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THE BAGAN IRON PROJECT: PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE FIRST INTENSIVE STUDY OF IRON PRODUCTION IN THE BAGAN REGION, MYANMAR (11TH TO 20TH C. CE)

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The Kingdom of Bagan, with its capital on the Irrawaddy River in central Myanmar, was a primary regional competitor to Angkor whose success was similarly based on rice, trade and conquest. A key question is whether other practices, such as intensified iron production, similarly enabled Bagan's political domination of the region. The Bagan Iron Project represents the first exploration of iron smelting practices conducted around the capital, focussing on three production sites at the village of Zi-O. This paper presents the preliminary results of excavation, mapping and pXRF analyses from the 2019 field season. Comparison of slag and slag mound morphology, furnace visibility and spatial organization between each site suggests the presence of different technical traditions or modifications of one tradition over time. Overall, the scale of Bagan's iron production shows some important differences with their counterparts in Cambodia.