of the Buddha in *dhyānāsana* and *bhūmiṣparśamudrā* sits on a double lotus throne. The face and hair knot is unclear. It may be a local product, indicated by the fuzziness of the image, or this may be due to weathering. This tablet seems to be dated to the 10th–early 11th century CE.

Group 2, Type 2: Standing Crowned Buddha



Fig. 10 [10 x 4 x 1.7cm]. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

The Group 2, Type 2 tablets are oblong and ovoid, featuring a standing crowned Buddha is surrounded by halo with right hand in *abhayamudrā* and left hand hanging. The depiction is probably of Buddha's Descent from *Tāvātimsā Hsā*. The depictions of four great occasions of the Buddha's life: 'The Enlightenment, Great Miracle, The First Sermon and The Descending from *Tāvātimsā* seem to be popular for both Mahayanist and Theravada Buddhists. The style of Buddha image is probably dated to the 10th- early 11th century CE.

Group 2, Type 3: Seated Buddha with six stupas, banyan leaf shape



Fig.11 [7.5 x 6.5 x 1cm]. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

Type 3 is a banyan leaf shape depicting a seated Buddha in a crossed leg position on a (?)lotus throne. The image is in the *bhūmiṣparśamudrā* flanked by three bell-shaped stupas on each side with a conical shape finial. The rim is decorated with a line of bead-shapes. It is assigned to the 10th-early 11th century CE. It may be the locally made due to the roughness of the motifs, or this fuzziness may be due to weathering.

Group 2, Type 4.1: Umbrella finial type



Fig. 12 Umbrella finial supported by long pole without *sikhara* and stupas. [14.5 x 6.5 x 1.5cm]. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

Type 4.1 is rectangular in shape with a pointed top. Buddha is depicted with an elongated body and pointed *ushniṣha* (hair knot) seated in cross-legged position in *bhūmiṣparśamudrā* on the double plain pedestal. Buddha sits inside a niche or trefoil arch surmounted by the umbrella (with three *chattravali*) supported by a long pole which rises to the top finial. From the top of the *tamikai* (the back part of the seat) appear the branches and leaves of Bodhi tree. The style is probably dated to the 10th century before King Aniruddha of Bagan and may be a local product of Thaton.

Group 2, Type 4.2: Umbrella finial type, Buddha with twenty stupas



Fig. 13 Umbrella finial type, Buddha with twenty stupas. [6.7cm x 4.6cm x 1.7 cm]. Source: U San Win.

The shape of type 4.2 is ovoid. The Buddha sits in a cross-legged position on the double lotus throne with the right hand pointing downwards in the “witness” attitude (*bhūmiṣparśamudrā*). The image is flanked by ten stupas, with umbrella on the niche. There might have been the Buddhist formula *Yedharmā* inscribed under the throne but it has disappeared now.

The tablet from Catubhumikka monastery may be compared with the tablets from Sind province, India (now in Pakistan) dated to the 7th-8th century CE according to the orthography of the inscription (Cousens 1914: 88, Pl. XXXIX, Fig. e). Other comparisons are to a tablet (9th-10th CE) from Kyaikkatha mound No. 2, in KyaikHto Township, Mon state (Archaeology Office 1986) and a tablet from Khubua, Thailand which came from Nalanda, India to Khubua in 956 CE (Bhumadhon and Pongpanich 2015: 395, Figs. 9 and 20). The earliest type tablet from Sind has only two stupas at each side of Buddha and later similar ones had more stupas up to ten. Stylistically, Type 4.2 is probably dated to the 10th or the early 11th century CE before the reign of King Aniruddha of Bagan.

Group 2, Type 4.3: Umbrella finial type, Buddha with ten stupas on each side

Fig. 14 Umbrella finial type, Buddha with ten stupas on each side. Note the *Yedhamā* stanza in Nāgari script at the bottom of tablet. [10.5 x 7 x 1.5 cm]. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

The shape of Type 4.3 is a rectangular base and an almost rounded top. Buddha sits in cross legged position with the *bhūmisparśamudrā*. The image is inside a trefoil arch surmounted by parasol, from which Bodhi leaves and branches emerge. There are five stupas at the both sides of pillar and arch and two-line inscriptions in ancient Nāgari, probably the *Yedhamā* verse, inscribed at the bottom.

