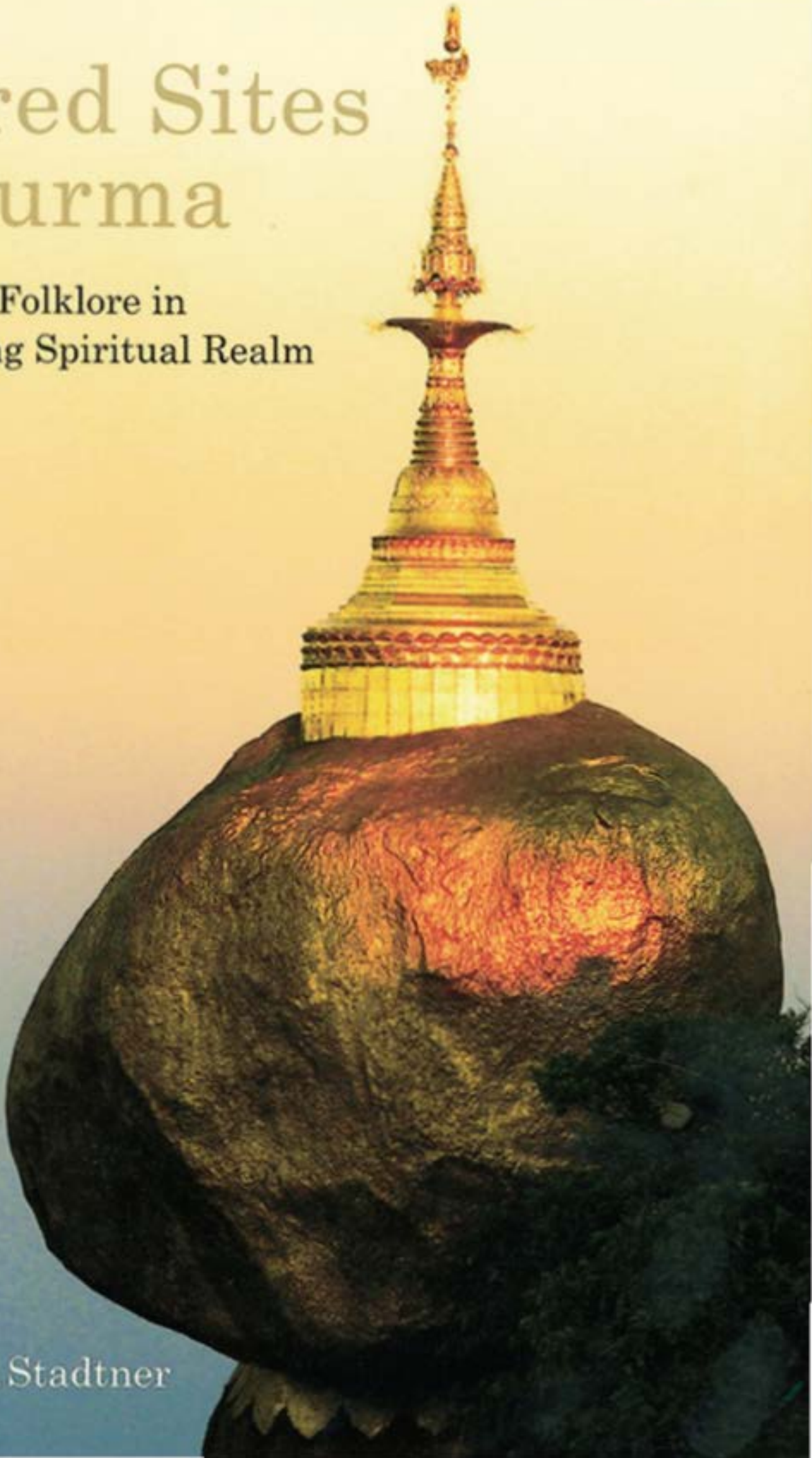
Sacred Sites of Burma

Myth and Folklore in an Evolving Spiritual Realm



Donald M. Stadtner

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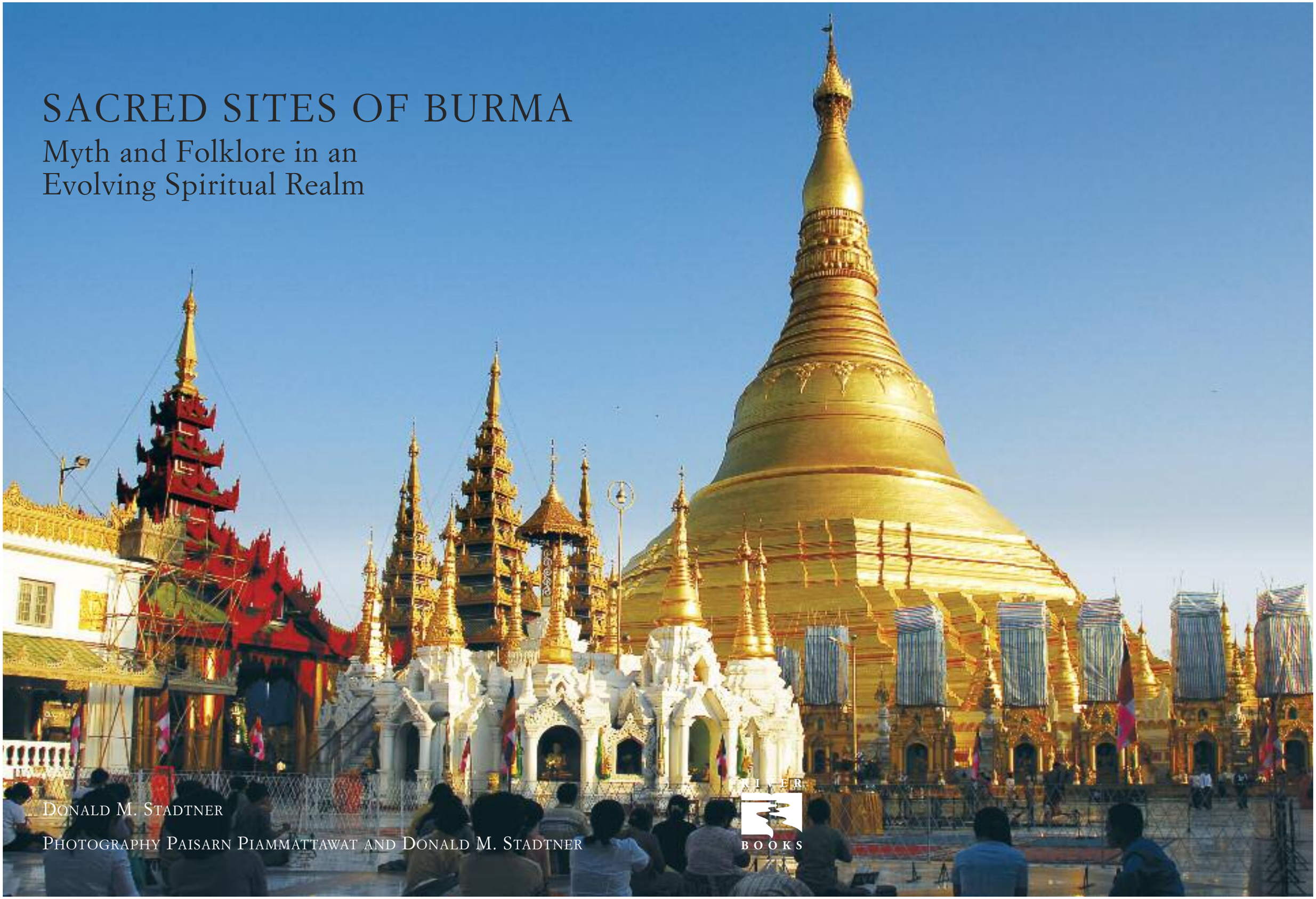

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Contents

Acknowledgements

The legendary Sri Lankan king Dutthagamani ordered the construction of a massive stupa to honour relics promised by the Buddha himself. Suddenly, a senior monk of 'wondrous power' came forward at the ground breaking and counseled the ruler to restrict the size of his monument, arguing that one lifetime was too short to finish such a project and that moreover huge stupas spelled only huge headaches for future generations stuck for repairs. The king wisely bowed to this sage advice and so drew in the stupa's circumference (*Mahavamsa*: XXIX. 53). This cautionary tale haunted me in as much as I often questioned the wisdom of embarking on a study with such limitless parameters. Indeed, tabulating Burmese sacred sites is perhaps as futile as counting the stones in the Great Wall of China. My ready excuse was that since sacred sites were not born over night, then I would need more than one night to unravel them all. Compounding the problem was that each time I returned to Burma, new material and questions came up.

A great number of colleagues contributed to this book in various ways. Some patiently went through the bulk of the text, notably Robert Brown, Pamela Gutman and Patrick Pranke, while others reviewed selected pieces. Michael Charney shared his insights on the Rakhine section, Pierre Pichard carefully examined the Pagan section, Victor Lieberman reviewed the Pegu section, Jacques Leider critiqued the Rakhine section and the Introduction and Tilman Frasch elucidated key issues relating to Pagan. Alexey Kirichenko generously responded to the Pagan and Kyaik-hti-yo sections and the Introduction with a raft of suggestions, most of which have been adopted. For the first-millennium and its thorny archaeological questions, Bob Hudson and Elizabeth Moore were always there to answer questions.

For the Mon material Mathias Jenny provided invaluable translations concerning the Golden Rock at Kyaik-hti-yo. I was also in touch with Christian Bauer who made many thoughtful suggestions for the Pegu and Thaton sections and for issues related to Mon epigraphy. He also supplied me with a translation of a Mon bell inscription from Pegu that shed new light on the mythology of the Shwemawdaw. Elizabeth Moore and I discussed my Kyaik-hti-yo and Shwedagon sections, and she put me in to touch with her colleague, U San Win, who shared unpublished translations relating to the Golden Rock. To understand the role of *nat*-worship, I turned often to Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière. Others with whom I conferred from time to time include U Thaw Kaung, Tampawaddy U Win Maung, Catherine Raymond, Patricia Herbert, Chotima Chaturawong, Alexandra Green, Michio Takatani, Pattaratorn Chirapravati, Sunait Chutintaranond, Peter Skilling, Jason Carbine, Ralph Isaacs, Zayar Ohn, and Francois Tainturier. For the synagogue in Yangon, my conversations with the late Ruth Cernea will always be remembered. For the Parsis, I am grateful to Mitra Sharafi who introduced me to the last representative

of this once influential community in Burma and with whom I toured the new community cemetery on Yangon's outskirts. Special thanks also go to Richard Cooler who allowed River Books to illustrate his rare aquatints made at the time of the First Anglo-Burmese War. Richard's old slides were skillfully digitised by Alan Potkin. Photographs from Schouten's *East India Voyage* are thanks to Catherine Raymond and Alan Potkin, from a French edition (1725) preserved in the National Maritime Museum, Amsterdam.

Many friends in Burma helped me appreciate the subtle but powerful ways in which sacred sites fit into society at large. I am especially grateful to Ma Thanegi, Daw Tin Tin Thaik, Daw Khin Myo Lwin, and Myat Wunna. Much of my traveling was with an old friend, Moe Aung Lwin, who helped me enquire into local lore and to share the bumps on the roads as well as the sunsets with *chota* pegs.

One key resource for the entire project was Patrick Pranke, a specialist in the history of the Burmese *sangha* and Theravada traditions. His sensitivity to contemporary Buddhist practices and beliefs and their pre-modern antecedents served as a model. Another anchor was U Tun Aung Chain, a retired professor of history at the University of Yangon. He provided me not only with translations from chronicles and inscriptions but also set these illusive sacred sites into the concrete historical landscape. That numerous citations to his articles pepper these pages is therefore no accident, representing only a fraction of his true contribution. He reviewed nearly the entire text, his modest erudition spilling into the margins in red pencil.

Former gurus who shaped my formative and later years include Mowry Baden, Anand Krishna, Walter Spink and Joanna Williams. These senior mentors contributed little to the preparation of this book but all set examples, each embodying different humanistic values. Others who have been influential are Daw Ma Tha Sa and U Pa Du Dee.

Thanks are also due to Stephen Murphy, an able editor at River Books, Bangkok, and a graduate student in Southeast Asian archaeology. His patience was matched by his humour and both were reassuring when deadlines pressed and I needed to make yet another change.

The man behind the lens for much of the photography was Paisarn Piammattawat. He and my wife, Kwanchai, and I traveled to Burma where it was instructive to see Burma through the eyes of two whose life experiences were in Thailand. Narisa Chakrabongse of River Books recognised the value of the project, and her judicious editing in the final stages has greatly enhanced the flow of ideas.

Learned readers can appreciate that a single book introducing Burmese sacred sites inevitably skims the surface. The history and legends of religious sites form a complex labyrinth in which one is easily lost and bewildered, like Alice in Wonderland descending into the Rabbit Hole. Each sacred site merits mulitiple monographs, not simply the few pages accorded each here. Researchers will surely refine and overturn many of these preliminary and tentative conclusions. I felt that as I came closer to understanding each pagoda there was always further to go, like Sisyphus rolling his stone up the hill.

Burma

Map of Burma illustrating the chief sacred sites discussed in this book.

Spellings and Proper Names

A number of ways for transliterating Burmese into English exist but none are entirely satisfactory for a general survey. For example, older usage gives us Irrawaddy but in the government's new system of transliteration it comes out as Ayeyarwady. To minimise confusion we have adopted the most standard spellings that have grown up in the writings about Burma and those truest to English phonetics whenever possible. Therefore, we have used Moulmein rather than Mawlamyine, or Pagan rather than Bagan. The government also changed names that were in use during the colonial period, such as Prome which is now Pyay. In general we have used the older more familiar spellings, with the new words and spellings introduced once at the beginning of each section.

Burma was adopted during the English period, but the country knew itself as Myanmar, or really with many variations on this spelling. The name was changed from Burma to Myanmar only in 1989 but is still known by its former name to many abroad. In addition, the regime's decision to revert to the former name has never been entirely accepted. This explains why Burmese opposition groups deliberately employ the name Burma and not Myanmar.

This book is intended for a general audience and therefore no diacritical marks are used. Foreign words are italicised and classified, such as *kamma* (Pali) and *kyaik* (Mon). Burmese words are so numerous that they are merely italicised.

Students working on homework in a pavilion at the Shwedagon and enjoying lunch from metal tiffins, seen in the foreground. Such secular activities blend effortlessly with religiosity in Burma.

Preface

The Shwedagon, illuminated at night, from Kandawgyi Lake.

A friend broke my sleep with a call to my hotel. His sister-in-law was burned in a kitchen fire early that evening, and so he needed to cancel our visit the next morning to a pagoda in downtown Yangon. Since her condition was worsening by the hour, he was departing early the next day to a temple in the country. It was an exhausting drive on a bumpy road, but its powerful Buddha was renowned throughout Burma. The metal image was taken by the British to Bombay in 1856 where it was to be melted into coin for the realm. But it miraculously resisted the hottest forges. The exasperated smiths then tried pounding it with heavy hammers – whereupon Queen Victoria was visited by pounding migraines. A dream soon instructed the monarch in London to send the Buddha back to where it belonged, converting good karma into sure relief. The Buddha came to be called *Pyi-daw-byan*, or 'Returned to the Kingdom'. My friend dismissed this story and other miracles surrounding this Buddha, but he had made successful appeals there in the past. Also, his friends urged him to attend the shrine where they too had been helped.

On the next day a young Burmese friend and I visited the Shwedagon Pagoda, Burma's most sacred site. He was having trouble

sharing the same roof with his wife, and his mother-in-law's longtime astrologer recommended that the headstrong couple commission two sets of prayer beads, combining woods associated with their birthdays. In Burma, for example, a Friday-born is linked with the wood apple tree, or *thi* (*Feronia elephantum*), while a Sunday-born with the wood of the coconut palm, or *ohn* (*Cocos nucifera*). My friend deposited money at a workshop near the eastern entrance of the Shwedagon; the beads would be ready the following week, the two woods strung snugly side-by-side, echoing the desired harmony between the pair. That these beads were carved at the foot of the Shwedagon greatly enhanced their efficacy.

We then ascended the stairs to the pagoda to make an offering. The giant monument's power hinges on miniscule hairs of the Buddha inside, like a sprawling nuclear plant fuelled merely by tiny bits of uranium. The strands inside the pagoda were given by the Buddha himself to two brothers who returned to their native Yangon and enshrined them on this hill. Since it was an auspicious full-moon day the expansive platform surrounding the pagoda was flooded with several thousand people. Many worshippers recited a formulaic prayer inside one of four image halls abutting the pagoda. Others sat on the platform's stone flooring and quietly intoned prayers, some counting with beads; others read prayers from special books in Burmese and Pali. Yet others sat in deep meditation inside pavilions facing the pagoda. Nearby in the same pavilions families enjoyed elaborate picnics of curries and rice from open metal tiffins; next to them were groups of students completing homework assignments, calculators and papers spread on the cool floor. And even a few young couples managed to find private spots amidst the welter of shrines and pavilions, sitting close and whispering sweet words, away from the pesky eyes of neighbours and family. Many on the platform seemed to be merely strolling, arm in arm with small children or grandparents, chatting and pointing out things of interest.

Strings of beads, usually numbering 108, come in various sizes. Certain woods are considered more auspicious than others. The strings are often purchased at shops outside major shrines.

I was struck by the casual ambiance, despite the shrine's paramount sanctity. Indeed, little was solemn on that day, faces awash with smiles and even gentle laughter now and then. But the atmosphere was deeply respectful, purposeful and charged with an indefinable quality. All were united in a desire to pay reverence to the Shwedagon's relics. I recalled a remark from a visitor in 1797 who found '...no jostling, or ill-humour...[and]...all were gay and decorous' (Cox: 13). His impressions were uncannily like my own hundreds of years later. I then began thinking about the millions of devotees over the centuries who ascended this hill in Yangon and shared the same pagoda platform.

Worshippers pay homage to the Shwedagon but at the same time come to effect positive changes in their lives and the world around them. The heart of the matter is life's ups and downs, and sacred monuments are there for assistance in our daily lives. The recovery of a loved one, success in business or with an impending exam, or prayers for positive rebirths, are among the countless wishes put before sacred pagodas. This comes across in conversations in Burma and there are many success stories about wishes that are granted to those seeking help. Shrines are celebrated for their wish-fulfilling properties, some more than others. For example a mini-pilgrimage arose within Yangon recently that required making offerings at nine pagodas whose names ended in '*gyi*', such as Kyauk-taw-gyi and Nga-htat-gyi. It could be performed only on Mondays and the circuit had to be completed by noon, and one was restricted to one wish. While the route is now out of vogue, there will surely be something to replace it. To say that Burmese attend sacred sites solely to lay wishes before the pagoda is far too simple, but offering wishes and seeking well-being is a major component.

I contrasted these attitudes to the Buddha's fundamental message of non-attachment, both to possessions and even to emotional ties, and the 'middle-way'. Indeed, these mundane and sometimes baldly materialistic wishes invoked at shrines often strike outsiders as hypocrisy or at best a conflict with Buddhist teachings. But such a clash never arises for worshippers who see religion as a force forever there to help achieve their most treasured goals, in this life and the next. If religion cannot serve these obvious critical needs, then truly what is faith good for? Such worldly concerns probably always held true in Burma, such as the Kubyauk-gyi temple in ancient Pagan constructed by a prince for the recovery of his father. This is no less true in other Southeast Asian Theravada countries and probably religious communities worldwide, if not in the present, then at least in the past.

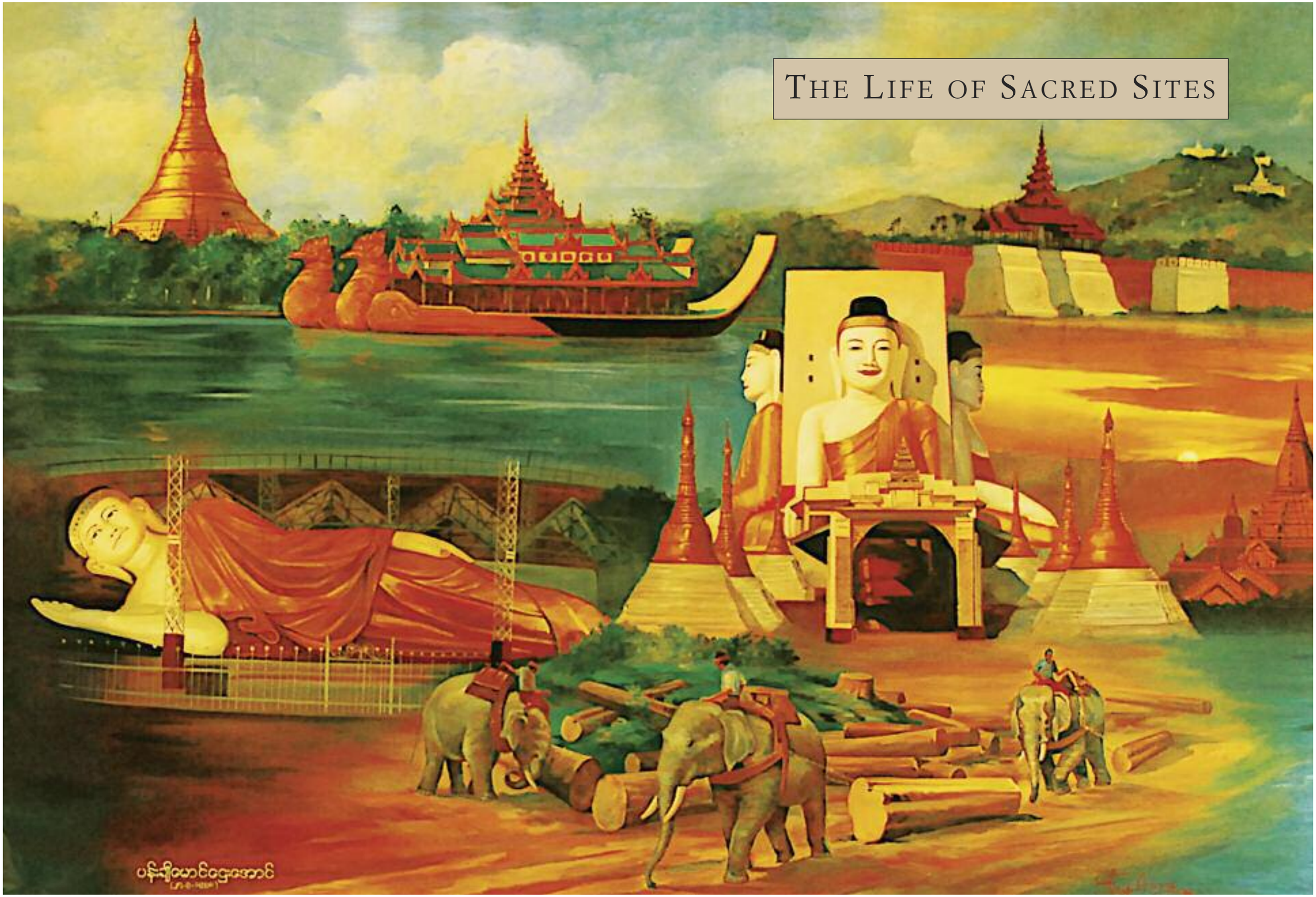
Many devotees silently recite formulaic prayers, keeping track with beads, much like Catholic rosaries. Others meditate. Worship at sacred sites can be expressed in countless individual ways. Shwedagon Pagoda platform.

The Shwedagon myth is based on two brothers offering food to the Buddha (right) and receiving hair relics in return (left). By Maung Saw Maung, c. 1960s. Hpaya Nga-su Pagoda. Yangon.

To assume that all Buddhists are motivated by the principles of non-attachment and the 'middle-way' would be naïve, in the same way we scarcely expect everyone in Western societies to rule their lives entirely by Judeo-Christian values. All faiths are founded on lofty ideals but are of course tempered by the reality of human nature. Morality and human nature are not black and white opposites but are rather more like a kaleidoscope of constantly shifting colours. Indeed, the jostle between our worldly nature and moral codes has defined humanity through the ages. Such ambiguities are indeed at the core of life. This is why we are still drawn to Chaucer's complex and nuanced pilgrims bound for Canterbury or Molière's endearing characters stumbling over the most pious but foolish platitudes. Not surprisingly, traditional Buddhist literature is rich with stories highlighting the perennial tension between right and wrong, and the recognition that model moral deportment is so richly rewarded precisely because it is so difficult to achieve.

A year following my visit to the Shwedagon I returned to Burma and called on my friends. I did not ask about the pilgrimage to the famous Buddha which induced royal headaches or about the efficacy of the wooden beads commissioned at the foot of the Shwedagon Pagoda; my friend's sister-in-law had recovered from the kitchen fire, and the couple had patched things up and were on to their second child. But I was slowly understanding how the lives of Burmese people are profoundly touched by pagodas and special Buddha images. Indeed, sacred sites offer a unique glimpse into the most cherished aspirations of a people.

The Life of Sacred Sites



The Life of Sacred Sites

The farmer U Hla Ohn stands by the spot where he uncovered three ancient bronzes in 2005, now marked by a protective enclosure. His village, close to Yangon, has become a minor pilgrimage destination.

Previous page: *Key sacred sites from Lower and Upper Burma are combined in this modern mural. Independence in 1948 greatly accelerated this national vision. By Maung Htay Aung, 1998. Perhaps retouched by Maung Kyi, 2008. Bago Star Hotel, Pegu.*

A sacred site is born

The number of sacred sites in Burma expanded by one on 15 May 2005. On that morning, at exactly 9:15, a farmer struck an ancient metal Buddha image with a spade while digging a posthole outside his home. Two more bronze Buddhas miraculously emerged seconds later, adding to the astonishment of U Hla Ohn. Good news travels fast and members of the Department of Archaeology were soon on the scene in this small village only some 30 kilometres west of Yangon. The professionals wanted the objects removed to the capital for safekeeping, but the local folk were of a different mind. For the village, the startling discovery was as auspicious as it was miraculous. The village headmen insisted on retaining the images and so appealed to a divisional army commander who crafted a compromise – the Buddhas could remain in the village if their safety was assured and they were accessible to worshippers. Meanwhile, news of this remarkable discovery spread and the events were soon even featured on television. The sleepy hamlet then experienced a boom of activity from Yangon residents eager to worship the three ancient Buddhas that appeared out of the ground without warning. More miracles were reported in the surrounding countryside. Five more bronze Buddhas emerged from the earth in a neighbouring village – exactly one month later. Then, two more incidents occurred another month later. Next, two tiny sacred Bodhi trees were observed sprouting in U Hla Ohn's post hole. The farmer's fame grew to such an extent he abandoned the plough for the life of a serious lay Buddhist devotee, now garbed in special dark brown clothes associated with the religious life. U Hla Ohn's extended family were Christian and Karen (an ethnic minority in Burma), but these startling events nudged many in his family to forfeit the Gospel for Gotama. The three Buddhist bronzes were fast becoming the subject of an ever expanding legend (Myo Thant Tyn). A sacred site was being born.

But will this nascent sacred spot grow in fame to join important regional sites or fade in popularity, as quickly as it arose? Some sacred sites come and go with astonishing frequency, like shooting stars, while others endure for centuries. But to understand sacred sites, we must ask why they figure so prominently in the daily lives of people in Burma and indeed in all Theravada societies.

The Role of Sacred Sites

A sacred site, above all, must inspire people to believe that their most heartfelt prayers and precious material donations will advance their ongoing needs in this life and even sometimes into the next. A successful sacred site must therefore embody power, hope, and sanctity, in equal measure. These critical qualities come into play only if the sacred site is hallowed by tradition and endorsed by the community. Absent these qualities, the site is scarcely worth a visit and will surely founder.

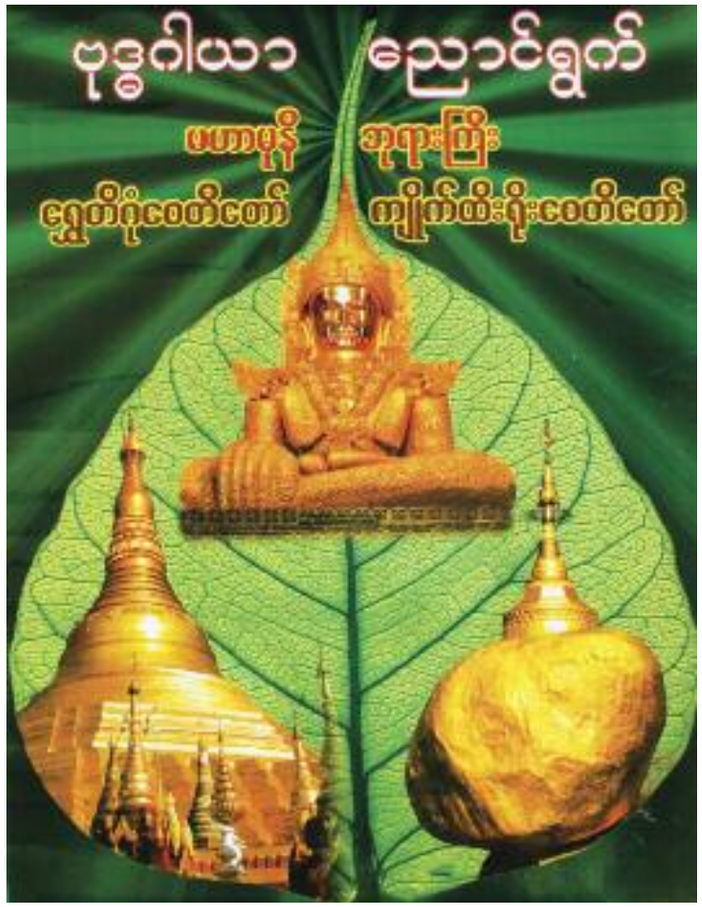
The place of sacred sites in traditional societies like Burma is hard for us to grasp, since our willingness to accept the miraculous has waned in the West. The Parting of the Red Sea or Christ Walking on Water are now taken as merely moral or poetic metaphors. But to appreciate sacred sites, it is necessary to suspend our skepticism about the supra-normal and leap into this very different worldview that the West once shared. Indeed, miracles, relics, pilgrimages, chanting, and opulent donations also marked pre-modern Europe. Such religiosity in fact still survives, witnessed by the thousands who embark on pilgrimages to Lourdes or Santiago de Compostela. And there is also never a shortage of 'sightings' of the Virgin Mary, from Milan to Manhattan. True, such bald-faced religiosity is no longer the norm, but faith in the supernatural lies just beneath the surface of our secular age. These beliefs pop out now and then, usually in times of crises, such as outside intensive care units, when science and rationality have run their course. In reality, deep down, we probably share more with Burmese worshippers than first impressions might suggest.

The three cast Buddhas found by the farmer are featured in a laminated poster. Their worship shows how quickly sacred sites can come into existence and the pivotal role of the miraculous, imbuing objects with special power to help devotees.

Burma's Three Most Sacred Sites

Three sites rise easily to the top as the most sacred in Burma – the Shwedagon Pagoda, the Golden Rock and the Mahamuni Temple. Linked together in the popular imagination, the three form a solid triumvirate, reinforced by countless religious souvenirs throughout the land. The most striking feature, however, is not their similarity but their diversity. For example, the Shwedagon is a traditional reliquary monument, or stupa, now within an urban area, while the Golden Rock is a granite boulder on the outskirts of nowhere. And the revered Mahamuni bronze in Mandalay was snatched in 1785 after a military campaign in western Burma, or Rakhine. The three most sacred sites in Burma could therefore not be more different – at least at first glance.

No less surprising features emerge. All three, for example, are of rather recent origin, developed centuries after the celebrated Pagan period (11th-13th centuries). The Golden Rock became widely popular only in the 19th century and the Mahamuni rose to national significance only after its seizure in 1785. The Shwedagon is the



The three top sacred sites in Burma, the Mahamuni Buddha, top, the Shwedagon, left, and the Golden Rock, juxtaposed with a Bodhi Tree leaf in this laminated poster. Each of these sacred sites developed outside mainstream Burmese civilisation and arose relatively recently.

oldest, but the monument's prominence is no earlier than the 14th century. The country's top sacred sites therefore came to be venerated in rather recent times, proving that antiquity per se is not a requirement for membership in the most sacred ranking. Much the same is true in Thailand where the country's top shrines today are also of recent origin, the Emerald Buddha in the Royal Palace and Bangkok's City Pillar just outside the palace walls. Another important site is the capital's Erawan shrine, begun only in the 1950s, with 'replicas' appearing throughout the land.

An even more unexpected paradox is that none of these national shrines owe their origins to the now dominant Burmese community. The Shwedagon and the Golden Rock are linked to the Mon, while the sacred matrix of the Mahamuni Buddha lies in distant Rakhine, on Burma's periphery. Groups outside the mainstream of Burmese society have thus been the very ones most responsible for the nation's top shrines. The key common threads underlying these three sites enable us to grasp what lies at the heart of a successful sacred site.

One of Burma's most sacred sites, the Golden Rock contains one or more Buddha hair relics, believed to be balancing the boulder on the cliff face.

The Buddha's Presence and Royal Patrons

One chief ingredient shared by the trio is an intimate link between the Buddha, his relics and kings. A Buddhist relic was merely 'latent or potential' until it was activated through the devotion, sacrifice and patronage of real or imaginary monarchs imbued with 'sufficient power to actualize it' (Swearer 1995: 95). A relic then is like a fledgling, first requiring gestation, followed by careful nurturing before it is able to fly on its own. Such a bond between a relic-shrine and its royal patrons was therefore a fundamental organising principle in many Pali and Burmese chronicles. This also explains why key pagodas throughout the Theravada world are still linked in popular imagination with either real or legendary kings.

A connection with real or fabled kings therefore provides a necessary footing for the most successful sacred sites, like start-up money in a business, but patronage must also be sustained for generations before a sacred site achieves lasting stature. In fact, tales lauding unbounded royal support and sacrifice become an indispensable part of the site's power and sanctity. The Shwedagon, for example, is enveloped in 'myths of patronage', beginning with the King Okkalapa who filled the relic-chamber knee deep with precious jewels to the more recent rubies, emeralds, diamonds and gold assembled by the military government in restoring the pagoda in 1999. Other stories tell of real kings and queens who gilded the Shwedagon with gold equal to their own weight or who paved the platform with 5,000 flagstones gifted from Sri Lanka. Such

The legendary king Okkalapa, top, is shown supervising the interment of relics prior to the building of the Botataung Pagoda in Yangon underscoring the connection between royalty and sacred sites. By U Ba Kyi, c. mid-1950s, Botataung Pagoda platform.

A king of Rakhine, left, intimates his desire for the Buddha to come to his court by miraculously sending flowers to the Buddha in India. Shown in wide arc, the flowers descend into the Buddha's left hand. The Buddha later allowed the king to cast an image of his likeness which became the bronze Buddha enshrined in the Mahamuni Temple, Mandalay, in 1785. By Po Yin, Mahamuni Temple, Moulmein, c. 1935.

hyperbole builds upon itself, successive kings not wishing to be left out of an esteemed lineage of real or legendary giving. Over time, a self-perpetuating cycle of royal donations assumes a life of its own. More importantly, these very donations become fused with the monument's power, sharing the limelight and sanctity with its relics.

Inscriptions and chronicles say surprisingly little about the corporal relics enshrined within stupas but dwell much more upon the interred precious objects, such as jewels and Buddha images. By the Konbaung period (1752-1885) or earlier, deposits could number in the thousands and usually included small images in gold, silver, bronze, copper, ivory and various types of wood. Subjects ranged from depictions of the Buddha to scores of characters drawn from the Buddha's life, such as his mother and father, his disciples and Sumedha (Taw Sein Ko 1906; Duroiselle 1915). Other images depicted the current king and queens and founding members of the dynasty; in one example there were even 433 images representing the grandsons of a former king (Pinnya: 147). The Mingun relic vaults were sealed in the late 18th century, with close to 37,000 such objects, listed in a chronicle (Scott and Hardiman: 1901. II. 2. 316). This emphasis on precious objects, rather than corporal relics per se, was as true for the Pagan period as it is today. However, trends in these deposits over the centuries have not yet been studied systematically.

Multiple interments at different times were not uncommon, such as for the huge Kaung-hmu-daw Pagoda near Sagaing which witnessed a total of seven during its construction. The smaller Kuthodaw Pagoda in Mandalay, by contrast, had only two. Other interments were occasioned by the rebuilding of stupas, often following earthquakes.

Once stupas were completed, subsequent generations focused on the tall tapering metal spires, or *htis*, crowning the tops of stupas, faintly discernable from pagoda platforms. These metal spires could weigh over a ton and were sumptuously gilded and studded with gems. Capping them was a metal orb, or *seinbu*, filled with yet more precious stones. An 18th century Pagan epigraph for example even likened the Buddha's relic bones to the precious jewels placed inside the hollow orb capping the Shwezigon's *hti* (Tun Nyein: 21).

Patronising pagodas is at the same time equated with sacrifice, that is, bestowing worldly possessions to something greater than

oneself. Examples abound in Pali literature and Burmese lore, such as Okkalapa who offered up even his head to the Shwedagon hair-relics (his queen convinced him that he could do more for the faith alive than dead) (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 47). Sacrifice was never confined to myth however. Old photographs of the Shwedagon reveal tall wooden stands bearing scores of dangling tresses presented by women devotees; one is seen in the Shwedagon museum (del Mar: 28). Such sacrifice echoes a 14th century inscription recording a governor's wife who twisted her shorn hair into a torch to be lit at the dedication of the pagoda (Tun Nyein: 149). Also, kings and courtiers are said to have impulsively stripped themselves of precious ornaments and tossed them into sacred relic coffers at dedication ceremonies (*Mahavamsa*: XXXI.112). Other opportunities for impetuous outpourings occurred at the casting of bells or Buddha images when worshippers 'rushed forward and threw into the crucibles … their gold earrings and … parents made their children take off the little silver anklets and bracelets and devote them to the same pious purpose' (Forbes 1878: 131). Sacrifice can also be measured in cash, and there is scarcely a shrine in Burma without a donation box. Large gifts to shrines and monasteries are even recounted on Burmese TV.

Royal or state support, however, scarcely guaranteed the long term success of monuments, and the Burmese landscape is dotted with royal monuments in ruin or of negligible significance. The Aung Mye Lawka stupa in Sagaing is one example, personally supervised by the pious Bodawpaya (r.1872-1819), but of minor importance today. State sponsored shrines can even flop, despite efforts to promote them, such as the two tooth-relic temples consecrated in 1996, one in Yangon and the other just south of Mandalay.

Royal patrons stood apart from regular members of society by virtue of their accumulated merit over successive rebirths. This notion is captured by a Pagan inscription which speaks of village women, upon spotting the king at the crossroads, remarking: 'such grandeur and magnificence as this derives from his pious deeds in the past' (Duroiselle 1919: I. 2. 120). Even a lowly farmer who had slain a king was able to ascend the throne because of his merit in a past life. As the chronicle concluded, 'Those who have good karma of good acts done in the past prosper without much ado' (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 60). Kings therefore deserved to be kings because of their past actions, or karma (*kamma*, Pali), no less than the Buddha himself whose birth in a royal family was a product of hundreds of previous rebirths. But even kings too were subject to the laws of karma, and Buddhist chronicles are replete with stories of those who suffered the consequences of bad actions. The Taliban's defeat in 2002, for example, was widely attributed in Burma to the bad karma accrued by the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, an incident widely reported in the country.

Kings were also responsible for upholding the Buddhist community, or *sangha* (Pali), and for 'cleansing' its ranks in the face

Tresses suspended on a wooden stand on the Shwedagon Pagoda platform, c. 1900. After del Mar, The Romantic East, *Photo: W. W. Schumacher*

Men decorating the sacred orb, or seinbu, *that caps the top of a metal spire, or* hti, *fitted on the top of a stupa. Inside are placed precious objects, such as gems, acting as relics to the degree that they become part of the pagoda's sanctity. Kyaik-kasan pagoda compound, Yangon.*

Workers stabilizing the metal hti *capping the Alodawpyi temple.*

The Alodawpyi at Pagan, singled out for renovation by a charismatic monk and a military figure, was associated with wishes fulfilled and became hugely popular. Its state patron was unexpectedly purged in 2004, thus tainting the temple with his 'bad fate'.

of schisms and laxity. This was partly motivated by a belief that Buddhism, or the *sasana* (Pali), would exist for a period of 5,000 years following the demise of the Buddha. This notion began in Theravada thinking around the middle of the first millennium and appeared first in Burma during the Pagan period (Than Tun 1978: 132; Lamotte: 196). The halfway point occurred in 1956 which Prime Minister U Nu timed to coincide with the his grand synod in Yangon. References to this 5,000 year period are often coupled with the wish to be reborn at the time of Metteyya, the Buddha of the Future, twin themes expressed in countless inscriptions in Burma and Thailand over the centuries (Tun Nyein: 2, 78; Luce 1969: II. 3; Skilling 2007).

A New Sacred Site in Ancient Pagan?

That new sacred sites can be born even in the ancient city of Pagan says much about the trajectory of successful temples, even when they are fostered by an unpopular military government. Neglected for decades, the Alodawpyi temple sprung into the national limelight in the 1990s when a charismatic monk joined hands with former Sect.-1, Lt. General Khin Nyunt, and actively promoted the temple (Houtman: 272). With intense media coverage, the Alodawpyi soon become a 'must' for Burmese pilgrims. Rumours that army staff obtained promotions after donating at the temple of course only fueled attendance. Temple booklets even maintained, with no justification, that an ancient Pagan ruler made successful wishes at the temple. The monk even advocated a mix of nine fruits that were best to offer at the shrine. The temple's fame grew and soon pilgrims from abroad added it to their list of sacred sites. It became the only monument at Pagan to be air-conditioned.

Suddenly, in October 2004, the Alodawpyi's meteoric success was thrown into jeopardy when its chief state backer, Khin Nyunt, was unexpectedly purged and forced into house-arrest. The temple became no longer associated with 'wishes fulfilled' but rather with 'bad luck' and attendance fell dramatically. Moreover, any major donations would risk signifying support for the ousted leader. The temple's rise and decline indicates how sacred sites can come and go quickly, and how the whims of history are ever at play. This case also reveals the pivotal role of charismatic monks in the promotion of many sacred sites and also demonstrates that sites can attain great sanctity, despite support by patrons associated with an unpopular regime.

Regional Foundation Myths

A handful of key regional myths furnish the context for not only the three most sacred shrines, the Shwedagon, Mahamuni and the Golden Rock, but also for countless sites within modern Burma. To the degree that these legends forecast the rise of future dynasties and their capitals, these traditions can be regarded as foundation myths. These are not 'cosmic' myths which explain the origin of the universe or good or evil but rather focus on the establishment of diverse kingdoms. These traditions share affinities with other Theravada societies, but the differences have yet to be worked out. Myths as old as the first millennium are lost, although later chronicles describe events and beliefs purportedly from this early period. But none can be verified.

The earliest recorded foundation myth is found among inscriptions belonging to Pagan's Kyanzittha (r.1084 -1113) (Tun Aung Chain 2004:124). The setting was the Jetavana Monastery where the Buddha smiled, prompting Ananda to ask, 'For what reason does my Lord smile? For without reason Buddhas do not smile' (Duroiselle 1919: I. 2. 113). The Buddha then prophesied that a sage named Vishnu ('bisnu') would build a city named Shri Kshetra at the time of his death and that a king named Kyanzittha would be reborn and become the founder of Pagan after 1,630 years. This same sage had also been born before as a merchant in Varanasi at the time of the previous Buddha Kassapa and later as a great king in Pataliputra and Ayodhaya.

Such prophecies enjoyed solid precedents in the Pali canon, not the least of which was the birth of Gotama Buddha predicted by Dipankara. Many prophecies in the canon were also triggered by the Buddha's smiling and questioning by Ananda. Such predictions not only confirmed a super-natural ability to see into the future but also validated the founding of dynasties, capitals and even stupas.

Kyanzittha's father belonged to the Solar Line of kings, while his mother 'dwelt within' a fruit, perhaps associated with the wood apple tree, or Bael (*Aegle mamelos*) (Luce 1953: 13; Duroiselle 1919: I. 2. 151, 167). Other famous Burmese kings also had mothers who were descended from trees. Anawrahta's mother sprung from a Bael tree, while Okkalapa's mother emerged from a Lemu tree (*Sonneratia caseolaris*). Human offspring descending from trees, gourds or tree-nymphs is an old theme in Buddhist literature and in Southeast Asian myths, ancient and modern (*Mahavamsa*: V. 213). Later Thai cosmology identified a forest whose trees gave forth 'fruit-maidens', or damsels 'who have just reached the age of sixteen' (Reynolds & Reynolds: 291). In other lore, wizards and hermits plucked 'fruit maidens' from trees with whom they enjoyed trysts, a subject even depicted in the murals of at least one royal temple in Bangkok, Wat Suthat.

Fruit-maidens plucked from trees by alchemists, or zawgyis*, a theme also known in Thailand. Such 'folklore' lends important layers to sacred sites. Shwe Yan Pye Pagoda, outskirts of Nyaung-shwe, Inle Lake, c. late 1880s-1890s.*

Burma's major ethnic groups, such as the Shan, Mon and Karen, march happily behind Burmese colours. This 'one big happy family' paradigm belies centuries of hostility. Paradoxically, Mon myths lie behind two of Burma's major sacred sites, the Shwedagon and the Golden Rock. This Yangon billboard commemorates the National Convention convened to formulate a constitution.

The legend of Kyanzittha is likely modeled on the founding of Sri Lanka by Vijaya who was forecast to arrive in Sri Lanka on the very day the Buddha died, directly echoing Shri Kshetra's creation. The Sri Lankan myth also included Vishnu, who was made guardian of Sri Lanka by the Buddha. Vishnu was also important in later Thai foundation myths where he is known as Vasudeva (*Mahavamsa*: VI. 47. VII. 5; Swearer & Premchit 1998: 5). The *Mahavamsa* was well known at Pagan during Kyanzittha's reign, with sections depicted in the murals at the Kubyauk-gyi Temple, *circa* 1113.

Foundation myths after Kyanzittha differed in two significant ways, since the Buddha not only came to Burma to utter his prophecies but also left tangible tokens of his presence, such as footprints and hair-relics, to be worshipped in his absence.

Mon Myths

These myths first appear in a number of stone inscriptions, found largely in and around Pegu and from the reign of Dhammaceti (r. 1470-1492). They were probably in circulation before his rule, but there is no certainty. These myths divide into four separate themes. Three focus on the Buddha's inauguration of Buddhism in Burma, while the fourth involves two missionaries sent to Lower Burma, or Ramannadesa, centuries after the Buddha's death (Pranke 2004: 130; Shorto 1970). The most revered involved the enshrinement of hair-relics in the Shwedagon by two brothers, Tapussa and Bhallika, obtained from the Buddha in India (Pe Maung Tin 1934). The second maintained that the Buddha flew to Lower Burma, converted a Mon king and granted hair-relics to six hermits in Thaton who returned to their hermitages and enshrined their relics in stone stupas. A third centred on a tooth-relic acquired in India at the cremation of the Buddha and brought to Thaton by a disciple named Gavampati (Shorto 1970). The tooth multiplied itself thirty-three times, each replica then enshrined in thirty-three stone stupas in Thaton. The fourth major myth jumps from the life of the Buddha to the time of Asoka when two missionaries, Sona and Uttara, were dispatched to Lower Burma to revive Buddhism by discovering lost relics and rebuilding shrines with a legendary Mon king (Taw Sein Ko 1893a). The Sona and Uttara narrative was likely appended at some point to the others, not only as a way of linking Lower Burma with the time of Asoka but also to provide the context for real Mon kings who patronised these ancient sacred spots (Pranke 2008b). Sona and Uttara not only converted the king of Thaton and the inhabitants of Lower Burma but also found lost and overgrown stupas, specifically those enshrining the thirty-three teeth, the six hair-relics, and the eight hair-relics in the Shwedagon. In cooperation with the legendary Mon king, they rebuilt all of the monuments, according to 15th century Mon inscriptions.

Sona and Uttara were also drawn from the *Mahavamsa*, but their simple mission of conversion in this text was expanded in Lower Burma to encompass the discovery and restoration of lost stupas. In later myths they were said to have expired north of Thaton, near Bilin, and the place marking their death became a pilgrimage centre, at least by the 19th century (Taw Sein Ko 1892: 381).

The Shwedagon legend, based on the visit to Bodh Gaya by the two brothers, was borrowed directly from the Pali canon and its commentaries (Pe Maung Tin 1934). However, the myth of the six hermits and six hair-relics finds no direct source in Pali literature. This myth proved extremely elastic and became associated later with numerous sacred sites in Lower Burma, the most famous of which was the Golden Rock at Kyaik-hti-yo (Stadtner 2008b). The legend of the thirty-three tooth relics was an indigenous contribution that underscored the role of Gavampati. Mon legends recorded in the Kalyani Inscription of Dhammaceti speak of the capture of the Pali canon at Thaton by Anawrahta (r. 1044 -1077) and his introduction of Buddhism into Pagan in the 11th century, a version of events adopted in later Burmese chronicles and firmly embedded in the national imagination. Dhammaceti, like his counterparts in Thailand, fell very much under the sway of the Mahavihara division of Sinhalese Buddhism, especially after the long reign of Parakkamabahu VI (r. 1410-1468) who oversaw a 'Theravada renaissance' in Sri Lanka (Pranke 2004: 22).

Burmese and Mon in Lower Burma

After the capture of Pegu, the Mon capital, in 1538, Lower Burma became gradually populated by Burmans; the Mon still made up about sixty per cent of the population by the late 17th century but their numbers progressively dwindled (Lieberman 1978: 465). The Burmese absorbed major Mon sites, such as the Shwedagon. The Shwedagon myth of the Mon quickly expanded to include the

The bestowal of hair-relics by the Buddha to hermits in Lower Burma is a major Mon religious theme, begun at least as early as the 15th century and underpinning important monuments today, such as the Golden Rock. Modern sculpture, Mt. Kelasa Pagoda compound, Mt. Kelasa, near Kyaikto.

legendary King Okkalapa and the belief that the pagoda contained relics left by three previous Buddhas who had visited Yangon; these fresh additions to the Shwedagon myth were recorded in 1588 and so were therefore added less than 50 years after the fall of Pegu in 1538 (*Jambudipa Ok Saung*: 158). More additions to the Shwedagon myth followed, such as a group of ogres who assisted the king in finding the lost relics of the previous three Buddhas. Whether such accretions and others made after 1538 were Mon or Burmese in origin is difficult to say, especially since so many of the surviving texts in both languages are in general agreement and are usually undated (Pe Maung Tin 1934). Also, these later additions may have sprung from a united vision shared by the Mon and Burmese, since the two communities increasingly occupied the same landscape.

One major change after the Burmese seizure of Pegu 1538 was the total disappearance of the Mon myth underpinning the Shwemawdaw in Pegu. The Mon myth centred on a tooth-relic enshrined in the Shwemawdaw by Sona and Uttara that was tied to Gavampati, a disciple of the Buddha important for the Mon (Stadtner 2007a). For unknown reasons, the Mon myth about the Shwemawdaw tooth-relic became completely lost after the Burmese conquest of Lower Burma. It was replaced by a myth that maintained the Shwemawdaw held two hairs of the Buddha obtained by two brother merchants. This major earlier Mon myth about the tooth-relic vanished completely from the historical record until a Pali inscription was discovered accidently at Pegu in the mid-20th century. This case forcefully demonstrates how myths connected to even major pagodas can be eclipsed, forgotten, and sometimes dropped completely from the historical record. Pagan is perhaps the best illustration of this phenomenon, since there are no temples whose original myths have survived from their period of construction.

One major Mon myth focused on the deep divisions between Burmese and Mon. This legend was composed sometime after the capture of Pegu in the 1750s by the Burmese ruler Alaungpaya (r. 1752-1760) who had suppressed a Mon rebellion. It begins when the Buddha flew over Lower Burma and spotted a male and female goose, or *hamsa*, on a miniscule island and predicted that this spot would one day grow into the flourishing city of Hamsavati, or modern Pegu (*Lik Smin Asah*; *History of Syriam*). A bitter rivalry then ensued among Mon, Burmese and Indian claimants over possession of Hamsavati, with the Mon eventually triumphing by a ruse. Numerous variations are known but the common thread is the Mon turning the tables on the other ethnic groups, despite the fact that Mon political control had dissolved.

Other myths perhaps formulated by the Mon after the fall of Pegu revolve around a legendary ruler named Bawgathena whose Pada kingdom was said to be outside of Thanlyin, or Syriam, near Yangon. The earliest dated documents mentioning Bawgathena are from the 19th century, but his origins probably go back to a time when more Mon inhabited Lower Burma (*History of Syriam*; Khin

Maung Nyunt 2000; Lloyd). Syriam, named after Joao Saraino, was a leading settlement before Yangon was made a fortified town by Alaungpaya in the 1750s (Hamilton; Tun Aung Chain 2004: 37).

In some myths Bawgathena is contemporary with Okkalapa in nearby Yangon. The two rulers' children even shared a love for each other which ended in tragedy, providing colourful lore for the Botataung pagoda in Yangon which marked the site of the prince's cremation. Other legends claim that Bawgathena ruled centuries after Okkalapa, at the time of Asoka (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000). These stories centre on Bawgathena receiving hair and bodily relics from eight 'enlightened monks', or *yahandas* (*arahants*, Pali), sent from Sri Lanka. Later, eight more monks from Sri Lanka arrived, with twenty-four hair-relics. Each expired in Burma and memorial stupas were created in their honour (*History of Syriam*; Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 28). The theme of eight special monks, or *arahants*, visiting rulers in Burma, such as Kyanzittha at Pagan, is also probably borrowed from early Pali literature (*Mahavamsa* XXV: 105; XXVII: 10; *Thupavamsa*: 91; *Glass Palace Chronicle*: 110). Bawgathena was also said to have founded the Sule and Botataung pagodas and others, but his name and legacy are unknown today, another example of how legends associated with the same sacred site come and go rather quickly.

Burmese, Indian and Mon contested the discovery of Pegu. Each group buried objects to prove its claim to be the first. The Mon king, left points to sickles that were buried beneath the objects left by the Indians and Burmese.Maung Win & Associated. Hinth Gon Shrine interior, Pegu.

Burmese Myths

The most important early Burmese foundation myths are noted in the *Yazawin Kyaw* (*Celebrated Chronicle*), completed in about 1520 (Pranke 2005: 23; Tun Aung Chain 2004b: 6; Lieberman 1986: 236). These Upper Burma myths in the *Yazawin Kyaw* were certainly current much prior to their recording, but the date of this text is somewhat later than the Mon epigraphs of the late 15th century. The Mon and Burmese communities selected and highlighted completely different narratives available from the vast number of Pali texts available in Burma. For example, nearly 300 manuscripts, in Pali, Sanskrit, and Burmese, were preserved in a single monastic library at Pagan, according to a mid-15th century inscription at Pagan (Bode: 101). Another early recorded foundation myth centred on the Buddha predicting that the 'Three Shan Brothers' would rule over three cities, mentioned in a poem dated to 1476 (Alexey Kirichenko, personal communication; Blackmore 1967: 312).

The *sangha* of Upper Burma in the 15th and 16th centuries came increasingly under Sinhalese influence, transmitted through a number of missions between the capital of Ava and major Sri Lankan centres associated with the Mahavihara tradition. At the same time, a faction arose within Ava that resisted and refuted Sri Lankan influence, insisting on the primacy of Burmese Buddhist traditions; this body of thought was represented by the early 16th century *Yazawin Kyaw*. The Burmese *sangha* in Upper Burma was said in this text to be older than the Singhalese division, the Buddha himself having converted Upper Burma's inhabitants 236 years before the conversion

The Buddha set down his footprints for a converted heretic and a snake-king, shown kneeling. This ancient Pali episode was adopted to explain the transmission of Buddhism from India. Related pagodas in the vicinity float above.

No one escapes the laws of karma, even the Buddha who in a previous life watched with no sorrow when his father, a fisherman, clubbed fish. His future punishment, as the Buddha, was pounding headaches. Twelve such stories were codified in a text, The Strands of Previous Kamma, *or the* Pubbakammapilot *(Pali). All twelve are now and then represented at pagodas, reminding devotees of the universality of karma. Konawin Zedi Pagoda, Sittwe, Rakhine.*

of Sri Lanka at the time of Asoka. Moreover, the faith in Burma was said to have flourished continuously, unlike, by implication, the *sangha* of Sri Lanka marked by repeated necessary 'purifications.' In subsequent centuries and today the *sangha* in Upper Burma traces much of its inspiration to Sri Lanka but at the same time points proudly to its roots that began with the Buddha's visit (Patrick Pranke, personal communication, 2009).

The foundation myth in the *Yazawin Kyaw* has two separate parts. The first begins with the Buddha's inspection of the Sandalwood Monastery constructed by two brothers in a village now named Legaing, close to the Irrawaddy's west bank, opposite Magwe. After his visit to the monastery, the Buddha set down two footprints nearby, inland, one for a snake-king and the other for a converted heretic; this site, on the bank of the Nan River, a tributary of the Irrawaddy, is called the Shwesettaw, or literally Golden Footprint. Another section of the *Yazawin Kyaw* describes the founding of ancient Shri Kshetra 100 years after the Buddha's death and the city's first king named Duttabaung; there is no direct mention of the Buddha's prophecy concerning Shri Kshetra and its king but it was likely understood (*Yazawin Kyaw*: 123; Patrick Pranke, personal communication, 2009). By the 18th century, the founding of Shri Kshetra was linked directly to the episodes of the Sandalwood Monastery and the two footprints (*Glass Palace Chronicle*).

Later, by the time of U Kala's *Great Chronicle*, *circa* 1729, the founding of Shri Kshetra follows directly after the Buddha's flight from Legaing and the Shwesettaw. The Buddha alighted on a hilltop a few kilometres above Prome on the west bank of the Irrawaddy. Here the Buddha peered across the river from Mt. Hpo-u and prophesied the rise of the nation's first capital, Shri Kshetra, and the appointment of its first ruler, Duttabaung. The first two tales are modeled closely on specific incidents in the Pali canon, while the foundation of Shri Kshetra echoes similar predictions of cities throughout Pali literature and the aforementioned prophecy from the Pagan period.

These three related episodes, with minor variations, entered all of the later major national historical and religious chronicles, such as the *Glass Palace Chronicle*. King Duttabaung, for example, never lost his symbolic significance, suggested by an 18th century king who carefully timed the day of his coronation to match Duttabaung's (Tun Nyein: 17). That the regime's top generals continue to make donations in remote Legaing and at the Shwe-settaw shows the enduring continuity and national significance of these traditions first spelled out in the *Yazawin Kyaw* nearly 500 hundred years ago.

This poor wife failed to see a palmist before wedding this no-goodnik. Vowing to pawn her clothes to raise money for his drinking habit, she admits suffering from lust and desire, her bad karma a result of neglecting her parents. Her palm print reveals her sorry fate. Far more popular than palmistry is astrology. Eindawya Pagoda platform. Mandalay.

Another component added to the national narrative was also drawn from traditional Pali sources and was completely domesticated from the outset. This tradition linked capital cities in Burma to the famed Sakya clan in India, to which the Buddha and even Asoka belonged. The Sakya's origins were traced in early Pali accounts to mankind's first ruler, a mythical king known as Maha-sammata (Pali), or Maha Thamada, who was chosen by consent to protect the people (Malalesekera 1983: II. 565). The connection with Mahasammata and Burma was made as early as the *Yazawin Kyaw* in the 16th century when the cities of Shri Kshetra, Pagan, Pinya, Sagaing and Ava were tied to this esteemed Indian lineage. However, toward the end of the 18th century the link between Burma and the Sakyas was further expanded and refined by claiming that a specific migration of Sakyas took place to Burma, to a place named Tagaung, a ruinous walled city about 270 kilometres north of Mandalay (ROB: V. 121). It was also known as Sangassanagara, after Sankassa (Pali) in India, where the Buddha descended from Tavatimsa Heaven. This choice of Sankassa illustrates again how sacred Indian locations could be transposed to Burma and also how Burmese chroniclers stretched Pali sources into new directions. This adoption of the Sakyan connection in Burma may have been inspired by very similar claims made by the first legendary Sri Lankan dynasty, a story well known in early Burma (*Mahavamsa*: VIII. 18). In later Burmese history even the custom of wedding siblings from different mothers was justified by reference to marital practices recorded among the Sakyas in Pali literature (ROB: V. 116).

Another parallel source for the 'Sakya migrations' was probably a longer version of the *Mahavamsa*, known as the *Mahavama-tika*, composed sometime before the 12th century in Sri Lanka (Hinuber: 92). This account provided another context and more details for the migration of Sakyas from India. One more Pali source possibly important for Burma was the so-called *Extended Mahavamsa*, a text perhaps datable to as early as the 9th or 10th century (Malalasekera 1937: lii). Both are much longer than the *Mahavamsa* and far richer in folk-like material (Malalasekera 1937; Skilling 2007a).

Their exact role in Southeast Asia has yet to be worked out but one or both texts influenced the later chroniclers of Burma and certain biographies of the Buddha, such as the *Tathagata-udana* (1772) and the *Malalankara-vatthu* (1798) that were important in the 19th century and today (Herbert 1992).

The *Glass Palace Chronicle* version of the 'Sakyan migrations', presented below, is a well-known account in as much as it formed part of an official royal chronicle, begun in 1829. However, the compilers harmonised a great number of diverse and often times even conflicting sources so there was no single 'definitive' version up until this time. The Burmese chronicle renditions of the 'Sakyan migrations' adhere generally to the outline found in Pali texts from abroad, but an enormous amount of fresh indigenous material was added and adapted to local circumstances. Indeed, so many changes, large and small, exist between the Pali sources and the Burmese chronicles, it is fruitless to seek perfect matches.

The migration from India began after the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu humiliated the king of Kosala by sending the family a princess whose mother was a slave. After the insult was discovered, an army from Kosala attacked Kapilavatthu. A few Sakyans escaped to the Himalayas, according to the *Mahavamsa-tika*, where they established the city of Moriya and the Moriya kingdom, which was later ruled by Asoka (Malalasekera 1983: II. 972). The Moriyas were also one of the clans that claimed a portion of the Buddha's relics at the time of the Buddha's cremation.

The escaping Sakyan king was Abhiraja but his name is found only in Burmese sources. He is said to have settled first in Sangassa-nagara but no mention of this is made in the *Mahavamsa-tika* (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 2). Abhiraja had two sons, the younger of whom ruled in Tagaung. The elder, known as Kan-raza-gri, left Tagaung and went down the Irrawaddy where he appointed his own son as king of the Pyu, Kanyans and Theks. The legendary Kanyans were likely modeled on the Kanhayanas, a group mentioned in Pali commentaries and also connected to the Sakyans (Malalasekera 1983: II. 970; *Glass Palace Chronicle*: 2). Kan-raza-gri then settled Dhannavati which can probably be identified with the Twante area, just west of Yangon in Lower Burma, according to the context (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 40, 46; *Vamsadipani*: 168).

A young girl passes through old age and then death. Karma and its handmaiden, impermanence, are major themes in Burmese life. Konawin Zedi Pagoda, Sittwe, Rakhine

In Tagaung, in Upper Burma, the descendants of Abhiraja later suffered reversals from foreign invaders, the Tarops and Tareks, but the kingdom was re-established by another wave of Sakyans from India led by Dhajaraja. It was during Dhajaraja's reign that the Buddha visited the Sandalwood Monastery near Magwe. One of Dhajaraja's successors at Tagaung had a brother-in-law who was associated with the birth of Duttabaung, the first king of Shri Kshetra (*Vamsadipani*: 139; *Glass Palace Chronicle*: 9).

The Sakyans belonged to the legendary Solar Dynasty and were also part of a succession of Indian kings that began with the legendary Mahasammata and included Gotama Buddha; the number of kings in this lineage numbered 334,569 (Pe Maung Tin and Luce: xv; Tun Aung Chain 2004b: 2). Mahasammata had been identified in the 5th century by Buddhaghosa as a precursor to Gotama Buddha (Reynolds: 31; Tambiah 1989). The theme of Mahasammata is repeated in many important chronicles from Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (Berkwitz ; Reynolds; Tambiah). This tied Burmese dynastic lines to the famed Sakyas of India and at the same time to the family of the Buddha. Later Burmese kings traced their descent to Mahasammata in India, sometimes with or without reference to the migrations from India (Maung Tin). Burmese chronicles consistently maintained a 'blood relationship' with Mahasammata and the Sakyas, but this was not true for the later ruling families of northern Thailand, revealed in the *Jinakamali* (Reynolds: 39). This same Mahasammata, conceived as a popularly elected leader, has even been even invoked by Burma's Nobel Prize winning opposition leader to prove that democratic notions are consistent with Buddhist ideals.

The restored Lokananda belongs to a group of four stupas containing tooth relics sent from Sri Lanka in the 11th century, according to a much later legend. These four stupas now form a special pilgrimage route within Pagan.

Tagaung also figured prominently in *nat* traditions, since a log of a *champak* tree, containing the spirits of a brother and sister *nat*, was thrown by a Tagaung king into the Irrawaddy. It washed up at Pagan where two images of the pair were carved from the log and established nearby at Mt. Popa. This tradition rose in importance by the 18th century, paralleling Tagaung's maturing fame in the chronicles (Brac de la Perrière: 2002; *Glass Palace Chronicle*: 46).

Archaeology Alters the Sacred Landscape

Tagaung and Shri Kshetra were the two most important of these ancient cities with legendary association by the 19th century, but a third, known as Beikthano, entered the national narrative in the 20th century. This walled Pyu city is located between Prome and Pagan and close by to Taungdwingyi. It was excavated early in the colonial era and then again in the late 1950s and 1960s and more recently in the 1990s and in 2004 (Moore 2007: 188). Significantly, Beikthano itself finds no mention in the 19th century *Glass Palace Chronicle* or in a list of royal centres from 1800 (ROB: V.121).

Beikthano is tied to Tagaung and Shri Kshetra by a slender thread, known today mainly by a single chronicle, the *Taungdwingyi Thamaing*, from the 19th century (Aung Thaw 1968: 2). Taungdwingyi is near Beikthano. This local *thamaing* repeated a well-known story in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* that begins when two blind brothers were cast off on a raft in the Irrawaddy by their father, the king of Tagaung; this story is told in a number of chronicles with many variations,

some of which are treated in the *Glass Palace Chronicle*. The two boys encountered on their river journey an ogress named Chandamukhi, or Moon Face, who restored their eyesight. The brothers proceeded to Shri Kshetra where one of them mated with Bedayi, who had sprung from a doe which had consumed the urine from a hermit residing in Shri Kshetra. This hermit had settled in Shri Kshetra, after leaving Tagaung in pursuit of a wild boar; the hermit's brother was the king of Tagaung and hence the two brothers on the raft were his nephews. The sources for this legend are complex, but the tale of the hermit impregnating a doe in exactly this way occurs in two Pali *jatakas* (nos. 523, 526). In these *jatakas* a daughter is not born, but a son; however, a daughter conceived from a doe is known from a tale told in an early Sanskrit *jataka* (Duroiselle 1906a: xii-xiii).

Chandamukhi coupled with one of the brothers and produced a son named Peitthano and the two together founded a village near Mt. Popa; they are never heard of again (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 14). However, the local *Taungdwingyi Thamaing* stated that the ogress gave birth to a daughter, not a son, and that her name was Panhtwar. The ogress and her daughter Panhtwar then left Shri Kshetra and settled in the vicinity of Taungdwingyi where they met the god Vishnu, disguised as a hermit. He recognised the young woman as his sister from a previous life and thereupon created a city for her named Beikthano-myo, or Vishnu-City, and appointed her chief (Aung Thaw 1968: 3). Duttabaung of Shri Kshetra later attacked the town and carried off Panhtwar to Shri Kshetra after disarming the city's special protective drum. This story found in this local chronicle must have had some currency since a version is found in another chronicle, from the late 18th century, which recorded that a Queen named Peitthato was ruling in Taungdwingyi (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: xv).

Some chronicles, it would appear, tied Beikthano to Tagaung and Shri Kshetra by virtue of this complex myth, but the episode of Chandamukhi's daughter settling in Taungdwingyi was entirely omitted from the *Glass Palace Chronicle*. Beikthano's elevation into the national identity was probably therefore prompted by the publicity surrounding the digs that occurred in the late 1950s and 1960s and the Taungdwingyi chronicle that was para-phrased in the excavation report (Aung Thaw 1968). The ever growing importance of Beikthano provides an example of how a legend, tucked away in unread local chronicles or lore, can spring to life and quickly enter the national narrative, given the right circumstances (25 May 2003, *New Light of Myanmar*). Beikthano is now spoken of in the same breath as Tagaung and Shri Kshetra, but this has become true only in recent history. A similar phenomenon enveloped the Botataung in the 1950s, where excavated relics fit into old myths that were soon completely twisted to fit the overarching Shwedagon myth (see Botataung section).

Why were these ancient walled cities so highlighted in Burmese chronicles? Arakanese chronicles from the second millennium did much the same, weaving in the two walled first-millennium cities of

Suffering begins before birth, even in the womb. The caption above cites a Pali commentary on the Vibhanga*, one of the seven books in the* Abhidhamma *section of the canon. By Ba Htan, Kyaikmarow Pagoda compound, Kyaikmarow.*

Dhannavati and Vesali into a connected mythic regional history. The same was true in Mon country in the second millennium. Myths that included the walled cities of Golamattika-nagara and Sudhamma-nagara, modern Ayetthema and Thaton, respectively, are both found in the Kalyani Inscription (Taw Sein Ko 1893a: 16; Myint Aung 1999). Each of these immense walled enclosures containing ruinous structures evoked a hoary and glorious past that was at the same time mysterious and unknown. This was no less true in the Pagan period for Shri Kshetra and this helps to explain the prophecy regarding the city and Kyanzittha. Other parallels, although not exact, would be the way Stonehenge was incorporated into Arthurian legends, or how a cave on Palatine Hill was related to Romulus and Remus, or later Japanese myths explaining the huge burial tumuli from the ancient Kofun period.

Pagan was later added to this list of successive capitals, a direct link being made between the last kings of Shri Kshetra and the foundation of Pagan (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 28; *Vamsadipani*: 141). The rise of Pagan was also predicted by the Buddha himself who pointed to the empty Pagan plain from a hilltop on the opposite bank of the Irrawaddy and prophesied the city's birth; this is told in a mid- 17th century chronicle, the *Vijjamayasiddhira Kyan*, or *Accomplishment of Knowledge* (Tun Aung Chain 2004: 137).

The need to establish the veracity of the chronicles and particularly the vaunted role of the Pyu in Burmese culture has also been a theme for the current regime. Following excavations at Tagaung, considered a Pyu site, a government newspaper concluded that 'Such findings will also be able to rebut with evidence the scoffs at Myanmar history books as though what was said in them were legendary' (*New Light of Myanmar,* 9 March 2004).

Burma's first President, Sao Shwe Thaike, hammering a stake to begin reconstruction of the Shwemawdaw stupa, only twenty days after Independence. Freedom from Britain spelled the fusion of Buddhism and Burmese nationalism, to the exclusion of 'ethnic groups' and those of others faiths. By Chit Maung, Mandalay artist, Shwemawdaw Pagoda compound, Pegu.

The Buddha is shown conversing with a crowned Rakhine king who cast an image of the Buddha, shown being filed down and polished. This Buddha is the famous Mahamuni, now in Mandalay. By Maung Hla Thein. Vesali Hpaya, Vesali.

Rakhine and Shan Myths

Rakhine State or Arakan bordering Bangladesh, developed its own unique myths but linked itself in important ways to the traditions of Upper Burma. The region's defining myth revolves around the visit of the Buddha to a king ruling in a kingdom called Dhannavati (Forchhammer 1891). The Buddha then allowed his physical form to be replicated in a metal image cast by the king with divine help. The Buddha himself then breathed life into a bronze image which became a palladium of the dynasty, beginning at least as early as the 15th century.

Rakhine royal families also borrowed from traditional Pali sources to claim descent from the Sakyas in India (Charney 2002; Leider 2005). For example, the older son of king Abhiraja, Kan-raza-gri, came to Rakhine and married a princess who belonged to the Marayu dynasty. A different Rakhine component centred on ten brothers who conquered Dvaravati, identified as modern Sandoway; their sister settled in Vesali, an ancient Indian city but connected to a walled city north of Mrauk-U. This was based on the *Ghata Jataka* (no. 454), with the Indian locations transposed to Rakhine. It is difficult to say how independent early Rakhine myths were from those of central or Upper Burma. None of the surviving Rakhine myths can be traced to the first millennium.

The Mahamuni metal image was removed by force from Rakhine in 1785 and established near Amarapura where it has been under continuous worship. It is the most sacred Buddha image in Burma today.

The Shan filtered into the rugged hills of northern Burma probably in the 13th or 14th centuries, from locations within southern China. There was never a single Shan kingdom but numerous principalities, many linked by marriage. Little is known about these Shan realms in this early phase, but a number of later Shan chronicles datable to perhaps the 18th century indicate that the Shan had by that time firmly connected their histories to the Burmese and Pali traditions of Upper Burma (Sao Saimong Mangrai; Robinne 2001). Many of the chronicles, for example, claim that the Shan descended from King Abhiraja, highlighting how the Shan had absorbed Burmese traditions (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 3). Many Shan legends also connect themselves to the exploits of Pagan's Alaungsithu and his magical barge. The story underpinning the most revered shrine in the Shan State, for example, the Phaung Daw Oo at Inle, is found with minor variations in the *Glass Palace Chronicle*. In the chronicle no mention is made of the Phaung Daw Oo shrine, but the narrative was transposed to Inle lake in Shan accounts. Another important tradition elevated an estranged Shan queen of Anawrahta named Sawmunhla (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 84). Earlier Shan foundation myths surely existed but were lost.

The Shan queen Sawmunhla, in green, was wed to a Pagan king but dismissed from court as a witch. She founded her own shrine, the Shwezeyan, a modern pilgrimage site just east of Mandalay.

Relics

As the Burmese king Alaungpaya (r. 1752-1760) and his army were fast advancing on Pegu in 1756, an urgent dispatch was sent to Upper Burma seeking council about the fate of relics which had been uncovered in a ruinous pagoda on the outskirts of the besieged city. The response was swift, arriving days later, on 19 December 1756. The decision permitted the king to not only remove the relics from the stupa but also to send them to Upper Burma for enshrinement. Ancient precedents were enumerated, such as Asoka's recovery and distribution of enshrined relics and the fabled seizure of the entire Pali canon from Thaton in Lower Burma by a Pagan king (ROB: III. 37, 41). This incident in 1756 vividly underscores the significance of relics, even in the upheaval of battle, and their association with imperial ambitions and royal symbolism.

That relics were central to Buddhism from earliest times is suggested by the 'war of the relics' in which eight rival clans in India nearly took up arms over the valued cremated remains of the Buddha. The rulers demurred to a brahmin named Dona, who divided the relics equally. Later Pali traditions claim that Dona absconded with a tooth relic which was taken from him by the god Sakka and enshrined in a special stupa. Sure lore ballooned over the centuries in Sri Lanka into a full genre of Pali literature that high-lighted specific relic-sites, beginning with the 10th century *Mahabodhivamsa* and the 12th or 13th century *Thupavamsa* and *Dathavamsa* (Berkwitz; Hinuber).

These later accounts differed from earlier ones by claiming that seven major relics were revealed at the time of the cremation: four canine teeth, the right and left collarbone and the forehead bone (*Thupavamsa*: 34, 172). These seven were recognised in Burma from a very early time but were overshadowed by sacred sites with indigenous pedigrees, namely the Shwesettaw west of Magwe and Yangon's Shwedagon containing eight hair-relics. None of the seven relics were mentioned, for example, in the 16th century *Yazawin Kyaw*.

The cremated remains of the Buddha are divided by the brahmin Dona. The god Sakka, hovering above, removes a tooth relic secreted by Dona in his turban. 19th century mural, Sapugoda Viharaya, Beruwala, Sri Lanka.

The monk Khema retrieves a tooth at the Buddha's cremation and presents it to King Brahmadatta in Dantapura, India. This relic was later enshrined in the Temple of the Tooth, Kandy.By Maung Ba Thein. Entrance coridor, Kaung-hmu-daw Pagoda.

The 'seven relics' were never completely on the sidelines, however, since the tooth-relics and the forehead-bone were now and then woven into Burmese religious lore. Perhaps the most famous was the forehead bone relic, or *nalata-dhatu* (Pali), enshrined in Shri Kshetra by Duttabaung who removed it from Kanyan Country, identified perhaps with the Twante area in Lower Burma (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: xxi, 12, 83). This same relic was said to be seized centuries later by Anawrahta who enshrined it within his Shwezigon Pagoda in Pagan (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 86). The legendary route of the forehead bone is not clear, but a 10th or 11th century Sri Lankan text devoted to the relic, *Nalatadhatuvamsa*, was known in Burma from at least the 15th century onwards (Hinuber: 95; Pe Maung Tin 1934; *Glass Palace Chronicle*: 86).

The upper left canine tooth was situated in a country called Gandhala, or ancient Gandhara, according to canonical texts, but this region was understood in some Burmese accounts to be China, or in areas bordering China (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 73, 81; *Sasanavamsa*: 171; Malalasekhara 1983: I. 749). No less than two Pagan kings, Anawrahta and Alaungsithu, failed to obtain this relic at the Chinese court. Anawrahta then turned to the ruler of Sri Lanka who happily dispatched a tooth replica which magically reproduced itself more than once at Pagan (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 82). Other famous tooth-relics sent from Sri Lanka to Burma were associated with Bayinnaung (r. 1551-1581) and Mindon (r. 1853-1878). In these examples, the replica miraculously replicated itself. The lower left canine tooth was taken at the Buddha's cremation by a monk named Khema who delivered it to King Brahmadatta in Dantapura, a location in ancient Kalinga, or modern Orissa state, a legend first recorded in the 13th century Pali text the *Dhathavamsa* (Strong 2004: 19). This tooth eventually came to be regarded as the one enshrined in the Temple of the tooth, Kandy. The 15th century Mon myth of Gavampati obtaining a tooth from the funeral pyre is probably based on this tale.

Ruinous stupas. When donors fail to fund ongoing maintenance, the weather and vegetation wreak havoc, hastened by damage caused by local treasure-seekers looking for precious objects. This cluster of mostly 19th century stupas surrounds the Indein Pagoda, Indein, Inle.

In Pali literature, at least as early as Buddhaghosa in the 5th century, there were references to countless smaller bone relics produced at the time of the Buddha's cremation. These were classed into three sizes: the smallest the size of a mustard seed, the next largest equal to broken rice and the largest being the size of half a pea (*Sinhala Thupavamsa*: 119). These small bone relics were probably as ubiquitous at shrines then as they are today, appearing as irregularly shaped whitish pebbles found throughout much of the Buddhist world, even noted by Xuanzang in 7th century India (Strong 2004: 176).

The earliest firm reference to Sri Lankan relics in Burma is found in a Pagan inscription from 1198. The king of Sri Lanka sent thirty unspecified body-relics ('*sarira-dhat*') of which four were placed in the royal Dhamma-yazika stupa at Pagan, together with a 'Lion Relic'(Luce 1969: I. 235; Tin Htway). This was the earliest recorded example in what is nearly a millennium of exchanges between these Buddhist countries. Relics, usually tooth replicas, went from Sri Lanka to Burma, while precious reliquaries to contain relics often went in the opposite direction. Bayinnaung even sent brooms for the tooth-shrine made from his own hair and that of his chief queen (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 108).

One later myth important for spots in Lower Burma centred on a Sri Lanka king who crafted four wooden Buddhas that were set afloat and landed in Bassein, Kyaikto, Kyaikkhami and Tavoy (Bonpyan Sayadaw: 121). The roots for such Burmese myths are difficult to unravel but generally reflect a complex conflation of foreign and indigenous traditions.

The definition of Buddhist relics is elastic, in as much as objects interred in stupas could be anything of value chosen to be venerated. This included corporal remains but also precious gems, images of the Buddha and his family made of gold, silver, crystal or ivory, hand-copied scriptures, personal items of the Buddha, such as a robe or bowl, and special fabrics, to name but a few examples. There were therefore no hard and fast rules governing the types of relics. Even an imported soda-water machine from England was placed inside the relic-chambers of the Mingun pagoda at the end of the 18th century, together with many thousands of other objects, such as sculptures of the king and his queens, various types of precious stones and even small wooden shrines (Cox: 110; Larson). 'One man's treasure is another man's relic' is a maxim that fairly conveys this concept.

A formal codification of relics emerged in Theravada society by the 5th century that probably reflected a need to establish an hierarchy among relics (Strong 2004: 19; Willis: 13). First in importance were the corporal remains of the Buddha. Bodily relics included the aforementioned seven but also could be the chest bone, arm and leg bones, eyes, internal organs and so on. Terms in Pali that together or separately were frequently used to describe interments in stupas were *dhatu*, or relics, and *sarira*, or corporal remains. Pagan

Small, whitish pebbles in jars are bone-relics, usually said to be of enlightened monks, or yahandas, from modern times or the legendary past. Such relics, or dattau, are displayed inside special relic halls or in 'museums' attached to pagodas. Wish-fulfilling Mountain Pagoda, or Su Taung Pyi Hpaya, Mandalay Hill.

A tooth-relic replica inside a glass reliquary on the platform of the Shwedagon Pagoda, 'absorbing' the sacred qualities emanating from Burma's most holy site. It was later enshrined in a restored pagoda in Yangon's outskirts.

inscriptions, for example, speak often of enshrining *sarira-dhatu*, or 'corporal relics', and there are references to relic-stupas ('*sariraka ceti*') (Than Thun 1978: 128; Luce 1969: I. 235). Of lesser sanctity were objects once used by the Buddha, such as his alms bowl, a robe or walking stick, collectively called *paribhoga* (Pali). This class can even include Bodhi trees. The third class pertained to the Buddha's teachings, or *dhamma* (Pali). *Dhamma*-relics normally encompassed written scriptures.

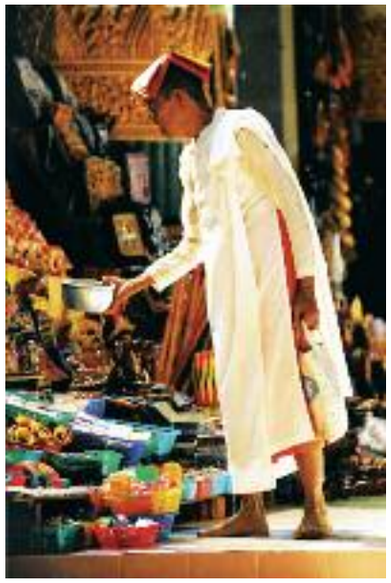
The Checklist

Before finalising my list of shrines for this survey, I spoke with travel companies in Yangon specialising in package-tours for locals embarking on pilgrimages. Coaches are forever going up and down the country, with pilgrims piling out at temples and rushing about offering flowers, lighting candles and making donations and then quickly proceeding to the next sacred site down the road where the process is repeated. It is all done with light cheer, with smiles and laughter, but the undertaking is serious at the same time. Such 'pilgrimage tours' naturally have a different focus from foreign groups in Burma for which art and culture usually trump the sacred. I therefore reasoned that these Yangon tour companies would dare not leave out the most important pagodas in their 'sacred itineraries.' And I was happy to find that my checklist of sites was largely in agreement with theirs.

Some ninty per cent of the population is Buddhist, and so my choice of sites reflects this fact. However, a handful of key Muslim, Chinese, Hindu, and Jewish shrines have been included, in recognition of the country's pluralistic make up. Sacred sites in the so-called 'ethnic' or 'tribal' areas on Burma's borders have not been added, partly because research in these outlying areas has been hampered by travel restrictions but mainly because this material would be just too much to put between the covers of a single book.

Another key layer in Burmese religious life is the role of indigenous 'spirits', or *nats*, whose worship occurs at virtually all of the major Buddhist shrines and within homes. It was once thought that these beliefs were 'pre-Buddhist' in origin or adapted from India, but *nat*-worship grew up alongside Buddhism and within the development of Burmese kingship (Brac de la Pierrère 2002). The principal *nats* came to be organised around Thirty-seven Lords, headed by Thagyamin, or Sakka (Pali), also a key deity in the Buddhist pantheon. Many *nats*, both male and female, met violent ends, often in opposition to monarchs, such as the Taungbyon brothers who ran up against a Pagan king. The deification of those who perish in brutal circumstances may seem odd, but Western culture provides similar examples,such as the violent death of many saints. Indeed, the horrific crucifixion of Christ fits into this very pattern. Hinduism is also not without examples. A infant smashed on a rock by an evil king, an episode included in all of the Krishna myths, became a goddess worshipped under many names.

Female renunciants are now known as thila-shin*, or 'keeper of Buddhist precepts'. The tradition of fully-ordained nuns ended centuries ago in Theravada countries and* thila-shin*, today garbed in pink, enjoy far less respect that monks in Burma.*



An important nat*, named Popa Medaw, or Mei Wunna, who died of grief, left, because her husband was executed by a Pagan king and her two sons were taken away. She is manifested, or reborn, as a* nat *associated with Mt. Popa, on which she stands, with the Taung Kalat promontory behind her. By Nyan Hlaing, a Mandalay painter. This modern panel is displayed in one of the major* nat *shrines at the foot of Taung Kalat, a pilgrimage centre at Mt. Popa.*

Sets of the Thirty-seven Lords were under worship in the palace by the Konbaung era (1752-1885). Kings even petitioned the *nats* for assistance from time to time, such as for locating a white elephant in 1806 (ROB: V. 315). Burma's first Prime Minister, U Nu, was a staunch Buddhist but was also devoted to the *nats*, a policy reversed by Ne Win in the 1960s. Some Burmese eschew *nat*-worship, which they see as superstitious and non-Buddhist. To do justice to *nat*-worship and the countless *nat*-shrines would demand a separate book, and one is therefore invited to consult the growing list of outstanding studies on this challenging topic (Brac de la Pierrère; Robinne).

Folklore is commonly associated with peasant society, but it must be emphasised that these legends were endorsed by the entire community, from farmers to elites. That this lore entered royal chronicles suggests the degree to which these beliefs were embraced. It would therefore be misleading to label these myths as folklore, at least in the way the term is generally understood. Indeed, folklore formed an important layer of Buddhist belief from the beginning, witnessed in the famous birth-tales, or *Jatakas*, and many stories in the Pali canon centred on demons, ogres and dramatic miracles. No less is true for the world's other major religions.

Pagoda platforms are quiet places for prayers and meditation. A female renunciant, Myathalun Pagoda, Magwe.

The sacred sites of Burma is a limitless topic, especially since new sites continue to come up and old ones evolve in new directions. Moreover, the history of each stupa or famed Buddha image resembles a Gordian Knot that can never be unraveled completely. This modest survey has taken merely one or two steps into this rich, varied and wondrous world.

YANGON

map of
yangon

YANGON:INTRODUCTION

Previous page: *The Shwedagon Pagoda is the country's most sacred landmark, defining the very nature of the modern Burmese nation.*

Yangon's religious landscape is dominated by the Shwedagon Pagoda, a monument believed to contain hair relics of the Buddha conveyed from India by two brothers. The Shwedagon myth arose by the 15th century but much later expanded to incorporate two major city shrines, the Sule and the Botataung pagodas. The Sule marks the spot where a reformed ogre helped the local king find lost relics in fulfillment of a prophecy delivered to the two brothers by the Buddha. The Sule was added to the Shwedagon legend only after the stupa was made the hub of the urban grid plan adopted after the annexation of Lower Burma in the 1850s. The Botataung is taken to be the spot on the bank of the Yangon River where the king greeted the ship with the returning brothers. The Botataung, however, was swept into the orbit of the Shwedagon legend only in the mid-1950s.

Immigration beginning in the 1850s indelibly changed the character of the city, with Chinese and Indians outnumbering Burmese within decades. Chinese and Hindu temples became commonplace by the turn of the century, together with mosques. For Catholics and Protestants their focus was St. Mary's and Holy Trinity. The small Jewish community congregated at the Musmeah Yeshua synagogue, founded in the 1850s and still in its original location. One of the city's oldest Hindu temples, the Mahapeinne,

Monks and laity mingle in bustling Yangon. A truck conveys a large metal Buddha to a pagoda.

even became entangled in the Shwedagon legend. Yangon's Muslims venerate the site where the last Mughal emperor took his last breath, four years after his exile from Delhi. His underground tomb, deliberately concealed by British officials, was accidentally discovered in the 1990s. The world's major religions therefore come together in Yangon, a reflection of the Raj, and one does not stroll far before stumbling upon a site sacred to one of these hallowed faiths.

Independence in 1948 unleashed a wave of Burmese Buddhist nationalism that further altered the sacred landscape, adding major shrines, such as the Kaba Aye complex, and rebuilding others, such as the Botataung. The dictatorship of Ne Win (1962-1988) that followed promoted the Burmese Road to Socialism at the expense of *dhamma*, but new building was not neglected, notably the Maha Wizaya Pagoda at the foot of the Shwedagon. Since 1988 the country's new military clique has embarked on endless religious projects the most ambitious of which are a huge temple dedicated to a tooth replica and an enormous marble Buddha. The Botataung Pagoda is the only monument since Independence to be tied to the national Shwedagon legend; the others stand outside that core tradition but strive to add new mythic dimensions to the city.

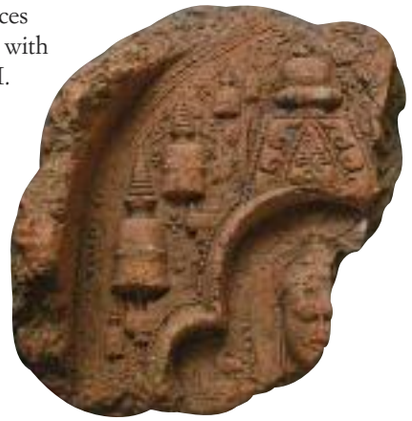
Maung Di Pagoda, between Yangon and Twante. Similar stupas probably existed throughout the Yangon area by the end of the first millennium. The octagonal base is faced in laterite; the stupa drum is of ancient brick. From the early Mon period or built during the reign of Pagan's King Anawrahta whose tablets were found here (see below).

Beginnings

Lower Burma was in the hands of Mon-speaking peoples during the first-millennium, but artifacts from this era in the Yangon region are few. The most important were recovered in the relic chamber of the city's Botataung stupa and from scattered Buddhist sites across the river, near modern Twante, only 30 kilometres west of Yangon (Moore 2007).

The Mon in the Yangon area came under Pagan's control in the 11th century when Yangon or Dala was perhaps a small port town (Frasch 2002: 61). Only a single monument survives intact from this period in the Yangon region, the Maung Di stupa, located between Twante and the Yangon River. Two of the upper circular terraces were once lined with dozens of large terracotta tablets incised with the name of Pagan's Anawrahta (r. 1044-1077) (Luce 1969: III. pl. 4). The tiles were probably added to an already existing Mon-period stupa, since their height does not match the dimensions of the terraces. The stupa base is octagonal and faced with laterite but the drum section was made up of ancient brick (Stadtner 2008a). Its existence proves that monumental architecture was well advanced in the Yangon area at the turn of the first millennium, if not much earlier. The pagoda's traditional name commemorates a legendary prince named Maung Di who fell from a tree and died as he was escaping the pursuit of a princess. This myth was

Fragmentary votive tablet, one of dozens found on the two upper terraces of the Maung Di Pagoda. Many are inscribed with the name of Anawrahta. Identical plaques were recently found at Pagan. These are the largest terracotta tablets known in Burma, h. 68.58cm.



recorded in the 19th century and is probably not too much older (Lloyd: 68). The government has recently promoted a new legend associating the stupa with Anawrahta's march to conquer Thaton but with no evidence. Its ancient myths or the nature of its relics are unknown. Stupas similar to the Maung Di monument were surely in Yangon from the same period, but none can be positively identified or dated with confidence. These would include even the Shwedagon and many other lesser monuments, such as the Kyaik-waing, Kyaik-kasan, Kyaik-kalei, Kyaik-kaloe, Sule and Botataung pagodas (Thaw Kaung 2004; Saya Thein). Many of these were constructed of laterite, with octagonal bases, but were covered later in brick and extensively refurbished (Bird 160; Spearman II: 281). Some were completely neglected and only 'discovered' in vegetation in recent times, such as the Kyaik-waing in 1853 (Yeo Wun Sin: 217). The word '*kyaik*' appearing in many of the modern names is a Mon word for a stupa (or a Buddha image), another indication that many of Yangon's pagodas hark back to a period of Mon ascendency.

Yangon's oldest pagodas, such as the Botataung, cannot be attached to myths which are any earlier than the 18th century. This is because legends come and go and new myths become so popular that older ones are often submerged into oblivion. The majority of the local Mon and Burmese chronicles containing foundation myths are rarely earlier that the 18th century and these generally focus only on the most recent legend. The Shwedagon Pagoda myth can be traced to as early as the 15th century, but this is a sole exception, made possible only by surviving epigraphs.

As Pagan's hegemony over Lower Burma waned by the 14th century, the Mon reasserted control. A Mon and Pali inscription dedicating a monument, now lost, was found near Twante and dated to 1362, further highlighting the Mon presence in the Yangon area (Bauer). By that time the Mon had established their capital in Pegu. The Mon name for Yangon was Dagon or Lagun, and it was chiefly important for the Shwedagon Pagoda whose rise started probably in the mid-14th century when the Mon capital was in nearby Pegu. Yangon was always overshadowed until the 18th century by a trading centre named Dala on the opposite side of the river.

The bell from the Shwedagon destined for Madras as a war trophy is shown sliding into the river in 1825. It was salvaged ingeniously by the Burmese who restored it to its original position on the platform where it is today. By Ohn Myint Win, 1987. Shwedagon platform.

Yangon was also associated with the name Okkalapa, derived from Ukkala, a name for the Indian coastal state of Orissa known by that name in early Pali literature. The brothers responsible for bringing the hair relics from India to the Shwedagon Pagoda are said in Pali sources to have hailed from Ukkala; and this is the reason for the name's significance in Burma. The name Okkalapa also came to be applied to the city of Yangon, the local kingdom, or was commonly used for the region's first legendary rule, King Okkalapa, noted first in an historical entry dated to 1588 (*Jambudipa Ok Saung*: 158). Another name in old Burma for Orissa was Ussa which was sometimes applied to Pegu (Tun Aung Chain 2002: 48).

