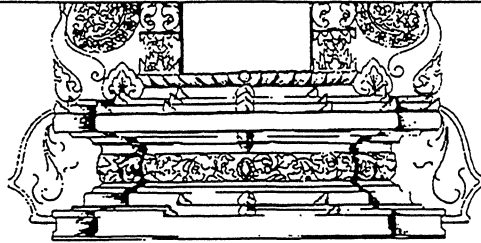


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BULLETIN OF THE BURMA STUDIES GROUP

NO. 53

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**Association for Asian Studies
Southeast Asia Council
June 1994
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Juliane Schober, Editor

Burma Studies Group Business at AAS in Boston:

The business meeting of the Burma Studies Groups was held Friday, March 25, 6:30 - 8:30 pm in the Tufts Room of the convention hotel. The following are the minutes taken at the meeting:

F.K. Lehman called meeting to order at 6:45 pm. Called membership to elect officers (President, Secretary, and book review editor Current slate re-elected: Lehman (Chair), Schober (Secretary-Treasurer), Lefferts (Review Editor)). Announcement of Burma Studies Colloquium on October 7, 8, 9, 1994 at NIU. Cooler announced preliminary arrangements; Maureen Aung Thwin announced preliminary list of topics proposed for the Colloquium; mentioned Burmese students in U.S. to be invited to Burma Colloquium; at present, there are about 25 papers under consideration by the program committee. Maureen Aung Thwin elected regular Program Committee Chair (with D. Steinberg and Sarah Bekker), replacing their ad hoc status to date.

Deirdre Chatham (of the Burma Desk, US Department of State) announced that up to 25 Burmese now in Thailand will be funded for two year study in the U.S.; beginning with Indiana; the funding comes from the U.S. government and is administered through CIEE in New York; at present, 14 people have been selected for this program, not necessarily in anything relating to Burma Studies, though we may wish to encourage any such by seeking to have some of them to come to the Colloquium.

F.K. Lehman encouraged that papers be given on minority groups at the Burma Studies colloquium, because Burma Studies is more than the study of Burmans and Burma proper.

J. Schober made announcement concerning news letter submission and subscriptions. Three names were selected of individuals who would become corresponding member to the BS Bulletin; nominations were solicited and are to be given to F.K. Lehman within the next few months, along with pertinent biographical information about the recipient. This is to be forwarded to AAS through SEAC, in order to explore the possibility of making one or more of them three-year Corresponding Members of the Association (paid up, getting all publications and Programs). This was forwarded to BSG from yesterday's SEAC meeting. Some preliminary nominations are Daw Ni Ni Myint; U Myo Myint (Mandalay, History, currently in Singapore and soon to return to Mandalay), and a Thai scholar from Chulalongkorn with an active interest in Burma studies.

New business from the floor included a suggestion to put preliminary program for Burma Studies Colloquium into AAS newsletter.

David Steinberg mentioned recent activities involving the Australian Foreign Ministry, the Carter Center in Atlanta, and the Asia Foundation are involved in several explorative and conciliatory meetings and seminars concerning in-depth discussions about recent developments in Burma. Following discussion explored how these materials could be made available to the scholarly community;

Michael Aung Thwin mentioned that the Bagshawe translation of Myanma Min Okchok Pon Sadan is nearing completion for camera-ready production; NIU will have rights of first refusal for the work and will seek funds for publishing it in the NIU series;

Hugh MacDougall mentioned recent problems in distribution of the Burma Press Summary and inquired about the interests of the readership among the BSG members. Also, Hugh needs to obtain copies of the December 1992, January, and February issues for 1994 to fill in gaps in the subscription of the New Light of Myanmar. We voted, at his request, and told him the product is valuable, so he agrees to continue it for the time being.

Larry Ashmun mentioned a meeting of Thai specialists to discuss setting up a Burma studies program there. The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Burma Studies Foundation:

The trustees of the Burma Studies Foundation met in conjunction with the AAS in Boston immediately following the BSG business meeting on Friday, March 25, from 9-11 pm in the Tufts Room.

Condolences:

We note with sadness the passing of Mrs. Sallie Bagshawe on May 11, 1994. Our thoughts and condolences go to her husband, Euan Bagshawe and her family. Condolences can be sent to 2310 Celastrus Drive, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

Bi-Annual Burma Studies Colloquium:

The bi-annual colloquium of the Burma Studies Group will be held October 7 (evening reception), 8 and 9, 1994 at Northern Illinois University. Please contact Guest Rooms at the Holmes Student Center (815-753-1444) for reservations. The Center for Burma Studies will make meal arrangements according to the information attached to this issue of the Bulletin. Please make a note in your calendars to attend. A program for the colloquium will be sent to you once it is available.