It can be compared with the tablet of ‘*Sri Bañano*’ which has six lines inscribed in Pyu script at the back, found from Bagan. It has the *Yedhammā* stanza in *Nāgari* script at the bottom but the languages are mixed with Sanskrit and Pali datable to the 11th century CE (Mya 1961: Vol. I, 23-24, Figs. 29). The Group 2, Type 4.3 tablet is also similar to the tablet with four stupas from Śriksetra before Bagan period (Mya 1961: Vol. II, 19, Fig. 23).

This Type 4.3 tablet also has the *Yedhammā* stanza in Nāgari script at the bottom but no initial of the donor was found on the reverse of the votive tablet. It seems to be earlier than that of the *Sri Bañano* tablet and contemporary with the tablet found from Śriksetra mentioned above. One scholar Dr Nan Hlaing (2016) said that the *Yedhamā* stanza is inscribed in Pallava script and datable between 5th-10th centuries CE. However, the *Yedhamā* verse inscribed in Nāgari script may not be earlier than 9th - 10th century CE (Nan Hlaing 2016: Fig. 34).

Group 2, Type 5: Stupa finial, Buddha with two stupas inside niche



Fig. 15 Group 2, Type 5 [8.1 x 4.8 x 1.5cm] (seen while wet). Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

The shape of Type 5 has a rectangular base and a slightly pointed top. It depicts the Buddha in *bhūmisparśamudrā* sitting in a cross-legged position on the *Khou nan: gjou*: throne (projecting corners on throne). The Buddha has a faint smile. Each miniature stupa flanks the Buddha inside the niche. Banyan leaves come out behind the both sides of stupa finial. There is a flower above the shoulders of Buddha. The 'stupa finial' is on the harmika or relic chamber of the Sri Lanka type and is not the same as seen on the Maha Bodhi *śikhara* of Bodh Gaya. The pediment can be called a *cetiya* or stupa finial(*calac*). The pillars of pediment are decorated with turnery or with the thick floral motifs which may be compared with the votive tablet found near Nan Phaya, Myinkapar, Bagan (Mya 1961: Vol. I, 68, Fig. 102). It may be dated to the 10th century CE.

Group 2, Type 6.1: Bodhi śikhara with amalaka finial, without stupa



Fig. 16 Type 6.1 Left: [15cm height x 8cm width]. Right: Fragment of votive tablet. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

Catubhumikka votive tablet Group 2, Type 6.1 has a rectangular base and a rounded arch top. The clarity of the facial expression resembles faces depicted on Indian sculpture suggesting it may have been imported from India. The Buddha sits in *bhūmisparśamudrā* and a cross-legged position (*dhyānāsana*) on the (?)lotus throne above the high plain pedestal inside the niche surmounted by a *śikhara* recalling the Mahabodhi stupa of Bodh Gaya (Than Tun 1978). It is decorated with curvilinear flower patterns which rise to the *amalaka* and the top finial. There are flying pennants (*tam khon*) emerging from the top finial. Comparing the upper fragment of same tablet (Fig. 16, right), the curvilinear flowers patterns are also seen clearly beside the Bodhi *śikhara*.

The shape of Buddha's face is oval with a prominent nose and open eyes looking straight, rather than the more usual downcast expression. The top knot (*usnisa*) is not high but visible and the hair curls are modelled like beads. The robe is transparent on the body, made visible by a line on the left chest and shoulder. The chest and arms are full and fit and the navel is visible, comparable to 9th-10th century CE in Pala art. This type came probably from Bengal or Bihar, the eastern school of Benares.

Group 2, Type 6.2: Śikhara with six stupas type



Fig. 17 Type 6.2. [8.1cm x 6.8 cm x 1.2cm] Source: U San Win.