Dhannavati was another important location connected with Yangon and was used to describe Twante and its environs and the location where King Okkalapa greeted the brothers returning from India (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 47). Dhannavati was, in addition, identified as a legendary Mon capital established after the destruction of Thaton, the Mon centre in southeastern Burma (*Vamsadipani*: 124; *Glass Palace Chronicle*: 12). Dhannavati was also considered a town within the province of Ukkalapa in Burmese and Mon chronicles (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 46). Dhannavati, like Hamsavati, was a name drawn from classical Pali sources and was in addition applied to a location in Arakan.

Early Yangon: 'A Motley Assemblage'

For centuries Yangon was important mainly for the Shwedagon Pagoda, but this changed in the mid-18th century when Alaungpaya (r. 1752-1760) replaced Pegu with Yangon as Lower Burma's commercial centre. Alaungpaya was the founder of the Konbaung dynasty (1752-1885) whose capitals were always in Upper Burma. All the family's rulers continued to patronise the Shwedagon, even after Yangon and Lower Burma fell into British hands in the 1850s.

Alaungpaya changed the city's Mon name, Dagon, to Yangon, or 'End of Strife' and also constructed a large stockade bordering the river, roughly 1.5 kilometres long and 800 metres wide. The Sule Pagoda lay just outside the enclosure, to the north. Inside were Armenian and Roman Catholic churches and a mosque, continuing the cosmopolitan character of Pegu, the preceding Mon centre. City officials and all 'persons of consideration' lived within the stockade. Outside resided 'shipwrights, and people of inferior rank' who could always find amusement on one street 'exclusively assigned to common prostitutes'(Symes: 205). From the fort led a single road to the Shwedagon, over 3 kilometres distant, paved in brick by a Muslim convert to Buddhism in the early 19th century (Crawfurd: II 54).

King Pagan (r. 1846-1852) constructed the Eindawya Pagoda complex near the base of the Shwedagon, to the southwest, within the earthen walls created by his predecessor in the 1840s. This is the ordination hall, which no longer exists. Murals, Kyauk-taw-gyi Pagoda, Amarapura, c. 1850.

Yangon's population had grown to about 30,000 by the 1790s, outpacing Pegu and its nearby satellite of Syriam, or Thanlyin. Its reputation was unsavory, an 'asylum of insolvent debtors from the different settlements of India…[and] crowded with foreigners of desperate fortunes', creating 'a motley assemblage… of Malabars, Moguls, Persians, Parsees, Armenians, Portugueze, French, and English' (Symes: 215). British troops taking Yangon in the 1820s even came upon an English shipbuilder supervising

'Here is the tomb of Pedro, from the realm of Ava, who died 1 March 1749.' (after the Portuguese). Pedro's death is recorded in Armenian, Portuguese, and Burmese. The double-headed eagle is associated with old Armenia. Europeans were present in Burma long before the British colonial era. Shwegugyi inscription shed, Pegu.

a 'twenty-eight gun frigate on the stocks for the Imaum of Muscat', revealing the extent to which Yangon was tied to the broader world (Snodgrass: 290). Its commerce derived from trade and also the building and refitting of foreign ships, since construction costs were far lower than in India. Also, Burmese teak, scientifically tested in Calcutta in the early 19th century, proved stronger than Indian samples (Crawfurd: II. 209). Globalisation and out-sourcing were therefore well underway before the 20th century.

The Anglo-Burmese Wars

The wooden stockade facing the river failed to defend Yangon during the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1823-1826, but the Treaty of Yandabo of 1826 returned the town to the Burmese. During the British occupation a huge bell from the Shwedagon designated as war booty for Madras slipped from a barge into the river. Although recovered by locals and returned to the pagoda in 1826, the bell's sinking symbolised the country's growing vulnerability.

The stockade was dismantled and a new town built in 1841 by Tharrawaddy (r. 1837-1846). It was located 2 kilometres from the water's edge, to mute the effectiveness of cannon from ships in the river. The perimeter was defined by a massive earthen wall nearly 5 metres high which encompassed the Shwedagon in its northern corner. These ramparts can be made out from descriptions and old maps and the elevated road immediately north of the Shwedagon is perhaps built upon a small section.

The new town in 1841 was known as Okkalapa, in homage to its legendary first king and kingdom of the same name, but its official name was Aung Myey Yan Hnin, or Victorious Land for Repulsing Enemies. It was built northwest of the old town by the river due to astrological reasons, since the king's birthday was Tuesday and linked with the northwest (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). Tharrawaddy spent over six months in Yangon supervising the work and also restoring the spire, or *hti*, of the

British ships in the Yangon River assaulting the city's wooden stockade at the outset of the First Anglo-Burmese War, 1824. The stockade was replaced by a thick earthen wall surrounding the new city laid out in the 1840s, far from the river. Aquatint from Eighteen Views Taken at and near Rangoon*, 1825. Courtesy: Richard Cooler.*

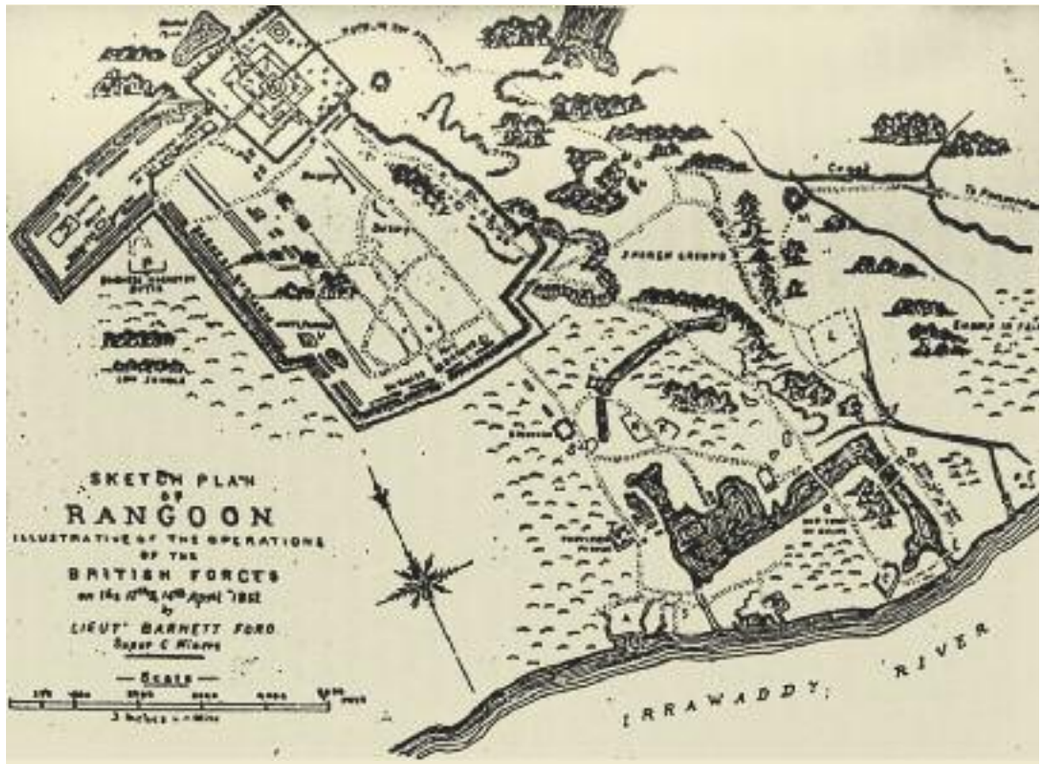
Shwedagon Pagoda, right. Kandawgyi Lake, left, was known as Royal Lake in colonial times. By Maung Saw Maung, c. 1965, Shwe Indein Pagoda, Indein, Inle Lake.

Shwedagon before returning to his capital in Upper Burma. His successor, King Pagan (r. 1846-1852), built a pagoda named the Maha Dhamma Yan Thi (The Great Light of the Buddha's Teachings), known as the Eindawya Pagoda and pictured among the wall paintings of the Kyauk-taw-gyi temple at Amarapura. It is southwest of the Shwedagon and was restored in the 1990s. The Sule and the Botataung pagodas were south of the new city and surrounded by empty land, revealed in a Burmese map from the 1850s (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 34).

The Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852-1853) saw the capture of Yangon again and the annexation of all of Lower Burma. The British named Pegu as the capital but Yangon was made the commercial centre. The city's present grid plan was designed in 1853 by Lt. A. Fraser of the Bengal Engineers, with the Sule Pagoda as the hub. The new town was divided into plots of five classes, with prices ranging between £11 and £250.

Fraser's major challenge was to raise the city's ground level, since the present downtown area was a swamp, with water fluctuating with the river's tide. Yangon was described then as 'a Dutch village half under water' in 1846 (Grant: 16). Over four million cubic feet of earth had to be moved from higher ground to 'fill in' the city below (Pearn: 199). Fraser's plan encompassed the heart of today's downtown, with the Shwedagon well outside its perimeter. Old street names begun at this time, such as Montgomery, Phayre, and Dalhousie, have since been renamed. The population grew steadily after annexation, from perhaps 30,000 in 1795 to 46,000 by 1856. Yangon now dwarfs Fraser's plan and suburbs spill over the Yangon River, served today by two bridges.

Yangon's two lakes, Inya and Kandawgyi, were known as Victoria Lake and Royal Lake, respectively. In the late 19th century water from Victoria Lake was carried by iron mains to Royal Lake and from there distributed throughout the town.



Yangon, first a stockade along the river in the 18th century, was moved inland in 1841 and named Okkalapa. Definied by an earthen rampart, it too fell to English forces, in 1852. The Shwedagon was included it its perimeter in the north. This plan was prepared in April 1852. After William F.B.Laurie,The Second Burmese War (1853).

British Rangoon

After Lower Burma's annexation in 1853, the court in Upper Burma required the permission of colonial authorities to patronize any of the sacred sites in Yangon. This loss of access to the Shwedagon, the country's most revered shrine, underscored the humiliating defeat in the 1850s and the court's vulnerability. King Mindon requested to replace the spire, or *hti*, of the Shwedagon, an application carefully weighed since the British feared that sympathies for the royal family could boil over into rebellion in Lower Burma during such a symbolic ceremony. Permission was granted however, but the king was forbidden to attend the ceremony.

Patronage of Yangon sites continued in the reign of Thibaw (r. 1878-1885). A senior monk appointed to supervise the *sangha* in Lower Burma made his headquarters a small hillock about 2 kilometres east of the Shwedagon, now occupied by one of the city's great landmarks, the huge Nga Htat Gyi Buddha, or Pavilion of Five Stories. The brick Buddha was made in 1900, long after Thibaw was exiled abroad. A famous sculptor named U Nyet traveled to Sagaing in search of a model and found the Nga Htat Gyi Buddha, built by a 17th century king, Min Ye Yandameik. Four years later a huge bell was cast at a ceremony attended by prominent locals and Sir Herbert Thirkell White, the Lt. Governor of Burma.

The image was once housed in a wooden hall with fifty-seven teak pillars and a five-tiered spire but was replaced by an iron pavilion.

Another landmark from this era includes a huge reclining Buddha, or the Chauk Htat Gyi, built first in 1907 by Sir Hpo Tha. It fell into neglect but was rebuilt in 1957 and then covered with its present iron structure. Another is Koe Htat Gyi, or Nine Storied Pavilion, housing a large seated Buddha, made in 1905. The early 20th century marked a period of great private donations by Burmese who had succeeded in the colonial world.

A pond just north of the Shwedagon marked the site where Burmese women washed the bloody swords of freedom fighters during the wars with the English. It was dubbed Scotch Tank by the British, in jest, since local people used its waters for medicinal purposes.

The city was called Rangoon by the British, probably stemming from the Arakanese pronunciation of Yangon, Rankon; the Burmese pronunciation was always Yangon, however. The government changed the name from Rangoon to Yangon in 1989.

The Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885-1886) saw the collapse of the court in Mandalay and the annexation of Upper Burma. Burma's last king, Thibaw, was exiled to the coastal town of Ratnagiri, in the old Bombay Presidency. Yangon remained the capital until the government designated Naypyidaw as the country's administrative centre in 2006.

The Sacred Landscape

Yangon is home to the country's most sacred religious monument, the Shwedagon Pagoda, containing hair relics that the Buddha himself presented to two Mon brothers who traveled to India as merchants. This Mon legend was first recorded in the 15th century and grew to be a self-defining myth for the entire nation. The myth was soon embellished with many fresh narrative elements, even in the mid-20th century with the inclusion of the Botataung.

'Grainbags', mounted by Capt. Ewert, won the day in this steeplechase held to commemorate Queen Victoria's birthday, 1853. Within a year of annexation, Rangoon enjoyed English pastimes, albeit with unique twists, such as substituting elephants for horses. The Illustrated London News, *September 25, 1858.*

The god Thagyamin's four jealous wives, as hawks, intercepting a parrot carrying a flask of celestial seminal fluid. A drop fell and impregnated Mei Lamu, creating the first ruler of Yangon, known as King Okkalapa. Mei Lamu Pagoda, North Yangon.

A Fruit-maiden

From time to time, the Shwedagon legend continues to spawn new sub-myths that are connected to monuments. One example arose in the 1950s when a young woman in a dream was visited by a spirit who instructed her about the location of a lost pagoda. With monks and lay people, the overgrown brick stupa in north Yangon was cleared and restored. The pagoda then became tied to the birth-story of the legendary King Okkalapa.

The tale opens with a hermit collecting the fruit of the Lamu tree, or *Sonneratia caseolaris*, from which a woman miraculously emerged. The hermit named her Mei Lamu and became her foster father. Her beauty attracted the chief god of the Buddhist and *nat* pantheon, named Thagyamin, or Sakka (Pali), who assumed a human appearance and concluded a marriage with the lovely fruit-maiden. Sadly, Thagyamin was soon called home by his four jealous celestial wives, and Mei Lamu was thus abandoned. The god then sent a special messenger-bird to Mei Lamu with a jar of celestial water, but his four wives, turning themselves into hawks, attacked the bird, causing drops to fall. This heavenly bird eventually reached Mei Lamu who consumed some of the celestial water, causing her to give birth to the future ruler of Yangon, King Okkalapa. In this way, the very first king of Yangon emerged from a union between an auspicious fruit-maiden and the god Thagyamin. The Mei Lamu story was perhaps in existence for centuries, but it became attached to this once ruinous brick pagoda only by the mid-20th century.

That humans can arise from plants goes back to Pagan times when the mother of Kyanzittha (r. 1084-1113) emerged from the fruit of a Bael tree. Also, hermits rearing the offspring of unusual parents is a leitmotif in ancient and modern Burmese and Mon culture. The birth and popularity of this shrine illustrates not only the enduring tenacity of the Shwedagon myth but also its elasticity.

Created in 1900 on a hillock east of the Shwedagon, the Nga Htat Gyi Buddha belonged to a wave of projects sponsored by Burmese successful in the colonial world.

A Tale of Two Cities

A largely lost layer of Yangon's history centres on a mythical king Bawgathena, or Bhogasena, whose history has been reconstructed from a handful of 19th century palm-leaf manuscripts (*History of Syriam*; Khin Maung Nyunt 2000; Bonpyan Sayadaw). Bawgathena ruled in Syriam, or Thanlyin, a town across the Pegu River, only some 30 kilometres southeast of Yangon. His kingdom was identified with the town of Pada, just outside of Syriam and associated with laterite ruins (*History of Syriam*: 148). Bawgathena is sometimes called King Sihadipa, since Syriam was also known as Sihadipa, another name for Sri Lanka. Bawgathena's popularity probably never extended much beyond the Yangon-Syriam region, and few in Burma are familiar now with his legacy, apart from learned monks and historians.

In some chronicles Bawgathena lived at the time of the Buddha, while in others he ruled long after the Buddha's death, at the time of King Asoka. The legends surrounding Bawgathena may have evolved among the Mon in the 18th and 19th centuries when Mon and Burmese lived side by side after the Mon defeat in the mid-16th century. No sources state that Bawgathena was a Mon but his queen was from Thaton, an early Mon capital deeply tied to Mon cultural identity but which also came to play a special role for Burmese. He may have been created by the Mon as a foil to the legendary Burmese King Okkalapa who governed Yangon, but this cannot yet be proved.

Yangon's Romeo and Juliet

Bawgathena's fortunes become entwined with King Okkalapa of Yangon only after their hot-blooded children fell head over heels in love with each other. The match was doomed, however, since Bawgathena's daughter, Mhway Loon, began life inauspiciously, born in the cremation grounds on the very day her mother died. Due to this inauspicious handicap, the king forced the princess to live outside Syriam's city walls (*History of Syriam*: 142). King Okkalapa forbid his son, Min Nanda, to court a young woman who began life so inauspiciously, but the young man set off secretly each night to Syriam on the back of a devoted crocodile named Nga Mo Yeik. However, the jealous maidservant of the princess devised a plot that eventually led to the drowning of the prince as he was ferried across to Syriam by the crocodile (*History of Syriam:* 150). Hearing the news, the inconsolable princess died while gazing across the river to Yangon.

Both the prince and princess were cremated simultaneously by their fathers, the smoke blending in the sky over Yangon and Syriam and forming a brilliant rainbow that finally united the lovers. Only the melancholy conclusion of the story is widely known today in Lower Burma. Few are aware that the father of the princess was King Bawgathena or that the prince was King Okkalapa's son. Burmese often dub the pair 'the Romeo and Juliet of Burma', to help foreigners appreciate the story. The tragic romance was so popular in the 19th century that it was the subject of a drama entitled *Minnandar*, brought out in 1883 by the famous playwright U Ku (Maung Htin Aung 1956: 122).

The hillock on which the princess was sequestered can be visited today in Syriam, near the 18th century Catholic church, and the small pagoda marking the site is named after her. Prince Min Nanda was thought to have been cremated by his father at the site of the Botataung Pagoda on the bank of the Yangon River. This connection with the Botataung began at least by the mid-19th century, if not before (Lloyd: 105). The cremation site was marked by the Botataung Pagoda, a stupa built by the king's 1,000 officers (Lloyd: 73). This legend endured till the early 1950s but was dropped once the Botataung became linked to the Shwedagon relics by the mid-1950s in a new myth. In the modern version, the 1,000 officers were believed instead to have guarded the Shwedagon hair relics conveyed from India. The new myth borrowed directly from the old one but its meaning was twisted entirely.

Queen Mei Lamu, shown emerging from the Lamu tree. Raised by a hermit, she wed the god Thagyamin and gave birth to Okkalapa, the first king of Yangon. She entered the orbit of the Shwedagon legend only in the 1950s. Mei Lamu Pagoda, North Yangon.

The son of King Okkalapa riding on his crocodile to meet his sweetheart in Syriam. After he drowned, she expired from sadness, the smoke from their cremations uniting in the sky. This tragic love story was once very popular. After Maung Maung Dye's Tales of Burma.

Bawgathena's Pagodas: a lost mythic layer

The legendary King Bawgathena also contributed to Yangon's sacred landscape by distributing relics among the city's major pagodas. Bawgathena received the relics from a delegation of 'enlightened beings' or *arahants*, from Sri Lanka, either at the time of the Buddha's death or centuries later during the reign of King Asoka, according to at least three slightly different versions (*History of Syriam*; Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 28; Lloyd). In one account only bodily relics from Sri Lanka are given to the king but in another both bodily and hair relics are mentioned; in another version the relic was the forehead bone of the Buddha and a tooth (Lloyd: 107). In one chronicle the *arahants* first visited Thaton and then came to see Bawgathena to request a special ruby that was needed to control floods in Sri Lanka; Bawgathena was given the relics in exchange for the ruby. The king enshrined these relics in no less than ten major Yangon pagodas, including the Sule, Botataung and Kyaik-kasan.

These myths centred on Bawgathena probably arose no earlier than the 18th century and were certainly current in the 19th century. The king's fame probably never extended much beyond the Yangon and Syriam areas and were completely overlooked in the national chronicles. It is hard to know how these myths started or why, but they form a layer of Yangon's sacred landscape that has been entirely forgotten by residents today.

The Bawgathena myths may have begun in the mid-18th century when Yangon's population and importance grew and new pagodas were constructed and older ones renewed. These legends probably started in Syriam, since the king's own Pada kingdom was located there, together with the legendary royal associations with the sacred Kyaik Khauk Pagoda located just outside of Syriam.

Hide-and-Seek with the Buddha

One popular myth is connected to no less than three important old pagodas in Yangon, the Kyaik-waing, Kyaik-kaloe, and Kyaik-kale. These shrines are now part of north Yangon but in earlier times were far from the centre. The three are octagonal in plan, faced with laterite, but now covered in brick and plaster. They may well belong to the 15th century or even earlier but this cannot be proved.

The story of the Kyaik-waing opens with a visit by the Buddha to the future site of the pagoda which was inhabited by an ogre called Maha Thara Nat (Thaw Kaung 2004). The ogre challenged the

Buddha to a game of hide-and-seek and then transformed himself into the smallest grain of sand and buried himself deep below the earth. The Buddha easily spotted him and placed him on the palm of his hand. It was now the Buddha's turn to hide, whereupon he turned himself into a tiny particle and hid between the ogre's eyes. The ogre gave up his search and in defeat became a devotee. The Kyaik-kaloe and Kyaik-kale pagodas are based on the same story but the Buddha Gotama is replaced by an earlier legendary Buddha, Kakusandha. The hillock where Kakusandha effected his disappearance is Kyaik-kale, while Kyaik-kaloe marks the spot where the ogre submitted to the Buddha. Numerous tales in the Pali canon describe the Buddha converting belligerent demons but none follow this particular pattern.

King Bawgathena's minister conveying a reliquary to the Botataung. This legendary king patronised many Yangon pagodas, including the Sule and the Kyaik-kasan, but he is virtually unknown today. By U Ba Kyi. c. mid-1950s. Botataung pagoda.

Hair relics from Thaton

Another tradition underlying some sacred sites in Yangon stems from a Mon myth claiming that the Buddha bestowed hair relics on hermits gathered in Thaton, a Mon centre north of Moulmein. This legend emerged by the 15th century and is recorded in Mon inscriptions of the time.

The myth enjoyed many variations over the centuries, but the common thread was the Buddha's appearance at Thaton and his gifting hair relics to hermits. The most important modern shrine in this myth cycle is the Golden Rock at Kyaik-hti-yo but another important site is the Kyaik Khauk Pagoda outside of Syriam. In this example, a hermit, or *yathe*, named Kyauk Gauk returned from

The Buddha, challenged to a game of hide-and-seek by an ogre, found the ogre deep beneath the ground and then held him in his palm. When it was the Buddha's turn to hide, he reduced his size and stood between the eyes of the demon, now unable to find him. At least three pagodas in Yangon are tied to this legend which probably arose no earlier than the 18th century.

Thaton to Syriam with a hair relic (*History of Syriam*: 148). The Kyaik-kasan pagoda in north Yangon is said to contain a hair relic donated by the same hermit. Another tradition, recorded in the 19th century, claimed that the Buddha distributed hair relics not from Thaton but from the nearby Mt. Zingyaik (Lloyd: 93).

The hair-relic myths centred on Thaton are testimony to the enduring nature of Mon myths and also the degree to which they were absorbed early on by the Burmese population of Lower Burma following the collapse of Mon power in the 16th century.

Sacred Sites in the Colonial Era

Yangon is also home to sacred sites associated with diverse foreign communities, beginning after the city's annexation in the 1850s when overseas Chinese and Indians were welcomed to this new outpost of empire. Complementary land grants were awarded in the first year of occupation, 1853, for an Armenian church, a Hindu temple, two mosques, a synagogue, two Chinese temples, and the American Baptist Mission (Pearn: 195). Many are still in their original locations. Even before annexation large numbers of Chinese and Indians had made Yangon their home. In the 1840s there was even a small colony of Bengalee and Madrasi washer men, or '*dhobis*' (Hindi) (Grant: 46).

Immigration over the next few decades grew so rapidly that foreigners outnumbered Burmese, with Indians making up the lion's share. By the late 19th century the Burmese were 'slowly but surely being ousted from the business quarter of the city by the natives of India and the ubiquitous "John Chinaman" ' (Bird: 175). Yangon's early cosmopolitan flavour, however, was well advanced even in the late 18th century when 'In the same street may be heard the solemn voice of the Muezzin, calling pious Islamaites to early prayers, and the bell of the Portugueze chapel tinkling a summons to Romish Christians' (Symes: 215).

The Buddha flying to Burma and bestowing hair relics to hermits stems from a 15th century Mon legend. The group receiving hair relics here is associated with the Kyaik-kasan Pagoda in Yangon, and the Kyaik Khauk Pagoda outside of Syriam. Kyaik-kasan Pagoda compound, Yangon.

Indian Town

Residents of Indian descent in Yangon are today only a small minority, but before Independence they formed the dominant ethnic

Indian babu*, right, and an English policeman clutching a baton stand out in a world otherwise belonging to Burmese. This painting captures the world depicted in the works by George Orwell. By Po Yin, c. 1935. Mahamuni Temple, Moulmein. .*

group. Many were also successful merchants and officials implementing British rule, a point of friction for the Burmese who became de-facto second-class citizens. Added to this were the unpopular Chettiar moneylenders from Tamil Nadu. The bulk of Indians, however, were coolies for the rice and timber farms and dockworkers, and most were Tamil. The old Burmese term for Indians is *kala*, a derogatory word, and old Rangoon was often called Indian Town, or *Kala Myo*. Prince Damrong visiting from Thailand in 1936, observed that 'hardly any ethnic Burmese can be seen along the city streets' (Damrong: 31).

Pogroms against Indians broke out in hard times, such as in 1930 when they comprised over eighty per cent of the city's skilled and unskilled labourers. Also, friction between Indian Hindus and Muslims erupted into violence now and then. One incident was sparked by the slaughter of a cow during a Muslim festival in 1893. The Lt. Governor at the time 'resented bitterly the stirring up of strife by Mohammedans and Hindus in a land where they were strangers and pilgrims, hospitably received and treated with courtesy.' He likened the riots to guests hurling 'decanters at one another across their host's dinner-table' (White: 236).

The tensions among all of the ethnic communities is captured in a painted panel from a Moulmein pagoda, from about 1935. A corpulent turbaned Indian businessman stands imperiously amid a group of demure Burmese overseen by an English policeman clutching a baton. The officer and the Indian *babu* are the only characters in the composition sharing eye contact, as if cementing a fragile bond in a world they controlled but to which neither belonged. Ten years earlier George Orwell had been in Moulmein, preparing his perceptive critique of colonial society in his essay *Shooting an Elephant*. Neither Orwell or anyone else could scarcely imagine that this tidy and comfy world in 1935 was on the eve of oblivion, since Japanese boots would be on Yangon's streets in just over five years.

The Indian population experienced a steady exodus to India during World War II and also at Independence. The next big spurt was occasioned by Ne Win's 'Burmanisation' in the 1960s when those with the means got out, leaving those without means behind.

British soldiers desecrating a former pagoda site by slaughtering cows. The moral contrast between Buddhists who spared life and English who took life still flavours perceptions of the colonial era. This pagoda near Scotch Pond marks the spot where the hair relics were kept while the Shwedagon was built, according to one local legend. Hpaya Nga-su. By Maung San Mya, c. 1960s.

So many were repatriated to Tamil Nadu that there is today an Indo-Burma Buddhist Cultural Centre in Chennai, and a section of Chennai's market is called Burma Bazaar. The majority of Indians in Burma descended from Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. Another part of the mix in Yangon are Nepalese Gurkhas who served the Raj and whose Hindu temples are found in Yangon, Mandalay and in other centres.

Muslims of Indian descent live throughout downtown and are mainly Sunni, with many coming from former East Bengal, now Bangladesh. The country's major mosques are in the vicinity of Sule Pagoda, such as the Bengali Sooni Mosque. Another is the Sooratee Mosque, founded by Muslims from Surat in western India. Only one major mosque is Shia, the Mogol Masjid. Tamil Muslims, called Kyulayar, are also in Yangon, witnessed by the Choliya Mosque opposite Scott Market. The majority of Hindus and Muslims throughout Burma are bi-lingual, speaking Burmese and Hindi or its kindred tongue, Urdu.

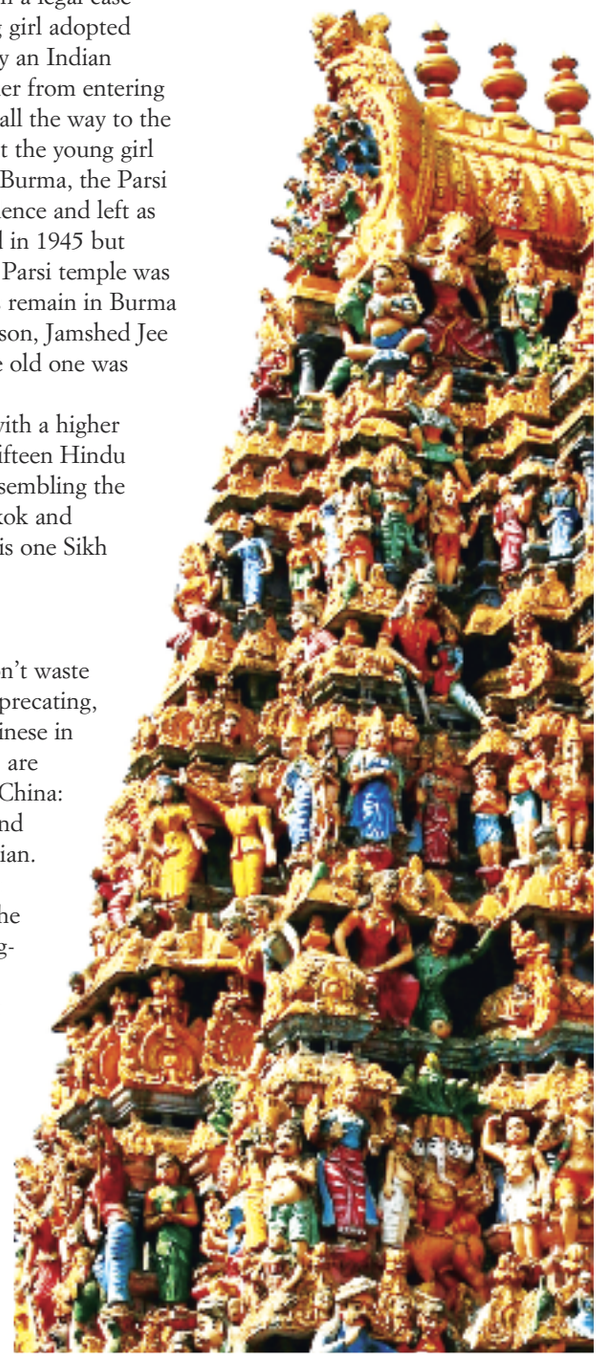
A major Muslim shrine is located in Syriam, commemorating a Sufi master and his four followers (Yegar: 8). These five are said to have been martyred in Syriam by the Portuguese mercenary, Filipe de Brito, who controlled Syriam for a brief time in the 17th century. Their five tombs are worshipped not only by Muslims but by local Buddhist and Christians, especially during a major winter festival. It is believed to have been founded by a Sufi saint sent to Burma from Baghdad in the 13th century, but this and the subsequent martyrdom at the hands of de Brito are probably legendary. The saint is said to have meditated in a cave at Syriam, the same cave that later drew the five Sufi martyrs from Mecca. This shrine is not mentioned in 19th or 20th century gazetteers, so its popularity is probably rather recent. The name of the shrine, Panch Pir Dargah (Urdu), or Mausoleum of the Five Saints, links it to a far ranging and popular religious 'cult' of the same name found throughout Bangladesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and even the Punjab, both among low caste Hindus and Muslims. The identity of the 'five saints' varied from place to place and thus there was an infinite variety (Hastings IX: 600). None of the 'saints' at Syriam relate to those in India or Bangladesh, suggesting an indigenous overlay on a foreign format. The closest and most important Muslim-Hindu pilgrimage site of the same name is in the town of Sonargaon, near Dhaka, in Bangladesh.

Parsi tombstone, in English and Gujarati, 1900, testimony to the role of this foreign community in colonial Rangoon. Only a handful of Parsis remain. Courtesy: Mitra Sharafi.

Yangon was also home to a small number of influential Parsis during the colonial era. Even the first Prime Minister, U Nu, had a crush on a Parsi girl during his student days at Rangoon University, before eloping with a Buddhist woman. This tiny community captured the attention of the entire Parsi world with a legal case in 1914 centred on the religious identity of a young girl adopted by Parsi parents. Her biological father was allegedly an Indian Christian from Goa, a parentage that disqualified her from entering Yangon's Parsi fire-temple. The case was appealed all the way to the Privy Council, London, which ruled in 1925 against the young girl (Sharafi). Like all the other Indian communities in Burma, the Parsi were closely tied to British Indian before Independence and left as World War II broke out (Adamjee). Some returned in 1945 but departed when Ne Win seized power in 1962. The Parsi temple was once on old Mogul Street. Only a handful of Parsis remain in Burma today, including a mother and son in Yangon. The son, Jamshed Jee Jee Bhoy, manages the new Parsi cemetery after the old one was nationalised in 1995.

Indians are most numerous in the large cities, with a higher concentration in Lower Burma. There are at least fifteen Hindu temples in Yangon, mostly in south Indian style, resembling the well-known Indian temple on Silom Road in Bangkok and countless others in Singapore and Malaysia. There is one Sikh temple in Yangon also.

South Indian style temples are commonplace in Yangon. This is the large gateway, or gopuram*, to the Shri Kali Temple, west of Sule Pagoda.*



'Earn like the Chinese'

'Earn like the Chinese, save like the Indian, and don't waste money like the Burmese' is a popular, if not self-deprecating, maxim reflecting the commercial success of the Chinese in Burma. The Chinese-Burmese, called *tayoke kabya,* are divided into three groups, based on their origin in China: the Hokkien, Cantonese, and Hakka. The largest and most influential is the Hokkien, originally from Fujian. The Cantonese were called in old Burma the 'short jackets', because of their short-sleeve coats, while the Fukienese were styled 'long jackets', after their long-sleeve robes (Chen Yi-sein). Common Chinese surnames in Burma include Li, Peng, and Min, but all Chinese residents have Burmese names too. Intermarriage between Chinese men and Mon and Burmese women was the norm, since so few Chinese women immigrated to Burma, attested to by an inscription from 1863 found in one of the early Guan Yin temples (Yin Yin Myint: 264).

Trade with China is centuries old and Chinese junks sailed throughout Southeast Asia, linking Yangon with Malacca, Singapore and Batavia. There was even a 'China Wharf' in the mid-18th century. Trade to Burma included silk and cotton

A silver bowl, probably by a Burmese artist working in Bombay, c. 1890-1900, was exported to the Rangoon Parsi community. Based on an Iranian rock-cut relief, this depicts the Sasanian king Sharpur I defeating the Roman emperor Gordian. Courtesy: Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.

cloth named Nankeen, after modern Nanjing. Chinese porcelain came to Burma from the European communities in the Straits of Malacca (Crawfurd II: 379). The Chinese lived outside Rangoon's early settlement in the 18th and 19th centuries in an area called Tat-ga-le, or Tatkalay, immediately to the west of the stockade.

Chinese immigration on a sizeable scale began only in the 1850s when Britain opened the doors. Most came from Guangdong at the beginning, followed by those from Fujian in greater numbers, mostly from the port of Xiamen (Yin Yin Myint: 262). Land was allotted without charge for the construction of two temples, both dedicated to the Buddhist goddess Guan Yin. The Hokkien temple is now called the Kheng Hock Keong Temple and fronts Strand Road. The brick and stone temple today was finished in 1903, replacing a wooden one completed in 1863, with a foundation stone of 1861 (Chen Yi-sein: 110). Inside are three shrines, each dedicated to various deities, such as the Queen Mother of the West, or Xi Wang Mu. Chinese offer bowls of green bananas and coconuts, borrowing Burmese devotional practices. Prayers printed on paper are placed in a huge incinerator in one corner of the compound, a Chinese practice worldwide. This temple is more colourful than the Cantonese temple on nearby Mahabandoola Street reconstructed after a fire in 1855 (Yin Yin Myint: 266). Another early temple, dedicated to Fusan, was built near Inya Lake, donated by the Fujian. The thick smell of incense, the Daoist deities, and even the men playing 'checkers' in the courtyard are familiar sights in Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia.

The Chinese were always dwarfed by the Indian community. For example, they numbered only about 30,000 in 1931, compared to an Indian population of over 211,000 (Pearn: 287). Despite their small numbers, Chinese flourished, from the inventor of Tiger Balm, Aw

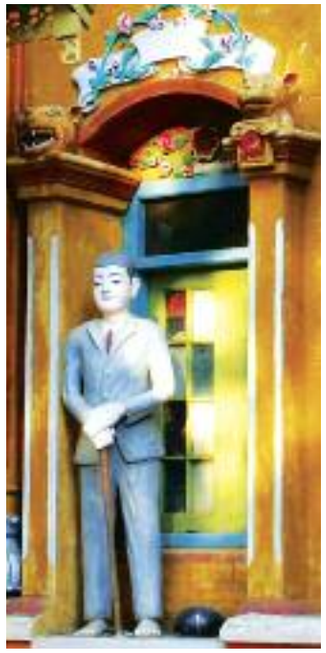
The Sooratee Mosque retains its shape today, though its exterior is now covered in tilework. Named for the large population of Muslims from Surat, on India's west coast, who migrated to Rangoon. Old postcard.

Boon Haw, to a Director-General of Archaeology, Taw Sein Ko. In the 1960s, however, over 100,000 of the most prosperous fled abroad, preferring not to march with General Ne Win on his Burmese Road to Socialism. Lauding this change in Chinese fortunes, Ne Win designated the house belonging to a Chinese entrepreneur, Y. H. Kwong, as an official government guesthouse. Before Ne Win's take-over, there were six Chinese and nine Hindi newspapers (Yin Yin Myint: 265).

The Burmese-Chinese today use Burmese as their mother tongue and have adopted local attire. They are mostly in major cities, such as Yangon, Mandalay, Taunggyi, and Moulmein. The Chinese freely attend Burmese Buddhist shrines and had even constructed Chinese-style pavilions at the Shwedagon as early as the 19th century. Chinese deities are now a regular feature in many Buddhist temples in Burma, especially urban ones. The most popular deity is the goddess Guan Yin, a phenomenon throughout Southeast Asia.

There are also Chinese Muslims in Burma called Panthay whose origins are in Yunnan, bordering the Burmese frontier in the far north. There was even a 19th century Sultan of Yunnan, and Muslims conducted trade by mule train, from Yunnan to Bhamo, north of Mandalay, bringing silk from China and returning with cotton.

Left: Tiger Balm packet.



Tiger Balm founder, Aw Boon Haw, one of the many celebrated Chinese in Burma. The family established this medical dispensary at the Sambodhi Pagoda, near Monywa, in Upper Burma. c.1920s-1930s.

Christian Sacred Sites

Catholic missionaries reached Burma as early as the 16th century but formal evangelising began only after Pope Innocent XIII dispatched Italian Barnabites to Burma in 1722. The most famous were Father V. Sangermano and G. M. Mantegazza who both wrote up their experiences (Tun Aung Chain 2004b: 87). The Barnabites ended their mission in 1829 and other European Catholic orders filled the vacuum. Tensions between the missionaries even led to violence when a Portuguese cleric tried to poison his Italian rival, Father Carpani. The guilty priest was to be transported to Goa but was taken down by an alligator while swimming in the Rangoon River (Pearn: 82). By 1855 there were eleven priests and over 5,000 converts throughout the country.

Catholics today number no more than one or two per cent of the population. The earliest standing Catholic church is located in Syriam, near Yangon, a simple, roofless ruined brick structure from the mid-18th century.

Special Christian quarters were established in Pegu in Lower Burma and in Ava and Amarapura in Upper Burma. Armenian Christians were also in Burma, not as missionaries, but as merchants and advisors employed by Burmese courts. Within the 18th century

The Chinese community was far smaller than the Indian but influential. Chinese style temples are found throughout Burma. Kheng Hock Keong temple, Strand Road.

The original Holy Trinity Cathedral, located by the river on Strand Road. Taken down in 1890-1891, the new cathedral went up in its present location in 1894 near Bogyoke Aung San Market. After The Illustrated London News*, 6 March 1869.*

stockade in Yangon was an Armenian church, and there is also one today in central Yangon, named the Apostolic Church of St John the Baptist. The best known Armenians, the Sarkies brothers, were the founders of the famous Strand Hotel. A handful of 17th and 18th century tombstones in Pegu and Syriam, with inscriptions in English, Burmese, Armenian, Portuguese and Latin, provides a glimpse of this once small but influential foreign presence.

Yangon's St. Mary's is the headquarters for Burma's Catholics but Mandalay's Sacred Heart Cathedral was finished earlier, in 1890, with funds provided by a wealthy Burmese convert. An artist from Rome working in Mandalay reproduced paintings found in the Vatican and a Burmese craftsmen, under a European master, produced three teak altars (Bird: 290). This church is a disappointment today, since nothing survives from the early period. It is located on 82nd street between 25th and 26th street, near the Shwe Kyi Myin Pagoda.

In the compound of nearly every Catholic church in Burma is an artificial stone grotto depicting the vision of the Virgin by the fourteen-year old French girl Bernadette at Lourdes. Less popular in Burma is the story of Fatima, the young woman in Portugal who also had a vision of Mary. The most important annual festival for Catholics takes place in a small town north of Pegu, known as Nyaunglebin. The festival started in 1902 but why it began here or grew to such importance is unknown. The image of the Virgin taken in procession from the church was brought from France in the 1950s.

All of the major Protestant groups are represented today in Burma. The English Baptists of Serampore, India, were among the earliest to arrive, in 1807, with Felix Carey who began the first Baptist mission just outside of Rangoon's stockade (Tun Aung Chain 2004b: 107). American Baptists soon followed in 1813, whose leading representative, A. Judson, was imprisoned by the Burmese First Anglo-Burmese war. Missionary work stepped up as English control increased throughout the 19th century, and there was a sizable Christian population in Mandalay before annexation in 1886. King Mindon (r. 1853-1878) even sent some of his children to a school operated by an Anglican missionary named Rev. Marks.

Britain permitted missionary activity in the hills surrounding central Burma and in the southeast, and many among the so-called ethnic communities were converted, especially the Chin, Kachin and Karen. Their foreign faith unfortunately served as another wedge dividing them from the Buddhist majority following Independence.

The European population was a small minority but the controlling voice in political life. Most had cut their teeth with long service in India and generally found the Burmese far more agreeable; they also praised the freedoms that Burmese women enjoyed relative to their sisters in India. Many colonialists flourished in their new environment, such as the novelist and magistrate Maurice Collis and the savant, G. H. Luce. A few detested the parochial and elitist 'club life' in Burma, such as George Orwell, who was only too ready to leave.

The British left an indelible mark on Yangon. Government buildings include the High Court (1911) near the Sule Pagoda, designed by the Scottish architect John Ransome (1865-1944) and the nearby Telegraph Office (1911) by John Begg (1866-1937). Both served consecutively as Consulting Architect to the Government of India in Bombay. The Strand Hotel went up in 1896 but did not open until 1901. The majority of the surviving colonial buildings, however, are residential flats still in use. The hybrid City Hall, adjacent to the Sule Pagoda, was built in the 1930s to plans by U Tin who trained in Bombay in the 1920s.

The British cultivated their own sacred sites, principally the Anglican Holy Trinity Cathedral, next to Bogyoke Aung San Market. This was built in 1894, replacing a church of the same name consecrated in 1867 by the Bishop of Calcutta. It was located near the river but no longer stands. Scores of churches representing many Protestant denominations are also found throughout Yangon. The most visible is the Immanuel Baptist Church, opposite Sule Pagoda.

British Rangoon came crashing down within days after the Japanese blitzkrieg-like invasion of Burma which began with heavy aerial bombardment in late December 1941. English residents and thousands of Indian families fled north to start their trek to safety in India. A puppet Burmese government formed by the Japanese invited the fiery Chandra Bose to Yangon to raise levies for the Indian National Army which fought Allied forces all over Southeast Asia.

Rowe & Company department store opened in 1910, facing Fytche square, now Mahabandoola Garden. Designed by a Bombay firm, Charles F. Stevens & Company, its basement was a novelty. The company had branches in the major cities and issued a quarterly catalogue.

A grotto evoking the vision of Our Lady of Lourdes is found at most Catholic churches. Church of the Sacred Heart, Kyauktan, near Syriam.

The Japanese were welcomed by many as liberators but most soon realised that one colonial power had simply been exchanged for another. The nationalist leader Aung San first fought the British but later joined the retaking of Burma in 1944. Many in the Allied high command demanded his head for treason, but Lord Mountbatten reasoned that Burma would require men of his calibre following the war. By the time the British actually entered Yangon, the bedraggled Japanese had begun their own walk out of Burma to safety in Thailand. Their thoughts probably drifted back to better days, such as when the Japanese army sponsored a meal for thousands of Burmese monks to mark the first anniversary of the start of the war.

The city's sacred sites were largely still intact in 1945, albeit a bit the worse for wear. The Shwedagon came out unscathed but the Sule sustained minor damage. St. Mary's had its windows blown out, and some furnishings had been trashed at Holy Trinity. The only major site entirely destroyed was the Botataung Pagoda, a target amidst the docks.

Independence in 1948 unleashed a catharsis of nationalism that was aggressively Buddhist in character. Indeed, post-colonial Burma was to be a Buddhist Burma led by Burmese with little room for religious or ethnic minorities. Much the same occurred in Sri Lanka, and both countries unwittingly sowed the seeds for intractable problems by failing to incorporate their minority populations. The new official Buddhist flavour was expressed on the very day English colours were lowered on 4 January. In the morning the new president planted a Bodhi sapling at the Shwedagon, while government officials inaugurated the rebuilding of the Botataung Pagoda near the river.

A Burmese nurse adminstering to Japanese soldiers in Burma, 1942-1945. Such postcards reassured an anxious Japanese public that the troops were welcomed in Burma.

Yangon's City Hall, facing the Sule Pagoda, 1930s, designed by U Tin, who trained in Bombay. A fusion of European and Burmese styles.

Fierce debate for a decade centred on the issue of adopting Buddhism as the state religion, made more pressing since it was thought that the faith was in decline and in need of revival. Lay meditation was also promoted at this time with the appointment of Mahasi Sayadaw as head of his famous mediation centre (Thathana Yeiktha) started at that time.

The Kaba Aye Pagoda

The first Prime Minister, U Nu, cast himself as a leader of a newly liberated Buddhist nation free at last to express its Buddhist and Burmese ethnic identity. He is remembered for convening the Sixth Great Buddhist Synod, emulating King Asoka in ancient India and King Mindon in Mandalay. The convention was held inside a spacious hall, or 'cave' (Maha Pasana Guha) built within an artificially created mountain that consumed 12,000 tons of cement and 380 tons of steel. Its inspiration came in a dream to U Nu after he visited the famous Satta Panni Cave in Rajghir, India, the site taken to be the First Buddhist Synod.

Also, a miracle presaged the opening of the synod – a monk who was only forty-three years of age recited the entire Pali canon. Later

World Peace Pagoda at Kaba Aye, centre of Prime Minister U Nu's renewal of Buddhism in Burma. Finished in 1952, the stupa's completely hollow interior made for displaying relics broke with centuries of tradition which interred relics in solid core stupas, forever unavailble for viewing.

known as the Mingun Sayadaw, he was likened to the Buddha's disciple Ananda who became an 'enlightened being' or *arahant,* just before the beginning of the First Synod in India. Such a feat had never been accomplished in Burma before, and the monk's appearance at that moment 'augured well for the Sixth Buddhist Council' and signaled the rebirth of Buddhism that U Nu envisioned (Win Pe: 10; Mendelson: 267). The council concluded on the full-moon day of 26 May 1956, commemorating 2,500 years after the Buddha's demise.

Emerging from the Sixth Synod were the two major systems of Vipassana meditation, one technique developed by the Mahasi Sayadaw, the other by a laymen U Ba Khin. The latter's most famous pupil, S. N. Goenka, began the world-wide Vipassana movement .

Near the 'cave' was constructed the Kaba Aye Pagoda, or World Peace Pagoda, completed in 1952 and designed to display the bone relics of two disciples of the Buddha, Sariputta and Moggallana. The relics were excavated near Sanchi, in central India, and kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. They were returned to India in 1947 and then put on tour in Sri Lanka for two years. Prime Minister Nehru gave a portion of the relics to U Nu in Calcutta in 1951 (Daulton).

The inspiration to build the Kaba Aye Pagoda began some years earlier when a lay recluse practicing meditation near Pakkoku received from a hermit a bamboo staff inscribed with the Pali words, 'Siri Mangala', or Glorious Prosperity. The hermit told the lay devotee to present the staff to U Nu and to instruct the Prime Minister to construct a pagoda by the end of 1952. If this were accomplished, then peace and prosperity would flow to the nation and the world. The prime minister discovered in Yangon a hillock of the same name, Siri Mangala, and there created his famous Kaba Aye Pagoda. This was interpreted as a miraculous fulfillment of the prophecy uttered by the hermit who discovered the incised staff (Mendelson: 272; Daulton). This modern story captures the flavour of ancient legends and shows how pre-modern traditional thinking motivated U Nu and is still very much in play today.

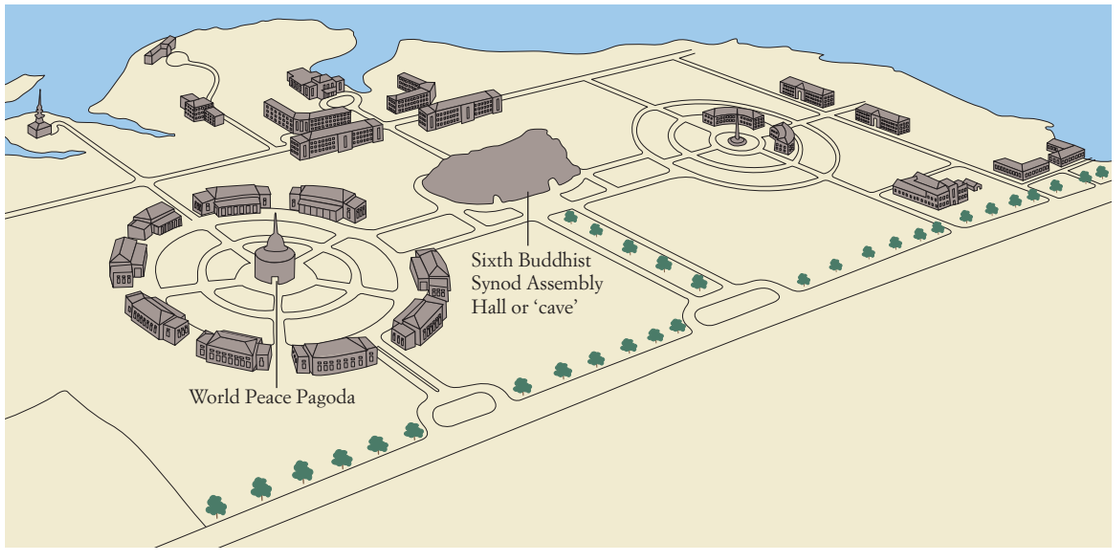
The Kaba Aye stupa completed by U Nu in 1952 was a complete break from the past, since it was designed so that worshippers could enter and see the relics. Traditional stupas were solid, and the relics contained within sealed chambers were never meant to be viewed. Inside the hollow interior is a huge strongroom with thick metal doors opened daily. This novel hollow design quickly became the standard for large public projects, such as at the Botataung (1953) and the Maha Wizaya (1980). All of the large government-sponsored pagodas since then have also adopted this plan, such as the shrines for the tooth-relic replicas, in Yangon and near Mandalay, and the Lokananda Pagoda in Sittwe.

The first Prime Minister also never neglected the so-called indigenous spirits, or *nats*. In 1955, for example, a dam built near Mt. Popa suffered from dangerous seepage shortly before its formal opening. The engineers failed to stop it, but U Nu enlisted a friend from Mandalay who chanted Buddhist prayers to the great local Maha Giri Nat and others at five in the morning. The skeptical engineers, U Nu recalled, were 'dumbfounded' when the seepage ceased, even after a heavy rain (Nu: 8).

Buddhism was adopted as the state religion at the end of U Nu's tenure, but not without tremendous political and social costs. It was fiercely opposed by the country's minorities, including animists from the major ethnic groups, organised into the National Religious Minorities Alliance and led by the former first president of Burma, Sao Shwe Thaike (Smith: 251). Opposition came also from liberal-minded Burmese more comfortable with secular traditions. These sensitive issues were hotly debated in parliamentary sessions and in the press. On the streets violent confrontations took place against Muslims, led by monks who felt that the U Nu government had given too many concessions to non-Buddhists (Smith; Spiro).

The Great Victory Pagoda

U Nu's accumulated merit proved inadequate to prevent General Ne Win from toppling his government in 1962. Ne Win and his Revolutionary Council opposed U Nu's desire to make Buddhism



Kaba Aye complex. The Cave, centre, was the site for the Sixth Synod. The World Peace Pagoda, left. Adapted from The New Light of the Dhamma, *1953.*

An artificial cave created for the Sixth Synod, emulating a legendary grotto in India thought to be the site of the First Synod. Still used for state religious occasions, such as mass examinations of monks. World Peace Pagoda, right. The Buddha Museum, Shwedagon.

the official state religion and turned their attention to the Burmese Road to Socialism. The Council also opposed U Nu's support of *nat*-worship, and the mayor of Yangon was ordered to dismantle all of the city's public *nat* shrines (Smith: 296).

Corruption and schisms slowly built up in the *sangha* until Ne Win launched a purge of the monasteries. Nine sects were officially sanctioned at the time, and the Great Victory Pagoda, or the Maha Wizaya Pagoda, was begun in 1980 to symbolise the unification of the *sangha* (Htun Hmat Win). It was built across the street from the Shwedagon, on the south side, on a hillock named Dhammarakkhita Hill, or 'Hill of the Protection of The Religion.' Its hollow interior features a small metal Buddha gifted by the Nepalese royal family, together with sacred earth from the Buddha's birth place. Its ceiling is ornamented with constellations, and its wall paintings depict scenes from the Buddha's life by the famous U Ba Kyi (1919-2000).

Sacred Tombs

Nearby on the road leading south of the Shwedagon is a cluster of mausolea known as Kandawin Gardens, a Burmanised version of the old Cantonment Gardens. The oldest belongs to Queen Supayalat who was exiled to India in 1886 with the deposed king. The white-washed brick monument erected after her death in 1925 is in traditional style, the designers wisely divining that she would be happier in a tomb reflecting the past rather than the present. She died in Mandalay after returning to Burma following her husband's death in India. Another shrine, modern and sober, commemorates U Thant, the former Secretary General of the UN, whose burial

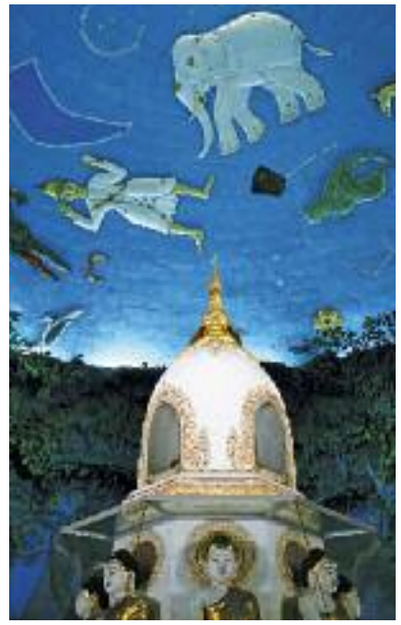
provoked a violent confrontation in 1974 between Ne Win and students. Another is dedicated to Daw Khin Kyi, the wife of General Aung San and mother of Aung San Su Kyi, her tomb amidst the country's notables, proving how her husband's legacy trumps the regime's disapproval of their steadfast daughter. The last in the series, to the south, enshrines the ashes of Thakin Ko Daw Hmine, another Independence leader. His shrine and Daw Khin Kyi's were designed by U Kyaw Min, an MIT trained architect and a former chairman of the architecture department at Rangoon University. These tombs are rarely visited and poorly looked after but are sacred sites in their own right.

Just north of the Shwedagon is the Martyrs' Mausoleum dedicated to Aung San and eight others who were gunned down on 19 July 1947, just six months before Independence. It was designed by the architect U Sun Oo. It is now off-limits to residents, the regime hoping that diminishing Aung San's legacy will somehow moot the power of his offspring.

These memorials to the past, in the shadow of the Shwedagon, are haunting reminders of Burma's turbulent history and uncertain future.

A Fresh Wave of Piety

The new military leadership that assumed control in the late 1980s quickly made up for Ne Win's lacklustre support of the *sangha*. High profile pagoda refurbishments were begun in earnest after the democracy demonstrations were crushed in 1988, proving that power and piety can go hand in hand (Schober 2005). Ne Win's socialist rhetoric therefore gave way to an entirely Buddhist agenda. U Nu's enthusiasm for pious Buddhist works was restricted by parliament and public opinion, but there has been no such restraint since 1989.



Ne Win capped his reforms of the sangha *with his Maha Wizaya Pagoda, or Great Victory Pagoda, 1980, near the south entrance of the Shwedagon.*

Four tombs commemorate an Independence leader, Aung San's wife, Supayalat and U Thant, left to right. Rarely visited, they encapsulate the triumphs and tragedies of modern Burma.

This metal hti *was donated by Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt. It came down after he was deposed and was replaced by one gifted by his rival, General Than Shwe. On the pagoda platform, the old* hti *is shunned by worshippers, sensing the bad luck of the former leader.*

The new rulers have sought to identify themselves with ancient kings, emulating traditional roles played by monarchs. Three august kings have been singled out and their purpoted palaces have been rebuilt. The rulers, Anawrahta, Bayinnaung and Alaungpaya, were Napoleons in their respective eras, expanding Burma's borders. This helps to explain the unbounded government support for large scale Buddhist projects, and the renovations of pagodas, such as at Pagan. Poignant royal symbols are also put into play, such as white elephants, a prerogative of monarchs and a traditional palladium of kingship throughout Theravada Southeast Asia. Three white elephants were captured in Arakan and removed to Yangon where they are now on display beneath a pavilion, near the airport. Brochures claim that the 'Emergence of the white elephants is a good omen for the nation at a time when the state is endeavoring to build a peaceful, modern and developed nation.'

Among the religious projects undertaken soon after 1988 was a complete facelift of the Sule pagoda. The renovation was planned as early as 1981 but stalled for years until it was rushed to completion in only four months in October 1989 (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 108) This was followed by the restoration of the Botataung. However, the jewel in the crown was the gilding of the Shwedagon and the hoisting of a spectacular *hti*, in April 1999.

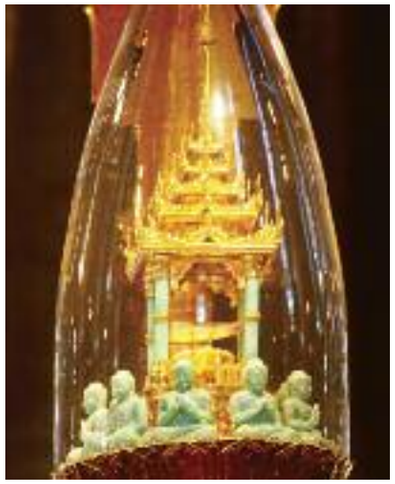
Other major projects included the largest marble Buddha in the realm, created by a noted sculptor named U Taw Taw in 2000. The 500 ton stone was floated on a barge from Upper Burma, resembling

Next to the abandoned hti, *in a small shrine, is the semi-legendary Yarkyaw Sayadaw.Donated by Than Shwe, it contrasts with the* hti *associated with Khin Nyunt. Such symbolic public displays are politically charged.*

The army, or tatmadaw, *and monks serving and sacrificing for the country together is an ever present theme in the tightly controlled media. The marble Buddha quarried from north of Mandalay is set to be floated in a barge down the Irrawaddy. One or two deposed military figures have been airbrushed from the composition, politics trumping piety. By Myanmar Artisans' Association, 2001. Mindhamma Hill, entrance corridor.*

similar flotillas in Burma's past. This Buddha is deliberately larger than the previous record set by the Kyauk-taw-gyi marble Buddha in Mandalay, commissioned by King Mindon. The Buddha caps a hillock called Mindhamma, chosen for its associations with hermits, wizards, and ogres. The hill was also tied to a famous monk named Yarkyaw Sayadaw, or 'One Who Lived 100 Years'. Its location was therefore scarcely accidental and shows how certain spots are hallowed for their auspiciousness.

The Buddha is showcased in an open pavilion now crowned by a *hti* established by the top political figure, General Than Shwe. The former spire was hoisted by another prominent government figure, the former Sect. 1–Lt. General Khin Nyunt. This leader was put under house arrest in 2004 which prompted the removal of his metal *hti* and its replacement by Than Shwe. The metal *hti* of Khin Nyunt now stands forlornly inside a small shrine on the platform, its offering box always empty, shunned by Burmese mindful of the former leader's inauspicious fate. To its side is a well-kept shrine featuring a life-size sculpture of the Yarkyaw Sayadaw, donated by none other than Than Shwe. This crass display of one general's triumph at the expense of another is there for all to contemplate.



In 1994, the Chinese government loaned a tooth relic to Burma which toured the country with two replicas. One was established in a pagoda in Yangon (above), the other near Mandalay. The large tooth is displayed horizontally.

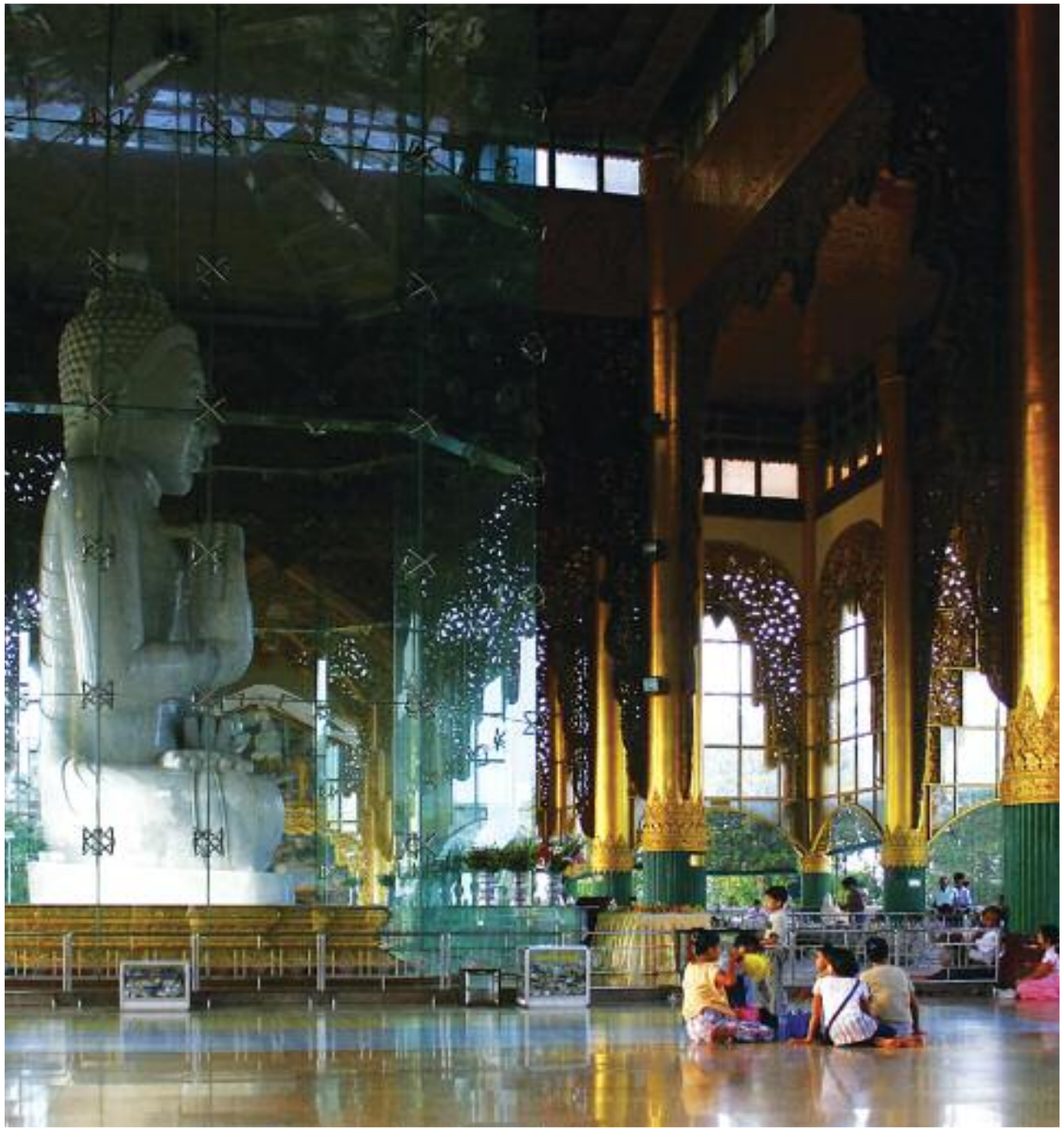
One major event was the reception of a tooth relic from the government of China in 1994. The tooth was taken throughout the central part of Burma and displayed with two replicas, plus an 'emerald' Buddha tied to the mythology of a Pagan king (Schober 2000). The replicas were then established in large new temples, one in north Yangon and the other just south of Mandalay. These projects were government sponsored but also received private donations from the nation's elites, eager to share the merit and to enjoy government favour, their participation reported in the national media. There is also a government sponsored replica of Pagan's tallest temple, the Thatbyinnyu, finished in 2000.

The newly built government shrines, however, have generally failed to capture the devotion of everyday people. This is not to say that people shun them, but they compete poorly with time-honored shrines, such as the Shwedagon or the Sule pagodas. Such lack of enthusiasm partially reflects the unpopularity of the state patrons, although attendance at the Shwedagon in Yangon and the Mahamuni Temple in Mandalay has never flagged, despite receiving massive support from the military government.

In the 1990s a handful of new pagodas were built in the rapidly expanding eastern sections of Yangon. The unspecified relics were said to be recovered from a stupa that was destroyed by bombing in World War II in Myingyan, northeast of Pagan. The relics were conveyed to Yangon where they were displayed in a procession throughout the city in 1991, raising private donations that supplemented the government's support of the new pagodas. The procession and the creation of the new pagodas were heralded on national television; the government's intention was to integrate these newly developed areas of the city into a wider Buddhist network (Brac de la Perrière 1995). One can only imagine the creative myths that will evolve around these related pagodas over the decades and centuries.

Yangon's sacred landscape has never stood still and continues to change. Once a sleepy village on the river noted largely for the Shwedagon Pagoda, the city's character was altered irrevocably after its rise to commercial prominence in the 18th century. The Mon were the first to patronise the Shwedagon, followed by the Burmese in the 16th century when earlier Mon myths were embellished. The Sule and the Botataung pagodas were both integrally woven into the Shwedagon legend but only in the 19th and 20th centuries, respectively.

Yangon's Chinese and Indian populations increased greatly after British rule began in the 1850s and immigration was encouraged. A host of new sacred sites arose then that reflected Yangon's cosmopolitan population of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Parsi, and Jewish creeds. Independence in 1948 put a firm national Buddhist stamp on Yangon, with a burst of piety in the 1990s that shows no signs of diminishing.



The largest marble Buddha in the nation was created in 2000. It is set on Mindhamma Hill, known for its ties to wizards, ogres and hermits. Despite its size and cost, it has failed to generate much devotion among residents who favour time-honoured shrines like the Shwedagon.

SHWEDAGON

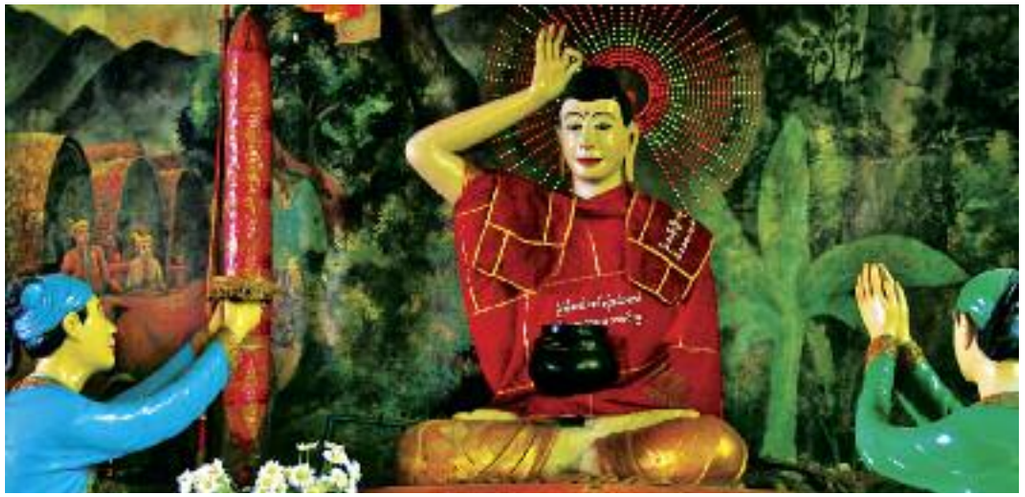
The Shwedagon is celebrated for eight hair-relics gifted by the Buddha to two brothers from Yangon. The brothers were the first Buddhist converts, the sacred hairs the first Buddhist relics and the Shwedagon the first Buddhist reliquary monument, or stupa. Such 'firsts' invest the monument with special significance for Buddhists worldwide and ensure that the Shwedagon is the country's paramount religious site followed by the Mahamuni and the Golden Rock.

Burma's very identity today is linked to the Shwedagon, expressed on Independence Day in 1948 when the nation's first president, Sao Shwe Thaike, planted a Bodhi sapling on the pagoda's platform. Ongoing donations and refurbishments augment the Shwedagon's sanctity and traditions, the huge gilded monument serving as an open-ended book for each new generation to leave its own chapter.

The growth of the Shwedagon myth illustrates how a single trifling tale extracted from the ancient Pali canon came to mould the imagination and prayers of millions. Indeed, this rather insignificant episode from the life of the Buddha expanded into an epic narrative that has never ceased growing, like a seed carried to a distant land which took deep root.

Most Burmese are familiar only with the bare outlines of the myth and therefore have only hazy ideas about the nature and number of the relics and the details of their transmission from India. The intricacies of the Shwedagon myth found in many Mon and Burmese chronicles are of little interest to residents; their conviction that the Shwedagon's relics are of supreme sanctity is enough.

Thought to contain eight hair-relics of the Buddha, the Shwedagon Pagoda is the most venerated shrine in Burma. It assumed its present shape in the late 18th century, but its founding probably extended deep into the first millennium.



The Buddha plucking eight strands of hair for the two Mon brothers from ancient Yangon. In early Pali traditions the brothers are said to be from Ukkala, in India, but by the 15th century were associated with Yangon. Modern sculpture. Kyay Thon Hpayagyi, Yangon.

The Beginnings

The Shwedagon's history comes into sharp focus only in the 15th century with three inscriptions, in Mon, Burmese and Pali. No reliable records before then have yet surfaced, but an ancient stupa was probably located on this hilltop as early as the first millennium.

The Mon epigraph was translated by C. O. Blagden in 1934, supplemented in the same year by a learned treatment of the Mon, Pali and Burmese versions by Pe Maung Tin and translations of later Mon chronicles which are embellishments of the story told in the inscriptions. The few words remaining in the much effaced Pali text indicate that it repeated the same subjects covered in the Mon and Burmese versions (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 9).

The three slabs were established during the reign of the great Buddhist patron, King Dhammaceti (r. 1470-1492). The Shwedagon Inscription is undated but Dhammaceti was the last ruler named in a list of donors, and therefore the stones were almost certainly incised during his reign. Also, the paleography of the inscriptions conforms to dated epigraphs found in nearby Pegu from the last quarter of the 15th century.

Dhammaceti was a Mon king ruling over a vast realm which then encompassed most of Lower Burma. The Mon capital since the mid-14th century was Pegu, the site of numerous Buddhist monuments (Tun Aung Chain 2002). The chief pagoda in Pegu at the time was the Shwemawdaw which was then thought to contain a tooth-relic brought from Thaton (Stadtner 2007a). Bilingual epigraphs were reserved for only the most important monuments, all others accorded a single Mon inscription; the Shwedagon is the only monument from the 15th century with surviving trilingual inscriptions. The Mon dynasty ruling Lower Burma and Yangon was toppled by Burmese forces coming from Toungoo in 1538, less than fifty years after Dhammaceti's reign.

The Buddha Kakusandha presenting his staff to the converted ogre, Sule Nat. This relic, together with others belonging to other Buddhas, are believed to be enshrined in the Shwedagon. By Ba Htan, Kyaikmarow Pagoda compound, Kyaikmarow.

The Brothers Tapussa and Bhallika – Pali sources

The mythology of the Shwedagon centres on two merchant brothers, Tapussa and Bhallika, who obtained hair-relics from the Buddha in Bodh Gaya, India. The brothers returned to their native home, now modern Yangon, where they enshrined the relics in a stupa on the hill occupied by the Shwedagon. This core legend drew upon ancient Pali canonical sources and especially Pali commentaries composed around the middle of the first millennium. However, these early Pali sources associated the homeland of the brothers with Ukkala, one of the ancient names for the coastal state of Orissa, in eastern India. The pair came to be linked to Yangon only in these 15th century inscriptions at the Shwedagon. These early sources and their incorporation into the history of later Lower Burma has been nicely unraveled by a Pali scholar who also studied Mon with Blagden (Pe Maung Tin 1934).

In the earliest canonical account the merchant brothers presented the Buddha with 'rice cakes' and 'honey-food' at the end of a seven-week period that began with the enlightenment of the Buddha, recorded in a section of the *Mahavagga* of the *Vinaya Pitaka*. Their visit to Bodh Gaya occurred on the forty-ninth day after the enlightenment, while the Buddha sat beneath a Rajayatana tree, or *linlun* (*Buchanania lantifolia*). The pair, said to be from Ukkala, was considered the first of the Buddha's lay devotees, but they received no relics at Bodh Gaya in this earliest version.

Hair-relics were introduced into the basic story only many centuries later, in the age of the great commentaries composed in the middle of the first millennium. One revered commentator, the 5th-century scholiast Buddhaghosa, reported that Tapussa and Bhallika had been born in the time of the previous Buddha known as Padumuttara. During this birth, the brothers expressed the wish to be reborn as disciples of a Buddha.

The hometown of Padumuttara was Hamsavati, a legendary city located on the Ganges or along one of its tributaries in India. That Hamsavati was selected as the classical name for Pegu in the 14th or 15th century was perhaps a way of underscoring the link between Lower Burma and the two brothers, but such a connection was never openly stated anywhere.

The brothers were re-born in the town of Asitanjana during the period of the historical Buddha Gotama, eons after their birth at the time of Padumuttara Buddha. It was in this lifetime that they were able to achieve their desire to be disciples of a Buddha. Asitanjana was located in northern India, or Uttarapatha, in classical Pali sources, but in Burma Asitanjana was identified by the 15th century with the area now known as Yangon.

The brothers presented food-offerings to the Buddha at Bodh Gaya and then requested an object of worship, according to Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Anguttara Nikaya* of the *Sutta Pitaka*. The Buddha then 'passed his right hand over his head and gave the two men eight hairs as relics…[which were]…put into a golden casket…and deposited in a shrine of living hair relics at the gate of Asitanjana town' (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 4).

Another Pali commentator, named Dhammapala, from about the same time as Buddhaghosa, presented a slightly different version. The brothers were reborn not in Asitanjana but Pokkharavati, a legendary location perhaps in Orissa, but also identified with Yangon in the Burmese and Mon inscriptions and later chronicles. Dhammapala added that the brothers were leading a caravan of 500 oxen in India. Passing near the Buddha at Bodh Gaya, the brothers heard a voice from a female relation perched in the fork of a tree, 'Make the Buddha an offering of food and that will be to your advantage and happiness' (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 5). The Buddha then presented the two with an unspecified number of hair-relics. In this account, Tapussa, the elder brother, becomes a disciple of the Buddha, while Bhallika becomes a monk. This is more or less the version appearing in another early Pali text from about the same time, an introduction to the *jataka* commentary (*Nidanakatha*: 107).

These various versions, from the Pali canon, and more especially from the commentaries of Buddhaghosa and Dhammapala, formed the building blocks for elaborate legends developed later in Burma, starting in the 15th century with the Shwedagon inscriptions.

The story of Tapussa and Bhallika was known in Upper Burma and indeed throughout the Theravada world, from Pali manuscripts, long before the 15th century, but it was only in Lower Burma in the 15th century that the brothers became associated with Burma in any way and with the Shwedagon Pagoda. When exactly the myth recorded in the inscriptions coalesced around the Shwedagon is unknown, but it may have started as early as the mid-14th century when the Mon kings from Pegu likely began their patronage of the monument. But we cannot be sure.

King Okkalapa, standing in the Yangon River, receiving the hair-relics intended for the Shwedagon. The connection between the Botataung and the Shwedagon arose only in the mid-1950s. In earlier accounts, the hairs are taken first to Twante. By U Ba Kyi, c. mid-1950s. Botataung Pagoda.

plan showing their location on platform

In Sri Lanka the same original Pali stories led to myths which claimed that Tapussa and Bhallika enshrined on the island at least one of the hairs that they received at Bodh Gaya; in these accounts there is of course no mention of Burma and the tradition never became that important (Strong 2004: 80).

Following the 15th century and the Mon loss of Yangon to Burmese forces, the myth vastly expanded, with numerous accretions over the centuries. In fact, the last major addition to the Shwedagon narrative was as recent as the 1950s when the Botataung Pagoda in Yangon was drawn directly into the story's orbit.

The Shwedagon Inscriptions

The Mon and Burmese inscriptions at the Shwedagon follow the basic narrative found in the Pali commentaries of Buddhaghosa and Dhammapala but alter a few key elements and add new episodes. One of the chief differences is that Asitanjana and Pokkharavati, both considered the hometown of the brothers in India, were identified with Yangon in Lower Burma, or the 'Country of Ramanna' or 'Ramannadesa', as the Burmese inscription stated (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 27). Such transposing of locations from classical Pali sources to indigenous place names was commonplace throughout Theravada Southeast Asia, serving to anchor local sites to a wider world charged with meaning.

The basic narrative is the same in both Mon and Burmese epigraphs, but many differences indicate that one text was not simply a translation of the other. For example, certain episodes appeared in different sections of both inscriptions. Also, the Burmese text was far richer in some details which were drastically abbreviated in the Mon version. Such discrepancies suggest that the two incised texts may have derived from two slightly different original sources in the 15th century or that there may have been a Burmese version current at that time that was slightly different from the Mon.

Both epigraphs begin by describing the seven-week period that the Buddha spent at Bodh Gaya. The first week, marked by the enlightenment, was followed by weeks in which various miracles occurred, such as the appearance of a jewelled walkway created by the gods in the third week. In the seventh week the Buddha sat beneath the Rajayatana tree at Bodh Gaya and received the Mon brothers on the last day.

Tapussa and Bhallika are described as leaders of a trading caravan of 500 oxen carts. Passing near Bodh Gaya, the wheels of their carts were checked by a mysterious force. From the fork of a tree, their mother from a previous birth suddenly spoke to them and urged them to give the Buddha his first meal in order to achieve 'perpetual happiness and welfare'. This summary is taken from the Burmese version, but the incident was sharply telescoped in the Mon text to the brothers having 'heard the words which the spirit spoke'; even the identity of the spirit (their mother) is unstated in that version (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 28).

The brothers then offered food to the Buddha. They told Him that they were from Asitanjana town in Ramanna Country and asked for an object to worship upon their return. The Buddha 'stroked his head with his right hand and got eight hairs', according to the Burmese inscription. The two placed the eight hairs in a golden casket and returned to Ramanna after departing on their ships from Ukkala (Orissa). The Buddha gave no instructions about enshrining the relics nor was a prophecy delivered.

Thesee three 15th century incised slabs record the founding of the Shwedagon by Tapussa and Bhallika. Detail, above, is from the Burmese stone, reverse face. Shwedagon platform, northeast corner.

The Trilingual Inscriptions

These three incised stone slabs were discovered in 1880 on the hill's eastern slope, just a metre or two north of the present stairway and about 15 metres below the platform; the three slabs were found upright within ancient brick flooring (Forchhammer 1884). The trio was shifted later to the pagoda platform where they are now protected by a pavilion in the northeastern corner. The stones were arranged to match their original positions on the slope, beginning with the Pali record on the north and followed by the Mon and Burmese slabs, respectively. Each slab was accorded a separate language, incised on both sides, with the obverse of each stone facing north. The staircase on the eastern face may have been located originally a few metres further north of its present position, since this would have made the front side of the first inscription plainly visible as one ascended the hill in the 15th century.

The snake-king Jayasena stealing two hair-relics aboard the ship carrying the two brothers home to Yangon. The relics are now thought to be enshrined in a stupa at Cape Negrais, in the western part of the delta. By U Ba Kyi, c. mid-1950s. Botataung Pagoda compound.

Jayasena, The Theiving Snake-king

The brothers kept two of the eight hair-relics in their own possession, for private devotion, clearly described in the Burmese text but unstated in the Mon version. These relics were then stolen by a snake-king named Jayasena. It is not clear exactly when this incident took place on the return voyage from Ukkala, but Jayasena resided in an underground kingdom known as Bhumindhara. The snake-king swallowed the relics, but they were recovered by a fearless young monk sent to retrieve them on behalf of a legendary Sri Lankan king. The king then incorporated the sacred strands into his own shrine, thereby permanently depriving the brothers of two of them.

This tale of Jayasena in the 15th century inscriptions was lifted directly from a Sri Lankan Pali text, the *Nalatadhatuvamsa* ('Story of the Forehead Bone'), probably composed in the 10th or 11th centuries and known in Burma even as late as the 19th century (Hinuber: 95; *Glass Palace Chronicle*: 94). The kernel of the story first appeared in the Sri Lankan *Mahavamsa*, but with no reference to the two brothers (*Mahavamsa*: XXXI. 67). The blending of this medieval Sri Lankan tale with much earlier Pali texts testifies to the huge range of diverse sources from throughout the Pali world that learned monks in Burma drew upon.

The Ceti on Tamagutta Hill

The brothers returned to Asitanjana, also called Pokkharavati in the Mon and Burmese inscriptions. They then enshrined the six hair-relics in a stupa on Mt. Tamagutta, said to be to the 'east of Asitanjana town' (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 29). The term in the Mon inscription for stupa is '*ceti*', from *cetiya* (Pali).

The Burmese inscription clearly stated that a total of six hairs were enshrined, reflecting the loss of two relics stolen by the snake-king. The Mon inscription, however, nowhere mentioned the number of hairs enshrined in the Shwedagon, but it is evident that the snake-king stole an undetermined number. In both inscriptions there is also no reference to meeting a king in Yangon, intimating an idyllic epoch in which even the institution of kingship was unnecessary.

The 'Lost' Shwedagon

The Mon and Burmese inscriptions agree that the stupa containing the relics on Tamagutta Hill eventually fell into neglect and became lost, due to Buddhism's decline after the death of the Buddha. The full story is preserved in the Mon version but is mostly missing in effaced portions of the Burmese text. The story then skips ahead to 256 years after the death of the Buddha. In this year two 'great elders', or *mahatheras* (Pali), named Sona and Uttara, came from India to the city of Suvannabhumi (identified with Thaton), to re-establish the religion. This segment is borrowed from the *Mahavamsa* which described missionaries from India sent at the time of the Third Buddhist Synod convened by King Asoka.

The Thaton king, called Sirimasoka, requested from Sona and Uttara relics for worship, which prompted the two to discover the 'lost' stupa, established by Tapussa and Bhallika in Yangon. The king then 'had the jungle, bushes and creepers cleared, and caused it [the '*ceti*'] to be repaired' (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 20). Sona and Uttara located and restored other relic pagodas in Lower Burma, all with the assistance of Sirimasoka, an episode recorded with nearly identical phrasing in many other inscriptions belonging to the reign of Dhammaceti. This key episode is treated at length in the Mon version but only hinted at in the Burmese text; the last three lines of the inscription are illegible but it would not match the length of the episode in the Mon version, even if complete.

The Mon inscription concluded with a lengthy description of the many repairs and improvements undertaken by Mon kings, starting in the 14th century when Pegu was the Mon capital. Not unexpectedly, the Burmese epigraph contains none of this information extolling Mon patronage.

Mon and Burmese Versions?

The Burmese text in the hands of the engravers at the Shwedagon in the late 15th century was not a verbatim translation of the Mon face, in view of the many aforementioned differences. The sequencing of key events in the inscriptions not only varied but some episodes were treated differently. This perhaps suggests that there existed an independent Burmese version of the Shwedagon myth in the 15th century or that the Burmese text may have been translated and copied from a Mon text that differed slightly from the one on the Mon face. However, the existence of a coeval Burmese version of the Shwedagon myth is as tantalising as it is speculative.

The Shwedagon is linked thematically to the complex of monuments in Pegu which commemorated the seven-week period that the Buddha spent at Bodh Gaya. The episode of the hair-relics, featured on the last day of the seven weeks, was the culmination of the events at Bodh Gaya. In this sense, the shrines in Pegu served as an introduction, or overture, to a narrative whose finale occurs at the Shwedagon in Yangon. Such a symbolic connection between the sacred complex in Pegu and the Shwedagon in nearby Asitanjana was probably not lost on worshippers (Stadtner 1991). The Mon of Ramanna firmly rooted their realm in the life of the Buddha, with the Buddha's hair-relics in Yangon and a tooth-relic within the Shwemawdaw in Pegu.

King Okkalapa, left, having miraculously restored the four hair-relics taken by Jayasena and an avaricious king. All eight hair-relics were then conveyed to the Shwedagon. The brothers Tapussa and Bhallika, right, gleaming with astonishment and relief. By U Ba Kyi, c. mid-1950s. Botataung Pagoda.

A spot on the platform considered auspicious for devotions, known as the Ground of Victory. Formal prayer groups, clad in special brown attire, are seen closer to the stupa.

The Myth Expands: 16th–17th centuries

With the advent of Burmese control over Lower Burma in the 16th century, the myth of the two brothers and the hair-relics was greatly embellished. Whether these changes can be attributed to Burmese or Mon is difficult to say, since both communities lived side by side. Also, the Mon and Burmese chronicles are in general agreement and rarely can be dated with precision, making it even more difficult to know if accretions can be attributed to Mon or Burmese influence.

The first major changes, however, are found in an entry dated to 1588 which refers to a ruler in Yangon, King Okkakapa, who welcomed the brothers to Yangon after their trading mission to India, said to have lasted nine months (*Jambudipa Ok Saung*: 158). No king was ruling in Burma when the brothers enshrined the relics, according to the 15th century inscriptions.

King Okkalapa, the two brothers and the god Thagyamin then searched for hidden relics on Singuttara Hill and discovered a buried chamber containing the relics left there by the three Buddhas who had visited Yangon many eons before. These legendary Buddhas (Kakusandha, Konagamana and Kassapa) preceeded the historical Buddha Gotama in mythic time. The relics left behind in Yangon included a water pot and a staff, according to the *Jambudipa Ok Saung*. The relics of the three previous Buddhas were later grafted onto the Shwedagon legend and probably stemmed from the *Mahavamsa* which described a major stupa built by King Dutthagamani that also enshrined relics of the same previous three Buddhas (*Mahavamsa*: XV. 84-172). This added episode concerning the three earlier Buddhas had dramatic consequences in the subsequent elaboration of the tale.

An undated text known as the *Mon Yazawin* provides a somewhat different account. It may be of the same age as the *Jambudipa Ok Saung* or slightly earlier (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). In this Mon chronicle, known only in a Burmese translation, the Buddha first came to Thaton in Lower Burma and then stopped on Singuttara Hill in Yangon. He was accompanied by an entourage of special 'enlightened ones' or *arahants*. This tale is unique since it places the Buddha himself in Yangon. The Buddha remarked on Singuttara Hill, 'I gave the two brothers, Tapussa and Bhallika, eight of my hairs. The snake-king Gavanna hid two of the hairs…and built a pagoda in the land of the *nagas* [snakes]. The elder monk [*mahathera*] named Culapati told the two brothers to build a pagoda to enshrine the hairs to worship and the two brothers built a pagoda on Singuttara Hill enshrining the six hairs which they had received.' (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication).

This version largely follows the story of the Shwedagon inscriptions, with a total of six hairs being finally enshrined in the Shwedagon and two hairs having been stolen by the snake-king. One major difference is that there is no mention of the hairs being recovered from the snake-king by a Sri Lankan king, as recorded in the inscriptions. Another major difference is the introduction of the monk Culapati, who never reappears in later narratives. Also, there is no mention of a local king, such as Okkalapa, or previous relics buried on Singuttara Hill. This myth represents perhaps the earliest Mon accretions following the Shwedagon inscriptions or quite possibly another early parallel version. Constructing a precise time

Monks in one of the open pavilions facing the stupa. Some are reading from Burmese and Pali prayer books, while others recite prayers, keeping count with strings of beads.

Boat arriving with hair-relics to Twante, identified as the spot where King Okkalapa met the two brothers. The region of Twante, 30 km west of Yangon, was called Dhannavati in early sources. The landing spot was changed in the 1950s to the Botataung Pagoda bordering the Yangon River in the downtown area.
By Maung Saw Maung, c. 1960s, Hpaya Nga-su Pagoda, Yangon.

line for the growth of the myth is nearly impossible, since there probably co-existed many slightly different versions even as the 'official' royal inscriptions were being incised in the late 15th century.

18th–19th centuries

Numerous additions to the basic Shwedagon myth follow after the 17th century. These appear in various Mon and Burmese chronicles which are normally undated and which generally differ only in details. There are no less than four Mon chronicles focusing on the Shwedagon, although only one is dated, to 1766, the *Slapat Rajawan Datow Smin Ron* (Pe Maung Tin 1934).

An important Burmese source is an official national 'history', the *Hmannan Maha-yazawin-daw-gyi*, a portion of which is commonly known as the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, compiled about 1829 but which drew heavily upon 18th century sources. By and large, this chronicle forms the 'standard' narrative today. The only major difference between the *Glass Place Chronicle* and the later Mon and Burmese texts is that the former makes no reference to ogres helping to find the lost relics (Pearn; Pe Maung Tin 1934)

The two traders, according to the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, returned by sea to Asitanjana with their eight hair relics in a ruby casket. On their return journey, the brothers met a legendary king named Ajjhatta who insisted on taking two of the eight hair-relics. The location of Ajjhatta's kingdom is unclear, but the episode occurred after the mission boarded its vessels in India. The ships then reached Cape Negrais, in the western part of the Irrawaddy delta, and here two hairs were stolen by the snake-king Jayasena. The brothers finally reached the modern Yangon area and were received by the king of Ukkalapa. These two episodes in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (King Ajjhatta and Jayasena) are also in all of the Mon and Burmese chronicles.

After the brothers confessed to the king that they had lost four of the eight hairs en route, the king passed clockwise around the reliquary and the four missing hairs were miraculously restored. The

king and the brothers then came to Singuttara Hill, said to be to the east of Asitanjana. On the hill, with the help of Thagyamin, they located the buried relics belonging to the three previous Buddhas. In this version, Kakusandha left behind a water filter, Konagamana a robe and Kassapa a staff (Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing 1996: 1). However, in different accounts, the number and type of relics vary.

The hill known as Mt. Tamagutta in the 15th century inscriptions was later called Mt. Singuttara. However, there were no less than seven popular names for the same hill at one time, although Singuttara was the most common (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 41). Today Burmese refer to the hill as Theinguttara.

King Ajjhatta is a new element to the story which cannot yet be traced to other sources. He appears in most of the Mon and Burmese chronicles under similar names. This king at first threatened to take all eight hair-relics, in one Mon account, but the brothers reminded him that the Buddha prophesied that all of eight relics were to be enshrined on Mt. Singuttara. The king then relented and took only two. So ecstatic was his queen that she severed her gorgeous topknot with her husband's sword and offered it to the two relics (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 43).

King Ajjhatta's hairs are now honoured with a pagoda bordering the coast near Sittwe, Rakhine. In the modern versions, he is often cast as a tax collector or a customs officer, reflecting the reality of modern life and its redtape.

The theft of two hair-relics by Jayasena, the snake-king, is easily traced to the Sri Lankan *Nalatadhatuwamsa* chronicle first used in the

Devotees making offerings at their planetary post, left. Carpet and stand indicate a special ceremony by an individual or group.

15th century Shwedagon inscriptions. The epigraphs follow the Sri Lankan version, with a legendary Sri Lankan king recovering the two relics from the snake-king for his own private worship. However, in later Burmese and Mon accounts no reference is made to the king retrieving the hairs. Indeed, in all later Mon and Burmese accounts, Jayasena retained his relics. In some versions, the snake lived at the bottom of the ocean and stole on board the moored ship as the brothers returned to Lower Burma. Jayasena offered great valuables to the relics, like Ajjhatta, and thus was able to promise his queen that she would not be reborn in the 'loathsome form of a Naga [snake]' and would 'never more…cause misery to others' (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 43). The Jayasena-caper always comes after the loss of the two hairs to the avaricious Ajjhatta.

At some stage, probably by the 18th century, Jayasena's home became associated with Cape Negrais, a coastal point in the western part of the delta. There is today an important shrine at Cape Negrais commemorating these two hair-relics, with a huge annual pilgrimage. Called the Mawtin Zun Pagoda, it is also believed that King Alaungsithu sailed to the point on his legendary barge and englarged the pagoda.

Ogres to the Rescue

One important episode not found in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* but current in Lower Burma at least as early as the 18th century involved a group of five reformed ogres whose assistance was critical in helping to locate the lost relics on Singuttara Hill. This local lore coalesced by the late 19th century around a single former ogre associated with the Sule Pagoda, who is now the chief spirit, or *nat*, at the Sule Pagoda, and plays a key role in the modern legend.

