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**PUYO, ONE OF KOREA’S ANCIENT CAPITALS By Helen B. Chapin\***

The Kingdom of 百濟 Paekche, traditionally said to have been founded in 18 B.C., was at first located on the land surrounding the present 廣州 Kwangju, in Kyonggi province. From B.C. 5 to 375, the capital was at 春宮里 Ch’ungung-ni, Northeast of 南漢山 Nam Han San. In 475, the Kingdom of Koguryo, Paekche’s northern neighbor, invaded the country, destroyed the capital and drove Court and people far to the south.

The new capital was established the same year at 熊津 Ungjin, now Kongju, in South Ch’ungch’ong province, where it remained until 538. In this year, the seat of the Court and the government was shifted to 泗沘 Sabi, now 扶餘 Puyo, not far away. In 661, the walled city was taken by the combined Silla and Chinese (T’ang) forces under the Chinese General 蘇定方 Su Ting-fang. About 70 Japanese war vessels, sent to aid Paekche, arrived too late to take part in the defense of the capital. They were annihilated in a naval battle fought in the 錦江 Kumgang, or “Silk River,” by forces under the Chinese Commander, 劉仁願 Liu Jen-yuan. In 660, the Kingdom fell and the territory was added to the growing kingdom of Silla, destined to rule as mistress of the entire peninsula from 668 to 935. Paekche’s history, in the real sense of the word, falls within the Three Kingdoms era, A.D. 313-668.

\* The writer is indebted for much of the information in this article to a little pamphlet entitled Kudara no kyuto: Fuyo koseki meisho annai, “The ancient capital of Paekche: Guide to the ancient remains and famous places in and around Puyo,” issued by the Fuyo Shiseki Kensho Kai, Association for the Celebration and Display of the Histor ical Remains in Puyo, Seoul, 1941. The information, with the exception of that regarding legends and traditions, labelled as such, has been checked and supplemented by information from other sources, such as the Chosen bijutsu shi, “History of Korean Fine Arts,” by Sekino Tadashi, Samguk Yusa “Three Kingdoms Remains,” the reports of the Museum of the Government General of Chosen, the word of officials of the Korean National Museum and the writer’s own knowledge and experience.

Since her sources are not primary, she of course stands open for corrections.

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In the 6th and early 7th centuries especially, Paekche not only played an important role in Korean history but also greatly influenced Suiko Japan (552-646).

Paekche, while in the North, bordered on the Chinese colony of 帶方郡 Tai-fang Chun (Taebang Kun) until in 313, the Koguryo destroyed the last vestige of Chinese colonial authority. However, the influence of the Han colonists and of the ideas and art objects they brought with them and/or made on the spot, far from being annihilated, permeated the entire peninsula, crossed the sea to Japan, and is still active today in Korea (the Korean flag, for example, is based on diagrams introduced by these Han settlers). Thus, Paekche came earlier than Silla under the civilizing influence of Han. In 384-5, Buddhism was introduced from Koguryo, to which it had come from China in 372,but little is known of its effect on Paekche before the flight South.

After the new capital had been established at Ungjin (Kongju), successive waves of Buddhist influence flowed in by sea from South China, principally from the Kingdom of 梁 Liang (502-556). Under the inspiratior of the Buddhist faith, and supported by royal patronage, the arts flourished and great temple compounds were built, each consisting of many wood buildings, with painted walls, beams, ceilings and pillars, filled with Buddhist images of wood, bronze and stone, where priests in ceremonial robes chanted the scriptures.

At various dates in the 6th century, some say as early as 538, but certainly in 545 (when a 16-foot image crossed the sea) and 552, Paekche sent Buddhist texts and images to the Yamato Court in an effect to gain assistance against Silla and Koguryo. Thus, Paekche sowed in the fertile fields of Nippon the seeds of the religion which inspired much of Japan’s greatest art and which still flourishes on her soil. Later, Paekche, at the request of the Nipponese ruler, sent architects, sculptors, painters and weavers across the sea, through whose work and influence arose the great Suiko temples, one of which, farfamed Horyuji, still stands today. Many of the great Suiko masterpieces are undoubtedly the work of first [page 53] and second generation Paekche sculptors. In the follow­ing century, Korean influence was superseded by direct contact with China.