News from the Britain-Burma Society:

contributed by **Anna Allott**

"Recording the Past in the Present" was the topic of a talk given by Richard Blurton on May 18, 1994. The June 15, 1994 meeting of the Society will feature a video on the life of a Burmese nun by Dr. Hiroko Kawanami.

Anna Allott and John Okell are preparing the section on Burma in a state-of-the-art survey, conducted at SOAS, of Language and Literature Studies in SEA languages.

The BSG Bulletin's Review Section:

Gear, Donald and Jean

1992. **Earth to Heaven: The Royal Animal-Shaped Weights of the Burmese Empires.** ISBN: 0-9519599-0-5. Order from: Twinstar Ltd, Cunningham House, Westfield Lane, Kenton, Harrow HA3 9ED, England, United Kingdom.

Review by **F.K. Lehman**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

This book is about the metal weights in the shape of certain symbolic animals that have, alas!, come in recent years to be known as 'opium weights.' They were, as the authors observe in the Introduction, associated with the Burmese Empire from about the 15th Century. Their more extended distribution in Northern Thailand and Laos is surely a function not simply of what the anthropologists call 'diffusion', but more specifically of the extension for a good bit of history of the Empire to include these latter countries. The complexities of this latter point are nicely dealt with in a brief Appendix, which embodies also a history of animal weights and of the royal regulation of market weights in those places in comparison with the authors' lengthy consideration of this important technical question for Burma in Chapter 3. Indeed, it appears that the present work may have grown out of Donald Gear's earlier concern with Burmese numismatics, where special technical expertise primarily concerns establishing traditional conventions about weight scales and mass scales and the associated standards of metal fineness, both for purposes of distinguishing genuine from false specimens, for dating them, and in order to understand the value systematics for which the genre provides evidence. For most scholars this stock in trade of numismatists is rather arcane and it may, to an anthropologist or historian reading this work for the insight it may provide into institutions of Old Burma (economic, administrative and religious), seem somewhat old fashioned; to the art historian or archaeologist, however, it will prove, I dare say, more enlightening.

Certainly this concern with metal weights has to be a real subject of investigation for the economic historian as also for the historian of the systems of ideas, e.g., the evidence it provides of early systems of number

and measure (one is immediately put in mind of Luce's demonstration of the competition in Old Burma between a decimal and octal based system in this regard). The trouble is that this concern can easily become an antiquarian's obsession with simply the classification and categorisation of specimens and there is at least some evidence of this in the present work which, however, should not obscure its inherent interest and scholarly value as a surprisingly thorough and exhaustively researched survey of the scholarship about these items. Indeed, the authors are to be congratulated for their dedication and industry both making enquiries in the field in Burma and otherwise in putting together this work. Its shortcomings must be excused on the grounds that, after all, the authors are not in any general sense Burma scholars, as certain typographical errors especially in references to Burmese works in transliteration clearly show (e.g., the လောကဗျူဟာကျမ်း [Law:ka. Byuha Kyan:] is astonishingly mistransliterated at least two different ways and attributed in authorship to its modern editor). But, still, it must be said that there is a certain sense of unreality in the fineness of measurement that this tradition of scholarship is prone too: for it is folly to imagine that more than a certain approximation to modern standards of exact measure was even possible for the technologies available to mediaeval Burma. This difficulty is, indeed, the hallmark of the gifted amateur in science as well as in more humanistic scholarship; I refer to the problem of spurious accuracy, in which the physicist, say, differs from the book keeper in requiring that the carrying of a calculation to arbitrary decimal places be shown to be meaningful in context.