In the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, the god Thagyamin, King Okkalapa and the brothers easily located the relics left behind on Singuttara Hill by the three previous Buddhas. In local legends, however, the relics lay lost somewhere on top of Singuttara Hill, since the three Buddhas had been to Yangon so many eons ago and no one could remember the locations of the interments. Even the great god Thagyamin was not present at the time. Thagyamin thus required the help of ogres who had been converted by the previous Buddhas. Each Buddha left an ogre a relic to worship, such as a staff or robe. In most accounts there are five ogres, one for each of the three previous Buddhas, one for Gotama and one for the Buddha of the Future, Mettayya. One source briefly describing these five ogres is a Mon chronicle compiled in 1766 (*Slapat Rajawan Dataw Smin Ron*).

Sule Nat pointing to Shwedagon Hill and the location of lost relics belonging to the previous Buddhas who visited Yangon. Modern mural, Sule Pagoda.

The only survivng major ogre on the platform, which for unknown reasons many now consider to be an ogress. Near northern entrance hall.

Some of the ogres were associated with trees, such as the Acacia or the Bael; others were only named, such as Dakkhina and Rohini. One ogre is associated with Hmawbi, a location near Yangon. All of these ogres were probably once tied to real spots and shrines in and around Yangon. In one later Burmese chronicle, one of the ogres is called Sule Nat but his residence was simply listed as 'Dagon', or Yangon (Pearn 6). The conversion of ogres to Buddhism is a common theme in Pali literature, but their inclusion in the Shwedagon story should probably be seen as an elevation and absorption of local deities or spirits, or *nats*, into the national Shwedagon myth.

This episode coalesced by the late 19th century around the single former ogre of the Sule Pagoda Hill, the Sule Nat, pushing the others into the shadows. The process probably started when the Sule Pagoda was made the hub of Yangon in the colonial plan for the city adopted in 1853; four *nats* were said to reside at the Sule, by 1868 (Lloyd: 98, 108). One Mon version did not include the ogres and claimed that the relics were discovered by Thagyamin at a spot on Singuttara Hill marked by a wood-oil tree (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 49).

The moment when Sona and Uttara discover the lost and ruined Shwedagon, 236 years after the demise of the Buddha, is today no longer part of the 'standard' legend, but was preserved in later Mon texts (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 57). The two monks who discovered the Shwedagon in these later versions were not Sona and Uttara but Moggaliputta and Uttara. The discovery of the lost pagoda is a minor theme in these later Mon works, almost an afterthought, compared to its central role in the 15th century inscriptions. Moggaliputta and Uttara were also responsible for the rebuilding of the lost Shwemawdaw, recorded in a 19th century Shwemadaw Pagoda chronicle (Browne).

The Shwedagon's real relics are unknown, but interments from the 17th century onward may have included small metal images featuring episodes from the Buddha's life. This example, circa 19th century, shows the Buddha cutting his hair after leaving the palace. Such metal figurines are widespread in Burma, having once been most likely placed in stupas. Let-kauk-zay Monastery, Mrauk-U

The Myth Grows: 20th century accretions

The last major addition to the Shwedagon myth is the Botataung Pagoda which is now considered the place where King Okkalapa welcomed the brothers back from their trip to India. However, this association with the Shwedagon only began after World War II when the pagoda had been completely destroyed by Allied bombs and rebuilt in the 1950s. Its restoration by the government started on the very day Independence was declared in 1948. It was not finished until 1953 and shortly thereafter the episode associating it with the Shwedagon was forged (Ohn Ghine).

The later Mon and Burmese sources differ about exactly where the brothers first met the king, but Okkalapa is often tied to the kingdom or city of Dhannavati or Dhannyavaddi, identified with Twante, about 30 kilometres west of Yangon (Lloyd: 66; Spearmen: 635). In some Mon sources Dhannavati is considered to be a town within Okkalapa province (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 46). Dhannavati was understood at least by the 18th century to be the capital that followed the destruction of Suvannabhumi, or Thaton (*Vamsadipani*: 168). No sources before 1948 identify the place where King Okkalapa met the two brothers with the Botataung or this particular spot on the river.

Another modern accretion to the Shwedagon story was the 'discovery' of a ruinous brick pagoda in north Yangon in the 1950s and its restoration. It became associated with King Okkalapa's mother and is known as the Mei Lamu Pagoda. Two figures sculpted on the lower terraces of the Shwedagon, in the northwest quadrant, are usually identifed as King Okkalapa and his mother.

The Shwedagon Relics

The Shwedagon almost certainly contains no corporal relics of the Buddha, such as his hair or bones, since the pagoda's origins are centuries removed from the time of the Buddha. Its real contents are likely to remain a mystery, since the inner core has been sealed for centuries and boring inside is unthinkable. A passage made into the east face by 19th century English troops disclosed only a solid brick core in 'seven casings', implying that the pagoda has experienced numerous enlargements and refurbishments (Biggs: 26). However, this exploration was scarcely scientific and the true number of encasements cannot be known.

Its earliest relic chamber perhaps resembled the one exposed at the Botataung Pagoda after its destruction in the last war. Its underground chamber contained a single hair-relic, small bone fragments, and nearly 700 objects, mostly terracotta votive tablets ranging widely in date, from the first and second millennia,

suggesting that the entire stupa was rebuilt a number of times.

It was believed in the 15th century that only six hair-relics were interred inside but later Mon and Burmese texts assert that the number was eight, combined with the relics associated with the three previous Buddhas. Chronicles from the 18th and 19th centuries record a great number of objects placed inside the original relic-chamber of the Shwedagon, such as golden statues of the two brothers, King Okkalapa, and the eighty disciples and so on, but these descriptions can be dismissed since they are so many centuries removed from the original interments (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 53). However, objects like these were interred in pagodas, beginning at least as early as the 17th century.

Early view from the 1820s reveals one of the four worship halls, centre, and many small chapels removed later in the century and then replaced. Aquatint based on a drawing made by Cpt. J. Kershaw at the time of the First Anglo-Burmese War. Views in the Burman Empire (1831). *Courtesy: Richard Cooler.*

Documents are strangely silent about the enshrinements of relics and precious objects after the original founding of the Shwedagon. This is surprising since the histories of some stupas detail successive interments over the centuries, usually as a result of major renovations and enlargements undertaken by various kings. Such new deposits did not diminish the primacy of the original relics but rather enhanced them. The Shwemawdaw Pagoda in Pegu, for example, experienced numerous deposits over the centuries, at least in myth (Browne).

Despite the constant rebuilding and enlarging that the Shwedagon experienced over the last 500 years, no records speak of new interments. However, it would not be surprising to find many small relic-chambers throughout the fabric of the pagoda, added over the centuries. The focus for royal patrons, it seems, was on expanding the very size and height of the stupa and restoring its *hti*, rather than on new interments.

Relics placed inside stupas need not be corporal remains of the Buddha, such as bones or hair, or even objects used by the Buddha, such as his alms bowl, but anything deemed of special value. For example, during the last major refurbishment in 1999, thousands of 'relics', in the form of jewels and precious objects, were placed in association with the *hti*, either attached to the wide vane or placed inside the orb like finial, or *seinbu*. These were of course never given the importance accorded the enshrined relics but enhanced the sanctity of the pagoda. Indeed, such precious objects become part of the legendary history of the monument which, together with relics, enhances the pagoda's prestige, power and efficacy. There is a fine line between what are considered relics in the West and in Theravada societies.

One undated Mon text claimed that two Burmese kings unsuccessfully attempted to break into the Shwedagon relic-chamber. The first was the legendary King Duttabaung, from Shri Kshetra.

The Shwedagon Bells

Donations of bells to a pagoda is a longstanding tradition in Burma, beginning as early as the Pagan period. The oldest bell surviving at the Shwedagon is popularly known as 'Singu's Bell' or the '*Mahaghanta*' (Pali), meaning Great Bell, now suspended in an open hall in the northwest quadrant of the platform. It was ordered by King Hsinbyushin (r. 1763-76) during his visit from Upper Burma to dedicate a new *hti* in 1774. He never lived to hear his bell toll, leaving its completion to his son, King Singu (r. 1776-1781), on 17 January 1778. The bell was ordered to be 15,555 *viss*, or about 27 tons, less than a third the weight of the Mingun bell near Mandalay which weighs in at just over 90 tons.

Singu's Bell, right, fell in the river as it was being loaded for its voyage to India as war booty. It was raised by Burmese and reinstalled on the platform in January 1826. This aquatint was made before the bell's removal. Aquatint, based on the drawing of T. Hunt. Eighteen Views Taken at or near Rangoon (1825). *Courtesy: Richard Cooler.*

The twelve-line inscription opens with conventional praises of the Buddha in Pali. The remaining text in Burmese describes King Singu's repairs of old shrines in Ava, his gilding of pagodas and dedication of 84,000 sets of scriptures, or *tipitakas*. It also mentions his building four and five storied monasteries, with three tiers of spires. There is also a list of his territories, which included parts of northern Thailand ('Hariponyinsa', or Haripunjaya). The enshrined eight hairs are mentioned on Mt. Tampakuhta (old Tamagutta) in the city of Thikinsana ['Asitanjana' (?), or Yangon] in the Kingdom of Paukhayawaddi (Pokkharavati, Pali). The names of the four large Buddhas at the four faces of the pagoda are mentioned too but are not associated with specific directions. There is also mention of four stupas, probably those placed directly behind and above the halls, as we see today. The king expressed his desire to have a revelation of 'Aremadeya', or Metteyya (Pali), the Buddha of the Future, and for the 'voice of homage' to be heard at the Shwedagon for a period of 5,000 years. Above the inscription is a band of interlocking floral designs, each incised with numbers and characters making up a rune, or magic combination (Khin Maung Nyunt 1988b).

This bell was destined for an artillery cantonment near Fort St. George in Madras as a trophy at the conclusion of the First Anglo-Burmese War (*Illustrated London News*, 4 December 1825: 494). It was loaded on a raft to be transferred to the *Sulimany* in the Rangoon River in April 1825, when 'Thousands of Burmahs [sic] were looking on, deploring the loss of so revered a relic…when it heeled over and sank' (Trant: 34). Failing to raise the bell after a week, the British accepted a petition from a monk just before the war's conclusion, in January 1826. Two cables

Incised on Tharrawaddy's bell are pillars with suspended banners containing Burmese prayers.Alternating with pillars are tall umbrellas (left) with Burmese characters that strung together create formulaic Pali prayers.

Glass mosaic, detail, part of the ceiling sheltering Tharrawaddy's Bell. Pavilion donated by a local banker named U Thun in 1885.

fastened to the bell were tied to a 'brig moored over it…when the tide rose so did the bell, and it was hauled on shore by thousands of enraptured natives' (Alexander: 46). The bell was showered with flowers, accompanied by music and dancing before being removed to its former position at the Shwedagon. The oldest pictorial record of the bell is from the 1820s and shows it standing alone on the platform. The present pavilion from 1920 replaced one built in 1861 by a rice broker. Large paintings inside by Ohn Myint Win done in 1987, show the king ordering the bell, the dedication by his son, and the bell falling in the river.

'Tharrawaddy's Bell', in the northeastern quadrant of the platform, was cast on 19 February 1843, from a mould prepared in 1841. It was begun by King Tharrawaddy on his pilgrimage to Yangon in October 1841. According to the bell's inscription, fifty craftsmen were assigned the task, under the supervision of the Minister of Bronze Casting and Arsenal. The king departed from Yangon in February 1842, with orders to finish the bell and his new fortified town. He was scheduled to return in August but the trip was postponed due to a cholera epidemic in Yangon. The bell was completed the next year, in 1843, but Tharrawaddy never returned to Yangon to hear his bell ring. His ministers dedicated the hall to house the bell, but this was replaced long ago.

Tharrawaddy's Bell is much larger than that of Singu, measuring a little over 42 tons, and is the second largest bell in Burma, after the colossus at Mingun. Its hundred-line text makes it the longest bell inscription in Burma. The bell is named in the inscription, 'Great Bell of the Three Sounds', or '*Mahatisad-daghanta*' (Pali). The inscription recounts the life of the Buddha, beginning with his previous life as the ascetic Sumedha right up to the Buddha's granting his eight hair-relics to Tapussa and Bhallika. The king recorded his gilding of the Shwedagon, his founding of a new town, and hoped that he would obtain Buddhahood in a future rebirth. Above the inscription are incised pillars and umbrellas. The former are crowned with special geese, or *hamsas*, holding long banners ornamented with Pali prayers, while the latter consist of tiny squares incised with characters that when strung together spell out a Pali prayer. A similar device is found at the tops of stone inscriptions, one from King Hsinbyushin's famous record at the Shwezigon pagoda, Pagan (Tun Nyein 1899: 13). Many bells donated over the centuries are now missing. The most famous was dedicated by King Dhammaceti and is said to have weighed 289 tons. Other kings dedicated bells, notably Bayinnaung, Anaukpetlun and Bodawpaya, but none have survived. No less than thirty smaller bells are now spread about the platform, with about half donated by the laity and others by members of the *sangha*.

Inscription records the king's wish to see the Buddha of the Future, Metteyya. Auspicious runes set amidst floral designs above, Singu's Bell.

King Tharrawaddy's Bell is the second largest bell in Burma, after Mingun. Begun in 1841, it was not cast until 1843. Its inscription records the king's founding of Okkalapa, his new city whose earthen perimeter encompassed the Shwedagon. Meditating beneath the bell is considered efficacious.

The second was a Pagan ruler whose fifty workers were thwarted by a fierce storm. Both kings, still wishing to pay homage, established costly umbrellas on the platform (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 57). Such stories of later kings, foiled in their efforts to seize the relics, conform to a pattern found at other major shrines, such as the Mahamuni in Rakhine.

The Age of the Shwedagon

The stupa's origins likely go back to the first millennium but there is no firm proof in the absence of excavations and epigraphs. The contents of the Botataung Pagoda's relic chamber and bronze Buddhas found in the Twante area confirm that Yangon participated in the lively Buddhist Mon culture of Lower Burma (Stadtner: 2008a). The large laterite faced pagoda near Twante, datable to the reign of Anawrahta or earlier, affords a glimpse of the monumental architecture that must have been present in the first millennium. A stupa on the present Singuttara Hill would therefore be not unexpected, especially since hills commonly were sites for monuments. There is no information regarding the pagoda's original relics or the myth surrounding it before the 15th century inscriptions.

Our first concrete historical evidence appears only in the 15th century incised trilingual record now on the platform. The Mon inscription describes refurbishments of the pagoda, beginning with Mon kings in the second half of the 14th century. These slabs are the oldest objects on view at the Shwedagon, followed in time by two large bells, one from the late 18th century and the other from the mid-19th century. The pagoda assumed its present size and shape in the late 18th century. The true age of the pagoda's founding can never be settled nor is this of importance to worshippers who accept that the two brothers enshrined the hair-relics during the lifetime of the Buddha. Indeed, if this fundamental belief were in doubt, then there would be scant reason to venerate the pagoda.

Vane hoisted on 29 April 1889, to replace Mindon's hti *damaged by a quake in October 1888. The brass vane is covered with silver and gold plates made from jewellery melted in furnaces on the platform. Some 'brooches and lockets of European make …' can be seen embedded in the vane (Biggs: 24). Note the gold comb. Shifted to the Shwedagon museum in 2009.*

Bricks and Mortar

The 15th century Mon inscription summarised the building history of the Shwedagon from when the two Mon brothers, Tapussa and Bhallika, erected a stupa over the hair relics without the aid of a king. The pagoda then fell into ruin for a period and was lost in the vegetation. To restore the pagoda two monks were dispatched to Lower Burma, at the time of the Third Synod, who rebuilt the pagoda with the help of the Mon king named Sirimasoka who ruled in Thaton.

The pagoda, or '*ceti*', became a 'great *ceti*' ('*mahaceti*') during this unspecified era after

Queen Shinsawbu, left, pointing to the Shwedagon. The smaller stupa is the Elder Brother Stupa, a repository for the sacred hairs before their enshrinement in the Shwedagon. By Ohn Myint, Win Group. Near Pagoda Trust Office.

the rebuilding by the Thaton king (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 15, 20). The chronology in the Mon inscription then skips more than a thousand years to the reign of the ruler Bannya-u (r. 1369-1384) who enlarged the pagoda to a height of 40 cubits, or 18.5 metres. Bannya-U was the first Mon king to rule in nearby Pegu, suggesting that the Shwedagon was made a principal monument only after Pegu became the capital. His son, Rajadhiraja, (r. 1385-1423) further enlarged and gilded the pagoda and erected its spire. Disaster struck in 1436 when much of the bell-shaped stupa collapsed, perhaps due to an earthquake. The reigning king in Pegu, Bannya Ramkuit (r. 1423-1446), dispatched his queen and son to build up the pagoda anew. Other Mon kings continued embellishing the pagoda, with

Thagyamin,left, and Bo Bo Gyi, worshipped for good luck and protection. Thagyamin is chief of the nats, *and is also an important Buddhist deity known as Sakka (Pali). Encased in glass since at least the early 1970s.*

A gold reliquary discovered in 1855 within a ruined stupa near the base of the Shwedagon hill. It was found with other objects and a Pali inscription that likely belonged to the Mon king Rajadhiraja (r. 1384-1420). An object of incalculable importance, it was until the 1950s in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Courtesy: Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

the work largely completed by the middle of the 15th century during the reigns of Bannya Barow (r. 1446-1450) and Bannya Kendau (r. 1450-1453), when the exterior was plastered and a new spire raised. Subsequent Mon kings followed with their own repairs and enlargements, all treated briefly in the Mon inscription (Pe Maung Tin: 1934).

The most celebrated patrons were Queen Shinsawbu (1453-1472) and her son-in-law, King Dhammaceti, although they did not contribute to the enlargement of the pagoda or even hoist a *hti*. The pair moved from Pegu and dwelt 'at the foot of the hair relics', according to the Mon inscription (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 21). They were mainly responsible for massive landscaping projects which included embankments and terraces, faced with laterite stone (Blagden 1934: 42). The terraces are difficult to appreciate today because of so much new building but are clearly visible in 19th century photographs. They also paved the platform with flagstones, probably concealed now by layers of recent floorings. They also encircled the pagoda with stone lamps, perhaps resembling those seen today at the Kaung-hmu-daw Pagoda near Sagaing, as well as planting coconut palms within the terraces. However little can be gleaned about the appearance of the platform from the inscriptions.

Subsequent Mon and Burmese lore have greatly exaggerated the offerings of Queen Shinsawbu and Dhammaceti. The most repeated is that Shinsawbu donated her weight in gold to gild the entire exterior of the pagoda. She was also later said to have expired next to the Shwedagon, eyes fixed on the monument, poignant imagery probably borrowed from a Sri Lankan chronicle (*Mahavamsa*: XXXII. 9). In the same later accounts, Dhammaceti's donations were described no less zealously. He put his son and queen on the scales and donated their weight in gold to gild the pagoda and also offered a massive bell.

Nothing remains from the 15th century at the Shwedagon, apart from the three stone inscriptions, the terraces and the coconut trees that are perhaps descendants of those planted by Dhammaceti and Queen Shinsawbu. Three gold reliquaries, a helmet, a Pali inscription on a gold band and other objects were found in 1855 when troops cleared pagodas surrounding the base of the Shwedagon hill. The inscription likely belongs to Rajadhiraja (r. 1384-1420) (Sykes; Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). Only two of the reliquaries survived and were once both preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; one was deaccessioned in the 1950s, its whereabouts now unknown (Singer 1992). The gold band never entered the museum's collection and its location is also unknown.

Later Patronage

The Mon lost Lower Burma to Burmese forces around the middle of the 16th century, but Burmese kings continued to enthusiastically patronise the Shwedagon, first from their capital in Pegu and later from Ava in Upper Burma. Earthquakes were a perennial problem, forcing repeated rebuilding and refurbishment. Indeed, no less than seven tremors were recorded in the 17th century alone. The Sagaing-Namyin fault line lies only about 50 kilometres east of Yangon, running north and south.

King Tabinshwehti (r. 1538-1550) added a new *hti* and King Bayinnaung (r. 1551-1581) offered a bell which has not survived. Other great patrons included King Anaukpetlun (r. 1605-1628) who donated a bell, now lost, and a *hti* in 1619 which was replaced a year later because of a quake. The capital shifted from Pegu to Ava in 1635 but patronage never flagged. The Shwedagon's history was even the subject of a royal enquiry in 1642 (ROB: I. 125).

Enlargements continued over the centuries, but its present size and shape dates to a campaign sponsored by King Hsinbyushin (r. 1763- 1776). His rebuilding was occasioned by an earthquake in June 1768. This ruler also gifted his weight, 77 kilos, in gold for coating the exterior. He is chiefly remembered for donating in 1775 a jewel studded *hti*, rivaling his similar donation made some years before at the Shwezigon Pagoda in Pagan. The old *hti* was taken upriver where it was enshrined inside an older pagoda just north of Prome (Taw Sein Ko 1893b). The same king commissioned a bell but it was not finished until 1779, during the reign of his son named Singu (r. 1776-1781).

The pagoda's height today is 99 metres, which includes the new metal spire, or *hti*. Only the Shwemawdaw Pagoda in nearby Pegu exceeds this, soaring to 114 metres.

The Colonial Era

Old descriptions, antique photographs and paintings create a fairly full picture of the dramatic changes to the Shwedagon platform, entrances and the surrounding terraces. The driving force behind these changes was religious merit, and there was never a shortage.

The Shwedagon lay some distance from Yangon which in the late 18th century was a small stockade bordering the river. Two roads led from the stockade to the pagoda, one terminating at the south entrance and the other on the eastern side. Yangon was captured in the First Anglo-Burmese War (1823-1826) but returned to Burmese rule at the end of the conflict. The Shwedagon's commanding position over the countryside

Southern entrance, c. 1905. The turbaned Indian beneath the arch and the Burmese on the steps evoke the mixed nature of colonial society. Glass Painting. Private collection, Yangon.

A Tigress on the Platform

A tigress was spotted at the Shwedagon in 1903, climbing upon one of the upper terraces just beneath the drum of the stupa, on the south or east side. The monks ran down the hill to request soldiers in the cantonment who had to 'climb to the roof of one of the smaller buildings' to effect a good shot. 'The very pongyis [monks] who had begged the soldiers to kill the tiger denounced them as wicked slayers of the temple's nat or good spirit, and not only hung the skin over the spot where it was shot, but ultimately placed on the pagoda platform a plaster image of the tiger to be worshipped by the faithful' (del Mar: 28; Curtis: 275). The plaster sculpture of the tigress has not survived but was photographed at least once (Baker). It was also said that a spirit, or *nat*, rode upon the tiger to inspect the stupa's gilding. He dismounted and ascended the stupa and returned to find the tiger shot. 'Some say that he was unable to resume his journey, and is still there', according to the former Lt. Governor of Burma at the time (White: 15). Painting on glass faithfully recorded the incident at the time, even with the soldier poised atop one of the structures. One eyewitness account survived, by Col. Lawford (Win Pe: 48). Glass Painting, detail. c. 1905. Private collection, Yangon.

around Yangon made it important for the Burmese defence of Yangon and for the British in their occupation of Yangon in both Anglo-Burmese wars.

Perhaps the earliest depictions of the Shwedagon were drawings made during and after the British occupation of Yangon. These were issued as aquatints in two rare published albums (Cooler). The four pavilions abutting the stupa were in place then, together with numerous smaller stupas encircling the base, as today. The double-bodied man-lions, or *manuthiha*, were arranged at the four corners of the stupa base, interposed with fanciful lions, or *chinthe*. These were made of brick, covered with stucco and inset with coloured glass. They have been refreshed and painted countless times.

Fanciful-lions, or chinthe*, guard the small chapels encircling the base of the Shwedagon. Brick, covered with painted plaster.*

Small closely spaced 'chapels', with stupa-like spires, also encircled the pagoda, but these were all removed later in the century, as old photographs testify. Similar chapels were built again in the early 20th century, making the old *chinthe* and *manuthiha* sculptures in the background seem awkwardly positioned. Such chapels probably came back into vogue in the late 1880s, as are also seen at the Sule Pagoda and the Shwesandaw in Prome (Oertel: pl. 7). Another major addition by the 19th century were large vases supporting metal 'tree-offerings' located just beneath the row of stupas encircling the pagoda, on a separate terrace. The 'tree-offerings' and chapels were donated by wealthy families, as they are today.

Yangon was returned to Burmese rule in 1826 and patronage of the Shwedagon resumed, although the capital always remained in Upper Burma. King Tharrawaddy (r. 1837-1846) came to Yangon in 1841 and shifted the town inland with the new city's ramparts encompassing the Shwedagon at its northernmost point, its hilltop

position functioning like a citadel (Biggs). The Burmese placed heavy cannon on the pagoda platform and lighter guns on the lower terraces. Their fire was directed south, in the direction of the river, but the British took the pagoda by storming the steps on the eastern slope on 14 April 1852.

King Tharrawaddy regilded the pagoda and ordered a huge bell cast, now in the northeastern quadrant. He 'discovered' a Bodhi tree that was said to have come from Sri Lanka in hoary antiquity and there, in the northeastern part of the platform, erected an ordination hall, or *thein* which perished long ago. He also created a covered corridor to the southern approach; some of the original teak posts are on view in front of the Buddha Museum and a few are outside the National Museum

Teak columns once used in the covered southern stairway during the time of King Tharrawaddy in the 1840s. Opposite the Buddha Museum, base of hill, west side.

'A Most Mischievous Effect on the Public Mind'

26 November 1871 saw one of the most dramatic moments in the Shwedagon's history with the hoisting of a new *hti*. Although donated by King Mindon (r. 1853-1858), he was forbidden to attend the celebration, since it was feared that his presence would spark a nationalist revolt in Lower Burma. Mindon had requested the colonial authorities to establish a new *hti* when the upper section of the pagoda was gilded in 1869. The British were anxious that the reception of the *hti* from Mandalay could foster 'a most mischievous effect on the public mind' (Cooke: 39). It was therefore decided that the actual work of hoisting the *hti* was to be solely in the hands of the Burmese subjects of Lower Burma; the king's representatives were told to stand on the sidelines as passive observers.

Large man-lions, or manuthiha*, at the corners, left, shared space with fanciful lions, or* chinthe*. Planetary shrines encircled the pagoda only in the second half of the 19th century, together with metal 'tree-offerings'. Aquatint based on a drawing by T. Hunt, 1825. A turbaned Indian holdsan umbrella for the artist.* Eighteen Views Taken at or near Rangoon (1825). Courtesy: Richard Cooler

King Mindon's hti *was hoisted over a five-day period in November 1871 by a complex pulley system, likely the subject of this photograph (left).*

Mindon's hti*, weighing 1¼ ton, was replaced in 1999 and is now displayed in a special shrine, above right. Former* htis *are often placed on pagoda platforms, as objects of devotion.*

The newly fabricated *hti* was sent down river in October 1871, together with ornaments removed from the old one and sent upriver in March for refurbishment. The spire was designed with seven rings, all of wrought-iron and weighing a total of 1.4 tons. It was 4.15 metres in diameter and 14.32 metres tall when assembled. From the dock in Yangon each tier was taken in procession to the Shwedagon, with an estimated 50,000 Burmese helping and looking on. The old *hti*, established by King Hsinbyushin in 1774, was taken down and the new one raised by means of a pulley system, manned 'by thousands of people only too anxious to share in the merit of having a hand in so holy a work' (Cooke: 45). The seven sections were raised over a five-day period ending on 26 November. Some of the old bells and gold of the former *hti* were re-employed and many jewels embedded in the vane were gifted by women from the Mandalay Palace. Local people of all ranks in Yangon donated objects of value, including one 'country visitor' who 'pressed forward with an anklet of silver just taken from her child's feet' (Cooke: 48). The vane for this *hti* was taken down in 1888 and its replacement, in 1889, is now in the pagoda museum, studded with jewellery. No anti-British feeling was in evidence and 'the town was never more quiet as regards crime.' Moreover, the festivities created 'no doubt a much higher opinion of our power and our friendly relations with the King than they had before' (Cooke: 40).

The hoisting of *htis* carried certain risks for the colonial government, since individuals, entering ecstatic trances, uttered omens and predictions that could have political overtones. Such foretold events often created 'blind infatuation', and therefore the raising of *htis* was forbidden in some situtations (Cooke: 41). The hoisting of Mindon's *hti* was not without calamity. As one of the massive rings was nearing the tip of the pagoda two of the pulley ropes snapped, prompting a Christian missionary to observe that 'the whole structure was about to fall in token of God's displeasure with idolatrous worship' (Bixby: 115). Fortunately, the eight hairs of the Buddha proved far stronger than two broken ropes, but the next day two Shan fell to their instant death while repairing the pulley. Other incidents, real and imaginary, were added to the lore. One woman vowed to circumambulate the pagoda seven times and expired on the last round. 'Two children were born there and their mothers were considered most fortunate beings' (Bixby: 115).

A replica of Hsinbyushin's *hti* was soon made in cement and rests on the platform's eastern side, next to another of Mindon's *hti*, painted white. Mindon's *hti* toppled in October 1888 but was re-hoisted the next year with a new vane. A tremor in 1930 caused damage to the vane and orb, which were replaced the next year. Mindon's *hti* came down by orders of the military government and was replaced with a stainless steel one in April 1999. His wrought-iron *hti* is preserved inside a circular pavilion, next to the cement models, on the eastern face of the platform. Its central metal shaft is preserved in the pagoda museum.

plan

'Jumbled pell-mell'

There was never a master plan governing the Shwedagon platform, and this explains why everything appeared 'jumbled pell-mell' to W. Somerset Maugham. Indeed, no two structures look alike and new refurbishments are made regularly. None of the dozens of pavilions are earlier than the 1860s, and none have escaped modern retouching. Among the oldest are the Hair Washing Pavilion (1879) and the Chinese Chang Mah Phee Pavilion (1898).

Royal patronage at the Shwedagon was closely monitored by English authorities after the annexation of Yangon in the 1850s, but a new diverse elite in Lower Burma jumped in to fill the vacuum. These donors ranged from Mon timber merchants, members of the Legislative Assembly, Shan *sawbwas*, rice brokers, and Fujian Chinese. Donors were also able to gift gold or silver plates that were fixed to the surface of the stupa. More modest donations were copper plates that were accorded a spot on the bottom levels. Many from the 19th century incised with their donors names and specific dates can be seen in the Shwedagon museum (Moore 2008). In 1906 four gold plates were gifted by the Prince of Wales and Queen Mary. There are today 1065 golden bells suspended from the *hti* together with over 7000 diamonds, rubies and sapphires attached to the vane and contained within the small orb-shaped object at the top. New building is governed today by the Shwedagon Board of Trustees, an organisation from the 19th century whose offices are just below the platform on the south side.

Early 20th century monasteries are found at the eastern foot of Shwedagon hill.

Sixty-four small stupas encircle the base, each with miniature htis *donated by individuals. In front, at a lower level, are 'trees' made of metal and also capped with* htis*. Individual square gold plaques can be detected on the stupa's drum..*

The western stairway and portions of the northern half of the platform were militarized and off-limits to locals after the 1850s. It was not until 2 March 1930 that the Shwedagon garrison shifted to Mingaladon and authority for the entire monument passed fully into Burmese hands. A year later a fire on the western staircase sprinted to the platform and spread north and then east before finally running its course down the east stairway, picking off shops one by one. No less than 23 structures were consumed by the end of the day (Aung Than: 3).

The current fashion of decrying the 'debasement' of Burmese art in the face of European influence began over a hundred years ago. One observer noted that '…pure Burmese design … had begun to give place to more elaborate work degraded by contact with Italian and English influences.' This trend soon led to 'cast iron imitations of Burmese carving … abominations from a Glasgow foundry… nothing short of desecration' (Nisbet: II. 290).

The most common structures on the platform are open pavilions based on two different traditional architectural types distinguished by their roofs. One is marked by multiple tiers of diminishing dimensions in the shape of a pyramid, or *pyatthat tazaungs*. The other, known as *yun tazaung*, has rectangular gabled roofs reducing in size, stacked one upon the other, with no pointed central spire.

The last major refurbishment of the Shwedagon was begun in 1989 under the direction of the Committee for Continued Restoration and Renovation of the Shwedagon Pagoda. The southern and eastern stairways were entirely rebuilt with designs supplied by two artists, U Aye Myint and Tampawaddy U Win Maung, and executed by Mandalay craftsmen. The small square chapels surrounding the base of the stupa were also made uniform at this time. The knee-high wall encircling the pagoda made to hold candle offerings was faced with a complete set of *jataka* tiles produced in the Kyaukmyaung kilns, north of Mandalay. Other tiles depict the Eight Great Victories and the animals associated with the Buddha in his past births, such as a rabbit and an elephant.

Entrance and Devotional Halls

Four large pavilions abutting the pagoda are 'devotional halls', or *aryongan tazaungs*, containing the pagoda's major Buddha figures. These four represent Gotama (north), and his three immediate predecessors, Konagamanna (south), Kakusandha (east), and Kassapa (west). Only the eastern entrance is aligned strictly according to a cardinal direction (Moore 1999: 106). The halls are considered equally sacred today, but the eastern and southern ones are slightly more popular. Shrines sacred to these four Buddhas are not mentioned in the 15th century inscriptions but they may have existed by then. Early references to the halls appear in Singu's bell inscription from 1779 and they also appear in the early drawings taken at the Shwedagon from the 1820s (Cooler).

The southern hall was renovated in 1841 by the governor of Yangon and then again in the 1890s by a landowner named U Ba Yi and his family. Iron tracery once around the entrance was attributed to a local artist named Saya Pa.

The western hall went up in 1900 with carved *Ramayana* scenes by Saya Khin from Amarpaura, but the hall took the full brunt of the fire in 1931. Three marble inscriptions in Burmese, English, Chinese and Hindi are all that survive. The northern hall was donated by Sir Po Tha, a Member of the Legislative Council and a pagoda trustee who began his career as a rice broker. He also repaired the Kuthodaw in Mandalay in 1913. The subjects of the small wooden figures set into the spandrels ranged widely, such as the temptation of the Buddha by Mara's daughters, the defeat of an ogre, and a *jataka* in which court brahmins become intoxicated with the charms of a woman (*Ummadanti Jataka*, 527).

The eastern hall was constructed by one of King Tharrawaddy's queens in 1841 but was refurbished in 1869; she also created the covered western stairway. The hall originally had many *jataka* tales and a depiction of the demon Mara with a dead dog draped around his neck, a symbol of his utter disgrace effected by the monk Upagok (Biggs: 37-40). There was even a depiction representing a snake below a modern steamer, evoking the episode where the snake-king snatched two relics from the brothers. The hall was rebuilt in 1939 by an important land owner, after the 1931 fire. Its prominent peacock at the apex of the central arch signified the calls for Burmese independence. The image inside represents the Buddha Kakusandha. His right hand is not depicted in the usual earth-touching gesture but holds its palm upwards.

Each stairway terminated in an open pavilion facing the pagoda. The southern pavilion was last reconstructed in 1936 but extensively refurbished in 1995. Inside are panels depicting the Eight Great Victories by the artist U Shwe Taung. The western pavilion was rebuilt after the fire of 1931 with subscriptions of two *pice* from shopkeepers in the Sooratee Bazaar, named after Surat, a port in western India (the currency of the day was the rupee, divided into 64 *pice*). The eastern pavilion is entirely new, having been completed in the mid-1990s.

At the top of the northern stairway is one of two original paired ogres, made of brick and covered with plaster and now painted green. This ogre has grown in popularity during the last five years, together with a pair of ogres at the Kyaik-kasan Pagoda in Yangon. His companion ogre is no longer extant. Many people now believe that the image represents an ogress, for unexplained reasons. There were probably at least two other sets of ogres, at different entrances. Some of these, each with its own personal name, may be referred to in a Mon chronicle and all were created by Thagyamin (*Slapat*

The hamsa *bird, left, perched on a pillar, facing the pagoda. Many older examples have come and gone over the centuries.*

All 547 jatakas appear on tiles built into a low parapet surrounding the Shwedagon, moving clockwise. These two feature scenes from the Mahosodha Jataka, one of the last ten.

Shrine marking the spot where the hair-relics were washed before interment, thought to be above an underground reservoir created by the deity Thagyamin. Built in 1879, it has been refurbished many times and is now protected by a pavilion. Wooden structure, left, is the northern worship hall, destroyed by a fire in 1931. Old postcard.

A fanciful replica of the Maha Bodhi Temple in India evokes the Buddha's enlightenment and gift to the Mon brothers of the eight hair relics.

Rajawan Datow Smin Ron: 85). Smaller seated ogres are also located at the base of the southern stairway.

Pavilions

The most significant modern change to the compound's appearance occurred in the first decade of the 20th century when dozens of small brick chapels were placed on the platform immediately surrounding the base of the pagoda. Their placement explains the awkward appearance of the large half-lion-half-man images, or *manuthihas*, placed on the corners, and the *chinthe*, or fanciful lions, set between them. Similar chapels surrounded the base in the 1820s but at some point were removed for unknown reasons. Raised circular stone platforms, kneeling elephants and male figures holding large stone bowls were at one time planted at intervals around the base, all intended for offerings. Few survive today but similar examples can be seen at the Shwezigon stupa, Pagan. Food offerings are often placed in these receptacles, intended for the crows. Feeding birds and stray dogs at pagodas was considered meritorious but ridiculed by one king as mere superstition (Cox: 242).

Dominating the northern half of the compound is the large Elder Brother Pagoda, restored by a timber mogul from Moulmein in 1876. King Ukkalapa kept the hair relics inside this stupa before the main one was finished. Another legend asserted that the brother Tapussa returned to India and obtained a ninth hair and enshrined it here. Tapussa was elder to Bhallika, thus explaining its nickname.

Nearby, facing the main stupa, is the Hall of the Hairwashing where the eight hairs were cleansed before enshrinment. The original brick shrine dates from 1879, said to be built over a well.

Also close by the Elder Brother's Pagoda is Tharrawaddy's bell, suspended in a hall built by a banker named U Thun in 1885. The ornamentation has been refreshed many times but much is original. The 15th century inscriptions are housed in a pavilion in the far northeast corner where once were located the burials of four English soldiers who fell in the storming of the pagoda in 1852.

There is also the Ajagona Hall, relating to an alchemist monk from Pagan who failed to transform a lump of metal into a magic stone. In despair, he put out his own eyes. He then threw the lump of metal into a latrine but the metal, now mixed with excrement, was transformed into the magic stone that he had sought. Redeemed but with no eyes, the monk dispatched his servant to the market to obtain the eyes of either a goat or bull. The boy returned with one of a goat (*aja*) and one of a bull (*gona*); his vision restored, each eye looked different from the other. The eyes of the principal Buddha in this hall appear to be the same, and there is no ready explanation for the hall's associations with Ajagona.

Also in the northern half of the compound is a fanciful replica of the Mahabodhi Temple in India. This was created by a famous author, a woman named Dagon Khin Khin Lay who started writing short stories in 1917 when she was only thirteen. A replica of the Golden Rock was placed nearby but was removed in the 1950s or 1960s (Aung Than: fig. 7). Nearby is the Hall of Wizards which houses life-size figures dear to the occult component in Burmese Buddhism. On the right, at the start of the line, are the Setkya Prince, Thuraberi, and Bo Tha Aye. On the other side are Bo Bo Aung, the monk Indasapha, Brahma and the Golden Rock hermit. Opposite is a pavilion established by a pagoda trustee in the 1920s where a stone footprint is the focus. The wooden narrative sculpture is by the hand of U Po Thet (Fraser-Lu: 269).

Near Singu's bell is a pavilion from 1923 with fifteen panels by U Ba Thin telling the most famous stories from the *Mahavamsa*. In the southern half of the platform on the west side is Daw Pwint's Pavilion containing a reclining Buddha. Sculpture in the spandrels details the tale of the famous Taungbyon Brothers, whose advances were thwarted by a maiden sitting at a loom. This work is attributed to Maung Po Thit, active in Rangoon at the beginning of the 20th

A small chapel marking Tuesday appears between a 'planetary post' and a 'street light' in a turn of the century photograph. Shortly thereafter numerous small shrines packed tightly together completely encircled the base, obscuring the chinthe*, as their rebuilt replicas do today. Courtesy: British Library, London.*

Volunteers sweep the compound several times daily as an act of merit.

century (Fraser-Lu: 268). Inside the pavilion are painted panels depicting the story of the Golden Rock, probably from the 1930s but refreshed many times. In another part is a somber memorial for students who perished during the anti-colonial protest of 1920, a movement hatched in the shadow of a Bodhi tree on the platform. The text is in Burmese, English, French and Russian.

'Only a few green twigs, plucked on the way'

Worshippers come and go constantly to the Shwedagon, each with different aspirations which also change with each new visit. Devotion can be expressed in countless ways and it is hardly an exageration to say that each person has a very distinctive style of worship. Some visitors, for example, engage in deep meditation lasting hours, while others simply light a candle or two and depart. Devotion varies widely even within the same family. Many will make offering at their planetary posts, while others eschew this as rank superstition and will only make offerings in worship halls. Many place concrete wishes before the pagoda, while others request general well-being that includes protection from malevolent forces. Many return to the same spots on the platform at each visit, while for others the location is unimportant. Some prefer the large open public places, such as the worship halls, while others seek privacy in the infinite number of nooks and crannies. Many simply come to make an offering and recite the standard prayer; others are there to quietly chant or recite silently, counting through the use of beads; and others are there to meditate, both lay people and monks alike.

Prayers and Planetary-posts

Devotees at the Shwedagon generally begin their visit by reciting a standard prayer, known as the '*okasa*' (Pali), loosely meaning 'asking for permission'. It is composed in Burmese but sprinkled with Pali terms. Its authorship is anonymous but is probably of fairly recent age and is popular only in Burma; it is attributed to 'an unknown nationalist at an unknown date' and is a conflation of many Pali

Days of the week are associated with certain animals, the planets, directions and a certain duration. The rat, represents Thursday, Jupiter, the west and nineteen years. The animals appear on planetary posts encircling stupas, allowing worshippers to know where to make offerings based on their day of birth.

sources (Pe Maung Tin 1964: 31). The worshipper ends with a phrase about sharing the merit, often with one's family but this can be extended broadly. Most worshippers end the prayer with wishes relevant to their personal lives, such as passing an exam, the recovery of a loved-one or the desire for a better rebirth and nirvana, or *nibbana* (Pali), in a future life. This prayer is usually recited only once on each visit to the pagoda, either in a key location, such as before a principal Buddha image, or at one's planetary post. It can be said aloud, usually in a whisper, or intoned silently, while standing or seated. This prayer is recited at all Burmese pagodas.

Lighting candles is a major form of homage, usually at one's planetary post. This low parapet wall was created in the last major refurbishment of the Shwedagon, in 1999.

'Okasa Okasa Okasa.
Oh Venerable One [the Buddha]. May I pay obeisance to you. So as to be free from all my offences, accumulated from evil deeds, either physical, verbal or mental. I pay homage to the Three Gems: the Buddha, the dhamma *[teachings] and the* sangha *[the Buddhist community], once, twice, thrice with my joined-palms on my forehead very respectfully and humbly. Owing to my deeds of merit, may I always be free from the four hells (*apayas*), the three scourges (*kappa*) [famines, war, epidemics, etc.], the eight inopportune circumstances (*attakkhana*) [as an animal or without the faculties to understand* dhamma*], the five enemies (*verani*) [floods and fire, etc.] and the four deficiencies (*vipatti*) [bad rulers, lack of right effort, etc.], the five misfortunes (*byasanas*) [loss of wealth, relatives, and health, etc.] and in the final existence may I attain the path (*magga*), the fruit (*phala*) and nirvana (*nibbana*)'.*

Planetary posts, or small shrines or altars, encircle the base of the Shwedagon and are a critical focus for devotion. Each spot represents a specific day within a week divided into eight days (Wednesday is divided into two parts). One makes offerings at the planetary post connected to the day on which one was born. Each day is associated with a direction, a planet and an animal symbol. For example, Tuesday is tied to the southeast, Mars and a lion. The posts are often marked by a depiction of the correct animal. Such shrines are found at virtually all stupas and in the compounds of nearly all temples. Most Burmese begin their devotions at the planetary posts, although many regard them and un-Buddhist and opt to make offerings directly to a key Buddha image or choose only to meditate.

Small marble Buddhas placed before each planetary post are bathed by devotees, an important ritual activity.

Great numbers seek the advice of astrologers about the most efficacious way to perform their devotions. This is accompanied usually with specific instructions, such as how many candles to light, the colour of paper umbrella offerings

Worship at the Shwedagon varies tremendously, some pray in groups and others alone. A devotee tucked into a quiet corner of a modern pavilion. Shwedagon platform.

and the most auspicious locations for devotion. Nearly everyone brings an offering, often a bouquet of flowers purchased from shops at the base of the stairways, or 'only a few green twigs, plucked on the way', as a missionary remarked in the 1830s (Malcom: 77).

All elements of Burmese society mingle at the Shwedagon, from the richest and most well recognised to the poorest and most forgotten. Generations also mix, with parents, children and grandparents walking hand in hand. Monks also go to the Shwedagon, either alone or in small groups, sometimes accompanied by lay well-wishers, but they are not expected to conduct rituals. High ranking military officers also make appearances, comforted by the presence of bodyguards and television crews which transmit the day's piety onto evening news broadcasts. The foreign traveler also enters this open stage, a subject of curiosity despite righteous efforts to be innocuous and respectful.

There is also no formal starting or stopping point for devotions, both in time and space. Worship is usually performed individually, although devotees often come with friends. Some come as part of a formal devotional group and members are usually clad in special dark brown attire and sit together in prayer.

Worshippers generally proceed about the pagoda in a clockwise direction, but there are many who walk in the opposite direction. Circumambulation in a clockwise fashion is a time-honoured mode of devotion in Buddhism but is not codified as an essential part of worship today in Burma. Also, the number of times one circles the pagoda is also unimportant in Burma. In neighbouring Thailand three times are common, said to represent the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, or the Three Jewels. Full moon days or annual festivals are considered auspicious and attract greater numbers in all Theravada countries.

Paper umbrellas are common offerings at sacred sites. The colour and number of the umbrellas are often suggested to devotees by astrologers or palmists. Sule Pagoda compound.

The first 'official' rituals of the day are performed inside the four large pavilions set against the sides of the pagoda. The rites begin shortly after four in the morning with groups of men, dressed in white, and women, clad in dark brown, making offerings to the Buddhas. One member blows a conch, an auspicious symbol.

The Shwedagon through the Ages

The hair relics enshrined within the Shwedagon by the brothers Tapussa and Bhallika thrust Burma into the great drama of

Two novices in procession with families. Dressed like princes, they will later in the day adopt monk's attire, emulating the Buddha's departure from the palace for the simple life of the forest. Shwedagon platform.

the Buddha's life. The monument is thus a tangible reminder to the country that their personal and national history is tied directly to Gotama Buddha.

A minor episode selected from the vast Pali canon in the beginning, the myth grew on Burmese soil into a veritable epic. The core legend first arose among the Mon but the Shwedagon became immediately venerated by Burmese rulers who took Lower Burma in the 16th century. Other monuments were gradually added to the Shwedagon legend over the centuries, such as a pagoda at Cape Negrais commemorating the two relics stolen by the snake-king. The Sule Pagoda entered the Shwedagon orbit only after the mid-19th century. The last monument to join the myth was the Botataung whose legend was created in the heady days of Buddhist nationalism fostered by the U Nu government in the 1950s. New stories and related monuments will surely be added in the decades and centuries ahead and older ones will likely even be dropped. Some myths show remarkable endurance, while others vanish quickly, even without a trace.

It is also no coincidence that all of the great moments in the nation's tumultuous recent history have taken place in the shadow of the Shwedagon, such as the demand for freedom in the dark colonial era, ironically now repeated in the 21st century. The Shwedagon indeed symbolises modern Burma, a past enveloped in unrealised aspirations. It is a pity that Gotama Buddha is no longer here to utter a prophecy that could instruct and reassure us about the country's future.

Sule Pagoda

The Sule Pagoda marks the spot where a reformed ogre pointed out to King Okkalapa and the brothers Tapussa and Bhallika the location of old relics hidden at the future site of the Shwedagon Pagoda. The Sule's ties to the Shwedagon emerged only after the pagoda was designated the hub of the new city plan adopted in 1853. A life-size sculpture of Sule Nat, called the Sule Bo Bo Gyi, is one of the most popular devotional figures in Yangon today, enshrined on the platform. The history of the Sule illustrates how certain monuments are commemorated more for associations with legendary events than for relics or special Buddha images.

After the Sule Pagoda was made the hub of the city plan adopted in 1853 by the British, the pagoda soon became drawn into the Shwedagon myth.Yangon River in the distance.

Sympathetic Ogres

The standard tale known today begins when the Mon brothers, Tapussa and Bhallika, docked at the spot now marked by the Botataung Pagoda and were greeted there by King Okkalapa. The brothers had been instructed by the Buddha in India to enshrine the hair-relics with objects belonging to the three previous Buddhas that were previously buried somewhere on Singuttara Hill, the future site of the Shwedagon. Their exact location was unknown, however, since the three Buddhas had visited Burma so many eons in the past and on different occasions. Unable to find the earlier relics, the king and the brothers therefore 'wept and wrung their hands in despair', according to the *Shwedagon Chronicle*, a modern history (Pearn: 5). In one Mon version, the brothers nearly gave up after spending three years in search of the relics (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 48). To the rescue came the god Thagyamin, or Sakka (Pali), who enlisted the help of the gods. But even the gods were stumped, because none were present so long ago. In desperation, Thagyamin consulted the oldest local deity, named Sule Nat, who resided on Sule Hill, the spot now identified with the Sule Pagoda. Sule Nat then pointed to the location of the relics on Singuttara Hill, from his home on Sule Hill. The name Sule is said to come from the Burmese term '*su wei*', or 'assembly', signifying the gathering that took place on the hillock; but the derivation of the word Sule is subject to disagreement.

Sule Nat began life as an ogre whose daily diet was an elephant. One day, unable to catch a tasty pachyderm, he encountered the Buddha Kakusandha, the first Buddha to visit Yangon. Kakusandha persuaded Sule to adopt the five precepts which included a vow to abstain from taking life and so swore off elephants from his diet. The ogre was soon converted and became a deity, or *nat*. Kakusandha then left Sule Nat his water-strainer which was buried on Singuttara Hill. Two more Buddhas visited Yangon in the same long eon, and they also left relics with two more converted ogres who also buried them on Singuttara Hill.

With the king and the two brothers anxiously watching, Sule Nat pointed in the direction of Singuttara Hill to indicate the lost location of the previous relics. The hair-relics from India were then interred with the three newly uncovered relics on the hill, a fulfillment of the Buddha's prophecy at Bodh Gaya.

Primacy is given to Sule Nat in locating the relics in the modern Shwedagon stories, but earlier Mon and Burmese chronicles named five ogres who located the relics (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 51; *Slapat Rajawan Datow Smin Ron*: 83; Pearn: 6; Bigandet: 101). This number corresponded to a cluster of four Buddhas ending with Gotama, followed by the Buddha of the Future, Metteyya, who uttered to a fifth *nat* a prophecy about a collarbone relic that would be gifted in the future to the Shwedagon (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 52). In one Mon source, Metteyya promised a canine tooth and an Adam's apple of the Buddha. The *nat* who received the eight hairs

Sule's Bo Bo Gyi pointing in the direction of the Shwedagon Pagoda and thereby revealing the location of the lost relics. Sule Nat began life as an ogre but was converted by Kakusandha, the first Buddha to visit Yangon.

from the Buddha was said to live on Asuk Hill, in one Mon version, which may be another name for Athok, one of the early Mon names for the Sule Pagoda (*Slapat Rajawan Datow Smin Ron*: 83-84). But this identification is speculative. One account from the 1860s claimed that there were four ogres, rather than five, who assembled at the Sule Pagoda (Lloyd: 108). In these early Mon and Burmese versions, all of the reformed ogres acted together and pointed out the lost relics.

The Creation of the Ogres

The ogres are introduced into the Shwedagon narrative solely in order to help the brothers locate the relics of the three previous Buddhas and so fulfill the Buddha's prophecy. This episode is absent in the 15th century Shwedagon inscriptions, since there is no mention of relics from earlier Buddhas on Singuttara Hill.

Ogres are not mentioned in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* in connection with the Shwedagon, suggesting that this myth was outside the national mainstream in the early 19th century. However, Mon chronicles in Lower Burma, one dated as early as 1766, clearly indicate that the ogres were required to find the lost relics for the brothers (Pe Maung Tin 1934; *Slapat Rajawan Datow Smin Ron*: 84). Such early local lore about the ogres eventually crept into the modern Shwedagon narrative sometime in the second half of the 19th century.

The local chronicles record that the five ogres gave equal assistance to the brothers in the quest for the missing relics (Pe Maung Tin 1934; Pearn). Each ogre was connected to different locations in and around Yangon that cannot now be identified.

Gotama and the twenty-seven preceding Buddhas are displayed once a year at the Sule. The images are also taken in an annual procession into four Yangon townships. North Devotional Hall

The Buddha taming the elehant Nalagiri, dispatched by the evil Devadatta. This episode forms one of the Eight Great Victories, a theme important in modern Burma and drawn from Sri Lanka.The full set is displayed in the western devotional hall. As a formulaic set of eight events, it is unknown in early Burmese art, such as at Pagan.

Some were associated with special trees, such as the Acacia and Bael. These ogres coalesced around the Sule monument, sometime soon after the pagoda was made the hub of the new city plan in the 1850s (Lloyd: 108). It was probably not until the end of the 19th century that the legend elevated the role of a single ogre, the Sule Nat, at the expense of the others (Shwe Yoe: 181). Most Yangon residents are familiar only with Sule Nat's role, while the other ogres are unknown.

The inability of later generations to know the previous Buddhas is an important part of the Sule legend, with the ogres having witnessed these Buddhas by virtue of their longevity. This same theme is echoed when King Asoka called upon a snake-king who had served previous Buddhas to fashion a Buddha image for him (*Mahavamsa*: V. 87).

Another underlying motif is the miraculous discovery of lost relics or monuments. The discovery of the Shwedagon relics by the ogres is reminiscent of Sona and Uttara, the two monks from India, who discover the ruinous Shwedagon Pagoda, as revealed in the 15th century Shwedagon Inscriptions. This theme also resembles a story in which King Asoka relied on a miracle after he searched in vain for a stupa whose whereabouts were unknown. Finally, a special monk, or *arahant*, came forward who was 120 years old. He remarked that when he was a young monk of seven his preceptor showed him the famous shrine, a 'small stone stupa' surrounded by a 'dark bush' (Bigandet: 379). This story about Asoka, known in Burma, was almost certainly borrowed from Sri Lankan sources which date to least as early as the 13th century (Berkwitz: 141). Such general but integral themes in the Theravada world provided the background for the lost relics of the Shwedagon.

Sule Nat pointing to Shwedagon hill, revealing the location of the hidden relics to the god Thagyamin(above) and the two kneeling Mon brothers. By Ba Htan. Kyaikmarow Pagoda compound, Kyaikmarow.

The Sule before 1853

The Sule Pagoda may have origins in the first millennium, like the Botataung, but there is no firm proof. The history of the pagoda comes into sharper focus only in the 19th century when it was located just a stone's throw north of the former stockade that delineated

Sule Nat pointing (centre), the two Mon brothers kneeling (left), and King Okkalapa (right). Behind stands Thagyamin. Five ogres assisted in the search for the relics but Sule Nat is now thought to play this role. After del Mar (1906). Photo: Watts & Skeen, photo studio, Rangoon.

Yangon in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Its exact position is revealed in old Burmese maps (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 30; Grant: 50; Singer 1995: 46).

Before the 1850s the Sule was neither associated with the Shwedagon myth or even with ogres but was known for a single hair-relic from Sri Lanka, mentioned in a palm-leaf manuscript datable to the first quarter of the 19th century (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 33, 35). This document identifies the Sule with a monument called Kyaik Dei Thut (Mon), another name for the Sule Pagoda. This reference seems to be linked to a legendary king named Bawgathena who ruled in nearby Syriam, or Thanlyin, and who was fabled to have distributed bodily relics and hair-relics to numerous pagodas in Yangon, including the Sule and the Botataung. One of the older Mon names for the pagoda was Kyaik Athok, and it is said that Athok was a minister of Bawgathena deputed to build the pagoda. The importance of this single hair-relic is now largely subsumed by the Sule's connection with the Shwedagon and the growing popularity of the Sule Nat as an object of devotion (Sadan).

A revered monk from Upper Burma paid homage at the Sule in 1816 and delivered sermons inside four Preaching Halls, or '*dhammasalas*' (Pali) that were probably placed in the cardinal directions, as revealed in the manuscript. The stupa was gilded and a new spire put in place and rays miraculously emitted from the pagoda for days. The renovations in 1816 also included the casting of a large bell which disappeared later in the century (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 33, 183).

This watercolour by M. T. Hla (1874-1946) resembles photographs of the Sule taken by F. O. Oertel in the 1890s. Courtesy: Michael Backman Ltd., London.

Such references indicate that the pagoda was signaled out for special attention by the early 19th century when hundreds of Yangon's pagodas had grown ruinous from neglect. Sketches of the pagoda reveal that the Sule remained in fine condition during the First Anglo-Burmese War (1823-1826) and into the 1840s (Pearn: pl. 9; Grant: 38).

Following the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852-1853), a new town was laid out in 1853, with Sule in its centre. This central position catapulted the pagoda's prominence, its popularity ensured. Soon after 1853 it became associated with the ogres and connected to the Shwedagon legend.

A new wave of renovation probably started in 1856, noted with inscriptions on small bells attached to the *hti* (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 36). A photo from the 1870s shows no structures obscuring the hillock, only simple stairways leading to the stupa; by the early 1890s, however, the base was concealed by worship halls and the entire pagoda was surrounded by a low fence of ornamental metalwork (Spearman: II. 847; Oertel: pls. 6-7).

The Sule Nat

A major focus of worship is a life-size figure of Sule Nat, now in a cramped room facing the open platform. Its raised outstretched right arm points north, in the direction of the Shwedagon on Singuttara Hill, evoking the dramatic moment when he directed the assembly to the missing relics. The Sule Nat is called Sule Bo Bo Gyi by locals. Bo Bo Gyi, or 'Grandfather' is a separate class of *nat* worshipped widely at major shrines (Sadan). The Sule Nat's distinctive pointing gesture can probably be traced back to images of the standing Buddha who pointed to the future location of special cities, such as Shri Kshetra and Pagan. This special pose has inspired a number of Bo Bo Gyis, such as at the Botataung and the Kyauk Kauk in Syriam, but in these examples the pointing-gesture has no connection to the legends of the pagodas.

A photograph from circa 1905 indicates that a large sculpture of Sule Nat was in worship at the pagoda by that time. The same image may have been attended by a female medium in about 1915. The deity grew in popularity following a popular series in an old Yangon newspaper, the *Thuriya Daily*, which published imaginary conversations among the different *nats* residing at the Sule, Botataung and Hmawbi pagodas (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000). There has been a significant rise in the worship of the Sule Bo Bo Gyi, beginning in the 1990s (Brac de la Perrière: 2009)

The Pagoda Platform

Four large worship halls, or *tazaungs*, surround the stupa at the cardinal directions and are dedicated to the Buddhas of our present era: Gotama (north), Kakusandha (east), Konagamana (south) and Kassapa (west). This order is the same for the four Shwedagon Buddhas but differs from the sequence at the Ananda Temple, Pagan. The halls belong to the 20th century, and the main images are modern replacements. The north one was built in 1928 but refurbished in 1995. The eastern hall was renovated in 1929 and is the oldest, containing a marble image of Kakusandha. In the southern hall is a marble Konagamana. The western hall was built in 1941 and has a metal image of Kassapa.

Attractions on the platform include a room dedicated to 'The Hall of the Holy Men' containing famous wizards, or *wiekzas*, such as Bo Bo Aung, Bo Min Kaung, Yetkan Sintaung Sayadaw, and female deities, such as Thuraberi and Guan Yin, kept in separate chambers. In the devotional hall on the west face are panels depicting the Eight Great Miracles.

The Sule was once part of Fytche Square which after Independence was named Mahabandoola Garden. Opposite the Sule is the High Court (1911). On another side is the Yangon City Hall. Nearby is the old Immanuel Baptist Church. On one corner is the government's former head tourist office, an ossified relic from Ne Win's Burma's Road to Socialism (1962-1988).

The goddess Thuraberi rides upon a goose and usually holds books or manuscripts representing the tipitaka. *Associated with knowledge, she is Sarasvati in the Hindu pantheon, consort of Brahma.*

Botataung Pagoda

The Botataung pagoda commemorates the spot where King Okkalapa welcomed the brothers Tapussa and Bhallika upon their return from India bearing the hair-relics intended for the Shwedagon. This association with the Shwedagon began recently, only after the pagoda's rebuilding in the 1950s, but the age of the stupa goes back to the first millennium.

The Botataung borders the Yangon River, a short distance east of the historic Strand Hotel, just before the start of old Monkey Point Road. Shops lining the narrow street in front of the shrine sell baskets brimming with bananas, coconuts, and flowers for offering at the pagoda.

Gold Pegs at 8:45 A.M.

The Botataung's modern history began with a direct hit by R.A.F. bombers on 8 November 1943. Its rebuilding after the war belonged to a wave of Buddhist nationalism unleashed after Independence was declared on 4 January 1948. That ground-breaking commenced on the very day Burma celebrated its freedom reflected the active role that the new state would play in the advocacy of Buddhism. The Botataung was singled out for special attention by the U Nu government because its rebuilding symbolised the fresh physical and spiritual renewal that the nation had embarked upon. Its mythic link with the Shwedagon, drew the Botataung and the Sule into an ever-widening national religious drama associated with the introduction of Buddhism into Burma. The lost myths of the Botataung also illustrate how legends can come and go both quickly and effortlessly, given certain conditions.

Construction began after five gold pegs were driven into the ground simultaneously, one in each corner and one in the centre, precisely at 8:45 A.M., a time selected by astrologers to coincide with Independence Day. The work consumed six years, but the pagoda was the scene of many state sponsored religious functions during that time. For example, the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana, given to U Nu by Jawaharlal Nehru, were displayed here in 1950 before being placed inside the Kaba Aye Pagoda. The next year saw the enshrinement at the Botataung of 'sacred earth' from Bodh Gaya that U Nu himself had conveyed from India. The metal spire, or *hti*, was hoisted in late December 1953, with the President and U

Long thought to mark the spot where King Okkalapa's son was cremated, this legend was replaced when the pagoda was rebuilt after Independence. The pagoda is now considered the spot where King Okkapala greeted the hair relics for the Shwedagon.

Hundreds of terracotta tiles were found in an underground chamber when the debris from the destroyed pagoda was cleared for its rebuilding. Some date from the 14th century or later, such as this plaque, while others belong to the first millennium, suggesting repeated interments.

Nu raising separate tiers. The pagoda still plays an important symbolic role in national religious life, witnessed by the display of a tooth-relic on loan from China in 1994.

The Botataung's construction permitted worshippers to view the relics by entering inside the stupa, a hollow-core design similar to the one at the Kaba Aye Pagoda finished somewhat earlier. The chief relic is a single hair of the Buddha displayed on an altar in a chamber in the centre of the circular interior. Devotees toss bank notes in the direction of the relic through a narrow slot set into the glass door of the sanctum. An empty narrow shaft beside the altar denotes the spot below where the relic-chamber was discovered after the war.

The Relic-Chamber

The debris cleared after the war revealed a pit about 1 metre below the surface of the ground. It measured roughly 6 metres square and about 2 metres in depth. Precious stones, jewellery, ornaments, terracotta plaques and small images made of gold, silver, stone, and brass were among the approximately 700 recovered objects. No full excavation report was compiled and therefore it is difficult to know if all of the objects belonged to the relic chamber below the surface or if some objects were once placed in various chambers throughout the solid core and then jumbled together following the stupa's destruction in 1943. Some are now displayed in glass showcases inside the pagoda, but where exactly the ancient material was found or even if some items were brought from outside locations is uncertain. The majority of items on view belong to the 19th and 20th centuries and were gifted to the pagoda after its rebuilding.

Inside the subterranean chamber was found a sandstone reliquary contained within a cone-shaped laterite object a little less than 1 metre in height. The propriety of opening this reliquary was debated by no less than fifteen religious elders, or *mahatheras* (Pali), who unanimously decided to uncap the casket before the Pagoda Rehabilitation Committee and the public. A rare photograph reveals the stone reliquary *in situ* before it was removed from the relic-chamber (Ohn Ghine 1953: 10).

A votive tile from probably the Pagan period, circa 11th-13th century, found inside the destroyed Botataung Pagoda. 43003

The two-part reliquary was in the shape of a stupa, with a circular base and a stupa-shaped top, comprised of a drum and multiple rings. Inside was a small, stone corpulent male figure, seated, and dressed in monk's robes, known as the 'fat monk' in some modern studies. His identity remains unclear in Burma, but later inThailand he is known as Sangkachai, a disciple of the Buddha and an important deity among the later Mon (Lagirarde). This image probably belongs to the 14th century or later, since traces of lacquer were found on the 'fat monk', and this material was probably not in use until after the Pagan period (11th -13th centuries). Also, no images of the 'fat monk' can be safely attributed to the Pagan period.

The second object inside the reliquary was a tapering stupa with a seated Buddha on either side, each with hands in the meditation gesture, or *dhyana-mudra* (Sanskrit). The object measures 11 cm in height and is made from a thin gold sheet whose raised designs were created by striking the reverse, a technique called repoussé. The tiny stupa rested on an octagonal base, made from a sheet of silver, probably datable to the 14th century or later. Inside this repoussé stupa was a small gold cylinder with two tiny bones the 'size of a mustard seed' and a 'Sacred Hair of the Buddha' that was 'coiled round and fastened with a little lacquer on which were traces of gold plaster' (Ohn Ghine 1953: 11). The two bone fragments and the hair relic that emerged from the reliquary were quickly fitted into a local myth (see below).

Top section of stone reliquary (right) and a repoussé stupa (left) once containing a hair-relic and two bone fragments.

Numerous terracotta votive tablets belonging to many different ages were found inside the relic chamber (Luce 1985: I. 162-63). A great many are on view in the display cases, without labels. The most recent include many large, rectangular plaques featuring the Buddha touching the earth, or *bhumisparsha-mudra* (Sanskrit), with the earth-goddess below wringing her long hair, signifying the 'flood' that defeats Mara. Depictions of the earth-goddess in connection with this episode are unknown before the Pagan period, suggesting that these plaques are no earlier than the 14th or 15th centuries. However, much earlier tablets seem to have been found inside the same relic-chamber, many with affinities to Pyu and Mon examples of the first millennium. One plaque was inscribed with the formulaic Pali prayer ('*ye dhamma …*') on the reverse in characters said to belong to the 7th century (Luce 1985: I. 162). Other tiles suggest a Pagan-period date. This single cache of tiles therefore runs from perhaps the 5th or 6th centuries up until possibly the 15th century or even later (Stadtner 2008a).

The 'fat monk' or Gavampati was also inside the stone stupa.

Such a wide range of dates implies successive re-buildings of the entire pagoda, since the chamber was below ground level. A somewhat similar monument came to light with the excavation of a stupa near Bassein, in the western delta. The outer monument is dated by a Mon inscription to 1524, but inside the stupa was an earlier one, also with evidence of successive internments (Maung Mya 1930-34: pt. I. 205, pl. CXVII).

Guarded by 1,000 Soldiers

The pagoda today is wedded to the Shwedagon legend, but this connection came about only after the stupa was rebuilt post war. The new legend identified the pagoda with the spot where the two brothers, Tapussa and Bhallika, were welcomed back from India by the legendary King Okkalapa, the first ruler of Yangon. The king assigned 1,000 soldiers to watch over the relics, hence the name of the pagoda, from *bo*, or 'army officer', and *tataung*, or '1,000'. The hairs remained here for six months, while the Shwedagon Pagoda was under construction, according to the latest pamphlet available

at the pagoda. The king gave back to Tapussa one of the hair-relics which he then enshrined on the very spot now occupied by the Botataung Pagoda. Since the single hair-relic was enshrined some months before those in the Shwedagon, the entrance sign boasts 'The Buddha's First Sacred Hair Relic Pagoda'. Oil paintings within the entrance corridor show the relics arriving from India with the brothers and the preparation of the relic-chamber, works all by U Ba Kyi (1912-2000).

King Okkalapa's gift of a hair-relic to Tapussa was never part of older traditions but was invented soon after the discovery of the hair-relic and the pagoda's completion in 1953. This Shwedagon connection quickly eclipsed an earlier legend that centred on another legendary monarch, King Bawgathena, and his gift of relics to the Botataung.

King Bawgathena of Syriam

Until the mid-1950s the principal pagoda legend revolved around King Bawgathena and his enshrinement of relics inside the Botataung. In some accounts he ruled at the time of the Buddha, as a parallel king to Okkalapa in Yangon, while in others he is said to have lived a few centuries later, at the time of the Third Buddhist Synod and King Asoka. His kingdom and his capital were known as Pada, a site nearby Syriam, or Thanlyin. Bawgathena is credited with distributing bodily relics and hair-relics of the Buddha he received from Sri Lanka. These relics were enshrined in numerous pagodas in Yangon and its environs, including the Botataung, Sule and Kyaik-kasan (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 29). Bawgathena can be traced in 19th century chronicles, but myths associated with him probably arose in the 18th century, if not earlier (*History of Syriam*).

The discovery of the two tiny bone fragments and the strand of hair inside the reliquary at the Botataung confirmed the myth concerning Bawgathena and his dispersal of relics. As a government guidebook from the 1950s concluded, '… the removal of the debris caused by the bombing afforded concrete identification of the traditional description of the origin of this pagoda [connected to Bawgathena]' (*Rangoon Sights and Institutions*: 46). Moreover, the identifi-cation provided further proof that 'those who in pre-war Burma were ready to doubt the real existence of the ancient relics and the accounts of the old histories' were clearly in the wrong (Ohn Ghine 1953: 7). An implicit anti-colonial message underlay this remark published in 1953 by an Australian apologist for Burma who adopted an indigenous name, Ohn Ghine. The submission of archaeology to the needs of the new Buddhist nation perhaps began here at the Botataung.

The chief object of devotion today is the hair-relic uncovered after World War II. A new legend started in the mid-1950s claimed that this hair-relic was donated by Tapussa, one of the two Mon brothers who returned to Yangon with the Shwedagon relics.

Above: Shin Thivali, with staff and monk's fan, his two usual attributes.

Yet another layer of myth, unrelated to the others, claimed that a hair relic in the Botataung Pagoda was enshrined by the founder of Thaton, a theme belonging to the larger myth cycle connected with the Golden Rock at Kyaik-hti-yo. All of the legends are briefly summarised in modern pagoda pamphlets, but only the link with the Shwedagon is of importance today and is widely known.

The principal legend at the Botataung shifted emphasis some time after 1953, away from Bawgathena who deposited bone fragments and a hair-relic to the Shwedagon myth. The standard Shwedagon legend was then slightly altered to incorporate the Botataung. In this version the single hair-relic found at the Botataung, formerely tied to Bawgathena, was turned into a gift from King Okkalapa to Tapussa and the Botataung stupa. Bawgathena's role at the Botataung quietly receded into the background, forming another nearly lost layer of myth, of interest to antiquarians and largely unknown to Yangon's residents now. U Ba Kyi's painted panels, probably from the mid-1950s, reflect the stage when the myth was in transition, since he includes episodes connected with Bawgathena and the Thaton king. But his painted series clearly stresses the pagoda's role in the Shwedagon story.

How exactly this transformation took place is unknown, but the new myth was probably hatched among government officials and senior monks, eager to connect this restored pagoda to the very

Above left: Pilgrims and a monk worshipping the hair relic in the central sanctum. Unlike traditional stupa architecture where relics were never meant to be seen, prominent government sponsored stupas begun in the 1950s reversed this age old practice by putting relics on display inside the structures.

The Botataung was once linked to a princess from Syriam who died of a broken heart. A stupa near the bridge entering Syriam commemorates her. Longing Place Pagoda, Syriam.

national legend of the Shwedagon. The connection with the Shwedagon was reinforced by the proximity of the pagoda to the river's edge, since the brothers arrived from India by boat. The Burmese and Mon chronicles describing the founding of the Shwedagon make no mention of the Botataung or Tapussa receiving a hair-relic from King Okkalapa, more reasons for suspecting that the connection with the Shwedagon was made only in the early 1950s (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 46). Moreover, in accounts prior to the mid-1950s, the brothers meet the king not in Yangon, or Dagon, but in Dhannavati, which was then identified with Twante on the opposite side of the river (Pearn: 4; Pe Maung Tin 1934: 47). Twante's role in the Shwedagon myth was not entirely forgotten, witnessed in some panel paintings, probably from the 1960s, such as at the Hpaya Nga-su Pagoda, Yangon.

Romeo and Juliette at the Botataung

Another major legend connected to the Botataung centred on the tragic love story of King Okkalapa's son and the daughter of King Bawgathena. The boy drowned on his nightly visit to his sweetheart in Syriam and was believed to be cremated at the pagoda site. The commemorative stupa was built by King Okkalapa's 1,000 officers. This connection with the Botataung was still known before World War II but was entirely eclipsed by the new myth fostered by the U Nu government once the rebuilding of the pagoda was completed (Pearn: 93; Lloyd: 105; *History of Syriam*: 150). The 'thousand officers' that constructed the stupa for the king's son was twisted in the 1950's to be the king's guards for the Shwedagon relics from India. Other 19th century lore, maintained that the stupa was built by 1,000 Burmese soldiers massed by the river to defend against the invading English, while yet another legend asserted the 1,000 were slain foreign troops, 'pierced and torn by the guns of the Burmese troops' defending the Shwedagon (Seppings: 24).

The Lady of the Emerald Palace sits above gold pots and coins. Her popularity has greatly increased over the last decade. Modern poster.

History

The Botataung was one of many similar stupas in and around the Yangon area whose foundations date to the first millennium. It probably rose to some prominence in the 18th century when Yangon replaced Pegu as the country's chief coastal trading centre during the reign of Alaungpaya (r. 1752-1760). It was probably during the 18th century that the Botataung became linked to King Bawgathena. The pagoda was just east of the perimeter of the riverside stockade built in the 1750s but close to populated areas. The stupa appears on a painted Burmese map from the 1850s, surrounded by empty space and captioned as 'Botataung hpaya', or 'Botataung Pagoda' (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 34). This suggests that the pagoda was of some importance, like the Sule, and was not among Yangon's numerous pagodas that had fallen into ruin over the centuries. It was however always overshadowed by the Shwedagon. For example, an English envoy in the late 18th century, Michael Symes, never mentioned the Botataung, although he stayed in its vicinity. The same was true with later visitors, such as John Crawfurd (1826), Colesworthy Grant (1846) and Walter del Mar (1906). Far more local attention was given to the Sule Pagoda, since it was placed in the centre of the new city plan in 1853. Indeed, it is fair to say that the Botataung came into prominence only after its rebuilding in the 1950s and its absorption into the national religious landscape. Its reconstruction is similar to its prewar appearance, although not identical (Ohn Ghine: 9).

In the narrow space between the pagoda and the river were a number of English graves, soldiers who fell in the capture of Yangon in 1852 (Pearn: 309). The pagoda trustees petitioned to remove the graves before World War II and also to reclaim glebe land. Even Nehru's father was enlisted, submitting a brief to the court from his home in Allahabad. The legalities festered for decades but the Japanese invasion mooted the matter, and the graves were moved to a European cemetery after Independence.

The Compound

A pavilion raised above a turtle-pond to one side of the stupa contains life-size figures, such as Thuraberi and Thagyamin. A Bo Bo Gyi points his raised right hand in the direction of the stupa, emulating the famous posture of the Sule Nat (Sadan). A statue of Guan Yin in a separate shrine illustrates Chinese influence begun in the colonial period.

One corner of the compound is devoted to life-size sculptures of famous Burmese Buddhist personalities. There is the monk Shin Upagok seated on an electrically powered boat-shrine whose progress is impeded by a snake who suddenly pops up among the waves. His counterpart, the monk Shin Thivali, is close by. In a long hall at the rear of the compound are images of famous monks, nuns and lay people drawn from Buddhist history, such as the Buddha's physician Jivaka. Also in the compound is U Nu's *hti*. In another part of the compound is large bell cast on 5 May 1913.

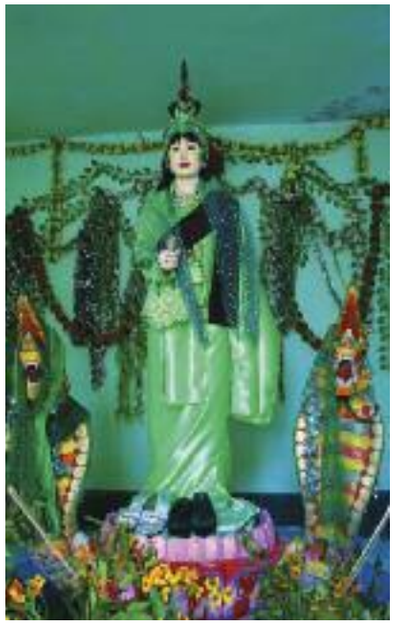
A metal image cast by King Mindon in Mandalay in 1859 is housed in its own large hall, built in 1981. Said to be cast in silver, bronze, gold, iron and lead, it was worshipped in the palace in Mandalay and captured by British forces with the surrender of Mindon's son. It was then removed to Britain where it was later displayed at the Victoria and Albert Museum until its return in 1951.

Lady of the Emerald Palace

Across the lane is a shrine popular with many residents. Its focus is not so much its bejewelled Buddha encased within a glass niche as a female goddess in the centre of the hall always enveloped in offerings of green bananas, coconuts and flowers.

The hti *that was hoisted at the Botataung over a period of days in December 1953, with Prime Minister U Nu himself raising one of the rings. The rebuilding of the stupa symbolised the nation's renewal after the colonial peiod. The* hti *is now in a covered shrine facing the pagoda.*

Occult masters often appear in the compounds of shrines, although many Burmese eschew their worship as non-Buddhist. Here are featured Bo Bo Gyi, left, and three images of Bo Min Kaung.



Images of female 'treasure spirits' are often found in temple compounds. Many times they are shown with snakes. A coloured pair flank this standing example at the Shwebontha Pagoda, opposite Prome.

Her name is Mya Nan Nwe, or Lady of the Emerald Palace, and she is believed to be an invisible guardian of a treasure trove, an allusive reservoir of wealth beneath the ground. She is worshipped mainly for her ability to confer financial success, or prevent ruin. She belongs to a class of deities collectively referred to as *ossa-taung*, or 'treasure spirit', whose 'power usually depends on the value of the treasure' (Maung Tin Aung 1933). Similar deities are found at many Buddhist shrines, at least in Lower Burma, and they are often called Ama Daw Mya Sein, or Elder Sister-Emerald Lady. She is always dressed in green, usually with a headdress incorporating the head of a snake, a creature associated with protecting treasure in the aquatic and subterranean realms, an old theme in Buddhist literature. Offerings to her also include miniature swing sets painted green, symbolising an opulent lifestyle spent merely swinging to and fro. The history of this class of deities has yet to be written. Her shrine was previously on the Botataung platform but her huge popularity began to compete with the pagoda, prompting the trustees to shift Mya Nan Nwe across the lane into her own building constructed only in 1990 (Brac de la Perrière 2009).

Mya Nan Nwe is perhaps unique, since her origin appears to be based on a real woman's biography, according to a new temple history, or *thamaing* (Aung Su Shin). Her story begins in Mogok, the gem mining centre north of Mandalay, where she was born in 1906 into a wealthy family; but in a previous life she had been a snake-goddess, or *naga-ma*. She received a B.A. in India in 1926 and then returned to Mogok where she rebuffed many eligible suitors. Prior to the Japanese invasion, she had a dream in which a holy man dressed in white told her that she should make a huge donation in Yangon. Her family spent the war in Yangon where she attended the Botataung everyday at 4:00 in the afternoon, before Allied bombs flattened the shrine in 1943. The hundreds of relics excavated after the war were placed in a temporary pavilion on the spot now occupied by Mya Nan Nwe's shrine. A day before her birthday, on 21 December 1954, she experienced another dream in which a holy man told her that she would receive a Buddha image that should be placed on the spot where the relics had been earlier displayed. Shortly thereafter she was visited by two beautiful ladies who presented her with a single gold Buddha studded with gems. The ladies were in fact *naga*-sisters in a previous life. The image was donated on 8 January 1955, about two years after the Botataung's rebuilding and is the main image presently worshipped. She then undertook a month long pilgrimage to the holy sites in India, such as Bodh Gaya. She returned to Yangon and then to Mogok where she soon died from an asthma attack.

Her recently recorded life story provides an unusual example of a deity arising from real circumstances, if the temple *thamaing* can be believed. Only those reading the temple's new history, however, know that the deity is based on a real person. Perhaps other popularly

worshipped figures today or in the past also emerged from such real life stories which have become completely embellished in myth and thus lost. Mya Nan Nwe's story weaves myth and probable facts together seamlessly, but one wonders how her story will evolve in the next hundred or five hundred years. Perhaps she will emerge as a Queen of Mogok or a Pauper of Yangon, but we can be sure that her story will be transformed. With the details of her biography then largely lost, she will be thought of as a deity without any historical basis.

Mya Nan Nwe, or Lady of the Emerald Palace, is a popular goddess in Yangon today. Associated with underground treasure troves and wealth, she is enshrined opposite the Botataung. Her life is based on a real woman who died in Mogok in 1955.

Baghdadi Jews

Pulpit, or bemah, *centre, and tabernacle,rear, containing* torahs. *View from women's section above.*

The Diaspora is emblematic of the former Jewish community of old Rangoon, since its descendants are now scattered by the whims of history. The Musmeah Yeshua Synagogue was built in its present location in 1854, immediately following the Second Anglo-Burmese War. Located on a narrow street west of the Sule Pagoda, at No. 85, 26th Street, it was once in the 'Jewish quarter'.

The Jewish community in Burma peaked between the wars when the total number was more than 2,000 (Cernea). Jewish families were in all of the country's large cities but outside of Yangon there were no permanent synagogues, services being conducted instead in private homes. The synagogue in Yangon was the epicentre of the community.

Jewish life in Burma, however, ended abruptly in December 1941, with the Japanese onslaught. Most fled by boat, but others trekked over mountain passes to India, joining thousands of Indians and Europeans. Some went from there to the newly-formed Israel, while others settled throughout the world. Only about 500 returned to Burma, but life was no longer the same.

The first Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, visited Yangon and formed a close friendship with U Nu, the first Burmese Prime Minister. When Ne Win wrested power in 1962, all of Burma's minorities were in jeopardy, and the few Jews left soon emigrated. Less than a handful

Women's section, upstairs.

remain today in Burma, so few that there are rarely ten men to comprise a *minyan* (Hebrew), or the required number to perform a service. The synagogue is well maintained, however, largely by donations from foreign visitors, with a major renovation in 1994 from a single contribution by David and Anna Gol from Geneva. Moses Samuels, a trustee, is now restoring an old ritual bath, or *mikveh* (Hebrew), to one side of the synagogue.

The first synagogue was constructed in wood in 1854 on land granted shortly after the annexation of Lower Burma. Replacing the old hall in the same location is the present brick structure finished between 1893 and 1896. The founders were descendants of Iraqi Jews, or so-called Baghdadis, who already had settled in India and who saw opportunity in Burma. Most of these first 'pioneers' came from Calcutta but maintained ties to Baghdad throughout this period. The Baghdadis are classified as Sephardic Jews. Genealogical records for the Burma community are held in the American Sephardi Federation, New York. Prominent Baghdadi Jews in Asia include the famous Sassoon family in Bombay and Hong Kong, but they were not influential in Burma.

The Baghdadis were keen to blend in with British colonial society and succeeded to a degree. Other Jews later filtered into Burma from the Bene Israel community in Bombay and from Cochin, and there was never a completely happy mix between these 'newcomers' and the Baghdadis. In fact, this division may have prompted a split in the community in 1932 when one division broke off and decided to meet for services inside a store belonging to a local merchant (Cernea). Jews from Europe, or Ashkenazi Jews, were also part of the mix, but they were absorbed by the Baghdadis.

In the centre of the hall is a raised pulpit, or *bemah* (Hebrew), surrounded by old wicker benches. Seating upstairs was reserved for women. The sacred books, or *torahs* (Hebrew) were preserved in the tabernacle behind the pulpit. There were at one time 126 *torahs*, but only two remain today, together with one Talmud. The *torahs*, once kept at the synagogue by families for safekeeping, were dispersed worldwide with their former owners. Some are in Israel, while others landed in West Los Angeles at the Kahal Joseph Congregation; others are in Australia, such as the Bondi Junction Congregation, Sydney.

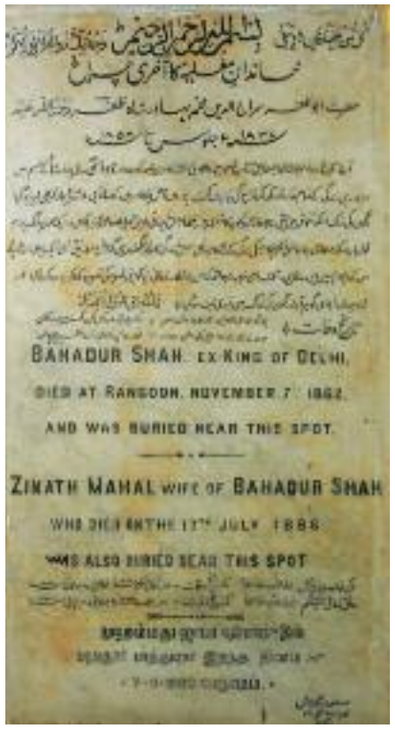
The Jewish cemetery was located on 91st Street where there are some 700 graves, the earliest of which dates to 1876. Ashkenazi graves are toward the back. The land was seized by the government in the 1990s, and the synagogue is engaged in shifting the tombstones to a site north of town.

The Jews, like the Armenians and the Parsis, wielded a far greater influence in Burma than their small numbers would suggest. Each community thrived during the colonial era but withered by the early years of the Ne Win period in the 1960s.

The synagogue was founded in the 1850s, largely by Baghdadis. It flourished until the outbreak of World War II.

Prayer shawl, or talis*, draped over old wicker bench.*

The Lost Mughal Tomb



Inscription records that the emperor was 'buried near this spot', since the precise location was concealed by the English. Signed toward the bottom, 'Raunaq Zamani Begum', a granddaughter who died in 1930. The engraver's name, Abdul Ghafur, is below, with his Yangon street address. Urdu, English and Tamil.

The last Mughal emperor, exiled to Yangon after the Mutiny in 1857, died four years later. His son was exiled to distant Moulmein. Tomb compound.

The great Mughal dynasty of India met its end in Burma, its last ruler exiled to old Rangoon in 1858. This sacred royal tomb evokes for Burmese Muslims a nostalgic pride for a world irretrievably lost. The British concealed the burial site, but it was discovered by chance in 1991.

The last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II (1775-1862), was exiled to Burma a year after the Mutiny in 1857, which nearly saw the overthrow of British rule in India (Dalrymple). Fearing his presence in Delhi, the king was dispatched to Burma. He departed with his empress and an entourage of over thirty, going first overland to Allahabad and then by a steam tug on the Ganges to Calcutta from where they transferred to a ship that docked at Yangon on 9 December 1858. The king's heir, a young prince named Jawan Bahkt, was quickly sent to far off Moulmein where he could play out his life harmlessly.

The shrine today marks the location of the house in which the emperor was sequestered and died at the age of 89, on 7 November 1862, four years after reaching Yangon. Charged with his welfare was Captain Nelson Davies who lived next door. When the home of the exiled king was destroyed and the present mosque constructed is unclear, but it was likely just before World War II. The street outside was first named Sadar Bazaar Road and then changed to Zafar Shah Road, at the request of Yangon's Muslims in 1938. It was recently changed to Ziwaka Road, after a Buddhist monk who sacrificed his life in the independence struggle.

The Lost Tomb

The British buried the king's body secretly behind his house, still mindful of his symbolic importance. Captain Davies recorded the extraordinary interment: 'Abu Zafar expired at 5 o'clock on Friday. All things being in readiness, he was buried at 4 P.M. on the same day, in rear of the main guard, in a brick grave covered over with turf, level with the ground…the grass will have again covered the spot and no vestige will remain to distinguish where the last of the great Mughals rests.' Suddenly, over a century later, while preparing an extension to the mosque, a workman's spade hit the brick-lined tomb on 16 February 1991. The tomb is now under worship, at the very spot where it was found, now in a special basement.

The emperor was secretly interred to avoid his tomb becoming a rallying point for Indian nationalism. His brick-lined grave, shown draped with a cloth, was accidentally discovered in 1991.

A marble inscription contains the date of the king's death and his wife's, which occurred twenty-four years later, on 17 July 1886. It records in English, Urdu and Tamil that the king was buried 'near this spot', since the exact location of the tomb was unknown then. The inscription itself is undated but was established by his granddaughter who expired in 1930. It was displayed outside the present hall in the 1960s. Bahadur Shah was known for his Urdu poetry, under his nom-de-plume, Zafar, and some of his most celebrated poems are reproduced on the tile work surrounding his tomb.

The main devotional focus is a shrine attached to the mosque, with three tombs arranged in a row. Above the door is a sign, 'Red Fort', evoking the emperor's last residence in Delhi. The largest tomb, capped by heavy crown, is considered the emperor's, although his real tomb is nearby in the basement. His wife and their granddaughter are represented by the two adjacent tombs. Worshippers offer trays of fruit, modeled on local practice, and place flowers directly on the tombs. An annual three-day festival marks the emperor's death.

While the Indian emperor was exiled to Burma in 1858, the deposed ruler of Burma was sent off to India in 1886, both monarchs feared as loose cannon capable of inciting calls for the restoration of indigenous rule. That the last representative of the great Mughal empire lies buried on this quiet street in Yangon evokes the Buddhist notion of flux governing the fates of individuals as much as the rise of fall of civilisations.

The burial site of the last Mughal emperor, exiled to Yangon. The shrine today also marks the spot of his original residence.

Holy Trinity and St. Mary's

An inscription on stained glass in the narthex notes that Grace Ann Darling drowned while rescuing her pupil at Amherst in 1894, the same year the cathedral was finished.

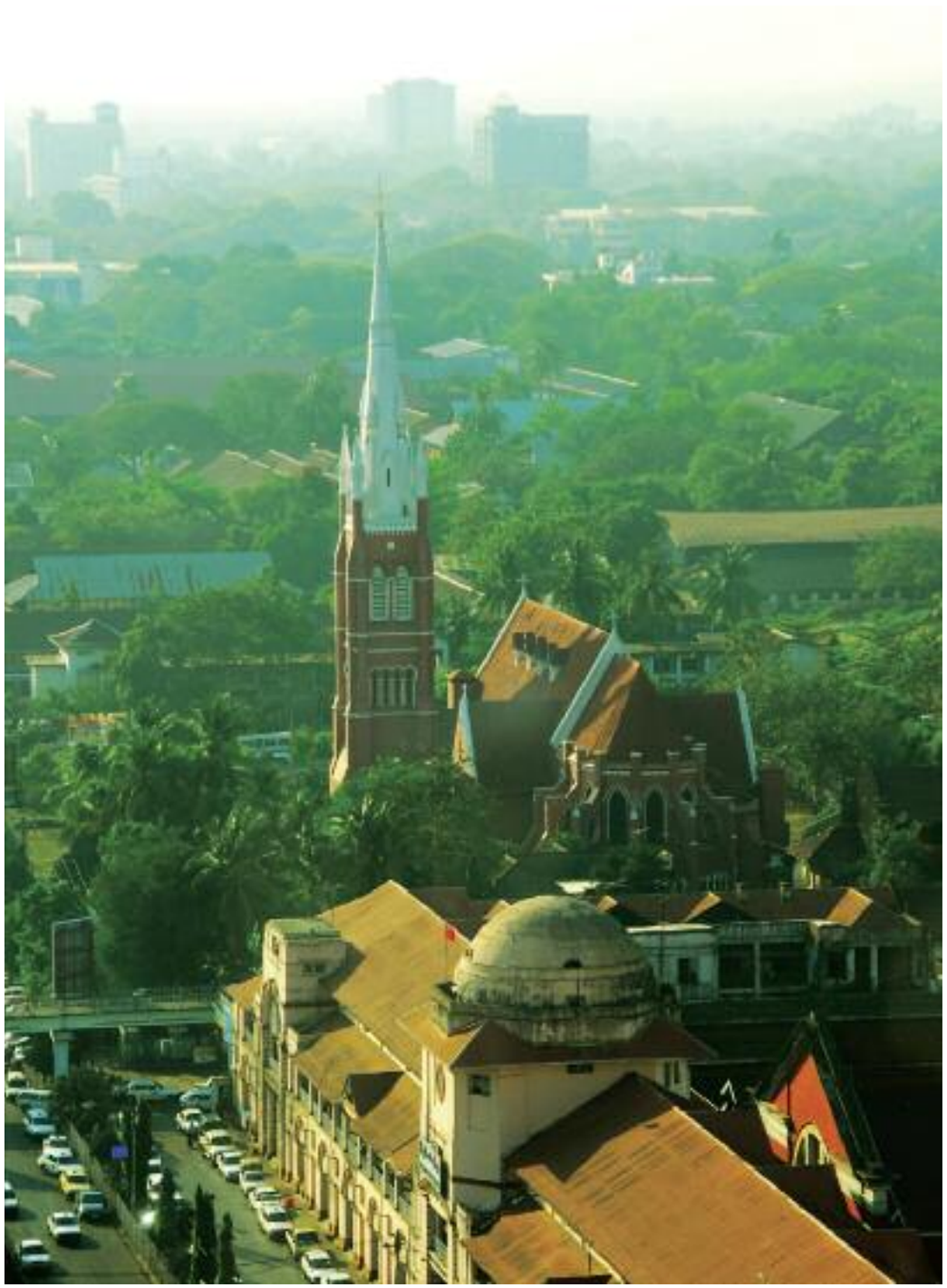
Christians form only a small percentage of the population, but churches are part of the urban sacred landscape in Yangon and all other large cities. Catholics were the first in Burma, starting in the 16th century, but Christianity's lasting impact began only during the 19th century.

The chief Anglican house of worship is Holy Trinity Cathedral, a few steps from Scott Market. The Cathedral embodies all the triumphs and tragedies of British Burma, from its completion date in 1894 through the dark years of the Japanese occupation. Its north transept commemorates the Burma Campaign with the *Book of Remembrance* containing the handwritten names of fallen Commonwealth combatants, a page turned each day in their memory.