Votive Tablet Type 6.2 has a banyan leaf shape. It depicts the Buddha in *dhyānāsana* on the double lotus throne and with *bhūmisparśamudrā*. He is seated in a niche surmounted by a *śikhara* and amalaka finial. The arch and niche are flanked by three stupas each with banyan leaves emerging behind the *śikhara*. There may have been a *Yedhamā* stanza in two lines inscribed under the throne, and there is no evidence of Mon scripts at the back.

It is dated to the 10th century according to the bell shape style of the three stupas with five *chattravali*. It may be compared with similar tablets from Bodh Gaya with eight stupas and examples with five stupas from Śrīksetra and Bagan (Cunningham 1892/1961: 51, Fig. XXIV e; Mya 1961: Vol. II, Figs. 89-90). It is probably datable to be 10th century CE and not later than the early 11th century CE.

Group 2, Type 6.3: Śikhara finial type with four stupas



Fig. 18 Group 2, Type 6.3. Left: [9 x 5.6 x 1.5 cm]. Right: [12.2 x 7.5 x 3.2 cm]. Source: U San Win.

Type 6.3 has an almost rectangular base and pointed arch top. The right tablet of Figure 18 has a thick rim. The *tamkai* is with the *śikhara* and umbrella finial. Buddha sits in *dhyānāsana* with *bhūmisparśamudrā* on the high double lotus throne inside the triangular arch *tamkai*. There are two stupas beside the pillar and a triangular arch surmounted by a *śikhara* and umbrella. It seems to be locally made due to the innovative triangular arch and may be datable to the 10th century CE.

Group 2, Type 6.4: Śikhara with trefoil arch, Buddha with twelve stupas



Fig. 19 Group 2, Type 6.4. Left: [12 x 8.8 x 2cm]. Right: [11.5 x 9 x 0.7 cm], Nalanda, (six stupas), 9th-10th century CE. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

Type 6.4 is banyan-leaf shaped. The Buddha is seated in *dhyānāsana* on the high double lotus throne and with the *bhūmisparśamudrā* within a trefoil niche surmounted by a *śikhara* and amalaka finial. Both sides of the throne and *tamkai* are flanked by bell-shaped stupas, a total of six. Banyan leaves emerge from the Bodhi *śikhara*. There may be a three-line inscription under the throne. The tablet is datable to the 10th century according to the bell-shaped stupa style. Other similar tablets with twelve stupas (9th-10th century CE) have been found at Nalanda, in Bihar, east India (Krishnan 2010: 76, Fig. 10865). Therefore, it is probably datable to be the 10th century CE and not later than the early 11th century CE.

Group 2, Type 6.5: Śikhara with twenty stupas

Fig. 20 Group 2, Type 6.5. [11 x 8.5 x 2.5 cm] Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

Votive tablet Type 6.5 is banyan-leaf shape. Buddha sits in *bhadraṣana* with *dhamacakrāmudrā* on the double lotus throne with his feet placed on a small double lotus pedestal. There are ten stupas at each side of the pillars and the Bodhi *śikhara* is raised to the *amalaka* and top finial. Five lines inscribed in *Nāgari* script of the *yedhamma* stanza are beside the feet of the Buddha and under the throne. It is probably datable to the 10th century CE and not later than the early 11th century CE.

Comparable examples are seen from Śriksetra and Bagan (12.7 x 10.1cm), mound no. 1 at Kyaikkatha (10x 10 cm) from 1986 excavations, and at the new building of the State Middle School at Thaton (10.1 x 7.6cm) (Mya 1961: Vol. II, 37, Fig. 87-88). These may have been made at Bodh Gaya (Cunningham 1892/1961: 51, Fig. XXIV c). Other comparable examples have been documented at Khubua, Thailand with three lines of *Yedhamā* stanza in *Nāgari* script under the throne, dated to 1500 AB (956 CE), it was originally from Nalanda, India, and this tablet is now in Rajbhuri National Museum², Bangkok Fine Arts Department (Bhumadhon and Pongpanich 2015: 395, Fig. 9.20).