Let us now take up some of the historical and legendary sites and important monuments to be seen in and around Puyo today. Puyo, once a great city, studded with splendid palaces and great temples, today contains no more than five or six hundred familes. Surrounding the small town, beautiful mountain and river scenes de­light the eye, as they did in the days of Paekche’s glory. But the city walls and gates, the painted palaces and pillared temple halls have fallen prey to the two great destroyers, war and time, leaving only a few stone pagodas, foundation stones, broken tiles and remnants of walls to tell a tale of past grandeur.

In the Southern suburb stands the 大唐平百濟塔 “Pagoda of the Defeat of Paekche by the Great T’ang.” Made of granite and five-storeyed, it belonged to the com­pound of a vanished temple, probably burned to the ground in 661 when the T’ang and Silla forces under General Su Ting-fang took the city. Its strange name derives from the inscription which the General had incised on all four sides, to record his martial achievements. The characters are well cut after an excellent calligraphic model This pagoda constitutes an important document for the study of Paekche architecture and may afford clues to the style of stone pagodas in South China a century earlier. An­other pagoda at 長蝦里 Changha-ri, ten miles from Puyo, although of later date, probably Koryo, shows strong Paekche influence and is much like the earlier pagoda.

Near the Pagoda of the Defeat of Paekche by the Great T’ang stands a large Buddhist stone image on a lotus pedestal. According to local tradition, it is a por­trait of General Su Ting-fang. In reality, it represents a Buddha and is coarse work of a later date, probably Koryo (935-1392). That there was a temple on this site in late Paekche times is attested to not only by the pagoda but also by foundation stones discovered nearby. A Koryo dynasty tile, dated in correspondence with A.D. [page 54] 1028, was found on the site. This tile yields, in addition to the date, the name of the Koryo temple, viz., 定 林 寺 Chongnimsa.

On 扶蘇山 Puso Mountain or Hill, which acts as a natural defense of the city, are the remains of fortifica­tions built near the time of the removal of the capital from Ungjin (Kongju) to Sabi (Puyo) in 538, The outer wall, in the shape of a half-moon, is known as 半月城 Panwol Song, or “Half-moon Wall.” Panwol Song is the earliest of city walls constructed on similar principles all over the peninsula. In one corner of the East Wall is a 迎月臺 “Moon-welcoming Terrace,” and nearby the visitor will find the site of the old Paekche military granary, marked by the charred remains of the rice, beans and wheat intended as rations for the Paekche soldiery. To the West on the 送月臺 Songwol Tae, the terrace from which the setting moon was viewed, stands a pavilion built in recent times called the 泗沘樓 Sabi Ru，whence stretches out below the beholder a panorama of hills and valleys with the White-horse River winding in and out among them like a silver ribbon.

In 1907, at a spot near the Southeast foot of Puso San, an important stela was discovered lying in the grass where it had been for nobody knows how many dozen of years, with base stone missing and body broken in two. In 1916, it was mended and re-erected on the spot by the former Government General of Chosen. But it fell again and in 1933 it was moved to the grounds of the Puyo Branch Museum, where it still lies flat on the ground (October, 1948). Plans have been made to re-erect it in the near future. This table, erected in 663, records the achievements of Liu Jen-yuan, the Chinese Commander who destroyed the Japanese fleet sent to aid Paekche in 661. Forerunner of a host of later monuments, it may once have had, like most of the later examples, a tortoise base. The dragon at the top symbolizes the power of Heaven or of the positive principle, yang, while the tor­toise symbolizes the power of Earth, which bears all things,or of the negative, passive principle, yin (in Korean pro­nunciation, um).

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At the Northern foot of Puso San lies a small convent. The old Paekche temple on this site was called 皐蘭寺 Koransa, after the koran, or orchids, which once grew in profusion on the cliffs in the rear. The convent, backed by steep cliffs over which a “sheep’s-gut” path winds through scenes of great beauty, faces the river.

The 落花巖 Nakhwa Am, or “Falling-flowers Rock,” interests all visitors to Puyo. When the capital city was surrounded by the combined T’ang and Silla forces, King 義慈 Uija fled to Ungjin (Kongju). As the capital was about to fall, the Court ladies, beauties all, who had been unchivalrously left behind by the fleeing King, broke out of their seclusion and, one after another, flung themselves into the river from this cliff. Tragic victims of war, they are remembered today through the name they have given the cliff even if monks no longer offer prayers on their behalf.