Incised memorials built into the nave walls honour various church personages, notably John Miller Strachan, the bishop during the cathedral's construction. A plaque in the apse notes the rebuilding of the altar and sanctuary fittings by Major R. D. Hill and his unit in December 1945, 'to replace those destroyed by the Japanese during the occupation of Rangoon.' The most poignant tug from the past is an inscription on a stained glass window near the entrance, '… in remembrance of Grace Ann Darling who was drowned off Amherst in heroically trying to save the life of one of her pupils, 21 April, 1894.'

The earliest official Anglican services took place in a Buddhist monastery after the capture of the city in 1853. A few years later the Bishop of Calcutta and Lord Dalhousie laid the foundation stone for the Church of St. Andrew. The project foundered, however, until a Town Church committee was formed and drawings for a new church near the river were prepared in 1865 by Captain J. M. Williams (see

Perhaps no church in Burma evokes the colonial era better than the Holy Trinity. Stained glass windows are original to the building.



Old Scott Market and Holy Trinity Cathedral, both cornerstones of colonial Rangoon. The market was completed in 1926. The cathedral dates to 1894.

Regimental crests from fighting units during World War II, north transept, Holy Trinity.

picture on page 56). This church was upgraded to Cathedral status in 1867 and consecrated by the Bishop of Calcutta. The old Town Church was torn down in 1890-1891 and work started on the present cathedral in its current location and finished in 1894. The architect was Hoyne Fox, a Public Works Department engineer who also reconstructed the Mahamuni Temple in Mandalay.

St. Mary's and Amsterdam's Rijks Museum

Burma's Roman Catholic cathedral is tucked away on a quiet street about seven or eight blocks east of Sule Pagoda on Bo Aung Kyaw Street. Its first location was on old Barr Street, but the Bishop, Paul Bigandet, sold the property in 1893 to purchase fifteen acres in its present location. The first plans for the cathedral were designed by Hoyne Fox but these were shelved when Bigandet's successor, Father Cardot, returned to France where he recruited Father Hendrick Janzen for the project. Janzen had studied architecture with J. Th. Cuypers, the son of the famed P. J. H. Cuypers, responsible for the Rijks Museum and the Central Station in Amsterdam. Janzen brought with him to Burma plans prepared by J. Th. Cuypers, a design that blended the neo-Gothic styles of his father with Romanesque and Byzantine touches.

St. Mary's two heavy towers sank upon completion, wrenching the bond with the nave and nearly collapsing the cathedral.

There were originally two sets of plans prepared by Cuypers, one showing a mix of Asian influences and a second incorporating elements used in the Haarlam Cathedral. The latter was more conventional, tending to neo-Gothic, and it was this plan that Janzen took to Yangon. Janzen improvised upon the plan, however, and many differences emerged.

The cleric-cum-architect reached Yangon in November 1898 and raced to work, adapting the old foundation to the new plan. The soil proved so porous that huge wooden piers had to be driven in the ground, and even today water sits in an artificial tank beneath the nave. The length of the cathedral exceeded the original plans by over nine metres. The cornerstone was laid on 19 November 1899, but the cathedral took over ten years to complete. The church is built largely of brick, but with many hollow cement blocks made to look like stone, designed to lighten the mass. Despite these precautions, the two towers on the façade immediately sank over half a metre, generating cracks within the nave walls. Janzen quickly severed the sections connecting the towers to the body of the church to halt further damage. The towers stopped sinking the following year, enabling the addition of the spires.

Unfortunately, Janzen slipped on a plank on 11 August 1907, and was disabled after returning from the hospital. The cathedral was completed by his Chinese understudy, Ah Yen, and consecrated on 22 February 1910. Six months later Janzen died and his tomb is set within the

Above right: Entrance to St. Mary's. A devotee paying respect to Christ the Shepherd.

Above left: Born in Holland, Father Janzen came to Yangon with architectural plans by J. Th. Cuypers, an architect whose father designed the Rijks Museum. Bronze portrait, narthex.

Left: One of the Stations of the Cross. Plaster. Imported from Paris. St. Mary's.

floor at the entrance. A bronze portrait of the kneeling cleric is placed in the wall of the narthex.

Janzen's church withstood the earthquake of 5 May 1930, with only two interior vaults collapsing. It escaped Japanese bombs at the beginning of the war, but jolts from an Allied aerial attack in 1944 blew out the stained glass windows. Behind the church is the Bishop's home and to one side is the old St. Paul's Boys School that was nationalised in the 1960s. Both are gems of colonial architecture.

Many of the Burma's Christians belong to minority ethnic groups, such as these Karen altar boys. St. Mary's.

The Ganesha Temple

Stupa in compound contains a hair-relic replica installed in 2002. The temple's new legend is connected indirectly to the Shwesandaw Pagoda, Pagan.

A supple female grasps a flowering plant. A granite door panel, probably shipped from Madras to Yangon's Shri Kali Temple, c. 1920s.

Yangon boasts dozens of Hindu shrines for residents of Indian descent, but the Mahapeinne Temple is one of only a few where many local Buddhists participate in Hindu rituals. Most residents, however, eschew Hindu temples as non-Buddhist. It is located at the corner of Mahabandoola and Pansodan, a short walk east of the Sule Pagoda.

Its foundation dates to the 1850s when immigration from India was encouraged by the new colonial government. A new stone inscription in the compound records that the land for the temple was given to Cumara Pillai, a south Indian, who constructed the temple in 1856. Such 'free grants' were handed out to many foreign religious communities after Yangon's grid plan was implemented in 1853.

Worship differs from Buddhist practices, since it requires a ritual specialist, a Hindu priest. The rituals resemble those in India, except that devotees offer the characteristic Burmese combination of bananas, green coconuts and flowers, arranged in large metal bowls. Cash payment covers the offerings and fees to the priests. Specific wishes and requests for general well-being are made at the temple, much like at pagodas.

The priest recites Sanskrit prayers before the images in three connected sanctums at the rear of the temple, waving a tray holding a small oil lamp, as worshippers stand just outside the doorway thresholds. This part of the service culminates when the priest cracks open a hard shell coconut and offers the meat to the devotees and gods, a 'ritual-food' known in India as '*prasad* ' (Sanskrit).

The Sanctum

Three chambers contain the principal images. The central shrine is devoted to the *linga* (Sanskrit), symbolising the god Shiva, which is flanked by his two sons, Ganesha (left) and Subramanyam, or Murugan (right). That this same configuration of deities is popular in Tamil Nadu is further testimony to the strong Tamil influence in Burma.

Its namesake, Mahapeinne, is the Burmese word for Ganesha, derived from Maha Vinayaka, one of the god's many Sanskrit epithets. Ganesha was an important deity for Hindus in Lower Burma, and there were even Ganesha street processions in nearby Syriam in the 19th century (*History of Syriam*: 148). Just inside the main entrance is a colossal image of Ganesha and a seated Shiva. Another downtown temple popular with Buddhists is the Shri Kali temple, west of the Sule, built in south Indian fashion, complete with sculpted granite doorjambs imported from India probably in the 1920s.

The linga*, centre, flanked by two sons of Shiva, a configuration borrowed from Tamil Nadu. Other key shrines at the temple are dedicated to Krishna and Durga. Krishna Lal, a brahmin from Nepal, is one of the officiants.*

Ties With the Shwedagon

The temple was levelled by Allied planes, noted in a recent Burmese stone inscription in one corner of the compound. It was rebuilt and opened in 1955 with chanting of the *Mangala Sutta* in English, Burmese and Pali. Another epigraph, dated to 2002, records the establishment of the large gilded stupa in one corner of the compound. Enshrined inside was a hair-relic replica kept at the Botataung Pagoda for more than 110 days, together with soil gathered from hair-relic pagodas all over Burma and Bodh Gaya. Ground breaking began in August 2001 and the *hti* was hoisted at the end of October. The four Ganesha images placed at the corners were installed in February 2002.

Another recent inscription in the compound associated the Yangon Mahapeinne shrine with a stupa at Pagan which is also called the Mahapeinne in chronicles (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 94). It is more commonly known today as the Shwesandaw, said to enshrine one of the hairs deposited originally in a stupa by Bhallika in Yangon at the time of the Buddha. By virtue of the matching names, the epigraph suggests that the Yangon Mahapeinne was the site of Bhallika's stupa. No historical basis for this claim exists but this modern myth-making illustrates how common names can be used to fashion new narratives and also how this Hindu temple has sought to weave itself into Burmese Buddhist traditions.

Krishna Lal, right, applying coloured paste on the forehead of a Buddhist devotee, Mahapeinne compound.

In a different vein, some Buddhists asserted sometime before World War II that the Mahapeinne stood on the site where the hair-relics paused on their way to the Shwedagon and tried to claim the temple grounds in a legal case which failed. The dispute must have lingered, since a female mystic from Pegu in 1969, possessed by two *nats*, also proclaimed that the Mahapeinne temple marked the resting place of the Shwedagon relics (Bonpyan Sayadaw: 43). However, this old controversy appears to be unknown today.

Mon Country

Pegu: Gateway to Mon Country
Kyaik-hti-yo: The Golden Rock
Thaton: The Buddha and Suvannabhumi
Moulmein: 'Lookin' Lazy at the Sea'

Pegu: Gateway to Mon Country

The hamsa*, a symbol of Mon identity, is found widely throughout Burma. The female* hamsa *rests upon her mate, evoking the moment when the pair took refuge on a spit of land in the ocean and were spotted by the Buddha. Other myths claim that the Buddha encountered the two only when they were in flight. Shwemawdaw platform.*

Pervious page: *Nobles in procession, below, attending the cremation rites of the Buddha, above, in this mural dated to 1901. Reclining Buddha Pavilion, Kyaik-than-lan Pagoda, Moulmein.*

Had Pegu not been razed many times over by competing armies, its monuments would have rivaled those at Pagan, not in quantity but quality. The city was a Mon centre for centuries before passing into Burmese hands in the 16th century. Pegu also served briefly as the British capital of Lower Burma in the mid-19th century, its fleeting colonial legacy immortalised by '*the Pegu*', a mixed drink concocted in old Rangoon's Pegu Club.

Pegu is about 85 kilometres northeast of Yangon and is divided by the Pegu River, with sacred sites on both sides. Its official spelling now is Bago, from the Mon '*bagow*', or 'beautiful', anglicised to Pegu long ago. Its classical name is Hamsavati (Pali), or City of the Hamsa, the *hamsa* identified as the Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), a species of goose that migrates from the Himalayas to India and Burma.

The Mon were the dominant ethnic group in Lower Burma until the 16th century but have dwindled drastically, a result of migrations to Thailand, intermarriage and assimilation. The Mon language belongs to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family and is unintelligible to Burmese. Today there are no more than a million or so Mon speakers in Burma and Thailand.

The traditional enmity between the Burmese and Mon kept in check during the colonial era was unleashed after independence when decades of warfare erupted (South). Mon autonomy is no longer a threat, and there is even a Mon state, with the *hamsa* featured on its flag. The military government has striven to put a national stamp on Mon turf by restoring Buddhist sites in Mon areas.

History

The Pegu region was inhabited by Mon in the first millennium, but came under Pagan's influence by the 11th century. The Mon reasserted themselves in Lower Burma by the late 13th century and established Pegu as a capital during the reign of Banya U (r. 1369-1384). The oldest parts of the city are thought to be east of Hintha Gon hill but only brick ruins survive (Stewart; Symes: 193). Pegu flourished during the reign of the great Mon king named Dhammaceti (r.1470-1492). Dhammaceti's grandson fell to Burmese forces from Toungoo when Pegu was seized in 1538, thus beginning the inexorable decline of Mon fortunes in Lower Burma. By the late 18th century

The Buddha spots two hamsas*, and forecasts the birth of Hamsavati, or Pegu, shown in the distance. This major Mon myth probably arose after a brief period of Mon ascendancy at Pegu was eclipsed by Burmese forces in 1757. By U Ohn Thwin Gyi. Entrance corridor, Shwe-tha-lyaung.*

the delta was comprised of sixty per cent Mon and forty per cent Burmese (Lieberman 1978: 465). The Mon enjoyed a resurgence in Pegu in the 18th century but lost the town to forces from Upper Burma in 1757. Pegu became the capital of Lower Burma in the 1850s following the Second Anglo-Burmese War, before it was shifted to Yangon in 1862.

The greatest Burmese ruler in Pegu was Bayinnaung (r. 1552-1581) whose reach extended to Ayutthaya and Chiang Mai. His enormous square brick walled city constructed in 1567 was situated east of the river and encompassed the Shwemawdaw Pagoda in its northeastern corner. The Hintha Gon Hill, just east of the Shwemawdaw, was always outside the walls. Each side measured 2.4 kilometres, with twenty gates, making it even larger than the 19th century Mandalay fort. It was said to be modeled on Toungoo and Ayutthaya, with three inner enclosures (Thaw Kaung 2000). The surrounding moat was inhabited by 'many Crocodiles, which are put there, that if any will wade over these ditches they may be taken and killed.' (Balbi: 30). One 'city' within the walls was for European traders and nobles, while a smaller enclosure was reserved for the king. By the 18th century, however, the walls of the earlier city were derelict and a new town, about half the original size, was built within the old brick enclosure. Its north and east sides relied on the earlier brick wall but its other walls were built stockade fashion (Symes: 184).

Bayinnaung's Mahazedi Pagoda, begun in 1559, suffered greatly from Pegu's 20th century earthquakes but was entirely rebuilt in the decade after independence. It is Pegu's most sacred site, after the Shwemawdaw. The most sacred relic, presumed to be inside, is a tooth-relic that the king received from Sri Lanka, which sprang from the 'original' tooth relic that is believed to be enshrined in the Kaung-hmu-daw stupa, Sagaing. The king offered four times his

own weight in gold to gild the Mahazedi and the Shwemawdaw, all lost today (Tun Aung Chain 2002: 44). The Mahazedi's sacred appeal these days, however, comes from the belief that Bayinnaung was the only king with sufficient spiritual and temporal power to hoist such a giant *hti*. In European sources Bayinnaung is said to have offered a vast ransom for a tooth relic captured by the Portuguese that was eventually destroyed in Goa (Wojciehowski).

The Mon in Pegu were crushed in 1757 by Alaungpaya (r. 1752-1760), the founder of the Konbaung Dynasty (1752-1885). Alaungpaya removed relics from a pagoda west of Pegu for transfer to Upper Burma but not before receiving permission from learned clerics who justified their seizure with references to analogous situations in Buddhist history (ROB III: 40-41). After the Burmese reoccupied Pegu in 1757 a miniature model of the Shwemawdaw Pagoda was enshrined inside a stupa built in Alaungpaya's capital in Shwebo (Tun Aung Chain 2004b: 160). The suppression of the Mon by Alaungpaya was tempered by the policies of his son, Bodawpaya (r. 1782-1819), who encouraged Mon to return to Pegu by renovating 'their favourite temple of worship', the Shwemawdaw Pagoda (Symes: 184). By the 19th century many Mon had fled into Siam and the Mon language was scarcely spoken in Pegu. Mon culture, however, had by no means vanished from Lower Burma.

Hamsavati

The name Hamsavati probably arose by the 14th century, if not earlier; its earlier name is lost. Hamsavati was drawn from Pali literature, after the mythical hometown of Padumuttara, a Buddha who appeared before Gotama. In modern Burmese it is Hanthawaddy. The name Hamsavati later became the nucleus of an elaborate myth linking the founding of the town to a pair of geese, or *hamsas*, and a prediction by the Buddha. This legend probably evolved sometime after the retaking of Pegu by the Burmese in 1757.

The complete foundation myth is comprised of three distinct

Indians burying nine gold trays to stake a claim on Hamsavati. In other versions, the Indians bury an inscribed pillar. By Maung Win & Associates. Hintha Gon shrine.

themes, or parts; each probably developed independently and were later linked together in chronicle form by the early 19th century (*Lik Smin Asah*). All three components are known in a number of slightly different versions (Tun Aung Chain 2000).

The first part begins when the Buddha, while flying over Burma, spotted a male and female *hamsa* resting on a miniscule sandbank in the ocean; the Buddha then prophesied that this tiny island would eventually evolve into the great city of Hamsavati, the modern Pegu. The spot where the geese alighted was identified with a sacred hill called Hintha Gon, or Goose-Hill, connected today to the Shwemawdaw Pagoda by a covered pedestrian walkway. In another version, the two geese were not spotted by the Buddha on an island but were seen in flight, their wings arranged in homage (*History of Syriam*: 5).

The second theme is devoted to rival claims for Hamsavati among different ethnic groups. It begins when the two *hamsas* sheltering on the island were observed by Indian sailors who reported this remarkable discovery to their king in the city of Vijayanagara in south India. The king's guru then told him about the Buddha's prediction of greatness for the unborn city. The Indian ruler rushed his sailors back to Lower Burma to claim the city-to-be by erecting on the tiny island an inscribed stone pillar covered in iron. Somewhat later, ethnic Burmese buried nine baskets of beans beneath the pillar, thus securing their claim. Mon pioneers arrived on the scene last but secretly buried a golden pillar beneath the post of the Indian king and the baskets of beans placed there by Burmese. This feat was made possible with the help of the god Thagyamin, and the Mon were thereby able to establish a preeminent claim to the land by this ruse. This version is drawn from a Mon text dated to 1825, but the basic legend probably evolved sometime after the 1750s (*Lik Smin Asah*: 166, 223).

This legend has numerous slight variations. In one example, the Mon first removed the iron post erected by the Indians, and then buried seven golden trays and nine sickles (*History of Syriam*: 1). Other versions attribute different objects to the different ethnic groups, but their commonality is that the Mon always triumphed by proving their claim to Pegu before all others (Lloyd: 7). The story is depicted among the modern painted panels at Pegu's Hintha Gon shrine. Here the Indians are shown burying nine gold trays, the Burmese nine sacks of beans, and the gleeful Mon nine sickles.

The concluding part of the myth continues with the appointment of Pegu's first and second legendary kings, the brothers, Samala and Wimala, respectively, who came to Pegu from the Mon centre of Thaton. Different chronicles attribute

Pegu Medaw, the chief nat *associated with Pegu and especially the Hintha Gon Pagoda. She is identified by her buffalo headdress and a fish in each hand. She was the mother of Prince Asah, sacrificed to save Pegu from demons sent from India to claim the city.*

The boy Asah, raised by a buffalo herd, later saves Pegu from ogres. Maung Win & Associates. Hintha Gon shrine.

Pegu's first kings came from a union between this seated maiden and a wizard, shown standing. He later discovered that she was a snake-goddess and then flew off in fright, seen on far right. By Nay Wun, Hintha Gon.

diverse dates for the brothers, ranging from the 6th to 9th centuries (Tun Aung Chain 2002). Samala's queen, born from a pumpkin and raised by a Karen couple in the countryside, gave birth to a prince named Asah. Wimala, who was sent to college in Taxila, returned to Pegu and slew his brother and banished Asah into the forest, raised there by a doting cow-buffalo and her herd. Meanwhile, the disgruntled Indians dispatched an army of demons to reinstate their claim to Pegu but were defeated by Asah. Having saved the Mon kingdom, Wimala then invited Asah to assume the throne. Asah tearfully abandoned his adopted buffalo-mother to marry a wealthy woman. Later, the Indians sent an army of demons again to take Pegu and to assure victory Asah was forced to ritually sacrifice his mother, the buffalo, for the sake of Pegu's independence. Her sad death is explained by bad karma in a previous life in which she killed her infant son, born out of wedlock; it was this same bad karma that caused her to be born as a buffalo (*Lik Smin Asah*: 274).

Asah's mother is now a major regional *nat*, represented as a beautiful woman with a buffalo headdress and usually holding two fish. The story of Asah and the conflict between his father and uncle resemble the *Mahajanaka Jataka*, and the themes may therefore represent a blending of Pali sources and indigenous lore. Also, the grandfather of King Asoka was adopted by a cow which also may have inspired the story of Asah and his buffalo-mother. This odd episode in Asoka's lineage was known in Burma, through commentaries on the *Mahavamsa* (Bigandet: 373).

In this nat *tableau in Thaton, the boy is shown kneeling with a sprear next to his buffalo mother. At right, another* nat*, Ko Aung Naing, rides a buffalo.*

Additional motifs in the Pegu legend find parallels in other regional myths, such as cities flourishing after water receded. This was true for the founding of ancient Shri Kshetra and for at least one myth associated with an old Laotian capital (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 7; Swearer, Premchit and Dokbuakaew: 43). Also, prophecies prompted by sightings of birds are not uncommon (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 29).

A different version of the city's founding is recorded on an incised bell seized from the Shwemawdaw compound in the Second Anglo-Burmese War in the 1850s and removed to Calcutta. It was returned to Burma in 1957 and is now on display in the National Museum, Yangon (Christian Bauer, personal communication; Chit Thein). Its Mon inscription is dated to 1754, which nearly marked the end of a twenty-year period when the Mon had driven the Burmese out of Pegu.

The inscription mentions nothing about *hamsas* on an island but claimed that the future Hamsavati would appear where kings had gathered on a sandbank to hear the Buddha predict the founding of the city. The sandbank was said to be at the foot of the hill now occupied by the Shwemawdaw pagoda; this inscription made no reference to the adjacent Hintha Gon hill or to any geese, the focus of the later myth. There is also no reference to ethnic conflict. The date of this bell inscription suggests that the elaborate story about the Buddha spotting the *hamsa* and the ethnic rivalaries was probably devised sometime after 1757. The Mon in Pegu paid a heavy price for their short-lived rebellion, since they were soundly defeated by the Burmese king, Alaungpaya, in 1757, three years after the bell was inscribed. The city remained in Burmese hands until the Second Anglo-Burmese War of the mid-19th century.

Marking the Buddha's seven-week period spent at Bodh Gaya, this complex was one of Dhammaceti's greatest achievments, although in ruins today. The wall with the demon tiles is in the foreground. A rebuilt shrine, rear, signals the fifth week when the Buddha was tempted by Mara's daughters.

The Hamsavati myth focusing on rival ethnic claimants was probably formulated by the Mon after their defeat in the 1750s in order to recall their former primacy in Pegu and Lower Burma. The myth also proffered wishful metaphors for turning the tables on the Burmese and an increasing number of Indian settlers. There was likely never an official chronicle recording the Hamsavati myth, since there was no longer a Mon court after the 1750s.

The Buddha's Homeland

One of Pegu's greatest moments was the reign of the Mon king Dhammaceti in the 15th century. This pious king sponsored an ambitious building campaign that recreated on Mon soil many of the major Buddhist sites in India. Few of these brick structures survive but the scale of Dhammaceti's conception was unprecedented in the Buddhist world, before or since.

The only well-known monument today belonging to this vast project is now a popular attraction, a colossal four-sided brick monument faced with seated Buddhas, known as the Kyaik Pun. It is located a short distance off the road leading from Yangon, about 6 kilometres short of Pegu itself, on the left.

A Mon inscription in the compound records its dedication in 1476 to the historical Buddha Gotama and his three predecessors, Kassapa, Konagamana and Kakusandha. The images have been restored many times and the inscription does not link the Buddhas to specific cardinal directions. Different heights for each Buddha are recorded in the inscription, three of which agree with an early Pali text, the *Buddhavamsa* (Stadtner 1990). The relic chamber was filled with figures of 'enlightened' male and female devotees, and the Hindu god Vishnu ('Mahabisnu') (Blagden 1934: 59). The exterior of the monument was adorned, according to the inscription, with

A 19th century Burmese cosmological map, detail. The Bodhi Tree, centre, is surrounded by shrines indicating some of the seven weeks the Buddha spent at Bodh Gaya. After R. C. Temple, The Thirty-seven Nats.

One of Pegu's landmarks, a four-sided brick shrine called Kyaik Pun, built in 1476 but regularly restored. The four Buddhas represent Gotama and his three predecessors, a theme relating to the nearby complex dedicated to the Seven Weeks.

statues of Mara's army, nuns, monks, and gods and goddesses, but these have been lost for centuries, due to their being made mostly likely in stucco. The crumbling brick wall encircling the Kyaik Pun is certainly from 1476.

The Buddha's Seven Weeks

The centrepiece of the king's campaign was a major complex celebrating a seven-week period that the Buddha spent at Bodh Gaya. These brick monuments are located south of the Kyaik Pun at the end of a dirt road leading from the main road, or are accessible by a jungle path from the Kyaik Pun. The shrines were in ruins in the mid-19th century but were Lower Burma's most impressive monuments in the 15th century. The ancient name of the complex is unknown, but today it is called Shwegugyi, its name since the 19th century and possibly much earlier (Shorto 1967: 128). Another early name for the site was Yathe-myo (Lloyd: 110; Bird: 172). Most of the monuments were built between *circa* 1478-1480.

The Seven Weeks, or Seven Stations, represents a transition between the Buddha's enlightenment at Bodh Gaya and his teaching mission at Sarnath. Since the two Mon brothers received the hair relics for the Shwedagon on the last day of this seven-week period, these Pegu monuments are therefore tied thematically to the Shwedagon. In a narrative sense, these monuments in Pegu were a preamble to the Shwedagon.

The Seven Weeks are represented among the paintings at Pagan in Upper Burma, but the connection between the two brothers and Burma was not made until the 14th or 15th century and was then only important for Lower Burma. The Seven Weeks complex is also connected to the four-sided Kyaik Pun in as much as the Buddha's biography usually begins with his descent from preceding Buddhas.

Each of the shrines, or stations, marking the Seven Weeks was once identified with a Mon inscription, some of which are preserved

19th century photographs of the Kyaik Pun reveal the monument's derelict state. After R. C. Temple, Notes on antiquities of Ramannadesa.

in small new sheds near the monuments. The shrines were all in brick, once covered with stucco. Some have been 'restored', while the majority are known only by their stone inscriptions or by ruinous brick mounds.

The layout of the seven shrines was important, since its efficacy rested on faithfully copying what was thought to be the original ground plan in Bodh Gaya. It was once argued that the plan was obtained by a mission sent to Bodh Gaya by Dhammaceti, but this is unlikely (Griswold). The layout of the monuments was probably based on early Pali texts, notably the *Nidanakatha* and Buddhaghosa's *Samantapasadika* which specify the orientation of the first four stations in relation to the Mahabodhi Temple, represeting the first week. Thus, for example, the Jewelled House, representing the fourth week, was northwest of the Mahabodhi Temple. It was this layout that was adopted in Southeast Asia in the 15th century, first at Wat Chet Yot, Chiang Mai, and then later in Pegu (Brown 1988; Stadtner 1991). A large replica of the Bodh Gaya Mahabodhi Temple is found at Pagan but was not surrounded by monuments connected to the Seven Weeks.

The Mahabodhi Temple

The principal temple faced east and signified the first week at Bodh Gaya when the Buddha obtained enlightenment. The massive buttresses on the corners and stone staircases on two sides are original. There was at least one inner chamber but the stone lintels above the doorways have collapsed and the interior is filled with fallen brick. Behind the temple is an inscription referring to a Bodhi tree; the 'original' Bodhi tree also appears behind the main shrine at Bodh Gaya.

Next to the temple, on the north side, are two modern monuments commemorating the Jewelled Walkway (week 3) and the Jewelled House (week 4), probably more or less in their original positions but whose shape and size are completely conjectural. Outside the compound is a small hillock with a modern standing Buddha, said to represent the second week when the Buddha gazed without blinking at the Bodhi tree. A large pond southeast of the

The Seven Weeks at Bodha Gaya: the enlightenment (1), the gazing at the tree (2), the jewelled walkway (3), the jewelled house (4), the daughters of Mara (5), the snake-king (6), and Tapussa and Bhallika (7). By Maung Saw Maung, c. 1960s. Shwe Indein Pagoda, Indein, Inle Lake.

Mara's demons, below, were placed into the compound wall of the Mahabodhi temple, while the daughters, above, were set into the wall surrounding a temple marking the fifth week. Courtesy: Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.

main temple marks the spot where the snake-king Muchalinda emerged from the water to protect the Buddha from a storm in the sixth week, also noted by an inscription. The last week at Bodh Gaya saw the two merchant brothers receiving hair-relics from the Buddha which they enshrined in the Shwedagon in Yangon. The shrine for the seventh week was south of the main temple and is perhaps a newly cleared brick mound outside the compound wall.

Thirteen huge inscribed slabs protected by an old shed outside the compound are probably the site's major foundation grant. Both Mon and Burmese appear on the effaced stones, but the text awaits a translation. In the same shed are a handful of 18th century stone inscriptions gathered from around Pegu, mostly tombstones incised in Portuguese, Armenian, Burmese, English and Latin.

Mara's Demons and Daughters

The wide compound brick wall of the Mahabodhi Temple is now scarcely traceable but its inner face once held large glazed ceramic plaques fitted into two parallel horizontal rows. The plaques featured Mara's demons whose bodies face to the right. A lesser number of tiles show the demons defeated, tumbling about in confusion. The number of plaques likely totaled between 200-300, but no more than 100 are traceable today. Around fifty are in public collections, mostly in Europe, and four are in the United States (Stadtner 1991). There are one or two on view in the National Museum, Yangon. The glazes are usually green, white and brown and appear in a variety of hues. A second set of demons has been recently found, once surrounding a huge newly cleared reclining Buddha in Pegu.

A small shrine about 100 metres east of the Mahabodhi Temple commemorates the fifth week when Mara's three seductive daughters attempted to derail the Buddha from his spiritual track. The original brick structure was recently demolished by the local monk and a hideous replacement put up. The monk's restoration was done with permission from the local commander and was opposed by the Department of Archaeology.

Into the inner face of the brick compound wall were set glazed plaques featuring the daughters of Mara; they multiplied themselves three hundred times in six forms, from young maidens, to women with one or two children, to middle-aged women and to older women and so on, the same categories as in an early Pali Buddhist text (Blagden 1934: 14; *Nidanakatha*: 106). The total was much less than the demons, since the encircling wall is far smaller. These plaques reveal far more diversity in technique and quality than do the demons. Most are inscribed at the top with brief Mon captions.

The Holy Land

The Mahabodhi Temple was the centre of the complex but many additional monuments extended far beyond this to recreate a replica

of much of the Buddhist holy land, the places and episodes described in Mon epigraphs (Shorto 1971: xxxi). For example, the famous Neranjara River at Bodh Gaya was represented by a wide depression, running north and south, between the Shwegugyi complex and the paved road, and filled with water only in the rainy season. On the bank of this 'river' were constructed two monuments marking the spots where the Buddha cast his alms bowl into the river before sitting beneath the Bodhi Tree, identified by two mounds of brick rubble deep in jungle, with adjacent ancient stone inscriptions.

To one side of the dirt road is the modern Washing Stone Monastery (Kyaukpya Kyaung), named after a stone that the god Sakka presented to the Buddha to dry his robe. Enormous cut slabs of stone are placed together to recreate Sakka's gift, identified in a Mon inscription in an adjacent shed (Chit Thein: 80). This episode is not part of popular biographies, such as the *Nidanakatha*, but is elsewhere in the Pali canon (Stadtner 1990). Other monuments in the surrounding jungle commemorate the defeat of the ascetic Kassapa and the meeting with Upaka, an Ajivika ascetic, between Bodh Gaya and modern Gaya. These monuments, which cover many square kilometres, have never been surveyed properly.

Pegu was overrun by Burmese forces from nearby Toungoo less than fifty years after Dhammaceti's death. The new dynasty patronised the Shwemawdaw, but its connections with Dhammaceti's other monuments are unclear. By the mid-19th century all of the monuments were derelict. One Mon text composed after the Burmese invasion refers to offerings by Dhammaceti to sacred trees at many of the earlier Mon pagodas, implying that many were still known (Shorto 1967).

Temple Bells to Portuguese Cannon

Dhammaceti's reputation is also tied to a massive bell donated to the Shwedagon in Yangon. Cast in Pegu and weighing 180,000 *viss*, or 300 tons, it was transported by barge to Yangon, according to a

King Dhammaceti's Mon monks in a barge on the Kalyani River, near Colombo. They were re-ordained there and introduced the Mahavihara division to Lower Burma.

This new concrete reclining Buddha replaced a long brick mound that may have been a reclining Buddha. Demon tiles in the brick rubble suggest that it belongs to Dhammaceti's 15th century reign. It is located between the Kalyani Vihara and the Shwe-tha-lyaung reclining Buddha.

much later Mon chronicle (*Lik Smin Asah*: 103). This account is probably hyperbole, since it would have been three times as large as the Mingun bell which is 90.52 tons.

The only bell mentioned by Dhammaceti himself weighed '3,000 *tolas*' (Blagden 1934: 235; Taw Sein Ko 1893a: 332). This bell was taken from Pegu on 25 September 1476 and arrived at the Shwedagon on 5 October, according to the Kalyani inscription (Taw Sein Ko 1893a: 46).

The Portuguese adventurer Filipe de Brito may have removed this very bell in 1608 in order to melt it down to produce cannon at his headquarters in Syriam. The ship overturned and the bell was never recovered. A Burmese text claimed that the vessel sank 'by the power of the Buddha' (*History of Syriam*: 53).

An attempt is made to raise the bell every now and then, once even with funding from an actor, a Hollywood Buddhist, but the bell evidently preferred the tranquility of the deep to the turmoil on land. People today believe that the bell is slowly moving out to sea and rises to the surface at every full moon. Dhammaceti may have also dedicated a much smaller bell to the Shwedagon, of 500 *viss*, but this too has disappeared (*Lik Smin Asah*: 103).

A Steadfast Daughter and a Reclining Buddha

Pegu's most famous reclining Buddha, known as the Shwe-tha-lyaung, is perhaps the most popular site in the town, but it is not especially sacred. Many pilgrims enjoy lunch and relax beneath the pavilion, after devotions at the Shwemawdaw and Mahazedi pagodas.

It was discovered accidentally in 1881, covered in vegetation, when the Burma State Railroad was searching for laterite. It was restored in the late 19th century and at that time became attached to a tenacious 15th century legend. There is no safe way to determine

Discovered in 1881, Pegu's reclining Buddha was restored and protected with a metal pavilion in 1896, shown in this old black-and-white photograph. The Buddha soon became attached to a 15th-century Mon legend. Courtesy: Department of Archaeology.

This reclining Buddha has been re-ornamented and repainted countless times. Auspicious symbols appear on the bottoms of the feet.

the age of the original Buddha. On the basis of its size alone, it has been identified with a large Buddha (*'mahabuddharupa'*) mentioned in the Kalyani Inscription, but this cannot be sustained (Shorto 1971: 60).

The current myth is told in painted frames lining the entrance stairway and also on plaster panels behind the reclining figure. It starts with the son of an heretical Mon king who fell in love with Dala Htaw, a Buddhist. The prince was a typidal heretic, so to win her hand he converted. His boorish father, King Migadippa II, became furious and ordered his own daughter-in-law to be sacrificed to the household idol since she steadfastly held to her faith. As she faced the heathen colossus, the idol burst asunder, prompting the hurried conversion of the king, terror trumping heresy. The king then commissioned the huge reclining Buddha, a symbol of his new devotion, and he and his family lived happily ever after.

The two lovers riding to the palace to face the wrath of the boy's father who is later converted by a miracle. This lore, ultimately descending from Pali sources, was associated with the reclining Buddha in the late 19th century. By Than Lwin, 2000. Entrance corridor, Shwe-tha-lyaung.

This myth descends from a similar legend recorded in two inscriptions, one of which is dated to 1470. In this version the legendary heretical king is named Tissa and the woman is not his daughter but his Buddhist queen named Subhadda (Shorto 1971: xxx). She did not cause an idol to explode but was able to persuade seven Buddha images to fly into the air! Together the royal couple constructed seven stupas to commemorate the spots where the Buddha images flew into the sky and two inscriptions record their restoration in 1470 after they were destroyed by treasure seekers (Chit Thein: 65). These monuments were located in a village nearby Pegu known as Kyaiktaingggan, but the originals have not survived.

This tale is repeated with minor differences in a later Mon text. In this instance, King Tissa faced off with a wealthy man's daughter named Bhadradevi who rescued eight Buddha images that the king threw into the city's muddy moat. She then caused the images to fly into the air. Tissa converted and elevated her to be his chief queen (*Lik Smin Asah*: 93). The story also appears in an 18th century Burmese Buddhist chronicle where the flying Buddha images are encased in a pagoda known as Kyaik Paw (Mon), or 'Flying Buddhas', the same name of the shrine appearing in the inscription (Pranke 2004: 170). This same Tissa was the last of the legendary Pegu kings before the fall to the Pagan kingdom.

These stories ultimately derived from a tale in the Pali canon where a Buddhist woman named Cula-Subhadda was married into a family of heretics who entertained in their home naked ascetics, or '*niganthas*' (Pali) in their home. When the horrified young lady protested, her father-in-law threw her out of the house. Her sympathetic mother-in-law interceded and allowed Cula-Subhadda

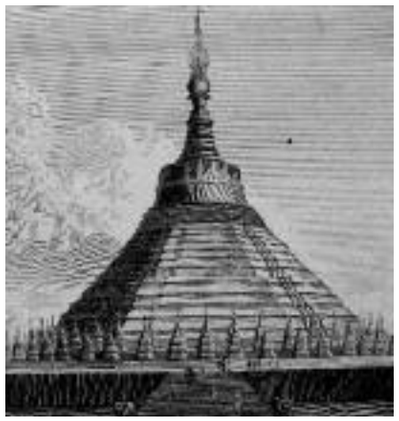
to invite the Buddha to their residence. The family then became devoted to the Three Jewels. This story is from a commentary on the *Dhammapada* (DhA. iii: 465) and likely provided the prototype for the one in early Pegu, albeit filtered over many centuries and perhaps with untraceable Sri Lankan influence. A related story is found in a Thai chronicle where *niganthas* convinced a king to throw a tooth-relic into a 'most loathsome moat.' The tooth then transformed the foul waters into a lotus pond, a miracle that turned the king's mind around (*Jinakalamali*: 90).

How exactly this myth became attached in the modern period to this reclining Buddha is unknown. My hunch is that the legend was current in Pegu in the late 19th century and the spectacular discovery of the reclining image triggered this arbitary association, a connection probably promoted by an influential monk. It is another example of an ancient Pali story, undergoing numerous mutations on Burmese soil over centuries, and becoming attached to certain images or structures in ways that are not altogether clear.

Once the image was cleared in the 1880s it was raided by Burmese treasure hunters seeking relics, with monks and officials sharing in the spoils (Taw Sein Ko 1882: 383). Its restoration began with a brick facing covered with painted stucco, in 1892 (Oertel: 18). Its original base is laterite. The metal pavilion was established by Burn and Co. of Calcutta and Howrah in 1896; the firm's enamel plaques remain on some of the posts. Two painted panels at the entrance tell the story of the rebuilding in 2001 of the covered entrance, 'constructed under the guidance of the Head of State, Union of Myanmar.' A military officer is shown conferring with local men-of-means, a reminder that those garbed in green are the gate-keepers to such pious works.

A second reclining Buddha was recently 'discovered' close to the Shwe-tha-lyaung. This long broad brick mound covered by vegetation gave no indication of which way the Buddha was facing or indeed if it was a recumbent Buddha. A number of glazed demon plaques were found amidst the brick rubble, linking the mound to Dhammaceti's period. The government lost no time in restoring what was thought to be a reclining Buddha, emulating kings of old who rebuilt ruined monuments. This 'discovery' led to the demolition of the earlier brickwork and the erection of a reclining Buddha in reinforced concrete. Ceremonies led by former Secretary-1, Khin Nyunt, enshrined a symbolic banyan tree, a gold throne and a Buddha in a reliquary casket inside the Buddha. Hundreds of small stone Buddhas and a few demon tiles found during excavation are displayed in an adjacent pavilion. That Mara's demons should surround a reclinging Buddha is possible, as they once encircled the four-sided Kyaik Pun pagoda, according to its inscription.

The Shwemawdaw in 1795, before the devastating quakes. The octagonal base was much higher in relation to the drum than it is today. By Singey Bey, an Indian artist. After Symes' An Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava.



The Shwemawdaw

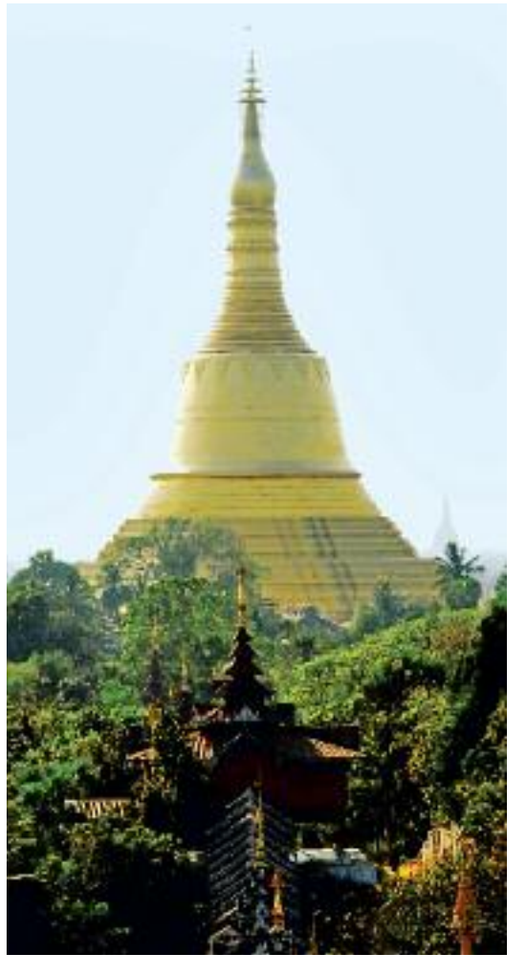
The Shwemawdaw ranks among the most sacred sites in Lower Burma. Its earlier history is murky, but it was in existence at least during the 14th century. It was first patronised by the Mon and then by Burmese after the Mon lost Pegu by the mid-16th century. The Mon myth underpinning the pagoda was completely eclipsed by entirely different legends beginning sometime afer the Mon collapse. The earlier Mon myth was nearly lost from the pages of history but for the chance discovery in the 1950s of a Pali inscription at the Shwemawdaw (Thein Tin).

This epigraph is a duplicate of a fragmentary Mon inscription at the Shwemawdaw now preserved on the platform (Chit Thein: 94; Thet Tin: 54-55). The Mon and Pali inscriptions centre on the Buddha's visit to Thaton, the bestowing of hair-relics to six hermits and an enshrinement of thirty-three tooth relics in separate stone stupas by the king of Thaton. These teeth had multipled from a single tooth relic conveyed to Thaton by Gavampati, the king's brother in a past lifetime. The thirty-three stone stupas later fell into ruin. Centuries later, the two famous legendary monks named Sona and Uttara were sent to Thaton at the time of the Third Synod in India. The two then discovered the lost and derelict pagodas. They disbursed the tooth-relics to various places, one of which was the present Shwemawdaw. The place in Pegu is Madhava in the Pali inscription, while in the Kalyani text it appears as Mudhava (Taw Sein Ko 1893a: 47). Today this name has been dropped but it was incorporated into the new name, Shwe-maw-daw. This Mon myth parallels the story of Sona and Uttara who discovered and restored the lost and derelict Shwedagon stupa in Yangon and that of the six hair-relics given to the six hermits in Thaton.

The Pali inscription also records the reconstruction and enlargement of the pagoda by Dhammaceti and Queen Shinsawbu, begun in 1458 and completed in 1462 under the supervision of a master mason. It mentions the good works of previous Mon rulers, starting with King Banya U who, at this spot, replaced an open shrine with a stupa in 1348, later enlarged by his son (Thet Tin: 54-55). The same information was probably in a now missing sections of the Mon inscription.

The Legend Today

The fate of the early Mon myth centred on a single tooth-relic cannot be charted precisely, but in the mid-18th century there was believed to be twelve unspecified Buddha relics enshrined inside the pagoda. These relics are recorded in the aforementioned bell



The Shwemawdaw ranks among the most sacred pagodas in Lower Burma. View from the Hintha Gon, or the hill said to mark the spot where the two hamsas *landed.*

Chronicles record enshrinements of relics over the centuries at the Shwemawdaw. This fancifully depicts the first interment of the two hair-relics when the stupa was only 50 cubits high, or 22.8 metres. By Aung Hlaing, Shwemawdaw Platform.

inscription of 1754. In that account, the Buddha visited Hamsavati before it became a city and predicted that there would be twelve unspecified bodily relics enshrined inside the future Great Stupa, or 'Mahaceti.' He uttered this prediction seated at a sandbank at the base of the hillock on which the Shwemawdaw is now raised. There is no suggestion in this inscription of the Buddha spotting two *hamsas* or any reference to the conflict among the Mon, Burmese and Indian claimants to Hamsavati. There is also reference to an additional eight unspecified bodily relics that were placed in separate stupas. These traditions spelled out in this bell inscription are unknown today. These eight stupas may have been outside the Shwemawdaw's compound but more likely were structures on the platform itself. Each was associated with major disciples of the Buddhas, such as Sariputta, Mogallana and Gavampati, and in total contained eight additional unspecified bodily relics of the Buddha.

Sometime after the re-occupation of Pegu by Alaungpaya and his successors a new myth arose, which was largely modeled on the Shwedagon legend (see page 74). It remains the current one and centres solely on two hair-relics brought from India by two merchants living near Pegu. This version was told to an English emissary, Michael Symes, who visited Pegu in 1795, therefore strongly suggesting that the current myth arose sometime between the re-occupation of Pegu in 1757 and the visit of Symes in 1795. It was probably during this same period or slightly later that the extended myth of the Buddha spotting the two *hamsas* arose, together with the Mon triumph over the Burmese and Indian settlers.

Local commander and Pegu's notables celebrating the opening of the modern corridor at the Shwe-tha-lyaung shrine. The military's role in patronising shrines is a leitmotif in Burma.

The present version begins with two merchant brothers presenting food to the Buddha at Rajagaha, India. The Buddha then 'shook his head, and presented them two hairs, directing them to enshrine the hair-relics on the Thudathana Hill [Sudhassana, Pali], west of the Hintha Gon' (Browne: 118). In Burmese texts the brothers are called Maha Thawaka and Sula Thawaka, or Maha Sala and Culla Sala (Pali). They are said to be from Zaung-tu, a village 46 kilometres north of Pegu. The brothers were unable to locate the special hill at first but the gods shook the earth once they reached the right spot. The pair constructed a stupa 50 cubits in height, or 22.8 metres. The pagoda over time fell into ruin and became lost. Three special monks, or *arahants* (Pali), were sent by King Asoka in India to find the missing stupa, together with seven others (Browne: 115). In the version told to Symes, the two brothers were said to be from a place east of Martaban (Symes: 192). The current legend is recorded in the *Shwemawdaw Thamaing*, compiled in about 1800, and in many slightly different versions (Browne; Page; Hsaya Ku).

Yet another myth is recorded in a Mon text dated to *circa* 1710. In this account, the relics in the Shwemawdaw number nine hair-relics. These were given by the Buddha, not to two brothers, but to his disciple Gavampati who then gave them to the god Thagyamin to enshrine (Shorto 1970: 20). That nine silver receptacles were discovered with relics during the rebuilding of the pagoda in the early 1950s is perhaps more than coincidence (*Weekly Burma Bulletin*, 21 March 1952). The number nine also recalls the nine sickles and nine golden trays of Pegu's foundation myth.

There are therefore no less than four completely different accounts of the principal relics at the Shwemawdaw. The most recent myth, featuring the two hair-relics, has buried the early Mon legend centred on a tooth-relic.

The Buddha requested two brothers to enshrine hair relics on Thudathana Hill in Pegu but it could not be found. The god Sakka, in the sky, points out the hill to the local king and the brothers. In some versions the brothers approached the hill and the ground shook, thereby identifying the right spot. Shwemawdaw Pagoda compound.

Quakes and Un-Parliamentary Language

The pagoda's building phases are mentioned in the *Shwemawdaw Thamaing* and other sources, but much is legendary. Samala and Wimala raised the height of stupa attributed to Maha Sala and Culla Sala from 50 to 54 cubits and later kings followed by increasing its size and adding relics. A king named Anuramam interred a sacred tooth from Thaton by boring a tunnel in the pagoda's northeastern side (Bonpyan Sayadaw: 164). Paving stones numbering 100,000 were received by Dhammaceti from Sri Lanka, with half going for the Shwemawdaw and the other to the Shwedagon (Browne: 121).

Burmese kings never flagged in their patronage either, beginning with Tabinshwethi (r. 1531-1555) whose ear-piercing took place at the Shwemawdaw. His successor, King Bayinnaung, deposited valuable earrings in the pagoda, constructed a scripture-library and donated fifty-two small stupas to the Shwemawdaw, each representing a year of his age.

This new structure is thought to mark the spot of King Bayinnaung's 16th century palace. However, the site may have been a Mon palace, built in 1753 and dismantled in 1757 when Pegu was taken by the Burmese king, Alaungpaya. Its cost and design have been controversial from the beginning.

The Golden Palace, the Kanbawzathadi

The discovery of 176 buried teak posts in the 1990s sparked the belief that the site marked the spot of Bayinnaung's 16th century palace. Many are preserved today inside a shed on site and a handful are in the museum nearby and at the National Museum Yangon. None were found complete, only the lowermost portions, averaging about 2 metres, with their tops showing traces of fire. Incised on the bottoms of 136 posts are the names of towns in Upper and Lower Burma and sometimes the names and titles of officials. The logs were probably felled in the Toungoo forest and shipped down the Sittang to Pegu where they were then inscribed. The city names incised on the pillars is reminscent of of Bayinnaung's city wall gates which were named after places within his realm.

The posts may have belonged to Bayinnaung's palace, but it is possible they were part of a palace built in 1753 during the reign of a Mon king named Banya Dala (r. 1747-1757) and dismantled in 1757 after Pegu fell to Alaungpaya's forces on 6 May 1757. This palace was noted by an English traveler, George Baker, who visited Pegu shortly after 1757: 'In the NE quarter [of the walled city] was the palace and the temple of Kyak Mintao [Shwemawdaw] . . .The pillars, &tc. [etc.] of the Pegu palace, were carried to Bengal in 1757 by Captain Bailey' (Baker: 634). The pillars were likely cut at their bases rather than extracted from the ground, explaining why the tops alone show traces of fire, a blaze that could have occurred at any time.

Baker also reported that the palace was built 'in one day' by 'a certain number of people, from every district, [who]... were summoned, with the proper implements, to be employed' (Baker: 634). The palace was a collective effort ('every district') which if true, may explain the inscriptions on the bottoms of the pillars. Also, a gazetteer in 1868 reported that 'On the south side of the Shoay-hmaw-daw [Shwemawdaw] pagoda is the site of the old palace' (Lloyd: 109). This may have been the same palace grounds noted by Baker, probably known by scores of teak stubs protruding from the ground, their greater parts somewhere in Bengal. Banya Dala's hold over Upper Burma was brief, however, making it difficult to reconcile the names of Upper Burma towns incised on the pillars. The true identity of the structure can likely be solved only by a combined scientific and historical investigation.

The new concrete pillars are said to have replaced those in teak in their identical positions, thereby replicating the original plan. However, the elevation is conjectural, since no palaces from this period have survived to provide models (Pichard 2005). For example, the decorative details resemble the Mandalay Palace, built in the 1850s and reconstructed in the 1990s. This leap to identify the palace with the former national figure and its fanciful rebuilding have drawn widespread condemnation. Another new conjectural structure to the east of the palace is said to represent the king's bedchamber.

The discovery of 176 teak posts in the 1990s prompted the belief that Bayinnaung's palace had finally been identified. Holes near the bottom were for chains strapped to elephants, a technique still used for transporting teak logs.

Mon and Burmese chronicles make numerous references to refurbishments to the pagoda, many in response to earthquakes. Quakes took their toll in 1739, 1744, and 1757, the latter after Alaungpaya took Pegu after a brief resurgence of Mon independence (*Lik Smin Asah*: 114). Later, King Bodawpaya, reversing the policy of his father, 'was more desirous to conciliate his new subjects by mildness rather than to rule them through terror' and so restored the pagoda and hoisted a *hti* to 'reconcile the Peguers to the Birman yoke' by the 'embellishment of the temple of Shoemadoo [Shwe-mawdaw]', according to a British visitor in 1795 (Symes: 183). The *hti* made in Upper Burma was shipped to Pegu, and 'many of the principal nobility came down from Ummerapoora [Amarapura] to be present at the ceremony of its elevation' (Symes: 189). A marble inscription from the reign of Bodawpaya was discovered during the rebuilding of the pagoda in the 1950s. The pagoda today resembles depictions published in the late 18th century (Symes). Its height then was said to be 100.8 metres, but it now soars to 114.3 metres.

The platform was rather barren when Symes visited Pegu in 1795, compared to today. He found four large corner stupas, a few preaching halls, rest houses, and three bells. In the southwest corner were four seated guardians, monsters described as 'Pallo', or modern *bilu*, holding clubs, probably much like the surviving ogre on the Shwedagon platform. On the eastern side were two figures representing Thagyamin, holding a book and pen, and a kneeling earth goddess associated with the defeat of Mara (Symes: 190). A number of preaching halls are mentioned in Mon chronicles, but none survive from the 18th or even early 19th century (*Lik Smin Asah*: 113; Fraser-Lu: 271). The major entrance in the 18th century was on the south side, guarded by two large couchant lions, or *chinthe*. In Symes' day the central stupa was ringed at its base with numerous smaller, fifty-seven on the lowest terrace and fifty-three on the upper.

Prime Minister U Nu laying the first brick in the rebuilding of the Shwemawdaw, 20 April 1951. By U Chit Maung. Pagoda platform. Restoring shrines was a top priority for newly independent Burma. The subordinate role of the two military figures, far left, can be contrasted to their central role in art works at major pagodas since 1989.

Avalokiteshvara, bronze, probably imported from eastern India. Its original findspot is unrecorded. Pagoda museum.

Male dancers, or natkadaws*, perform regularly at the Pegu Medaw shrine near the top of the Hintha Gon, the hill thought to be the spot where the two* hamsa *birds landed. The dancers are sponsored by those who have received help from Pegu Medaw.*

The Mon bell inscription of 1754 suggests that there were perhaps no less than five smaller stupas on the compound platform, each said to commemorate the location where a disciple sat when the Buddha was seated on the mountain which now marks the spot of the Shwemawdaw. They were disposed in an asymmetrical fashion, and within them there may have also been distributed eight unspecified bodily relics referred to in the inscription. The 1754 inscription also mentions the restoration of a teaching-hall ('*dhammasala*') and the creation of Buddha images and paintings that featured *jatakas*. Symes saw none of these shrines during his visit of 1795 and the tradition of the 28 relics does not appear in later chronicles or legends.

A mild quake in 1912 was followed by a major shake on 5 July 1917. One huge segment of the pagoda pinnacle tumbled down onto the platform where it has remained, attracting as much curiosity as worship. The rebuilding provoked a bitter controversy that lasted nearly a year, pitting those who wanted to repair the damage against those who wanted to enlarge the entire stupa, thus raising its height. Feelings ran so high between the clashing groups that it was feared that 'un-Parliamentary language might be used' (Taw Sein Ko 1920: 247). Fortunately, those pushing for enlarging the pagoda lost the debate, because another devastating jolt leveled most of the drum in 1930. In ruins for nearly twenty years, it took only twenty days after independence before the new president visited Pegu to drive in the foundation stake. The project stalled, but at noon, on 20 April 1951, Prime Minister U Nu laid the first brick for the rebuilding that was completed in 1954. Both events are

The massive chunk of brick that toppled in an earthquake in 1917 rests on the pagoda platform where it fell. The pagoda was rebuilt but collapsed again after a severe quake in 1930. It was not until the early 1950s that it was restored.

depicted in paintings hung in a pavilion facing the stupa, signed by U Chit Maung (1908-1973), a Mandalay painter.

The pagoda museum on the platform contains hundreds of objects collected from Pegu and the surrounding area (Stewart). These include scores of terracotta votive tablets from diverse periods, two fragmentary roundels from Kyontu, and glazed ware salvaged from the Shwegugyi complex. Highlights are a small early stone Buddha defeating the elephant Nalagiri, and a bronze Avalokiteshvara probably from the Pala realm in eastern India, a rare but not unexpected import. Some objects were recovered from the pagoda following different quakes, the unlabeled items intermingled with finds from excavations at Pegu in 1914. One of the most important is no longer on display but was a bronze seated Buddha with stylistic affinities with later Thai images (Ba Shin). Locals mainly visit the museum to see a cosmetic-stone associated with Bayinnaung's famous daughter named Datukalyar, known for her love for the poet Natshinnaung. Two stone fragments thought to be part of Shiva *lingams* stand on the other side of the pagoda platform (Stewart).

The Hintha Gon Pagoda is identified as the spot where the two geese landed. It is located on a hill to the east of the Shwemawdaw, accessible from a stairway leading from the platform. The temple was restored in the first part of the 20th century by the famous hermit from Mandalay, U Khanti, but the shrine has been rebuilt many times since then. Scores of painted panels surrounding the main shrine tell the legend of the founding of Pegu.

Pegu's most important *nat* shrine is near the temple entrance, nearly at the top of the hill. It is dedicated to Pegu Medaw, the cow-buffalo who raised Asah in the jungle. Ceremonies are routinely performed here for those seeking favour or protection, or to thank the *nat* for a granted-wish. Special male dancers twirl about to live music and devotees make offerings of food, whisky and cash.

Over twelve terracotta roundels from Kyontu, near Pegu, suggest the quality of Mon civilization in Lower Burma in the first millenium. Fragments are on display in the pagoda museum at the Shwemawdaw Pagoda.

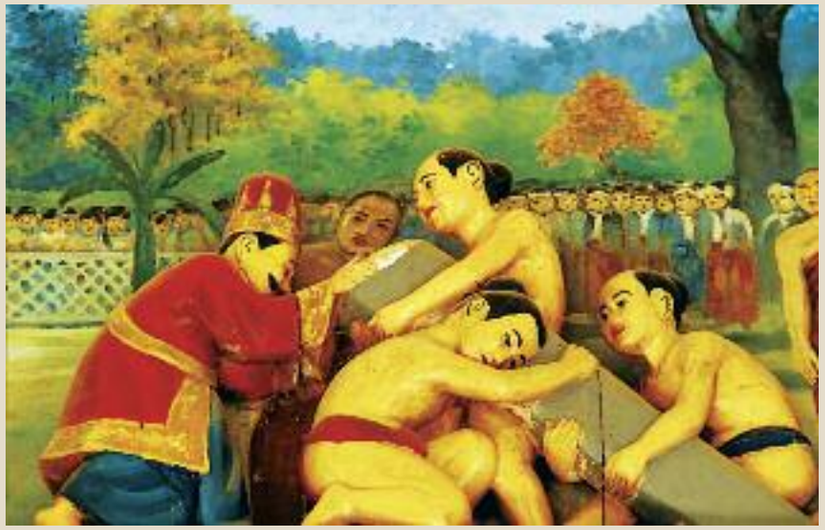
Kalyani Ordination Hall

The modern ordination hall marks the spot where Dhammaceti brought to fruition his vision of reforming the Buddhist community which had become lax and was wracked by schisms. Modeling himself on King Asoka and reformist kings of Sri Lanka, he launched a bold plan to re-ordain all of the monks of Lower Burma. Its centrepiece was the Kalyani Ordination Hall from where the 'seed of religion ...[will] sprout forth', as his famous Kalyani Inscription proclaims (Taw Sein Ko 1893a: 40).

The story of the ordination hall, or *sima* (Pali), is told on ten huge inscribed stones housed in a shed behind the hall. Three are in Pali, while the remaining seven are in Mon. The stones were found in thick vegetation and rubbings were made by E. Forchhammer. Most of them are now broken into hundreds of sections. The text of the inscription is also known from a number of palm-leaf manuscripts and on the basis of these and Forchhammer's rubbings the inscription has been translated and two or three of the slabs pieced back together. The hall today has been rebuilt countless times, but its present position probably marks more or less its original location, on a wide rectangular laterite base.

Dhammaceti's novel solution for reviving the *sangha* was to re-ordain every monk in Lower Burma within the Mahavihara division in Sri Lanka, an esteemed lineage throughout Southeast Asia. He therefore dispatched in 1476 a group of twenty-two elders and their disciples for fresh re-ordinations to the headquarters of the Mahavihara near the bank of the Kalyani River, just outside of Colombo. The Mahavihara traced its origins to a mission sent from King Asoka himself in India and the spot on the river was visited by the Buddha on his third journey to Sri Lanka. The inscription at Pegu was engraved four years after the monks left Burma, in February 1480. A similar mission was sent earlier in the same century from northern Thailand to Sri Lanka (*Jinakamali*: xxiv).

The ordination hall marks the location where a massive Buddhist purification drive was begun in the 15th century. This hall replaced an older one in 1953 and was dedicated by U Nu.



Lay volunteers and a court minister raise a stone marker delineating the sacred space encompassed by the ordination hall. There were eight such original stones but none have survived. Painted panels with small wooden sculptures telling the hall's history were placed within the inner corridor in the mid-1950s.

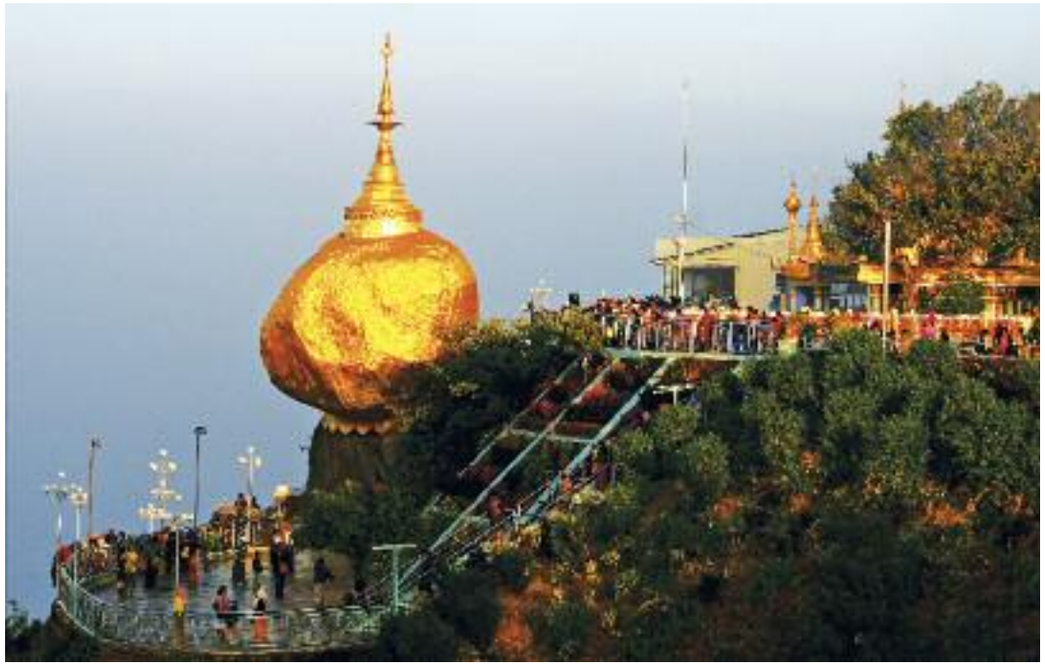
The clerics from Lower Burma were ordained on a special barge, or 'bridge of boats' moored in the Kalyani river 'where the Blessed One [the Buddha] enjoyed a bath.' (Taw Sein Ko 1893: 43). Upon their return to lower Burma, they then oversaw the re-ordination of monks in newly consecrated ordination chambers throughout Lower Burma, beginning with the Kalyani Hall in Pegu. The first ordinations may have been conducted without the benefit of a building or a laterite foundation, according to the inscription. Much of the inscription is lifted directly from medieval Pali ecclesiastical texts compiled in Sri Lanka (Pranke 2004: 16).

The *sima* today is in the midst of a residential district, but the spot was originally isolated and requisitioned from one of the king's ministers. A large stupa on a laterite base beside the hall may go back to the 15th century, and old photographs reveal its ruinous state before its refurbishing (Damrong: 65). A *sima* is traditionally demarcated by special posts, or *nimattas* (Pali), set outside the hall itself. The Kalyani Inscription states that there were eight stone pillars disposed in the eight directions, but no traces survive. Stubby modern little pillars now encircle the hall. A 19th century *sima* on the same spot suffered from an earthquake and was replaced in 1902. This fell into disrepair and was rebuilt in 1953 and opened by U Nu whose stone record stands before the hall's entrance.

Dhammaceti's coronation, his mission to Sri Lanka and the modern rebuilding of the hall in 1953, are illustrated in a series of panels beneath the ceiling of the outer corridor. The donor in 1953 was the owner of a cheroot factory whose logo was a lion, seen above the new bell. He is likely also featured among the panels, supervising the workers, including women, who puff on whacking great cheroots.

Men and women hauling cement for the rebuilding in 1953 sponsored by a local cheroot magnate. This perhaps explains why this woman, centre, is enjoying a puff. Inner corridor, Kalyani Ordination Hall, mid-1950s.

Kyaik-Hti-Yo: The Golden Rock



Weighing over 46 tons, the Golden Rock is held in balance by the Buddha's hair-relics thought to be enshrined within. The Golden Rock was worshipped by the mid-16th century, but its origins stem from a 15th century Mon myth featuring the Buddha coming to Thaton and presenting hair-relics to six hermits. A major sacred site today, it ranks with the Mahamuni Buddha and the Shwedagon.

The conviction that providence has prevented the rock from slipping into the abyss below probably explains why this site was singled out for veneration centuries ago. As one government source concluded, 'If it had been a man-made boulder, then it would have fallen down and have broken into pieces' (*New Light of Myanmar*, 20 March 2001). A common belief since at least the 19th century is that the rock once even levitated high about the cliff but later descended due to our 'degenerate age' (Forbes 1878: 207). Many still maintain today that a string can pass between the boulder and its stone shelf.

Pressing thin sheets of gold on the rock is the culmination of the pilgrimage, but only men are allowed to approach the rock directly. Women must request male family members, friends, or pagoda volunteers to apply the leaf on their behalf.

Origins

A 15th century Mon myth laid the groundwork for the later Kyaik-hti-yo legend, but there is no evidence that the Golden Rock was included in the myth during this formative period. The core legend became attached to Kyaik-hti-yo probably sometime by the 16th century but exactly how and why is unknown.

The most standard modern version was published by the pagoda trustees in 1997, which largely followed one issued by the Ministry of Information in 1949 (Moore 2003: 163; Aung Than: 25-26). Both the modern and the 15th century traditions focus on the Buddha dispensing hair-relics to hermits in Thaton but share little else in common. The current legend begins with the Buddha visiting the king of Thaton and distributing six hair-relics equally to three hermits, or *yathe*, who came from different nearby hilltops, Kyaik-hti-yo, Zingyaik and Kelasa, or Kelatha.

The names of the three hermits vary in different accounts but two were brothers. The elder is often named Tissa who resided on Kyaik-hti-yo mountain and was the foster-father of the Thaton king. Tissa kept his two relics in his topknot. His younger brother hermit, commonly called Siha, dwelt on Mt. Zingyaik where he deposited one hair in a stupa and the second on Mt. Zwegabin, a peak southeast of Pa-an in Kayin State (known as the Duke of York's Nose in colonial times). Siha was the foster-father of Gavampati, a boy who died in childhood and who became a disciple of the Buddha in India in another birth.

Both Gavampati and his older brother, the king of Thaton, were born from eggs produced by a snake-maiden, or *naga-ma*, disguised as a lovely woman, who coupled with a wizard, or *zawgyi*. The third hermit, often called Tila, lived on Mt. Kelasa where he interred one of his two hair-relics in a stupa and kept the other. At Tila's death, the hermit Tissa obtained the hair-relic that was not placed in a stupa and added it to the two already secreted away in his topknot.

As Tissa himself approached death, his son, the king of Thaton, together with the god Thagyamin, or Sakka (Pali), persuaded the hermit to relinquish his three relics for enshrinement in a pagoda that could be worshipped by all. The recluse assented but demanded that Thagaymin locate a stone reliquary that resembled the shape of his head. Thagyamin scoured the universe and returned with a huge granite boulder in which he placed all three hair-relics, carving a cavity in the top of the rock with his magic dagger. The Kyaik-hti-yo hermit then expired, gazing at the Golden Rock, his wish fulfilled.

This version was probably formulated in the late 19th or early 20th century and combined age-old elements in an ingenious fashion that elevated the importance of the Golden Rock. The intricacies of the legend are far from the minds of the majority of pilgrims for whom it is enough to believe that a hermit enshrined one or more hair-relics in a rock that resembles the shape of his head, conveyed there by Thagyamin.

The god Thagyamin, centre, received the hair-relics from the hermit Tissa, right, who inhabited Kyaik-hti-yo hill. With his dagger, Thagyamin bored into the rock and enshrined the relics. The popular wizard, Bo Bo Aung, left. Modern sculptures, just below Golden Rock Pagoda platform.

Tissa the hermit collapsing in the arms of the chief minister. The hermit's adopted son, the Thaton king, watches on the right. The Thaton king convinced the hermit to relinquish his hair relics for the common good, now enshrined inside the Golden Rock. Modern tableau Golden Rock Pagoda Platform.

The Myth in the 15th century

The core myth can be traced to Mon inscriptions from the reign of Dhammaceti (r. 1470-1492) who ruled in Pegu. Only two of the epigraphs retain their dates, both from 1486. Their formulaic texts state that the Buddha was invited to Thaton by a monk named Gavampati in the eighth year following the enlightenment (Shorto 1970; Chit Thein: 87, 91-92). The king, known as Sirimasoka, was Gavampati's kinsmen in a previous life.

Gavampati began life in Lower Burma but was reborn in India where he became a disciple of the Buddha. These early stone records do not specify the exact familial connection between Gavampati and the king, but in later Burmese and Mon sources they are always described as brothers, hatched from two snake eggs. (In the 15th century inscriptions no reference is made to the parentage of Gavampati, the Thaton king or to a coupling with a snake goddess). The Buddha converted the king and then distributed six hairs to an equal number of hermits who collected in Thaton. No personal names or colourful bits of biography are connected to any of the six recluses in these inscriptions, unlike the later traditions. The hermits lived in forest hermitages, some of which were in the vicinity of Yangon, named Asitanjana (Pali); their exact locations cannot be determined. At least one recluse inhabited a hermitage on a mountain top, Mt. Kelasa, located north of Thaton. One of the six hermits returned to his forest retreat where two younger hermits declared: '"But two of us got no such objects of worship"…the senior hermit then replied to the two junior hermits, "Let us pray and make a vow…let this one hair relic become three for the three of us to worship."' (Chit Thein: 91-92). All of the hermits enshrined their hair-relics in stone stupas, according to the inscriptions. Sources for this legend cannot be easily traced, but perhaps the closest parallel is the Buddha's visit to Sri Lanka and his bestowing an undisclosed number of hair relics to a deity who resided on Samanakuta, or Adam's Peak (Stadtner 2008b: 32; *Mahavamsa*: I. 33).

Hermits, a Wizard and a Snake-Goddess

The accretions following the 15th century not only added rich narrative material but also included Kyaik-hti-yo for the first time. Early references are found in two Mon texts, an undated Thaton chronicle named *Uppanna Suddhammavati-rajavasmakatha* (*The Story of the Royal Family of Suddhammavati* [Thaton]) and a text entitled the *Gavampati Chronicle*, attributed to *circa* 1710 (Shorto 1970). These chronicles probably reflect material that evolved in the 17th century, or perhaps even earlier, but which is absent in the 15th century sources.

One of the Golden Rocks mythical hermits is shown bestowing a pouch, presumably filled with relics, to a monk associated with the founding of the modern Hpaya Nga-su Pagoda, located just north of the Shwedagon. This evocation of the Golden Rock conveys the sanctity surrounding this pilgrimage spot. By Maung San Mya. c. 1960s. Hpaya Nga-su Pagoda, Yangon.

These two Mon texts begin with two princes who renounced their father's court in Thaton for hermitages on separate mountaintops. The elder, sometimes called Siha, settled on Mt. Zingyaik where he discovered two eggs left by a snake-goddess who had coupled with a wizard (Mon: *wijadhuiw*, from Pali: *vijjadhara*) (Shorto 1970: 19). The eggs were abandoned when the wizard discovered that his consort, a snake goddess disguised as a beautiful woman, had produced not children but eggs. The wizard ran off in fright and disgust, while his serpentine partner disappeared into the earth.

From the eggs hatched two sons. The elder hermit raised the elder child, who became king of Thaton (often called Siha-raja). The younger child was raised by the hermit's younger brother who lived on Mt. Zwegabin. This child died at a young age and was reborn in India where he became Gavampati, a disciple of the Buddha. Meanwhile, Gavampati's brother had assumed the throne in Thaton. These two sacred peaks, Mt. Zingyaik and Mt. Zwegabin, came to later play an important role in the modern Kyaik-hti-yo myth. Both these mountains, but not Kyaikh-hti-yo, appear in 17th century Burmese poems composed in Lower Burma (San Win, personal communication; Stadtner 2008b).

Gavamapti returned to his birthplace near Thaton to search for his mother who had been reborn and was living as a seven-year old girl. To convince the populace of his former familial descent, Gavamati caused milk to spring from the child's breasts into his mouth (Shorto 1970: 18-21). Gavampati also met his brother, the Thaton king, who requested the Buddha to visit Thaton. The Buddha then flew to Thaton and distributed the six hair-relics to the hermits.

This lore also appeared in later national Buddhist chronicles, although in sharply abbreviated form (*Vamsadipani*: 130-131; *Sasanavamsa*: 40-41). The story is only treated in passing in the famous *Glass Palace Chronicle*, as background to the Mon king Manuha who was captured by the Burmese king Anawrahta.

The *Gavampati Chronicle* of *circa* 1710 divides twelve hermits into three different groups which received hair relics in Thaton. 'One of the hermits', according to the text, 'carried the hair-relic which he received on his head and took it back to enshrine on a big hill called Kutapabbata. Because the hermit carried a hair-relic on his head, the place was called "Shrine of the [relic] which the hermit carried on his head" ' (translation by Mathias Jenny, personal communication). The Mon word used for the shrine in the text is '*kyaik-isi-yiuw*', or *kyaik* (shrine), *isi* (hermit) and *yiuw* (carried on head). The modern Burmese is Kyaik-hti-yo.

The majority of the locations associated with the other eleven hermits in the three groups cannot be identified but one appears to be Mt. Kelasa and probably two were in Lagun, an old Mon word for Yangon. The fact that there were three different clusters of hermits in the *Gavampati Chronicle* suggests that the myth had expanded by this time to include diverse sites in Lower Burma.

These Mon myths are supplemented by key historical references in U Kala's *Great Chronicle,* or *Maha-yazawin-gyi*, compiled in *circa* 1729. The earliest dates to 1555 and refers to a donation at Ithiyo, one early name for Kyaik-hti-yo; there is also a reference to a royal inquiry in 1639 that explored why the rock remained suspended in the air (Alexey Kirichenko, personal communication). At least two or three more references to donations occur later, in the reign of King Pyei (1661-1772), where one stated that the king 'donated *makutas* to the Shwemawdaw [in Pegu], the Itharo Pagoda [at Kyaik-hti-yo] and the Pyinnat Pagoda [in Mottama]'(Than Htut 2000: 83). A *makuta* (Pali), or crown or crest, was probably a spire, corresponding to the modern *hti*, suggesting that a spire capped some type of structure placed on top of the rock. The etymology of *Itharo* or Ithiyo reflects a Burmese corruption of *isi*, or hermit (*rishi*, Sanskrit), combined with '*iwo*', or 'a load carried on the head' (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). This connection with a relic 'carried on the head' was also the distinguishing feature in the *Gavampati Chronicle*. If the reference to a donation in 1555 can be accepted, then it suggests that the Mon myth of the late 15th century had become attached to Kyaik-hti-yo hill within less than a century and adopted by Burmese royalty.

Affixing thin gold sheets to the rock's surface plays an important part of a pilgrimage. Devotions continue until late in the evening.

Another Mon text, translated into Burmese in 1784, recorded that six hermits came to Thaton for hair-relics and returned to their mountaintops (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). All of the locations are near Thaton and included hilltops that became important in the modern legend, namely four, Kyaik-hti-yo, Kelasa, Zingyaik, and Zwegabin. The clustering of the hills near Thaton and Bilin suggests that the myth had narrowed its range, perhaps reflecting the continuing contraction of Mon territory in Lower Burma to the southeast.

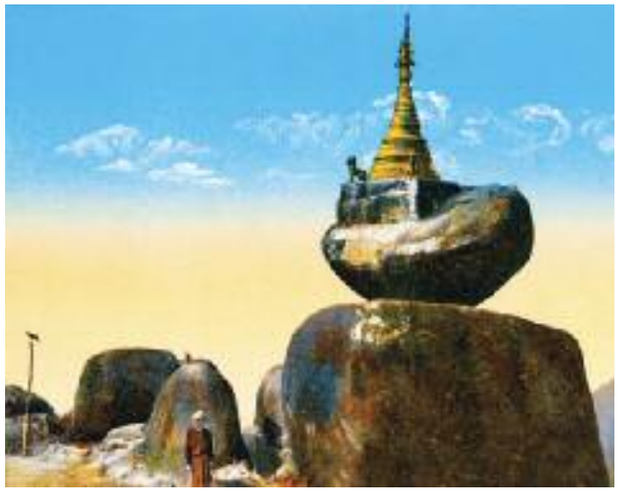
The modern myth drew on material and lore reflected in this manuscript that was translated in 1784, dropping some names and mountains and shifting around others. The hermit on Kyaik-hti-yo, for example, was known as Buddanana but his name is dropped in later accounts. In the current version the three hermits lived on the three most sacred peaks in the region (Kelasa, Zingyaik, Kyaik-hti-yo). This rendition shifted Tissa, residing on Mt. Zingyaik, to Kyaik-hti-yo, and he became identified with the foster-father of the Thaton king. Tissa's younger brother hermit, Siha, was moved in the new version from Mt. Zwegabin to Mt. Zingyaik. He is said to have enshrined one hair on Mt. Zingyaik and the other on Mt. Zwegabin, reinforcing the status of these two venerated hilltops. The hermit Tila remained associated with Mt. Kelasa, conforming to the earlier Mon chronicle. Tissa added to his two hair-relics a single hair-relic from Tila who expired on Mt. Kelasa. The three hair-relics are thought to be enshrined within the rock in one version of the myth.

The Golden Rock's Rise in Popularity

An influential monk named the Thwarn-phyu Sayadaw residing on Kyaik-hti-yo in the 1820s probably had a role in popularising the rock (Maung Cetana 1997b: 13). A small marble inscription from the early 19th century, located on the platform, records the hoisting of a *hti* in 1823 and other donations. The monk also 'discovered' a nearby site where the two famous missionary monks, Sona and Uttara, were said to have expired. Known as Kusinara, it is located on a steep hill about 14 kilometres from Bilin (Stadtner 2008b: 44). It is also associated with a hair-relic and the government rebuilt the shrine in the 1990s.

Kyaik-hti-yo's popularity probably began in earnest in the 1870s and greatly accelerated in the next decade. By 1892 a depiction of the Golden Rock appeared in Upper Burma among the murals at the Mahamuni Temple. It also adorned the walls of a pagoda at Inle Lake from the late 19th century. The unification of Upper and Lower Burma in 1886 must have enhanced the flow of pilgrims, but the real fillip to Kyaik-hti-yo's fortunes started in 1907, with completion of the Pegu-Martaban railway line. Pilgrims were then able to halt at nearby Kyaikto and start the ascent from there. It was visited by thousands annually as early as the 1870s (Forbes 1878: 205-210). Old photographs, beginning in the early 1890s, if not before, show a small stupa perched on top (Temple 1893a: 361, pl. XVIII).

Hermits, dressed in brown with leather hats, are among the pilgrims.



Thagyamin discovered the Golden Rock at the bottom of the ocean and conveyed it to its present location by means of a magic barge, represented by this flat-topped boulder crowned with a stupa. Old postcard.

Although Kyaik-hti-yo had become the most sacred peak in Lower Burma by the 1880s, the full modern myth was not yet formed. During this phase, the only three hilltops associated with hair-relics were Kusinara, Kelasa and Kyaik-hti-yo (Taw Sein Ko 1892: 382). The three hermits on these hills had no personal connection or contact with each other. It was believed too at this time that the king of Thaton's foster-father lived on Mt. Zingyaik, as a hermit; but he was not linked with the other hermits or a hair-relic (Taw Sein Ko 1892: 382). All of this was to change in the coming decades.

The Modern Myth takes shape

The myth that we know today was probably formed sometime in the late 1890s or early in the 20th century. It brilliantly reassigned the hermits on different mountain tops to elevate the importance of Kyaik-hit-yo and to pull in the king of Thaton as a principal actor. This version was probably fashioned by a local monk, perhaps prompted by the need to codify the legend as the site grew in fame. It drew on elements that are reflected in the Mon text translated into Burmese in 1784 in which all of the key hermits and hilltops are mentioned. The early Mon account featured six hermits and six hilltops, but the modern one reduced the hermits to three and shifted them from one mountain to another to elevate Kyaik-hti-yo and the Thaton king.

This new configuration not only put the Kyaik-hti-yo hermit in the epicentre of the myth but also connected him to his son, the Thaton king, the first patron of the Golden Rock. It also created for the first time the family drama between the dying Kyaik-hti-yo hermit and his adopted son who had convinced his father to relinquish his three hairs for the common good. The demand to locate a stone reliquary that resembled the shape of the hermit's head is also found in this version, apparently a new accretion. It is a tightly structured myth that drew in all of the principal protagonists, the major relics, important local sacred hills and the king of Thaton, the rock's first royal patron. The myth today bears little resemblance to its 15th century legend, but its core element remains the same – the Buddha bestowing hair-relics to hermits in Thaton.

There are at least two slightly different versions today, both endorsed by the government. One maintains that the Buddha dispensed two hair-relics to six hermits for a total of twelve strands. The Kyaik-hti-yo hermit placed his two in the Golden Rock, together with one belonging to a hermit from Mt. Kelasa, enshrining three relics inside the rock (*New Light of Myanmar*, 20 March 2001).

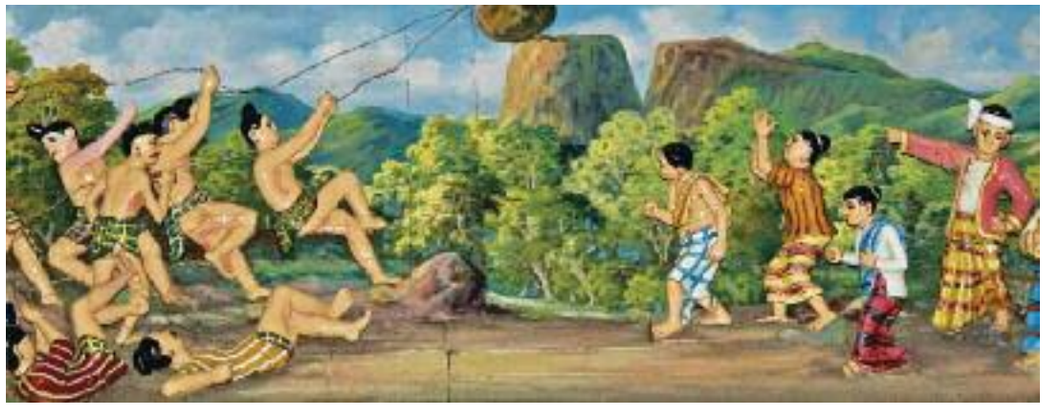
Golden Rock and the barge-shaped boulder which conveyed it to Kyaik-hti-yo are shown above the Shwedagon, each site reinforcing the sanctity of the other. Glass painting, circa 1905. Private Collection, Yangon.

Shwe Nan Kyin's mother enticing the wizard, left. Discovering her true snake-nature, he fled. She later delivered the two eggs that hatched to become Shw Nan Kyin and her sister. Daw Pwint's pavilion, Shwedagon Pagoda, c. 1930s, repainted.

Yet another official version claimed that the Kyaik-hti-yo hermit deposited a single hair in the rock. This is recorded on a metal plaque near the causeway leading to the rock, dated 19 March 2001, the day the most recent *hti* was raised. That even the number of relics can differ in two state-sponsored versions issued during the same week in 2001 suggests the fluidity of the myth.

The rock also became tied to the Shwedagon through a complicated numerical reckoning of the numbers and planets associated with the syllables in the names of both Kyaik-hti-yo and the Shwedagon (Moore 2003: 157). Such connections express a bond between the two monuments enhancing their power. Exactly when these formulations came into vogue is difficult to say, but there are paintings of the Shwedagon and the Golden Rock together, dating from *circa* 1905 (Stadtner 2008d). A measure of how these two shrines are linked is seen in the miniature depiction of the Shwedagon on the vane attached to the new *hti* installed at Kyaik-hti-yo in 2001, while earlier there was once a huge replica of the Golden Rock at the Shwedagon (Aung Than: fig. 7). On a hillock north of the Shwedagon is a temple complex called the 'Small Kyaik-hti-yo', or Kyaik-hti-yo-lay, with many tableau featuring the key players in the myth, including even a monkey-faced Karen.

Local Karen fail to topple the Golden Rock, using ropes. The caption beneath this depiction claims the Karen were angry at Burmese pilgrims trampling their crops. The Karen are turned into monkeys in other accounts. Daw Pwint's pavilion, Shwedagon Pagoda, c. 1930s, repainted.



The Golden Rock, centre. To the right stands Shwe Nan Kyin speaking to her father who is stuck in a tree and turned to stone with a monkey face, as punishment for disrespecting the Golden Rock. She is shown again on the left, interceding on her father's behalf with the king of Thaton. Burmese cartouches identify the action.

On the same wall, not illustrated here, is perhaps Shwe Nan Kyin being escorted to the Thaton court for her wedding.

This example at Inle Lake indicates how widespread the legend became and how many versions coexisted. Shwe Yan Pye Pagoda, Nyaung-shwe, Inle, c. late 1880s-1890s.

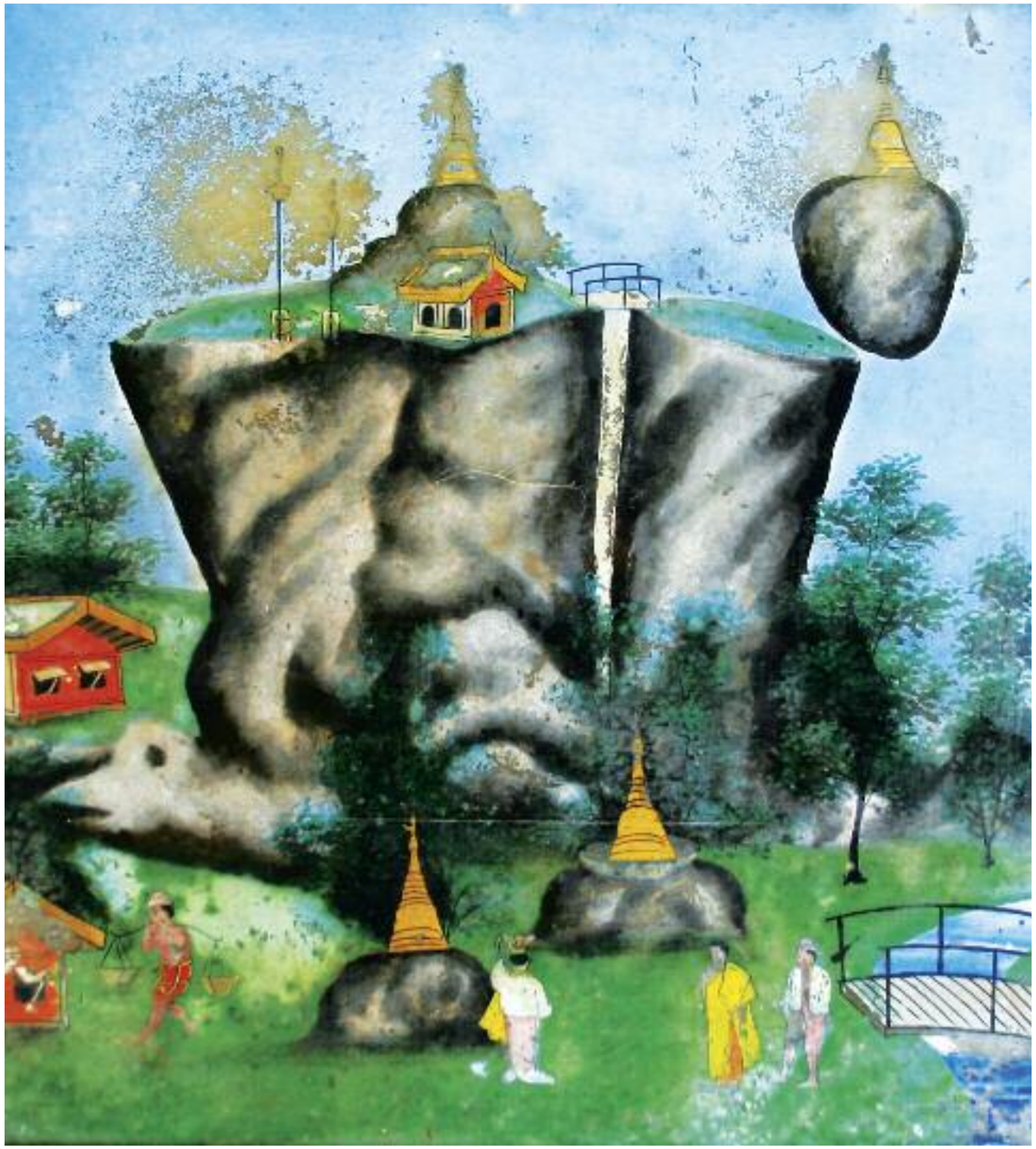
Shwe Nan Kyin: from an egg to a queen

The site is now inextricably linked to the fate of Shwe Nan Kyin, a legendary queen wed to the king of Thaton. A reference to her and the Golden Rock appeared in the early 1920s, but her sad tale probably became attached to the site sometime during the preceding century, if not earlier (Enriquez 1922: 60). She plays a minor role in the basic narrative, solely as a wife to the king, but her presence at Kyaik-hti-yo is pervasive. Her main centres of worship are two pavilions located on opposite sides of the walkway approaching the rock. The pavilions contain life-size tableaux depicting Shwe Nan Kyin with her family in faux court scenes and her death. They are always depicted in traditional Karen attire. Such displays were in existence in the 1920s (Enriquez 1922b: 60). Despite Shwe Nan Kyin's importance at the site, she is not mentioned in the standard local histories or chronicles which focus on the Golden Rock.

Her story begins yet again with a wizard who mated with a snake-goddess disguised as a woman. This union resulted in two daughters, not sons, and the eggs were also abandoned once the wizard realised that his charming consort was in reality a serpent in disguise. The sisters were raised at first by separate hermits, thus echoing the biographies of *Gavampati* and the Thaton king. The hermits soon gave the youngsters to two Karen couples to raise. Shwe Nan Kyin went to a simple pair in the countryside and her sister to a Karen chief. Both daughters were eventually betrothed to the king of Thaton who became enamoured after spotting them on a pilgrimage to Kyaik-hti-yo. The complete story is best appreciated among a number of painted panels displayed inside Daw Pwint's pavilion on the platform of the Shwedagon, probably from the 1930s.

Many of Shwe Nan Kyin's attributes are perhaps conflations of early Mon myths (Stadtner 2008b). The queen of a Thaton king is said, for example, to have been raised by Karens but born from a pumpkin; in another section of the same myth the mother of the first kings of Pegu was a snake-goddess in disguise, poisoned by her husband once he discovered her venomous snake nature (*Lik Smin Asah*: 159, 178).

There are many different versions of Shwe Nan Kyin's fate after her marriage, but each ends in tragedy. In one variant she was unhappy at court and the king therefore sent her home. A tiger attacked her travel party and she died trying to out run the beast. Her father, furious with the king for dismissinging his daughter, gathered the local Karen and attempted to pull the Golden Rock off its ledge with ropes. Not only did the rock refuse to budge, but the villagers turned into monkeys (Enriquez 1922b: 60). Other stories claim that the Karen turned against the Golden Rock after an influx of Burmese pilgrims to the region inadvertently trampled their crops.



Believed to levitate, the Golden Rock is the subject of this souvenir glass-painting, c. 1905. Private collection, Yangon

Devotees cover the deceased Shwe Nan Kyin in bank notes and vigourously massage her body. Such tableaus were noted here in the 1920s but her origins are probably much earlier. A pavilion near the platform of the Golden Rock.

Other tales claim that Shwe Nan Kyin was happy at court but failed to heed her family's wishes to return home to make offerings to a mountain-deity, popular among the Karen. For rebuking her parents and for neglecting the local *nat*, she paid the price by dying from exhaustion during the tiger-chase. Yet another account recounts that she fell ill at court after failing to perform a Karen ritual at the time of her marriage. Pregnant and with her foster-father, she returned home from the court to propitiate the offended spirit. It was too late, since the spirit sent a tiger to scare the life out of her. Upon death, her body turned into stone and resisted cremation (Tun Aung Chain & Thein Hliang: 89). Elsewhere it is told that it was Shwe Nan Kyin's father who was turned to stone with a monkey face for showing disrespect to the Golden Rock. This version is depicted was Inle Lake in the late 19th century; Shwe Nan Kyin is called Nan Shwe in the Burmese captions.

Shwe Nan Kyin should be considered a female *nat*, inasmuch as she met an unnatural death and is propitiated today. Her biography also underscores the time-honoured virtues of devotion to parents, husband and the local gods. This is reflected in an inscription in one of her pavilions at the Golden Rock that declares that the hall was renovated in 2001 in the desire that the 'effect of Shwe Nan Kyin's past deeds and sins be extinguished.'