It can also be compared with the tablet from Mirpur-Khas stupa, Sind province which was two hundred years earlier than those of Bodh Gaya. The tablet from Sind depicts the niche surmounted by umbrella instead of a *śikhara*. The *cetyia* (stupa) types are however, exactly the same. The Sind example has just two stupas, referring to

² Thai Scripts were translated by San Win, Member of Myanmar Historical Research Department, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Buddha's First Sermon as is indicated by the two deer visible under the inscription. There are three lines of the *Yedhamma* besides the feet are datable to the 7th or 8th century CE. Associated finds of Arab coins are dated to 715 CE (Cousens 1914: 88, Pl. XXXIX, Fig. e). The origin of this type is supposed to be come from Bodh Gaya and Sind province, India to Thaton, KyaikKhathar, Śriksetra, Bagan and Thailand in 10th -11th century CE.

Group 3

Group 3 Type 1 Episodes of the Buddha's life



Fig. 21 [11.5 x 5 x 1cm] (9th-10th century CE). Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

Group 3, Type 1 has a rectangular base, arched top and is rimless. To date, this votive tablet type has not been found elsewhere in Myanmar. It depicts the Descent from *Tavatimsā*. The pillars partially remain to support the rounded arch on which a *harmika* or relic chamber is placed between the lines indicating the receding roof tiers. Above this, the *śikhara* and the *amalaka* decorated with floral motifs is surmounted by the top *vajrā* finial. The leaves and branches of the Bodhi tree emerge from the both sides of finial.

Beside the *harmika* is each seated lion facing outwards at the both corners of the lower part of the receding terraces. The lion figure is used in the tablets of Śriksetra since the Pyu period. Some Pyu tablets depict a pair of standing lions and other mythical creatures on the either side of Buddha (Mya 1961: Vol. II, Figs. 10-14). That

custom continues until now of placing lions or mythical creatures at the entry of a stupa.

From top to bottom, each crowned *deva* or deity has the inner hand raised holding up an indistinct object and the outer hand hanging down. Floral motifs are below their feet. The figures on either side of the *sikhara* are depicted descending from the celestial realms. A miniature stupa and three flowers are also arranged at the space of the front face inside the *tamkai*.

The left hand of the standing Buddha is probably holding up the rim of the robe and right hand shows the *abhayamudrā* on the head of monk AggaSāvakaShin Sāriputtarā. The robe of Buddha depicts transparent and typical of the Pala period (9th-10th century CE). Above the head of Buddha is an umbrella, its pole held by in the right hand of a standing crowned *Indrā* on the pedestal at the left side of Buddha. AggaSāvakaShin Sāriputrā is kneeling on the two pedestals with the clasped hands (*namaskāramudrā*) below the Buddha's feet. The head of AggaSāvaka is shaven. Brahmā is also depicted in *namaskāramudrā* standing on the pedestal at the right side of Buddha.

Group 3 Type 2: Eight Episodes of Buddha's life, trefoil niche with 3 poles supporting umbrellas



Fig. 22 [12 x 7.5 x 1.5cm]. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

Votive tablet Group 3, Type 2 has a rectangular base and an arched top. It depicts the Eight Episodes of the Buddha's Life. It may belong to the 10th – early 11th century

CE. The Catubhummika tablet shows the attack of Māra's army under the double lotus throne. This type has not yet been found at Śrīksetra and Bagan. The upper portion of this tablet is comparable to a fragment from Bagan (Luce 1969-1970: Vol. II, 60 and Vol. III, 69). Other tablets of Bagan show three elephant-riders of Māra attacking below the *Mahāparinivāna* or passing over the top of the Buddha (Luce 1969-1970: Vol. I, 153 and Vol. III, Pl. 74d).