It should not be thought that the book is devoted to only these arcane technicalities, although Chapters 1 through 4 indeed are. Chapters 5 and 6 are similarly classificatory with regard to shape, dimension, and a cataloguing of the bird and animal shapes employed, and the use of orthographical marks upon the weights. But Chapters 7 through 14, 16, and 17 (Conclusions) are probably going to be of greater interest to the general Burma scholar. These chapters deal with more ordinarily 'cultural' matter: for instance, the distribution and conjectural history of the representation of animals, especially in figurine form, throughout Asia (the so-called 'animal art' complex extending from ancient Mesopotamia through Luristan in Persia and up through Central Asia across into China and down into South East Asia). There is, of course, a very fine tradition of scholarship on this vast art-historical subject; the authors have clearly gone through it thoroughly, but they are especially to be credited with bringing it to bear for the first time systematically upon the present topic and upon Burma. Their map of conjectured transference of certain animal motifs (Map 2, pg. 229) is a welcome summary of this tradition. I have nonetheless called this a tradition of conjectural history, as it makes little if any reference to more recent and less conjectural work in archaeology and its use in criticising the reconstruction of history from geographical distributions. That, I think, is what makes this work seem pleasantly out of date and this impression is strengthened if one reads the brief note on the outmoded orthographical conventions they have consciously adopted (pg. xii).

There are very useful chapters (10 - 12), then, on the identity of the various symbolical animals and their origins and external affinities. Here too however, one finds a use of sources that is more encyclopaedic than critical, and a surprising naiveté interspersed with quite useful scholarship, e.g., in their survey of the use, both alone and in combination, of the animal element called, in Burmese, *to*, they seem charmingly unaware that there may be less mystery here than they imagine, since it is, after all, nothing but the word for the common sheep, in spite of their exercise in amateur etymology (pg. 182) in deriving it from the Chinese *tou*. Certainly these chapters will be the most generally useful for most readers. Their survey of the definite and possible symbolic significance of the birds and beasts used is quite helpful, though here, too, one must be wary of the uncritical mixing of good and bad arguments and the omission of more modern studies of these matters. The authors make comparisons all over the place, almost arbitrarily, in space and time. They seem, as does this tradition of scholarship generally, to proceed by the free association of words and forms [e.g., if a beast has a forehead protuberance, they at once associate it with the 'wisdom eye' of a

Buddha figure and from thence back to the association between Buddhas and Kings (pg. 172)]. This would not be so off-putting were it not for the fact that, for example, nothing is said about the better attested calendrical-astrological associations of several of these animals and birds. This same sort of problem pervades most of the remaining chapters (13, 14, and 16), where the comparative net is cast even more widely and randomly; Chapter 14, on the system of symbolism of the diagrammatic and syllabic signs on some of the weights, reads, frankly, like an exercise in numerology. Chapter 15, however, on the Chronological Sequence of the Weights, is a thoroughly useful attempt at a proper seriation of the materials in hand.

Finally, it seems to this reviewer remarkable that, amidst all this discussion of obscure possible meanings and functions of these weights there is no hint of the documented fact that these were Royal weights not simply (perhaps hardly at all) because of the symbols of mystical royal authority that the weights carried but rather because it was essential to the practical fiscal health of the Kingdom that the Throne regulate prices and especially the convertibility of valuta in the marketplace. This review is no place to go into this matter, but the reader may be referred to such works as Victor Lieberman's discussions in his Burmese Administrative Cycles (Princeton University Press, 1984), to Robert Wicks's admirable study of the use, and frequent rejection of use, of coined money in these kingdoms (Money, Markets, and Trade in Early Southeast Asia, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, Studies on Southeast Asia), as well as to Dr. Toe Hla's (Northern Illinois University, 1987) doctoral thesis (Money Lending and Contractual Thet-Kayits) for its evidence of the astonishingly high official rank given to the royal bullion brokers.

Allott, Anna J.

1993 **Inked Over, Ripped Out: Burmese Storytellers and the Censors**. A PEN American Center Freedom-to-Write Report. New York: PEN American Center. 85 pp. ISBN: 0-934638-12-3. Order from: PEN American Center, 568 Broadway, New York, New York 10012; \$5.00 postpaid.

Review by **Hugh C. MacDougall, Cooperstown, N.Y.**

The appearance of Anna J. Allott's **Inked Over, Ripped Out** is doubly welcome. Not only it does she provide a graphic account of the difficulties faced by Burmese writers operating under a long-standing and very restrictive political censorship, but the seven translated short stories included in the book are a significant addition to the tiny amount of contemporary Burmese fiction available to the Western reader.

In an introductory essay, Ms. Allott—a distinguished British scholar of Burmese language and literature—describes how political censorship has developed since Burma came under military rule in 1962, and how it affects Burmese novelists and short story writers. She also provides a vivid picture of the current publishing environment in Burma. Her analysis is especially valuable because it goes beyond official regulations to examine how Burmese censorship operates in practice, and the financial and psychological burden it imposes on both writers and publishers. A system that usually orders the destruction or mutilation of books or magazines only after they are printed imposes such a cost on publishers, strapped both for money and for paper, that the temptation to self-censorship can be overwhelming.