Other themes are the role of fathers, uncles and brothers and the protection that they are expected to provide to female family members, or the intractable troubles that kings have with queens

and the tragedies that ensure. Some of these motifs come together in a popular play, *The History of Thaton*, written by Saya Yaw and published in 1877 (Maung Tin Aung 1937: 112). There is no mention of hair-relics or pagodas, but the character is a woman raised by a non-Burmese tribe. She later became the queen of Thaton but was transformed into an ogress, through no fault of her own. She was then slain by her husband but came back to life as a *nat*. Moreover, her brother and her son nearly killed the king, to avenge her death. The obvious similarities with Shwe Nan Kyin should not be viewed as a direct influence of the Golden Rock stories but rather reflect deeply held cultural values. Perhaps the best expression of such concepts is the famous story of King Anawrahta's estranged Shan queen who was banished from court, a story recounted in the 19th century *Glass Palace Chronicle* (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 83). Her principal pagoda is located east of Mandalay and she has important shrines in the Shan State. Her persona has no direct connection to Buddhism but large Buddhist shrines are built to commemorate her.

The Golden Rock is depicted among the murals at the Mahamuni temple, c. 1892. The two figures below on the right are perhaps the wizard and the lovely snake-goddess. South corridor, Mahamuni Temple, Mandalay.

These themes continue to resonate in Burma, to judge from the success of a posthumously published novel, *Not Out of Hate* (1991) by Ma Ma Lay (1917-1982). The tale is set in the colonial period when the pregnant heroine fled her oppressive husband to attend her father's funeral. She contracted tuberculosis and, returning home to her husband, died in his arms, un-reconciled. Although she was never banished, the conflict between husband and wife and the wife's allegiance to her father underscore the social values that many of these tales share.

Inasmuch as so many of the stories end with Shwe Nan Kyin's father and the local Karen attempting to dislodge the rock, her presence at the site very probably reflected tensions between the Burmese Buddhist community and Karen Christians in the late 19th century. For example, the Karen National Association (KNA) was formed in 1881 at a time of open strife between Burmese and Karen. A recent study noted that, 'To the Burmans, the Christian Karen supported the foreign [British] demolition of the kingdom and humiliation of Buddhism' (Gravers: 240). The folklore of Karens intent on demolishing one of the country's most sacred sites carries a strong message. The transformation of the Karens into monkeys is seen as humiliating but just punishment. Such anti-Karen sentiments enjoyed a long history. It was recorded in the 1920s that the rock 'did not in fact touch ground until the Karens tried to pull it down' (Enriquez 1922b: 61). These factors, however, are not meant to imply that Shwe Nan Kyin's presence at the Golden Rock can be reduced to simple ethnic and religious conflict.

Thaton: The Buddha and Suvannabhumi

Thaton touches heartstrings of Mon and Burmese alike but for entirely different reasons. For the Mon Thaton marks the spot where the Buddha himself introduced Buddhism to Lower Burma, while for Burmese Thaton is the place from which the Pali canon was seized from the Mon and introduced to Pagan in the 11th century. Thus, Thaton's small size belies its importance in the national mythology.

The Mon name for Thaton in the 15th century was Sadhuim, from Sudhammavati (Pali). Sudhammavati derived probably from Sudhamma, the hometown of the Buddha Sobhita, one of the 28 Buddhas in Burmese Buddhism. But Lower Burma had a flourishing Buddhist culture centuries before Pegu was made the capital in the 14th century. That monks from 'Aramana', or Ramanna, were invited to Sri Lanka to launch a purification drive in the mid-12th century is an indication of Lower Burma's Buddhist stature at that time (Wickremasinghe: 253). The monks were likely from Thaton or Mottama, or both.

Thaton's distinctive sculpture rivaled Pagan's in quality but little survives. Discovered in a mound near Thaton's Kalyani Ordination Hall, this standing Buddha is perhaps as early as the 11th century but may be much later. Shwesayan Pagoda godown.

The earliest surviving mythology surrounding Thaton appears in stone inscriptions from the reign of the Mon king Dhammaceti (r. 1470-1492) whose capital was Pegu. These epigraphs identify Thaton as the place where the Buddha came from India to convert its first king. This mythical ruler, named Sirimasoka, had a kinsmen named Gavampati who was a disciple of the Buddha in India. And it was Gavampati who persuaded the Buddha to visit Thaton to convert his brother and the land. At Thaton the Buddha presented six hair-relics to the same number of hermits. Later, following the Buddha's cremation, Gavampati brought a tooth-relic to Thaton that replicated itself 33 times. The king then enshrined the teeth in 33 stone pagodas in Thaton which subsequently fell into ruin and became lost (Shorto 1970). Two missionaries from India, Sona and Uttara, were sent to Thaton at the time of Asoka and rediscovered the lost pagodas. They then distributed the tooth-relics to stupas in Lower Burma. The most important was the Shwemawdaw in Pegu (see page 146). These 15th century legends were greatly elaborated upon over the centuries and eventually underpinned countless

pagodas in Lower Burma, including the Golden Rock (Stadtner 2008b). Following the 15th century there emerged in Lower Burma a far greater emphasis on hair relics, at the expense of tooth relics.

Thaton's first king was the offspring of a wizard and a snake goddess disguised as a woman, a myth found in many different Mon and Burmese versions preserved in post-15th century chronicles. The king hatched from a snake egg and was raised by a hermit living on Mt. Zingyaik, a sacred peak about 26 kilometres south of Thaton. His brother, a product from this same unorthodox union, was raised by another hermit, on Mt. Zwegabin, a nearby hilltop southeast of Pa-an in neighboring Kayin State and was reborn as the famous Gavampati. Another tradition claims that the Buddha dispensed eight hairs at Thaton, not six (Bigandet: 391).

Stupa foundation faced with laterite, c. 500 A.D., at Zothoke, northwest of Thaton. Such monumental architecture reveals the flourishing state of Mon civilisation in Lower Burma in the first millennium.

Although by the 15th century Thaton was dwarfed in importance by Martaban and Pegu, even, it remained a fountainhead for Mon identity, as revealed in later chronicles. The Kalyani Inscription records that the capital at the time of Sona and Uttara's vist was Golamattikanagara, a site possibly identified with a walled enclosure in the village of Ayetthema, at the foot of the range containing Mt. Kelasa (Myint Aung).

For Burmese, Thaton is immortalised as the place seized by the Pagan king Anawrahta (r. 1044-77) who captured the Pali canon from the Mon. This version of events was formulated first by the Mon themselves in the 15th century and later adopted by the Burmese. Anawrahta and Pagan kings did exert control over Lower Burma for some time, but the traditional accounts of seizing the canon can be dismissed (Stadtner 2008a). The canon's association

The Shwesayan Pagoda, left, is noted for tooth-relics of the Buddha, probably reflecting a lingering tradition from the 15th century when the Thaton king received a tooth-relic from his brother, Gavampati, a disciple of the Buddha. This relic multiplied itself into a total of 33 tooth relics. This turn-of-the-century worship hall, right, is a gem.

A terracotta votive tablet common to the Thaton region, such as at Winka, c. 500. Private Collection, Yangon.

with Thaton is also tied to Buddhaghosa, a renowned 5th century commentator whose home was often identified as Thaton in Burmese sources. He traveled to Sri Lanka and returned to Lower Burma with the scriptures that were centuries later conveyed to Pagan in Upper Burma (*Vamsadipani*: 116). Buddhaghosa became included in the national mythology, together with an embellished life history (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 46).

Old Thaton

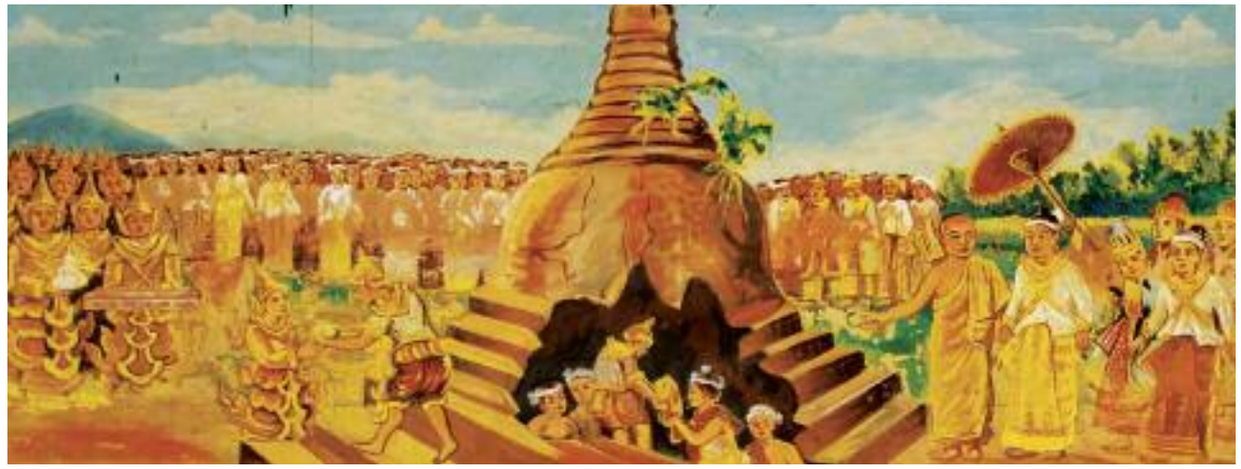
Early explorations at Thaton revealed a large rectangular walled enclosure. Finger-marked bricks beneath the walls and at nearby sites suggest a first-millennium settlement (Moore & San Win 2007: 215). The major pagoda complex, now dominating the centre of town, occupies only a small portion of this ancient enclosure.

Buddhism was known in the Thaton area from around the middle of the first millennium, as witnessed by the nearby brick monastic sites of Kyaikkatha, Winka and a stupa base at Zothoke. Three Hindu stone sculptures were also discovered in Thaton shortly before 1900 but their find-spots are unrecorded; and there are no surviving Hindu temples in Thaton. All three sculptures were destroyed during World War II when on display in the library at the University of Rangoon. They probably date to between the 8th and 10th centuries. Two of the sculptures relate closely to a sculpture in the Kawgun Cave, near Pa-an. The iconography, with three gods emerging from Vishnu's navel, is virtually unique to Burma. Two similar depictions of Vishnu occur at Pagan, further evidence of Mon influence from Lower Burma at Pagan (Stadtner 2005: 144).

Vishnu reclining on his serpent, with Brahma (left), Vishnu (centre) and Shiva (right) seated on lotuses above. This distinctive iconography is also found at Pagan, suggesting Mon influence. Displayed in the university library in Yangon, it was destroyed in World War II. After Temple 1893a: pl. XIV.

The Shwesayan Pagoda

The principal stupa is inside a vast walled compound facing the main street. Its real history is unknown but the most recent pagoda chronicle, or *thamaing*, probably reflects traditions current in the 19th century, if not much earlier. The story begins with the Buddha visiting Thaton and converting its first king, called Thuri-sanda, or Surya-chandra. The king offered the Buddha his crown and the Buddha then presented his four teeth which were miraculously replaced in his mouth. The Buddha pointed to a hill where he wished the teeth to be enshrined. The king then discovered on the spot an old ruinous stupa containing relics belonging to the three Buddhas preceding Gotama (hair-relics of Kakusandha, the walking stick of Konagamana, and the emerald bowl of Kassapa). The four teeth were enshrined with these other relics and the stupa rebuilt. Another local chronicle claims that Anawrahta from Pagan removed four tooth-relics from the pagoda placed there by the first Thaton king, according to the *Shwesayan Hpayagyi Thamaing* (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: xxi). The spirits became so enraged at this sacrilege that they caused the king to go mad and slip on the skirt of his queen, perhaps modeled on a similar episode in a Sri Lankan chronicle (*Mahavamsa*: XXIV. 6). References to tooth-relics at Thaton



The Thaton king, right, supervising the enshrinement of tooth-relics in the Shwesayan stupa. The new relics, on the left, are conveyed to the pagoda by Brahma and Thagyamin. The 15th century Thaton tooth-relic legend makes no mention of relics belonging to previous Buddhas. Mural. By Than Maung. Shwesayan Pagoda museum.

probably reflect lingering 15th century Mon traditions which centre on Gavampati bringing a single tooth to Thaton that multiplied thirty-three times. The Buddha's instructions and the relics of the previous Buddhas relate directly to the themes of the Shwedagon legend.

The original shape of the Shwesayan is difficult to determine, but it may have once have resembled the terraced Thagya Pagoda and another stupa on the platform usually called the Pitaka-taik; all of these examples used laterite extensively, probably excavated from a huge laterite-lined tank in one corner of the compound (Oertel: 22).

Three of the four worship halls have been refurbished but the principal one on the east is nearly pristine, from the early part of the 20th century. Most of the sculpture is plaster, formed around thin wire, which has been gilded or painted. It is rare to find old plaster work in such fine condition.

The eclectic pagoda museum displays objects donated over the last hundred years or so, plus terracotta votive tablets from various periods recovered in the area. Panels depicting the history of the Shwesayan and its relics are painted on the walls. A storeroom behind the museum holds ancient stone inscriptions, including the famous *trap* and *pandit* epigraphs, and sculptures. The *pandit* inscription lists all twenty-eight Buddhas, probably the earliest reference of this concept in Burma (Luce 1974: 133).

The modest Thagya Pagoda once boasted 64 terracotta panels depicting the last ten *jatakas*, the revered *Mahanipata* (Pali). If there were 64 plaques, then each of the ten tales would have been given about six tiles. In the late 19th century the pagoda was in 'a state of great decay…and many of the tablets have fallen out, while others are much injured and likely to disappear also' (Temple 1893a: 240). Twelve were described in the 1880s and fifteen panels survived *in situ* by the 1930s. The pagoda was repaired around 1896 which began a series of white-washings that has virtually obliterated the

Detail of an intricate plaster sculpture created on a wire armature, early 20th century. The Buddha cuts his hair after leaving the palace, the god Sakka waiting above to collect it. East entrance hall, Shwesayan Pagoda.

Over 60 terracotta jataka *plaques, featuring the last ten tales, were once placed inside niches on the terrace. The base and terraces were plastered and whitewashed in the early 20th century. Only some ten plaques survive in situ.*

jatakas. The pagoda has three staircases today but there were originally four. The dome of the stupa is restored, but its ancient size was probably somewhat larger. Old photographs show the horizontal registers of the laterite base with projecting geometric motifs (O'Connor: 337). The Thagya pagoda is testimony to the impressive monumental architecture in the Mon country by the 11th century, if not earlier. It is possibly the same age as the octagonal Maung Di Pagoda, across the Yangon River near Twante.

The narrative sequence of the tiles matches the special Mon order of the last ten *jatakas*, an order that differed somewhat from the sequence in the Pali canon favoured in Sri Lanka (Krairiksh). The same Mon sequence is repeated in the *pandit* inscription in the storeroom and is adopted at Pagan. Luce and others long ago recognised that this ordering of the *jatakas* at Pagan likely indicated Mon influence from Lower Burma.

Only one plaque, cleaned of whitewash, is preserved in the storeroom. It has been identified as Mahosadha fleeing to a potter's home, bottom register, while the top half shows Mahosadha sitting in a carriage en route to the palace. Other plaques are also divided into two horizontal segments. None of the *jataka* tiles at Pagan are separated into horizontal divisions in such a fashion, suggesting a mode of depiction local to Thaton.

One corner of the compound is occupied by over 500 large stone slabs incised with the Pali canon. Two sets were commissioned in 1912 by the famous hermit from Mandalay, U Khanti, one for Sandamuni Pagoda in Mandalay and the other for the Shwesayan in Thaton. For unknown reasons, over 200 of the slabs were never shipped to Thaton and are still stored in the compound of the Kyauk-taw-gyi Temple, Mandalay (*Myanmar Times*, 8 September 2008).

Mahosadha taking refuge with potters, below, and returning to the palace in a carriage.

The Kalyani Ordination Hall is outside the compound wall on an adjoining street. The present structure has suffered many modern refurbishments, but it probably marks the site of a 15th century ordination hall used in Dhammaceti's huge re-ordination of monks launched from the Kalyani Ordination Hall in Pegu. The Kalyani Inscription in Pegu contains a long list of ordination halls in Lower Burma which includes one called 'Gavampati ordination hall in Thaton', or '*sim gawampati sadhuim*' (Mon) (Blagden 1928: 276). This hall from the 15th century was also probably the location of a much earlier ordination chamber from the 11th century, evinced by sculpted pillar-like 'boundary stones' placed randomly today around the basement terrace and a dedication stone (Luce 1985: 172; Luce: 1953). The stones were sculpted on one side with the last ten *jatakas* which have been compared to *sima* stones in northeast Thailand (Krairiksh 59-63; Murphy Chapters 4 & 5). Two of the *jatakas* are accorded two stones, and the others were also probably given two stones, for the sake of symmetry. This would make a total of twenty *sima* stones. The two stones for each *jataka* would perhaps have been placed one behind the other in ten spots equidistantly around the missing hall.

Towering behind Thaton is a peak famous for the Myathabeik Pagoda containing an emerald bowl (*myathabeik*) and hair-relics of the Buddha associated with King Asoka's son and Sri Lanka. The hill was visited by a previous Buddha named Anomadassi who was offered earth by two white mice. The Buddha then prophesied that the mice would become the future royal family of Thaton. These are probably 19th century legends but it is hard to be sure. The hill is also the site of an inscription by Kyanzittha (r. 1084-1113) commemorasting the restoration of a nearby shrine (Luce 1969 I: 56).

Later, Burmese traditions wove the *nats* into Thaton's history by claiming that the city was protected by the body parts of an Indian buried 'with diverse charms and rites' around the city walls (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 78). The Indian's brother escaped to Anawrahta's court and defused the black magic shielding Thaton, enabling Anawrahta to seize the city and the canon. This same brother coupled with an ogress on Mt. Popa and their two sons became the famous Taungbyon *nats*. In this way, Thaton and the capture of the canon was tied at some time to a key *nat* tradition of Upper Burma.

The earth goddess, Wathundaya or Vasundari (Pali), rescues the Buddha from Mara and his army by wringing her hair to produce a flood. Late 19th-early 20th century lacquered, carved wood, Shwesayan Pagoda Museum.

Fragment of one of the 11th century sima stones devoted to the last ten jatakas. Most were around 1.35 metres. This example from the Vidhura Jataka shows four kings around a square lake. After U Mya, Exploration in Burma.

This early 20th structure probably marks the spot of an 11th century ordination hall. Sima-*stones from the period with scenes from the last ten jataks encircle the base.*

Moulmein: 'Lookin' Lazy at The Sea'

The Mahamuni Temple, upper right, and the Salween River and Mottama in the distance. Moulmein was an important colonial centre but slipped into the shadows after Independence.

Moulmein, or Mawlamyine, is Burma's third largest city, but its pace differs little from Kipling's estimation, 'lookin' lazy at the sea'. Although numbering more than 300,000 souls, it feels like a small town that refuses to be a city. This once small fishing village gained importance at the close of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826) when it became the capital of British Burma, from 1827 to 1852, after shifting from Amherst, or modern Kyaikkhami, on the nearby coast. Moulmein's population soon exploded and by the 1830s it reached 14,000. Until the 19th century, however, it was always overshadowed by Martaban, or Mottama, on the opposite bank of the Salween River, or Thanlwin, located at the end of the new bridge. Martaban was a major administrative division, called Muttima-mandala in 15th century Mon inscriptions, with Buddhist connections to Sri Lanka and Thailand (Chirapravati). Moulmein was mentioned in the Mon portion of the Kalyani Inscription and was later among the '32 *myo*' or thirty-two cities within the Martaban division (Shorto 1963: 575). The entire area passed into Burmese hands during the 16th century after the fall of Pegu, but little about Martaban today suggests its former greatness. Martaban was also known as an entrepôt for glazed jars shipped throughout Asia, beginning in the 15th century, if not earlier (Gutman 2001; Dijk 2006)

Moulmein's ethnic mix today reflects the liberal immigration policy begun in the 19th century, with many Indians, mostly Tamils, and a smaller number of Chinese. The Indian descendents are either Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Catholic or Protestant. Karens in Moulmein are mostly Christian. The city enjoyed a burst of commercial activity in the colonial era, and rice and teak traders emptied their fortunes into monasteries. Local patronage even extended to a Mon monk from central Thailand who introduced the Dhammayutt order in 1874 (Chaturawong). The town was prosperous into the 1930s when the revered hermit from Mandalay, U Khanti, with the help of a local Chinese couple, commissioned in 1935 a large metal replica of the Mahamuni Buddha, enshrined in a temple on the ridge overlooking the town.

Moulmein formed the backdrop for George Orwell's short story, *Shooting an Elephant*, in which a local crowd prodded a reluctant British officer to down a rogue elephant. The town perked up briefly during General Ne Win's socialist era when smuggled goods passed through from Thailand, but it has slipped back into a kind of hibernation. It is the capital of Mon State and home to the Mon Cultural Museum.

A Queen Wedded to Flux

The principal sites are tied to the fate of Queen Sein-don, one of the many wives of King Mindon (r. 1853-1878). She was not a chief queen but was nonetheless granted access to Mindon's deathbed, together with other minor consorts and the royal physician from Sri Lanka. Her fate changed overnight with the king's death and her detention on 6 November 1878, on orders from King Thibaw (r. 1878-1885). It was shortly thereafter that she and her spiritual advisor from Mandalay, Sayadaw U Waziya-yama, escaped to the backwaters of Moulmein in self-exile. Queen Sein-don was born in 1840, so Moulmein became her new home as she approached forty. Its quiet pace probably came as a relief after the glamorous but tumultuous years in Mandalay.

The Thingaza Sayadaw was also in Moulmein. He had been a leading member of Mindon's Thudamma Council and survived an assassination attempt by Buddhist rivals (Mendelson: 116).Other notables in town included one of the last Mughal emperor's sons exiled there from Yangon. Moulmein even became home to the fourth daughter of Sein-don's nemesis, King Thibaw. She expired in 1935 and her tomb is just below the Mahamuni temple, in a traditional design resembling her mother's shrine in Yangon. Small plaques also commemorate the recent deaths of her grandchildren, whose English names, Terrance and Margaret, are also included.

Moulmein's backwater status has preserved its colonial period civil and religious architecture. This monastic building stands between the Mahamuni Temple and Kyaik-than-lan Pagoda. 42809

Mottama, or colonial Martaban, was a port famous for exporting large glazed jars throughout Asia. Now made only in Upper Burma, they are shipped to Lower Burma on the Irrawaddy. The potter is compressing the top of this vessel to expand its shoulders and reduce its height. Kyaukmyaung kiln.

Replica of the Mandaly Mahamuni Buddha, made in 1904. Only the face is metal. Full-scale models of the Mahamuni are found throughout Burma, many organised by the hermit U Khanti of Mandalay. Mahamuni Temple, Moulmein.

Moulmein may have been a backwater but its residents embodied the country's rich history.

Sein-don soon became a nun and resided in a nunnery now bearing her name on the town's ridge; on the east slope behind her monastery rests her tomb. She also undertook one or two pilgrimages to the Temple of the Tooth at Kandy, from where a prominent young Christian woman named Catherine de Alvis accompanied her from Sri Lanka to Moulmein and converted to Buddhism (Bloss).

The Mahamuni Temple

Moulmein's most sacred sites dot a long ridge running parallel to the river, from which spectacular views unfold in all directions. The local name for the ridge is Nagawitha, with the key structures linked by a long covered corridor. Mostly dating to the 1920s, this walkway makes for one of the most atmospheric strolls in all of Burma.

A major pilgrimage stop is the Mahamuni Temple which is located on the extreme northern edge of the ridge. It was the combined creation of Queen Sein-don, the Sayadaw U Waziya-yama, and a wealthy widow named Daw Shwe Pwint. Its focus was a replica of the sacred Mahamuni Buddha bronze image captured in Rakhine by King Bodawpaya in 1785 and established outside of Amarapura. This large Buddha soon became the country's single most sacred image, which explains why those in Moulmein sought to create a replica in their hometown. It may have also been inspired by an earlier copy nearby in the town of Kyaikto, north of Thaton, made in 1894 after King Thibaw's elder sister gave permission for the mould to be made at the Mahamuni shrine in Mandalay.

A plaster mould taken from the original Mahamuni in Mandalay, to be used in Moulmein. By Po Yin, c. 1935. Mahahamuni Temple, Moulmein.

The story of the Mahamuni Buddha and the Moulmein temple is told in fourteen painted tin panels, each with a Burmese caption. The set was commissioned after a complete renovation of the temple in about 1935, and the works hang in their original positions within the central hall. The series unfolds above the doorway on the right (east) and ends at the opposite side (west).

The painter responsible for all of the panels signed his name 'Po Yin, Moulmein, painter [*bagyi-saya*]', sometimes in English and other times in Burmese. Po Yin's observations, combining whimsy and piety in equal measure, have assured him a spot as one of the most compelling artists from this era. He captured the flavour of colonial times, mixing English officials, Indian merchants and Burmese of all stripes into his compositions. Also, nowhere in Burma are so many works from the 1930s in such pristine condition and in their original setting. The first nine panels are devoted to the legendary casting of the image in Rakhine and its reception by King Bodawpaya two thousand years later in 1785 at a jetty near Amarapura. The last five take the story into the early 20th century, beginning with the former queen Sein-don and her Buddhist teacher supervising the preparation of a mould of the original image in 1903, made with permission from King Thibaw's sister; only the face was copied, since the body of the Buddha was already thickly encrusted with gold leaf in 1903. The mould is then shown being transported by steamer to Moulmein. The next panel depicts the casting of the present image, begun on 27 April 1904, on the northern edge of the Nagawitha Ridge, although in reality only the face is metal, the remainder being in brick covered with gilded plaster. The penultimate panel shows the temple after completion, but it had become derelict by 1935. The restored temple is shown in the last panel, as it was in 1935, with two smart motorcars and families of substance. The only elements original to the early 20th century are the Buddha, its base, and the towering throneback which is a tour de force. The rebuilt temple, which encloses the sanctum, is largely untouched from the 1930s. Casting large Buddhas was in vogue at the turn of the century in many places, such as in Sittwe at the Atulamarazein Pagoda.

In one corner of the hall is a recent portrait of Daw Shwe Pwint, signed 'Shwe So Win, artist'. In another is a portrait by the same artist of Pwa [Grandmother] Bi, said in the caption to have donated

Daw Shwe Pwint was a major donor in colonial Moulmein, cooperating with Queen Sein-don and Sayadaw U Waziya-yama. By Shwe Soe Win. Mahamuni Temple.

The Mahamuni Temple was built in circa 1904 but reconstructed in the 1930s, its fresh appearance captured in this panel painting hung in its interior. By Po Yin, c. 1935.

Three Good Wives planning civic works, left, while the fourth, Mrs. Haughty-Highborn, beautifies herself. This ancient jataka *tale is set in a colonial drawing room. By Po Yin, c. 1935. Mahamuni Temple. Moulmein.*

the Buddha's throne, which is probably the tall lacquered base we see today. In another corner is the rosy cheeked and ageless Seindon, while in another is her Buddhist mentor, Sayadaw U Waziyayama, both paintings done by Shwe So Win.

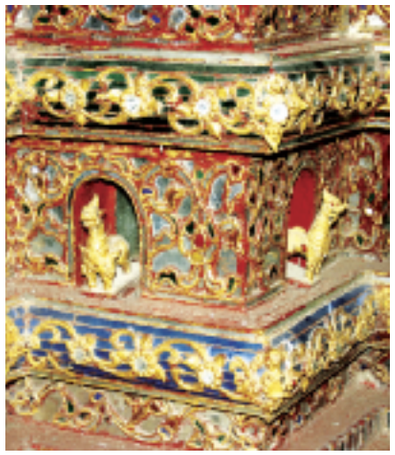
Good Wives, Reformed Wives and Dangerous Wives

The remaining panels are also by Po Yin and narrate two *jatakas*. One is the story of Magha, the Buddha-to-be who devoted himself to good works for his community (*Jataka* 31). Falsely accused of plotting a rebellion, he was sentenced to death by the king at the tusks of a elephant. The elephant refused to gore the lad, proof of his innocence.

The next three panels complete the story, starting with Magha and his three wives at the table planning civic works. The righteous spouses are named Goodness, Thoughtful and Joy, but his fourth wife, Mrs. Haughty-Highborn, is busy only beautifying herself before a mirror, aloof and selfish. The next panel shows a park and other benefactions of the family, followed by Magha's death. All four wives are grieving, but in the *jataka* tale itself the self-centred wife is reborn as a crane. After atoning in successive rebirths, the reformed wife re-married Magha after his rebirth as the god Sakka, or Thagyamin. This *jataka* underscored the virtue of community sacrifice and the suffering reserved for one who pursued selfish aims. The characters are shown as well-to-do Burmese, with Indian servants, reinforcing the notion that local elites could compete as equals in a stratified colonial world.

The remaining panels concern a king returning from battle to be told by his new, young queen that his son by a previous queen had seduced her (*Jataka* 472). The prince was unjustly accused, since it was the queen who made the advances which he resisted. Led off to his death, he is pushed off a cliff but is rescued by a flying snake-king, a miracle establishing his virtue. The prince, who is the Buddha-to-be, then became a hermit, an unexpected finale after the accusation of royal cuckolding. The last panel shows the hapless former queen facing the executioner's sword before being tormented in hell. The wicked queen in the original Pali tale is thrown off the cliff as punishment, but alas, she had no snake-king to break her fall. Twin themes poignant in colonial society, loyalty and betrayal, perhaps guided the choice of this *jataka*. Nearly identical copies of

Detail of the base of the Mahamuni Buddha, covered with lacquer and inlaid with coloured glass. The base, the huge throne back and the Buddha are the only works original to the founding of the temple in c. 1904. The rest of the temple belongs to a renovation campaign in the 1930s. Mahamuni Temple, Moulmein.



Po Yin's *jatakas* are found at the Mahamuni Temple in Kyaikto, north of Thaton, completed by U Thoung Po in 1952 and refreshed in 2003 by another artist and his son.

The Perfumed Chamber

The 1904 Buddha faces south, inside its square sanctum. Numerous stone inscriptions set within the walls suggest that the major rebuilding of the temple was finished in 1935 and it was only after then that attention turned to the interior ornament, between 1935 and 1941. No donations were made during the Japanese occupation, beginning again only in 1946. The glass mosaic work inside the sanctum was donated in part by the celebrated U Lu Pe Win, Department of Archaeology, in 1939. Donations to the image are also recorded in inscriptions placed into the walls. The crown and ear ornaments were restored in 1937, and the *salwe,* or chest bands, and epaulettes donated in 1939. The shrine itself is referred to in some inscriptions as the Gandhakuti (Pali), or Perfumed Chamber. The intricate wide base likely belongs to the same period as the original casting in 1904.

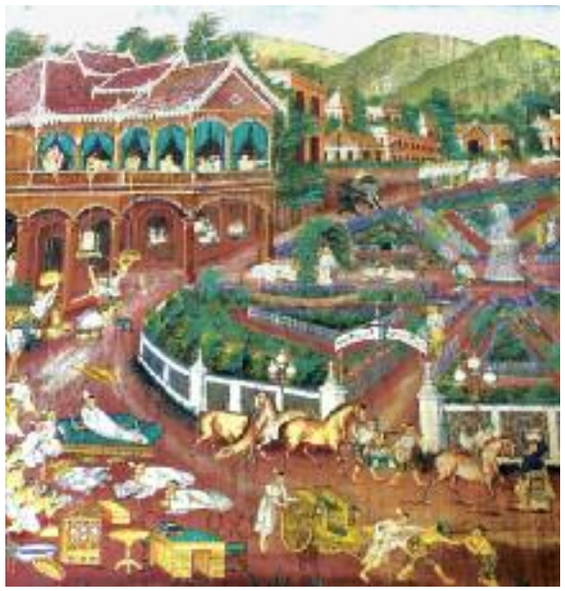
Dozens of plaques set inside and outside the shrine walls attest to other donations, many between 1936 and 1940. The shrine doorways, now painted green, were given in 1936 by various notables, such as a timber merchant, while the tin roof was restored the following year. The ornamental wall tiles are linked to an inscription from April 1938 and old floor tiles from that period were replaced sometime after 1993. Small pieces of mirror cover the walls inside and outside and at least some of these were donated by the town Commissioner in 1940. A member of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve made a dedication in 1946. Other donations are recent, such as a family of spice merchants in the market who contributed to the maintenance of the upper walls in 2002. The fine wooden ceiling of the entrance hall likely dates to the 1930s, together with pillars bearing donor inscriptions from 1937. A nearly identical ceiling is found at the Kyaikkhami temple nearby on the coast. Outside is a stone inscription in Burmese and Pali dated to 1937, donated by a publisher of religious tracts from Yangon.

The painted wooden ceiling dates to the Mahamuni's reconstruction in the mid-1930s.

A queen executed, left, and forever tormented in hell, right, for attempting to seduce the king's son born from a former queen. She falsely accused the prince who was sentenced to death but was saved to pursue the life of a recluse as the Buddha-to-be (Jataka *no. 472). In the Pali* jataka, *she is pushed off a cliff. By Po Yin, c. 1935. Mahamuni Temple. Moulmein.*

Detail of fresco below. A strolling English couple are accosted by two Indians hawking an object obtained at the liquidation of Sumedha's mansion, 1901. Reclining Buddha Pavilion.

Sumedha reclining, centre left, supervises clerks disbursing the contents of his house, shown above. Residents tussling in the street for every scrap poignantly contrasts with Sumedha's calm renunciation. A painted inscription indicates that the hall's murals were finished in 1901. Reclining Buddha Pavilion.



A Walk Back in Time

A long covered walkway from the Mahamuni to the Kyaik-than-lan dates to the 1920s when the Mahamuni shrine was undergoing its remodeling and the town reached one of its prosperous peaks (Chaturawong). About a dozen painted panels line the walkway, many dated in the 1930s. Some feature popular *jatakas*, such as the tale of Prince Temi oblivious to seductive damsels. At least one panel is signed 'Maung Bo Yin, Moulmein', probably the same Po Yin, in his youth, whose later works adorn the Mahamuni Temple. Other artists include Maung Ba Han, and Maung Khin Maung from the Kyauk-thwe-dan (gem-cutting) Quarter, Mandalay. The latter was responsible for two paintings, both dated to 1935. Some of these works were restored in 1955 by Dagon Chit, from Yangon, and his pupil Thein Maung. A few panels depict the benefactions by a monk named Sayadaw U Lakhana, each building noted with a date, ranging from 1920 to 1939.

Frescos, 1901

The only major frescos to survive from the turn of the 20th century in Lower Burma are found in a large hall below the entrance to the Kyaik-than-lan Pagoda. Their quality suggests a flourishing artistic community whose works are largely lost. The painting is arranged in an L-shape on two walls, encompassing a large reclining Buddha that fills up most of the room. The hall was in existence at least by 1895 but the murals were finished only in 1901 (Bird 204). Three wide doors lead into the room from the covered corridor. The other side of the hall is open, with views of the city and river below.

Burmese captions at the bottom identify the major scenes. One ink inscription records that the painting was completed in 1901 and funded by public subscription and by May May Pwint, almost certainly the same Daw Shwe Pwint who patronised the Mahamuni bronze nearby in 1904.

The north wall is taken up with the Buddha's early life, beginning on the right near the entrance. Familiar scenes from his birth and early childhood unfold chronologically such as Maya giving birth, the brahmin astrologers, and the miracle at the ploughing festival. Other scenes include the Four Sights, the departure from the palace and the death of the Buddha's steed. The last composition on the wall was dreadfully 'refreshed' in 2006. The caption partially reads, 'Buddha-to-be coming to Yazago [Rajagaha] for alms-gathering; people are confused if he is a human, god [*nat*] or snake dragon [*naga*]; people and the king realized he is the Buddha and offered him food.' Below the ceiling are ten Buddhas, each beneath a tree attended by pairs of gods, monks and laymen.

Ink inscriptions identify each Buddha and the special tree under which he obtained enlightenment. The ten belong to the series of 28 Buddhas and were probably meant to continue on the side-wall.The order of the Buddhas is rather confused.

The wall facing the reclining Buddha is organised around three arched doorways. The left side is devoted to Mount Meru, surmounted by the palace of Thagyamin, or Vejayatana (Pali). The four wives of the god are arranged about him and on the right is the Chulamani Stupa enshrining the Buddha's topknot. The bottom of the mountain is encircled by the fish, Ananda, or The Endless One, consuming its own tail (Herbert 2002: 86). The caption below reads 'The embryo of the Buddha is taken from the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods to Kapilavatthu [his birth place]'. This provides a thematic connection with the birth-scenes continued on the adjoining wall.

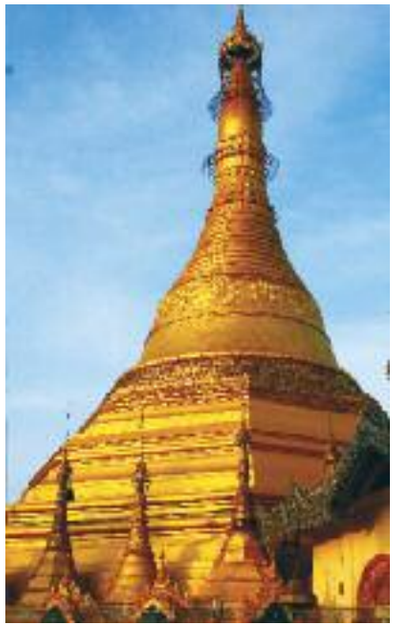
Indra with his four wives, left, on top of Mt. Meru. The stupa contains the Buddha's topknot. The embryo for the future Buddha is taken from here to his mother in Kapilavatthu, furnishing the link between this scene and those depicting the birth, 1901. Reclining Buddha Pavilion

The scenes to the right are dedicated to the life of Sumedha and the death of the Buddha. Sumedha's renunciation is told with great relish, with his belongings being emptied out onto the street. The caption reads in part 'The Would-be-Lord, Sumedha giving away mansion, treasure, elephant, horses, carts and taking refuge in the forest.' Some locals scuffle among themselves for his possessions, highlighting Sumedha's renunciation.

Further to the right is Sumedha, prostrate before Dipankara. Nearby is his fiancée whose marriage is now moot since he has vowed to renounce the world. The action takes place in Ramma-waddy (Rammavati, Pali), according to the inscription, the legendary hometown of Sumedha. It is also one of the legendary names of Moulmein, and this is perhaps why this scene was given so much prominence in the murals.

The narrative then jumps to the far right, at the end of the wall, and moves left, presenting first the preparation of the Buddha's tainted meal, then his death, cremation and the division of the relics. The caption on the far right partially reads, '… day before he died, a goldsmith offered him a meal.' The nature of the poisoned meal is debated by scholars, but an animal of an undetermined nature is shown slaughtered at the bottom. In another section the wife of the general Bandula presents a priceless cloth to shroud the coffin; named Mallika, she had earlier conceived a child, thanks to the intervention of the Buddha. The scene beneath the elaborate funeral pyre is labelled, 'Maha Kassapa followed by *yahandas* [enlightened monks] paying respect by holding up

Dancers celebrating the birth of the Buddha, Reclining Buddha Pavilion, 1901.



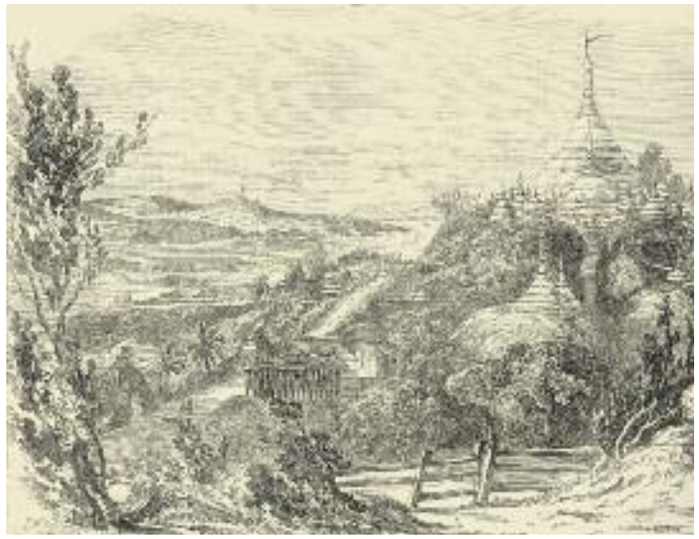
The Kyaik-than-lan is a major regional sacred site, with various legends linking it with different relics.

the Buddha's feet.' These episodes surrounding the death of the Buddha echo the theme of the recumbent image nearby. Many of the same subjects are treated in a painted manuscript, or *parabaik*, from Upper Burma, about a hundred years earlier (Herbert 1992). The doors facing the corridor were donated in 1936 by two ladies from merchant families. Other frescoes from this period are inside a small monastic building across the corridor.

Kyaik-than-lan Pagoda

Moulmein's most sacred shrine is the Kyaik-than-lan, located only steps above the painted pavilion containing the reclining Buddha image. The pagoda was important before the colonial period, but its modern rise depended directly on the growth of Moulmein in the 19th century. Like so many pagodas in Lower Burma, its origins likely go back to the first millennium, but refurbishing over the centuries has left little from before the early 20th century. Foundation myths over the ages have come and gone and others have combined to form a disjointed, multi-layered narrative.

One tradition begins with the Buddha's coming to the Naga-witha Ridge after first visiting Lamphun and Chiang Mai in ancient Yonaka Country, that is, northern Thailand. The Buddha declared to his disciples that in an earlier birth he had lived on this ridge as a golden goose (*hamsa*) and predicted the rise of Rammavati, or Moulmein. Some sources attribute the construction of the pagoda to a Mon king named Mutpi Raja in 875 or 974 AD, but he is not found in the usual Mon royal genealogies. The king is also said to have deposited a tooth-relic, originally from Suvannabhumi, and a hair-relic which was given to a hermit named Kappa who lived on a hilltop. Other relics included a set of scriptures and a gold Buddha. This version is distantly associated with the 15th century Mon myths



The Kyaik-than-lan Pagoda sits at the summit of the ridge facing the Salween, seen on the left. After London Illustrated News, *27 March 1852.*

linking the Buddha's visit to Thaton and his dispersal of hair-relics to hermits there. Yet another account connects the stupa with a tooth-relic that eight monks from Sri Lanka re-discovered in Burma (Bonpyan Sayadaw: 149). Unraveling these various traditions and knowing when each was current is difficult, in the absence of inscriptions and dated chronicles. A connection with neighbouring Thailand is also noted in at least one Mon chronicle (Shorto 1970: 18).

A large bell placed on the platform dated to 1527 is the earliest firm date connected to the stupa, donated by a self-proclaimed Mon king named Singasura who is otherwise unknown (Shorto 1963: 578).

The stupa was probably in a ruinous state by time of the First Anglo-Burmese War. A visitor in 1826 did not even mention the pagoda, suggesting its fame arose later (Crawfurd). It was restored by Maung Htaw Lay (1776-1869), a Mon governor of Dala, near Yangon, who fled to Moulmein after a Mon uprising in 1827. His two-sided inscription on the platform, made in the year of his death, recorded his donation of rest houses, wooden and brick monasteries and unspecified repairs at the Kyaik-than-lan where he hoisted the *hti* in 1830. It also noted his sucess in Hamsavati requesting British officials to desist from desecrating pagodas during the Second Anglo-Burmese War. By the 1890s 'vast sums' were spent on the pagoda by Daw Shwe Pwint, before her attention turned to the Mahamuni Temple (Bird: 204).

This depicts the metal reliquary made in Moulmein and donated to the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy in 1899. It is a detail from an incised double-sided marble inscription in the Kyaik-than-lan compound. The story of the mission to Ceylon is told in Burmese and English.

S.S. Derbyshire and 'in the Great Heell'

Moulmein participated in a wider Theravada world at the turn of the century, a history brought to life in a bilingual stone inscription on the pagoda platform and from other sources. A tooth-relic from Sri Lanka was put on tour in Burma's large cities in the 1890s. A fund drive was launched by 'four wealthy Buddhists' in Moulmein for a special reliquary to enshrine the tooth once it returned to Sri Lanka. Daw Shwe Pwint, called in the inscription Ma Shwe Bwin, was among the four. The appeal succeeded in 'the shape of money, gold and silver ornaments and precious stones.' The reliquary was made in Moulmein in 1897 over a nine-month period and included a base and canopy. It was taken by train to Yangon in December 1898, and then put on board the S. S. Derbyshire, accompanied by 1, 200 pilgrims. It reached Colombo on 10 January 1899. The reliquary was offered to the Temple of the Tooth, or the Dalad Maligawa (Sinhalese), in the 'mountain capital' of Kandy on 26 January. The epigraph concludes with a list of the gold, silver, pearls, precious stones and even custom duties that formed the donation, including an incised sketch of the reliquary itself. The casket was 71 cm in height. Burmese pilgrims often visited the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy; two stone pillars donated by Burmese from the colonial era can be seen there today.

Striking bells after making a donation is thought to share the merit with others. Kyaik-than-lan Pagoda platform.

Queen Sein-don's monastery perched on the ridge, from the street below, 1890s.

Sayadaw U Waziya-yama also received from Sri Lanka a tooth replica now enshrined in his former monastery. Other replicas from Sri Lanka during this same period are found at the Shwesandaw Pagoda, Prome, and at Paungde, just south of Prome. The Moulmein example is on view all of the time, but the other two are kept in strongrooms.

A bell on the platform contains an inscription in Mon and Pali, with a short imprecatory note in broken English, 'He who destroyed to this bell they must be in the great heell [sic] and unable to coming out. This bell is made by Koona Lingahyah the Priest and weight 600 viss. No one body design to destroy this bell. Maulmain,

Few places better capture the opulence of the former Mandalay Palace and 19th century court interiors.The 'Throne Room', Queen Sein-don's monastery, 1890s.

March 30, 1855.' (Temple 1892). In another corner hangs a rusty Japanese shell casing from World War II, now used as a temple bell, a grim irony.

The Queen's Monastery

Queen Sein-don's monastery is located a few steps south of the Kyaik-than-lan, lower down the ridge. She lived here as a nun, organising good works with Sayadaw U Waziya-yama and others, such as Daw Shwe Pwint. Three wide brick stairways reach the raised verandah whose original appearance is marred by modern shuttered windows. An unobstructed view of the complex is available from the street below, where steps lead up to the monastery.

The structure probably dates from the 1890s and was donated by Daw Shwe Pwint (Fraser-Lu: 273). Its plan is based on Burmese models, with the central chamber set to one side; the 'Mon monasteries' of Lower Burma place the main hall in the centre, with covered verandahs on the north and west sides (Chaturawong).

The central hall, often called the Throne Room, is one of the few places in Burma that captures the opulence of the former Mandalay Palace. One wall is dominated by a lacquered throne flanked by two side doors, all set within a solid wall composed of rectangular mirrors set in niches. The wall has hundreds of gilded wooden deities silhouetted against the mirrors (Fraser-Lu: 273; Ferrars: frontispiece). The top row and some niches on the row below contains animals, probably referring to the animal rebirths related in the *jatakas*. A dividing wall on the south side of the room bears gilded wooden sculpture depicting *jatakas*, such as Sama struck by an arrow. Opposite the throne is a chamber dedicated to the tooth-relic replica from Sri Lanka, now displayed in a glass case. The main entry is ornamented with gilded sculpture depicting the *Vidhura Jataka* whose refurbishment in 1998 is recorded in an inscribed plaque. The temple's formal name is Yatana-bon-myin.

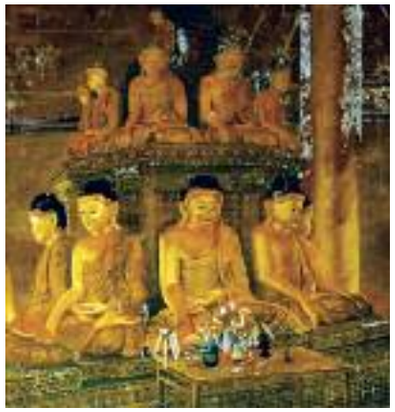
Modern portraits on the wall show Queen Sein-don seated with Mindon, listening to the Thanyog Sayadaw recite verses in Mandalay. The painting is dated to 1980, and signed Maung Maung. Another modern painting shows the couple alone, signed 'portrait artist, Aye Myint Lay.' These are contrasted to another recent portrait of the Queen, shown now as a nun, shorn and without her crown.

Eight square pillars adorned with carved bracket figures are among the best surviving woodwork in Lower Burma (Fraser-Lu: 273). The pillars, located outside the hall, are probably original to the monastery's founding in the late 19th century; inscriptions on each testify to unspecified refurbishments in the 1960s. The sculpture has been painted recently but their originality still sparkles. The scenes have not been fully identified but at least one is drawn from the *Vessantara Jataka*. Another depicts a man with a tiger-mask devouring Ma Shwe U, the lovely lady at the loom who refused the advances of the Taungbyon brothers. The inventive,

Queen Sein-don and King Mindon attending upon the Thanyog Sayadaw who recited from memory 7,762 sections from the Pali canon. Sein-don fled persecution in Mandalay after Mindon's death, becoming a leading actor in Moulmein's Buddhist life. By Maung Maung, 1980. Queen Sein-don's Monastery.

A winged cherub, doorway, throne room.

The bracket figures in the Queen's Monastery are among the most inventive wood carvings in Lower Burma. Ma Shwe U is being devoured by a tiger sent by the younger Taungbyon brother, 1890s.



The main shrine at Kyaikkhami. The topmost Buddha is shielded by snake hoods. One temple legend relates that four wooden Buddhas were set afloat from Sri Lanka, one landing in Kyaikkhami and the others at different coastal sites in Lower Burma. Shwe Indein Pagoda, Inle Lake. By Maung Saw Maung, c. 1965.

complicated compositions with multiple characters and animals in contorted poses is reminiscent of Burmese puppets, twisted together in mannered chaos. Other brackets with single figures are simple, almost chaste in comparison. For the exiled former queen these surroundings must have evoked a nostalgia for Mandalay tinged with melancholy.

The recent popularity of the Suvannabhumi hair-relic tradition has flavoured the latest histories of at least two old pagodas in Moulmein, the Uzina and Kyaikthoke or Kyaik-thutbhyuya pagodas.

Sacred sites south of Moulmein include a Hindu temple just off the main road to Mudon. It is dedicated to Dandayudhapani, or the One Who Holds a Club, a deity popular in South India and the son of Shiva and Parvati. The temple enjoys regional popularity among Hindus and Buddhists. Nearby is the largest recumbent Buddha in Burma, constructed in concrete and 180 metres in length. One can stroll inside, similar to Jonah inside the whale. Like so many of these outlandish acts of merit, this would have been impossible without a local charismatic monk mustering donations from the military regime. The cleric, the Win Sein Sayadaw, raised part of the funds by organising a private lottery (Rozenberg: 38).

Kyaikkhami, further south from Mudon and on the coast, was the former Amherst, the first British capital of Burma for a year or so before it shifted to Moulmein in 1827. The temple probably became important only in the early 20th century but is now a pilgrimage spot for those traveling to these parts. Perched on rocks jutting into the sea, the temple is subject to the ebb and flow of the ocean. The painted brick temple one sees today was built in 1927 after the wooden one perished in flames the preceding year; the tiered-roof has been replaced many times. Organising the rebuilding was U Chit Hlaing (1879-1952), the nationalist imprisoned for protesting the visit of the Princes of Wales in 1921.

The world's largest recumbent Buddha, concrete, near Mudon, south of Moulmein. 'Small is Beautiful' is a maxim unknown among donors in Theravada communities.

The centrepiece is a layered platform with seventeen Buddha figures, the topmost one shielded by a snake hood, which may be a reference to the association between snakes and water. Several distinct legends surround the pagoda. One involves a Sri Lankan king who sculpted four Buddha images set afloat with the help of King Asoka's son and a monk named Upatissa. They landed near Bassein, Kyaikto, Tavoy and the fourth at Kyaikkhami. The image at Kyaikto is bronze and noted for a mole on its temple that is said to move from place to place on the face.

Signboard for raising funds for the restoration of a Hindu temple dedicated to a deity popular in South India named Dandayudhapani, near Mudon. Many Tamils immigrated to Moulmein throughout the colonial era.

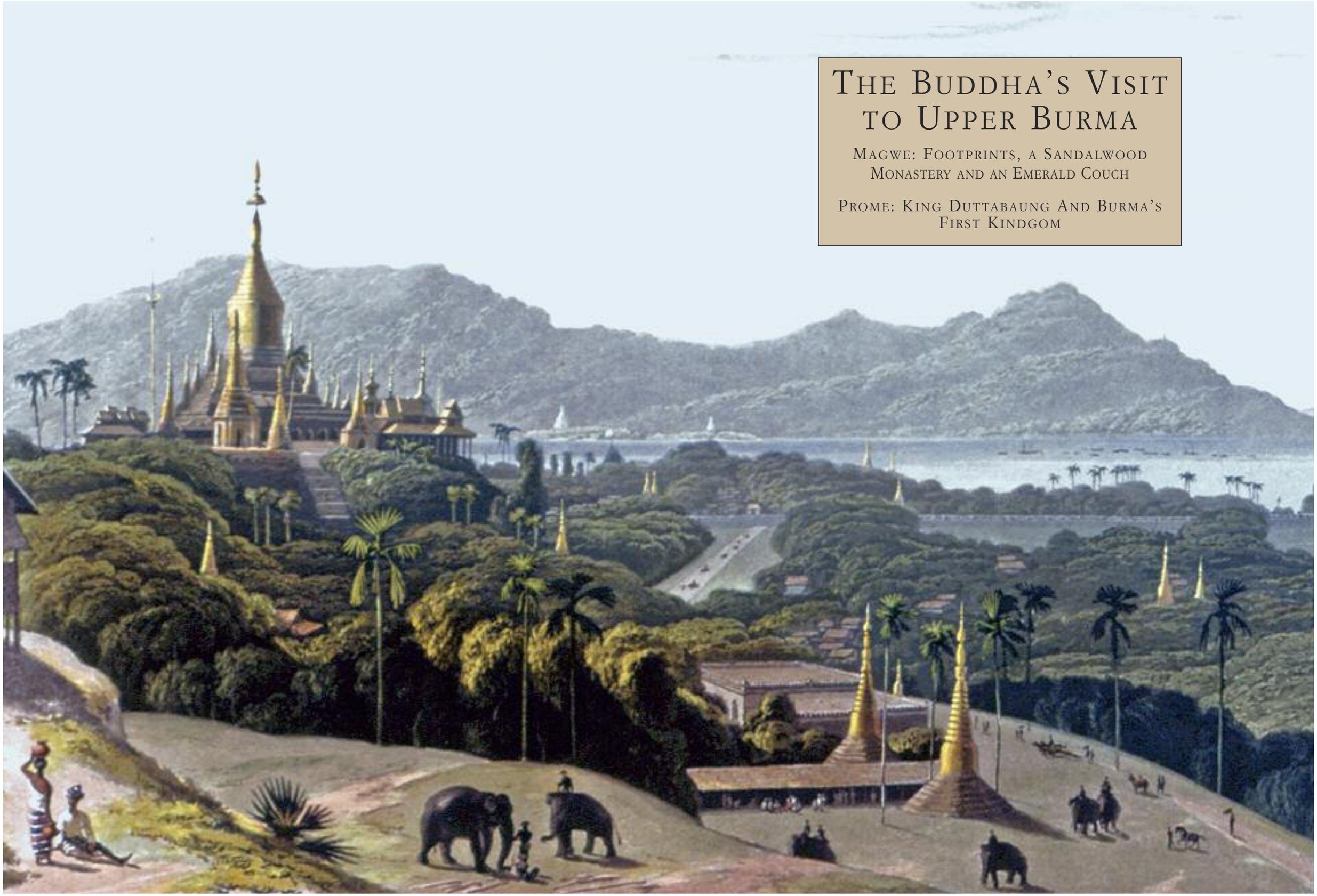
Another legend involves the hermit named Kappa who received eleven hair-relics from the Buddha, believed to be enshrined within a rock beneath the Buddha; the same hermit is involved with the founding of the Kyaik-than-lan pagoda in Moulmein (Bonpyan Sayadaw: 114). Another legend claims that a local queen waded out to a boulder, was trapped by the rising tide and died, missing a rendezvous with the Pagan King Alaungsithu who drifted by the rock in his famous barge. She became a spirit named Ye Hla and the sound of the sea is interpreted as the wails of Ye Hla's spirit. A kilometre or so from the temple is a sacred site for Burma's Baptists, the modest tomb of Ann Judson who died in 1826; the ornamental iron fence surrounding the tomb replaced a wooden one, probably in the late 19th century (Grant: 17). Her gravesite was originally on the bank of the Salween, as it met the sea, but at some stage it was moved inland to its present location. A drawing of the original site, with its 'light bamboo fence' appears in an account from the 1830s (Malcom: 36).

Kyaikkhami shrine, built on a rock outcrop in the sea. Its brick walls replaced a wooden structure destroyed by fire in the 1920s.

The Buddha's Visit to Upper Burma

Magwe: Footprints, a Sandalwood Monastery and an Emerald Couch

Prome: King Duttabaung And Burma's First Kindgom



Magwe: Footprints, A Sandalwood Monastery and an Emerald Couch

This gilded stupa marks the spot of the legendary Sandalwood Monastery, constructed by two brothers and visited by the Buddha himself, before flying to the nearby Man River and leaving a footprint for a snake-king and another for a converted heretic. Legaing village.

Three major pilgrimage spots in and around Magwe mark the Buddha's introduction of Buddhism to Upper Burma. The most sacred is the Shwesettaw which honours two footprints left by the Buddha, one to a devoted snake-king and the other to a converted heretic. The second is the Sandalwood Monastery which was constructed for the Buddha by two brothers. The third is Magwe's Myathalun Pagoda, venerated for its enshrined emerald couch, gifted by the Buddha to two reformed ogres.

The Buddha's visit to the Magwe region was immediately followed by an equally pivotal mission further south to the Prome area where the Buddha foretold the rise of the nation's first capital, Shri Kshetra, and its first ruler, King Duttabaung. In this fashion, both Buddhism and the state were founded in Upper Burma, one on the heels of the other. The Golden Footprints, the Sandalwood Monastery, Shri Kshetra and King Duttabaung were first referred to in a chronicle known as the *Yazawin Kyaw*, composed in Ava in the first half of the 16th century (Pranke 2004: 196). The introduction of Buddhism and the prediction of a nascent state were probably modeled on the legendary visits of the Buddha to Sri Lanka, extolled in Sri Lankan chronicles well known among the political and religious elite throughout the Theravada world.

Previous page: *The Shwesandaw Pagoda and the Irrawaddy River in the distance, at the time of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826). Aquatint. Captain James Kershaw's* Views in the Burman Empire, *1831. Courtesy: Richard Cooler.*

The specific stories of the footprints and the Sandalwood Monastery in the *Yazawin Kyaw* were drawn from early Pali sources in which the original locations and narratives all set in India were transposed to Upper Burma. For example, the vast region surrounding Magwe was called Sunaparanta, probably chosen because it was one of the six 'countries' which received missionary monks from India at the conclusion of the Third Synod. It appears in Pali sometimes as Sunaparanta, or Aparantaka, such as in the *Mahavamsa*. The region was identified with western India and the Narmada River.

The reasons for selecting the Magwe area for these pivotal moments in Burmese religious history are unknown, but it occurred by the 16th century, if not much earlier. These early legends in the *Yazawin Kyaw* are touched upon also in virutally all of the later national religious and historical chronicles, such as the *Vamsadipani*, *Sasanavamsa*, and the *Glass Palace Chronicle*; they are commonplace themes in Burma today.

The Sandalwood Monastery

The legendary monastery is now memorialised not by an actual monastery but by a large stupa in the village of Legaing, a few kilometres from the west bank of the Irrawaddy. The story, from early Pali sources, revolves around two merchant brothers who were residents of Sunaparanta, a region in western India. The older brother, Maha Punna, became a monk, while the younger, Culla Punna, remained a merchant. Culla Punna constructed a monastery for the Buddha at Legaing, from sandalwood (*tharekhkan*). The Buddha attended the dedication of the monastery in Legaing and remained there for seven weeks and converted 84,000 inhabitants, according to the Pali commentary, the *Punnovadasutta-atthakatha*, that appears to have provided the basis for the mythology (Duroiselle 1906b). The story is abreviated in many later Burmese sources (*Vamsadipani*: 137; *Sasanavamsa*: 61; *Glass Palace Chronicle*: 7).

It was during this very visit to the Sandalwood Monastery in Burma that the Buddha met the heretic and the snake-king and left his footprints for them to worship. The Sandalwood Monastery in Legaing was also tied in later legends to the fortunes of Alaungsithu (r. 1113-1169) who visited here on his magic barge and completed a prophecy by building a stupa (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 130). Legaing

The Buddha flew through the air from India with 499 disciples to convert Upper Burma, beginning at the Sandalwood Monastery. By Ma Thin Mi, North Okkalapa, Yangon, 1993. Sandalwood Monastery Pagoda compound.

Ogres sinking the boat carrying the sandalwood. One of the brothers, the monk Maha Punna, floating above, saves the day. By Ma Thin Mi. Sandalwood Monastery Pagoda compound.

The Shwesettaw on the Man River is the place where the Buddha met the snake-king and Sacchabandha, the heretic who became the 500th disciple. The Shwesettaw was sacred from at least the 15th century. Looking down from Sacchabandha's shrine to the former snake-king's abode and the enshrined footprint on the riverbank, left.

was also known as Vanijjagama, a name found in Pali commentaries and U Kala's chronicle. It is also the name of a monastery established by an early Sri Lankan king mentioned in the *Culavamsa*, a major chronicle from the island. The Sandalwood Monastery legend of the *Yazawin Kyaw* may have also been partially inspired by one preserved in a Sanskrit text (Pranke 2004: 196; Tatelman).

The present stupa has been restored many times, with nothing of antiquity surviving. A massive square brick retaining wall encircling the compound testifies to the site's patronage during the 18th century or earlier. Pavilions from the first half of the 20th century dot the platform and many restorations since 1991 have been made by the ruling military elite, patronage signaling its role in the national mythology.

The version known in the *Punnovadasutta-attthakatha* is recorded in local *thamaings* and is partially illustrated in eleven panels inside one of the surrounding pavilions. The story starts with the younger brother, Culla Punna, setting sail with 500 other merchants to make his fortune. On an island one of the traders stumbled upon a stand of valuable sandalwood, an answer to their commercial dreams. The boat loaded, they cast off to return home. However, ogres on the island took umbrage at this environmental outrage and caused the departing ship to heave in a storm. The demons are described as non-human, or *a-manussa* (Pali), and were certainly horrible, although their wrath was justified. Just as the ship was to capsize, the brother invoked his monk-brother who suddenly appeared and 'rose into the sky', frightening the ogres and saving the day (Duroiselle 1906b: 22).

The 500 traders were so grateful to touch land that they and their families converted when they recognised the monk on shore who had saved them. They then donated part of their precious cargo to the monk who built the Sandalwood Monastery. The story underscores the interdependence of the *sangha* and lay society, a theme encapsulated by the two brothers, one a monk and one a merchant.

The panels were painted in 1993 by a female artist who signed her works Ma Thin Mi, the daughter of the painter U Hla Thin Gyi, North Okkalapa, a district in Yangon. Her works are also at the Mei Lamu Temple, Yangon.

The footprint of the reformed heretic. The footprint and stupa are now enclosed in a pavilion finished in 1920. Mahamuni Temple, west corridor, c. 1892, Mandalay.

The Buddha left his footprint for Saccabandha on top of this rocky crag immediately overlooking the snake-king's residence on the Man River below. The present complex has been rebuilt many times but its sanctum dates from the 1920s.

Two Golden Footprints

The two Golden Footprints, or *Shwesettaw* (literally 'Golden Foot'), are about 50 kilometres west of Minbu, on opposite banks of the Man River, a tributary of the Irrawaddy. Although near the border with Rakhine State, this thickly forested area belongs to the northern part of the Arakan Yoma and the southern stretch of the Chin mountains. Its annual festival occurs on the fifth waxing day of Tabodwe (February-March), with recently over 25,000 assembling in over 500 temporary bamboo and thatch shelters set up along the riverbed. The mythology underpinning the overarching myth is found at the end of the same Pali commentary that described the Sandalwood Monastery (Duroiselle 1906b).

One stone footprint is located at the top of a massive stony crag overlooking the Man, while the other is directly opposite and is a depression within a low flat rock extending into the river itself. A new road reaches the top of the mountain from where steps lead down to the river. Pilgrims can ford the shallow river by foot or ferry across in small boats. The footprint is completely submerged in the rainy season.

Both footprints are directly connected to the Sandalwood Monastery, since the pair was left by the Buddha at the time of his visit to Legaing. The story in the aforementioned Pali commentary begins when the Buddha traveled to the Sandalwood Monastery with 500 celestial pavilions, filled with 499 disciples. The entire retinue stopped down on a hill named Saccabandha where the Buddha converted a heretic also named Saccabandha (Strong 2004: 90). The Buddha then invited the convert to board the single vacant celestial pavilion and together they all flew to the Sandalwood Monastery where the Buddha spent a week and converted 84,000 souls. On the return to the Jetavana Monastery in India, the Buddha went down to visit a snake-king who lived on the bank of the Nammada (Pali), or the Narmada located in western India. The abode of the snake-king along the river and the residence of Sacca-bandha are considered to be close together in Pali sources (Strong 2004: 91). At the snake's request, the Buddha left a footprint 'as a seal impressed upon the rock' in the riverbed for the snake to worship (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 7). On the opposite bank of the Man River, on a prominence now identified with Saccabandha Hill, the Buddha imprinted the mark of his foot on the solid, flat rock 'as easily as he would have done on a lump of wet clay [for the converted heretic]'

Gilded terracotta souvenir plaque showing the snake-king, left, and Saccabandha the heretic paying homage to the Buddha. Plaques featuring the two footprints are found throughout Burma. Perhaps early 20th century. Myathalun Pagoda museum, Magwe.

(Duroiselle 1906b: 26). This Pali story was known as early as the Pagan period (11th-13th centuries) and was depicted at least once in murals from the 13th century, inside the famous Nandamannya Temple, Pagan, where the snake-king and the hermit are shown on either side of the Buddha (Di Crocco: pl. 16). However, the footprints were not identified with locations in Burma at this early stage.

A mural from the Mahamuni Temple, Mandalay, datable to about 1892, is probably a realistic depiction of the site at the time. On the hill overlooking the river it shows the footprint and a small gilded stupa to the right, each protected by a separate open pavilion capped with a tower. The footprint in the riverbed by the bank is protected by a single crowned pavilion. The odd looking structure on the left represents a stack of offerings, such as umbrellas and lacquer containers, all jumbled together to form a temporary tower.

The footprint created for the snake-king is within a wide flat rock outcropping protruding into the river. It is protected these days by a thick iron hatch removed during the annual festival when the river has receded. Its present position, only visible as the river ebbs, matches the ancient Pali commentary: 'This imprint was covered by the waves at the time of high water, and uncovered when the water subsided, and it was greatly venerated' (Duroiselle 1906b: 26). The ceiling of the rebuilt tower preserves its early 20th century coloured glass, but the exterior and everything else is new.

The footprint presented to Saccabandha is located above the river on a massive steep stone outcrop. A fire consumed most of the complex in about 1915 but rebuilding started the next year, and a grander new pavilion was finished by 1921. Pilgrims lifted thousands of bricks up the hill for the site's expansion, with those lacking the strength paying for others to carry them (Enriquez 1922b: 82). The reconstruction is briefly recorded in inscriptions in raised lacquer on pillars surrounding the footprint. The new pavilion was established by a family from Yenangyaung, an oil town north of Magwe, their donation noted in the lacquer inscriptions. The family is also said to have sought donations from 'everywhere.' Two dates appear, 1916 and 1921, suggesting the beginning and closing years of construction. On one pillar are names of craftsmen, Saya U Lay and his son Maung Pyu and two apprentices, Maung Moe and Maung Khin, from the 'post-office' quarter, Mandalay. If this team supervised construction of the entire hall or only the lacquer ornament on the pillars is unclear, but the inscription says the work was finished in 1921. Nearby is a gilded sheet of metal whose inscribed text dated to 1917 records a donation of silver coins amounting to 1 *viss* and 85 *ticals*. A record on a marble slab nearby notes

The pavilion for the snake-king's footprint at the end of the 19th century. Odd looking 'tower' on the left is comprised of offerings, such as umbrellas and lacquer containers. West corridor, Mahamuni Temple, Mandalay, c. 1892.

The newly rebuilt temple sits atop the stone outcrop in which the footprint appears. The footprint is beneath the tallest pavilion, far left.The ceiling in this pavilion is original, probably from the 1920s. The annual festival occurs in the dry season when the footprint is not submerged.

the dedication of tiles in 1936 to the worship hall, or *tazaung*, by a family from a town in the Irrawaddy district. Next to the footprint is the same large gilded stupa shown in the Mahamuni mural from 1892. It is now encased in glass and is another major focus of worship.

Both prints are now completely gilded, and it is unlikely that they were once carved with the usual 108 symbols (Mya: 321). They both appear to be long depressions within the natural rock.

Below this principal hall is another massive pillared room whose main attraction is a bronze replica of the Mahamuni Buddha in Mandalay. Its casting, organised in 1927 by the famous hermit of Mandalay named U Khanti, required 300 *viss* of iron. A realistic portrait sculpture of U Khanti is placed beside it, donated in 1989.

A huge bell suspended just outside the hall relates to a tale in which an elephant pulled it up the hill to honour the Golden Footprint. The pious beast expired from fatigue but was later reborn as a Chin woman who made a visit to the spot with her brother. A tableau featuring the Chin pilgrim, her brother and the elephant are in a small chamber near the bell. The Chin hills are

Inscription on a lacquered pillar records the completion in 1921 of the new pavilion housing Saccabandha's footprint. The craftsmen hailed from Mandalay.

The Shwesettaw annual festival now attracts over 25,000 pilgrims. Four covered stairways connect the hilltop shrine to the river below. By Maung Saw Maung. Shwe Indein Pagoda, Indein, Inle Lake, c. 1965

The Buddha leaving his footprints, one for Sacchabandha on the hilltop, the other for the snake-king, on the riverbank. The snake-king, dressed in green, kneels before the Buddha. Sandalwood Monastery, Legaing. By Ma Thin Mi.

close by and this myth is a way of incorporating Chin pilgrims, reminiscent of the Karen associations with the Golden Rock.

Old local legends claim that Saccabandha was not an heretic but a hunter who sold venison. The god Thagyamin had him pledge to shoot only bucks on one day and does on another, but the deity made sure that neither bucks or does appeared on the right days. Flustered by the god's cunning power, the hunter eventually traded his bow for the staff of a hermit. Shrines in the late 19th century commemorated his hunting lodge and where he tanned the skins (Scott & Hardiman 1901: II. 3.163; Duroiselle 1906b). A small dent in the rock at the top of the hill was identified as the spot from where the hunter knelt before he shot a deer. Small *nat* shrines are located along the steep slope leading to the river.

The footsteps were probably under worship in the 16th century, judging from the *Yazawin Kyaw*. However, by King Thalun's time (r. 1629-1648) the footsteps were believed lost. The king therefore dispatched a party of 500 men and four Buddhist elders from the capital at Ava in April 1638, to search for them. They came back to court, mission accomplished, with a thread used to wrap one of the footprints. The thread miraculously multiplied and was distributed to various spots within the Shan States (ROB I: 97, 99; Than Htut: 80).

Tenacious folklore surrounding this mission expanded and the 500 men turned into 5,000 who were conducted to the Man River by a black dog. The footprint on the hill belonging to Saccabandha was revealed to the search party by a crow (Duroiselle 1906b: 27). Whether the footsteps were truly lost and rediscovered during Thalun's reign is uncertain, but his unearthing of the site remained folklore for centuries, noted in the late 19th century (Bird: 249). The English envoy Michael Symes was told about Shwesettaw in 1795, 'one days journey west of Memboo [Minbu], but there was no time to visit' (Symes: 247).

Thailand's most sacred footprint is said to have been revealed by a hunter in the 17th century who accidently found the print belonging to Saccabhanda the hermit, in the jungle close to Ayutthaya in Saraburi province. The discovery was reported to the king who

Coloured glass ceiling from probably the 1920s, now part of refurbished shrine dedicated to the snake-king's footprint.

sent a mission of clerics to determine if this print conformed to descriptions in Buddhist literature. It is now venerated in Wat Phra Phutthabat. In most Thai and Cambodian chronicles the footprints are located not in Sunaparanta but in Yonakarattha, another of the six 'countries' to which Asoka sent missions and which was identified with parts of Thailand (Strong 2004: 90).

The Emerald Couch, The Myathalun Pagoda

Unlike the Sandalwood Monastery and the Golden Footsteps, the story of the Emerald Couch enshrined in Magwe was an entirely indigenous contribution with no connection to traditional Pali sources. Magwe's Emerald Couch Pagoda legend developed sometime after the other two sites and was connected to the Sandalwood Monastery by only the thinnest narrative thread.

The Myathalun Pagoda enshrines an emerald couch, or *myathalun*, given to two ogres by the Buddha at the time of his visit to the Sandalwood Monastery. The ogres at the Sandalwood Monastery are not mentioned in the classical Pali sources nor in the major national Burmese chronicles, strongly suggesting that this story of the Emerald Couch is a local contribution. The Myathalun is yet another illustration of how the histories of certain shrines can become attached to more venerated sites, piggybacking indirectly on ancient Pali traditions.

It is hard to say exactly when this legend evolved or became linked to the Myathalun, but the pagoda was noted in connection with the Emerald Couch around 1825 (Crawfurd I: 90). The legend therefore probably arose by the 18th century, but the pagoda's real and legendary history before then is largely lost. Even during the 19th century, however, it never attained much national recognition, since it is not mentioned in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* which referred to the nearby Sandalwood Monastery and the Shwesettaw. It is also absent from religious chronicles of the time, such as the *Vamsadipani* and the *Sasanavamsa*.

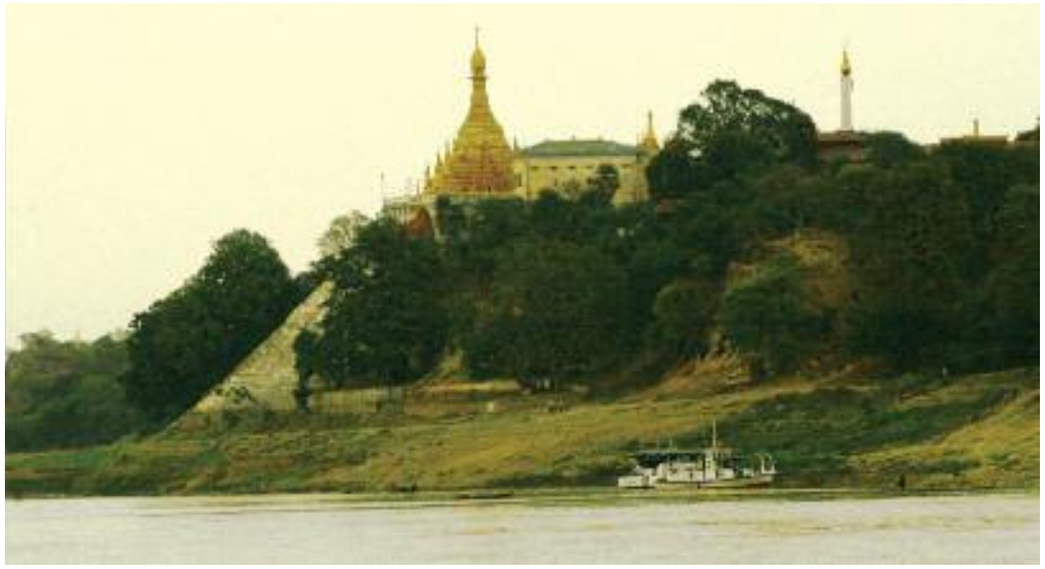
The pagoda is located on a promontory from which commanding

Two ogre brothers received an emerald couch from the Buddha that is thought to be now enshrined within the Myahtalun Pagoda at Magwe. Statues of both ogres guard one of the temple's entrances. This one is named Bawthura.

views unfold of the river below. The erosion of the bank was a problem in the 1850s when the mayor of Magwe reinforced the hillside facing the river by 'tiers of piles…and a brick revetment' (Yule: 10). It is just on the northern outskirts of town, in a quiet semi-pastoral setting. The history of the pagoda is told in modern murals along the corridor leading to the shrine, on the left side, reflecting lore preserved in local temple chronicles, or *thamaings*, probably formulated in the 18th century and later.

The story starts with the Buddha's visit to the Sandalwood Monastery on the opposite side of the river from Magwe. Two ogre brothers, named Bawthaw [or Bawthura] and Bawkyaw, presented themselves at the monastery and offered the Buddha a Myrobalam fruit *Terminalia chebual*; they then asked the Buddha for a memento that could be worshipped in his absence. As a result, the Buddha presented them with an emerald couch that the chief of the gods, Thagyamin, had given him and prophesied that a great city (the future Magwe) would arise where a pagoda was built to honour the emerald couch but only when the two ogres were reborn as humans. The ogres then removed the couch to the jungle and erected a stupa around it. Considered an unsuitable spot by Thagyamin, the god removed the couch and presented it to three hermits. The hermits transported it in a special barge to the present site, called Naguttama Hill, where the couch was concealed in an underground bunker containing a 'gold couch' that had formerly belonged to Kassapa Buddha, Gotama's predecessor. Sealing the bunker, Thagyamin stationed robots with weapons to guard the relics for 5,000 years and instructed the hermits that a pagoda to honour the couches could only be built only when the two ogre brothers were reborn as humans, thereby fulfilling the Buddha's predictions. In time the two ogres were reborn as rich merchants, but the problem remained that the three hermits could not locate them.

The god Thagyamin presenting the Buddha with an emerald couch. Covered walkway, Myathalun. By Kyaw Naing, Mandalay.



The Myathalun Pagoda in Magwe, overlooking the Irrawaddy, is connected to the Sandalwood Monastery only because the two ogres received the emerald couch from the Buddha there.

Meanwhile, a rich man pledged to construct a pagoda for the emerald and gold couches if the former ogres, later reborn as merchants, could be found. To this end he enlisted the help of his three lovely daughters who went into the countryside to look for the reborn merchants. They returned home unsuccessful, but one had left a note on a nearby hill asking the merchants to appear before her father and to identify themselves. The elder merchant discovered the note and came to the girl's father, who realised that the two brother ogres were now reborn as humans. Impressed with the elder brother, the father gave him his daughter's hand in marriage. The Buddha's prophecy could now be realised, since the former ogre now merchant, had been discovered. The merchant and his new wife together rebuilt the pagoda, enshrining both the emerald and gold couches. The pagoda fell into ruin 200 years later. The narrative then leaps to the Pagan period when King Sawlu was advised by his head monk, Shin Arahan, to build a pagoda over the two couches. Sawlu then restored the monument and seven others in different locations. Later, the Pagan kings Kyanzittha and Alaungsithu offered gold to Sawlu's pagoda. Another historical jump completes the story by recounting that two earthquakes struck the pagoda, in 1839 and 1847, the 1839 jolt being the same that cracked open the Mingun Pagoda. The pagoda was rebuilt in 1857 by the local mayor, at the behest of King Mindon of Mandalay.

Modern sculptures of the ogre brothers sit at the entrance to the pagoda platform, functioning as guardians and reminders of the devotion given to the Buddha. Another pair is found at the entrance of the long stairway, near the paved road bordering the river. That unsightly but enlightened ogres are paired for eternity with a priceless emerald couch provides an altogether happy ending.

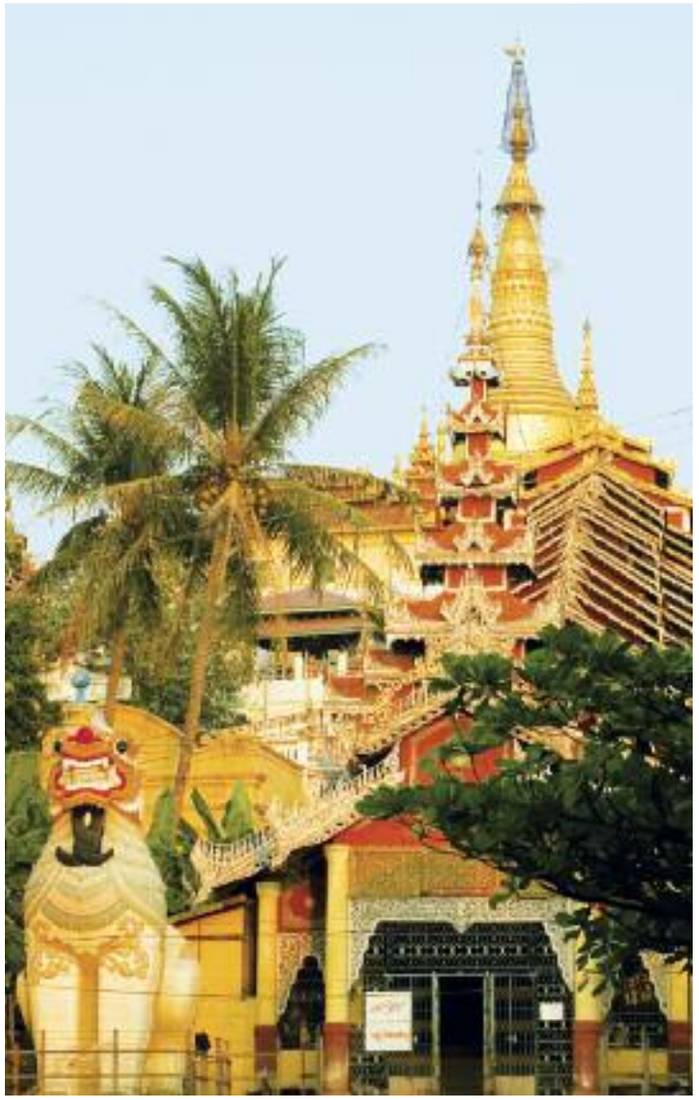
Prome: King Duttabaung And Burma's First Kindgom

The Buddha not only laid the foundation for the nation in the vicinity of Prome, or modern Pyay, but also gifted to two brothers three hair-relics now enshrined in the Shwesandaw Pagoda. The history of the pagoda has many slight variations but all are based upon the Buddha flying from India and presenting hair-relics to two brothers. The best-known version purports that the Buddha alighted on an island named Zing-gyan, close to Prome on the Irrawaddy. A local snake-king requested three hairs but the Buddha replied that they were reserved for two brothers, merchants named Ajjita and Balika. However, the Buddha accepted an emerald reliquary from the snake-king in which to hold the relics. The Buddha then suspended the emerald box from a tree branch on the riverbank where it was miraculously discovered by the two brothers returning from a journey. The pair then erected a pagoda over the relics on the present hill, called Sudassana, the mythical abode of Thagyamin.

After the brothers left Prome to return home, the pagoda collapsed and vanished. Years later, the stupa reappeared during the reign of the legendary King Duttabaung whose capital was nearby Tharekhittaya, or ancient Shri Kshetra. He then rebuilt the pagoda, noted in the *Shwesandaw Thamaing*, a text consulted by the compilers of the *Glass Palace Chronicle* in the 1820s (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: xxi, 17). The current myth is essentially the same as the one known in the 19th century (Spearman II: 500). It is told with minor variations among panels on the eastern side of the pagoda, signed by Saya Sein, Mandalay.

When this legend arose is difficult to say, but it probably dates to the 17th or 18th centuries. The pagoda's earlier legends are lost, buried by recent accretions. The two brothers are said to be from Thaton, the old Mon centre, which enjoyed a fabled reputation among both Burmese and Mon communities.

This tooth relic arrived in Prome from Kandy, Sri Lanka in 1899. It is kept inside a locked reliquary in a pavilion on the Shwesandaw platform. This modern panel shows the Burmese delegation at Kandy, left, and the arrival of the relic in Prome, right.



The Shwesandaw in Prome enshrines three hairs gifted by the Buddha to two brothers, a myth probably no older than the 17th century. A stupa in this location probably existed in the first millennium but it has left no trace and its myths are lost. The current legend resembles those at the Shwedagon, Yangon, and the Shwesandaw in Pegu. Kyanzittha's stone inscriptions are on the opposte side of the hill. West entrance.

The Shwesandaw is depicted among the Kyauk-taw-gyi murals where it is captioned 'Golden Myin-tin', another traditional name for the Shwesandaw. The Irrawaddy flows at the bottom. Kyauk-taw-gyi Pagoda, west corridor, Amarapura, c. 1850.

The actual history of the stupa is murky, since no donative inscriptions have survived. Its foundation, however, likely stretches back to the first millennium in light of the proximity to ancient Shri Kshetra and inscriptions of King Kyanzittha (r. 1077-1113) found at the base of the hill and now protected by a shed. The stone inscriptions make no reference to a monument, but their location suggests the hill's early importance. Work perhaps surviving in Prome from the Pagan period or probably later is a simple brick stupa near the Government Hospital.

Later donors to the Shwesandaw included Alaungpaya (r. 1752-1760), who re-gilded the exterior and one of his successors, Tharrawaddy (r. 1838-1846), who replaced the *hti*, in 1841. The

The two brothers discover tied to a tree, a reliquary containing three hair-relics, now thought to be inside the Shwesandaw. By Saya Sein, Mandalay. Shwesandaw Pagoda platform.

pagoda was also depicted among the murals of the Kyauk-taw-gyi Pagoda sponsored by King Pagan (r. 1846-1853). The pagoda was restored after a quake in 1858 by a local merchant, assisted by King Mindon (r. 1853-1878). Sometime later, more than eighty small chapels, each containing a Buddha, were constructed around the base, depicted in a mural at the Mahamuni Temple, Mandalay, from about 1892.

On the west side are panels telling the *Vessantara Jataka*, by Maung Maung Toe Aung, 1991, and others devoted to the Eight Great Miracles, by Saya Khin & Sons, Rangoon, from the same year. Others depict scenes from the life of the Buddha refurbished by U Win Naing in 1989. Another series draws on the Sri Lankan chronicle, the *Mahavamsa*, but focuses on different subjects than the set at the Shwedagon.

A large hall enshrines a tooth replica taken in 1899 to Prome from Kandy, Sri Lanka, now kept inside a locked stupa-shaped reliquary at the rear of the hall. The tea-growing family from the old Shan States that established the hall in 1949 can be seen in pictures at the entrance. The lacquered pillars inside were donated by individuals and groups. A stone inscription commemorating the centennial of the tooth replica's enshrinement was made in 1999 by descendants of the Shan merchants.

The tooth is put on display annually and every third year is taken on procession within the town by an elephant. The replica was kept with the genuine tooth in Kandy for forty days, together with nine other relics of the Buddha. It arrived in Prome by train, from Yangon. At least two other tooth replicas reached Burma from Sri Lanka at about the same time. One is in Padaung, south of Prome, and is under lock and key until its yearly procession. Another in Moulmein is on view daily within Queen Sein-don's monastery.

A pagoda museum has ancient terracotta votive tablets and the usual odds and ends. Some of the early Pyu-period tablets may have come from a ruinous stupa near the Shwesandaw that was unscientifically excavated in 1953 (*The Light of the Dhamma* 1953: 49). On a lower terrace is a large Bo Bo Gyi, seated with his left hand pointing to the pagoda. An impressive staircase on the east

Pillar inscribed 'Finished on 1915', base of eastern stairway.

side is framed with two ornamental brick posts, one inscribed 'Established 1913' and the other 'Finished on 1915'. The parquet-style brickwork of the stairs is now hard to find. A massive seated Buddha below the platform is one of Prome's hallmarks. A stainless steel *hti* was hoisted on the pagoda on 21 October 2002, under the guidance of former Sect. 1 – Lt. General Khin Nyunt, in order to replace the last one established in 1915 (*New Light of Myanmar*, 22 October 2002).

In Prome itself is the Shwephonepwint Museum and Library, with miscellaneous objects, including two terracotta heads probably from Shri Kshetra. Next door is the Shwephonepwint Pagoda, built by the legendary King Duttabaung. A related temple in Pyay is the Shwephonemyint and is depicted at the Kyauk-taw-gyi temple in Amarapura. Other finds from Shri Kshetra may be found in the Pyay University Museum and in the National Museum, Yangon.

When Prome was taken by the British during the Second Anglo-Burmese War, a wooden pilgrim's hall was dismantled somewhere in the town and removed to Eden Gardens in Calcutta, as much a curiosity as a war trophy (Stadtner 2001). Many Indians settled in Prome after annexation, including a number of brahmin ritualists whose families were silk weavers (Bastian: 29). Prome was also visited by Mahatma Gandhi during his political tour of Burma in 1929. The main covered corridor, on the north side, was re-built after World War II, with panels depicting the last ten *jatakas*.

Opposite Prome near the riverbank is the Shwebontha Pagoda which can be visited by boat or the new bridge. The pagoda was restored in the 1990s when the bridge was completed. The stupa is said to contain a Buddha cast from the 'great left-over', or '*maha kyan*' metal used for the original Mahamuni Buddha in Rakhine. This image and a second flanked the Mahamuni in Rakhine, according to legend, and all three were slated to be transported to Amarapura by the son of King Bodawpaya. When the bronzes reached the west bank of the Irrawaddy many Rakhine requested the prince to leave one of the images there. He acquiesced and thus was born the Shwebontha Pagoda. The other flanking Buddha is thought to be now in Zalun, north of Yangon.

Two shrines on the platform are dedicated to a popular goddess believed to guard underground treasure troves, or *thaiks*, called the 'Elder Sister Emerald Lady', or Ama Daw Mya Sein, or sometimes shortened to Mya Mya Sein (Brac de la Perrière 2009). The larger shrine was built by a donor from Mandalay and is named Treasure Trove

A pavilion dismantled in Prome in 1854 and established in Calcutta in 1856 as a trophy of the Second Anglo-Burmese War. Recently restored. Eden Gardens, Calcutta.

The Shwesandaw Pagoda. West corridor, Mahamuni Temple, Mandalay, c. 1892.

A guardian of underground treasures stands within her bed chamber, bank notes stuck within her headddress by devotees. Shwebontha Pagoda Platform.

Palace. People worship her for material success, donating small swings painted green, a mark of wellbeing and riches.

Shri Kshetra

The nation traces its descent to this walled city about 10 kilometres southeast of Prome. Its original name is uncertain but by the Pagan period (11th-13th centuries) was known as Shri Kshetra (Sanskrit), or 'Glorious Land'. This name gave rise to many English spellings, such as Thayakhittiya or Tharekhattara.

Shri Kshetra was inhabited by the Pyu people who settled in Upper Burma, beginning in the first millennium. Their culture once extended from Shri Kshetra in the south to the north above Mandalay. Whether the various walled Pyu communities were linked to form a kingdom or were autonomous is unknown (Moore 2007; Brown 2001). The Pyu language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family but has largely defied decipherment. Inscriptions at Shri Kshetra, in Pyu, Pali and Sanskrit, are written in a script derived from the southeast coast of India, probably from as early as the 5th century (Skilling 1997: 94). Kings bore Sanskrit names, such as Surya-vikrama and Prabhu-varman. Stone funerary urns from Shri Kshetra bear dates between 673 AD and 718 AD.

The Pyu may have called themselves Tircul but are known as the Piao in old Chinese chronicles and as the Pyu in later Burmese sources. The Pyu specialised in habitation areas encircled by thick, high earthen walls faced with baked brick. Shri Kshetra is the largest such enclosure in all of Burma, with the circumference of its nearly circular wall measuring close to 14 kilometres. Chinese chronicles report that the Pyu sent embassies to China in the 9th century, but descriptions of Pyu life in Chinese sources poorly match the archaeological record. The Pyu were perhaps overtaken in the 9th century by the Nanzhao kingdom from Yunnan, but this too comes only from Chinese sources and has never been corroborated with hard evidence. Whether the Pyu survived in great numbers by the beginning of the second millennium is unlikely, but the entire Prome area was absorbed by Burmans coming from Pagan, at least as early as the reign of Anawrahta (r. 1044-1077). Vestiges of Pyu culture are known at Pagan, revealed principally by the famous 12th century Myazedi inscription. But the Pyu were greatly reduced by then and have vanished today (Stadtner 2008a).

Large stone funerary urns inscribed with the names of Pyu rulers are on display in the Shri Kshetra museum. The example in the foreground belongs to Suriya-vikrama, dated to the year 50, or 688 AD.

The Pyu were Buddhists but probably also worshipped Hindu gods, much like other early Southeast Asian communities, such as the Mon in Lower Burma and the Dvaravati culture in Thailand. Pali Buddhist texts engraved on thin sheets of gold were found at Shri Kshetra. One drew on Buddhagosha's 5th century *Visud-dhimagga*, from Sri Lanka, abreast with fresh developments in the wider Buddhist world (Luce 1974: 127).

The heavily restored Bebe Temple, right, probably from the Pagan period or later, enshrining an inscribed Pyu period stele. The tower is completely restored. The Bawbawgyi stupa is in the distance, left. Shri Kshetra

Shri Kshetra was first explored in 1906-07 by a French savant named General Leon de Beylie, with permission from British authorities. Excavations continued all through the 20th century and today a government school of archaeology is based within the walls. Only a small portion of the total area has been excavated. As recently as 1993 a new inscribed burial urn was discovered, providing the names of new kings (Tun Aung Chain 2004a). The site museum houses the world's most important collection of Pyu stone art, with other key objects in the National Museum, Yangon. The Pyu also minted silver coins, their types probably derived from earlier Mon coinage in Lower Burma (Wicks: 110-121). Outside Burma very few artifacts can be attributed to the Pyu period with much certainty, at least in public collections.

'In the year when I shall achieve nirvana'

Myths arose after the decline of the Pyu connecting the ancient city of Shri Kshetra with the founding of Pagan and the birth of one of the Pagan's leading kings, Kyanzittha. Inscriptions record that the Buddha himself prophesied in India that Shri Kshetra would come into being 'in the year when I shall achieve nirvana.' The Buddha then requested his disciple Gavampati to instruct the sage ('*risi*') Vishnu to create Shri Kshetra (Duroiselle 1919: I.2.141). The Buddha also predicted that the sage Vishnu was to be reborn as the first king of Shri Kshetra and then in another rebirth, 1,630 years later, appear as King Kyanzittha in Pagan. This myth began in the time of Kyanzittha when Shri Kshetra was under Pagan's control and thus forever linked Shri Kshetra with Pagan in the nation's history.

Such a prophecy recalls the legendary Sri Lankan king named Vijaya who was also forecasted to appear at the time of the Buddha's death. This ruler was also assisted by the sage Vishnu in establishing cities (*Mahavamsa*: VI). This tale is drawn from a 5th century chronicle from Sri Lanka popular at Pagan during Kyanzittha's reign, and this Sri Lankan myth likely inspired Kyanzittha, in light of the striking similarities. Vishnu, under his epithet Vasudeva (Sanskrit), or Wasuthep (Thai), also plays a role as a sage in some Thai foundation myths, perhaps reflecting similar influence from the *Mahavamsa* or from other Pali sources (Swearer, Premchit & Dokbuakaew: 32).