Group 3, Type 2: Eight Episodes of Buddha's life

Mourner	(1) Mahāparinirvāna head to the right	
Ānanda	3 poles supporting umbrellas	Two kneeling figures with raised hand
Kneeling figures with raised hand	Trefoil arch	
(8) Nālāgiri elephant scene (standing Buddha with a monk)	(5) Seated Buddha in <i>dhyānāsana</i> and <i>bhūmisparśamudrā</i> (Enlightenment)	(2) Descent from Tāvātimsa (Buddha between Indra and Brahmā)
(7) Three Seated Buddha in <i>dharmacakramudrā</i> (First Sermon)		(3) Three Seated Buddha in <i>dharmacakramudrā</i> (Twin Miracle)
(6) Nativity (Māyādevi and her sister PajāpatiGotami)		(4) Parileyyaka Retreat (Buddha in <i>bhadrāsana</i>)
Māra's warriors attacking (circa seven figures)		

Table 3 Key to episodes (1 to 8) arranged in a clockwise direction.

Group 3, Type 3A and 3B: Trefoil niche with Śikhara and Amalaka finial



Fig. 23 Left: 3A [12 x 7.2 x 1cm]. Right: 3B [12 x 7 x 1cm]. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

There are three stupas at the top above the Parinirvāna scene, with the Buddha's head placed to his right (3A) and to the left hand (3B). There is same arrangement of the eight episodes seen at Bagan and Thaton but sometimes they change the place to right or left side for the arrangement of Nativity scene and Parileyyaka retreat episode.

At the top is displayed the passing on or *mahāparinirvāna* with the head of Buddha placed on his right hand. Type 3B shows the head place on his left hand. This changing arrangement is significant. The Enlightenment scene or illumination (*sambodhi*) is always placed in the centre. Buddha is looking straight ahead. He sits in *bhūmisparśamudrā* and *dhyānāsana* on a double lotus throne under the trefoil abacus-arch with *śikhara*, amalaka and lotus bud finial. At the middle lower tier is the Buddha Triad (three seated Buddhas) which represents both the First Sermon and the Twin Miracle.

From top to bottom, the second row left depicts the taming of the mad elephant Nālāgiri or Ratanapāla and at the right the Descent of Buddha from the heaven of the thirty-three gods. These two episodes are placed at the either side of *śikhara*. In the third row left is the first sermon at Benares and the Miracle of Śrāvastī scene at the right. In the centre shows the Enlightenment with the Buddha as the main figure. There is a depiction of Māra's army or daughters added at the bottom of tablets at Catubhummika Thaton which has not seen at the tablets of Bagan. However, some tablets from Bagan were inscribed in Nāgari or Mon scripts with the *Yedhamā* stanza or the names of donor and wishes (Luce 1969-70: Vol. III, 70-72, 74, Figs. a, c, d; Mya 1961: Vol. I, 13a, 45a, 51).

In Type 3A and 3B, the bottom left shows the presentation of honey to Buddha by the monkey at Vaiśālī and the bottom right depicts the birth. The birth shows Māyādevī standing under the *aśāla* tree clasping the neck of a female to her proper left, her sister Prajāpati Gotamī and the child; and the infant Buddha issuing from her proper right. These two episodes were changed from the left or right according to the artist or the donor's wishes.

There were also changes of episodes in arrangement of type 3A and 3B with the nativity and the retreat of honey rice placed on the left or right. Type 2 and type 3B are in the same arrangement for the nativity at the left bottom and Parileyyaka Retreat at the right.

Group 3, Type 3A: Eight Episodes of Buddha's life

Mourner one standing figure Ānanda and ?one seated figure	(1) Mahāparinirvāna head to the right <i>śikhara</i> with amalaka finial	One standing figure
(8) Nālāgiri elephant scene (standing Buddha with a monk)	Trefoil arch	(2) Descent from Tāvatiṃsa (Buddha between Indra and Brahmā)
(7) (?Three) Seated Buddha in <i>dharmacakramudrā</i> (First Sermon)	(5) Seated Buddha in <i>dhyānāsana</i> and <i>bhūmisparśamudrā</i> (Enlightenment)	(3) (?Three) Seated Buddha in <i>dharmacakramudrā</i> (Twin Miracle)
(6) Parileyyaka Retreat (Buddha in <i>bhadrāsana</i>)		(4) Nativity (Māyādevi and her sister PajāpatiGotami), one figure may be Brahmā or a baby
Māra warriors attacking (circa seven figures)		

Table 4 Key to episodes (1 to 8) is arranged in a clockwise direction.