In the river in front of Koransa stands a large and oddly-shaped rock, known as 釣 龍臺 Choryong Dae, or “Fishing-for-a-dragon Terrace.” According to tradition, when General Su Ting-fang was leading his forces to attack Sabi, a sudden cloudburst swelled the river to a seething flood, halting his men on the bank. Legend credits him with mounting this rock amid thunder and lightning and, with a white horse for bait, capturing a live dragon. In return for its life, the monster is said to have stilled the storm so that the entire army crossed the river in safety. The dragon, it will be remembered, is regarded throughout the Far East as having control over rain. The legend, which may on the one hand go back into the mists of time, was probably not associated with General Su Ting-fang until long after the 7th cen­tury. It serves as an explanation of the names of the White-horse River and the Fishing-for-a-dragon Terrace. The deep pool near the “Terrace” is a favorite resort of fishermen today.

To the North on the bank opposite Puso San, a big rock juts out into the river. Of old, when Paekche needed a Prime Minister, the names of three or four candidates were placed in a box on this boulder. A prince of the [page 56] blood, after praying to Heaven — and opening the box, read out the name on which a mystic seal appeared. The Court officials then bowed to the favored of Heaven, who was installed as Prime Minister. From this practice is said to derive the name, 政事岩 “Government-affairs Boulder,” afterwards changed to 天政岩 “Heavenly- government Terrace.” Nearby stands “Tiger Rock” and the land on which were erected in Paekche times the build­ings of 虎岩寺 Hoamsa，or “Tiger-rock Temple,” now only a memory.

Somewhat to the Northwest lies the site of a more famous temple, 王興寺 Wanghungsa, “Temple of the King’s Prosperity.” Only a few foundation stones remain to tell of the glory of this once national (i.e., of Paekche) shrine, which it took the thirty-five years from 600 to 635 and the wealth of two Kings to build. Here the King went in person to burn incense and here were held elaborate ceremonies for the security and prosperity of the realm, in which hundreds of clerics in rich purple and gold brocade carried out age-old rituals. Alas! Pride and pomp precede a fall. When the troops of King 武烈 Muryol of Silla (reigned 654-60) attacked this temple — which had probably been used as an arsenal by the King of Paekche — the seven-day military orgy ended in the slaughter of some 700 monks and the complete destruction in flames of all the beautiful temple halls and their con­tents.

浮山 Pu San, “Floating Hill,” one of three holy mountains near Puyo, a cone-shaped rocky hill, is situated on the White-horse River across from and South of Puso San. On its slopes stands the 大哉閣 Taejae Gak, or “Great Royal Word Pavilion.” On this site, the convent called 煥文庵 Hwanmun Am once stood, where in the time of King 孝宗 Hyojong of the Li dynasty (reigned 1650-9), the official 李敬興 Li Kyong-yo retired to study. After the convent had fallen to ruin, a stone stela was erected on its site, sheltered by a pavilion called the Taejae Gak. From this part of the hill, one looks out over the river to the slopes of Puso San on the opposite bank. [page 57]

West of Mt. Pu and the Great Royal Word Pavilion stands a rock like a great wall, with a flat top large enough to seat a dozen men in comfort. It is recorded in the 三國遺事 Samguk Yusa, an old history of the Three Kingdoms epoch (A. D. 313-668), that when the Kings of Paekche crossed the river on their way to Wanghungsa, they sometimes paid reverence to the Buddha on top of this rock, which gave out warmth for their benefit. It is not impossible, we may add, that the capacity of this rock or of another like it long to retain the heat of the sun, inspired the invention of the ondol, the Korean heat­ing system which works by means of heated air circulating under stones below the floors of buildings.

On a hill behind this rock stands the 水北亭 “North-of-the-stream Pavilion.” The stream referred to is a tributary of the White-horse River. This site provides a fine view of the old capital, with its surrounding hills, and of the river and its tributaries, with large and small sail­boats and flat ferries that come and go.