Censorship has changed only marginally since the SLORC took power in 1988. The Press Scrutiny Board continues to censor both books and magazines with a strict, if often arbitrary, hand. Indeed, writers face new problems because of their real or fancied association with the Democratic movements of 1988, or writings seen as supporting SLORC's "above ground and under ground" opponents. Nevertheless, Ms. Allott finds that the quality, variety, and significance of Burmese short stories have greatly increased since 1988.

Following Ms. Allott's comprehensive essay, the heart of **Inked Over, Ripped Out** consists of translations of seven Burmese short stories written since 1988; six published in Burmese magazines, and one rejected by the censors. One author was in 1993 serving a ten year sentence for subversion,

and another is the daughter of a jailed writer. Ms. Allott selected the stories in part because some Burmese readers have interpreted them as containing political messages, whether or not intended by the authors. For each Ms. Allott provides a brief introduction, with notes on its cultural context, a sketch of the author, and why some readers have read it as commenting on the current Burmese scene.

As stories, the seven tales included are of interest both as literature and for their vivid portrayal of the Burmese scene. "The Advertising Wagon" presents a nostalgic portrait of an upcountry village, where the only change is that the itinerant movies the author remembers are now replaced by videos (are Government promises of change illusory?). In "He's Not My Father," a street urchin refuses to believe that a dying derelict can be his lost father (by implication, drafted by the Army for forced labor?). U Win Pe provides three serio-comical sketches: a gentle boy is roused to rage when a cat kills the wounded bird (representing democracy?) he is trying to save; a man (the Government?) demands eternal and exaggerated gratitude for a minor favor; and meek man (everyman?) gets into trouble only when he sticks his neck out. "The Children Who Play in the Back Alleyways," refuse to use a fancy play ground erected by the Government on the site of a teashop where a playmate was killed in 1988. In "The Python" a ruined man miserably sells his family home to a wealthy (and by implication criminal) ethnic Chinese. In "Heartless Day" a housewife, reduced to poverty, must sell the ceremonial longyis of her youth to feed her family. And "Hard Labor" portrays the mental turmoil of doctors tempted to recommend illegal abortions to women whose health is being ruined by childbirth; alone of the seven stories, the censors refused to allow its publication.

Inked Over, Ripped Out concludes with seven biographic sketches of writers, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, being held in detention in mid-1993.

It is unfortunate that these stories can find translation and publication in America only because of their supposed political content. No literature is less known in the West than that of Burma, and it is ironic that we owe this important glimpse to the very censorship that PEN exists to combat around the world. Nevertheless, students of Burma will be grateful to Ms. Allott for making them accessible, and to PEN for putting them into print.

Recent and Forthcoming Publications of Interest to BSG Members:

Religion, Culture and Political Economy in Burma is the title of a new publication which appeared as Research Monograph No. 3 (1993) in a series published by of the Institute of Asian Research, Asian Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., V6T 1Z2. The volume is edited by Bruce Matthews and was the result of the 1993 meeting of the Northwest Regional Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies at U.B.C. It contains an introduction and by the editor and an essay on 'Myanmar's Agony.' Other papers are entitled 'The Politics of Forest Management in Colonial Burma' by Raymond Bryant (SOAS); 'The Politics and the Informal Economy of the Opium-Heroin Trade: Impact and Implications for the Shan State' by Chao-tzang Yawnghwe (UBC); 'Inequality and Education in Burmese Society' by Zar Ni (WI).

'Privatisation and Private Sector Development in a Transitional Economy: the Case of Myanmar' is the title of an essay by Paul Cook published in the inaugural issue of a new journal Southeast Asia Research (vol. 1, 1993), edited by Ian Brown at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Charles Keyes (U. Washington) presented a paper on 'The Nation-State and the Politics of Indigenous Minorities: Reflections on Ethnic Insurgency in Burma' at a conference organized by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation in Istanbul, Feb. 21-25, 1994.

The Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University reports several forthcoming publications of interest to the BSG readership. A special issue of the journal Crossroads dedicated to the study of Burma will tentatively include essays on Burmese language, lexicography, the status of the hill peoples, religion, current trends in literature, historiography, and archeology.