This stone slab once formed the lid of a relic chamber. The five seated Buddhas probably represent Gotama, his three predecessors, and the Buddha of the Future. Five umbrellas once crowned the stupa but are missing now. Height 1.64 metres. Museum, Shri Kshetra.

The Bawbawgyi, from the mid-first millennium, is the oldest and best preserved major stupa still under worship in Burma. Thousands of Pyu terracotta tablets remain in its wide hollow relic chamber. At least two additional chambers were also discovered, one found with coins and inscribed gold and silver sheets. Shri Kshetra. Courtesy: Elizabeth Moore.

Terracotta head from Shri Kshetra, Shwephonepwint Museum & Library.

King Duttabaung and Shri Kshetra

Later mythology in Burma, beginning by at least the early 16th century, altered the earlier Pagan period myth in a few fundamental ways (Pranke 2004: 198). It was claimed, for example, that the predictions about Shri Kshetra were uttered not in India but in Burma during the Buddha's visit. The prophesy about Shri Kshetra was made after the Buddha flew from the Sandalwood Monastery, near Magwe, north of Prome, and alighted on a peak opposite Prome known as Hpo-u Hill. It was from this promontory, overlooking the Irrawaddy, that the Buddha pointed toward Prome and the future Shri Kshetra and revealed the prophecy to his disciple Ananda. On this same hill a mole presented dirt from his burrow as an offering to the Buddha. Struck by this act of kindness, the Buddha predicted that this mole would be reborn as the first king of Shri Kshetra and would be named Duttabaung. Duttabaung is first recorded in a chronicle datable to the first half of the 16th century, the *Yazawin Kyaw,* and repeated, with variations, in many of the later major national religious and historical chronicles (Pranke 2004: 198).

King Duttabaung

King Duttabaung figured in later Burmese history as an august and righteous ruler, much like Alaugnsithu of Pagan. Duttabaung exerted a powerful influence on the later Burmese imagination, witnessed by the coronation of King Hsinbyushin (r. 1763-1776) that coincided with the same day as Duttabaung's legendary ascent to the throne (Tun Nyein: 17).

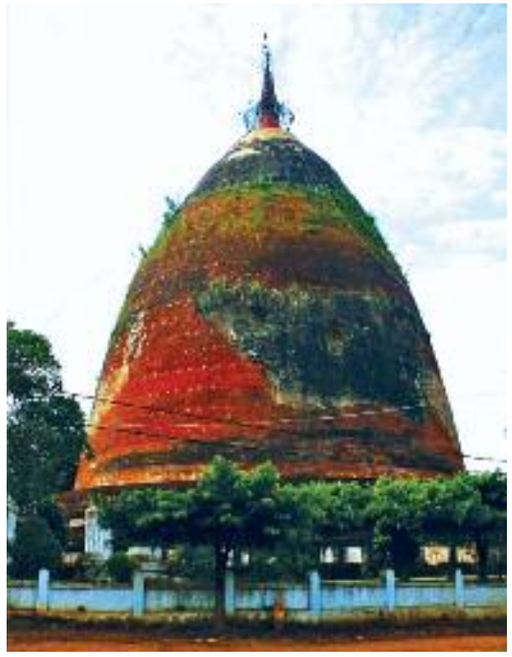
Most people in Upper Burma are familiar with Duttabaung's name, and innumerable pagodas are associated with him, even in the delta, such as at the Shwesandaw in Twante, near Yangon. He also plays a minor role in the later Shwedagon legends.

One observer in 19th century Prome commented, 'Everything in Prome is filled with the great folk hero Dwattabong, and every child in the street can tell a story about him' (Bastian: 39). Maybe his most colourful donation was a Buddha at Shwedaung, south of Prome. Later, the king lost his eyesight, but his vision was restored after he offered spectacles to the Buddha. The temple today is popular for those with occular problems and is one more example of how ancient myth and modern life combine seamlessly.

By the early 18th century Duttabaung's biography was woven into a complex historical quilt that included an early archaeological site named Tagaung, about 240 kilometres north of Mandalay (Pranke 2004: 198). Shri Kshetra and Tagaung were linked by a king named Abhiraja who had migrated from India to Tagaung; Abhiraja belonged to the same Sakyan clan as did the Buddha. In this way, the future kings of Burma claimed descent from the royal family of the Buddha.

Abhiraja's brother-in-law killed a giant boar menacing Tagaung, before coming to Shri Kshetra where he lived out his life as a hermit. Meanwhile, the queen of Tagaung and her paramour, a snake-king, produced two blind sons who were forced to board a raft alone on the Irrawaddy. The two princes, Maha-sambhava and Cula-sambhava, were rescued by an ogress named Chandamukhi, or Moon-Face, who restored their sight. The boys landed at Shri Kshetra where the hermit realised that the two were his brother's children. The eldest boy married a woman named Bhedari who sprang from a doe which became pregnant after drinking the hermit's urine. This couple produced Duttabaung, founder of Shri Kshetra and its first king.

Tagaung is not mentioned in the 16th century *Yazawin Kyaw* chronicle but appears in U Kala's *Maha-yazawin-gyi* from the early 18th century (Tun Aung Chain 2004: 124). Duttabaung's half sister was sometimes linked to another ancient city known as Beikthano. He waged war against Beikthano and she became his chief queen. In this way, three of Burma's major walled cities, Shri Kshetra, Tagaung, and Beikthano, were joined in a unified narrative, although the inclusion of Beikthano in the national mythology occurred only in the 20th century. Connections with Buddhism in this convoluted myth are often thin but fundamental, such as the linking of the Buddha's royal family to the ruling monarchs of Burma. In folklore, Duttabaung's chief queen was spectacularly beautiful, called the Cleopatra of Burma. Many later Burmese chronicles associate



Phayagyi Pagoda, outside the walls of Shri Kshetra. Often taken to be of the Pyu period, there is no firm evidence for its date.

King Duttabaung offers spectacles to the Buddha image at Shwedaung, thus restoring his lost eyesight. The Shwedaung Pagoda, south of Prome, is sought by those with ocular ailments. By Zin Maung Tar. Shwedaung Pagoda.

Two brothers from Tagaung (left) meeting the hermit and his daughter, the future mother of King Duttabaung. Saya Sein, Mandalay. Shwesandaw, Prome.

Duttabaung with enshrining bodily relics of the Buddha but differ about the nature of the relics, their number, and the locations of the pagodas (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 17).

From the Pagan period onward Shri Kshetra was included in the long list of the country's capitals preserved in major chronicles, right into the 19th century; Beikthano, however, is noticeable by its absence. Early European missions to Burma, for example, were all encouraged to visit Shri Kshetra, although it was probably in a ruinous state. Shri Kshetra was also known as Yathe-myo, or City of the Hermit, in memory of the hermit whose son became the first king.

The only major structure at Shri Kshetra safely assignable to the Pyu period is the Bawbawgyi Pagoda, a nearly cylindrical brick pagoda resting on six circular terraces (Guy 1999). It is a short distance outside the walls, in the southwest. This pagoda still contains thousands of Pyu terracotta votive tablets inside an original hollow shaft about 3 metres in diameter and 25 metres high. Treasure hunters years ago hacked a small horizontal tunnel through the brick exterior on the west side. A terracotta vase containing five silver coins and silver and gold strips incised with Pyu characters was interred about two metres below the dome on the northwest side; on the eastern side near the top was a relic-chamber but its date cannot be fixed (Luce 1985: pl. 8; Taw Sein Ko 1920: 261). The inner shaft was opened at some point in the Pagan period, since two terracotta votive tablets of King Anawrahta were found inside in the 20th century. These tablets prove that objects were sometimes interred in stupas long after their original completion and sealing. The hollow inner chamber was covered with a corbelled dome, a technique sharing little with the sophisticated radial vaulting at Pagan. The stupa can perhaps be dated to the 6th or 7th century or earlier. It is likely the oldest stupa in Burma under continuous worship, with few changes to its size or shape. Three stones found near the vicinity of the stupa were incised with selections from the Pali canon.

Fashioned from metal moulds, thousands of small clay votive tablets were produced over the centuries at Shri Kshetra. Many were placed inside brick stupas, such as the Bawbawgyi. Museum, Shri Kshetra.

In later mythology the Pagan king Anawrahta was said to have destroyed a stupa built by the great king Duttabaung and seized its relic and enshrined it inside the Shwezigon stupa in Pagan; but old chronicles disagreed about the type of relic (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 86). One account, for example, reports that Anawrahta took from

Shri Kshetra a precious headdress (*Sasanavamsa*: 59). Many today associate the Bawbagyi Pagoda with this episode, but there is no hard evidence that Anawrahta seized any relic at Shri Kshetra. The story underscores the ongoing symbolic role of Shri Kshetra in later Burmese history.

A handful of brick temples from the Pagan age or later can be seen at Shri Kshetra, together with twenty brick mounds from this period (Hudson 2004: 144). Two are the Payataung and East Zegu Pagodas. Another is the Bebe Pagoda that incorporates a huge stone panel containing three seated figures with an effaced Pyu inscription at the bottom. The lowered left hand of the Buddha, rather than the usual right, is difficult to explain. This large panel was once the centre slab of a triad, a configuration found only at Shri Kshetra. This sculpted slab was considered sacred by later peoples who built a temple to encase it. The Bebe has been restored so often that it is hard to reconstruct its original exterior appearance. Another later temple containing Pyu sculpture is the Lemyathna, where three Pyu panels were placed around its central core centuries after the monument was built in the Pagan period or later (Stadtner 1998).

Two large cone-shaped pagodas, the Phayagyi and the Payama, are outside the walls on the north. They are usually attributed to the Pyu, but it is hard to gauge their true date. The Phayagyi is said to contain the big toe nail of the right foot of the Buddha. It has enjoyed a recent revival, the result of promotion by a local monk. Some pilgrims come only for devotions at this pagoda and neglect the walled city altogether.

Seated Buddha stele enshrined in the Bebe Temple, rear wall. The unusual hand-gesture, the left hand 'touching-the-earth', finds no ready explanation. Heavily restored in concrete. Shri Kshetra.

Two small moles facing the summit of Hpo-u Hill.

The Buddha predicted that one of the moles would be King Duttabaung in a future rebirth. The second mole is taken to be the king's future consort. The myth is referred it in an inscription on the hill by Hsinbyushin (r. 1763-1776). Hpo-u Hill is on the west bank of the Irrawaddy, about 6 kilometres north of Prome.

Hpo-u Hill, a Mole and Cow Dung

This famous hill is about 6 kilometres north of Prome, bordering the Irrawaddy on the west bank. A visit requires a half-day, with a private boat from Prome, since there are no regular public boats or roads. The hill is not visible from Prome, due to a bend in the river.

The Buddha came to Hpo-u Hill after first flying to the Sandalwood Monastery near Magwe, on the opposite bank of the Irrawaddy, further north. From the summit the Buddha spotted a cowpat floating on the surface of what was then the ocean stretching below. A mole then presented the Buddha with a bit of earth gathered with his snout, as an act of devotion. The Buddha prophesied that Shri Kshetra would come into existence where he observed the floating dung, 101 years after his demise, and that the mole would be reborn as King Duttabaung, the city's first ruler.

The presentation of earth is modeled on King Asoka in India who as a tiny tot in a previous life innocently offered the Buddha a handful of dust (Pranke 2004: 198). Duttabaung laid out the city's circumference in a way reminiscent of King Dutthagamani's planning of the Mahathupa in Sri Lanka (*Mahavamsa*: XXIX). The pagoda is associated with a chronicle, the *Hpo-u Thamaing*, based largely on the Shwesandaw Pagoda chronicle (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: xxi).

The hilltop was visited by Hsinbyushin (r. 1763-1776) on his return from Yangon in 1774 where he had replaced the *hti*, which had been thrown down from the Shwedagaon Pagoda by an earthquake in 1769. The king hauled the old metal spire to this very hilltop where it was placed inside the stupa which needed repairing.

The pagoda on the hill was 'laid on a massive rock', according to the king's stone inscription of 1774 which remains on the hill. The king raised the stupa to about 9 metres and interred images, small stupas, bone and hair-relics, together with the old *hti* taken from the Shwedagon (Taw Sein Ko 1893b: 1).

Small sculptures of two small moles, now painted white, are found near the base of the huge rock on which the pagoda is perched. One represents the future king Duttabaung, while the other is his wife, associated with the great Pyu centre, Beikthano, located between Prome and Pagan.

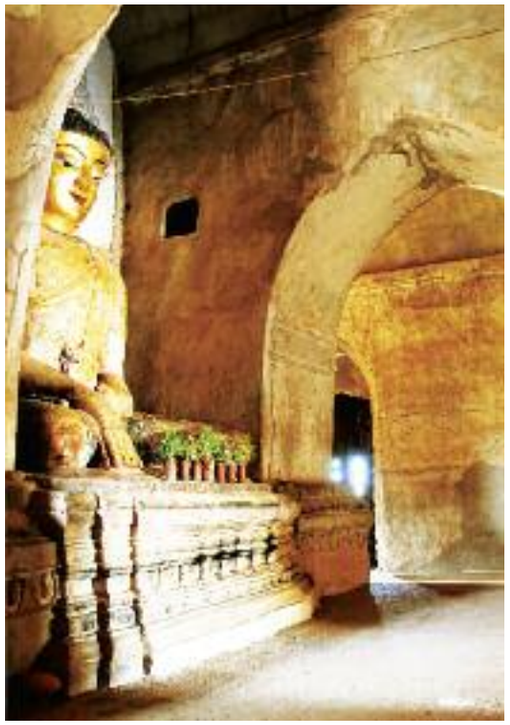
An image of the Buddha was established next to the pagoda in a shrine built in 1874, his right index-finger pointed toward Prome and Shri Kshetra, much like the image on Mandalay Hill (Taw Sein Ko 1913: 206). It has been replaced with a modern standing Buddha, with two tiny moles at his feet.

The Buddha prophesied from the Hpo-u Hill the rise of Shri Kshetra and its first king, Duttabaung. The stupa contains the hti *from the Shwedagon enshrined by King Hsinbyushin in 1774.*

Pagan

A prophecy of 'charity and virtue'

Pagan: A Prophecy of 'charity and virtue'



Finished in only seven and half months, the Shwegu-gyi was donated by King Alaungsithu in 1131. It is the first dated temple designed with a solid-core shrine, encircled by a corridor. Pagan is known today through chronicles no older than the 15th century, few of which truly reflect the period in which the city flourished, c. 11th-13th centuries.

Previous page: *Early morning mists envelop Pagan's magnificent stupas and temples in a special spiritual glow.*

Pagan has really two histories, one built on information gleaned from contemporaneous inscriptions and the monuments themselves and the other fashioned around myths developed in the centuries following the city's eclipse in the 14th century, preserved in chronicles. Most modern books mishmash the two, indiscriminately combining fact with legend, leaving readers bewildered, like an opera with two librettos going on at the same time. These two distinct 'histories' must rather be understood separately in order to comprehend properly the city's development. The more solid historical information is presented here first, since it provided the raw skeletal structure around which later myths were loosely attached.

Only two of Pagan's thousands of ancient monuments rank as major sacred sites in Burma today. Yet the pair, the Ananda temple and the Shwezigon stupa, are a notch below the country's three currently most venerated shrines, the Shwedagon, the Mahamuni, and the Golden Rock, which came into prominence centuries after Pagan's golden age (*circa* 11th-13th centuries).

History

The ancient Pali name for the city was Arimaddanapura, or 'City of Crusher of Enemies'. Its original local name was Pukam, or Pokam, which was often used together with Arimaddanapura throughout Burmese history. It came to be Pagan by the 20th century, but its official name now is Bagan, following the national system of Romanisation adopted in the 1990s.

Pagan was a Pyu community for much of the first millennium, but no standing structures survive from that long period (Gutman & Hudson). Pyu bricks were employed now and then in later building, and some temples were even erected over earlier Pyu structures. The Pyu fell to the Nanzhao dynasty from Yunnan, according to Chinese sources, but this has never been verified. The Pyu or the Nanzhao are thought to have been replaced in Upper Burma by the 9th or 10th centuries by the advancing Burmans from the north, but the earliest concrete evidence for an independent dynasty at Pagan does not appear until the 11th century, during the reign of Anawrahta or Aniruddha (r. 1044-1077). The nature of Pyu influence at Pagan is hotly debated, but Mon culture contributed far more to Pagan's civilisation (Stadtner 2008a). Pagan signaled the beginning of Burmese civilisation, in as much as its residents were largely Burmans

The last great expansion at Pagan occurred in the eastern part of the plain, far from the river and largely in the 13th century. view from the Tayok-pyi pagoda, looking east.

who had filtered into areas bordering the Irrawaddy by the beginning of the second millennium. Lower Burma was then in the hands of the Mon, but far less is known about its monuments and traditions.

The earliest construction started in the 11th century near the river's edge and within the walled city and only in the next century moved eastward into the flat plain. The Sulamani Temple, for example, was built far from the river, in 1183. The 13th century saw numerous large monastic units sprout up in the eastern reaches of Pagan, such as around the villages of Pwasaw and Minnanthu. However, monuments were still being created near the river and within the walled city throughout the centuries.

Little signs of domestic architecture survive, but excavations suggest that a structure with wooden pillars stood inside the city walls. This is perhaps the site of a palace described in an inscription from the reign of Kyanzittha (r.1084-1113). The government recently created a new 'palace' within the city walls, claiming associations with Anawrahta; unfortunately, no evidence links this king to any palace, and its design is based largely on conjecture, if not fantasy, much like the new palace at Pegu (Pichard 2005).

Wall painting was later added to much earlier temples as acts of devotion. A disciple of the Buddha from the Konbaung Period (1752-1885) appears on the wall of the late 12th century Sulamani Temple.

Pagan's decline in the 14th century remains unexplained, but there was no single cataclysmic collapse, such as occasioned by invasion, disease or economic dislocation. The city's slide was rather triggered by the capital shifting from Pagan to the Ava area in the 14th century and an ensuing decline in patronage and a concomitant neglect of monuments. Pagan was never abandoned, however, and never ceased to be a sacred city, but patronage of new temples slowed dramatically once it was no longer the capital. For example, over 2,000

Intrusive Buddhas were often painted on walls by devotees long after a temple's completion. This shows a horoscope dated 1376 partially covering the head, proving the Buddha was earlier. Htilominlo Pagoda, circa 12th or 13th century.

structures went up during Pagan's zenith, while less than 200 or so were built between the 15th and 20th centuries (Pichard 1996: 760).

The vast majority of Pagan's monuments fell into a period of neglect, desertion and inexorable ruin, following the shift to Ava. A number of painted inscriptions suggest the nature of the decline and the repairs and upkeep associated with select buildings (Than Tun 2004: 166-244). By the 18th century the monuments had 'sunk into indistinguishable masses of rubbish, overgrown with weeds', as one foreign visitor observed, but this description was probably no less true even in the 15th century (Cox: 414). The situation remained the same in the mid-19th century when 'the greater number [of monuments] have been abandoned to the owls and bats and some have been desecrated into cow-houses by the villagers' (Yule: 36). Such descriptions recall Pagan before the total rebuilding of the city began in the 1990s. Comparing photographs from the early 1990s with the temples today one gains an idea of how extensive (and misguided) the restorations have been (Pichard 1992-2001).

However, it would be quite wrong to think of Pagan as abandoned after the 14th century (Frasch 2001a). New and impressive monuments regularly went up, such as a brick monastery in 1442 whose library contained nearly 300 Pali, Sanskrit and Burmese manuscripts (Bode: 101). This donation was made by the governor of Taungdwin, suggesting how key patrons outside of Pagan sought to accrue merit in the venerated city, similar to sponsors living outside Pagan today.

Also, patronage from the 14th century onward focused upon only a score or so of the thousands of temples. Most prominent were the Ananda and the Shwezigon but others included the Sulamani, Htilominlo, and Dhamma-yazika. A smattering of smaller temples also remained under worship, such as the Abeyadana and the Nagayon, perhaps because they were possibly located near an ancient road leading south from the city walls, as the new road does today. It was no coincidence that these temples and stupas under continuous worship are the very ones highlighted in the later myths preserved in the chronicles; conversely, the many hundreds of completely abandoned shrines were never referred to in the chronicles.

The sorry state of most of Pagan's monuments was even interwoven into later mythology, specifically the hurried building of a new defensive city in the face of an immanent Chinese attack. Time did not permit the normal manufacture of brick and collection of stone and therefore a royal order was given to 'quickly…pull down pagodas [stupas], *gu* [temples] and monasteries.' The number amounted to 1,000 stupas, 10,000 small temples and 3,000 monasteries (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 174-175). This story indicates how myths sought to make sense of Pagan's largely ruined condition.

King Anawrahta, left, overlooks four 'great elders', or 'mahatheras' *who are perhaps comparing the Pali canon from Thaton to a set obtained from Sri Lanka. Upali was named as the chief of the four and his namesake gave rise to the name of the ordination hall today. Rear opening, side wall. Upali Ordination Hall,* c. *1793-1794.*

Many of the early temples selected for later worship have on their inner corridor walls large painted Buddhas added long after the original

Over two thousand brick monuments went up in a frenzy of merit-making, between the 11th and 13th centuries. Once the capital shifted to Ava, construction slowed but the city never ceased to be a religious centre, explaining why ancient temples stand beside recent ones.

construction, commissioned as acts of devotion. They are always painted on top of the original light tan washes that covered most of the wall surfaces. Also added to the walls were many dated horoscopes and Pali prayers. One horoscope dated 1376 overlapped one of the many added Buddha figures in the Htilominlo corridor, proving that such painting started sometime before 1376 (Stadtner 2005: 210). These painted Buddhas at the Htilominlo were sponsored by an energetic monk named Anandasura whose bold 'signature' in red paint can be picked out in many of the major temples.

Much later, during the Konbaung age (1752-1885), a number of the same major shrines were repaired in systematic fashion, some finished with 'a rude plastered surface, scratched without taste, art or result' (Crawfurd: I. 111). The interiors of some temples were also whitewashed, such as the Thatbyinnyu and the Ananda (Yule: 45, 49). Many painted inscriptions and even murals were added in this period, the best at the Sulamani. Other structures went up afresh, such as the Ananda Brick Monastery and Upali's Ordination Hall.

Pagan suffered repeatedly from earthquakes over the ages, with the last major one in 1975. But quakes were benign compared to the restorations of the 1990s, a rebuilding that has sparked condemnation from art historians and preservationists worldwide. Criticism within Burma also runs high but is muzzled. The chief objection is the highly conjectural nature of the rebuilding. Moreover, the pink coloured brick exterior of the shrines makes the new temples stand out like plucked chickens, unlike the natural weathered appearance of un-restored monuments covered with their original protective layer of stucco.

Monkeys frolic amidst the 18th and 19th century painting at the Sulamani temple from the 12th century.

The Buddha foresees the founding of Pagan, on Mt. Tangyi, from the opposite side of the Irrawaddy. The disciple Ananda, left, an ogre and a snake goddess, kneel in reverence. The earliest recorded prophecy surrounding the city is tied to King Kyanzittha whose rebirth in Pagan was predicted by the Buddha within the Jetavana Monastery in India. Mt. Tangyi Pagoda compound.

Religion at Pagan

Many religious currents operated in ancient Pagan, but the overarching one stemmed from Pali traditions. This is proved by thousands of ink captions in Mon which are translations from Pali sources and which identify the wall paintings. Some of the earliest examples are found at the Kubyauk-gyi temple (Myinkaba), dated to *circa* 1113, where large sections of Pali texts were put into Mon, such as the *Vimana Vathu*. The use of Mon suggests that Lower Burma was perhaps the source for these traditions. Later inscriptions were in Burmese, or a combination of Pali and Burmese, as the use of Mon faded.

Mahayana imagery is found in some temple wall painting, but no evidence points to Mahayana texts, monks or practices at Pagan among the hundreds of inscriptions between the 11th and 13th centuries. Although Mahayana artistic imagery was borrowed liberally from eastern India, or possibly Nepal or even Tibet, it was likely set within a Theravada context where patrons and artists made little distinction between these broad Buddhist divisions so sharply defined by 20th century scholars. For example, the entrance chamber of the Abeyadana temple is filled with murals depicting a set of *jatakas*, with Mon captions based on Pali sources, but Mahayana and even Tantric subjects dominate the inside walls, with clear artistic ties to the Mahayana art of eastern India. Were the temple's patrons therefore Theravada Buddhists in the antechamber but Mahayanists within the sanctum?

Sri Lanka probably played an incalculable role in Pagan's religious life but the details remain unclear. That portions of the major Sri Lankan historical chronicles, the *Mahavam*sa and *Culavamsa*, were illustrated in the murals of the Kubyauk-gyi temple of *circa* 1113 is ample proof of this solid connection that began early at Pagan (Luce & Ba Shin; Frasch 1999; 2001b). Later in the same century a Burmese monk named Chapada received his ordination in the Mahavihara tradition in Sri Lanka and returned to Pagan with a small group of monks, probably early in the 13th century. Such a Sri Lankan backdrop is the context for a Burmese king who received relics from the island's king which he then enshrined in the vast Dhamma-yazika stupa between 1196 and 1198 (Tin Htway; Frasch 2001b). Unlike the ubiquitous artistic features from eastern India at Pagan, it has been much more difficult to isolate Sri Lankan artistic influence.

The Lokananda Temple is one of four stupas at Pagan thought to contain replicas of a tooth relic brought from Sri Lanka during the reign of Anawrahta. All four stupas are linked in a popular modern pilgrimage.

Sinhalese religious leanings formed only part of the story, however, since another division at Pagan turned more inward to indigenous traditions and lineages. This trend was more likely identified as

the 'Myanma *sangha*' at Pagan, recorded in the much later Kalyani Inscription in 15th century Pegu, in distinction to the 'Sinhala *sangha*'. This 'Myanma *sangha'* may have included a faction led by a monk named Mahakassapa whose centre was in east Pagan for part of the 13th century; but the exact nature and composition of the 'Myanma *sangha'* during the Pagan period has yet to be worked out. Evidence suggests that the realm's religious milieu was not only fragmented and complex but also fluid (Pranke 2004: 19-21).

Hindu influences played a role in consecrating Kyanzittha's palace where the chief deity was '*nar*', or Narayana (Sanskrit), an epithet of Vishnu. Only one Hindu temple survives, the Nat Hlaung Kyaung, inside the city walls, and it may have been a royal temple. Its chief image was Vishnu reclining upon a serpent, a common theme in Indian art. At Pagan, however, the depiction has peculiar iconographic affinities with three earlier stone images found in Lower Burma, another probable indication of Mon influence at Pagan (see Thaton section; Stadtner 2008a). Indian traders were also at Pagan, but they left only a single Tamil inscription and no temples or images can be ascribed to them. Nor is there any reference in Pagan era inscriptions to *nat* worship. These deities are important today, however, and *nat* shrines are at all of the major Pagan temples.

The sole surviving Hindu temple at Pagan is within the city walls. Dedicated to Vishnu, it may have been for royal rituals. Its outer brick wall and broad porch are missing, and the tower has been conjecturally restored.

Building Types

Despite a bewildering variety of buildings at Pagan, there are only three major categories: temples, stupas and monasteries. Less common were ordination halls, libraries for palm-leaf manuscripts and modest, single-room image houses. The city saw the creation of over 900 temples, 500 stupas and 400 monasteries between the 11th-13th centuries, together with hundreds of shrines right up until our day. This explains how ancient shrines come to be side by side with those of recent origin. No two shrines are exactly alike, despite a seeming uniformity.

The eleven largest monuments are traditionally assigned to the 12th and 13th centuries and attributed to kings. These would include the Ananda, Thatbyinnyu, Sulamani and Dhamma-yazika. The Dhamma-yazika alone took six million bricks, based on estimates of its volume. Taken together, these eleven Leviathans amounted to roughly one quarter of all of the building in the classic Pagan period (Pichard 1996: 761). Such mammoth structures declined in the 13th century, in favour of a greater number of much smaller temples that belonged to monastic complexes. Even the largest monuments probably took no more than three or four years, as a few inscriptions indicate. A medium-sized temple within the city walls, the Shwegu-gyi, took only seven and half months to complete.

A temple (right) and stupa (left) are the two major building types at Pagan, although they rarely are paired in this fashion. Both are heavily restored but retain much original stucco. Sein-nyet-Ama & Sein-Nyet-yima. The Irrawaddy is in the distance.

The quartz dome of this small bronze reliquary contains a seated bronze Buddha. Such objects, noted in inscriptions, are extremely rare. This was found after a stupa (no. 906) collapsed, Hsutaung-pyi monastic complex. Courtesy: Bob Hudson

Temples and Stupas

Temples were designed for worshippers to enter a sanctum that featured one or more principal Buddhas. Pagan's architects worked with only two basic ground plans but within these limitations there was infinite variety. One is based on a solid brick core encircled by a vaulted corridor, while the other has an open vaulted sanctum, usually also surrounded by a covered corridor. The earliest dated hollow core temple is the Kubyauk-gyi (Myinkaba), *circa* 1113, while the earliest solid core temple with a firm date is the Shwegu-gyi, *circa* 1131. By the late 12th century larger two-storied temples were designed, such as the Thatbyinnyu and the Sulamani (1183). The largest temple is the Dhammayan-gyi, which is not two storied but has multiple roof terraces.

Stupas assumed many different contours but a bell-shape was most common for the larger stupas, like the Shwezigon. This type became the standard in later Burma, such as the Shwedagon,Yangon. Many of the later temples are capped with stupa-like superstructures, or towers, thus blurring the rigid distinctions made today in studies on Buddhist architecture.

Relics placed inside stupas generally include unspecified bone relics of the Buddha, together with numerous precious objects, such as gold and silver Buddhas and images made of various costly woods (Than Tun 1978: 129-131). Rarely do inscriptions from the 12th and 13th centuries refer to specific bodily relics. Even the thirty bone relics ('*sarira dhat*') sent from Sri Lanka were unspecified, including the four placed inside the royal Dhamma-yazika stupa (Luce 1969: I. 235; Tin Htway).

Relics were also buried within the fabric of large brick Buddhas placed in sanctums as chief icons. These were probably small stupas and Buddha images made in metal (Hudson 2011). Very few have survived, since they were removed over the centuries by robbers, probably beginning in the 14th century (Than Tun 2004: 165-244). Such relics were commonly placed in the head, chest or base of the brick image, to judge from the crude cavities made by thieves. Before the re-building of Pagan in the 1990s, virtually all of the large brick Buddhas had been 'gutted', like fish in a market. In the 1890s it was 'difficult to find a single pagoda here except the few still tended, which does not show the marks of these marauders [treasure seekers]' (Oertel: 16). These metal objects were presumably sold in

King Kyanzittha requested eight monks 'to call up by their power' plans for the Ananda Temple, modeled on the legendary Nandamula Cave from which the eight had descended. This myth is probably no older than the 15th century. The temple's original legend is lost. By Toni, Sein Paung Quarter, Mandalay, c. *1970s. Ananda Temple, Mahamuni complex, Mandalay.*

The Dhamma-yazika stupa, c. 1197-98, was founded after the king discovered a vapour rising from the ground, one of the few myths surviving from ancient Pagan. It also contains relics sent from Sri Lanka.

local markets to be melted down, since it would be unlikely that they would be sold again as relics. But even the deliberate damage caused by thieves in the pre-colonial period was minor in comparison to the slow and inexorable effects of the climate. The thin clay mortar binding the bricks together was the site's Achilles Heel, as it washed out easily, with disastrous results. Indeed, in October 1983, after 18 cm of rain, thirteen structures suffered severe damage (Stadtner 2005: 46).

Pagan's Myths

Pagan's earliest foundation legend is preserved in a handful of Kyanzittha's inscriptions. The myth centres on the Buddha's prophecy in India that Pagan would be founded 1,630 years following the Buddha's death and that its first king would be Kyanzittha (see Chapter One). However, Pagan's epigraphs during its classic age (11th-13th centuries) recorded very few other myths per se. Rather, Pagan's hundreds of stone records mostly described objects interred in both stupas and temples, the pious wishes of donors, and the funding mechanisms for the construction and maintenance of the shrine or monastery and the types and numbers of donated slaves. For example, the Kubyauk-gyi inscription of *circa* 1113 speaks only of a donated metal Buddha figure, arrangements for the upkeep of the temple and the ailing king for whom the temple was built. Even Kyanzittha's long inscription outside the Shwezigon compound contains no mythical elements relating to any monuments. Also, most key shrines are missing their original inscriptions, such as the Shwesandaw, Ananda and Thatbyinnyu temples, making it impossible to verify accounts recorded in later chronicles.

The only major Pagan shrine to be connected to what might be called a myth is the Dhamma-yazika stupa where a stone inscription recorded that the king went 'forth from his capital, Pukam, called Arimaddanapura, went looking and searching for a sight with auspicious marks, to serve as a field of merit for the building of a royal *ceitya*. And verily he saw a column of vapour pure white issuing from the ground ascending, having the height and measure and girth

A white elephant carried tooth-relics to four sacred places, now linked in a modern pilgrimage trail, starting at the Shwezigon and ending on Mt. Tuyin, east of Pagan. Mt. Tangyi pagoda platform.

A New Pilgrimage Route

When the tooth-relic came to Pagan from Sri Lanka, Anawrahta set it within a reliquary placed upon a white elephant. The king vowed to build a stupa where the tooth would 'be pleased to rest' (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 91). The elephant then wandered but knelt at the Shwezigon whereupon the king enshrined the tooth, together with the forehead bone acquired earlier in Shri Kshetra. Additional tooth replicas were created in the same fashion and the same white elephant knelt in other locations where the king built stupas. After the Shwezigon, the elephant went first across the Irrawaddy to the top of Tangyi Hill, then crossed back and knelt on the river's edge where the Lokananda stupa was constructed. The next spot was deep in the countryside east of Pagan, on Mt. Tuyin. Other sites were Mt. Thalyaun and Mt. Hkaywe but these are no longer so important (Thaw Kaung: 2003). Burmese pilgrims now trace the route of the elephant in the same order (Shwezigon, Tangyi Hill, Lokananda, and Tuyin Hill), but the entire circuit must be concluded by noon and only one wish is allowed. The stupa on Tangyi Hill was well established in the 19th century when it was included in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* and mentioned by foreign visitors (Yule: 39). That the stupa has received much attention by the military government in recent years is a sure sign of its symbolic national role.

The motif of the elephant seeking a special spot for a relic-stupa also has roots in earlier Pali literature, such as the famous story of an elephant that selected the final resting spot for the island's most sacred relic, the collarbone (*Mahavamsa*: XVII). One famous example in Thailand is Doi Suthep, or the sacred hill overlooking Chiang Mai, that was selected by an elephant bearing a bone-relic, which had also replicated itself (Swearer, Premchit & Dokbuakaew: 78).

The Tangyi Hill stupa contains one of the four tooth relic replicas said to be from Sri Lanka.

of a palmyra tree', and he marked the location with an iron nail (Tin Htway). This is not really a myth in the usual sense, but it is one of the few legends surrounding any of the major monuments from the period of their construction. That this Pagan era myth for this major temple is not recorded in later chronicles is one more indication that later chronicles had little access to myths original to the classic Pagan period (c. 11th-13th centuries).

Pagan Through the Ages

In the 15th and 16th centuries the city saw many new temples, monasteries and stupas go up, but they were set against a backdrop of thousands of ruinous shrines from preceding centuries. It was

probably in this age that numerous myths arose to describe the city's founding and its important temples, but by this time virtually all of the earlier myths had been lost. Perhaps the earliest extant account of Pagan from this period is noted simply in the *Yazawin Kyaw*, or *The Celebrated Chronicle*, from the early 16th century. Pagan was founded, according to this text, after Shri Kshetra. Its first ruler was the legendary Pyusawhti (Luce 1969:1. 5). Far more embellished stories crystallised by the end of the 17th century, many recorded in *The Great Chronicle*, or the *Maha-yazawin-gyi*, compiled in the early 18th century by U Kala (Luce & Pe Maung Tin 1923: xiv; Pranke 2004: 192, 200). Many of these passed into the famous *Glass Palace Chronicle* prepared around 1829 in Ava. This chronicle became the 'standard' and official history of Pagan, but its compilers openly wrestled with many different versions of similar myths preserved in various chronicles. It is therefore wise not to think of what myths are more genuine or older but rather try to ask what myths coexisted and when were certain myths more popular during various time frames. The *Glass Palace Chronicle* version of 1829 has, however, completely coloured our views of Pagan today.

Pagan had three vital connections to the legendary past of Burma and Buddhist India, each facet highlighted somewhat differently in the various chronicles over the centuries. The first was a visit to Pagan by the Buddha to make a prediction about the rise of the city in the future and its first august monarch, usually named Pyusawhti. The second was to connect Pagan to earlier prestigious capitals in Burmese history, specifically Tagaung and Shri Kshetra, and by doing so to also the Sakya family in India to which the Buddha belonged (ROB: 5. 121; Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 124). In this vein, Pyusawhti's predecessor named Thamoddarit was linked to the Pyu dynasty at Shri Kshetra, sometimes in a roundabout way but at others directly, with some texts claiming that he was a nephew of the last Pyu king (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 28; *Vamsadipani*: 141; Alexey Kirichenko, personal communication). The third connection was to the foreign evangelising missions sent from India at the time of Asoka that included Sona and Uttara's mission to Lower Burma and Mahinda to Sri Lanka. Pagan was said by the 18th century to be located in Aparantaka, or Sunaparanta, a 'country' that received one of Asoka's missions and in Burma identified with central Burma (Alexey Kirichenko, personal communication). The mission was headed by Dhammarakkhita who converted the inhabitants. However, Buddhism inexorably declined after Dhammarakkhita's visit to the point where it had vanished in Sunaparanta. Moreover, Pagan became overrun by 'sham ascetics', or 'false monks' who 'wore bright red robes' (*Sasanavamsa*: 62; *Vamsadipani*: 142). These monks were a disagreeable lot, even demanding to deflower virgin brides on the eve of their weddings, an unspeakable custom upheld even by the king (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 71). This group was collectively known as the Ari and symbolised everything that good-minded Buddhists abhorred. It was into this environment that Pagan's first

The mythical Pyusawhti slayed with a bow four beasts (a bird, tiger, boar and flying squirrel), saving the Pagan kingdom from ruin. The ruling Pagan king then awarded him his daughter, and he assumed the throne. Pyusawhti is also tied to the Sakya family in India and to Tagaung. Another myth claims that he was the product of snake goddess who coupled with a sun spirit. This modern bronze forms the centre of a fountain opposite the Pagan Museum.

The Shwegu-gyi temple, a mid-size temple dated to circa 1131, took only about seven and a half months to complete. Tower largely reconstructed.

truly historical Burmese king entered the picture, as Anawrahta, a champion and purifier of the faith closely modeled on the life of Asoka in Pali literature (Pranke 2004: 11, 201). In some ways, the lengthy recounting of the entire history of early Burma in the chronicles is groundwork for Anawrahta's rule and his pivotal role as a promoter of the faith. It is therefore no coincidence that Anawrahta is vaunted today by the military as the 'Founder of the First Myanmar Union' (*New Light of Myanmar*, 9 September 2003).

After introducing Anawrahta and his lineage, the *Glass Palace Chronicle* records the conquest of the Mon in Lower Burma and the capture of its king and the Pali canon that ushers in Theravada Buddhism. The chronicle then describes many of the key monuments at Pagan built by its principal kings, such as the Ananda Temple, but none of these myths can be shown to be current during the period when the temples were created. Nonetheless, kernels of truth in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* can be corroborated by early inscriptions, such as the basic sequence of the city's historical kings, beginning with Anawrahta. Only one temple associated with a specific ruler in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* can be corroborated by an inscription. This is the city's Shwegu-gyi temple, said to be built by Alaungisthu in the chronicle and luckily confirmed by a 12th century epigraph. The other major temples mentioned in the chronicle, such as the Shwesandaw and the Ananda, are missing their original donative inscriptions. Associations between certain shrines and kings lingered at Pagan, probably from the period of their construction. Comparing the brief notes of an English visitor in 1826 with the nearly identical material brought together in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* in about 1829 reveals how some of the lore about Pagan was in general agreement (Crawfurd: I. 110).

An early important foundation myth occurs in a mid-17th century text, *Vijjamayasiddhira Kyan* (*Accomplishment of Knowledge*), which claimed that the Buddha came to Pagan after first making a prediction about Shri Kshetra from the Hpo-u hill, across from Prome. The Buddha then traveled north to the tall hill overlooking Pagan on the opposite bank of the Irrawaddy, now called Tangyi Taung, or Tangyi Hill. Here the Buddha saw the Pauk tree (*Butea monosperma*) on the river bank and made a prediction that Pagan would arise at this spot. If the Buddha was seated, standing or accompanied by Ananda is unstated, but he is said to have smiled, a motif repeated with most of the Buddha's prophecies (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 126; Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). This episode echoes the earlier prophecy that the Buddha made about Pagan and Kyanzittha, but the Buddha himself journeyed to Burma in this example.

Jataka *537. Kings suspended in a tree are released after a king-turned-cannibal listens to a sermon by a young prince who is the Buddha-to-be, seen on the left. Loka-hteikpan, c. 12th century.*

This paradigm of the Buddha predicting the rise of cities and future kings is found throughout

The Ananda Temple, at the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826). Just outside the temple's compound, on the left, is the Ananda Brick Monastery, c. *1775-1786. In the distance by the river is the Shwezigon. One of the last skirmishes in the war took place at Pagan. Aquatint. Captain. James Kershaw,* Views in the Burman Empire*,* 1831. *Courtesy: Richard Cooler.*

Burma and the Theravada world, even including the prediction of the greatness of Asoka's capital, Pataliputra. In many myths, the Buddha states that he was an animal in a previous life in the location which he is presently visiting. For example, in one local chronicle the Buddha claimed that he and Ananda were two white cocks in a previous birth and that two bats which he spotted would be reborn as two brothers who would rule over two nearby villages, near Toungoo (Po Saung).

The *Glass Palace Chronicle* placed the Buddha also on Tangyi Hill but the earlier myth was greatly embellished. The Buddha saw there a white heron and a black crow perching on a Pauk tree; a lizard with a forked tongue was in the same tree, with a frog at the base. The Buddha smiled and in response to Ananda claimed that the city of Pagan would arise 651 years after his death. The animal omens were mixed, since some of the city's future inhabitants would practice 'charity and virtue' while others would speak 'falsehood' (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 29). The first king would be Thamoddarit but his realm was menaced by a great boar, a bird, a tiger and a flying squirrel. The location of this legendary kingdom in or around Pagan is unclear but it was comprised of 'nineteen villages', possibly located about thirteen kilometers east of Pagan or in Pagan itself, in people's belief (Hudson 2000: 12). In the early 19th century it was located east of the Lokananda stupa. This kingdom would be saved, the prophecy continued, by a king named Pyusawhti who would

The Ananda's original appearance has remained largely unchanged, despite endless refurbishing and periodic earthquakes. Jataka *tiles are set into the roof terraces. The tower has recently been regilded. Only the east side is without an early 20th century corridor.*

journey to Pagan and slay the four creatures. Shrines connected to one of these creatures killed by Pyusawhti were venerated in the late 19th century (ROB: V. 121; Bird: 356).

Pyusawhti's ancestry is also linked to mythical kings in India, namely, the Sakya family of the Buddha and lastly to a former king of Tagaung, the legendary capital above Mandalay. Pyusawhti was given a bow by his father and left for Pagan where he was raised by a Pyu couple. In time he slew the animals and then acquired the throne after his marriage to the daughter of Thamoddarit. While endorsing this myth, the *Glass Palace Chronicle* dismissed another legend that Pyusawhti issued from a female snake who mated with a sun spirit. The snake deserted the egg that was found by a hunter who removed it to Pagan. Such diverse accounts suggest the multiple current myths that grew up over centuries. Pyusawthi came to symbolise the defense of Burma, with a Pyusawhti Executive Council in the U Nu government that oversaw a militia in the 1950s.

A long line of Thamoddarit's descendants continued to rule at Pagan, leading up to the first historical king, Anawrahta. In this period there was said to be no Buddhism, only the religion of the heretical Ari (*Vamsadipani*: 142).

One tradition links Pagan directly with Lower Burma's Shwedagon legend. This centred on a hair-relic given to Anawrahta by a Mon king in Pegu that was originally one of four hairs Bhallika received from the Buddha. In this version, Bhallika and Tapussa each received four hairs and each built stupas in Yangon. Later, King Duttabaung raided Bhallika's stupa and brought the relics to his Shri Kshetra, from where they was seized by Mon kings from Pegu, or 'Ussa' (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 94). This later legend underpinned

the sanctity of the Shwesandaw pagoda at Pagan, but the stupa's original legend in the Pagan period is lost.

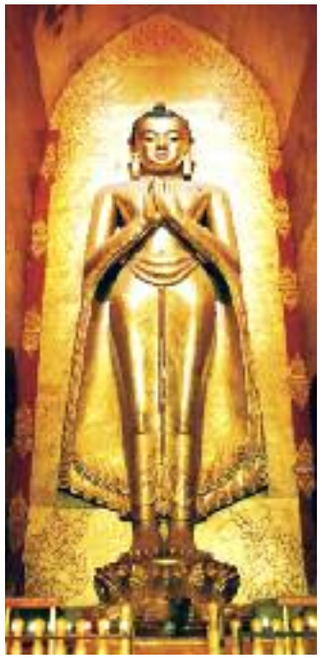
The Ananda Temple : '...the likeness of Nandamula grotto'

The Ananda has remained under continuous worship since the day it was built. Despite earthquakes and endless restorations, its basic outline has remained true to the original. There are no early donative inscriptions associated with the Ananda, but the temple likely dates to the end of the 11th or beginning of the 12th century, or during the reign of Kyanzittha. This conjecture is based on a number of factors, such as the Mon captions on its tile work and the style of its stone sculpture that relates to the Kubyauk-gyi temple of *circa* 1113.

A myth recorded in the later chronicles links the shrine to Kyanzittha who was visited by eight 'enlightened monks', or *yahandas* (*arahants*, Pali) who came from the Nandamula Cave located on Mt. Gandhamadana. Kyanzittha fed and housed them and in return asked them to 'call up by their power the likeness of Nandamula grotto' (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 110). The king then constructed the temple after this vision and named it the Nanda temple. This episode is probably modeled on the famous Sri Lankan king Dutthagamani who received a linen cloth depicting a spectacular monument also from eight *arahants* who had returned from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods; the king then ordered the famous Lohapasada built, according to this design (*Mahavamsa*: XXVII). Nandamula Cave is connected with Mt. Gandhamadana, sometimes described as one of the five mountains surrounding the mythical Lake Anotatta (Malalasekera 1983: I. 746).

The Ananda is based on a cruciform plan, each long corridor identical in size. The chief objects of devotion are the four tall standing Buddhas placed in niches within its massive central brick core. The gilded wooden figures represent the historical Buddha (west side) and the three preceding Buddhas in our present epoch, Kakusandha (north), Konagamana (east), Kassapa (south). None of these Buddhas are associated with the cardinal directions in canonical Pali literature, and the identifications we have today differ completely from those recorded in the 19th century (Yule: 39). The four were likely established sometime early in the Konbaung period. The original images may have been seated Buddhas, made in brick, since there were no standing Buddhas or wooden Buddhas which occupied central positions within temples during the Pagan period.

The principal entrance was probably on the west, as the narrative sculpture inside begins on that side. Each entrance chamber contains sixteen sculptures in niches showing major events in the Buddha's life. The temple interior is organised around two concentric corridors. The outer one features sculpted panels within 80 niches divided into two parallel rows. The story begins on the bottom row, just inside the west entrance, and then winds around the temple clockwise. To appreciate the full series, one must circumambulate the entire temple twice, the first time looking only at the bottom row.



Four wooden Buddhas, donated in the 18th and 19th centuries, stand in niches set into the temple's massive brick core. They represent Gotama and his predecessors. The Buddha Kassapa, south.

80 interior niches arranged in two rows house stone sculptures of the life of the Buddha. Here the Buddha gives his jewellery to his groom who will return to the palace. The horse, right, dies from grief. Top tier, north corridor.

Detail of a scene showing the Buddha's birth. Queen Maya stands and the Buddha slips out from her side.

The stone images share an astonishing affinity with a Pali text from the 5th or 6th centuries (*Nidanakatha*). Moreover, the large number of sculptures, their narrative details, and their early age make the Ananda series unique in Southeast Asia. Also, certain scenes are extremely rare in Buddhist art, if not unprecedented, such as the Buddha fainting at the end his six year fast which is clearly described in the *Nidanakatha*.

The series begins with the Buddha, or really Buddha-to-be, or *bodhisattva*, seated in the company of two kneeling gods in Tusita Heaven, prior to his birth. Many of the following scenes are dedicated to the birth of the Buddha by Maya. A famous panel is the Buddha emerging from his mother's right side, as she grasps the flowering *sala* tree (*Shorea robusta*). Panels then concentrate on the miraculous events of the Buddha's infancy and his life as a young prince. The Buddha is also shown encountering the 'Four Sights', the corpse, the sick man and so on, which prompted him to seek the answer to suffering. The last panels on the lower tier depict the Buddha preparing to abandon the palace for the life of an ascetic.

The upper tier begins on the west face immediately north of the entrance with the departure from the palace on the Buddha's horse. Other scenes depict his visit to Rajagaha and his later encounter with two ascetics whose practices (a form of trance) he rejected, shown in the east corridor. The Buddha is shown fasting, with gods infusing 'divine energy through the pores of his skin' by rubbing an elixir into his arms (*Nidanakatha*: 89). The last scenes on the east wall show Sujata offering the Buddha food before the Buddha approached the Bodhi Tree. The episode of the grass cutter is curiously extended over five panels, all on the south face. The cutter is shown first by the Buddha's side; in the other four panels the cutter is absent but the Buddha holds the grass in slightly different ways. This protracted attention to this incident does not match the brevity of its description in the *Nidanakatha*; the theme's emphasis at Pagan likely reflects an old

The Ananda Temple, By Maung Saw Maung, c. 1960s. Shwe Indein Pagoda, Indein, Inle Lake.

tradition reflected in an 18th century Burmese biography of the Buddha that embellished the episode far beyond the *Nidanakatha* (*Malalankara-vatthu*: 140). The final relief of the series shows the seated Buddha, his right hand lowered, signifying his enlightenment. The *Nidanakatha* takes the biography to the awarding of the Jetavana Monastery by Anathapindika, but the Ananda sculptures end with the enlightenment.

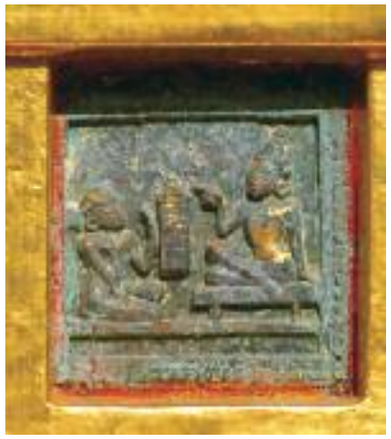
This rarely depicted episode of the Buddha fainting was likely taken from the Nidanakatha*, a Pali text influential at Pagan.*

The Tile Series

The exterior of the Ananda boasts over 1,500 green glazed tiles set into exterior niches, each identified with Mon characters incised on its base. The basement tiles are devoted to Mara's demons, on the west face. The majority of plaques show two demons together, facing left, or toward the north (Guillon). One common category includes men with unpleasant faces, made more disagreeable by snakes emerging from their ears, eyes, or even noses. A typical Mon captions reads, 'Mara's army with snakes coming from their eyes.' Some of the demons are harmless looking creatures, like ducks, or a figure riding a camel, there to remind us that Mara can assume many different guises. On the east face are depictions of the many gods in the Pali Buddhist universe, such as the Regents of the Four Quarters, their Twenty-eight Generals, and many other divine beings, such as mythical birds, snakes, gods and goddesses, many shown in procession. Unlike the demons facing in a single direction, the gods are divided into two moieties, each moving toward the east entrance. The tiles on the roof series are the most complete surviving ceramic *jatakas* series at Pagan. They begin on the southwest corner of the lowest terrace and wind around the temple in a clockwise direction, ascending to the topmost terrace. Each of the first 537 *jatakas* is accorded a single tile and identified with its Pali name and number (Brown: 1997). The last group of ten tales, known as the *Mahanipata*, are the most sacred and they collectively consumed a total of 389 tiles. The number of tiles accorded to each of the last ten varied greatly, with two *jatakas* receiving as little as two or nine tiles, while the *Vessantara* and the *Mahasodha Jatakas* merited 124 and 95, respectively (Tun Aung Chain 2005b: 5).

Hundreds of green glazed tiles surround the temple base, each identified by Mon inscriptions. Those on the east show deities in the Theravada pantheon. These male deities hold elephant goads.

The demons are usually shown paired. Many have snakes issuing from their eyes, ears or noses. All the Ananda tiles were copied in the late 18th century and used as models for the ceramic series at the Mingun Pagoda.



The jatakas *at the Shwezigon are unique in Pagan since they are made of stone and covered with a green glaze. The series here numbers 550, not the standard number of 547.*

The Shwezigon : '...the lunar orb in a clear sky'

The Shwezigon inches somewhat above the Ananda as the most sacred site at Pagan today, and this was probably true throughout history. Enveloped more in myth than real history, it is among the earliest and largest stupas at Pagan. An inscription during the reign of Kyanzittha sits just outside the temple compound but no mention is made of the Shwezigon or even any construction here. The stupa's exact date and its true relics will therefore probably never be known.

Its foundation, according to later chronicles, was attributed to Anawrahta who enshrined therein the forehead bone of the Buddha that he had seized from a stupa in Shri Kshetra created by King Duttabaung. Anawrahta also deposited a tooth-relic that he obtained from the reigning king of Sri Lanka, as a consolation for failing to acquire a tooth in China. The tooth arrived from Sri Lanka by ship which docked at the Lokananda stupa, toward the southern end of Pagan. The tooth then reproduced itself many times. The locations of the stupas in which they each were interred was selected by a royal elephant, allowed to roam at will. One replica is thought to be enshrined inside today at the Shwezigon, a second at the Lokananda, a third on Mt. Tangyi across the Irrawaddy, and a fourth on Mt. Tuyin, a hilltop a few kilometres east of Pagan (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 89). There is no firm evidence for any of these tooth-relic deposits during the time of Anawrahta, but two later Pagan inscriptions referred to a tooth-relic at Mt. Tuyin. The earlier one, dated to 1348, mentioned that Anawrahta himself made a donation to a stupa with a tooth-relic located on Mt. Tuyin. The later record, dated to 1472, simply spoke of a dedication connected to the Mt. Tuyin tooth-relic (Frasch 1999: 88; Tilman Frasch, personal communication). This inscriptional evidence, albeit much later than Anawrahta's reign, perhaps lends some credibility to the tooth-relic tradition associated with Anawrahta in the later chronicles (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 91).

Anawrahta finished all of the three square basement terraces before his death, but it fell to Kyanzittha to complete the drum (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 88). The Shwezigon is unique at Pagan, since it is faced with stone and not brick. The only major parallel is the Aung Mye Lawka stupa in Sagaing built by King Bodawpaya (r. 1782-1819), perhaps emulating the Shwezigon.

The Mon captions incised on the *jataka* panels inserted into the terraces suggest that the stupa can be attributed to Anawrahta or Kyanzittha, or to both their reigns. However, the colourful accounts in the chronicles may have been influenced by a celebrated incident in Sri Lankan lore which also speaks of a dying king bequeathing to his successor the task of finishing a stupa (*Mahavamsa*: XXXII. 59). The *jataka* panels are unique since they are made of stone, covered with a green glaze. The series depicts 550 tales, resembling the early terracotta series at the Hpetleik stupas, but departs from the usual number of 547 (Stadtner 2005: 223).

The Shwezigon inspired rulers throughout Burmese history, even more than the Ananda. Land and slaves were given over to the stupa in the 14th and 15th centuries, but the most dramatic donation was a huge bell by Bayinnaung (r. 1551-1581). The bell's Mon and Burmese inscription is silent about the pagoda's history but relates only the king's gilding of the entire structure (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 110). Much later, Hsinbyushin (r. 1763-1776) replaced the *hti* at the Shwezigon with an eleven-tiered one, filling the metal cone at the top with 1,000 emeralds and 111 coral beads, 'to represent the sacred relics of Gautama', recorded in a stone inscription enshrined on the platform. This epigraph recorded that the Shwezigon contained the forehead bone and the tooth and that Anawrahta finished the stupa within his reign; Kyanzittha established only the *hti*, the very one that Hsinbuyushin had replaced. The Shwezigon, with its new *hti*, was 'as conspicuous as the lunar orb in a clear sky' (Tun Nyein: 14-22). A European visitor recorded in the mid-18th century that the Shwezigon enshrined 'one of God's teeth and collar bone' (Baker: 626).

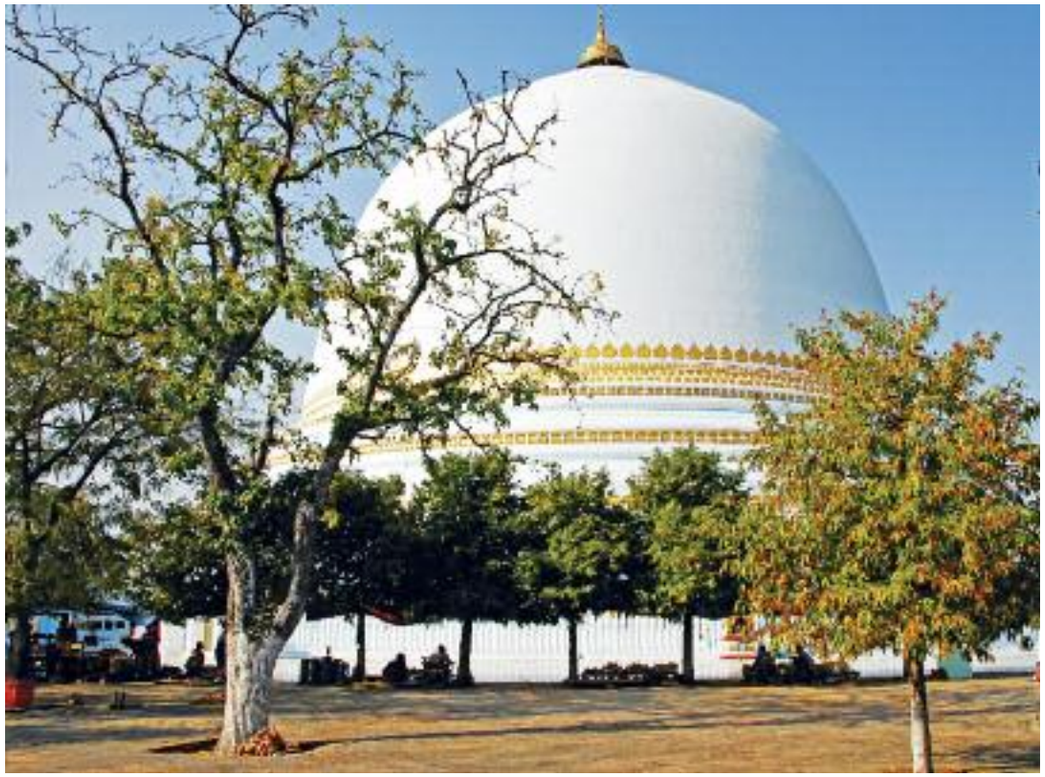
Many traditions surround the stupa, such as the 'Nine Wonders', immortalised in a poem by the famous minister, Kinwun Mingyi (1822-1908). These include a drum that played on one side of the pagoda which cannot be heard on another, and the presence of two types of trees in constant bloom. The verses are found incised on a large stone alms bowl. Another tradition refers to twelve spots where worshippers should apply gold leaf, many of which are *nat* images within the compound (Stadtner 2005: 225).

Enshrined within the Shwezigon is the forehead bone of the Buddha, from Shri Kshetra, and a tooth-relic, received from Sri Lanka. Built in the late 11th or early 12th century, the pagoda has been subject to continuous patronage, notably a huge bell by Bayinnaung in the 16th century and a new hti *from Hsinybyushin in the 18th century.*

Later Burmese Kingdoms

Kaung-hmu-daw: Tooth and Bowl Relics
Amarapura: King Bodawpaya's Vision
Mingun: Piety and Earthquakes
Mahamuni: Sacred Spoils of War
The Kyauk-taw-gyi at Amarapura
Mandalay Hill: A Prophecy Fulfilled
The Kyauk-taw-gyi at Mandalay
The Kuthodaw: A Book In Stone

Kaung-Hmu-Daw: Tooth and Bowl Relics



A tooth-relic and alms bowl obtained from Sri Lanka are enshrined inside. Construction began in 1636 and finished 13 years later. Its peculiar shape emulated the Thuparama stupa in Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, noted in an inscription in the compound dated to 1650.

Previous page: *U Bein's famous bridge in Amarapura, captured in a watercolour by Colesworthy Grant, the official artist with the Arthur Phayre mission to Upper Burma in 1855. Courtesy: British Library.*

The Kaung-hmu-daw ranks among the most venerated pagodas in Upper Burma, enshrining a tooth-relic and an alms bowl obtained from Sri Lanka. Rising dramatically from the plains behind the Sagaing hills, it is even visible from the Irrawaddy.

The pagoda was largely completed by King Thalun (r. 1629-1648) but it fell to his son and successor to raise the *hti* in 1649. Construction began in 1636 and concluded thirteen years later. The capital then was in nearby Ava, having recently been shifted from Pegu in Lower Burma. Its formal title is Rajamanicula (Pali), or Royal Jeweled Crown, but is popularly called the Kaung-hmu-daw, or Royal Work of Merit.

Its donative inscription is dated to 1650, the second year in the reign of Pindale (r. 1648-1661), Thalun's son. The land for the pagoda was cleared in January 1635 and consecrated the following year, in May 1636. Work began in December 1636 and was finished in 1649, a year after Thalun took his last breath at age 64, on 23 August 1648. His son then supervised the hoisting of the *hti* during

May 1649. Also, there is lore that the court astrologer, Azaguru, correctly predicted the date of Thalun's death, leading the furious king to exile him to Pagan (Than Htut: 10; ROB: I. 140).

King Pindale and his entourage crossed from Ava to Sagaing in a boat shaped like the sweet-voiced *karavika* (Pali) bird, or Karaweik. Despite Pindale's abundant merit resulting from these donations, it did not impress his brother who dethroned him less than twenty years later, in 1661.

A mere 10,126,552 bricks make up the fabric of the pagoda. In addition, 650, 385 baskets of red earth were used, presumably as filler. The wooden scaffolding required to raise the metal spire prompted a royal order for 1,000 cut trees and 10, 000 stalks of bamboo (ROB: I. 138). The metal *hti* was made up of five vertical rings receding in size, the lowest one having a diameter of 4.11 metres. Gold allocated for its gilding amounted to 150 *viss*, or 248.86 kg. An order to prepare for the hoisting of the finial was issued on 8 April 1649 (ROB: I. 139). The original *hti* has been replaced many times. The decision to locate the stupa in the plains behind Sagaing has no ready explanation.

Worshippers gather before a sacred metal Buddha inside the southern devotional hall adjoining the Kaung-hmu-daw Pagoda. Both the hall and the Buddha are modern.

A Tooth and a Bowl

The key relics were enshrined on 12 December 1636, according to Pindale's inscription in the compound dated to 1650. Displayed first in a nearby pavilion, the relics included a tooth and hair(s) of 'royal veneration', innumerable unspecified relics (*dhatu*, Pali), hair-relics, stupas studded with jewels and jewelled images conveyed from many unspecified countries. The epigraph also described paintings on the compound walls (long lost) that depicted the arrival of a tooth-relic and alms bowl from Sri Lanka to Pegu and their removal to Toungoo and finally to Ava. The captions to the paintings were said to be in Burmese, Mon and Yun (Lanna Thai) (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). The key relics were therefore thought to be the tooth and alms bowl from Sri Lanka. This inscription also proves

The hoisting of the hti *in 1649, which required 1,000 cut trees, is shown in this modern panel. The stupa was begun by King Thalun but completed by his successor, King Pindale, who looks on at the right. By Maung Ba Thein. Entrance corridor. Kaung-hmu-daw Pagoda.*

that by the 17th century some painting focused on real events which occurred in religious contexts. This differs from Pagan painting which largely took its inspiration from Buddhist texts.

The peregrinations of the tooth and the bowl relics are not mentioned in the inscription but can be traced from Burmese chronicles. The tooth was first brought to Burma as a gift to Thalun's grandfather, Bayinnaung (r. 1551-1581), who was ruling in Pegu. It was sent from Sri Lanka by King Dhammapala in exchange for military assistance. Bayinnaung received the relic at the port of Bassein and conveyed it to Pegu. The king placed the relic inside a casket containing four gems associated with two earlier Mon rulers (Banya Barow, Dhammaceti), the *sawbwa* of Mongmit and the king of Ayutthaya. He retained the original relic in his Pegu bedchamber but enshrined tooth replicas in two stupas in Pegu, the Mahazedi and Mahavijaya. The lord of Toungoo raided Pegu in 1599 and removed the tooth-relic to Toungoo, together with a relic bowl, on 22 February 1600. Both were then seized in Toungoo by King Anaukpetlun (r. 1606-1628) and taken to Ava in 1610. They were finally installed in the Kaung-hmu-daw in 1636. King Thalun also ordered the casting of two Buddhas, in gold and silver, equal to his weight, but there is no mention of their enshrinement inside the pagoda (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication).

The early records are silent about the alms bowl, but it most likely accompanied the tooth-relic from Sri Lanka The linking of the Buddha's tooth to the alms bowl endures in Theravada traditions to today, beginning in Sri Lanka from at least the 12th century, evinced in the famous slab inscription of the Velaikkaras at Polonnaruva (Wickremasinghe: 254). It was also noted in 18th century Burma (ROB: IV. 21). Today in Kandy, for example, a stupa dedicated to the alms bowl is near the Temple of the Tooth and other lore maintains that the bowl lies in a base immediately beneath the tooth relic (Strong 2004: 195; Geiger 1986: 213).

Hundreds of stone lampposts and shrines dedicated to the days of the week encircle the base. The age of the posts are unknown but were noted in 1826 by John Crawfurd.

The inscription in the compound recorded seven separate enshrinements but only the first is described in detail. Its date of 1636, implies that this key relic-chamber was excavated into the ground or placed near the base of the stupa. The remaining later six interments probably occurred over the years of construction, suggesting multiple chambers throughout the height of the pagoda but which contained relics of lesser importance.

That these paired-relics, the tooth and alms bowl, represent a palladium of kingship no doubt explains why these two sacred objects were the focus of so much attention in the 16th and 17th centuries and merited such an imposing structure. The relics also reminded those in Upper Burma of the conquests in Lower Burma and unification of the country, however brief.

A Nod to Sri Lanka

The inscription at the Kaung-hmu-daw states that the monument's shape resembled the Thupayon stupa, or Thuparama (Pali), at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. This stupa was built by Sri Lanka's greatest legendary king, Devanampiyatissa, who became a Buddhist at the time of King Asoka. Its chief relic was the right collar bone of the Buddha. The peculiar contour of the Kaung-hmu-daw is therefore modeled on this famous stupa in Anuradhapura, although the Burmese example is more tapered toward the top, above the shoulder. It is a departure from the usual bell-shaped design in Burma, such as at the Shwezigon in Pagan. The Thuparama in Sri Lanka underwent many restorations, however, especially in the 19th century, and so it is therefore not easy to access the extent to which the 17th century Burmese monument matched the one in Sri Lanka. The tradition of emulating certain celebrated stupas from Sri Lanka probably began as early as the Pagan period but there is no firm proof. However, an inscription recorded that the Hsinymashin stupa in Sagaing, in 1431, was modeled upon the famous Ratanacetiya (modern Ruvanwelisaya) built by King Dutthagamani in Anuradhapura (Than Tun 2004: 225).

A purely Burmese tradition also arose to explain the pagoda's odd appearance, reported in at least three chronicles. This story places Prince Thalun at the ancient city of Shri Kshetra. In the earliest account, Thalun vowed before the Tharama Pagoda (also called the Payama) that he would recreate a stupa resembling the Payama in his capital if he succeeded in capturing the throne. This story by U Kala in the 18th century is repeated in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* from the early 19th century. In another account, the *New Chronicle,* the pagoda is said to be the Bawbawgyi Pagoda at Shri Kshetra. In other sources the same story is found but without the name of the specific stupa (*Sasanavamsa*: 115). The conical shape of the Payama and the cylindrical design of the Bawbawgyi pagoda bear only a superficial resemblance to the Kaung-hmu-daw. These legends underscore how ancient sites, such as Shri Kshetra, were continually woven into later Burmese history, such as the capture of relics from a stupa at Shri Kshetra by Pagan's Anawrahta.

The Compound

The Kaung-hmu-daw is ringed with 812 spindly stone lampposts, recalling those once established at the Shwedagon in the fifteenth century and lights encircling Asoka's Great Stupa noted in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (Strong 2004: 147). The base is lined with 120 niches, each with a seated, painted stone guardian, a floral ornament in the raised right hand and a short sword in the lowered left hand. These appear to be recent replacements for similar sandstone images noted in the 19th century (Crawfurd: I. 344; Bird: 297).

Four worship halls are now placed at the cardinal directions, but only one was described in the early 19th century, on the east side, with a gilded sandstone image of the Buddha (Cox: I. 345). By the

120 painted stone guardians encircle the base of the stupa.

The stupa's major donative inscription, dated to 1650, recorded seven enshrinements over the course of construction and the stupa's connection with the Thuparama in Sri Lanka. This epigraph also details the extent of the Burmese kingdom and was used by Henry Burney in the 1830s to bolster Burmese claims over Manipur, now in India. Kaung-hmu-daw compound.

mid-19th century four small worship halls had appeared (Yule: fig. 22). The principal entrance today is on the south side, where government figures make their donations.

A compound wall built at the same time as the pagoda was adorned with frescoes arranged in horizontal rows. The base was devoted to hell scenes, followed by rows featuring the abodes of men, gods ('*deva*', Pali) and another class of divinities called '*brahmas*' (Pali). The middle row had a complete set of *jatakas*, numbering 547, while the top of the wall was given over to scenes from the Buddha's life (ROB: 1. 139). The captions to the frescos were in Burmese, Mon and Yun (Lanna Thai), testimony to the regions subsumed within the kingdom. None of these paintings have survived. Over a century later Bodawpaya (r. 1782-1819) ordered restorations of some paintings depicting royal boats and barges in the enclosure, but these are also lost (ROB: V. 226).

The main entrance corridor, on the south face, was put up as recently as the 1960s and features panels covering the founding of the stupa and the arrival of relics from Sri Lanka. The opening scene shows the Buddha pointing in the direction of the future pagoda from a hill located in Sagaing, recalling the Buddha gesturing to Pagan and to Mandalay. Most panels appear to be from the hand of Maung Ba Thein, a Mandalay painter. Near the entrance are two globes supported by flanking lions and dedicated by Shwe Chu and his family, the same cheroot-tycoon who donated the present Kalyani Ordination Hall in Pegu in the 1950s. It is also an auspicious place to liberate birds kept in cages. Sparrows can be released cheaply, but they accrue little merit compared to the more exotic species whose freedom carries a heftier price tag.

The stone inscription from 1650 stands inside this probably 19th century structure.

The Marble Inscription

The Burmese inscription, dated to 1650, is incised on a massive marble slab in the northeastern corner of the compound. It therefore would have been on the right as one entered from the original eastern entrance. The stone came from the Sagyin quarries and is over 2.5 metres in height and nearly 30 cm wide. Each side has eighty-six lines. Designs in the shape of bodhi-leaves and foliate patterns are found at the top. A horrid blue-green paint now covers one side.

Part of the text delimits the extent of Thalun's kingdom which at that time included Chiang Mai. It also contains the earliest reference to the famous 32-city classification found in Lower Burma (Shorto 1963: 573). The Burmese court in the 19th century used territorial claims stated in this inscription in its negotiations with the

English over disputed lands in eastern India (Yule: 351; Blackmore 1985: 72). The stone record was also one of those copied centuries later by King Bodawpaya and set up at the Mahamuni Temple.

The modest building housing the inscription is probably 19th century, with corner pilasters of European design. The small inscription-shrine in the compound of the Shwezigon, Pagan, from the late 18th century follows a similar design but is free of foreign influences.

Three nearby villages north of the pagoda were also dedicated to the shrine by Thalun. One was devoted to musicians used during festivals, another for dance and stage shows and a third for preparing food for monks during festivals. These villages were given surrounding land to till and were exempt from taxes and military service. Henry Yule noted in 1855 separate villages for paper-making and metal-working (Yule: 64). One nearby village engaged in marble sculpting but the ateliers imported the stone from the Sagyin quarries since the local variety 'does not afford any fit for statuary' (Cox: I. 298).

Pagoda slaves were attached directly to the Kaung-hmu-daw, from the outset in the 17th century (ROB: I. 140). In 1807 over 100 slaves assigned to the pagoda had been poached by petty chiefs in the area, and it was ordered that they be returned. They were rounded up and tattooed and their names recorded in an inscription, to prevent them from deserting service at the pagoda (ROB: VI. 1). After the fall of Mandalay in 1885, the Kaung-hmu-daw walled compound became a retreat for bandits, or dacoits, but the 'pagoda was attacked and the defendants driven out' (White: 136).

The relics await interment before the relic box. The tooth radiates light. The Buddha's bowl is on the left. King Thalun, right, pays homage. South corridor, By Maung Ba Thein.

Lamps inside the tops of these tightly spaced stone posts give a special glow to the stupa's base. When these lamps were established is hard to say. Lamps also encircled the Shwedagon in Yangon, according to the pagoda's 15th century inscription.

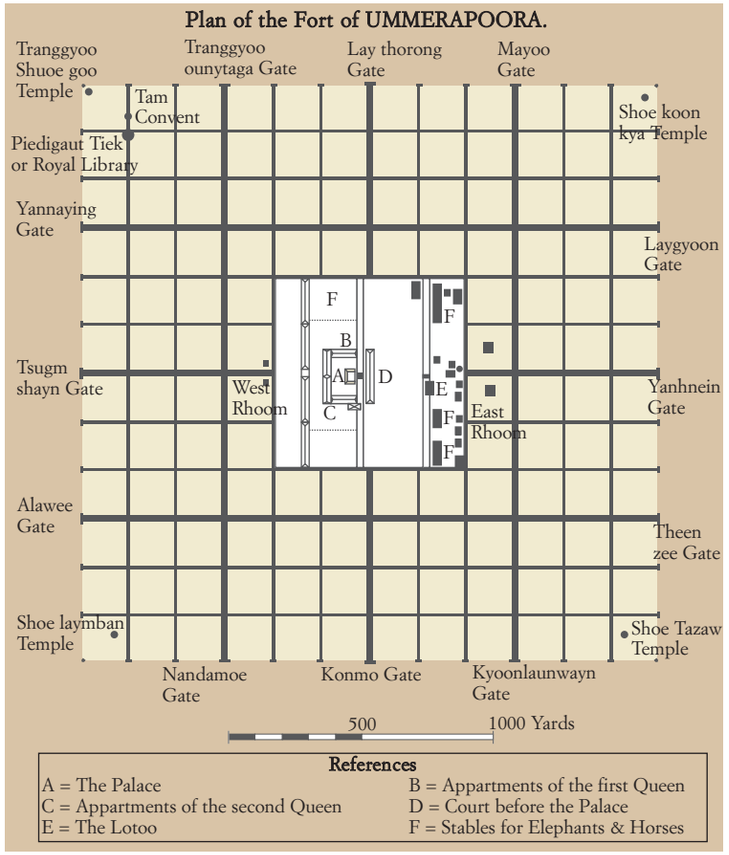
Amarapura: King Bodawpaya's Vision

Amarapura is now merely a southern extension of greater Mandalay, but it was once the capital of Burma. Despite its brief ascendancy, the city's rulers forever coloured the nation's sacred landscape. The city was founded by Bodawpaya (r. 1782-1819) whose nearly forty-year reign saw the building of the Mingun Pagoda and the capture of the Mahamuni bronze from Rakhine. Little survives of old Amarapura today, but its environs evoke a past altogether different from Mandalay's hustle and bustle.

Bodawpaya was the son of Alaungpaya (r. 1752-1760), founder of the Konbaung Dynasty (1752-1885). Early rulers of the dynasty saw the greatest expansion of Burmese territory ever known, but three consecutive wars with Britain in the 19th century led to the gradual loss of Lower Burma and the fall of Mandalay in November 1885. The reigns of Bodawpaya and Mindon (r. 1853-1878) resulted in some of the most revered sacred sites in the country.

Amarapura was made a new capital shortly after Bodawpaya overthrew his nephew in Ava in 1782. Court astrologers dictated every step in the creation of the new city, beginning with an auspicious moment for groundbreaking on 21 October. Building started only when drums announced the first night watch, at precisely 9:00 PM. Seven key projects were begun simultaneously on 9 January 1783, which included the city walls, the moat, a monastery and a library. The labourers moved clockwise, beginning in the north, and even the birthday of the workers was required to match the king's (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 130). The city was formally opened six months later, on 1 June 1783, after the coronation in the new city on 17 May 1783 (Okudaira and Huxley).

King Mindon's palace was visited by the Arthur Phayre mission in 1855, a few years before the capital shifted to Mandalay. Nothing survives of the palace today. This watercolour, with pen and ink, was done by Colesworthy Grant, the mission's artist. Courtesy: British Library.



Founded by Bodawpaya in 1783, Amarapura was laid out on a grid, with the palace, centre, facing east. The square brick walls were about 1.6 kilometrss long, with 12 city gates. Plan adapted from Michael Symes, An Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava.

Amarapura owes its birth to a prophecy delivered by the Buddha to four ogres who inhabited surrounding legendary hilltops. The prediction, in a contemporaneous document, declared that after a specified number of years a universal monarch would appear and locate his capital there (Maung Tin). Another tradition recorded that these four ogres were predicted to be reborn as future kings in Amarapura, resembling a prophecy at Pagan (*Sasanvamsa*: 135; *Glass Palace Chronicle* 159). The new capital was also directly compared to an ancient Indian city called Rajagaha, in modern Bihar state, home to the dynasty from which King Asoka sprang. Rajagaha was likened directly to Amarapura, at first a 'deserted place, a forest abode haunted by ogres' (Maung Tin). And there were heavenly associations also, since Amarapura was equated with Amaravati, a capital reserved for the gods. Bodawpaya also likened his actions to King Asoka and Devanampiyatissa, a legendary king of Sri Lanka (Maung Tin; ROB: VI. 3).

The square-shaped city was defined by thick brick walls roughly 1.6 kilometres in length that were encircled by a moat fed by a nearby river. The twelve gateways were each associated with an astrological house. The city's massive brick ramparts have mostly

This cannon, seized from Rakhine in 1794-1795 and nearly 9 metres in length, was once at Amarapura. It is now at the rear of the Mandalay Palace.

A Burmese mission to Delhi in 1817 is captured in this painting by an anonymous Indian artist, c. 1817-1820. In the background is Delhi's famous Red Fort. Inscriptions identify the characters. Courtesy: Francesca Galloway.

been dismantled and used in local building but traces of the walls and the moat are still visible in some spots. Modern development, a timber yard and a military cantonment have now taken up most of the old city. A 19th-century railway line cuts through the northwest corner of the city.

Like Mandalay, the wooden palace was located in the centre of the city walls. Nothing remains of it presently, but it was situated near where there are today two brick buildings now named the Treasury and Archives, from a later period (Bird: 303). The palace faced east, toward the sun, reflecting the connection made by Burmese dynasties from the Pagan period onward with the Solar Line of mythical kings, or *adityavamsha* (Sanskrit) (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 132).

The palace was itself surrounded by a low brick wall and outside on the eastern side were a bell tower and a structure enshrining a tooth-relic of the Buddha. Both were still in existence at the end of the 19th century but cannot be traced today (Bird: 305). Nearby was an enormous cannon that was part of the booty captured in Rakhine at the same time as the Mahamuni image (Blackmore 1985: 118). The two largest guns were dubbed the 'Two Brothers Cannon' and affixed to two wooden carriages in 1815 (ROB: VII. 95; Crawfurd: I. 252). The pair was accompanied by smaller cannon, but by the late 19th century everything was enveloped in dense vegetation (Yule: 136; O'Conner: 143). The larger one is now stationed at the Mandalay Palace, at the rear entrance.

The city was divided into parallel streets, with the palace taking around twenty per cent of the total area within the walls. Three wide intersecting streets were crisscrossed by small lanes, creating small blocks. In each corner of the city was a large brick temple, designed to protect Amarapura from untoward forces. They were in a ruinous state at the beginning of the 20th century but have been restored.

Some of the key monasteries donated to the most important monks in the land were built over 3 kilometres north of the city walls in what was then quiet countryside (*Sasanavamsa*: 137; Symes). In their immediate vicinty was sited the Mahamuni temple, a location that was probably chosen because of its proximity to these establishments.

The king inherited a pernicious dispute centred on whether novices should enter the lanes for their morning alms with one or two shoulders covered by their robes. Bodawpaya came down strongly for the two-shoulder faction and even forced a key opposing monk to disrobe (Pranke 2004: 2). The king was overbearing and his long reign is marked by sharp friction with the *sangha*. He unified the *sangha* under the Thuddhama Council, a reform resulting in the Thuddhama division, the leading component in monastic life today in Burma.

Bodawpaya also relied on Indian brahmins to govern certain aspects of court rituals, such as coronations. This was true for all Burmese kings but was especially pronounced during his reign (Thant Myint-U; Leider 2005/2006). Even Hindu deities, such as Ganesha, were openly worshipped in this Buddhist environment (ROB: VI. 307). One Hindu deity favoured for a time was Kapila

The stone image of the Hindu sage Kapila Muni, imported from Varanasi in 1812, opposite, is nearly identical to this example in Varanasi, below. The one in Amarapura, 139 cm high, is in the Kyaw Aung San Hta Monastery. This one, 148 cm, is in the Kapiladhara Temple, Varanasi.

The Pahto-daw-gyi, modeled on a stupa built by the legendary King Dutthagamani in Sri Lanka, stood just outside Amarapura's walls, to the southwest, close by Taungtha-man Lake. The relic chambers were opened by robbers in 1905 but items were recovered. View from U Bein's Bridge.

Muni, a legendary sage who was widely revered in eastern India in the 19th century (Singh: 118). The deity's popularity today is limited to Bengal where its chief shrine sits on the tiny Sagara Island at the mouth of the Hoogly River south of Calcutta. A large stone image of this deity was acquired by a Burmese mission to Varanasi in 1812 and towed up the Irrawaddy on a barge, with dancers and much fanfare. Over 1 metre in height, the stone sculpture is very heavy. It was installed in a small shrine at Amarapura in 1814, situated in the shadow of the huge square brick pagoda dominating the north-east corner of the city (ROB: VII. 84). In the recent past the image was shifted to a monastery near U Bein's bridge where it is still worshipped under the name Kapila Muni. However, the original temple still survives and the exact position that the stone image occupied can be traced. The sculpture is virtually identical to a Kapila Muni sculpture still venerated in Varanasi (Stadtner 2001). Indeed, both sculptures probably came from the same stone workshop in Varanasi at roughly the same time. Nearby is another brick structure probably of the same age, likely a residence for a chief monk and one of the few survivals from this period. Amarapura enjoyed contacts with independent Indian states in order to moot British influence and to acquire Sanskrit manuscripts on various subjects. A rare illustration probably recorded a mission to Delhi in 1817 in which the Burmese ambassador was described in a Persian inscription above his head as 'Likeness of Nud Myaw Manakala Kyaw' (Losty; Stadtner 2001).

The Pahto-daw-gyi

Bagyidaw (r. 1819-1837) kept the seat of power in Amarpura after his grandfather's death in 1819 but shifted the capital back to Ava in 1824. He oversaw his army's defeat in the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26) and the loss of much coastal territory. His chief queen constructed a brick monastery in Ava which remains in excellent condition, the Maha Aungmya Bonzan, from 1828. One of the king's first key achievements was a large stupa built just southwest of the city walls, a stone's throw from the lake's edge and visible from U Bein's bridge. The stupa is called by locals the Pahto-daw-

Inscribed marble plaques in the Pahto-daw-gyi's terraces depict the jatakas*, the life of the Buddha and other subjects. A rabbit sacrifices himself for Sakka, disguised as a starving brahmin, an episode immortalised by Sakka imprinting a rabbit on the moon* (Jataka *no. 316).*

gyi, or 'Royal Work of Merit', but its formal name was Maha-wizaya-yanti-hpaya, or 'Great Victory Pagoda'. Ground breaking started on 5 January 1820, with the foundation-stakes laid two months later. There were two relic enshrinements, both coinciding with a lunar eclipse, first on 29 March 1820 and again on 17 March 1821. Its *hti*, was hoisted on February 1824. The stupa's basic outline is original, although it has been refreshed many times. It is represented among the murals of the Kyauk-taw-gyi at Amarapura.

The history of the temple appears in Burmese chronicles and a long inscription in the northeastern corner of the compound. The inscription recorded that the monument was modeled on a famous stupa founded by Dutthagamani, a legendary ruler in Sri Lanka. The pagoda's contour, however, conforms to typical Burmese shapes and has little to do with the appearance of early stupas in Sri Lanka, such as the Ruwanweliseya stupa started by Dutthagamani, implying a metaphorical affinity and not a physical one.

The inscription further mentions that the relic-chambers numbered sixteen, four large ones in the centre, surrounded by twelve smaller ones. The large rooms were nearly 12 metres long by 2 metres wide. Each of the four central chambers was dedicated to separate Buddha images: Gotama (east), Konagamana (south), Kassapa (east) and Kakusandha (north). Thousands of relics were placed inside the sixteen chambers, which included Buddha images made in gold, silver and other precious materials (Pinnya). There were also portrait sculptures of the royal family, such as the king who founded the Konbaung Dynasty and his queen, and those of Bodawpaya and his family. Portrait sculptures of Bagyidaw and his consort were in the eastern chamber. There were also numerous small bronze images of scenes from the life of the Buddha, such as the two brothers Tapussa and Bhallika important for the Shwedagon. The three terraces forming the body of the stupa are decorated with hundreds of small marble plaques, the majority inscribed. Subjects include the life of the Buddha, the 28 Buddhas, and all 547 *jatakas*. The compound also houses a huge bell established in 1828.

The great quake of 1839 brought down the *hti*, not replaced until Mindon's reign. Robbers broke into the relic-chambers in 1905 and made off with many items but some were recovered (Pinnya). A quake struck in 1912 but the spire was replaced in 1919. The last big tremor hit in 1956 and a new *hti* went up the following year, with Prime Minister U Nu placing on the crowning orb, or *seinbu*.

Brahmins in procession, dressed in white. Hindu ritualists and astrologers played a key role in court life. Mural, south corridor, east side. Kyauk-taw-gyi, Amarapura, c. 1850.

Amarapura's major attraction is the Kyauk-taw-gyi temple, located near the far end of U Bein's Bridge, by the south shore of the lake. It was built during the reign of King Pagan (r. 1848-1853) who succeeded his father King Tharrawaddy (r. 1837-1848). Tharrawaddy moved the capital once again, from Amarapura to Ava in 1840. After his death, King Pagan moved the capital yet again from Ava to Amarapura. His tumultuous six-year reign ended with his overthrow by his half-brother, Mindon.

Mindon occupied Amarapura for about six years before moving the capital northward some 10 kilometres to the foot of Mandalay Hill. It was at this time, 1855, that the king hosted a British mission from Lower Burma headed by Arthur Phayre. The mission included a photographer, Linneaus Tripe, and a watercolourist, Colesworthy Grant. Fifty sets of the calotype negatives were printed but only seven have survived (Dewan 219); Grant's watercolours are found only in the British Library. The mission's secretary, Henry Yule, published an account of the mission three years later.

Amarapura's population from the beginning was cosmopolitan and the trend accelerated in the 19th century. European Christians, Chinese, Indian Muslims and Hindus, and Armenians were all part of the mix. The city was linked to the wider world, with even newspapers from Calcutta translated into Burmese for the king. Thus in the late 18th century European missions were surprised to find luxury gift items from Calcutta in local shops (Symes: 371). Even the livery of the king's servants was tailored from imported fabric.

Phayre shared with Mindon the recent monograph by General Alexander Cunningham on the famous Sanchi stupas which prompted the king to request the relics from these excavations. Over a century later his wish came true when U Nu accepted relics excavated in stupas near Sanchi.

Another ethnic group in Amarapura were descendants of conquered peoples removed by the thousands from Manipur on the Indian border. These Manipuris were called Kathe by the Burmese and were often known as Cassay in English sources. Most Manipuris formed an underclass of labourers but many were involved in the silk shops, either weaving or spinning (Yule: 144, 154). Many were Hindus but some were Muslims, especially those involved in dying cotton (Yule: 156). Manipuris were also known for their metal work. Some Manipuri men formed an elite equestrian unit within the military. This community has intermarried with local Burmese and has now assimilated.

Chinese were also among the foreign communities. They lived both inside the city walls and in the residential area west of the walls. Active trade occurred between Upper Burma and Yunnan in which cotton from Burma was exchanged for silk, all transported by pack trains. The most tangible testimony to this Chinese presence is a temple dedicated to the goddess Guan Yin. It was first founded in Ava during the reign of King Hsinbyushin (r. 1763-1776) but was moved to Amarapura. Destroyed and rebuilt several times after fires devastated the capital in 1811, 1830 and 1838, it was finally relocated in 1847 to its present location, now set along a narrow dirt road running along side the west bank of Taungthaman Lake known in the past as China Street. The high outer wall is entered by a dramatic circular doorway, or Yay Kun Mint (Moon Door), a favorite subject for colonial photographers. It was originally supported by the local Chinese community from Yunnan (Bastian: 81).

U Win Maung measuring the very spot where the imported Kapila Muni sculpture was placed in 1814. This ruinous temple is beside the pagoda in the northeastern corner of Amarapura.

Mingun: Piety and Earthquakes

This massive structure took over 20 years to complete, in 1812. If it was left unfinished, without its tower, remains an enigma. The brick blockhouse protruding from the top may have been capped by a metal spire, or hti. *The devastating quake of 1839 was preceded by lesser jolts in 1812, which may have influenced the course of construction.*

Thought to be abandoned and unfinished by its inept royal patron, Burma's largest pagoda evokes more curiosity than devotion. Derided as an 'extraordinary Folly' by an early English envoy, it was nonetheless the grandest of Burma's many audacious architectural achievements. Approaching Mingun by river affords spectacular views of the pagoda, while a poor dirt road leading from Sagaing skirts an enormous tank from the same period.

A Royal Retreat

Mingun was chosen in 1790 as a retreat by Bodawpaya (r. 1782-1819) who established his capital at Amarapura in 1783. The word Mingun means Royal Rest House, since this pastoral spot was no doubt a relief from the hustle and bustle of the city. The king lived near the pagoda in the early years of its construction but later shifted to a temporary palace on one of the expansive sandbars opposite Mingun. Such sandbars are visible today in the cold season up and down the Irrawaddy but vanish once the river rises. This 'insular abode' was called Middle Island, or Alegyun, and provided some defense against palace coups and the frequent fires that plagued Amarapura (Hall: 142).

The king himself laid the pagoda's foundation on 9 January 1791, by setting down gold and silver bricks. The project probably took about twenty-one years, likely finishing sometime in 1812, but there is no formal completion date found in the chronicles or mention of its *hti*-hoisting. Its commanding position by the river's edge may have been inspired by the Shwezigon at Pagan and the Shwedagon, visible from the Yangon River. The king played an active role in designing the pagoda and supervising its execution (Stadtner 2000b). The Mingun Pagoda was a second jewel in the king's crown, ranked with the Mahamuni image yanked from Rakhine and established near Amarapura. The pagoda is also known as the Patho-daw-gyi, or Great Royal Pagoda, or sometimes as the Kaung-hmu-daw, or Royal Work of Merit.

A devastating earthquake in 1839 produced 'prisms of yawning crevasses [in the walls], like those…of an Alpine glacier' (Yule: 170). The precious relics beneath the pagoda have remained unperturbed for over two hundred years now, like clams at the bottom of the sea.

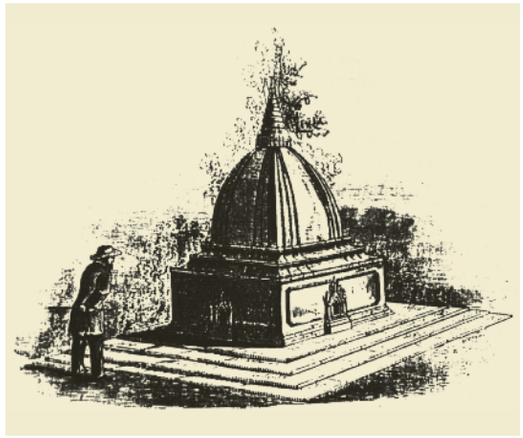
The Tooth-Relic from China

The pagoda functioned as a reliquary monument, or stupa, in as much as the interred relics were never designed to be seen, only worshipped from outside. The normal shape for a stupa is spherical, and the reasons behind this square-based plan are uncertain. An unidentifed temple pictured in the Kyauk-taw-gyi Temple, Amarapura, *circa* 1850, reveals a square temple surmounted by a small stupa-like superstructure. This later depiction was not meant to represent the Mingun Pagoda, but it suggests that massive receding roof terrraces, or huge towers, were never mandatory features. The tops to the solid brick corner-shrines at Amarapura have all been restored, but they may likely have resembled the temple seen on the murals. Other stupas built during this king's reign followed the usual bell-shaped design, such as the Aung Mye Lawka pagoda in Sagaing.

How exactly the pagoda was worshipped is unknown, but small vaulted chambers in the centre of each wall were probably the focus for offerings, especially on the east side, facing the river. The pagoda received donations even throughout its construction, including royal banners from Amarapura and Bodhi saplings from Sri Lanka (ROB: V. 213). The king himself made offerings at the pagoda before the walls were begun, a donation sanctified by sprinkling water from a leather waterbag given to him by an English envoy from Calcutta (Cox: 111).