In 軍守里 Kunsu-ri, about one mile south of Puyo, on the West bank, of 馬川池 Mach’on Ji, ‘‘Horse-river Lake,” was erected in Paekche times a large temple com­pound. In 1935 and 1936, when this site was excavated by the former Government General of Chosen, a Buddhist image of stone and another of gilt bronze, each with its pedestal, together with several hundred rosaries, were found. On the basis of the remains (i.e., the location of foundation stones, etc.), the excavators judged that the temple compound had about the same form and shape as that of the famous 四天王寺 Sitennoji “Temple of the Four Deva Kings,” in Osaka—the oldest temple in Japan. In Paekche times, the buildings on this site, as on that of Sitennoji, must have dazzled the eye by their splendor.

Disputed by the Koreans is the belief of the Japanese that the remains of barracks which give to Kunsu-ri its name of “Barracks Village,” mark the site of the encamp­ment of the Japanese soldiers who came to aid Paekche in its war with Silla. These remains are about one mile South of Puyo, near the left bank of the Kumgang. [page 58]

Acting on the basis of an old tradition that 外里 Wea-ri, in 窺岩面 Kyuam-myon, about 4 or 5 miles southwest of Puyo, was the site of a Paekche temple, the Government General conducted an excavation there in the spring of 1937. Some important finds were made includ­ing many paving bricks with molded phoenix, lotus, demon, geometric whorls (some say clouds, others wings), dragon and, most remarkable of all, landscape designs. Earlier two small Paekche Bodhisattva images of gilt bronze were discovered here. Some of the bricks are in the local museum; others are in the National Museum, Seoul, where is kept also one of the Bodhisattva images. The bricks merit special note: masterpieces all, those with the landscape designs are perhaps the earliest examples of landscape used not as a background but as the main theme.

The site of the 義烈祠 Uiryolsa, or “Shrine to the Upright and Meritorious,” is situated about 4 or 5 miles Northeast of Puyo in the Northwest corner of the 靑馬山城 Ch’ongma Fortifications on 望月山 Mangwol San, “Viewing-the-(full) moon Mountain.” In 1575, the Chief of Puyo County, 洪可臣 Hong Ka-sin, built this shrine to three loyal ministers of the Paekche regime and to 李存吾 Li Chon-o of the end of the Koryo dynasty. Al­though the shrine has fallen to ruin, the stela recording its erection is still in place.

About 4 or 5 miles east of Puyo, in 陵山里 Nung- san-ni, or “Royal-tombs Village,” is a group of six graves traditionally said to entomb Kings of Paekche. When these graves were excavated by the former Government General of Chosen, some remarkable paintings were dis­covered in the Lower East Tomb. Of the Gods of the Four Directions (Green Dragon, East ; Red Bird, South ; White Tiger, West; and Black Tortoise and Snake, North), only the White Tiger now rears his head on the West wall, but the lotus flowers on the ceiling, immovable among swirling clouds, bloom in almost pristine glory. The key to this tomb is kept in the Puyo Branch of the National Museum, which we shall presently visit. Water, which [page 59] was found to be seeping into the tomb, has now (October, 1948) been diverted; and it is hoped that what is left of these important paintings may be saved for posterity. The Middle Upper Tomb yielded fragments of gold orna­ments for a gilt bronze crown which had disintegrated. The finds from the other tombs (which had undoubtedly previously been rifled) were negligible.

The remains of the Ch’ongma mountain fortifications lie nearby. At one time, a stone wall about 8 miles in circumference protected the Eastern approach to the Paekche capital. It is said to have been constructed in 548. Broken inscribed tiles have been found on the site.

On the top of 聖興山 Songhung San, North of the old town of 林川 Imch’on, about 12 miles Southwest of Puyo, lies the site of the 加林城 Karim fortifications, said to have been first built in 501. A stone wall followed the lines of the hills which even in themselves guarded the approach to the capital from the ford at the mouth of the Kumgang. The King’s son, we are told, held these fortifi­cations for some time, inflicting heavy losses on the attack­ing forces of Silla and Tang in the momentous days when the fate of Paekche still hung in the balance.