Group 3, Type 3B: Eight Episodes of Buddha's life

	Three Stupas	A standing figure (?Shin Mahākasapa)
Two Mourners	(1) Mahāparinirvāna head to the left	
Ānanda in standing position	<i>śikhara</i> with amalaka finial	
(8) Nālāgiri elephant scene (standing Buddha with a monk)	Trefoil arch	(2) Descent from Tāvatiṃsa (Buddha between Indra and Brahmā)
(7) (?Three) Seated Buddha in <i>dharmacakramudrā</i> (First Sermon)	(5) Seated Buddha in <i>dhyānāsana</i> and <i>bhūmisparśamudrā</i> (Enlightenment)	(3) (?Three) Seated Buddha in <i>dharmacakramudrā</i> (Twin Miracle)
(6) Nativity scene, Māyādevi and her sister Pajāpati Gotami) and ? a child to the left of Māyādevi		(5) Parileyyaka Retreat (Buddha in <i>bhadrāsana</i>)
Māra's warriors (about seven figures)		

Table 5 Serial Number 1 to 8 are arranged in a clockwise direction.

Group 3 Type 4: Ten Episodes of Buddha's life



Fig. 24 Left: Group 3 Type 4 [12.5 x 7.5 x 1.5cm]. Right: From Śriksetra, 9 Episodes of Buddha's life. Source: Khin Ma Ma Mu.

	Stupa	
	Mourners	
Ānanda and one standing figure	(1) Mahāparinirvāna head to the left	Two standing figures
(10) Nālāgiri elephant scene (standing Buddha with a monk)	<i>śikhara</i> with amalaka finial Trefoil arch	(2) Descent from Tāvātimsa (between Indra and Brahmā)
(9) (?Three) Seated Buddha in <i>dharmacakramudrā</i> (First Sermon)		(3) (?Three) Seated Buddha in <i>dharmacakramudrā</i> (Twin Miracle)
(8) Parileyyaka Retreat (Buddha in <i>bhadrāsana</i>)		(4) Nativity scene, Māyādevi and her sister Pajāpati Gotami) and a (?child to the left of Māyādevi
(7) Sujata's offering milk rice		(5) scene of the Dukracirā
	Māra's daughters (about seven figures)	
	(?)Māra's army or Māra's attacking (about seven figures)	

Table 6 Key to scenes (1 to 10) arranged in a clockwise direction.

Group 3, Type 4 is the Ten Episodes of the Buddha's Life. It has a rectangular base and an arched top. From top to bottom, at the peak, there is a stupa-like relic casket above the reclining Buddha (*Mahāparinirvāna*) with unclear figures behind the reclining Buddha. The head of Buddha in the *Mahāparinirvāna* episode is placed on his left hand. There are two standing figures at the side of Buddha's head, and other mourners are also standing at the feet of Buddha, one of which may be Shin Ānandā. The main Buddha figure presents the episode of Enlightenment.

At the first tier, the right side is very clear: the kneeling Shin Sāriputra in *namaskāramudrā*, is from the episode of Descent from Tāvātimsa. The left side presents the episode of the Nālāgiri elephant. At the second tier, the Buddha Triad is indistinct, possibly the First Sermon at left side and the Twin Miracle at the right side. At the third tier, right side, the Nativity scene is unclear while the left side shows Parileyyaka Retreat.

At the fourth tier, two extra episodes are added: probably an episode of 'Sujata's offering milk rice' is on the left (? an unclear figure of Sujata on the left side of Buddha), and the scene of the *Dukracirā* on the right while the ten scenes Andagu steles of Arakan (Rakhine state) represents the episode of the Naga Mucalinda sheltering the Buddha at that place (San Tha Aung 2016: 95, Pl. 78).