Nearly 40,000 relics were sealed in chambers beneath the solid brickwork, according to one chronicle. These included images of the Buddha in gold and silver, figures of the Buddha's mother and son and the ruling king and his father; an abbreviated list from a Burmese chronicle has been translated into English (Scott & Hardiman 1901: II. 2. 316-318). The most prized relic was presented to Bodawpaya in 1789, a tooth-relic replica gifted from the Emperor of China (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 195). The replica was enshrined inside the relic-chamber at the base of the pagoda on

The quake on 23 March 1839 at 4:00 A.M. was felt all the way in Yangon. A series of small jolts in 1812 may have prompted a scaling back of the size of the planned tower. Thin chains encircling the walls snapped instantly as the ground heaved in 1839. The chains were embedded just beneath the exterior surface and were concealed by light coloured plaster, still visible in many horizontal rows.



This miniauture stupa close by the riverbank was thought by Henry Yule to have been the model for the Mingun Pagoda nearby. It was described first byYule in the 1850s but never figures in any foreign or Burmese accounts during Bodawpaya's reign (1782-1819). It was probably erected between 1819 and Yule's visit. After Henry Yule, Mission to the Court of Ava in 1855.

12 March 1797, preceded by a show of fireworks put on by 'princes of the blood' and by the king (Cox: 111). In addition, in 1790, Bodawpaya had received three young brides who were thought to be granddaughters of the Emperor. New archival research suggests that the king was hoodwinked and his new 'queens' were sent not from the Emperor but from an imposter in Yunnan (Thaw Kaung: 2008).

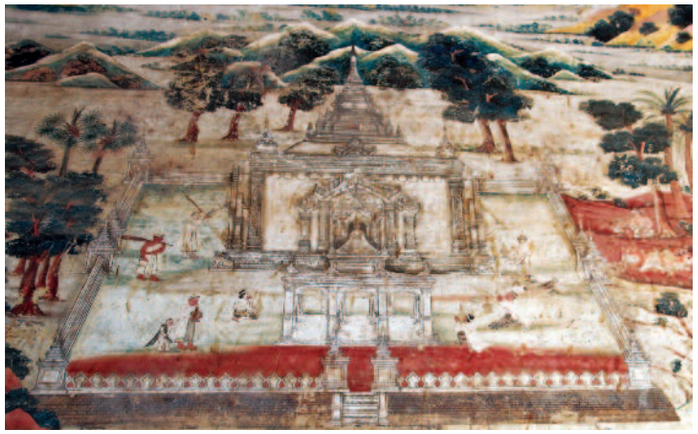
A tooth-relic from China carried special meaning in Burma, since in later legends two august Pagan rulers, Anawrahta and Alaungsithu, had attempted to obtain it from the Chinese court but were rebuked. A prophecy of the Buddha maintained that the tooth-relic would remain in China until the lapse of a special 5,000 year period beginning after the Buddha's demise; the Buddha of the Future, named Metteyya, was thought to appear sometime after this long period (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 83). The awarding of the tooth to the Burmese king by the Emperor in 1789 left no doubt that the spiritual and military might of Bodawpaya surpassed his predecessors, and that the king associated himself with the Buddha of the Future. This link with Metteyya is made explicit in connection with Bodawpaya's seizure of the Mahamuni Buddha which was predicated on a prophesy that the Mahamuni Buddha would not go to Anawrahta at Pagan but only to the 'beloved nascent Mettayya', who was none other than Bodawpaya (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 195; Pranke 2009). In this sense, the acquisition of the Mahamuni Buddha and the tooth-relic from China fulfilled two legendary prophecies and thus further bolstered the king's right to rule.

Relics from China still carry weight, evidenced by the fanfare given to the arrival of a tooth-relic from China in 1994 (Schober 1997).

The Pagan king Anawrahta, left, is shown with the Chinese emperor before a reliquary bearing a tooth and an 'emerald Buddha.' The famed tooth relic was prophesied to go to King Bodawpaya, the founder of the Mingun pagoda. By Thet Swe, Shwe Kyi Myin Pagoda, Mandalay, 2004.

'...impregnating water...'

An English envoy named Hiram Cox visited Mingun early in 1797, and left an eyewitness account at the time the relic-chambers were being filled, before the walls went up over them. These compartments were placed in the centre of the topmost basement terrace, itself



This unidentified temple may have resembled the original design for the Mingun Pagoda, showing a disproportionately sized stupa-shaped tower.This design was also adopted for four large temples built at the corners of Amarapura's walls. One is featured in a photograph taken in 1855 at the time of the Phayre mission. Kyauk-taw-gyi Temple mural, north corridor, west side.

raised high above ground level. Cox stood by the side and looked down inside the chambers which were over 3 metres deep. The larger and central rooms were reserved for the king, while the outer ones were 'devoted to the oblations of his courtiers' (Cox: 106). In the larger chamber small wooden shrines resembling temples were placed on 'Bengal carpets' (Cox: 106-07).

Among the thousands of relics he saw was 'one of Dr. Priestly's machines for impregnating water with fixed air' (Cox: 110). Dr. Joseph Priestly did not invent this machine until the 1770s, and its presence in Upper Burma by 1797 is a measure of how the local court was increasingly tied to the trade and culture of the Bay of Bengal. None of Dr. Priestly's machines of this vintage have survived in Europe, enhancing the importance of its entombment in far away Burma (Larson). Dr. Priestly was a friend of Benjamin Franklin.

Cox was told 'that there was another set of chambers of the same dimensions' beneath those which he saw, a strong possibility in light of the enormous number of relics referred to in chronicles (Cox: 107). The wide brick terraces forming the foundation took six years to complete, after calculating the pagoda's starting date in 1791 and Cox's visit in 1797. Mingun's relic-chambers resembled others in a nearby pagoda in Sagaing, constructed by the same king (ROB: IV. 8). The tops of the chambers were covered by metal beams, followed by a layer of stone, sand and over 300,000 *viss* of dark copper ore, according to a chronicle (*Konbaungzet*: II.118).

Bricks and Chains

The Mingun pagoda is a solid mass of brick, amounting to an estimated six to seven million cubic feet. Court records suggest that thousands of workers toiled here for more than two decades. For example, 7,000 men were deployed along the river bank producing brick in 1807. Young men trampled the clay, while older men filled the moulds (ROB: VI. 95, 101). Each worker was expected to produce 300 bricks daily. If each of the 7,000 workman created 300 bricks,

The plaster which concealed the horizontal rows of chains has come out in some spots and bits of chain dangle down the walls of the structure.

then the grand sum would exceed two million per day, at least in theory. The bricks were large, many averaging about 45 centimetres in length.

Shortages of wood slowed kiln production at least once, when over 10,000 men were dispatched upriver in 1787 'for cutting down bamboos and firewood' (Cox: 229). Burmese workers and those from Manipur, India, were settled near the pagoda in 1801 in order to produce enough lime needed for the mortar (ROB: V. 130). Demand for materials and labour was probably insatiable.

Thin metal chains encircling the walls of the pagoda were meant to counter centrifugal forces. Each parallel row of chain was concealed just beneath the surface of the wall with plaster, easily visible today as horizontal rows on the exterior surface. Bits and pieces of the chain today dangle from the wall where the plaster has fallen out. This use of chains was perhaps borrowed from European architecture and is unknown in any other Burmese monument.

The Lion Brothers

These two enormous brick lions, or *chinthe*, at the river's edge signaled the grand processional path to the pagoda. The jolt in 1839 left nothing but their haunches intact, their front parts thrown about in huge chunks bound together by mortar. The two were called the 'Lion Brothers' and were said to tower 'halfway to the sky' in one record (Tung Aung Chain 2004a: 199). The pair was started on 20 January 1794 and nearly finished by the time Cox visited Mingun in February 1797. Rains damaged the lions and crews were ordered to repair them in August 1795 (ROB: V.104). Much of the original plaster covering the brick still survives, even with traces of paint.

Two enormous brick lions, or chinthe*, stood at the entrance of a processional path leading from the river. The 1839 quake left only their haunches, covered with original painted plaster.*

Cox reported in 1797 that huge marble eyes and teeth were ready to be installed into the faces of the *chinthe*, a task which required 'some exertions of mechanical ingenuity' (Cox: 105). Two of the eyes are now placed next to the modern compound wall. A third is partially buried near the main road facing the pagoda. A later visitor to Mingun, Henry Burney, reported in 1831 that the eyes were never installed (Yule: 171).

Hubris, Prudence and Earthquakes

It is a matter of faith in Burma that the mammoth Mingun Pagoda was left unfinished, abandoned by a despotic and ineffectual royal patron who bit off more than he could chew. It is believed to be incomplete because it lacks the typical tower, or huge brick superstructure commonplace for Burmese temples. This belief can be traced back to an Italian missionary in Burma who claimed with no justification that the king abruptly quit Mingun after losing a row with his Buddhist advisors. The missionary added that his hasty departure to his capital at

Amarapura was also motivated by 'his love of power and his impatience under the denial of the luxuries of the seraglio [in Amarapura]' (Sangermano: 75). The missionary said nothing about the pagoda at Mingun, but a later English visitor, Henry Yule, extrapolated from Sangermano that work on the pagoda was suddenly stopped owing to the king's impulsive departure. Yule was a member of an English embassy to Upper Burma in 1855, led by Arthur Phayre, which included a photographer and a painter who recorded their visit to Mingun.

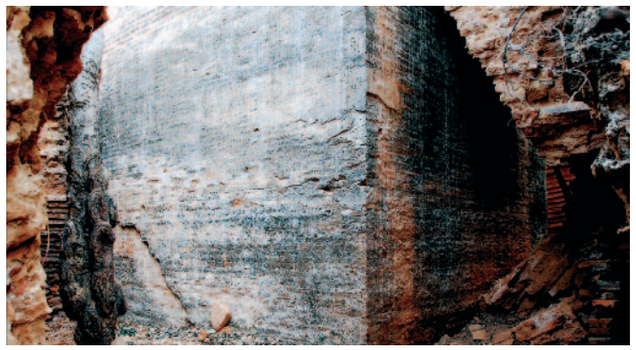
The marble eyeballs intended for the chinthe *may never have been installed, according to Henry Burney who visited Mingun in 1831, eight years before the great quake. Two are found in the compound of the two lions.*

Yule's second reason for believing Bodawpaya failed to finish the pagoda was a miniature brick pagoda still standing today, near the river bank. Yule opined that this small temple functioned as a working model, showing the larger one 'as it intended to be' (Yule: 169-170). However, if this miniature was in existence during the king's reign, it would have proclaimed to all his inability to finish the project, an unthinkable public admission of failure. It was therefore likely built sometime between the king's death in 1819 and Yule's visit in 1855. That this 'model pagoda' is not referred to in any of the English or Burmese sources during the king's reign strengthens this conclusion. Moreover, the Mingun engineers scarcely required a simple replica to guide their work, since royal documents reveal that builders used small scale models and drawn plans (ROB: VI. 87, 300; VII. 34). That the majestic Mingun pagoda was mentioned by a Burmese envoy to Cochin China in 1822 suggests that it was finished and never abandoned as a failure (ROB: VIII. 69).

Was an enormous tower planned for the pagoda originally but dropped in the later stages, as English and Burmese authors have argued (Aung Thaw 1972; Singer 2004)? Or was the pagoda considered complete during the reign of Bodawpaya, as it appears today, lacking a prominent superstructure? No clear answers emerge, only ambiguity.

However, a compelling fact in this examination is that the monument shows no physical signs of abandonment, or of faltering during construction. Indeed, the millions of brick forming the two top terraces are set in mortar, and the solid brick square blockhouse protruding from the centre of the upper-most terrace, still visible today, was an integral part of the structure (see below).

This solid brick blockhouse once capped the pagoda. The centre of the flat roof collapsed inward at the time of the 1838 earthquake, causing the blockhouse to plunge inside the pagoda. It was originally supported by four corbelled arches that were concealed immediately below the roof. These arches prove that the blockhouse was part of the original design and perhaps suggests that the builders had completed the pagoda.



An original plan specifying a huge tower may have been dropped because of earthquakes in 1812. Intermittent tremors took place between 17 January 1812 and 27 October 1812, coinciding more or less with the

completion of the upper terraces (Stadtner 1999). Such jolts in that year may have prompted the builders to abort any tower that was part of the original design, just as the walls were nearing completion or completed (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 202). The effects of these jolts from 1812 or later were probably witnessed by Burney in 1831 who noted 'various patched cracks in the brickwork' (Yule: 170). These plastered repairs may still be detected on all sides of the building, as large splotches, juxtaposed with the huge fissures created later by the major tremor in 1839. Bolstering this notion is the fact that court records do not refer to any construction taking place at the pagoda after November 1811, suggesting that the monument was finished toward the beginning of 1812 (Stadtner 2000a). This 'earthquake theory', if correct, would suggest that the king and his builders abandoned the idea of a huge tower as the top terraces were nearing completion, guided by prudence rather than hubris. On the other hand, a plan for a large tower may also have been dropped, simply because the engineers felt that it was impractical, regardless of the threat of quakes. It is equally possible that no large tower was originally planned, and the monument was therefore considered finished in 1812.

The large, solid brick blockhouse rising from the centre of the topmost roof terrace is key evidence in any interpretation since this blockhouse was original to the structure and was finished at the time of the top terrace. Each side of this solid square block is just over 4 metres, and it is at least 15 metres high. It is visible from the river or from the ground at some distance from the pagoda. This mass of brickwork survived the huge quake in 1839 but sank a number of metres into the fabric of the pagoda when the violent shifting occurred. This explains why the tower is tilted slightly and also why it does not protrude higher above the roof now. Immediately surrounding the tower at the bottom, some 5 metres below the surface of the top terrace, were four massive corbelled brick arches that originally supported the square tower. The arches inside the pagoda collapsed inward in the 1839 earthquake but are still visible. These four arches were originally concealed within the fabric of the pagoda, just below the surface of the top of the building, and thus were never designed to be seen, existing solely to provide support for the square tower that rested on the flat roof. One can inspect these arches today in a narrow space surrounding the bottom of the tower, now resembling an irregular chamber open to the sky. However, if the earth starts to shake, one must be nimble to escape or risk being 'enshrined' inside the pagoda.

Each of two recessed roof terraces contained hundreds of square niches probably intended for glazed tiles. Why the tiles were never installed is a mystery.

That this tower played an integral role in the building is suggested by the trouble taken to create the arches beneath the surface of the roof. They could only have been built when the terraces of the pagoda were advancing upward. The probable function of this square blockhouse was to support a *hti*, or perhaps a royal banner, that would have been easily visible from the river and afar. This also implies that the monument was considered finished, since the blockhouse and the concealed arches would be superfluous if a huge tower had been planned.

The dramatic fissures of the exterior walls are from the great earthquake that struck on the morning of 23 March 1839, a jolt felt all the way in Yangon. The thin chains encircling the structure first snapped like match sticks, with huge chunks of brick weighing tons tossed about the landscape like marbles. Extensive damage also took place in Sagaing, Ava and Amarapura (Yule: 350).

Yule also attributed the temple's missing tower to a prophesy heard from the local people at Mingun, 'Some say that it has been foretold to him [King Bodawpaya] that when the temple was finished his life would come to an end' (Yule: 169). Yule mistook this as proof of the king's cowardice in the face of a superstitious threat. In the Burmese cultural context it carried an entirely opposite meaning. For example, a Pagan king was threatened with death if he did not halt work on the famous Mingalazedi stupa. The ruler's spiritual adviser rebuked him soundly: 'Must this country and thou, its king, abide forever and not die.' By trying to escape death, the monarch ignored the fundamental truths of impermanence. Recognising his error, he finished the pagoda without delay, lest future kings 'laugh me to scorn' (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 171).

Following the publication of Yule's book in 1858, his version of the 'unfinished pagoda' formed the kernel of an ever-expanding legend, repeated in all subsequent writings about Burma, with ever greater exaggeration (Singer 2004). The pagoda symbolised for the English all that was wrong with the Burmese court, governed by a debauched, superstitious and inept tyrannical king. Bits and pieces were added to the legend with no justification, and the pagoda soon was painted as a juggernaut, inexorably exhausting the resources of a poorly run state. Such a negative picture of the Burmese monarchy helped justify the British annexation of Upper Burma in 1886. Paradoxically, Burmese historians were comfortable endorsing and perpetuating the legend, eager to contrast the recent past with the 'golden age' of Pagan (Stadtner 2000b).

Casting the Mingun Bell required 510 furnaces working non-stop for over four days. Created on the opposite bank of the river, the bell was floated on a barge into its present position after a canal was dug from the river in 1811.

Following the quake, the bell's supports buckled, causing it to rest upon squat wooden supports. It remained silent until a new metal support structure was put into place in 1896, manufactured in the old Dala shipworks, across from Rangoon.

The Bell

One of Mingun's greatest attractions is the Great Royal Bell. It originally stood between two large piers comprised of thick wooden posts concealed by brick and plaster. The bell itself was suspended from a 'triple beam of great size, cased and hooped with metal' supported by the piers (Yule: 171). By his visit in 1855 the piers had

The two piers were made up of vertical logs and brick, all concealed by plaster, as seen in this late 19th century photograph. A ring at the top of the bell looped through three horizontal logs. Courtesy: British Library.

Detail of chinthe *at top of bell.*

crumbled greatly, probably as a result of the earthquake in 1839, and the bell had sagged on small wooden blocks placed around the circular base of the structure. The bell could not swing nor could a note be struck.

Everything was dismantled and replaced by the present metal uprights, crossbeam and wooden pavilion in March 1896. The metal parts were produced in the shipyards opposite old Rangoon in Dala. It was put up under the supervision of G. Hislop, an official at the Mandalay dockyard. The pavilion has been refurbished many times.

The bell's history is told in a Burmese text composed by one of the king's chief ministers named U Tun Nyo (1726-1809). It was intended to be inscribed on the bell but for unknown reasons it was not. The text is known only in palm-leaf manuscripts. The casting began on the east side of the river on 13 May 1808, at 4:00 P.M. and concluded on 17 May at 2:42 A.M (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 108). There were 510 furnaces in continuous operation for 106 hours and 42 minutes. The text further specified the exact amount of wax and metal used. The copper amounted to 100,000 kg but the chronicles state a different weight, 90,721 kg (90.72 tons), or 55,555 *viss*; the royal orders record yet a different weight, 200,000 *viss* (Ni Ni Myint). By way of comparison, the largest bell in the world is twice as large and is now in the Kremlin. It was cast between 1733-1735 but cracked before it was ever rung by its patron, Tsar Kolokol III.

Once the huge bell was completed in 1808, , the engineers were at a loss for transporting such a heavy load across the river. A search was begun for a European or Burmese seaman in Yangon accustomed to handling heavy cargo (ROB: VI. 120). Whether this mission succeeded or not is unknown, but the bell was finally shifted to the west side the river three years later, in 1811. A canal from the river to the bell's present position was then excavated and the barge floated in. The canal was ordered in November 1810, with shackled

Pilgrims, young and old, strike the bell with wooden mallets, sharing the merit of their donations.

prisoners providing some of the labour (ROB: VI. 271, 276). If there was no intention of completing the pagoda in or about 1810, then there would have been little incentive to install the temple's bell.

The Mingun Tiles

Bodawpaya envisioned his pagoda with a series of glazed tiles, modeled directly on the celebrated tile series at the Ananda Temple, Pagan, created 700 hundred years earlier. To ensure that the Mingun tiles conformed to those at the Ananda, he sent artists to Pagan to prepare illustrations of over 1,500 plaques placed in niches on the exterior of the Ananda. The artists copied all of the tiles encircling the Ananda basement, which depicted Mara's demon (west face) and the key gods in the Buddhist universe (east face). They also sketched all of the hundreds of *jataka* tiles preserved among the roof terraces at the Ananda. The illustrations were carefully reviewed in February 1791 by Bodawpaya's chief religious advisor, a monk named the Maungdaung Sayadaw Nanabhivamsa. Evaluating the Pagan tiles solely in terms of their conformity to the Pali canon, the learned monk generally accepted those at the Ananda as authoritative models, but changed the design of some Pagan tiles to conform to a strict reading of the Pali text. One example is a *jataka* which records that sixteen hunters carried a long snake. The Ananda tile shows only four men lifting the snake, but the plaque from Mingun includes all sixteen. The captions beneath the scenes are not narrative but are more in the nature of instructions: 'No. 524. The Bodhisatta as Sankhapala, 1 king of snakes, observing the precepts, in the pose of being carried by sixteen hunters on eight shoulder-yokes' (Stadtner 2003: 106). Each of these hundreds of tiles are described in the Sayadaw's book, called *Questions and Answers*, in an entry dated 20 February 1791.

None of the drawings survive but the captions on the plaques are nearly verbatim copies of those found in the *Questions and Answers*. Some of the demon plaques and those depicting the gods are numbered, suggesting a serial order, or sequencing of their appearance along the basement of the Ananda.

The subjects on the tiles went beyond those at Ananda to include a variety of categories. They can be easily identified, since nearly all have Burmese captions incised below the scenes. One class depicts the three Buddhist synods, another the single, unnamed *yahandas* (*arahants*, Pali), who attended the synods. Other plaques show two monks within a cave inscribing the Pali canon, meant to represent Buddhadatta and Budhaghosa transmitting the canon in Suvannabhumi, or Lower Burma, according to *Questions and Answers*. Other categories also existed and some plaques seem unique, such as a depiction of a lake north of Mandalay associated with the famous Taungbyon brothers, two *nats*. Another unique plaque depicts a chief monk beside a stack of manuscripts. The caption reads: 'The *pitaka* [presented] to the *sayadaw* Kawinabhidhaja-maharajaguru in Mui Mit [Momeik]' (Stadtner 1998c: 175). Whether

The king's Buddhist advisor designed the Mingun tiles according to a strict reading of the Pali jatakas *and comparisons with drawings of all of the Ananda Temple tiles. The Ananda plaque, above, shows four men bearing the snake, while the Mingun tile, below, has sixteen, precisely the number specified in the Pali* jataka.

This tile depicts a lake linked to the Taungbyon brothers, two popular nats. *The Burmese caption reads, 'The lake of the Lord of Taungbyon'. Private collection, Yangon.*

This example shows two monks copying the scriptures on palm leaf. Private collection, Yangon.

A unique tile depicts a monk, seated before a stack of manuscripts containing the Pali canon. Courtesy: Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.

Bodawpaya built or restored 230 temples throughout his realm and each may have been depicted on a tile. The name of the town is illegible here. Private Collection, Yangon.

these last two plaques represent a class of tiles cannot be certain as they are not described in the *Questions and Answers*.

The tiles are glazed in one of three colours, white (*hpyu*) brown (*nyo*) and green (*sein*). The names of colours are incised on the reverse of many tiles as instructions for the kiln workers. The composition of the glaze and the differing firing conditions resulted in different hues. Some plaques specified to be 'brown' are very pale, almost orange, but others are nearly black. The colour designated as 'white' is always cream.

The Enigma of The Tiles

Why none of the plaques were ever installed, despite such great planning and expense, remains a mystery. They were intended to be set into the two slightly receding superimposed roof terraces, since there are no niches on the basement terraces or the walls of the pagoda. These twin terraces contain well over a thousand shallow square niches, each just large enough to contain the tiles which average about 21 cm square. They would have been secured by mortar.

The number of original Mingun tiles is difficult to estimate, but they probably were between 1,500 and 2,000, or possibly more, in light of those at the Ananda that were copied and the new categories of plaques that were added. One Mingun category, for example, included temples throughout Burma with which Bodawpaya was associated. Only a few tiles of this type survive, but this class could have numbered hundreds since he was commonly associated with 230 special shrines, or *shwegus*.

Perhaps the tiles were never installed because the king's Buddhist advisor, Nanabhivamsa, no longer enjoyed the king's approval. He was the king's favourite when the pagoda was first begun, but he had lost the king's confidence by 1814. In fact, the king forced him to disrobe (ROB: VI. 29-30; Pranke 2009). That this defrocked monk was so intimately tied to the tiles may have supplied the reason for the king to cancel the installation of the tiles. Also, the king had by this time openly challenged many of the key ideas that the tiles expressed, such as the role of Buddhaghosa in the transmission of Buddhism to Burma and even the accuracy of the textual tradition possessed by the Burmese *sangha* (Pranke 2009).

Where exactly the hundreds of tiles were stored at Mingun was never recorded. However, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries a small number had entered the Indian Museum, Calcutta, the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin. These plaques and others in foreign public collections amount to no more than thirty.

A brick storeroom at Mingun was built in the late 1950s or early 1960s for between four and six hundred plaques that were then thoughtlessly cemented into three interior walls. A spectacular theft occurred sometime early in the 1980s and nearly all of the plaques were stolen, now dispersed worldwide, detectable by faint traces of modern cement on their reverses. About twenty were recovered by

the Department of Archaeology and are preserved in the office in Mandalay. A few others were salvaged and cemented into a wall at the U Pu Gyi Monastery high above the river at Mingun. This same monastery is home to a unique cluster of early 19th century monuments representing the seven-week period that the Buddha spent at Bodh Gaya. The old brick storeroom, next to the modern steps going to the top of the pagoda, is now a visitor centre.

The Mt. Meru monument had fallen into ruins by 1855 but was rebuilt in 1874, with perhaps the central tower being replaced entirely. This woodcut from 1868 was based on a contemporary photograph. After Sladen, Some Account of the Senbyu Pagoda.

Mount Meru

Mingun's second grand monument replicates Mount Meru, the centre of the universe. For pilgrims to Mingun, it ranks as the most sacred pagoda, known for making wishes come true. It is named the Hsinbyume, or Myatheindan Pagoda.

It was begun in 1802 by Bodawpaya's grandson, Bagyidaw (r. 1819-1837), and completed in 1807-08, according to chronicles (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 202). Less than fifty years later the pagoda was covered in vegetation and derelict following its partial collapse in the 1839 earthquake (Yule: 172). It was cleared and the innermost circular temple entirely rebuilt in 1874 during the reign of Mindon (r. 1853-1878). The central part had been largely destroyed, to judge from an old photograph, proving that its modern appearance took shape in the second half of the 19th century, if not much later during its many refurbishments (Sladen).

The monument represents Mt. Meru rising in the middle of seven concentric mountains. Each is represented by a low circular wall topped with a wavy parapet that probably symbolises the seven rivers separating these land masses. In theory, the mountain ranges

Mt. Meru, centre, surrounded by the seven concentric mountain ranges. The monument's size and configuration make it unique in Buddhist architecture. View from the top of the Mingun Pagoda.

Seated marble guardians within niches in the concentric rings surrounding the central Mt. Meru were noted by the Phayre mission of 1855 and by Sladen in 1868. A number have been collected at the pagoda compound, just outside the last ring.

are of unequal height and the rivers are of different widths and depths. The outermost compound wall may depict the 'iron wall' which contains this universe, or *chakkavala* (Pali) (Herbert 2002). A nearly identical cosmology is found in Thailand and Cambodia (Ono).

The tall central circular structure symbolises Mt. Meru at the top of which is located the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods, or Tavatimsa (Pali), governed by the chief god named Sakka (Pali), or Thagyamin. The Buddha's topknot was taken here by Sakka and worshipped in a special stupa and it is also the place where the Buddha's mother was reborn. This heaven is most famous for a three month period in which the Buddha instructed his mother and the gods, before descending to earth on a triple stairway. Such a triple stairway is seen on the east face. The Buddha is often shown proceeding down the stairway, flanked by Sakka, usually holding a conch, and by Brahma, grasping an umbrella. The descent is celebrated as a major holiday in Theravada countries, a festival also enjoyed at court (ROB: VI. 83). It occurs on the full moon in the month of Thadingyut, or September-October.

Buddhist cosmology developed fully only in the period of the commentaries and in Buddhaghosa's famous *Visuddhimagga* of the 5th century (Gombrich). By the Pagan period Mt. Meru was a popular subject among Pagan's murals and in subsequent centuries. It was also popular in later Thai mural painting where the theme often took up the entire rear wall of temples. However, the enormous replication of Mt. Meru at Mingun is unique in traditional Buddhist architecture. A small modern copy of the Mingun temple is on the outskirts of Pegu, on the road heading east.

The centremost circular temple was rebuilt in the second half of the 19th century during Mindon's reign. Its wide base is encircled with five ascending rows of niches placed on platforms but it is not certain whether these were part of the original design or were added later when the central tower was rebuilt. Five similar recessed rows appear in an unidentifed temple depicted in the north corridor of the Kyauk-taw-gyi Temple, probably representing another Mt. Meru monument. The niches hold marble figures representing guardians that Sakka appointed to protect Mount Meru against demons, or *asuras* (Pali). The demons had once resided in the Tavatisma Heaven but were cast down to the base because of their drunkenness. They perpetually try to climb back up the mountain, 'like ants going up a pillar', but are thwarted by teams of various gods. Chief among them are the Four Great Guardian Kings and their minions. These deities are usually shown in painted depictions of Mt. Meru and using these for comparison the ascending order of the marbles at Mingun was probably: snakes (nagas, Pali), mythical birds (*garulas*, Pali), celestial demons (*kumbhandas* and *yakkhas*, Pali) and finally at the top the Four Great Kings (*catummaharajikas*, Pali).

Deities, such as nagas *and* garulas, *set into pointed niches, surround the base of the central tower. These marble figures perhaps belong to the original period of construction or possibly date to King Mindon's restoration of 1874.*

Many of these figures have been shuffled about over the years, and it has yet to be determined if they are original to the early 19th century or later and which are in their original positions. The crowned figures are likely the Four Great Kings, placed in the top row. Many hold a special short sword, mostly supported on their right shoulder. Numerous niches house snakes, or *nagas*, and there are a few with birds, or *garulas*. There are also marble seated figures, presumably guardians, in various niches within the concentric rings forming the seven continents.

This temple on the river contains a marble footprint of the Buddha. It was built between 1804 and 1811.

Mingun's Legacy

Another important shrine at Mingun was designed for a marble footprint of the Buddha. Popularly known as the Settawya Pagoda, it was started by Bodawpaya on 5 April 1804 and finished on 12 June 1811 (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 202). The footprint inside the temple is perhaps the original. Photographs from the 1860s reveal a large pillared porch that once abutted the entrance and faced the river. At the rear of the temple, towards the road, is an enormous chunk of masonry that fell from the temple, probably during the 1839 quake. Bodawpaya also cast a bronze Buddha image in 1803 that was enshrined somewhere at Mingun. It became known as the Chandamuni Buddha and was later shifted to Amarapura in 1815. This image was eventually transferred by Mindon to his new capital where it became the chief object of devotion in the Chandamuni, or Sandamuni Pagoda, next to the Kuthodaw at the base of Mandalay Hill (see photograph on page 301). One of Bodawpaya's sons dedicated a bell at Mingun in 1801, but very much inferior in size to the big bell. Bodawpaya excavated a huge masonry lined tank south of Mingun, visible from the dirt road leading from Sagaing.

Mingun's fortunes must have suffered a setback because of the 1839 earthquake and at least one key monument, the Mt. Meru Pagoda, lay derelict until years after the Phayre mission in 1855. Perhaps Mindon's revival of the monument signaled the site's renewal before Mandalay fell in 1885. By the early 20th century Mingun slipped back into being a small hamlet, known mainly for its nunneries, its dramatic 'unfinished' pagoda and its bell (O'Connor: 186). The village today is known for its rest-homes for older people. It also gave the nation one of its most revered religious figures, the former Mingun Sayadaw U Vicittasarabhivamsa, the first monk in Burma to recite the entire canon from memory, a feat which electrified U Nu's synod in Yangon in the 1950s.

A shrine near the bell is devoted to the famous Mingun Sayadaw, the first monk in Burma to recite the entire Pali canon from memory.

Detail of what is perhaps the original marble footprint, incised with auspicious symbols.

Mahamuni: Sacred Spoils of War

Worship starts before sunrise and finishes late at night. The Mahamuni Buddha was snatched from Rakhine in 1795, fulfilling a prophecy. The image is probably no earlier than the 14th century but is enveloped in myth stretching back to the time of the Buddha.

The Mahamuni Buddha is a solid third member of the nation's sacred triumvirate, together with the Shwedagon and the Golden Rock. The bronze was brought to life by the Buddha himself at the court of a legendary king based in distant Rakhine. Symbolising Rakhine, the 'Great Image' became a target for a Burmese king who annexed the region and conveyed the bronze Buddha hundreds of kilometres to its present location in 1785. For the Rakhine, however, its capture still represents a humiliating loss, a wound that will likely never heal.

Little has changed since the 19th century when the temple entrance was enlivened with 'stalls for fruit, sweetmeats, flowers, tapers and other articles used as offering, as well as for ear-cylinders and all sorts of toys and gimcracks and small wares' (Yule: 166). The most lively time is just before sunset when local worshippers and pilgrims flood the complex. The blocks surrounding the Mahamuni are sprinkled with older monasteries and shops devoted to items gifted to monks by lay people, such as robes, fans and alms bowls. Now part of southern Mandalay, the temple was originally in open countryside, some 3 kilometres north of Amarapura. In 1904 it was connected to Mandalay by a tram service from Zegyo Market.

The Buddha permitted his likeness to be cast by king Chanda-suriya in Rakhine who watches the standing Buddha and his seated 'younger brother', another name for the Mahamuni Buddha. By Po Yin, circa *1935. Mahamuni Temple, Moulmein.*

The formal entrance is on the east side from where the glistening image can be seen at the beginning of the long corridor. A wide pillared entrance hall facing the street has escaped restoration, keeping its original wooden carving dated by the inscription to 1917. A depiction of the Buddha-to-be severing his hair after abandoning the palace is over the central opening. The story of the Mahamuni image is related on twenty recent painted panels inside the pavilion, signed by Ba Thein.

'...a people disinclined to luxury...'

The Mahamuni dominates its cramped chamber, with wide openings on the front and sides. The image itself measures nearly 4 metres high and rests on a tall wide platform. Pressing thin gold sheets onto its surface is the chief mode of devotion. Only men are allowed inside the sanctum, and women therefore request male family members, friends or pagoda volunteers to apply leaf on their behalf.

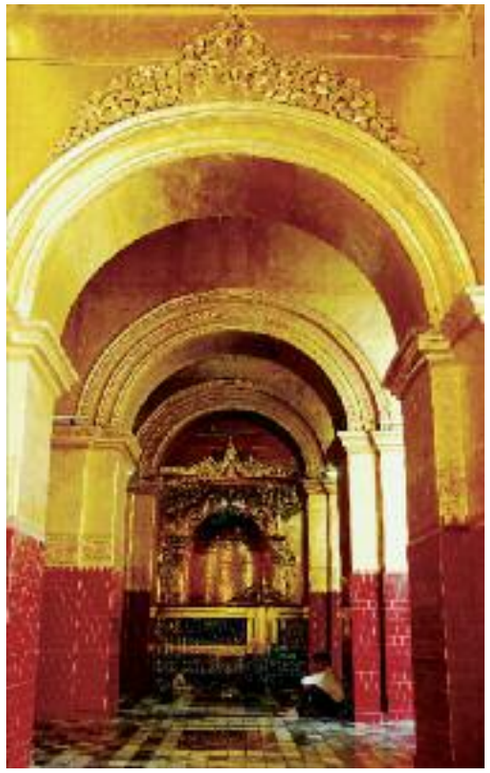
The original Buddha is now concealed by an estimated 12 tons of gold leaf placed in layers on the image for over a century. This calculation was made in 1996 when the encrustation averaged 15 cm. The transformation of the image since the early 20th century is documented in four photographs displayed to the left of the shrine. A British envoy's observation on the gold leafing in 1795 is perhaps no less true today: 'This is the only manner in which a people, naturally frugal and disinclined to luxury, seem to apply their superfluous wealth' (Symes: 395). The gold leaf is now made in Mandalay but in the late 19th century was produced in China, packed in sheets of a 100 and separated by paper (Bird: 276). The gold adhered to the surface with glue made in olden times from the juice of the Tallow tree (*Croton sebiferum*). The disfigurement of the image with gold leaf, however, occurred by the mid-19th century, if not earlier (Yule: 166).

The Buddha's lowered right hand symbolises his defeat of the demon Mara and the enlightenment. The crown and crossed chest-bands (*salwe*) are modern but the image was likely similarly adorned in its home in Rakhine (Raymond 2002). Thousands of donated jewellery items are attached to the faceted crown and chest bands.

Early woodwork at the Mahamuni is found at the east entrance. This cartouche has the date 1917 in Burmese, flanked by the British lion and unicorn.

The key daily ritual centres on washing the Buddha's face by the chief monk assisted by laymen dressed in white, beginning around 4:30 A.M. Only the head monk is permitted to clean the face, with a preparation made from ground sandalwood. This face-washing ceremony probably began even while the image was in Rakhine and has continued throughout its stay in Mandalay (Raymond 2002; Yule: 166). Laymen hand up implements from below, like aides to a surgeon, such as an enormous toothbrush rubbed back and forth against the mouth. Towels to dry the Buddha's face are returned to worshippers and treasured at home. The assembled recite the *Metta Sutta* (Schober: 1997). A major festival occurs at the conclusion of the Buddhist lent when the '*Book of Conditional Relations*', a section of the *Pattana* (Pali), is recited by monks. This is one of the sermons that the Buddha uttered to his mother residing in the Tavatisma Heaven and belongs to the seven books of the *Abhidhamma*.

The rebuilt temple after the 1884 fire was critiqued as '…debased Italian style', referring to the lower arcade incorporating European inspired arches and pillars.The design, by Hoyne Fox, Executive Engineer, blended European and Burmese conventions but there was a call from some Europeans to adopt a purely Burmese style.



'Younger brother, do not stand up'

The story associated with the Mahamuni Buddha begins with a visit by the Buddha from India to Rakhine. The visit itself was prompted by the Buddha realising that a king there named Chanda-suriya wished to pay him respects. With a retinue of 500 'enlightened ones', or *arahants* (Pali), and his disciple Ananda, the Buddha flew to Rakhine from India and alighted upon a hillock near the king's capital. After converting the king in his court, the ruler requested an image to be made in the master's likeness in order that the Buddha could be worshipped in his absence. A metal image was then cast by the chief of the gods, Thagyamin, and the divine craftsman named Vissakamma (Pali). The Buddha completed the work by breathing upon it, thereby infusing life into cold metal. The Mahamuni is therefore sometimes called 'a living royal image', or *yoke-shin-daw*.

The Buddha addressed his newly created 'double', saying: 'Younger brother do not stand up'; he then prophesied that the image would be imbued with the supra-mundane powers of a Buddha and would remain in this world until 5,000 years after the Buddha died and passed into nirvana (Forchhammer 1891). Nine miracles then ensued, such as birds which imposed a no-fly zone above the image. Also, the six-coloured rays emanating brightly from the Buddha dimmed when non-believers came close. The creation of the 'living double' may also have evoked an episode in the Buddha's life in India in which he replicated himself (Schober 1997). Other lore is that the Buddha instructed his 'double' not to utter another word, until the coming of the future Buddha, named Metteyya (Shwe Yoe: 170).

The real date of the present Mahamuni image is difficult to fix, but it was perhaps cast in the 14th century. Its traditional home in Rakhine is Dhanyawadi, or Dhannavati

(Pali), a sacred site about 32 kilometres north of Mrauk-U, and it is from there that it was taken to Upper Burma. Most modern histories of the Mahamuni are based on an English translation of a Rakhine text, the *Sappadanakaranam*, perhaps dated to the 16th century but reflecting earlier material (Forchhammer 1891; Schober 1997: 284).

The image remained in worship in Rakhine for over two millennia, according to legend. Once cast, it was subject to innumerable vicissitudes chronicled in Rahkine sources. Stories abound of kings from far away capitals, such as Shri Kshetra and Pagan, failing to capture the image and then attempting to destroy it; failing, they instead restored the shrine (Chan Htwan Oung). These stories resemble those of nearby kings wishing to remove the hair-relics from the Shwedagon.

The Rakhine chronicles become more reliable from the early 15th century when a king paved a road to the shrine from Mrauk-U and rededicated the temple in 1658 following a fire (Gutman 2001: 3; Raymond 2002). The earliest surviving, if fanciful, depiction of the Mahamuni Buddha was based on descriptions by Wouter Schouten, a Dutchman who traveled to Rakhine in 1660-61 (Raymond 2002). The invasion of Rakhine by Burmese forces was foretold by unsettling omens, such as a river flooding and three women giving birth at the same time while taking shelter inside the Mahamuni temple. The bad fortune the image suffered was attributed to two sinful actions by the Buddha himself in a previous life as a king living in the island of Cheduba, namely, breaking a bone of a gardener and cutting the skin off a prince (Forchhammer 1891: 5).

Monks ritually cleanse the face of the Mahamuni each morning, with assistance from lay volunteers. An estimated 12 tons of gold leaf encrusts the image, applied by devotees for over a century.

This engraving was based on Schouten's 17th century account but the Mahamuni image bears little resemblance to the Mahamuni we know today. After Recueil de Voyages*, an edition published in Rouen, 1725.*

Hoyne Fox retained the existing inner sanctum, untouched by the 1884 fire, and capped it with a seven-storied tower that likely resembled the 18th century original. The arches are framed by painted plaster work affixed to wire armatures.

Some lore maintains that the Buddha in Mandalay is not the real one, since the original sank in a river when the Burmese army failed to move it. Another tradition records that the Burmese king sent wizards to Rakhine disguised as monks to divest it of its potency (Harvey: 267). The image may have been cast in three horizontal sections, but one persistent tradition holds that the image was cut into three pieces in order to facilitate its transport, symbolising the disrespect shown by its new owners (Yule: 166; Crawfurd: I. 476). Another belief is that the back of the image's head was damaged in transit but that the Buddha himself came down to mend the hole, where metal smiths had failed (Taw Sein Ko 1913: 279). There was even a tradition at the turn of the century that the Mahamuni was invisibly shackled, reflecting a fear that the image wished to return to its home in Rakhine (Temple 1893b). These stories and countless others tell us less about the real history of the bronze and much more about the unresolved and enduring ethnic and regional conflicts that the image symbolises to so many.

The Seizure of the Mahamuni

The reigning Burmese king, Bodawpaya (r. 1782-1819), launched his invasion of the Rakhine in 1784 in the name of Buddhism, 'to restore proper conditions in Rakhine for the prosperity of the Buddha's religion' (ROB: IV. 75). This righteous campaign was directed by the king's son who also organised the transfer of the image early in 1795. Ten thousand men were assigned to escort the bronze, estimated to weigh six and half tons. It was first floated by raft and boat down the Kaladan River to the coast and then hauled overland via high

mountain passes, stopping at fifty-four camps en route, many of which are mentioned in a recently discovered manuscript (Than Tun 1983). It reached the Irrawaddy at Padaung, below Prome, and then was floated upriver to Amarapura in two joined barges, a trip taking thirty days (Thaw Kaung 2001; Than Tun 1983). The chronicles report that at Sagaing the king 'went into the water up to his neck to welcome it' on 4 May 1785, an event modeled on a famous Sri Lankan ruler who greeted a ship carrying the Bodhi Tree from India 'neck deep into the water' (*Mahavamsa*: XIX 30). Other kings wading into water to receive relics include Anawrahta, for a tooth-relic sent from Sri Lanka to Pagan, and Okkalapa who welcomed the Shwedagon hair-relics in Yangon. The Mahamuni reached its new home in Amarapura on 7 May 1785, and it has never been moved since.

Workmen swing hammers to press the gold into thin sheets which are then cut to form the gold leaf applied to the Mahamuni. King Galon Leaf Workshop, Mandalay.

'I shall go only with my older brother'

The justification for removing the huge bronze image to Amarapura came from no less a person than the Mahamuni Buddha itself. The story is told in a long text intended for the Mingun Bell that was never inscribed. Composed by Bodawpaya's minister of state, it begins when an ancient Pagan king, Anawrahta (r. 1044-1077), tried unsuccessfully to wrest the image from Rakhine. Visiting him in a dream was the Mahamuni Buddha who declared, 'I shall go to the eastern country [Upper Burma] only when I am taken there by Metteyya [the Future Buddha] who has been my elder brother' (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 195). The king returned to Pagan empty-handed but content with the prophecy that the nation would one day be visited by the Future Buddha. The Future Buddha, or Metteyya, is none other than King Bodawpaya, the 'older brother' in the Mingun Bell inscription. The likely source for linking kings to the 'family' of Metteyya is found in the *Mahavamsa* that claimed that a king and queen of Sri Lanka will be the mother and father of Metteyya and that their grandchild will be the son of Metteyya (*Mahavamsa*: XXXII 82). Burmese kings quite often claimed that they would be reborn as a Buddha, or a fully-enlightened one, but it was highly unusual to claim to be the Future Buddha, Metteyya (Pranke 2008a). This prophesy about the king becoming Metteyya in the future was perhaps formulated after the Mahamuni Buddha came to Amarapura, thereby reinforcing the theoretical justification for the conquest.

This narrative elevates Bodawpaya beyond even the legendary exploits of Anawrahta and also establishes the king's claim as a Future Buddha who at the same time is related to the great image from Rakhine. It also justifies the seizure of the image and by extension the conquest of Rakhine, all for bolstering Buddhism. The Rakhine invasion and the display of the Mahamuni image was therefore as much a spiritual conquest as a military one. The seizure of the image became a tangible symbol of his military and spiritual victory and his concomitant right to rule, made even more poignant since Bodawpaya had usurped the throne only a short time before the Rakhine invasion.

Outside the Mahamuni complex are stone carving workshops, using marble from the Sagyin quarries, just north of Mandalay.

Bodawpaya wasted no time in erecting a temple for the image after it reached the jetty at Amarapura on 27 April 1785 (ROB: IV. xviii). From the river bank it was then moved more than 3 kilometres north to its present spot. This location was likely chosen since it was close to a revered five-storied monastery that the king created three years earlier for his favoured preceptor, a monk named Nanabhivamsa (*Sasanavamsa*: 137). By 1795 the Mahamuni temple was located in a cluster of many important monasteries which included a special structure for the repose of embalmed Buddhist clerics (Symes: 390). The area retained its importance as a place of cremation into the 1860s, if not beyond (Bastian: 93).

The earliest temple tower, or *pyathat*, was planned with seven stories, a tradition perhaps stemming from the semi-legendary Lohapasada temple in Sri Lanka (*Mahavamsa*: XXXIII 7). A British envoy noted in 1795 that the gilded tower was finished and that the image was installed inside a chamber 'within an arched recess.' The 'walls [of the sanctum] are gilded, and adorned with bits of different coloured mirrors, disposed with much taste' (Symes: 391). The temple remained unfinished in 1795, however, proving that construction extended over more than a decade. The tower has been replaced many times, but its basic seven-storied shape and height probably resemble the original.

Access to the image was open to all from the beginning but with restricted hours. One foreign envoy noted in 1795 four large pilgrim halls to the north of the temple for 'the repose of strangers, who come from a distance to offer up their devotions' (Symes: 391-392). He revisited the pagoda seven years later, in 1802, but noted no major changes (Hall: 212). A sea captain named Davies was perhaps

The Mahabodhi Temple, India, probably based on photographs. Burmese pilgrims were added to the landscape, south corridor, c. *1892.*

the first American to visit the pagoda, in 1806, at the king's invitation, but he left no account (ROB: V. 315).

The temple consisted of no less than 250 gilded wooden pillars, at least by the early 19th century (Crawfurd: I. 476). The original seven-tier tower was replaced in 1807 (Crawfurd: I. 476; ROB: VI. 82, 86). Two years later the king offered a gold headband to the image (ROB: IV. xxvii). Royal banners and umbrellas were also displayed at the Mahamuni on many different occasions. Also, Bodhi Tree saplings brought to Amarapura by monks from Sri Lanka were planted at the Mahamuni. One tree intruding on the eastern compound wall was uprooted and shifted further from the wall in 1806 (ROB: VI. 262). Pilgrims were also not without their problems, one hapless woman being robbed of her gold anklet at the shrine in 1817 (ROB: VII. 149). The Mahamuni was in the early 19th century 'frequented by votaries…and a proportionate number of beggars, most of whom were persons lame, blind or very old' (Crawfurd: I. 477).

Women are not permitted to enter the inner sanctum but pay homage to the Mahamuni in surrounding worship halls.

By the mid-19th century two roads from Amarapura led north to the shrine, joining two entrances in the southern part of the compound. There were also new corridors, probably added in the 1840s (Yule: 166). Kings throughout the 19th century made dedications to the Mahamuni. King Mindon (1852-1878) presented a gold cloth to the Buddha in 1854, depicted in a *parabaik* in which it was described as 'gold lace cloth of inestimable value' (Herbert 1998: 96). This was designed to be placed over the chest of the image, described in the 19th century and a device seen in old photographs of the Kyauk-taw-gyi (Yule: 166; O'Connor: 155). At this dedication Mindon must have reflected on his harrowing escape from Amarapura only two years earlier, fleeing his half-brother, King Pagan, who was only too eager to kill him (Scott & Hardiman 1900: I. 1. 32). In the dead of night Mindon and his entourage fled to the Mahamuni temple where they were able to capture arms required for their self-defense. His donation at the Mahamuni shrine two years later as king probably evoked for all the strange workings of fate.

London's Crystal Palace in Mandalay?

A small blaze consumed the western entrance area in 1879 but the temple itself was spared (ROB: IX. xxvii). A French engineer fabricated iron doors and railings on behalf of the court in 1883, but none have survived (ROB: IX. xxxi). Luck ran out five years later when the main wooden temple, with its corridors of 252 gilded pillars, was destroyed by flames on 8 April 1884 (ROB: IX. xxxiv; Shwe Yoe: 170). The melted gold collected from the image after the fire amounted to close to 90 kilos, or 5,450 *ticals*; the gold was salvaged and refashioned as a large mantle placed over the image, resembling a monk's robe (ROB: IX. xxxiv, xxxvi) A partial restoration was completed on 5 July 1884 by Thibaw (r. 1878-1885) who donated 18,360 rupees for the work. He also presented a special

This modern painting shows Hoyne Fox, the architect behind the rebuilding of the temple after the fire, assisted by Kinwun Min Gyi, standing stately to the left. Signed: Than Kywe, student of U Chit Myae. Mahamuni compound.

couch made in glass, purchased from France, now in the Mandalay Palace Museum. His supreme gift was a spectacular 'white umbrella' ornamented with 879 diamonds, 282 emeralds and nearly 5,000 rubies and over 8,000 pearls. With his queen, Supayalat, he presented a golden crown (*makuta*, Pali) and other accoutrements to the Mahamuni on 1 July 1884 (Tun Aung Chain 2005). In just over a year Mandalay would fall to British forces, on 28 November 1885.

A public meeting was called in 1891 to decide upon a new design for the temple. The acting English engineer left an account of the discussions and a detailed description of the new building's construction (Donnan). Different proposals were floated. One was to rebuild according to the old plan, in timber or brick, or to employ iron and glass, an idea advocated by some Burmese who had seen the Crystal Palace in England. A vote was taken and brick masonry won the day, but the design would not follow the old pattern. The Pagoda Trustees then sought a plan from Hoyne Fox, the Executive Engineer from Yangon, whose conception was finally adopted. His plan was a hybrid, with the traditional seven-tiered tower but with a European style ground floor. Others later objected and characterised the 'lower arcade' as 'a sort of debased Italian style' (Oertel: 8). Some Europeans were disappointed that the temple was not based on earlier Pagan models, regardless of any anachronisms (Bird: 282). Two different designs were on view in the compound by 1892, which remained up until at least 1895, but nothing is known of the rejected design.

The present four walls of the sanctum largely went up before the rebuilding, and it was therefore decided to conform the newly designed structure around this core. To distribute the weight of the new tower away from the walls of the sanctum a layer of concrete was set surrounding the upper walls of the sanctum, held in place by a riveted metal plate. Also, to diminish further the weight of the tower, the engineer 'had special wedge-shaped brick moulded for the inner lining of the cone.' The metal section connecting the *hti* to the tower was to be brass but its moulding was left 'to some Burmas [sic] in Mandalay who failed miserably.' Time was running short and in the end an iron rod was employed, 'covered over with gold leaf' (Donnan: 346). To secure the *hti*, a teak post about 4 metres long was placed inside the tower toward the top. Astrologers determined the day for the hoisting of

King Mindon with his chief queen seated before a 'gold lace cloth' suspended before seven monks shielded by large fans. From a folding book, or parabaik*, depicting seven royal donations between 1853 and 1857. c. 1857. Courtesy: British Library.*

Mount Meru, centre, surrounded below by the seven mountain ranges, a popular theme in Theravada art. The central mountain is encircled by a fish consuming its own tail. The Buddha descended to earth after preaching to his mother, his entourage depicted on right. c. 1892. West corridor.

the *hti*. The lowest metal ring was raised on the first day, accompanied by a salute of fifteen guns. Each day a new ring was fixed to the top, marked by a five gun salute, with the seventh and the last ring meriting fifteen guns. On the third day there was a minor earthquake at 4 a.m. which was greeted a positive auspicious sign among locals (Donnan: 348). The *hti* collapsed in a wind-storm in 1916 and was replaced in 1918.

Raising funds for the rebuilding was partly guided by a former minister, Kinwun Mingyi (1821-1903), who was also active in the rebuilding of Mandalay's shrines after annexation. Prominent citizens and local people rallied, but it took fourteen years to complete the rebuilding, following the fire. Some funds came directly from rent charged to the stall owners and from collection boxes containing gold that failed to adhere to the image (Bird: 281). Many of the bricks used inside the piers were themselves gilded, as acts of merit. The low wooden railing encircling the sanctum, with glass balusters, probably dates from the early 20th century and is similar to those at Mandalay's Shwenandaw monastery. The thick gilded beams of the ceiling and the ornamental circular insets are found also in the old corridors leading to the Ananda Temple, Pagan.

Temple Compound

The crown prince responsible for bringing the Mahamuni image to Amarapura is commemorated by a recent bronze statue, now in the compound. He died long before his father, perhaps bad karma catching up with him as a result of the Rakhine campaign. Other attractions include a huge bell of 40 tons donated in 1811 by one of Bodawpaya's sons. In the northeast corner is a small shrine containing a marble slab, now painted red, incised with the name of the temple, 'Mahamuni', perhaps dating from the original construction. In the southeastern corner is a marble inscription describing various donors and their specific benefactions at the temple in the late 19th and early 20th century. At one time Bodawpaya had collected from throughout Upper Burma over 500 stone inscriptions,

Here the 'southern branch' of the Bodhi Tree rises in the air, top left, and then is taken in a special boat down the Ganges and to Sri Lanka, conveyed by Asoka's daughter. Sri Lanka exerted a profound influence on Burmese religious life, beginning at least as early as the Pagan era. South corridor, Mahamuni Temple, c. 1892.

once preserved at the temple but now mostly removed to the Mandalay Palace grounds.

In the northwest corner in a special building is a standing image of Thagyamin, pointing his raised right hand to the enshrined bronze. Also connected to the Mahamuni Buddha is a fictional brother and sister who were forced to accompany the Mahamuni image from Rakhine to Upper Burma. They died during the deportation and at some stage became worshipped locally as *nats* in a neighbourhood adjoining the Mahamuni to the southwest (Brac de la Perrière 2005).

One pavilion on the west side contains a recent marble footprint of the Buddha. Next door is the Mahamuni Library, with printed copies of the entire *Tipitaka* and various manuscripts. Some thirty large oil paintings mounted in a museum facing the compound tell the major events in the life of the shrine.

Murals

Three days of the week are represented in this detail from a fresco in the western corridor, c. 1892.

Today painting is found inside only the western and southern corridors but was almost certainly present in the other two aisles also, probably finished around 1892, judging from at least two painted inscriptions, in the south and west corridors. Before the fire of 1884, frescos were found in the ceilings and walls of the wooden corridors but with unknown subjects (Shwe Yoe: 170). The paintings are restricted to the arched chambers connecting the concentric brick walls encircling the main shrine. These walls and chambers went up in the 19th century, but it is difficult to know if one or more were established before or after the fire of 1884 or if they were built at different times. Only five chambers retain their original work (two on the south and three on the west), the others are hidden beneath layers of whitewash. The frescos take up the ceilings and the upper parts of the walls. All of the paintings were certainly finished by 1896 (Bird: 276). The majority were labeled with lengthy Burmese captions but thoughtless whitewashing has obliterated much of this valuable record.

A monk contemplating a decaying corpse, a reminder of life's impermanence, a common theme in 19th and 20th century painting. Southern corridor, c. 1892.

The subjects range from scenes of the Buddha's life, selected *jatakas* and rows of the Twenty-eight Buddhas. The murals were also intended to situate the Mahamuni Temple into the vast wider Buddhist world, with many compositions drawn from the *Mahavamsa*. One spectacular composition in the south corridor shows the severing of the 'southern branch' of the Bodhi tree sent to Sri Lanka by King Asoka in India. Another in the same corridor depicts the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya in India, peopled with Burmese pilgrims. Many subjects focus solely on Burmese sacred sites, such as the hair-relic pagoda in Prome, and a festival at the Golden Footsteps, or Shwesettaw, near Minbu, both in the west corridor. The Golden Rock at Kyaik-hti-yo also appears, suggesting how by this time this former Mon site had been absorbed into the pantheon of Burmese sacred sites. Depictions of the heavens with the zodiacal signs and the constellations occupy the ceilings, reminiscent of earlier examples on the ceilings of the Kyauk-taw-gyi temple, Amarapura. The descent of the Buddha from Mount Meru in the west corridor is a tour de force in juxtaposed colours. Vivid depictions of the various Buddhist hells were placed at the bottom of many compositions, but only a few in the western corridor survived the whitewashing. There are also rows of animals associated with the *jatakas*, such as the sixteen cranes linked with the same number of *jatakas* in which the Buddha-to-be was a crane (Moore: 1995).

A painted inscription in the southern corridor mentions that a certain family came from the Pegu district, from a village named Than Daga, near Kawa township. The reason for coming to the 'Myat Muni' was for prosperity. The family donated a tower, or '*pyathat*' which was probably the small brick spire that topped the arched chamber in which the paintings appear. The inscription is dated 1892. The paintings in this chamber may have been part of the donation, but there is no certainty. Another donor family recorded in the west corridor was from the Shan States, near Momeit district. These two inscriptions do not appear to refer to the murals, but the painting was likely finished soon after the towers over the corridors were completed in 1892. The lost murals in the eastern chambers, which faced the image, were probably the most important and were likely devoted to the history of the Mahamuni shrine and the Shwedagon.

Burmese painting was heavily influenced by European painting in the late 19th century, seen for example in the adoption of single-point perspective in the depiction of many of the buildings. Before the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886, Europeans were often

The Buddha's disciple Mogallana faces off with a snake-king named Nandopananda. This episode from the Pali canon was included among The Eight Great Victories, a popular series in the 20th century. Southern corridor, c. 1892.

placed in compositions, even among *jatakas*, such as at the Ananda Brick Monastery at Pagan. However, only a handful of foreigners appear among the Mahamuni murals, restricted to those riding within the carriages of two or three trains crawling through the landscape or driving the trains.

Whether the works in each of the chambers were coordinated in an overarching iconographic program must await further study. Other unresolved issues are the exact literary and pictorial sources for the paintings and whether the works were done by more than one atelier.

Pagoda Slaves and Brahmins

Burmese sources and early European accounts refer to 'pagoda-slaves' at the Mahamuni. These people were assigned by the crown to the pagoda and took care of its upkeep, much like the paid crews and volunteer staff at the Shwedagon today, but this forced service carried a heavy social stigma. Defrocked Burmese monks, for example, were sent to the Mahamuni as 'pagoda slaves' as punishment for their ignorance of monastic rules in 1801 (ROB: V. 180)

The Rakhine campaign netted more than 20,000 prisoners of war and probably a few entered service at the Mahamuni as 'pagoda slaves.' Approximately 120 families from Rakhine were granted to the pagoda, a figure repeated in early European sources, beginning in 1826 (Crawfurd: I. 477). The Rakhine descendents of these families were noted throughout the century (Yule: 167; Shwe Yoe: 170; ROB: IV. 167). Hindu priests taken from Rakhine and those already established in Amarapura were also assigned to attend to the rituals for the Mahamuni image. Also, ritualists, or *punna*, who had serviced the image in Rakhine were selected for duty at the Mahamuni shrine in Amarapura, suggesting that such continuity ensured the efficacy of the rituals (ROB: V. 119, 185; Leider 2005/06). Astrologers and palmists of Indian origin now working in the shops along the southern corridor are in some ways the last vestige of the Hindu ritualists in Upper Burma. Most hail from Bengal but are conversant in Burmese, Hindi and Bengali. They proudly wear around one shoulder the Hindu sacred-thread.

'Left–overs'

A number of images are said to be made with the 'great left-over' metal, or *maha-kyan*, from the original casting of the Mahamuni Buddha in Rakhine. Different legends list different numbers of images but four have achieved the greatest fame. Two are in modern monasteries in Mrauk-U. A third, called Shwebontha, is commemorated by a pagoda facing Prome on the other side of the Irrawaddy. According to lore, the Shwebontha was to be taken to Mandalay by Bodawpaya but was left opposite Prome at the request of Rakhine pilgrims. The fourth is in Zalun, on the edge of the delta north of Yangon. These images piggy-back on the sanctity of the real Mahamuni and cluster together geographically, similar to the grouping together of hair-relic pagodas in the area near Thaton.

North entrance, Mahamuni Temple, donated by local business man, U Kyaw, in 1962. By U Chit Myae (1904-1976), Mandalay, c. 1965. Eindawya Pagoda platform, Mandalay.

Replicas of the Mahamuni, but not created by the 'left over' metal, are found widely in Burma, many organised by the hermit U Khanti in the first half of the 20th century. These are in Moulmein, Thaton and at the Shwesettaw and probably other places also. A second replica of the Mahamuni is also in Moulmein, cast there in 1904 after a plaster mold of the face made in the preceding year in Mandalay. Other Mahamuni replicas are in Hispaw (1895), Kengtung (1921-1926) in Shan State, and in Kyaikto (1894), Mon State.

The Ananda Temple Replica

Immediately south of the Mahamuni's eastern corridor is a copy of the Ananda Temple, Pagan, donated by the chief queen of King Pagan (r. 1846-1853), the founder of the Kyauk-taw-gyi temple in Amarapura. It differs from Pagan's Ananda Temple in many ways but shows how the Pagan temple served as a model for centuries. Its peculiar pointed tower is probably not original. Recent painted panels in one of the pavilions tell the history of the Ananda Temple at Pagan and others take the history up to the 20th century when the hermit U Khanti discussed with donors building the future corridor that leads from the Mahamuni temple to the Ananda Temple. At least two painters signed their works, one named U Ko Ni and another Maung Ko. Another set of paintings depict the results of bad actions in this life time.

A king's wife runs off with a thief with neither legs or arms. The lovers fail to kill the king who later casts them into exile, a popular jataka *(no. 193) in the 19th century. Modern sculpture, Ananda Temple compound. Mahamuni Temple complex.*

A tableau of wooden figures in one corner features the popular *jataka* of prince Paduma whose wife ran off with a paraplegic no-goodnik (*Jataka* no. 193). Together the couple tried to kill Paduma by pushing him off a cliff. Not realising that he had been rescued by an iguana, they encountered him again after he has assumed the throne when they boldly asked for a hand-out. The king drove them both out of town, proving that bad karma catches up with you – a popular tale in the modern period.

Khmer bronzes taken as booty from Angkor in the 15th century by Thais were then seized by Burmese invaders at Ayutthaya and taken to Pegu and then Toungoo. They were then removed to Rakhine, from where they were finally shifted in 1785 to the Mahamuni Temple.

If These Orphans Could Talk

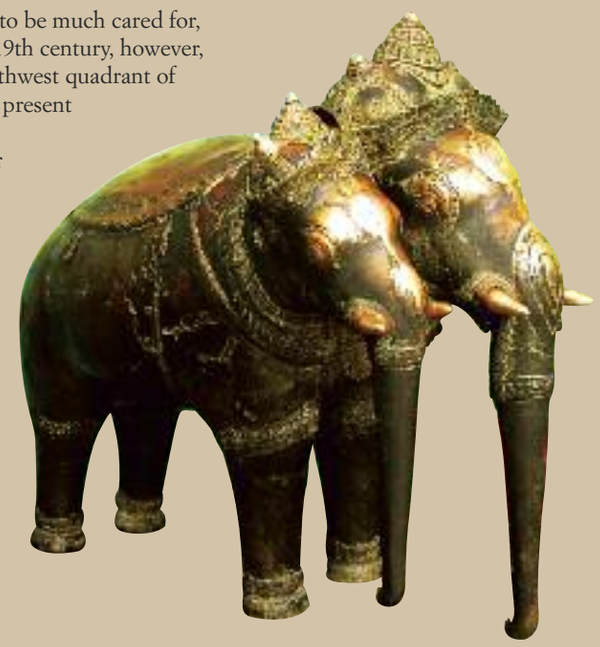
These six bronze figures are poignant reminders of the ebb and flow of empires and the symbolic role of imperial loot. Their first home was Angkor, centre of the Khmer kingdom, probably cast during the 12th or 13th centuries. The two males resemble stone guardian figures at Angkor, while the three-headed elephant probably represents the mount of the Hindu god Indra (Boisselier). There are also three lions, but the two heads are modern, made sometime between 1916 and 1935 (Taw Sein Ko 1916; Damrong). Two of the lions are the same size and their bodies twist inward, suggesting a pair. The third is slightly larger and therefore was probably never directly associated with the other two. Since the two standing male figures are of different sizes, they probably were not a pair in Angkor.

Thai armies captured the bronzes from Angkor and removed them to Ayutthaya in the 15th century. When King Bayinnaung sacked the Thai capital in 1569, they were then taken to Pegu and later shifted to Toungoo in 1599. In the same year they were plundered by a Rakhine king who shipped them off to Mrauk-U, his capital in western Burma. They were then hauled to Upper Burma in 1785 after the conquest of Rakhine and have been kept near the Mahamuni Buddha ever since. The six were probably among thirty bronzes seized in Rakhine, together with 2,000 cannon, which included the giant cannon now at the rear of the Mandalay Palace (*Konbaungzet*: II. 31). These bronzes were probably displayed in Mrauk-U but how they were used is unknown. They are also referred to in a Rakhine chronicle (*Candamalalankara*: 148-149).

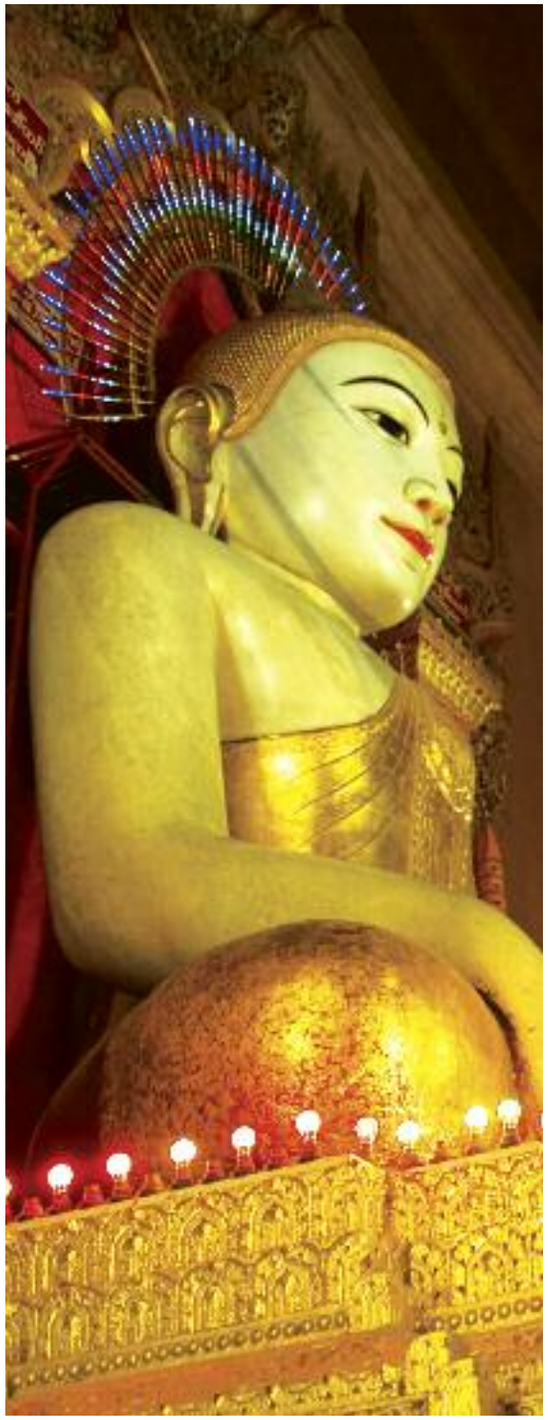
The Khmer figures are today an important focus for temple-goers, but they were rather overlooked until the late 19th century. The bronzes were stored in the 1820s in a separate wooden building near the Mahamuni which contained another 'single, handsome image of Gautma [sic].' The two standing figures, 'all more or less mutilated, were lying neglected on the floor' (Crawfurd: I. 479-480). Their fate was not much better thirty years later when they 'do not appear to be much cared for, and are partially broken' (Yule: 167). By the late 19th century, however, the bronzes were displayed somewhere in the northwest quadrant of the compound, as they are today (Bird: 282). The present pavilion is rather recent.

In another version, these bronzes wound their way from Ayutthaya to Rakhine as ransom for a younger brother of the Thai king, Naresuan, who the Rakhine seized in Lower Burma in the 16th century, according to *Rakhine Minrajagri Satam* (Michael Charney, personal communication).

By the late 19th century devotees began rubbing the images to treat physical ailments and general well-being (del Mar: 77). It was especially noted for intestinal problems, as 'pilgrims affected with dyspepsia and other stomach ailments insert fingers into the navel' (Taw Sein Ko 1916). Their number, size, quality, and unique place in regional history ranks these bronzes among the most valued antiquities in all of Burma, if not Southeast Asia.



The Kyauk-Taw-Gyi at Amarapura



The Kyauk-taw-gyi is home to a marble Buddha, together with some of the most outstanding mid-19th century frescos in Burma. The temple appears to be on an island, viewed from U Bein's famous bridge, but the area is connected by land on the opposite side. It is popularly known as 'The Great Royal Stone Image (Kyauk-taw-gyi) at Taungthaman Lake' to distinguish it from Mindon's Kyauk-taw-gyi in Mandalay. The Buddha is about 3 metres smaller than Mindon's marble Buddha (8.1 metres) and less than half the size of the marble Buddha in Yangon commissioned by the military in 2000.

The temple is said to be based on the Ananda shrine at Pagan, since both are cruciform in plan and capped with an Indian style superstructure. But the parallels end there, since a single marble image dominates the interior rather than four standing wooden Buddhas.

The exterior stucco ornament is mostly original, with composite man-lions, or *manuthiha*, encircling the temple, some retaining original ear ornaments cut from metal sheets. A chapel next to the entrance contains a marble slab with a single-word inscription recording the temple's formal title, 'The Great Light of Shakyamuni Buddha' (Maha-thakya-ranthi). In openings on the eastern face are groups of kneeling marble figures representing the Eighty Disciples of the Buddha, 'enlightened monks', or *yahandas* (*arahants*, Pali), a theme of some currency in the Theravada world (Tun Nyein:170; Geiger: 205).

The Marble Buddha

The temple was constructed by King Pagan (r. 1846-1853), but the Buddha was commissioned decades earlier by Bagyidaw (r. 1819-1837) who himself selected the massive marble block at the Sagyin quarry about 40 kilometres north of Mandalay. It took two years to dislodge from the marble hillside, reaching the capital of Ava on 17 May 1830. The stone was then shifted from its landing place by 5,260 men to 'The Royal Ordination Hall', or Thein Daw, a structure no longer traceable in Ava (Pinnya).

The temple itself was begun on 26 April 1848 under the supervision of an architect named U Hmo. In the following summer of 1849, the block was

transferred to the temple by 3,000 men, and the temple was then built around the Buddha. The project was completed with its *hti*-hoisting on 29 October 1850.

The frescos were probably executed in the months preceding the raising of the *hti* in October 1850. The structure today is largely faithful to its original shape, to judge from a painting in the eastern entrance. It is made entirely of brick, apart from wooden beams supporting the inner passage. The only major loss has been in the compound wall which once had a covered walkway whose ceiling was supported by wooden cross beams, the holes for which are still visible. The last major restoration occurred in 1981, sponsored by donations from two donors in Mandalay and supervised by an architect named U Mya Than. The principal entrance is on the east, facing the central image, but most visitors enter from the south after walking from the bridge.

The north gate of the temple faced the walled city of Amarapura directly across the lake. The nearby shoreline was reserved for foreign missions visiting Amarapura. Michael Symes (1795), Arthur Phayre (1855) and others stayed there in the 'Mission Residency' and were ferried to the palace for official audiences (Yule: 72). The wood and bamboo 'Residency' perished long ago but was only a stone's throw to the northeast of the temple. The Phayre mission was there only five years after the temple's completion, but the shrine received scant attention (Yule: xxi, 80).

The Frescos

The paintings celebrate religious benefactions made by Pagan throughout his short reign. The frescos fill all four corridors and

Finished in 1850, the temple's cruciform plan and general appearance resembles the Ananda at Pagan.

Guarding the corners of the temple are man-lion figures, or manuthiha*, made of stucco-covered, whitewashed brick. Flamboyant ear ornaments, were cut from tin sheets.*

Opposite: 3,000 men were needed to move this marble Buddha from nearby Ava to Amarapura in 1849.

Unfinished sections show outlines that first defined the composition which were later filled in by colour and detail, such as eyes and noses. The murals were probably completed before the hti *hoisting in October 1850. The cartouche below this cruciform temple is partially effaced. West corridor, south wall.*

most scenes are identified by short Burmese inscriptions within cartouches. The paintings are set roughly at eye-level but once likely extended lower, now covered by whitewash.

The locations specified in the painted inscriptions are Amarapura, Ava, Sagaing, Pagan, Prome, Kukhan (Pakhangyi) and Yangon. Each wall combines in most cases shrines from widely separated locations, such as Yangon and Ava, so the scenes were far from literal depictions. There are also repetitions of a pagoda in Ava known as 'The Great Crown of the World Pagoda' (Maha-loka-tharahpu-hpaya) and wooden monasteries associated with that pagoda (Tun Nyein: 170). Duplications occur of another famous pagoda, 'The Great Victory Pagoda' (Maha-wizaya-ranthi-hpaya), or the Pahto-daw-gyi, a stupa built by King Bagyidaw and visible from U Bein's Bridge.

The degree to which these depictions conform to the actual monuments has yet to be determined. However, at least one monument departed from reality, the Shwezigon stupa at Pagan, shown without its prominent four temples abutting the stupa. Many donors are seen standing before the shrines, but it is unlikely that any are specific portraits of the king since the characters differ from one another.

Wall painting was traditionally restricted to themes from Pali literature, such as the life of the Buddha or *jatakas*, but the Kyauk-taw-gyi breaks from this tradition by highlighting key shrines of the day. The artists also reveled in everyday scenes, such as children flying kites and men fishing, but this is scarcely secular art since the overriding purpose was to exalt the ruler's religious works. However, such an innovative approach to wall painting signals new perceptions. The Kyauk-taw-gyi murals stand alone in some ways, however, since little in Burmese wall painting relates directly to the style or themes

represented here; however murals in one temple in the Amarapura area from this period also depict actual temples located in other parts of Burma (Alexandra Green, personal communication). The atelier must have ranked at the top, but related work in the Amarapura area is lost.

European aerial perspective is partly why these murals are so distinctive. How foreign pictorial modes were introduced to Burma is uncertain but it probably began in the 18th century when British missions presented books with illustrations to the court, sent from Calcutta. Indian artists, exposed to European art, may also have been responsible for instructing Burmese artists (Bailey).

Each wall surface is treated as a single composition with a low horizon line tapering off into the ceiling. This contrasts to earlier painting where the action took place on a single flat plane. The size of figures and the intensity of the colours diminish in the distance, two hallmarks of aerial perspective. Shadowing is also used to create depth, but with an inconsistent light source. Single-point perspective is absent here since multiple points of view operate in a shifting pattern within each composition. The top of each wall is inhabited with celestial figures and clouds, but no attempt is made to visually integrate the celestial realm with the worldly one below. This improbable blending of traditional Burmese and European conventions is probably what makes these works so engaging.

The artists began with outlines of figures drawn directly on a dry, primed surface. Lines made with charcoal or a type of pencil are easily detected beneath light coloured washes or where the painters have not entirely filled in the outline. Some outlines were also made with pink coloured lines. Filling in the outlines with colour washes was the last step. Many of the compositions were left partially

The ceilings are taken up by various categories of celestials, such as this alchemist, or zawgyi, *in red. West corridor, south wall.*

The Kyauk-taw-gyi temple itself is shown here within the entrance corridor, south wall. The wooden monastery below was rebuilt in 1993, in another part of Amarapura, with this depiction as a model. The monuments in all four corridors showcase the benefactions of King Pagan.

Two monks with a child holding a fruit, paired on the opposite wall with a man, with perhaps a child and two women. Entrusting children to the monastery is perhaps the subject of these otherwise enigmatic compositions. These works appear in the south corridor, at the entrance.

unfinished, usually toward the exterior, suggesting that the colourists began from the interior and worked outward. Why so much work remains unfinished will probably never be known.

The four corridors transport us into a bucolic timeless world but storms were brewing. Less than two years after the paint dried, Pagan was imprisoned by Mindon (r. 1853-1878) and English troops were on the verge of annexing all of Lower Burma.

East Corridor

The principal entrance enjoys an unobstructed view of the marble Buddha. The Kyauk-taw-gyi complex itself is depicted on the left wall (south), as we face the interior. Close to the entrance is shown another compound with five stupas, which should be the Eindawya complex in Mandalay (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). A large single stupa at the end of the wall is likely the Htupayon Pagoda, Sagaing, repaired by Pagan but unfinished.

The opposite wall on the right starts off with a procession of devotees, jumbled together masterfully. The donor kneels before the monks receiving the donations. All four cartouches on this wall are illegible. The ceiling is dominated by a footprint of the Buddha, likely re-touched recently.

South Corridor

On the left (west) side, facing the interior, are scenes from Ava mixed together with those from Yangon, with the Irrawaddy dividing the composition. Near the centre is a stupa in Ava identified as a 'Brick Temple Inside the Compound of the Loka Tharaphu Temple in Ava City' (Awa-myo-loka-tharaphu-hpaya-maha-yan-atwin ok-pyathat). A wooden monastery to the upper right is identified as the 'Warso Monastery inside the Great Victory Temple' (Maha-wizaya-ranthi-hpaya-mahayan-atwin-warso-kyaung), or the Patho-daw-gyi stupa in Amarapura visible from U Bein's Bridge. Other monuments on

A donor kneeling before a monk on the left, followed by a procession, complete with musicians. East corridor, north wall.

this wall were in Okkalapa, or Yangon. Four are connected to the Eindawya Pagoda, a restored stupa just southwest of the Shwedagon. One represents an ordination hall ('*thein*'). Scenes on the right, facing the interior, show shrines in Ava and Pagan, linked by the Irrawaddy. Two Chinese traders with pack animals travel amidst ravines, reflecting the robust silk and cotton trade between China and Upper Burma at this time (Yule: 145). The large central stupa is the Shwezigon, Pagan, or 'Work of Royal Merit in Pagan, the Shwezigon' (Kuthodaw-pagan-myo-shwezigon-hpaya). Nearby a group of eight white- clad brahmins are in procession, two holding drums. At the end of the wall is a herd of elephants, including white elephants. To the left of the Shwezigon is a smaller stupa depicting the same brick pavilion in Ava that appears on the opposite wall (Awa-myo-loka-tharaphu-hpaya-maha-yan-atwin ok-pyathat). The wooden monastery closest to the interior is identified as the same Warso Monastery that also appears on the opposite wall.

A huge white tusker and her offspring frolic amidst a herd. South corridor, east wall.

At the entrance on both sides to this corridor are two enigmatic scenes that may have been added later, since their subjects and style do not relate to the original project. One shows two older monks, one holding a small child with a circular fruit in his hand. The grouping on the other side shows a male on the left, with perhaps a child at his shoulder. It seems that two women are on the right. The compositions probably relate to each other, but the subject is unclear.

West Corridor

On the left (north), facing the interior, is depicted a temple on the top of Mandalay Hill, with the cartouche 'Covered Stairway leading to the Mandalay Royal Merit Pagoda' (Kuthodaw-Mandalay-hpaya-zaungtan). In the centre of the wall is a large stupa labeled 'The Work of Royal Merit called Theinnyawarshi (?) in the City of Kukhan' (Kukhan-myo-Theinnya-warshi-kuthodaw-hpaya). Kukhan is the former name of Pakhan, known today as Pakhangyi, about 50 kilometres northwest of Pagan. Below is a monastery, captioned as the 'Warso Monastery', the same encountered at the beginning of the wall and in the south corridor.

On the right are scenes of monuments in Prome, or Pyay, such as the Shwesandaw Pagoda elevated on a hill. The partially effaced cartouche reads 'Golden Myin-tin' which was the old name of the pagoda connected to King Duttabaung (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 17).

North Corridor

On the left (east), facing the interior, is a temple close to the entrance whose cartouche reads the 'Work of Royal Merit: The Golden Temple [Shwegu]'. Its location has been effaced. Further to the right

A heavenly pair taking a terrestrial break, cane and sprig between them. North corridor, west wall.

Wooden monastery, with two donors seated before a monk. Children wrestle and play games below. Identified as the 'Warso Monastery inside the Great Victory Temple' or the Pahto-daw-gyi, Amarapura. South corridor, west wall.

are two stupas and a monument nearly completely missing due to water damage. Laymen clad in white are shown feeding monks next to a wooden monastery. Boat races are in full swing below.

On the opposite wall is a stupa on a rocky hill and a temple on a stone embankment but both cartouches are lost. Next comes an unidentified temple whose plan resembles the Mt. Meru monument at Mingun, with five concentric rings around the base and staggered arched entrances. Next to it is a monument with parallels to the brick pagoda at Mingun, but there are many differences too. Also depicted is a popular monument today in Sagaing, 'The Work of Royal Merit: the Tunnel-Cave Pagoda' (Sagaing-myo kuthodaw-umin-gu-hpaya). These 'cave-temples' were renovated by Pagan in 1847 but the site's foundation is attributed to King Tarahpya (r. 1323-1336). Nearby are two exhausted celestial hermits taking a break from their heavenly chores. Their characteristic floral sprig lies at their feet, awaiting re-entry above.

Unfinished Wall

Beside the north corridor is a narrow side aisle containing an entire wall of unfinished painting, the composition laid out but with no colour applied. The scenes appear secular in character, with saddled horses and cattle, together with an elephant inside a pavilion. Two groups of seated figures face one another in front of a palace. The composition lacks the expansive unity of the finished frescos. At least two empty cartouches can be made out. Were frescos with such secular themes once intended for all of the side corridors and then never completed?

Ceilings

The ceiling of the eastern entrance highlights a single Buddha's footprint but the remaining corridors showcase the constellations. In two corridors the stars are arranged in concentric elliptical circles. In the west corridor the stars are set amidst parallel lines. The names are painted beside the clusters of stars, using mostly Pali terms but also some common Burmese words, such as *hamsa*, for goose. Similar constellations were recorded in the late 18th century by Europeans (Buchanan). The north and south ceilings also have small footprints but are clearly secondary to the constellations.

The constellations are featured among the ceilings, reminiscent of those in the Mahamuni Temple from later in the 19th century. Astrology, and its handmaiden, astronomy, play an important role in Burmese life. South corridor.

Celestial figures are placed floating in the air above the landscapes. Many are alchemists or wizards and others are celestial hermits, often carrying sprigs or white umbrellas. One seems to be fighting another over a 'fruit-maiden', or a lovely woman plucked from a tree. The gods include one depiction of Brahma, identified by his three heads.

U Bein's Bridge

At nearly two kilometres, this is the longest wooden bridge in Burma. Started in 1849 at about the same time as the nearby temple, its patron was U Bein who served as clerk to Bai Sahib, the city's highest official, or Myo Wun. Both were Muslims, showing the cosmopolitan nature of the times. The original materials were recycled from deserted dwellings at Ava and Sagaing. Work on the bridge took three years, from 1849 to 1851 (Pinnya).

The lake was until recently dependent on the ebb and flow of the Irrawaddy, fed by a small tributary. The bridge was therefore subject to flooding. In the 1990s the government placed a dam at the small river connected to the Irrawaddy, and now the water level remains nearly constant, a happy thing for the ducks, fisherman and photo-enthusiasts.

Near the beginning of the bridge is an enormous brick Buddha begun in 1786. It remained uncovered into the 20th century. Two brick structures outside the entrance date from the 19th century.

U Bein's teak bridge opened in 1851, after three years of construction. U Bein was a Muslim in the local government. Arthur Phayre crossed the bridge with horses in 1855.

Mandalay Hill: A Prophecy Fulfilled

From Mandalay Hill the Buddha prophesied that a great city would arise below, founded by King Mindon. Dotted with shrines, the hill has several stairways leading to the top. By Maung Saw Maung, c. *1965, Shwe Indein Pagoda, Indein, Inle Lake.*

Mandalay was the nation's last capital on the eve of the colonial era, but cities in its immediate neighbourhood were once epicentres of Burmese history following the Pagan period (11th-13th centuries). The most important was Ava, a centre from the mid-14th to mid-16th centuries and then on and off again for short periods between the 17th and early 19th centuries. Mandalay's construction was begun by Mindon (r. 1853-1878), the penultimate monarch of the Konbaung dynasty (1752-1885). The city's formal name was Ratanapunna (Pali), or literally the City Filled with Gems, shortened to Ratanapun and pronounced Yadanabon.

Mindon relocated his capital from Amarapura, a walled city about 10 kilometres south of Mandalay (see p. XX). The king first pondered the move late in 1856 but grew committed to it after two dreams early in 1857. In the first he was visited by a woman named Mi Tun Aung who urged him to shift the capital on the basis of old augurs and prophecies. The second featured a man named Nga Htin who presented grass cut from Mandalay Hill which symbolised the realm's security if fed to horses and elephants.

Mandalay Hill towers above King Mindon's palace, the wide moat and thick brick wall.

Ministers and senior religious advisors then provided other reasons, notably invoking a prophecy that centred on the Buddha appearing on Mandalay Hill with his disciple Ananda. An ogress of the hill named Chandamukhi, or Moon Face, greeted the Buddha and made Him an offering of her two severed breasts. (Konbaungzet). A sculpture of the kneeling ogress now faces a small stupa just beneath the temple located on the summit. A nearby marble Shan inscription dated to 1919 perhaps records the dedication of the stupa. Offerings to the Buddha connected with prophecies were part of a long tradition, which even included Asoka who as a child in another life innocently offered dirt to the Buddha. In Burma the best example is King Duttabaung who in his previous life was a mole who also presented the Buddha with earth.

The Buddha then forecast that the ogress would be reborn as a future king (King Mindon) in the royal city of Yadanabon in the environs of Mandalay Hill 2400 years after his demise, or in 1856-1857. This prophecy was also commemorated by making the four massive walls equal to 2,400 *ta*, or with each wall over 1.6 kilometres; a *ta* is a unit of measurement roughly equal to 3.5 metres in length.

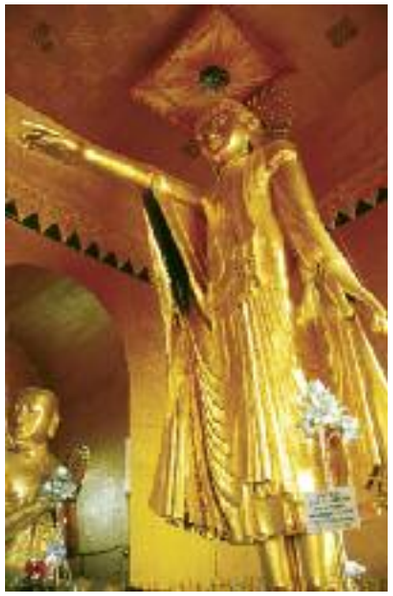
The Buddha pointed from Mandalay Hill in the direction of the present walled city, a critical episode Mindon honoured by commissioning two enormous wooden figures near the top of the hill. One was a standing Buddha, with his right hand raised, pointing in the direction of Mandalay, and the other was Ananda kneeling below. The shrine was finished on 22 March 1860 but everything perished in a fire in 1892 (Bastian: 75).The motif of the Buddha predicting the rise of certain cities and kings can be traced to the Pagan period during the reign of Kyanzittha. Images of the Buddha pointing across the Irrawaddy to future cities are found at Pagan and near Prome.

Mindon surveyed the future site of Mandalay on 28 January 1857. The staking ceremony for the palace occurred in January 1858 and the huge teak posts were set in place the following month. Mindon took possession of the palace about six month later, on 16 July 1858. It perished during World War II but was reconstructed in the early 1990s, based on old photographs and descriptions (Moore 2003). The massive city walls, consuming untold millions of bricks, make Mindon's creation among the largest standing walled cities in Southeast Asia. The dimensions of Chiang Mai's city wall are slightly larger.

The king's piety also had few boundaries and Mindon sponsored numerous shrines, two of which are paramount pilgrimage destinations, the Kyauk-taw-gyi and the Kuthodaw. Mindon also convened the Fifth Buddhist Synod, in 1871, to review the Pali canon, and in the same year sponsored a new *hti* for the Shwedagon. His most ambitious project was one that never reached fruition, a massive stone pagoda started in December 1876 to the east of Mandalay that rose to only about a metre (Scott & Hardiman 1900: I. 1. 76).

The king saw himself as a reformer and promoter of the faith and modeled his actions on those of King Asoka. He also thought of himself as a social and economic reformer, bringing Burma into the modern world in order to resist encroaching pressures from British India. Many advisors from Europe were employed at the court, conferring over a range of activities, from establishing a mint to starting textile and armament factories (Maung Min Naing).

It was during Mindon's time that the Sagaing hills attracted monks who sought to avoid the lax discipline among the prosperous monasteries in Mandalay patronised by the king. Sagaing was also home to many sacred sites over the centuries, such as the 15th



The Buddha points to the future Mandalay and predicts the rise of the city to his disciple Ananda, kneeling below. Set up by Mindon in 1860, the pair perished in a fire in 1892. The shrine today, called the Shweyattaw Hpaya, is nearly at the top of the hill.

The ogress Chandamukhi, or Moon Face, offers the Buddha her severed breasts, cupped in her hands. Chandmukhi faces a stupa, just below the hill's summit.

century Htupayon Pagoda, but only the Soon Oo Ponnya Shin Pagoda has achieved some degree of religious popularity today. Sagaing is still known for its many monasteries and meditation centres for lay people. Contrasted with the flat plain of Mandalay, the Sagaing hills affords endless nooks and ravines for isolated monastic establishments, many of which date to the first part of the 20th century.

The opening months of Mindon's reign saw the loss of Lower Burma to the British, including Yangon and the Shwedagon Pagoda. A son named Thibaw assumed the throne in 1878 but seven years later he was exiled to the Bombay Presidency when British troops swept into Mandalay in November 1885. The enormous palace therefore was occupied by only two kings, for a total of only twenty-four years. Mindon is cast in Burma as a pious and capable king, while Thibaw, his wife, and his pushy mother-in-law are too often simplistically blamed for the downfall of the nation.

A cluster of seven projects were all inaugurated on the same day, 15 May 1859, and all within the southern shadow of Mandalay Hill: (1) the palace brick wall, (2) the moat, (3) Maha Lawka Marazein, or the Kuthodaw, (4) the Dhamma Myitzu Thein, an ordination hall, (5) Maha Atula Weyan Royal Monastery, or the Atumashi, (6) the Pitaka Tike, or Library, and (7) Rest Houses for visiting monks. All seven projects were staked at the same moment and the foundations begun simultaneously on 22 May. Each project was finished at different times, such as the hoisting of the *hti* at the Kuthodaw on 19 July 1862. In this sense, Mandalay began with Mindon's vision late in 1857 and was completed by 1862.

Inaugurating seven projects when laying out Mandalay enjoyed a solid precedent in Konbaung history, starting with the founding of Shwebo by Alaungpaya (r. 1752-1760) (Lieberman 1984: 238). It was also true for Amarapura, created by Bodawpaya (r. 1782-1819), and even marked the legendary founding of Shri Kshetra (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 14). The actual projects, such as moats, palaces, or gateways, varied but the number was always seven. The projects are

A small temple capping Mandalay Hill, left, suggests the hill's sacred associations before Mindon's time. This temple is tied to the Pagan king Anawrahta, according to later chronicles. Kyauk-taw-gyi, Amarapura, west corridor, north wall, circa *1850.*

sometimes referred to as 'seven requisites' or even 'seven places'; as a tradition, it can be traced to early Hindu and Buddhist literature (Francois Tainturier, personal communication). The capital of the first ruler of the world, Mahasammata, was also associated in later Burmese chronicles with the seven requisites (Tun Aung Chain 2004b: 1; Tin: 69). Most of Mindon's seven projects were not included in the Pali lists of seven constituents, but this tradition in later Burma almost certainly derived from Buddhist sources.

U Khanti, left, the reformed demon Alavaka, and the ogress Chandamukhi, shorn of her breasts. Modern depictions inside U Khanti's former headquarters at the base of the Mandalay Hill.

Mandalay Before Mindon

Mandalay Hill was enveloped with sacred associations long before the rise of Mindon's city below. A temple on the summit was in existence since at least the 18th century, its creation attributed to King Anawrahta of the Pagan period (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 84). This very temple or another figures among the frescos at the Kyauk-taw-gyi from *circa* 1850, showing a long covered walkway leading up to it.

Before Mindon's reign a small area was selected as the residence of Prince Pagan, from May 1844 to September 1844, just before he assumed the throne. Its position northwest of Amarapura was determined by the direction associated with the birthday of his father, Tharrawaddy (r. 1837-1846), who went mad and was forced by his ministers to leave Amarapura for astrological reasons (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). The place is today marked by the Eindawya Pagoda, or Royal Residence Pagoda, now west of the city walls. Its formal name was Maha-lawka-ranthi, or 'Great Light of the World', its metal spire hoisted in November 1848. It was once a major sacred site, but its popularity dwindled since the late 1960s, for unknown reasons. The grounds are in shabby shape now, another indication of how sites come in and out of favour. The pagoda is depicted among the paintings in Amarapura's Kyauk-taw-gyi temple.