At 大鳥寺 Taejosa, “Temple of the Big Bird,” about 12 miles southwest of Puyo, stands a colossal granite image of the Buddhist Messiah (Maitreya, called by the Koreans, Miruk), here represented as a Bodhisattva. This image, about 10 meters in height, was built in Koryo times. Although it is of higher quality than the still larger image of Maitreya Buddha at Nonsan, in the same province, it is far less well-known. It is remarkable for its blue eyes, which may be of turquoise or possibly of bronze with a blue-green patina. It would not be strange for Maitreya to be intentionally represented with blue eyes, for he is expected to be born in the West. The Chinese were familiar with “blue-eyed and red-haired barbarians from the West” at least from the time of Christ on and probably long before; and even if the Koreans had never seen such people (a supposition open [page 60] to doubt), they must surely have heard of them. Un­fortunately, Taejosa’s surroundings, denuded of their trees, resemble, except for a few stumps, a monk’s shaven poll.

無量寺 Muryangsa, a larger temple, founded in Paekche times, is located on 萬壽山 Mansu San, in 外山面 Waesanmyon, about 24 miles Northwest of Puyo. All of the wood buildings are of Li dynasty construction, but the famous five-storeyed pagoda, 7 meters high, dates from early Great Silla times (ca. late 7th century). Near­by is a stone lantern of contemporary date and, outside the gate, the flanking pillars of the temple flagstaff remain. Inside Paradise Hall is enshrined a large Buddhist trinity –

separate images of Amitabha Buddha and his two attendant Bodhisattva—backed by tall paintings of good quality, representing the same divinities. The huge rolled painting kept in a monstrous long box in this hall—13.88 meters long and 7.65 meters wide—is said to have been executed in 1627. On great occasions, it is hung in the courtyard on a scaffold erected for the purpose. The monks say that it takes 20 men to install the painting.

The Puyo Branch of the National Museum, situated at the Southern foot of Puso San, near the beginning of the ascent to the fortifications on that hill, occupies the site of an old Paekche palace. Its buildings were con­structed as part of a 客舍 kaeksa, or “Guest house,” in the Li dynasty. Each county had a kaeksa, in the Main Hall of which was enshrined a tablet to the reigning King. Here officials assembled to pay homage to their sovereign. In the adjoining halls, visiting officials were housed. Thus, the buildings of the Museum, as well as the contents, have a story to tell of Korea’s past. The objects in the Museum were practically all found or excavated in the neighbor­hood ; they include stone age weapons and vessels as well as objects from the Three Kingdoms, Great Silla and Koryo epochs. Among them is a small gold-covered bronze image of Paekche times (8.8 cm. high), which came from the Seeing-the-moon-set Terrace on Puso San. On the halo is an inscription which gives neither the date [page 61] nor the name of the Buddha but states that a certain person (name given) had the image made on behalf of his dead wife, that she might avoid the three bad paths of rebirth (as an animal, as a hungry ghost or as an inmate of one of the purgatories). This image is at present (June, 1948) in the Main Museum in Seoul, for the repair of the broken halo. The image was stolen from the Puyo Museum and the break occurred at some time before it was found again.

Besides the paving bricks of which we have. already spoken, many roof tiles with beautiful floral and other designs in relief are kept in the Museum. In the grounds are many stone images, parts of pagodas and other pieces of sculpture, most of them of Paekche date. The beauti­fully shaped large globular basin said to have been used by the Kings of Paekche, probably to hold growing lotus, has a pavilion to itself. The unfinished inscription starts out like that on the “Pagoda of the Defeat of Paekche by the Great Tang.” Evidently, the Chinese general changed his mind and decided that the pagoda was a better place for the record of his achievements.

Mr. Hong Sachun, the Director of the Puyo Branch Museum, is fully alive to the importance of the Puyo region in general and of the artistic and historical remains in his care in particular. It is a pity that this part of the country, so rich in history, legend and art, should be so seldom visited. Let us hope that good roads, a good bridge over the Kumgang, good inns and pleasure boats on the river will in the future add their attractions and draw many Korean and foreign visitors to this historic spot. We must not close this account without mention of the nearby town of Kongju, site of Paekche’s earlier capital, in which there is a still smaller museum, and in the vicinity of which are two important temples, 甲寺 Kapsa and 麻谷寺 Magoksa, and an important tomb of a Paekche King.