Under the throne of main Buddha figure show Māra's daughters at the upper line and Māra's assault in the lower. Below it at the base is an unclear but a two-line inscription can be guessed. Nine episodes depicted on the tablets have been discovered at Śriksetra and Bagan which show only one extra episode - 'the offering of Milk-Rice by Sujātā (see Luce 1969-1970: Vol. III, 61, Pl. 70a-d; Archaeology Department 1969-70). The depiction of ten episodes of Buddha's life on votive tablet has been only discovered at Thaton, Catubhummika monastery except the Andagu stele found at Rakhine. Beside these it is probably datable to the 10th or early 11th century CE.

Conclusion

The excavated votive tablets of Catubhummika, Thaton provide valuable evidence to support the distinctive Buddhist art and iconography of Thaton from the 9th century - 10th century CE. The assemblage generally speaking is not earlier than the 8th century CE and not later than the early 11th century CE.

The iconography of some tablets is similar to that seen on votive tablets associated with Mahayana sects from Nalanda, Bodh Gaya and Bengal in Pala period. There are similar tablets seen at Śriksetra and Bagan in Myanmar, on the other hand Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam as well, dated between the 8th -11th centuries CE. The smallest size of votive tablets is 6.7 x 4.6 x 1.7 cm and the biggest one is 15 x 8 x 2cm. The shapes of tablets are rectangular base and pointed top, rectangular base and rounded top, oval and Banyan leaf (oval with pointed top).

The *Mudrās* of Buddha are *bhūmisparśamudrā*, *dharmacakramudrā*, *dhyanamudrā* (*Samadhimudrā*), *vitarkamudrā*, *abhayamudrā* and *mahākarunikamudrā*. The *Asanas*

of Buddha are *dhyānāsana*, *Lalitāsana* and *andbhadrāsana*. The most popular of *mudrā* and *asana* of Buddha are the *bhūmisparśamudrā* and *dhyānāsana*. The *mudrā* and *asana* of Bodhisattva are *abhayamudrā*, *karunamudrā* (unclear), *MahaRazalilāsana* and *Lalitāsana* (*asana* of Nimāna Buddha) and *virāsana*.

The arrangement of the eight episodes is same to those of the tablets of Bagan. However, sometimes the scenes switch to the right or left, notably the Nativity scene and the Parileyyaka retreat episode. The head of the Buddha is alternately inclined to his right or left hand. There is a depiction of Māra's army or daughters added at the bottom of tablets at Catubhummika Thaton which has not seen at Bagan.

Ten episodes of Buddha's life expressed on votive tablets highlight the creativity of donors or artists at Thaton although similar scenes have found at the Andagu steles at Bengal, Rakhine and Bagan. Two more episodes – Dukracariya and offering of Sujata's milk rice – were added to Thaton votive tablets.

The Buddha triad was always placed at the middle lower tier and the episode of Enlightenment always was placed in the centre. The making practise of Buddha Triad is seen at not only eight episodes of the Buddha's life but also just one. Depictions of Māra's army and (or) daughters were often added at the bottom of tablets at Thaton, but have not been found in Śriksetra and Bagan yet.

Most tablets have the Yedhamā stanza in ancient Nāgari scripts and some distinctive figures which are pointed to the date of 9th-10th century CE. There is no evidence of Mon or Pyu inscribed on the base or back of the tablets though some tablets included Pyu or Mon letters have been found at Bagan in the reign of King Anirudha. Therefore, these Catubhummika tablets are seemed to be earlier than that of King Anirudha or the early Bagan period.

These 1350 votive tablets and fragments of the spouts of libation jars indicate that this place was the sacred Buddhist site because it is very close to the ancient Thaton palace site and famous ShweSaryan pagoda. As a tomb of monk was placed at the centre of all pits from CBK 1 to 8, we had no chance to know what was buried under the tomb. Although we could not excavate under the tomb, I assumed that under the present tomb there would be a chamber and/or a Buddha image placed for worship. All tablets and laterite pillars are now displayed in situ. As a group, they give significant new evidence on the prevalence of Mahayana practices at Thaton from circa the 8th to early 11th century CE.

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