The entire area around the foot of Mandalay Hill was made a cantonment after annexation in 1886. Key royal shrines were therefore off limits to locals and soon fell into neglect. Access reopened only after a successful petition to Queen Victoria in 1890. The first offering of food to monks at the Kuthodaw occurred in the same year, followed by the steady refurbishment of all the major shrines in Mandalay by a newly formed committee comprised of senior monks and many local notables, such as Sir Saw Maung, the *sawbwa* of Nyaung-shwe and Kinwun Min Gyi (1821-1903), a former chief royal official. The council functioned until 1915 when the role passed to the trustees at the Mahamuni Temple (Woodward: 67). Mandalay Hill was administered directly by the country's Patriarch, or Thathanabaing, a recognition of the hill's sacred position.

The hermit U Khanti restored many key monuments in Mandalay and throughout Burma in the early 20th century. This old postcard shows him with his characteristic headdress.

Detail of a carved, wooden Maha-janaka Jataka, showing the prince beneath a capsizing boat being rescued by a goddess. Late 19th cnenury. Shwe-in-bin Monastery.

U Khanti and a Card-cheat

The present character of Mandalay Hill owes as much to an indefatigable hermit named U Khanti (1867-1948) as it does to King Mindon. Indeed, U Khanti's name is associated with the restoration of many of the shrines on the hill. His activities were not confined to Mandalay, however, and his good works are found throughout the country. He organised donations from ordinary lay people to projects that were previously restricted to royal patrons (Woodward: 82).

U Khanti sponsored full-scale metal replicas of the Mahamuni Buddha now in Moulmein, Thaton, and at the Shwesettaw. He also commissioned two sets of the *Tipitaka*, engraved on over a thousand stone slabs. One set, together with Pali commentaries, went to the Sandamuni shrine, next door to the Kuthodaw, while another was intended for the compound of the Shwesayan in Thaton. For unexplained reasons, only about 500 slabs arrived in Thaton. Some 200 stones stayed behind in Upper Burma where they languish today in a shed in the Kyauk-taw-gyi compound.

Depictions of U Khanti are found throughout the country in sculptures and paintings. He is almost always shown as a hermit, or *yathe*, dressed in the dark brown clothes and tall tapered stiff leather headgear associated with hermits in Burma. He was first a monk for twelve years and is therefore sometimes depicted in monk's robes. Then, free from the hundreds of troublesome Buddhist *vinaya* rules, he was able to raise funds and operate independently. His role at Mandalay Hill is reminiscent of Kruba Srivichai (1875-1935), a monk who restored the sacred monuments on Doi Suthep, a mountain towering over Chiang Mai, in the first half of the 20th century.

U Khanti worked closely with the remaining royal family, courtiers, and the Shan *sawbwa* from Nyaung-shwe. He was also a favourite of British officialdom which embraced his activities, even receiving the Viceroy of India at his hermitage (Woodward). Queen Victoria was said to have awarded him free travel stipends within Burma in order to carry out his work (Aye Maung).

U Khanti was not without his detractors, however. His major foe was a prominent woman named Sansi Khin Lay, the wife of a high official from a Shan kingdom who in 1906 began restoring Mindon's large Pointing Buddha that had burned earlier. U Khanti arrived in Mandalay in 1907 and competed for restoring the Pointing Buddha. A classic turf battle soon ensued. The Thathanabaing advised U Khanti not to restore the image, in as much as this high profile project was already taken. U Khanti, however, threw down the gauntlet and erected a standing Buddha just in front of the Pointing Buddha.

The protagonists once met on the steps of the hill, and on this hallowed ground she abused him by calling him a fake hermit. Word of the insult spread fast and a propaganda war soon raged on both sides. Sansi Khin Lay was then accused not only of playing cards in Mandalay's Chinatown but of cheating, concealing cards with numbers three and four, cards whose names in Chinese made up her

first name, San-si. She was so vilified that she was asked to leave the hill and to pass on the work to U Khanti. The issue was finally forced into a tribunal, held on the hill in a rest house. The verdict was clear. The card-cheat was told to desist from her work and to hand the reins to U Khanti. As a compromise, she was allowed to donate 30,000 bricks to the present structure, her presence thus not entirely forgotten. After her rebuke at the hearing, she is reported to have run down the hill and soon lost her memory. With such a colourful story to launch his remarkable career in Mandalay, the hermit U Khanti was assured a beloved spot in 20th century Burmese lore. The new Pointing Buddha was completed in 1909, made with a huge teak log from Katha, a logging centre north of Mandalay on the Irrawaddy. For many years the 'charred stumps' of the original images protruded through the floor (Bird: 271). The shrine today is called the Shweyattaw Hpaya, or the Golden Pointing Buddha.

These stone tablets incised with the Pali canon were part of U Khanti's plan to transport an entire set from Mandalay to Thaton in Lower Burma. 100s of panels were sent but many stayed behind for unknown reasons. Kyauk-taw-gyi Pagoda compound.

Another project was the restoration of the temple perched at the highest point of the hill, known as the Wish Fulfilling Mountain Pagoda, or Su Taung Pyi Hpaya. It is a sacred site and popular among pilgrims. The temple is also associated with a well-known maxim, 'If you want a long life, then come to Mandalay Hill.' The temple has four seated Buddhas, representing Gotama and his three predecessors, each in separate halls facing the cardinal directions. Inside the eastern hall is a life-size seated bronze image of U Khanti. The temple has been restored many times but was in existence during Mindon's day when it was called Myat-saw Nyinaung (Scott & Hardiman 1900: I. 1. 46).

Some steps below the temple platform, on the north side, are two sculptures of long cobras, their raised heads facing the main shrine above. They evoke old lore from a time when U Khanti was restoring Mandalay Hill. The story begins when two snakes, a male and female boa, were first spotted by a man named U Be in his compound in Mandalay's Linzin quarter. A snake charmer was called to remove the pair. One of U Khanti disciples saw the snakes and asked for them, chiding the snake charmer that he had made enough money displaying the two, echoing a theme in the famous *Bhuridatta Jataka*. The monk then took the snakes to the two enormous *chinthe* which can still be seen at the southern base of the hill. Crowds came to see them, and it was soon circulated that the pair were former human donors on Mandalay Hill reborn as snakes. They remained on the hill for nearly two years, also entertaining the workmen who were finishing the Pointing Buddha. When the shrine was completed, the monks removed the snakes to Yangin Hill where they disappeared down a deep hole (Ludu Daw Ahmar 1997).

Two covered walkways at the southern base of the hill join up for the final stage leading to the summit. Ancient Buddhist bone-relics

Two snakes resided on Mandalay Hill at the time of U Khanti, immortalized in legend and now the subject of devotion. They are located steps below the Wish Fulfilling Mountain Pagoda, or the Su Taung Pyi Hpaya, the modern temple on the summit.

Detail of the Bo Bo Gyi image housed in a small shrine at the base of Mandalay Hill.

from Peshawar, in ancient Gandhara (now in Pakistan), were until recently on display in a separate pavilion but have been shifted now to a building closer to the base included in the precincts of U Khanti's Mandalay Hill Monastery. Also near the base is U Khanti's former headquarters, with some of his memorabilia. Before his death, U Khanti bequeathed control of the hill to two senior monks in the Thuddhama division. Funds were short and the two aksed the Young Monks' Association to take control of the hill. A Mandalay Hill association was formed which administered not only the hill but the forty-six establishments begun by U Khanti all over the land (Mendelson: 321). The hill now is controlled by the Mandalay Hill Religious Building Maintenance and Renovation Association.

Mandalay Hill's chief Bo Bo Gyi shrine is at the base of the hill, in a small shrine across the street from the Kyauk-taw-gyi temple. Other small *nat* figures are also within the same shrine. Boys often visit in the early morning on the day of their novitiate ceremony before making a donation at the nearby Kyauk-taw-gyi shrine, a poignant reminder of the coexistence of these two different traditions.

Shwe Kyi Myin Pagoda

After the loss of the Mandalay Palace and its shrines in November 1885, an old temple outside the walls was revived by the Burmese elite in 1889 as a repository for a handful of sacred Buddha images once kept in the palace. The small stupa complex, Shwe Kyi Myin, is not far from the moat in a southwesterly direction, near the old Sacred Heart Cathedral. Legends assert that the temple was begun by Minshinsaw, one of Aluangsithu's sons. The prince spotted a golden crow at the future temple site, an omen for him to erect a stupa there.

A double-sided stone inscription from the early 20th century in the compound gives a partial history of the temple, from 1889 when British authorities told Burmese officials to remove over 40 sacred images from the palace. Under the leadership of the Buddhist Primate, Taungdaw Sayadaw, and chief minister, the famous Kinwun Mingyi, the objects were taken from the palace and transferred to their new resting place. Each image had a distinguished mythical pedigree, enhanced by having been worshipped by kings for centuries. One was a Buddha made from the 'southern branch', or *dakkhinasakha*, that the Pagan king Anawrahta brought from Thaton; this 'southern branch'

The court, after annexation in 1886, worships the images inside the Shwe Kyi Myin. Modern paintng by Thaung Htaike. Shwe Kyi Myin Temple compound.

Buddha images once worshipped in Mandalay Palace shown entering the south entrance of the Shwe Kyi Myin Pagoda, shifted here after the British took control of the palace. The temple is now a favourite of the military elite due to its past royal associations. Shwe Kyi Myin compound. By U Ni, Sein Paung Quarter, Mandalay. 1974.

was associated with the branch of the Bodhi Tree sent to Sri Lanka by Asoka. Another image, the Shinbyu Buddha, was carved from the marble slab at the base of the Jambu, or rose apple, tree under which the Buddha sat. Five related images were made of sandal-wood. Other images included the Sutaungpyi, the Myatheindan, the Shwe-linbin and Shwe-kun-ok. The latter two are seen as most sacred today. Legends linked with some images are in the *Glass Palace Chronicle*. The reverse face of the inscription records many donations since its opening in 1889, such as for the roof, pillars, a pond and four iron chests for receiving donations.

The present focus is on the numerous Buddha images behind glass in the main worship hall. The Shwe-kun-ok, a standing crowned Buddha, is linked with Alaungsithu's rescue of the son of an ogress from drowning by use of a golden net, a story also found in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* and important for the Paung Daw Oo shrine at Inle Lake. In addition, this image seems to have tenuous connections with a brick pagoda in the northeast corner of Amarapura, now called the Golden Net Pagoda. The most extraordinary image is a small emerald Buddha, now completely concealed by gilding, said to have been given to Anawrahta by a Chinese emperor as a consolation prize for failing to obtain the Buddha's sacred tooth for Pagan, and again in the *Glass Palace Chronicle.* The gilded image was 'found' just prior to the arrival of the tooth-relic sent to Burma from China in 1994. The Emerald Buddha went on tour with the Chinese relic and two tooth replicas gifted to Burma (21 April, *The New Light of Burma*; Schober 1997a) The fact that the image was miraculously uncovered just before the arrival of the Chinese relic displas a mixture of bald-faced government propaganda and genuine religious belief.

The temple enjoyed a brief revival in the 1960s but then became rather moribund until the change of government in 1988 when its fortunes revived through strong associations with former monarchs, the Mandalay Palace, and the fact that the images survived colonial rule. No shrine in Burma better epitomises the mingling of old and new traditions; its rich complexity merits an exhaustive monograph.

Mandalay remain poignant as the country's last royal capital. Independence saw the country for the first time with neither Burmese kings or Whitehall dictating policy. Like a bird with clipped wings held captive too long, the country is struggling to fly again on its own.

The Shwe Kyi Min's central worship hall contains numerous Buddha images once venerated inside Mandalay Palace.

The Kyauk-Taw-Gyi at Mandalay

Mindon vowed that if he triumphed over his half-brother he would commission a huge marble Buddha. Headband, ornaments and paint are not original to the 19th century.

The Kyauk-taw-gyi was built at the foot of Mandalay Hill, a short distance west of the Kuthodaw and Sandamuni. It was not one of the seven projects begun by Mindon (r. 1853-1878) but was built within this cluster of monuments. Nearby across the road is Mandalay Hill's chief Bo Bo Gyi shrine, a short distance up the stairway to the top.

The temple was conceived when Mindon, as a prince, fled into the countryside after the reigning monarch, King Pagan (r. 1846-1853) accused him of rebellion in 1852. Hiding amidst the Sagyin marble quarries north of Mandalay, he vowed there that if he could overcome his half-brother, then he would return for a block of marble for a Buddha image. Mindon succeeded and kept his promise, dedicating the image on 16 May 1865, about six years after he transferred the capital from Amarapura to Mandalay.

The shrine's popular name is Kyauk-taw-gyi, or The Great Royal Stone, but its formal Pali title is Maha-sakya-mara-jina, or The Great Sakya Conqueror of Mara (the Buddha belonged to the Sakya clan). The Buddha's lowered right hand signifies his enlightenment and defeat of Mara, the most popular hand-gesture for Buddha images in Burma, from the Pagan period onward. The solumn sanctum is dominated by the Buddha whose estimated weight is 180 tons. Its height is just over 8 metres in height.

From Quarry to Temple

The block was wrested from the Sagyin quarries in August 1864, and then labouriously moved to the Irrawaddy River where it was loaded on two flat barges towed by the steamer *Setkya Yin Mun*, obtained from Hardie and Bullock Co. Ltd. (Bird: 284). It was floated during the peak of the rainy season, so to diminish the chances of its lodging on the bottom. Arriving closer to Mandalay more steamers joined in to form a small flotilla. The Buddha was greeted by Mindon and his court amidst deafening cannon salutes at a jetty in northwestern Mandalay. The barge continued from the river into the Shwe Ta Chaung canal west of the palace walls. For the last four miles it was placed on a sledge. The move through the streets took thirteen days and the labour of 10,000 volunteers, entertained by musicians and dancers, was supervised by the crown prince. Unscrupulous locals demanded money from citizens to defray the entertainment costs, but it was returned once Mindon was notified (ROB: IX. 120). At its new home, the sculptors worked day and night under a special pavilion, amidst ongoing festivals.

Mindon and his chief queen inspected the carving often and even spent nights at a temporary palace close by. The work was guided by two master masons, U Toke Gyi and U Pike Htway. By February 1865, the image was nearing completion and the king himself advised the sculptors about the expression of the Buddha's face (Scott & Hardiman 1900: I. 1. 51). The image was completed on 9 May 1865.

This single block of marble was installed in its present location in May 1865, nearly a year after it was quarried from the Sagyin hills north of Mandalay. Its estimated weight is 180 tons, twice the weight of the Mingun Bell.

The Grand Procession

The consecration of the image occurred on 16 May 1865, starting with a vast procession from the palace. The event was described in at least two chronicles, the *Konbaungzet* and the *Mandalay Rajavan* and was also recorded in an illustrated folding-book, or *parabaik*, with fifteen double-page coloured illustrations (Duroiselle 1925). The original book has been in the British Library for over a century, but faithful copies have been painted on large panels hung in a detached pavilion near the pagoda's main entrance. Each section is packed with

A magnificent procession from the palace to the temple in 1865 was captured in fifteen colour illustrations in a folding book, or parabaik. *The set was hand copied onto large panels at the Kyauk-taw-gyi. This example shows Europeans employed in Mindon's army. Kyauk-taw-gyi compound.*

A frog swallowing a snake, a violation of natural law, is likened to a young lassie wed to an older man, shown henpecked mercilessly. One of 'Sixteen Dreams of King Kosala'*, a popular* jataka *whose moralistic vignettes are depicted throughout Burma. The panels at the Kyauk-taw-gyi, from 1968, rank among the best works in the oeuvre of Maung Saw Maung, a Mandalay-based painter.*

figures, such as lancers, gunners, elephants, horses, chariots, and more. Six battalions led the procession, six brought up the rear and His Majesty and his court, with musicians and dancers, were in the middle. A Burmese text details the various regiments. The text is one or two 'pages' ahead of the illustrations, and a few descriptions of the forces are left out of the illustrations, such as a group of fifty archers. One panel shows Europeans who formed part of the army. Mindon's 'artillery force' of 500 was cosmo-politan, composed of Burmese, Indian, Manipuris, and Chinese Muslims (Yule: 247).

The climax of the day was the king ascending a platform to personally paint the lips, eyebrows and eyes of the Buddha. The two ministers assigned to move the Buddha from the quarry were then allowed to paint the face. The last act was the recitation in Pali of a passage from the *Dhammapada* beginning, 'For countless lives I have kept running in this endless cycle of becoming', a verse later influential for the founder of the Vipassana meditation movement, S.N. Goenka. A large modern painting by Chit Than Zin, showing Mindon and his wives at the opening ceremony hangs in the same side pavilion, the Seinban Quarter, a local district known for its traditional puppets. Also there is a marble alms bowl of uncertain date, dwarfed by the one established in Yangon on Mindhamma Hill which weighs in at 30 tons and stands over 3 metres.

The main corridor has panel paintings of the popular Jataka 77: '*Sixteen Dreams of King Kosala*'. These are signed by Maung Saw Maung and dated to 1968. His atelier was based in Mandalay but his commissions appear widely, from Yangon to Inle Lake.

The Temple and Compound

The temple enshrining the Buddha was not finished, even in the reign of Thibaw (r. 1878 -1885), until after annexation, during the late 1890s or early in the 20th century (Bird: 284). This was a period when many of the royal shrines at the base of Mandalay Hill were rehabilitated by former Burmese nobles, Shan *sawbwas*, merchants and donations from common people. The semi-circular European arches of the hall recall the rebuilt Mahamuni shrine of the same period. Its corrugated octagonal iron tower was established at this time by the *sawbwa* of Nyaung-shwe, its shape echoing his Yadana Man Aung Pagoda in Nyaung-shwe.

Surrounding the central temple are 80 small shrines, each with a seated disciple of the Buddha. They were finished sometime before the mid-1890s and were probably part of the original conception. The 80 Disciples of the Buddha was a popular theme at the time. Outside the compound by the east entrance is the foundation for an ordination chamber of which only the 'boundary stones' survive.

The Big Five

Mindon's decision to commission a colossal marble Buddha was not without precedent in Burma. Two were sponsored by Taninganwe (r. 1714–1733), one of 6 metres now in the Lei-kyun man-aung Pagoda in Sagaing, and the other in Pinya, south of Ava, which is nearly 9 metres. The next was commissioned by Bagyidaw (r.1819-1837) and is now inside the Kyauk-taw-gyi temple, Amarapura, followed by the example at the Kyauk-taw-gyi in Mandalay. However, all of these were dwarfed in 2000 when the military commissioned a seated Buddha for Yangon over 11 metres in height.

All of these massive Buddhas were taken from the Sagyin Hill quarry which was visited by T. Oldham, a geologist who accompanied the Phayre mission to Mindon's court in 1855. Oldham observed that the 'blocks [at the quarry] dazzled the eyes like the Himalayan snows…and even the whitest lumps have a delicate tinge of light blue throughout' (Yule: 175, 327). Such blue veins are easily detected on the Kyauk-taw-gyi images in Mandalay and Amarapura. It was also Sagyin marble used for the inscribed slabs at the Kuthodaw. Three marble images, each over a metre high, were sent to China from King Bodawpaya (r. 1782-1819) on 17 June 1795 (ROB: V. 82).

Oldham described the labourious process of polishing the marble. A file is first applied, followed by a fine-grained wet piece of sandstone. Fossilised wood is then ground into a powder, mixed with water, and then 'rubbed strongly and carefully over the marble' (Yule: 327). The last step is the application of the same powder but without water. Many of these same techniques can be witnessed today among the stone-working ateliers found near the Mahamuni Temple. Power-tools are used today for the crude cutting, but the fine polishing is still done manually. These stone working families were at one time within the walled city of Amarapura but moved outside after the capital shifted north to Mandalay.

Oldham also noted in 1855 that some of the workmen told him 'that for years they had been trying to obtain a very large block for the king [Mindon], but could not [find one]'(Yule 327). This report confirms the popular story of Mindon's vow, prompted by his deadly conflict with his brother. As the Kyauk-taw-gyi Buddha was not begun until 1864, this suggests that it took the king about ten years to find the right block. Rubies discovered at the Sagyin quarries in 1887 were first judged to be on the same par as those from the famous Mogok and the hill was briefly renamed Ruby Hill, or Baddamya-taung, but the name never stuck (Scott & Hardiman 1900: I. 1. 60).

The temple was not finished until decades after the consecration of the image. the sawbwa of Nyaung-shwe, Inle Lake was an important figure in the rebuilding of Mandalay after annexation in 1886, hence the reemblance of this octagonal tower to that of the royal temple at Nyaung-shwe.

A modern painting showing Mindon and his court attending the marble Buddha's consecration. Mindon himself painted the eyes, eyebrows and lips of the Buddha. By Chit Than Zin, the Seinban Quarter, Mandalay. Kyauk-taw-gyi compound.

The Kuthodaw: A Book in Stone

The Kuthodaw is known for its 729 marble slabs incised with the entire Pali canon. The stones are often said to replicate the text adopted by Mindon's Buddhist Synod but the project was started almost ten years before the synod began. The complex was part of Mindon's 'seven projects', one of the few to survive. View from Mandalay Hill.

The Kuthodaw celebrates the Pali canon, or *Tipitaka*, whose full text is incised on 729 marble slabs. It may not be the 'biggest book in the world', as guides insist, but it is certainly the heaviest. The Kuthodaw belonged to the cluster of monuments, including the palace and its walls, that were planned at the base of Mandalay Hill by King Mindon (r.1853-1878) and all begun on a single day in May 1859 (ROB: IX. 106). The monuments included a monastery, a library and an ordination hall. None have survived intact, so it is difficult today to assess how the area beneath Mandalay looked like originally, a feat made even more difficult today, with new roads and construction. The Kuthodaw was an anchor in the king's vision for his new capital, with its large stupa and its unprecedented *Tipitaka* inscriptions.

The Kuthodaw's bell-shaped stupa design is said to resemble the Shwezigon at Pagan, although smaller in scale and with no *jataka* plaques. The stupa saw two separate enshrinements before its completion on 19 July 1862. The first occurred on 17 October 1862 and included unspecified relics, Buddha images, stone stupas incised with passages from the Pali canon, and figures of royal personages and *yahandas,* or 'enlightened monks'.

The second interment took place about six months later, on 15 March 1862, and included fourteen gem-encrusted golden stupas, six golden stupas, one stupa of gold and copper alloy, four silver stupas, six pearl-coloured relics, twenty-six relics the colour of medlar stone, and one silver box containing Bodhi Tree leaves. The principal interments were two tooth-relics from Sri Lanka placed in a mother-of-pearl casket. Enshrining tooth-relics from Sri Lanka was a revered tradition in Burma, such as Anawrahta's legendary connection with the Shwezigon, Pagan and Thalun's Kaung-hmu-daw. The *hti* was hoisted four months later, on 19 July 1862, according to chronicles.

The relic from Sri Lanka came from a mission sent by Mindon which returned to Mandalay on 14 June 1859. The relic was imbued with 32 major marks, 80 minor marks and six hues commonly attributed to the Buddha himself. The tooth rose up into the sky and replicated itself, and these two teeth are now thought to be inside the pagoda. Even before this mission, however, the king had in his possession a tooth-relic that was said to have been given to an ancient Burmese king by the legendary King Dutthagamani from Sri Lanka. This was worshipped in a special temple inside the palace at Amarapura in 1855 (Yule: xxxii).

The first group of relics was probably within one of the lower terraces, while the second and more sacred group was either in the top terrace or somewhere in the drum. At the much earlier Kaung-hmu-daw stupa outside of Sagaing, the most sacred relics were at the bottom, with lesser valued enshrinements above.

The temple today is simply called the Kuthodaw, or the Royal Merit Pagoda, but its official title is Maha-lawka-marazein Zeidi-daw, or The Royal Stupa of the Great World Conqueror of Mara; Mahalokamarajina (Pali) is one of the Buddha's epithets. The complex is far better known for its unusual marble slabs than for its enshrined relics; a pledge to protect the stone inscriptions was even enshrined in the state's constitution in 1961 (Smith: 330).

In a twist of fate, the pagoda was a gathering point for conspirators who led a bloody but unsuccessful coup against Mindon. The ruler's treasonous son held aloft the severed head of Mindon's brother as he administered a loyalty oath to a wavering accomplice. The stupa was venerated throughout the reign of Mindon's successor, whose chief wife, Supayalat, donated an umbrella ornamented with 874 diamonds, 317 emeralds, 4,627 rubies and 8,554 pearls, on 15 April 1883.

The 729 Marble Slabs

While the stupa took merely three years or so to finish, from 1859 to 1862, the engraving of the stones consumed seven years, six months and twenty days, starting on 14 October 1860, and finishing on 4 May 1868. It is often said that the Pali canon inscribed on the marble stones was the text approved at the synod that Mindon convened in 1871, but the complex was completed nearly ten years before the synod took place.

The stones took some fifty engravers over seven years to complete, each averaging between ten and fifteen lines per day. The letters were originally inlaid with gold which was replaced long ago by black ink, reapplied many times.

The voluminous text engraved on the 729 stones was first approved by three learned clerics, appointed to ensure that it conformed to the Pali original. The actual engraving, by some fifty carvers, took place in a room within the palace grounds and was witnessed by at least one foreign observer (Fytche: 9; Scott & Hardiman 1900: I. 1. 64). Parallel horizontal lines were first drawn on the stones in order to ensure that the text would be straight. Once the lines were inserted, then the incising of millions of characters could commence. The painstaking process of engraving inscriptions can be seen today in the stone-working quarter in southern Mandalay. Skilled workmen could accomplish around fifteen lines per day, but most averaged about ten. The width and depth of the lines could not vary too greatly or the outcome would be uneven and sloppy.

The characters were originally filled with gold, refreshed later by Mindon's son. The gold was removed during the turmoil following the fall of Mandalay in 1885 and replaced with black ink, for the first time in 1892. The best ink was a shellac made from ash gathered from burnt straw and soot from oil lamps. It has been re-inked in five times in the last fifty years.

The stone was quarried from Sagyin Hill, the famous marble quarry about 40 kilometers north of Mandalay. Cut in large blocks, they were then floated on a stream to the Irrawaddy and on to Mandalay. Once inside the palace, the slabs were cut to the proper dimensions and made ready for the masons who chiseled the letters. Each tablet is 1.5 metres in height and is housed within a white-washed, brick shrine open to all sides.

Commissioning the copying of scriptures is by itself a time-honoured religious act in Buddhist societies, beginning in Burma as early as the Pyu period when portions of the canon were engraved on gold sheets and interred as relics at Shri Kshetra. From the Pagan era onward transcribing sections of the canon on palm-leaf was commonplace and continued into the last century.

To engrave the entire canon on stone slabs was a novel notion, and we can only thank Mindon's creativity and piety for inaugurating this ambitious project. He also had the canon copied on paper, one with letters in ink and another in gold, and a third on palm-leaf. These three sets were placed in 200 chests and stored at the foot of Mandalay Hill in a library which no longer exits (ROB: IX. xx). Mindon also had the *Tipitaka* produced on a printing press powered by a steam engine, thanks to the help of a French Bishop (ROB: IX. xx). A complete set of the canon was presented to the British envoy, Arthur Phayre, in 1855, now one of the treasures of the British Library; the set was made during the reign of an earlier king, Tharrawaddy (r. 1838-1846) (Herbert 1998).

Each stone is accorded a square chapel made of brick, coated with plaster and whitewashed. Those closest to the central stupa contain the Vinaya*, while the* Abhidhamma *and the* Suttas *radiate outward in a clockwise direction.*

The Tipitaka

The 729 slabs record the Pali canon, a vast assemblage of sacred scripture venerated by Theravada Buddhists and probably committed to writing in Sri Lanka in about the first century B.C.E. Although additions were made from time to time, it has remained remarkably consistent over two millennia (Trainor 2004: 186). An English translation of the canon goes into more than fifty volumes, so it is no wonder that it consumed both sides of 729 large slabs. The canon is divided into three sections, or 'baskets' (*pitaka*, Pali), each with a different focus. Three Pali texts not usually included in the canon were added at the Kuthodaw, namely, the *Nettipakarana*, *Milinda Panha*, and *Petakopadesa*.

One engraved stone in a small temple-like structure in the northeastern corner of the inner enclosure recounts the history of the project and Mindon's reign. The Kuthodaw was said to promote the welfare of Buddhism for 5,000 years, in order to ensure the appearance of the Future Buddha, Metteyya. The epigraph also mentions Mindon's synod, an event that occurred in 1871, many years after the installation of the 729 stones. The inscription even lists the names of steamships the king purchased from abroad. A similar shrine in the southeastern corner of the inner compound contains three engraved marble slabs, established in 1921 by the famous hermit U Khanti. The slabs describe the major gifts made by Mindon during his nearly thirty-year reign, amounting in total to 226 million *kyat*.

Guardians, as ogres, are placed among the stupa's terraces. The stupa contains two tooth-relics, the first obtained by Mindon from Sri Lanka in 1859. Many other relics were interred, on two separate occasions in 1862. The hti *was hoisted on 19 July 1862.*

The Order of the Tablets

The entire series is contained within three concentric walls stretching out over thirteen square acres, with the stupa anchoring the project in the centre.

The first tablets of the *Vinaya* start on the northwest side of the central stupa, followed by the *Abhidhamma* and then by the *Suttas* which are closest to the outer wall. The slabs run in a clockwise order, the sequence conforming to the direction of ritual circumambulation. The traditional order of the canon (*Vinaya*, *Suttas* and *Abhidhamma*) is not observed at the Kuthodaw, since the *Abhidhamma* slabs are placed between the other two. The five sections of the *Vinaya* take up 111 slabs and are placed closest to the stupa. This series finishes in the second enclosure, followed immediately by the seven sections of the *Abhidhamma*, also within the second enclosure. This middle compound contains 168 chapels. The *Abhidhamma* then skips to the outermost enclosure, with 519 chapels, immediately to the left of the western entrance. This series also goes in a clockwise direction, concluding with a total of 208 slabs. The last division, the

An old weathered wooden door at the south approach. One iron doorway, donated by the great dancer Po Sein in 1913, no longer exists.

Suttas, consumed 410 stones and are all contained within the three rows of chapels in the outer enclosure, sharing the first row closest to the modern entrance with the last *Abhidamma* slabs. The main entrance today is on the south, but the eastern gateway was originally considered the principal entry point.

'...with a gay and giddy throng'

By 1897 the Kuthodow complex had been restored to its former glory, with British officials attending a festival, or *pwe*, in October, where the '…scene was vivid with a gay and giddy throng of men, women, and children, decked with jewels and clad in rainbow-coloured silks' (White: 266).

Much of value was pilfered at the Kuthodaw after annexation, such as 15,000 pieces of Italian marble flooring, *htis*, and 6,570 small bells topping the hundreds of chapels. A committee member suggested that the small *htis* be replaced with a stone capping, a device he had seen on small stupas at Bodh Gaya in 1881. With the help of all of the royal family members, Shan *sawbwas*, and public subscription the stone tops were put into place in 1892. In the same year two types of trees (*Acanthus ebracteatus*; *Madhuca longifolia*) were planted within the inner and outer compound, providing a brilliant juxtaposition of colours and shade.

The carved wooden doorways are largely restored, but one old one remains, inside the south entrance, although its exact date cannot be determined. Iron doors were provided for the outer entrances, with one donation made by the great dancer Po Sein in 1913. The children and grandchildren of Mindon donated iron gates on the north and east sides, even as late as 1932. The hermit U Khanti rebuilt the southern and western covered corridors in 1919, but they have since been replaced.

The Kuthodaw likely inspired other engraved series throughout Burma, such as in Minkin, Meikhtila, Danubyu and Mogok. The most famous set is in Monywa. The Kuthodaw version of the canon became standard in Burma, beginning with the publication of thirty-eight volumes by an Armenian, Phillip H. Ripley. As a child, he knew Mindon and attended an English-speaking school in Mandalay with many of the king's children. A selling point for Ripley's published canon was that his volumes were 'true copies of the Pitaka inscribed on stone by King Mindon' (Ludu Daw Ahmar 1994: 41).

The Sandamuni

A complex similar to the Kuthodaw stands next door to the west, bordering the main road. It was Mindon's temporary quarters before the palace was completed. The original central stupa commemorates the death of a number of the king's sons in a coup staged here in 1868 in which Mindon's brother, Kanaung, was decapitated. In the early part of the last century the pagoda's annual festival was attended by descendants of those murdered on this very spot (Taw Sein Ko 1913:104).

At the base of the stupa is a shrine housing a solid metal Buddha, now covered by gold foil, weighing 18.564 kg. It was cast by King Bodawpaya in 1803 opposite Mingun and first enshrined there. It was later moved to Amarapura in 1815 and placed north of the city walls on the same road leading to the Mahamuni image (Crawfurd: II.475; Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 202). It was surrounded by four subsidiary figures and 80 figures representing disciples of the Buddha, each enshrined in a separate chapel. It then was shifted to Ava in 1823 by Bagyidaw (r. 1819-1837), who also established the eighty disciples. It was later taken back to Amarapura in 1838 before Mindon transferred the image and its disciples to the present location. The 1,774 engraved marble slabs in chapels represent the canon, along with some of its vast commentarial literature. All of the stones were added in 1913, long after the construction of the stupa. A panel in iron in one of the chapels is a copy of a 1907 pamphlet used by U Khanti to raise funds.

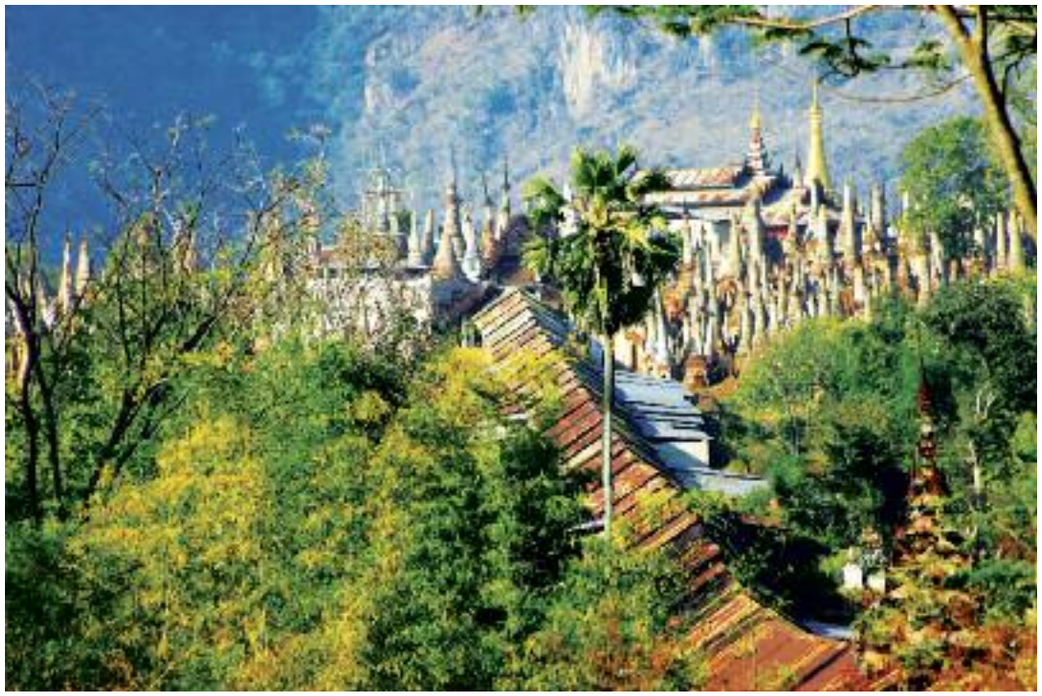
King Mindon moved this gilded image from Amarapura to its present location to commemorate a foiled palace revolt.

Two species of shade trees planted long ago make for a wonderful juxtaposition of colours.

Inle Lake

The Shan and King Alaungsithu's Magic Barge

The Shan and King Alaungsithu's Magic Barge



Amidst this cluster of ruinous 19th and early 20th century stupas and shrines is the Shwe Indein Pagoda. The village of Indein was once an administrative centre and a military post for Burmese and later English troops.

The vast mountainous plateau bordering Thailand, Laos and China is now modern Shan State, one of the largest divisions in Burma. Scores of sacred sites are found throughout this area but only a single pagoda has achieved national prominence, the Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda at Inle Lake.

The Shan make up about seventy per cent of the total population in the Shan State, but Burmese-speakers are now sprinkled over the entire region. The Shan numbered nearly three million in the national census of 1983, with ninety per cent being Buddhist. The Shan language is closer to northern Thai, or Tai-Lanna, than to Burmese. Many Shan call themselves Tai and related groups are found in Yunnan, over the Chinese border, and in Laos and Thailand. The Shan probably entered this region from southern China during the 13th and 14th centuries. However, scores of smaller ethnic groups unrelated to the Shan share the landscape. The most well known include the Intha, Pa-o, Lahu, Kokang, and Palaung. Indigenous cultures have survived, due partly to the region's inaccessibility.

The Inle area is predominantly inhabited by the Intha and Pa-o, with about 150,000 living in hundreds of villages around the lake. Few Shan reside around Inle Lake today, but the Shan royal family based in Nyaung-shwe controlled the lake and the surrounding area for centuries. The town of Nyaung-shwe is now more or less made up equally of Burmese and Intha. The Intha, literally 'Sons of the Lake', are famous for a distinctive style of cultivation, the 'floating gardens', and narrow fishing boats propelled by an oar manipulated by one leg. The Pa-o, called by Burmese 'Taungthu', are known for growing a special tree, the Cordia, used for the wrapping of Burmese cheroots.

Previous page: *Sunsets at Inle Lake cast striking shadows and create memorable juxtapositions of colours.*

Local legends and chronicles among the Shan connect the region with ancient kings and events drawn from Burmese mythology. For example, the Shan kings, like Burmese royal families, traced their descent to a legendary prince who fled from India and settled in Tagaung, north of Mandalay. Upon the destruction of Tagaung three groups dispersed and one divided later into the '19 Shan Clans', according to the Burmese *Glass Palace Chronicle* and repeated in many Shan histories. Local Shan chronicles often follow standard Burmese histories, notably the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, but they cleverly weave in the legendary and real dynastic history of local reigning families (Robinne 2001; Takatani 2000). The one major exception was the powerful Shan kingdom of Kengtung, bordering Thailand, whose origins were traced to Chiang Mai (Sao Saimong Mangrai 2002). The earliest Shan foundation myths, from the 14th and 15th centuries, were lost long ago, supplanted by mainstream Burmese legends probably by the 18th century.

There was never a single unified Shan 'country' but rather independent kingdoms, many of which were related by marriage alliances. Some realms were enormous, the size of Belgium, while others were miniscule. The local rulers were called *saophas* (Shan) or *sawbwas* (Burmese). There may have been nine principal kingdoms at one time (Takatani). The Shan royal family in Nyaung-shwe was established in 1359, according to local chronicles (Sao Saimong).

Like the Shan, the indigenous peoples of the lake region absorbed Burmese myths, many of which tie their communities to

Traditional weaving is one of the lake's hallmarks. Reeling silk is one stage in this long process.

Prince, left, slays with an arrow a giant spider holding a maiden captive within the famous Pindaya Cave, a myth among the Danu, an ethnic group living in the vicinity of Inle Lake. Pindaya Cave, entrance, northwest of Inle Lake. Such local legends are found among the numerous ethnic groups inhabiting the Shan State.

legendary Pagan. For example, Indein's chief pagoda is connected to the Pagan king Anawrahta and his estranged wife, identified as a Shan princess in Burmese sources (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 83; Robinne 2001). The Intha also connected themselves to an Indian prince named Pateikkara and his son, the Pagan King Alaungsithu (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 105; Robinne 2001). Also, the Danu people, living around the famous Pindaya Cave, traced their origins to the legendary Suvannabhumi, or the Golden Land in Pali literature.

Some ethnic groups also formulated purely indigenous legends. Among the Danu, for example, a huge spider held a maiden captive within a cave, released only when a Danu prince sunk an arrow into its side. The Pa-o trace their descent to a union between a wizard and snake goddess whose male and female offspring ruled in Thaton in Suvannabhumi, a variation of a Mon myth from Lower Burma but also similar to those in many Burmese texts. Another important group are the Taungyo, inhabiting the western mountains of the lake, whose myths are also an amalgam of reformatted Burmese legends (Robinne 2001).

Many of the formal names for the Shan kingdoms derived from renowned Pali place names, a practice also common in Burma proper. For example, the Nyaung-shwe kingdom was officially called Kambojarattha (Pali), or Kamboja Country. Mongmit was known as Gandhararatta (Pali), or Gandhara Country, a name drawn from the list of kingdoms found in the *Mahavamsa* which received Buddhist missions from King Asoka. The British permitted these names to continue during the colonial period (Sai Aung Tun).

The Intha trace their arrival to two brothers who came from Tavoy, a small city in southeast Burma. The pair entered the service of the first *sawbwa* in the 14th century who allowed them to call for thirty-six families from Tavoy, according to the *Nyaung-shwe Chronicle*. They are said to have gradually inhabited the entire area (Sao Saimong). Some truth may be behind this tale, but it may also reflect the Shan belief that the Intha were latecomers to the lake and were there owing to the goodwill of the Shan elite.

The Shan and Burmese were always testy neighbors, with the latter generally taking the upper hand. The subjugation of the Shan by the Burmese began during the reign of Bayinnaung (r. 1551- 1581) whose conquest was made in the name of spreading Buddhism. He established a pagoda near Mongmit in 1557, with unspecified bodily relics of the Buddha, and also outlawed the Shan custom of killing men and woman and interring them with deceased

nobles. Shan leaders swore allegiance to Burmese kings over the centuries, right up to the collapse of the Burmese state at the time of annexation in 1886. The daughters of *sawbwas* were also routinely sent to Mandalay as wives to members of the Burmese court, symbolising their submission and to guarantee their allegiance.

Burmese culture filtered into the Shan country at all levels, but Shan identity was never totally subsumed. Many artisans and musicians from Mandalay sought patronage among the *sawbwas* whose traditional court life was less disrupted by the British annexation in 1886 (Conway). The *sawbwa* of Hsipaw was a leader among the Shan kingdoms after the fall of Mandalay. Even a replica of Mandalay's Mahamuni image was established by the Hsipaw *sawbwa* in 1895, shortly after his visit to England for eye treatment and an audience with the Queen Victoria (Scott & Hardiman 1901: II. 1. 223).

The annexation of Upper Burma spelled relief for the Shan kingdoms, free from the sometimes arbitrary rule from Mandalay. The colonial government conferred limited autonomy to over two dozen Shan kingdoms who controlled an area larger than England and Wales combined, with a population of over a million. Taunggyi was then designated the capital of the newly formed Shan States; in Taunggyi a school for the children of the *sawbwas* was formed, the Shan Chiefs School. The ruler of Nyaung-shwe, Sir Sao Maung, played an important role in reconstructing the shrines in the Mandalay area that were destroyed and neglected after annexation.

The Shan rulers were ambivalent about calls for independence after World War II, much like the hundreds of 'princely states' of India. The Burmese government, however, continued many of their privileges after Independence in 1948, and the Shan ruler from

The palace of the former Kambojarattha Kingdom, the former Nyaung-shwe State. It was finished in the 1920s and combined European and Burmese elements. It served as regional headquarters for the Japanese secret police during the war. Outskirts of Nyaung-shwe.

A Shan leader from Nyaung-shwe and his chief consort, or Mahadevi, in ceremonial attire. He grasps a sword and a yak tail. Photograph taken in the Rangoon studio of P. Klier, c. 1900.

Nyaung-shwe, Sao Shwe Thaik (1896-1962) was made the country's first president. The situation changed dramatically, however, after the military takeover in 1962 when the *sawbwas* were ruthlessly repressed. The tragic tale of an Austrian married to a Shan prince murdered by General Ne Win is an underground classic in Burma (Sargent). Other excellent books have described this black period (Sao Sanda; Elliot). Symbols of Shan identity are viewed even today with mistrust by the ruling junta, such as a splendid turn-of-the-century Shan palace in Kengtung leveled in 1991 and replaced by a tasteless government hotel.

Nyaung-shwe

The name Nyaung-shwe, or literally 'Golden Bodhi Tree', is a Burmanisation of the original Shan name, Yawnghwe, or 'Highland Valley' (Sao Saimong). The lake and its surroundings were controlled by Shan *sawbwas* ruling from Nyaung-shwe as early as the 14th century, according to a local chronicle. The palace is located on the northeastern edge of town, and until recently was a public museum showcasing memorabilia belonging to the last ruling Shan family. In a crass cultural move, all traces of the former Shan presence in the palace were removed in July 2007 and said to be taken to the new capital, Naypyidaw, spoils of a war that is long over but not forgotten. The residence is now officially called the Buddha Museum, filled with mostly soulless replicas of famous Buddha images in Burma.

The palace was started at the turn of the 20th century and finished in the 1920s. It is a fusion of styles, the ground floor made up of European brick arches and the first floor and tower in traditional style. Its ceremonial façade looked east, flanked now by two cannon; today's entrance is on the south side. The upper floor of the palace is divided into large halls. Formal receptions of the *sawbwa's* subjects in April and November took place in the hall on the east, while the middle one was for conventional matters of state where the king ascended a gilded throne. The rear section was reserved for private living quarters. During the Japanese occupation in the 1940s the palace was requisitioned by the secret police. The royal family continued to live upstairs, but Japanese officers occupied the ground floor. The family carefully concealed a phonograph recording of *God Save the King*. The British returned in 1945, and three years later all of the Shan chiefs apprehensively embraced Burmese Independence.

The Shan ruler, or sawbwa*, conducted matters of state in this middle hall. The portrait in foreground is Sao Shwe Thaike, the first President of Burma. The government removed every trace of Shan identity from the palace in 2007 when it was converted into the Buddha Museum.*

The royal temple, Yadana Man Aung, is located close to the centre of town and evokes the splendour of yesteryear. Some panel paintings in the corridors are by the great Maung Saw Maung, from Mandalay, from the mid-1960s. Inside are flamboyant murals showing the life of the Buddha, dated to 1965 and signed by Kham Lun, described in some captions as the chief pupil of Maung Saw Maung. The painted inscriptions record that Maung Saw Maung was a recipient of a government title, 'Celebrated Artist', or '*alingakyawswa'*. The name Kham Lun is not Burmese and so he was probably a local artist trained in Mandalay under Maung Saw Maung. Works by Maung Saw Maung are also found at the Shwe Indein Pagoda and in Mandalay, such as at the Shwe Kyi Myin Pagoda. Framed in the wall near the entrance are two sculpted stone panels from eastern India, from the Pala period (8th-12th centuries), probably presented by the Indian government to the reigning *sawbwa* when he was president of Burma in the 1950s or perhaps taken home from India as religious souvenirs in the early 20th century.

The Buddha's life story is painted on tin sheets lining the walls of the Yadana Man Aung Temple, Nyaung-shwe. The Buddha's birth is perhaps based on a European nativity scene. By Kham Lun, 1965, pupil of Maung Saw Maung, Mandalay.

Shwe Yan Pye Monastery

One of the finest surviving local monasteries is north of town, just off the paved road south of the major junction. The entire complex was built by the Nyaung-shwe *sawbwa* named Sao On (r. 1886-1897) on the very spot that he welcomed British troops who confirmed his rule in a bitter succession dispute in February 1887. An inscribed bell cast in 1889 and a stone inscription from 1890 record that the stupa was begun on June 12 1888 and the *hti* hoisted in the same year, on December 22 (Than Tun 2001).

The stupa is surrounded by an unusual square brick wall faced with European arches. The inside walls are covered with scenes from the Buddha's life and other Buddhist subjects, together with a tree laden with 'fruit-maidens' plucked by wizards. There is also a depiction of the Golden Rock, underscoring the widespread popularity of this Lower Burma shrine even in the 19th century when Inle Lake was surely an 'out of the way' place. The figures were created by affixing thin strips of molded lacquer to the wall; details, such

The Shwe Yan Pye stupa marks the spot where a British force confirmed the rule of the local sawbwa*. The walls encirclin the stupa are line with Buddhist glass painting.42923*

Hundreds of ruinous brick stupas and temples surround the lake, mostly from the 19th or early 20th centuries. Small metal images or other precious objects contained inside were removed by treasure-seekers over a hundred years ago. Without ongoing maintenance, mother nature wrests control.

as eyes and moustaches were then painted onto the glass inserted into the raised lacquer outlines. Local documents record that the *sawbwa* commissioned in Mandalay a full *Tipitaka* set incised on 24,000 palm-leaves and 700 marble Buddhas that were once placed in the small wall niches (Than Tun 2001: 6).

The wooden monastery next door was completed in 1890, its founding referred to in both inscriptions. Many of the interior furnishings and Buddha images are probably from the date of construction, but it is difficult to be certain. Steps to restore the monastery were taken in the early 1990s (Than Tun 2001). A painting in the monastery depicts the entire complex, adapted from an old photograph in 1972.

Indein

Villages surrounding the lake vary greatly in prosperity and age. One of the most picturesque is Indein, at the southwestern corner of the lake, reached by a narrow river. Indein was an important town in the 19th century when a Burmese garrison occupied a large stockade before the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886. The Indein pagoda complex, picturesquely perched on a hill overlooking the lake, was patronised by the Nyaung-shwe *sawbwas*. The stone inscription at the Shwe Yan Pye monastery links Sao On to a list of patrons who were also associated with the Indien pagoda, including Asoka, Pagan's Narpatisithu, and King Mindon (Than Tun 2001: 4). An English Lieutenant in Indein observed in 1864 that the 'hills in the background were dotted over with pagodas', doubtlessly describing many of the scores of small stupas and temples seen today on both sides of a long covered corridor leading to the Indein pagoda on the hilltop (Scott & Hardiman 1901: II. 1. 26). Built after 1864, most resemble works common to Upper Burma and all are picturesque ruins now. Traces of wall painting are found in a few. The derelict shrines confirm the 17th century axiom, 'A stupa stands fine until a banyan tree destroys it.'

The Shwe Yan Pye Pagoda, left, and its monastery, centre. This was based on an old black-and-white photograph. By Nyun Way, Shan Yoma Studio, 1972. Shwe Yan Pye Monastery.

Despite its sleepy appearance today, Indein was a divisional headquarters in the days after annexation when the Shan royal family ruled from Nyaung-shwe. Even the Shan king who eventually became Burma's first president spent part of his childhood there (Sao Sanda: 37). It was probably in the early 1960s that the temple on the hill at Indein was refurbished with panel paintings commissioned from the great Mandalay master, Maung Saw Maung. One depicts the shrine itself under construction, said to be supervised by none other than King Asoka of India. Another shows the present outer worship hall in which the panel paintings are now hung.

Nga-hpe Monastery

Wooden monasteries from the late 19th and early 20th century have been mostly replaced, but one classic is the Nga-hpe Monastery created by wealthy merchants in the 1840s. Most boats today approach from the north side, the monastery's rear. It has recently entered all of the tourist 'chronicles' as the Leaping Cat Monastery, since its enterprising monks turned long ago from promoting *dhamma* to prompting a pack of well-fed cats to jump through hoops on command. These gifted felines have made the temple a must-see tourist site, but the monastery's chief appeal are large 19th and early 20th century wooden shrines placed on a dais (Fraser-Lu: 248). The small shrines were donated by wealthy individuals over the decades, but with no firm dates. They were perhaps created in Nyaung-shwe when the town once boasted many traditional crafts. This is the best monastery to gain an appreciation of an image-platform from a bygone era, since others have undergone many refurbishments. The small shrines on the broad dais reveal a variety of styles. Some of the Buddhas are made of dry-lacquer while others are in marble, partially covered with lacquer and inset with coloured stones. In the recesses of the ceiling above the dais are depictions of the Twenty-eight Buddhas and their disciples. To one side is a large modern panel painting featuring the Five Precepts. In one panel a woman steals cloths, while on the right she hides in shame, naked to the waist. The artist calls himself Saya Hni. Two older panels depict King Bodawpaya receiving the Mahamuni image by the river's edge, by Saya Kyaw whose address was the 'southern end of Chinatown, Mandalay.'

Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda

The spiritual life of the lake centres on five Buddha images enshrined in a temple in the village of Namhu, near Ywama, situated on a spit of land toward the bottom of the lake, on the western side. The Buddhas can be mistaken for small gilded stones because they are completely concealed by layers of gold leaf, applied by hundreds of thousands of devotees over many decades. Each of the Buddhas rests within a silver receptacle placed in the centre of a raised pillared platform in the middle of the hall. Only men are allowed to approach the images, while women make offerings just beyond the

Lacquered and gilded shrines from the 19th and early 20th centuries are preserved on the dais of the Nga-hpe Monastery. The shrines form a museum of different styles and techniques, presented by donors as acts of merit over many decades.

Detail from one of the turn-of-the-century shrines, the Nga-hpe Monastery. This painted glass retains its full vibrancy.

The Shwe Yan Pye Pagoda, just north of Nyaung-shwe, boasts the finest late 19th century coloured glass work. The stupa was completed in 1888 but it is difficult to precisely date the compound wall and its glass work.

dais. The annual festival occurs in October when four of the five images are taken in procession around the lake in a ceremonial barge, berthed to one side of the temple. The procession takes about nineteen days and culminates in the return of the images, accompanied by colourful boat races.

The present temple was constructed between 1952 and 1956, soon after the Nyaung-shwe *sawbwa* stepped down from the presidency. Its octagonal ground plan was designed by a local architect named U Phu. The ceremonial *hti* was established in 1957, but the temple itself has been renewed many times since. The central pillared shrine is much earlier than the hall itself.

The Legend: A Royal Barge Goes to Inle Lake

The story of the five Buddhas centres on a famous Pagan king named Alaungsithu (r. 1113-1169) and the exploits of his magical barge. The core legend at Inle Lake is featured in the Burmese *Glass Palace Chronicle* compiled in 1829, but this chronicle makes no direct connection between Inle Lake and Alaungsithu. The legendary locations in the myth have therefore been transposed to Inle Lake and the basic narrative changed slightly. The story of the pagoda is told in at least one surviving local history, or *thamaing*, but there are numerous slightly different versions (Sao Saimong). The modern name for the temple is Phaung Daw Oo Hpaya, or 'Shrine of the Prow of the Royal Barge', a measure of how closely the story is tied to Alaungsithu and his barge. When exactly this central Burmese myth became attached to Inle Lake is unknown, but it may have started as late as the 19th century or much earlier. The myth connected to the five Buddhas represents a conflation of elements drawn from the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, much like many of the other myths found at Inle Lake (Robinne 2001).

The story begins in Mallayu, a mythical mountainous spot known in antiquity as Malaya (Pali), located on the island of Sri Lanka (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 116; *Mahavamsa*: VII. 68). The Pagan king Alaungsithu encountered there a distraught ogress whose son had just drowned in a lake. The king struck the water with his magic cane, and the resuscitated child emerged instantly from the water in the hands of a goddess named Manimekhala, a deity of the same

The Shwe Indein Pagoda at the time of its restoration, mid-1960s, showing a pillared prayer hall and its image chamber, or 'gandhakuti' *(Pali), on the right. Brick stupas on the left appear new but were then in ruinous condition, as they are today. By Maung Saw Maung. Shwe Indein Pagoda, Indein.*

An ogress and her husband stand by as a goddess rescues their son in a golden net, at the beckoning of King Alaungsithu. The ogress rewards him with a sandalwood log and the 'southern branch' of the Bodhi Tree. The king then carved them into Buddha images, now said to be the gilded images at the Phaung Daw Oo pagoda. By Thet Swe, c. 2004. Shwe Kyi Myin Pagoda, Mandalay.

name who rescued a prince from a shipwreck in the famous *Maha-janaka Jataka*. The grateful ogress then made scented offerings to Thagyamin, chief of the gods, who in turn presented her with a log of sandalwood, or *tharekhan*, and a piece of the 'southern branch' of the Bodhi Tree, the same branch taken to Sri Lanka by Asoka's daughter. The ogress presented these wood-treasures to Alaungsithu, paying thanks to his saving of her child. The king returned to Pagan and personally carved five images of the Buddha from the sandal-wood (Sao Saimong). In some of the modern Phaung Daw Oo legends the drowning incident at the mythical Mallayu has been identified with Inle Lake.

The remainder of the tale has been completely domesticated to Inle Lake, beginning with Alaungsithu placing the five Buddhas on the prow of his barge and setting off to Inle Lake from Pagan. To enter the lake the king cleaved a ravine through the mountains, a wide valley 'in the shape of a hull of a boat'; residents still point out this valley, on the western side of the lake (Sao Saimong: 77). He then deposited the images in a cave on the western shore near a village named Than-htaung. The images emitted a supernatural light, a fact reported to the first king of Nyaung-shwe, said to be in the 14th century. The ruler then removed the images from the cave to Nyaung-shwe where they remained for 256 years. Concerned about the safety of the images, a female *sawbwa* in the 17th century had them transferred to the village of Indein.
There they remained for 156 years before the monastery burned in 1771. The images then spent about 100 years in a village called Ban Pong, an unidentified settlement. By 1881 they were shifted to their present location which was then marked by a monastery (Sao Saimong). This structure soon perished in a fire and the images were transferred to Thar Lay village on the east side of the lake. Once the temple was completed in 1956, the images were removed to their present location.

Five Buddha images, completely covered in gold leaf, are the major objects of devotion at Inle Lake. Created by King Alaungsithu, these wooden Buddhas once graced the prow of his magical barge on his journey from Pagan to Inle Lake. The core story evolved in Burma, without reference to Inle Lake but was adapted to Inle at some stage, perhaps as late as the 19th century or much earlier.

The Karaweik barge on its annual procession capsized with all five sacred images in 1965. Four were recovered and the fifth miraculously reappeared on the dais in the Phaung Daw Oo temple. Since then, only four images are allowed on the barge. By San Pay, 1975. Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda.

Many elaborations of the basic myth are known, some recorded in the pamphlet now available at the temple and depicted in modern panel paintings arranged around the interior of the hall. Most of the stories owe their origin to episodes in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* in connection with Alaungisthu, such as an elephant that refused to carry one of the relics (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 118).

During the annual procession of the five images in 1965, the ceremonial barge went down in high winds between the temple and Nyaung-shwe. Four of the images were quickly recovered but the fifth went missing. When the pagoda trustees returned to the shrine, bereft because of the loss, the fifth Buddha was found on the dais, still wet and covered with water-weeds. The spot where the barge went down is marked in the lake by a pillar surmounted by a *hamsa* bird. The event is captured in a painting located above a side door, signed by the artist San Pay and dated on the same day as the festival in October 1975 (the frame bears a 1965-date). Since then, only four images are allowed to go on the barge, a fifth always remaining 'home', safely inside the temple.

Another miracle occurred ten years later when the four Buddhas were out on procession and an unexplained darkness enveloped the temple. But sunlight resumed when the images returned. These remarkable events are now part of the temple's uninterrupted history recorded in temple pamphlets, in Burmese and English.

Numerous painted panels encircling the walls illustrate the history of the temple, beginning near the entrance. Some are signed by the artist Than Maung, from nearby Kalaw, in 2001. Other panels depict scenes from the life of the Buddha, such as the Dream of Maya. At the rear of the hall are much earlier panels, the two on the

The Phaung Daw Oo is home to the five Buddha images crafted by Alaungsithu and conveyed to Inle Lake from Pagan in his magic barge.

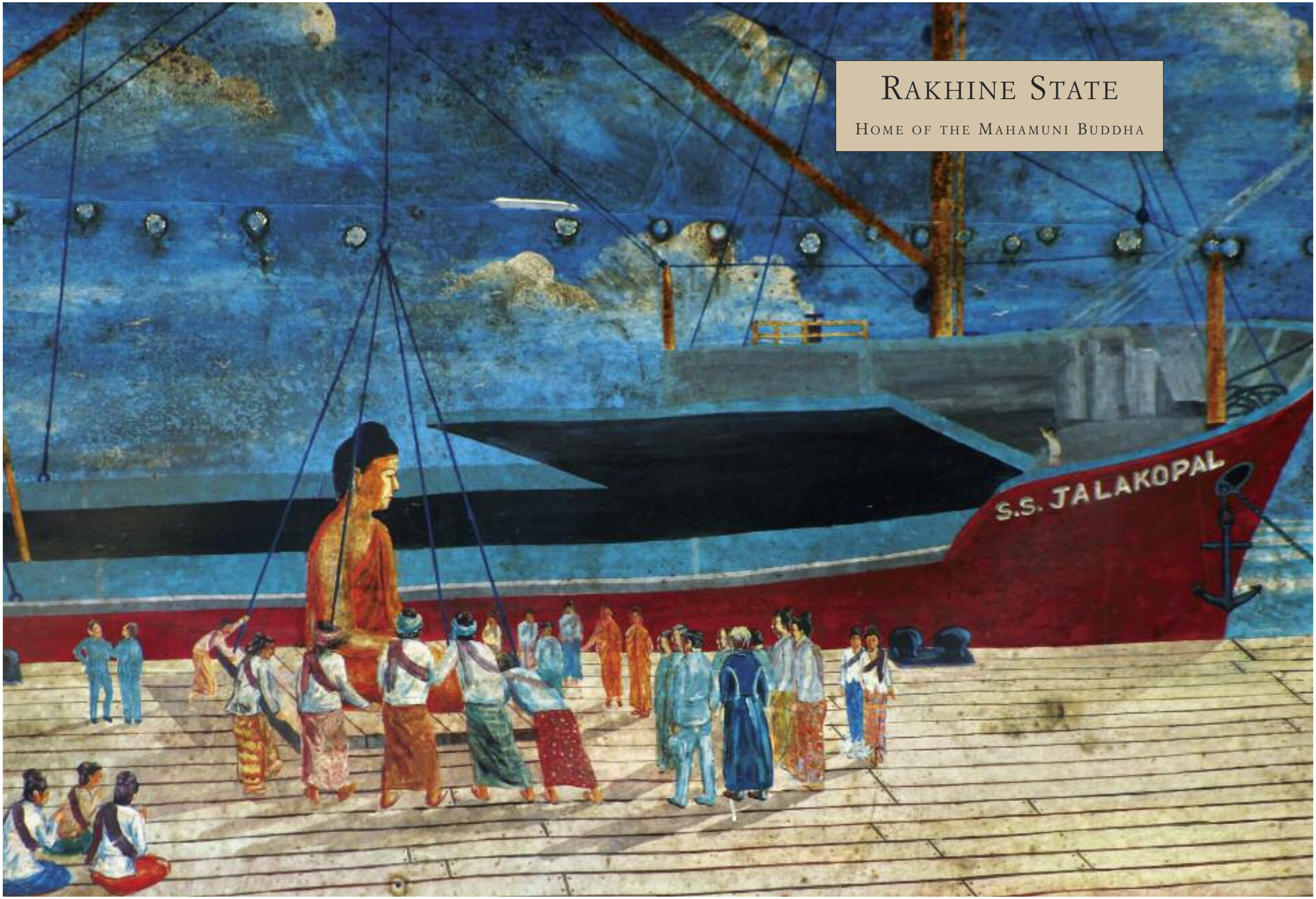
left (Maya's Dream and the Birth) by the artist Maung Saw Maung, whose address, 27th Street, Mandalay, appears in the inscription. The remaining panels are by Kham Lun, Maung Saw Maung's pupil also responsible for the murals in Nyaung-shwe. Another set of old paintings on the rear wall are by Maung Paw Mya, also from Mandalay, devoted to Alaungisthu carving the mountain pass to the lake with his special dagger and establishing the wooden images.

The barge to the side of the temple is shaped like the Karaweik bird and departs on procession with the four images during the chief festival which lasts nearly three weeks, with overnight stops at nineteen villages.

Slightly different legends surrounding Inle Lake and Alaughsithu gave rise to the creation of Buddha images marked by an 'upturned water lily' as a cap and sometimes aquatic creatures on the underside. It is said that 84,000 of these images were made in Burma in 1922. Buddhists from Nyaung-shwe were invited to Chiang Mai in 1968 and supervised the creation of 5,000 of such images, to raise money for a local temple (Penth 2006).

Rakhine State

Home of the Mahamuni Buddha



Home of The Mahamuni Buddha

Five hundred disciples accompanied the Buddha to visit King Chandra-suriya in Rakhine, a legend brought to life in this meandering row among the terraces of the Mahamuni Temple, north of Mrauk-U.

Once upon a time the Buddha visited a legendary king named Chandra-suriya ruling in what is now Rakhine State, bordering Bangladesh. At the king's request, the Buddha permitted a metal replica to be cast in his likeness, brought to life by his very own breath. It was an identical copy, 'even by the breadth of a hair', according to an old Rakhine chronicle (Forchhammer 1891: 4). This 'living' token of the Buddha's presence remained in Rakhine to be worshipped and grew to symbolise the realm. Indeed, it was for this very reason that this palladium of royal authority became the target for a Burmese king who seized the region in the late 18th century and removed the image to its present home near his capital of Amarapura, just south of modern Mandalay. This Buddha image now ranks with the Golden Rock and the Shwedagon in the nation's sacred triumvirate.

The myth provided the bedrock for Rakhine's identity, in the same way as the Buddha's sojourn to Thaton for the Mon, or his inspection of the Sandalwood Monastery in Legaing and his bestowal nearby of two footprints for Burmese. These key Mon and Burmese myths arose by the end of the 15th century, as we have seen, but fixing the dates for the casting of the surviving Mahamuni Buddha and its surrounding myths is far trickier. It would appear, however, that the Mahamuni image was possibly cast by the 14th or 15th

Previous page: *This modern panel shows the offloading in 1893 of a huge bronze Buddha in old Akyab that was originally intended for Sandoway. By Shwe Khaing Maung. Atulmarazein Pagoda, Sittwe.*

century and that the Chandra-suriya myth evolved in tandem or sometime soon thereafter. No myths have survived from earlier periods in Rakhine.

The founding of Rakhine is told in the *New Chronicle of Rakhine*, a comprehensive history compiled by a learned Rakhine monk in the first half of the 20th century (Candamalalankara). This work wove together a number of loose strands from earlier texts, notably the *Nga Me Chronicle* and the *Dhanawati Ayedawpon*, to form a three-part narrative for the legendary establishment of Rakhine (Leider 2005: 9). The overriding aim underlying this complex and convoluted 'history' was to establish a link between the legendary Rakhine ruling families in Dhannavati and Vesali and royal lineages based within India and described in traditional Pali sources.

The first part of the narrative stemmed from a *jataka* tale about ten brothers who subdued the Indian city of Dvaravati, identified in Rakhine as Samtwe, or modern Sandoway, while the brothers' sister, Anjanadevi, settled in Vesali, also in India but also identified with a walled city of the same name in Rakhine (*Ghata Jataka*, 454). The second part begins when one of Anjanadevi's descendants wedded King Marayu, who was a product of a brahmin hermit and a female *sambur* deer. King Marayu founded Dhannavati, identified in Rakhine sources as the walled city containing the famous Mahamuni temple; Marayu is also perhaps linked to a king of the same name mentioned in Burmese sources and to Moriya, a city established by the fleeing Sakyas, according to an influential sub-commentary on the *Mahavamsa* (*Glass Palace Chronicle*: 2; Malalasekera 1983: II. 972). The final segment involves the famous Sakyan-migrations from Kapilavatthu in which an older brother, Prince Kan-raza-gri, came to Rakhine and married a princess belonging to Marayu's dynasty (Leider 2005: 6). In other sources, Kan-raza-gri and his brother and father, Abhiraja, are said to have first gone to Tagaung in Upper Burma. This Sakyan migration from India is also important in both Burmese and Shan chronicles and all of the myths perhaps stem from a story in an early Sri Lankan chronicle in which a Sakyan queen fled from the

The wax model for the Mahamuni Buddha under preparation, the court and locals looking on, deities hovering above. Two brahmin ritualists with conical hats stand by. By Po Yin, c. 1935, Mahamuni Temple, Moulmein.

same doomed Kapilavatthu and wed a descendant of the founding ruler of the island (*Mahavamsa*: VIII.18). The borrowing and transformation of the *Ghata Jataka,* however, appears to be without precedent elsewhere.

Candamalankara's account pulled together in a continuous narrative many of the key themes, or legends, current in Rakhine over centuries, somewhat artificially (Leider 2005). Each diverse myth later brought by him under one umbrella may have once sprung from small individual kingdoms. Later chronicles may have united the various accounts, in the same way that the separate histories of Tagaung, Beikthano and Shri Kshetra came together into a single narrative in modern Burmese lore. In any case, the Rakhine core myths arose in the second millennium, probably sometime in earnest in the 16th and 17th centuries. Indeed, that not a single reference to the Mahamuni Buddha, Dhannavati, Vesali, or to the Sakyan migrations appears in the lengthy Shittaung Inscription from the early 8th century (see below) is further evidence that these myths were not present in the first millennium.

References to Tagaung in Rakhine accounts suggest strong influence from Upper Burma, but it has been argued that perhaps the influence was the other way around (Charney 2002). That Tagaung was a theme in later chronicles is revealed by a story of a Rakhine king who spent one of his lifetimes as a pet dog in Tagaung (San Baw 1923).

The origin of the name Rakhine is obscure, but the word was occasionally found in Pagan inscriptions, two dated to 1366 and 1407 (Charney 2005: 43; Frasch 2002; Gutman 1976: 2-3). Rakhine appeared in English sources as Arrakan (1683), or Racan (1687), and mostly as Arakan in the 19th and 20th centuries; Portuguese and Italian sources used many different forms, such as Arraçao (Charney 2005: 44; Gutman 2002:163). The region had a Muslim population from early times, but tensions between the Muslim and Buddhist communities arose mainly during the last two hundred years. Indeed, this conflict is the state's hallmark today, with Muslims calling themselves Rohingyas.

Rakhine has been disparaged by its neighbours for centuries. 'Seen from Mughal India, Arakan was merely a barbarian extension of eastern Bengal, seen from Burma it was a disobedient marginal principality on the western fringe of the kingdom' (Leider 2005: 19). The mixed population of Rakhine has also coloured modern studies with its ethnic and religious groups claiming primacy. The region

King Chandra-suriya, kneeling, welcomes the Buddha and his 500 disciples. His ministers beckoning the Buddha to enter the court. A colonial street in the distance. By Po Yin, Mahamuni Temple, Moulmein, c. 1935.

inhabits a kind of 'no-man's land' between India and Burma in today's scholarship (Gommans & Leider).

Too much of Rakhine's history has been filtered through too few sources, notably the Shittaung Inscription, and a handful of accounts, such as the undated but much quoted Rakhine *Sappadanapakkarana*, *Rakhine Min-thami Eigyin* (1450s), *Rakhine Minrajagri Satam* (early 17th century), *Dhanawati Ayedawpon* (1788), *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon (1816), Nga Me Chronicle* (*circa* 1842), *Candamalalankara's Yahkaing Yazawinthit Kyan (New Chronicle of Rakhine), Danyawadi Yazawinthit*, or *New Dhannavati Chronicle* (1910) (Charney 2002; Leider 2005; Thaw Kaung 2000).

Rakhine was never included in the Pagan kingdom, although much later texts, such as the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (1829) and the *New Chronicle* (1790s) record that a Pagan-era king restored a Rakhine king to his throne and that the region fell into Pagan's orbit (Frasch 2002). There was also a later myth that Anawrahta attempted to capture the Mahamuni Buddha but that the image appeared to him in a dream and refused to 'go to the eastern country [Upper Burma]', allowing itself to be moved only by Bodawpaya (Tun Aung Chain 2004a: 195).

Rakhine partook of a dramatic cultural and economic transformation that changed the face of Southeast Asia in the first millennium, leavened in part by influences from India. Indeed, early Rakhine produced two enormous walled cities, Dhannavati and Vesali, a fact which should dispel the notion that the region was in any way in the backwaters (Hudson 2004: fig. 81). These cities, together with Mrauk-U, have each yielded Hindu and Buddhist artifacts datable to the first millennium matching the quality of early Pyu and Mon art.

One inscribed stone found at Mrauk-U furnishes a wealth of information. Said to have been removed from Vesali to the entrance of the Shittaung Pagoda, its original location is uncertain. This square pillar was inscribed with a number of inscriptions ranging from as early as the 5th or 6th century to the mid-11th century (Gutman 1976: 29-51). The most complete and legible is attributed to *circa* 729 and is composed in Sanskrit (Johnston; Gutman 1976: 37; Sircar). The record eulogised King Anandachandra who was a lay Buddhist, or '*upasaka*' but also a donor of Hindu monasteries ('*mathas*', Sanskrit) that incorporated his own name (Johnston). One was probably for Vaishnava mendicants ('Anandamadhava'), while another for Shaivas ('Anandadesvara'). This inscription is perhaps the clearest statement of the eclectic religious environment that held true for most, if not all, of Southeast Asia in the first millennium (Skilling 1997).

Anandachandra also made 'gold and silver *caityas* [stupas] containing relics ['*dhatu*'] of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Cunda and others …' and images of the Buddha in brass, bell metal and copper, and ivory, wood, terracotta and stone. He also commissioned 'innumerable clay *caityas* and books ['*pustaka*']'(Johnston). An

More than a score of small stone stupas are known in Rakhine, dating to about the middle of the first millennium. They are often incised with a formulaic Buddhist phrase, usually in Sanskrit or in mixed Sanskrit-Pali. Many are just over a metre in height, while others are smaller. Mahakuthala Museum. Sittwe.

Sujata presenting food-offerings to the Buddha just prior to the enlightenment beneath the Bodhi Tree. This stone fragment was discovered recently at Vesali, c. 6th century. Mrauk-U museum.

earlier stone Sanskrit inscription from Vesali, from the 6th century, refers to a king donating one hundred '*stupas*' (Sircar: 109). A number of small stone stupas, a little over a metre in height, have been found in Rakhine, some engraved with a formulaic prayer in Sanskrit or mixed Sanskrit-Pali.

Anandachandra was also linked to a much wider world. He dispatched gifts, such as an elephant and robes, to a contemporary ruler named King Silamegha who may be identified with a Sri Lankan monarch (Gutman 1976: 37; *Culavamsa*: 48. 41-67); while not conclusive, this may be the firmest earliest epigraphic reference to communication between Burma and Sri Lanka. Also, Anandachandra wed the daughter of a king ruling in 'Tamra-pattana', a hitherto unidentified location but which is perhaps ancient Tamralipta, a major entrepôt in ancient times, situated at the mouth of the Ganges delta in West Bengal and known now as Tamluk. Many of the early kings listed in the inscription also issued coins in their names. One early ruler was named Chandrodaya, perhaps the legendary Chandra-suriya of the Mahamuni myth. Kings following Anandachandra may have been connected to a later Chandra dynasty in Bengal (Gutman: 1976: 2; Leider 2002: 144). The sole element in this lengthy inscription which relates to a myth is simply the description of the king's family as descendents from a bird ('*andaja*', Sanskrit), a possible reference to the *garuda* bird, Vishnu's vehicle (Sircar: 107).

Excavations at Dhannavati and Vesali have revealed the remains of 'elite enclosures', or possibly former palaces, surrounded by extensive protective walls (Gutman & Hudson: 157). What these cities were called in the first millennium is unknown, but their current names were drawn later from Pali traditions. Dhannavati for example was the birth-city of the Buddha Narada, the ninth in the series of Twenty-eight Buddhas (Dhannavati was also used later for the Twante area, opposite Yangon, where King Okkalapa met the two brothers conveying the Shwedagon relics). Another parallel is Hamsavati (Pegu), the birth-city of Padumuttara, another in the series of Twenty-eight Buddhas. Dhannavati enjoyed numerous spellings by Europeans over the centuries, such as Dhinnyavadi and Dhanyavati, with different local meanings, such as 'Grain-Blessed'. King Dvan Chandra (r. 370 - 425) is often considered the city's founder, but few assertions about the early capitals in the later chronicles can be verified.

The sacred hill where the Buddha first met king Chandra-suriya is about 36 kilometres north of Mrauk-U, above the west bank of the Kaladan River. Its traditional name in the chronicles is Mt.

Selagiri, or Sirigutta. Chandra-suriya's capital at the time, Dhannavati, was about 8 kilometres from the modern village of Kyauktaw, east of the river. The Buddha's alighting on a mountaintop overlooking a river and uttering prophecies is a leitmotif in Burmese thought, recorded first in the *Yazawin Kyaw* (*Celebrated Chronicle*) of the early 16th century in relation to the founding of Shri Kshetra. At the foot of Mt. Selagiri were a handful of Buddhist stone images found surrounding a ruinous brick stupa, probably dating to the 6th or 7th centuries. These objects suggest Gupta influence but also indigenous traditions; some depictions are rare, if not unprecedented in Buddhist iconography (Gutman: 1998; 2001: 49). A closely related panel, depicting the Buddha receiving Sujata, was recently found at Vesali and has been dated to the 6th century (Gutman 2005). Also, at Vesali and Dhannavati were discovered a few Vishnu images, along with outstanding bronze Buddhas. Moreover, a lintel discovered in Mrauk-U shares an uncanny affinity to pre-Angkorian examples from 7th century Thailand and Cambodia (Gutman 2001: 46).

The Mahamuni Temple

A much-rebuilt temple northeast of the Dhannavati 'palace' marks the home of the original Mahamuni Buddha. In as much as the real Mahamuni bronze is now in southern Mandalay, a certain melancholy surrounds the shrine, like a castle without a king, or a summer house in winter. It reminds one of the Haw Phra Kaew shrine in Vientiane which was once home to the Emerald Buddha taken to Bangkok's Royal Palace.

The temple rests upon three massive concentric terraces faced in stone. The shrine has been rebuilt countless times, most recently with a nearby helicopter pad, a telltale sign of the regime's respect for the site. The temple was restored long ago by a banker in Akyab named U Ye Kyaw Thu whose donative inscription, dated to 1900, remains on the platform together with the central metal Buddha figure commissioned by him. It was considered a replica of the one snatched from this very place in 1785. Four old wooden pillars from probably about 1900 have been spared restoration, but the temple is largely new, with concrete columns dedicated by military figures and notables in the private sector.

Curiously, the huge Buddha in the middle of the temple is rather neglected by pilgrims today with attention riveted on a much smaller Buddha seated in the centre of a triad to the right of the major image. It is widely believed that this small Buddha was cast immediately before the large Buddha, serving as its model. A ladder allows devotees to place gold leaf directly on the image, considered to be an exact replica of the original one now in Mandalay, albeit vastly smaller. Women request male friends and relatives to apply the leaf on their behalf. Many also believe that the original Mahamuni went into hiding to avoid capture in 1785.

Following a stop on Mt. Selagiri and meeting Chandra-suriya, the Buddha then flew with his retinue to coastal Sandoway where

Bronze work is not commonplace in early Rakhine but of high quality, c. 7th-8th centuries. Let-kauk-zay Monastery, Mrauk-U.

Stone Buddha, within the ruinous brick and stone Pizi-phara Pagoda, c. 16th and 17th century, just south of the large Koe-thaung complex. Inlaid eyes with coloured stones.

further prophecies were issued. From there he traveled to Shri Kshetra, the Pyu centre, underscoring the links that Rakhine chroniclers were eager to forge with central Burma (Forchhammer 1891: 5). The Mahamuni Buddha and its shrine were then subject in the chronicles to a long string of fabled stories, each stressing the perilous but miraculous nature of the image (Forchhammer 1891; Chan Htwan Oung; Thaw Kaung 2001). At times the shrine was completely destroyed, once by Mon and Pyu peoples working together and on another occasion by the Shan but these desecrations served merely as foils for pious and powerful Rakhine kings to rebuild the shrine. Also, at least two august Pagan kings are said to have paid tribute to the shrine. To explain the misfortunes that befell the image, the Buddha himself attributed them to bad *kamma* he had acquired in a previous lifetime as a king who broke the bone of a gardener and injured a prince (Forchhammer 1891: 5).

Few of these stories in the chronicles can be verified, although events are often assigned specific dates. However, episodes with the ring of authenticity appear in the *Sappadapakarana*, starting around 1400, such as a road constructed to the shrine leading from Mrauk-U, built by Min-saw-mun (r.1404-1433). If the Mahamuni image was in fact a focus of worship in the early 15th century, then the bronze image itself may have been cast sometime in the preceding century. But even an approximate casting-date for the bronze is impossible to determine. By the 16th century a Rakhine king commissioned stone images resembling the Mahamuni and placed them in different pagodas, notably the Shittaung in 1536, according to the *Sappada-pakarana* (Forchhammer 1891: 7).

The Buddha also recounted to Chandra-suriya seven earlier births that took place in Rakhine, each existence associated with a different identity and relic (Forchhammer 1891). For example, the Buddha claimed that he was once a rhinoceros when he left his left ear for enshrinement in the Kana-dhatu-ceti on a hill probably south of Mt. Selagiri. These multiple references imply a number of different stupas in existence that became attached to the greater Mahamuni legend; linking shrines of lesser importance to major ones was commonplace, as the Sule became linked to the Shwedagon or as hair-relic pagodas still continue to sprout around Thaton. Such 'sacralising' of an entire region by the Buddha's visits is reminiscent of well-known later northern Thai chronicles (Swearer, Premchit & Dokbuakaew).

A bell once found on the platform was incised with a lengthy record dated to 1733. It claimed that stupas set up in certain locations within Rakhine would bring victory against other kingdoms

and potential enemies, such as Phalaungs (Europeans, from Feringhi, or Franks), Mun (Mon) and places within Burma such as Ava, Muttama (Mottama), Puggan (Pagan) and Thanlyin (Syriam). The epigraph concluded: 'Foreign invaders will be frightened and repelled by the sound of the Yattara bell through which the incomparable Mahamuni image proclaims and yields his power' (Forchhammer 1891: 12). The bell was removed to Akyab following the First Anglo-Burmese War and then returned when the Mahamuni shrine was rebuilt in the late 19th century. It went missing sometime (Tun Shwe Khine: 12; Collis: 132). Unfortunately, the bell's power provided inadequate protection in late December 1784 when the army of Bodawaya (r. 1782-1819) seized Rakhine.

Bodawpaya justified his aggression by charging that Buddhism in Rakhine was in decline (ROB: IV. 332, 392; Charney 2002: 216). Also, his claim to the Mahamuni Buddha was rooted in a prophecy uttered to King Anawrahta who failed to acquire the image (see Mahamuni section). Bodawpaya also sent 'missionary monks' out to Rakhine to bring the local *sangha* in conformity with Upper Burma. There were also 20,000 prisoners of war taken to Upper Burma, together with over 500 households of brahmins, barbers and thirty eunuchs (*Konbaung-zet*: II. 31). Descendants of some of these Rakhine ritualists were often noted by visitors to the Mahamuni temple near Amarapura (Leider: 2005/06; Stadtner 2005b).

More than twenty stone sculptures were found in the 19th and 20th centuries on the first and second terraces (Forchhammer 1891:12). They almost certainly formed one set, but their exact original positions at the site cannot be fixed. Most of the slabs stand

The Mahamuni Buddha was removed from here in 1785 to its new home outside of old Amarapura. The restored terraces are first millennium but everything else has been rebuilt recently. Early stone sculptures are placed in modern brick sheds, right, dotting the complex. This temple marks the most sacred site in Rakhine.

More than twenty stone figures formed a distinct group of deities within the Buddhist pantheon, now placed among the terraces.This unidentified male figure holds an indistinct object.

about 1.2 metres with a single figure carved in high relief against a flat panel; The majority are now in small brick sheds dotted about the terraces. Only one bears an inscription, on its reverse side, with twelve abraded lines.A single legible phrase reads '*yaksha senapati Panada'* (Sanskrit), or 'Yaksha General Panada', in characters attributed to the second half of the 5th century (Gutman 1976: 201). This deity belonged to an extensive Buddhist pantheon associated with the Regents of the Four Directions (*catummaharjika*, Pali). One Regent, Kubera, represents the north, with his retinue of Twenty-Eight Yakkha Generals, or '*yakkha senapati'* (Pali), which appears in the Pali canon (Luce 1969:1. 360). Others listed in this legendary universe were the Four Kings of Death, *nagas*, *suparnas*, *kumbhandas*, *devas* and *devis* (Shorto 1966). Figures with snake hoods are found in this set at the Mahamuni, augmenting the identification of these sculptures with the set described in Pali and Sanskrit sources.

Such a carved set appears to be unique in the Buddhist world, at least for the first millennium. However, a far fuller ceramic set is found among hundreds of glazed tiles on the eastern basement of the Ananda at Pagan, *circa* 1100. For example, the Ananda group includes all Twenty-eight Yakkha Generals, each identified with Pali captions, including one relating directly to the Mahamuni temple sculpture, '*panadayakkhasenapati*' (Shorto 1966: 165). Panada is last in the Pagan series, which perhaps indicates an elevated role and may explain why Panada's panel at the Mahamuni is taller than the others (1.84 metres) and why his panel alone was inscribed, marking the end of a series, as it did at Pagan. A number of the seated males figures have been identifed as bodhisattvas (Gutman 1976: 199). What type of temple or stupa was placed on top of the hill in this early period is unknown. No evidence suggests that the Mahamuni bronze, now in Mandalay, was cast during the first millennium.

Schouten's descriptions of his visit to Rakine in 1660-61 were the basis for the earliest surviving views of Mrauk-U. After Recueil de Voyage*, an edition published in Rouen in 1725.*

Mrauk-U

The old capital of Mrauk-U was founded on 20 August 1430, based on astrological calculations (Tun Aung Chain 2004b:129). It was built upon a far older city with first-millennium walls and earthen works probably used for the management of water (Hudson 2005). It is mostly known now, however, for its scores of spectacular stone monuments spread over many kilometres built in the Mrauk-U period (1430-1784). The city flourished between the 15th and 17th centuries when it was a regional commercial and cultural centre (Leider 1998; 2002). Its lavish court life was described by a 17th century Portuguese Augustinian monk, Father Sebastian Manrique, whose account was immortalised by Maurice Collis in his *The Land of the Great Image*. In the same century another description with engravings made from drawings was made by Wouter Schouten, an employee of the United East India Company, or the Verenigde Ostindische Compagnie (VOC) (Raymond 2002). Even this later Rakhine dynasty was tied in the chronicles to the legendary Chandra-suriya; and the Mrauk-U military forays into Bengal were even likened to King Dutthagamani's legendary conquests of the Elara, or Tamils, in Sri Lanka (Leider 2002: 146).

Mrauk-U's etymology has generated much lore. The most popular claims that Asoka, while visiting Rakhine, met a monkey-queen who had coupled with a peacock-king, producing two eggs. Asoka, or sometimes the Buddha, then prophesied that a great city would arise on this spot and would be named Myauk (monkey) U

Many believe this small Buddha was cast just before the large Mahamuni, to serve as its model. Many also contend that the large, original Mahamuni miraculously escaped capture in 1785 and remains in hiding. Far smaller than the one in Mandalay, only men are permitted to apply gold leaf. A much larger bronze in this same hall was donated by U Ye Kyaw Thu in 1900 but receives less attention.

The gilded stone Buddha within the central sanctum of the Shittaung Pagoda, believed to have been founded in 1536 by King Min Pa (r.1531-1553).

(egg), or modern Mrauk-U. The eggs hatched, producing two lovely girls that were raised by two guardian *nats* (San Baw 1923).

For modern pilgrims none of the temples in Mrauk-U can compete in sanctity with the Mahamuni temple near Kyauktaw. However, in Mrauk-U itself the most important shrine today is the Shittaung Pagoda, nestled against a ridge just north of the old palace site. Shittaung literally means '80,000', rounded off from 84,000, the number immortalised by Asoka who enshrined that many relics in stupas throughout India. The unspecified relics are believed to be inside the central stupa placed over the sanctum. The Shittaung was founded in 1536 by Min Pa (r.1531-1553), according to chronicles. The temple is thought to commemorate his victories in Bengal over twelve provinces, or the 'twelve town of Bhanga' (Leider 2002: 145). For this reason, the temple is also called 'Temple of Victory', or Ran Aung Zeya. This association with military might and the 84,000 relics are the only two features underlying the sanctity of the monument today. The central stone Buddha, now gilded, is seated upon its original 16th century ornamented stone base. The image dominates its small chamber, access to which is via a narrow corridor. The sanctum is surrounded by two concentric corridors. On either side of the inner corridor are twenty-eight Buddhas, representing the Twenty-eight Buddhas in Theravada belief. Figural carving is lavished on the inner side wall of the outermost corridor where its surface is divided into six horizontal registers with hundreds of figures. Collectively, the imagery may represent the 'world of desire' in a structured Buddhist universe

(Gutman 2001: 96). Some of the sculptures still retain bits of original coloured glazing. The most complex figures are on the corners, with at least one representing Indra upon his elephant and flanked by his four loyal but troublesome wives. The nicest are whimsical depictions of wrestlers and everyday scenes. Earth goddesses are shown wringing out their hair at the time of Mara's defeat (Raymond 1998). A small number of *jatakas* are also said to be depicted, but this is difficult to prove.

The court and *sangha* also had strong ties to Sri Lanka, with missions from the island bringing the *Tipitaka* from time to time. For example, the Andaw stupa in Mrauk-U is thought to contain a tooth-relic from Sri Lanka. There was even a time in the 17th century when a reform movement was begun in Sri Lanka, with Rakhine monks at the centre, with Dutch ships facilitating the exchanges. There were also bronze Buddha figures probably sent from Sri Lanka to Rakhine (Raymond 1999). Casting ateliers were also influenced from China, notably during the Yongle period (1403-1424) when Sino-Tibetan styles converged (Gutman 2001: 149).

Although the Shittaung is today the most venerated shrine in Mrauk-U, its fame as a devotional focus probably arose sometime in the 20th century. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the temple was virtually in ruins, the small stupas outside (now restored) 'undermined by treasure-hunters' and in a 'dilapidated condition'. Inside was worse: 'The debris and rubbish have so accumulated on the outer platform…that no light can penetrate … Innumerable bats whisk through the passage, and the stench arising from unventilated ancient bat colonies renders a prolonged staying in it impossible (Forchhammer 1891: 21- 22). The temple's transformation from a deserted ruin to one of the region's principal shrines would reveal much about the creation of sacred sites in the modern era.

King Min Pa and his Queen, donors of the Shittaung Pagoda. Modern portrait. Shittaung Pagoda compound.

The restored 16th century Shittaung Pagoda is the most sacred spot in Rakhine, after the Mahamuni Temple in Dhannavati. It was in ruins in the early 20th century. Near the entrance is an early 8th century Sanskrit epigraph recording Buddhist and Hindu donations.

A six-armed male deity, often identified as a personification of King Min Pa, stands upon a four-armed elephant, at the corner of one of the inner corridors. Shittaung Pagoda.

One stupa important in the 19th and early 20th centuries is found on the banks of the Kaladan, about 25 kilometres north of Sittwe. Known as the Urittaung Pagoda, it marks the spot where the Buddha proclaimed that he had been born a brahmin and that a stupa would be built to enshrine his skull. Rakhine chronicles describe various kings who repaired and enlarged the structure. In addition, a marble inscription of 1879 recorded the stupa's gilding after its renovation (Forchhammer 1891: 57). The pagoda remains popular in Rakhine but is overshadowed by the Shittaung.

Old Akyab

After the British annexed Rakhine in 1826, the capital moved from Mrauk-U to the tiny village of Akyab, probably named after a ridge (Akyattaw) with four stupas northwest of town. In the 1990s the government dropped the name Akyab in favour of Sittwe, meaning 'where the army camps'. Its rapid cosmopolitan growth in the 19th century parallels the history of Moulmein, with Indians, Chinese, and a smattering of Parsis and Jews. One prominent local Buddhist reformer was Sangharaja Saramedha (1801-1882) who was honoured by King Mindon at his synod in Mandalay (Charney 2002: 218). It was also in this period that a copy of the Mahamuni image was made in Pahartali in neighbouring Bengal. A famous shrine visited by Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists is located on the southern outskirts of Sittwe and is known as

The largest monument in Mrouk-U, the Koe-thaung Pagoda, is attributed to King Dikkha (r.1553-1556), the son of Min Pa, founder of the Shittaung. Inner corridor, heavily restored.

Budder-mokan. It commemorates a popular Muslim saint named Badarudin Aulia of Chittagong (Temple 1926b), one of two merchant brothers who had a dream in which he was told to create a shrine for the saint. Although poor, their cargo of turmeric turned to gold. The motif of two merchant brothers suggests borrowings from popular Burmese Buddhist lore underpinning numerous sites, including the Shwedagon and the chief stupas in Prome and Pegu.

The Pyilon Chan Tha pagoda, also called Atulamarazein, is among Sittwe's oldest shrines, built in the late 19th century. Its history is tied to a huge bronze Buddha, cast in Shwedaung, near Prome, that was commissioned for Sandoway in 1893. Taken down the Irrawaddy and then out to sea, it proved difficult to offload in Sandoway. The ship then docked in old Akyab where the bronze was established in a temporary pavilion before being sent to Sandoway. A local abbot suggested in 1899 that a replica be cast to replace the one lost to Akyab's coastal neighbour. This was done in 1899 and the shrine completed in 1910. A mysterious man dressed in white came to suggest the pagoda's name, 'The Country Will Prosper'. There is no suggestion that this is a copy of the Mahamuni. In the compound is an incised stone commemorating Badanta Candramani (1876-1972), a monk who welcomed to Akyab the Theosophist, Col. H.S. Olcott.

Also in Sittwe is a monastery founded by U Ye Kyaw Thu, the restorer of the Mahamuni temple in 1900. He operated the only Burmese-owned bank in the colonial period and his local lending effectively kept the Chettiars and others Indian money-lenders from penetrating Rakhine (Turnell: 120). His son was called to the Bar by the Middle Temple in London, at the same time his father was rebuilding the Mahamuni temple in Dhannavati, a poignant juxtaposition of the old world and the new one on the horizon.

The banker, U Ye Kyaw Thu (1843-1911). He donated the large bronze Buddha at the Mahamuni Temple in Rakhine in 1900. His descendants built a monastery in Akyab in 1917 where this photograph is displayed.

The Buddha predicting the rise of a great city named Mrauk-U to a monkey-queen and peacock-king. The names Myauk (monkey) and U (egg) coalesced to form Mrauk-U, based on this episode. A friendly ogre sits behind the monkey-queen who holds her two eggs. Shittaung Pagoda compound.

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