Also forthcoming are four parallel texts for learning Burmese by John Okell, Lecturer in Burmese at the London School of Oriental and African Studies. The series is entitled **Burmese** and accompanied by a set of tapes; books 1 and 2 contain an introduction to the spoken language; book 3 an introduction to the script; and book 4 an introduction to the literary style. Please contact the CSEAS at NIU for information concerning publication dates and prices.

Anna Allot mentioned two titles which recently appeared in Britain. She reports that Culture Shock: Burma by Saw Myat Yin is a most valuable 'Guide to Customs and Etiquette.' There are chapters on holidays and ceremonies, on visiting and entertaining, on local travel, on Burmese attitudes, and perceptions and modes of address. This compact little book is published by Kuperard Lt., 9 Hampstead West, 224 Iverson Road, NW6 2HL.

Another is Folk Tales of Burma by Maung Htin Aung, reissued in the Macmillan Folk Tales series. It includes a short introduction and 27 tales. It is a paper back of around 100 pages and printed in fairly large type to encourage the young reader.

E-Mail Directory of BSG Members, Continued:

For the time being, e-mail addresses of BSG members will continue to appear in the Bulletin. The list below includes new e-mail extensions, in addition to those that appeared in earlier issues. If you want your e-mail extension to be added, kindly send me a note via IFJSS@ASUACAD.BITNET.

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Contributions to the BSG Bulletin:

F.K. Lehman, Hugh MacDougall, Anna Allott, Daw May Kyi Win, Bruce Matthews, and Leedom Lefferts have contributed to this issue of the Bulletin. Please accept my thanks and appreciation for your contributions in this format in lieu of individual letters.

The publication of the BSG Bulletin is the voice of its readership. All members of the Burma Studies Group are invited to send contributions to the editor. Of interest is information about scholarship on Burma in the U.S. and abroad; conferences and public lectures; submissions on research notes; reports on recent developments in Burma or about Burmese communities abroad; and brief substantive articles on special topics or points of interest explored in your research. Please send your contributions, preferably on disk in Word Perfect 5.1 format, to the BSG Bulletin editor, Juliane Schober, Department of Religious Studies, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-0402 or via e-mail to IFJSS@ASUVM.inre.asu.edu

Materials, Media, and Book Reviews:

Leedom Lefferts is the Materials/Book/Media Review Editor for the Bulletin. Readers who would like to serve as reviewers and authors or publications editors should contact him at the Department of Anthropology, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey 07940, U.S.A.

Lefferts encourages non-traditional participants in the review process. Reviewers will be expected to submit reviews of no more than 500 words in both paper (one copy) and on computer disc, using Word-Perfect 5.1 or better, within one month of receipt of the material for review. Discs will be returned to review authors. The Review Editor also encourages authors and

publishers of ephemeral material, such as pamphlets, mimeographed works, and computerized material to send items to him for possible review in the BSG Bulletin.

Subscriptions to the Burma Studies Bulletin:

Subscriptions to the BSG Bulletin or inquiries concerning your subscription should be directed to The Center for Burma Studies, c/o BSG Subscriptions, Adams Hall 410, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb IL 60115.

Bibliography - Books and Articles on Burma:

**Compiled by Daw May Kyi Win
Southeast Asia Curator, NIU**

This bibliography is an attempt to bring together all current articles and books on Burma in English and other European languages. Installments of this bibliography have appeared in each issue of the Bulletin of Burma Studies Group since No. 48, August 15, 1992. This is the fifth segment. Future installments will be numbered consecutively.

The following procedure is being used to compile this bibliography. Articles on Burma are downloaded onto a disk from the H.W. Wilson CD-Rom Humanities and Social Sciences indices, which are updated monthly. Articles from journals published in Southeast Asian countries which are not included in the above databases are then added to the bibliography. Monograph lists are taken from the NIU Southeast Asia Collection development (acquisition) files. The arrangement of entries is alphabetical by author (usually last name) or title (in absence of an author). Burmese and Thai names are alphabetized in direct written order. For example, the Burmese names "Mya Than" and "Aung San Suu Kyi" would be listed under "Mya" and "Aung," respectively; the Thai name, "Sulak Sivaraksa" under "Sulak."

If you have questions concerning the bibliography, please contact the compiler at the Southeast Asia Collection, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115. Ph (815) 753-1809 or through e-mail: C60MKW1@NIU.BITNET.

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