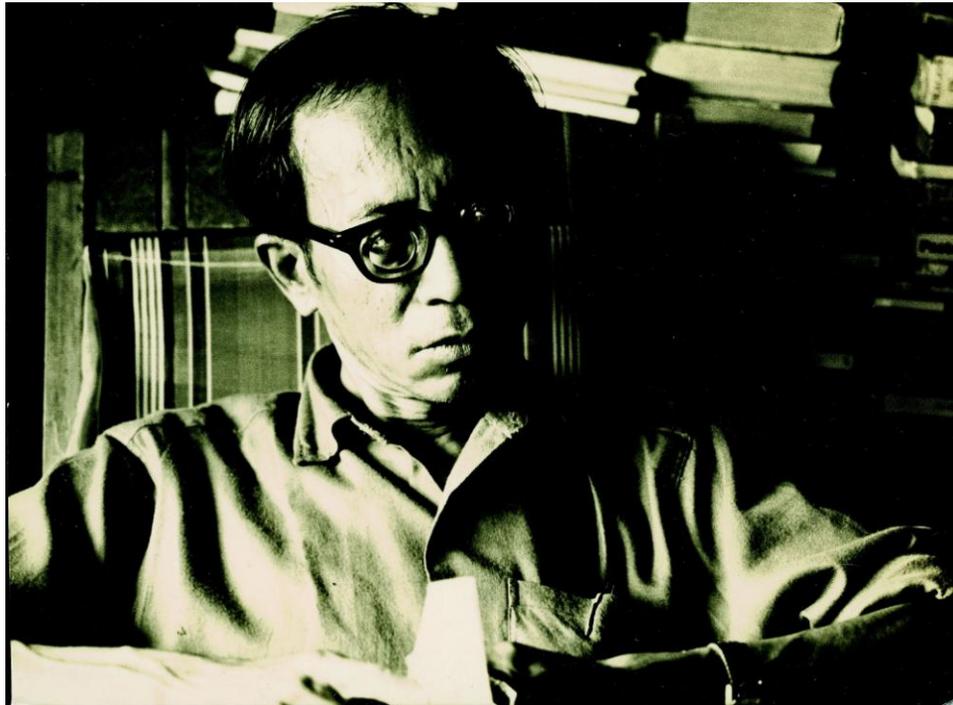

***BULLETIN OF THE
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STUDIES GROUP***



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March 2004
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Primate Cities and De Kalb

In July I had the exciting experience of spending time in Rangoon, Bangkok, and Singapore, all in the space of a week. The three cities are of course geographically very close to one another and in most other respects worlds apart. Reflecting on their differences I was struck at how many different ways cities can be cosmopolitan, as all three of the cities assuredly are. My favorite tea shop in Rangoon, the Mercury (Anaratha Rd. and 46th St.), serves a great cup of the Burmese version of Anglo-Indian black tea, along with naan, dosas, a wonderful variation on jelly doughnuts, Ovaltine, and of course unlimited amounts of green tea. The owners appear to be Sino-Burmans. I call that cosmopolitan. Bangkok—sin, shopping, and sprawl—retains some charm, against all odds: the cooking smells from all those vendors remind you constantly that you're still in Southeast Asia, even if this particular corner of it has been overlaid by cement in every direction for as far as the eye can see. If Rangoon hurtles insistently toward a Southeast Asian primate city's disarray, and Bangkok—primate city par excellence -- illustrates how the individual interest in, say, owning a car will aggregate to the generalized misery of nightmarish traffic, Singapore proves that the inevitable is only apparently so. That city's struggle against automotive transport shows that if a government is both incorruptible and ferociously stubborn it can triumph over individual selfishness to a remarkable degree. The newest line of the city's underground system opened while I was there and I could only marvel at the ease with which I moved over the entire island.

Of course the city's planners make unfortunate decisions, too: the lovely green space in front of the history museum at the foot of Orchard Road is being plowed under in order to build the new Singapore Business University, the best instance I can imagine of misplaced priorities. But I can think of no city I have been where a pedestrian is accorded so much convenience and ease as in Singapore.

In the U.S., pedestrians suffer only a little less contempt than in Bangkok. The conviction that if you don't own a car you don't count holds just as much among most Americans as among most Southeast Asians. But at least in smaller places in the U.S. getting around is not such a challenge. Those of us who have been to De Kalb know that getting around presents no problem whatever if you stay, eat, and attend the Burma Studies Conference all in the Holmes Student Center!

So it is a pleasure to announce that the Burma Studies Foundation has decided to hold the next two Burma Studies Conferences at Northern Illinois University in De Kalb, in October, 2004, and in Singapore, in 2006. The endlessly resourceful Tony Reid has been kind enough to offer to expedite the Singapore conference, through the good offices of the newly established Asia Research Institute, which he heads, at Singapore National University. Details concerning the Singapore venue remain to be worked out, so this is a tentative announcement. But holding our conference in Singapore would demonstrate especially clearly our commitment to gathering scholars from all over the world who share an interest in Burma.

The March issue of this Bulletin will provide more details concerning next fall's

conference in De Kalb. (The precise dates are October 22 – 24, 2004.) We might even condescend to give transport advice to people without cars. Such as: This is America. Rent one! –*The Editor*

The Burma Studies Group

Okay, this is the Bulletin. But what's the Burma Studies Group?

The Burma Studies Group (BSG) was founded in 1986-87. Operating under the purview of the Association for Asian Studies, it issues a Bulletin two times a year, which contains information about research, teaching, conferences, and publications concerning Burma in the United States and throughout the world. BSG membership is obtained by paying an annual subscription of \$25.00. This subscription includes the fully-refereed *Journal of Burma Studies*, also published by the Center for Burma Studies. The editor for the Bulletin is Dr. Ward Keeler (Anthropology), University of Texas at Austin (ward.keeler@mail.utexas.edu).

The group also sponsors a biennial Burma Studies Conference, commonly held at the Center for Burma Studies at Northern Illinois University, but occasionally held in Europe or Asia, with a view to internationalizing its work, in accordance with the policy of the AAS itself. Information about previous and forthcoming Burma Studies Conferences can be found at the following website: www.grad.niu.edu/burma/con. For further information regarding the Burma Studies Conference at NIU, please contact the Director of the Center for Burma Studies,

Dr. Catherine Raymond (craymond@niu.edu), or her assistant, Beth Bjerneby (bbjorn@niu.edu). Or consult the website www.grad.niu.edu/burma.

BSG's current Chair is Dr. Mary P. Callahan, Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington, Seattle (mpc@u.washington.edu). She will serve until March 2004.

The Mya Than Tint I Knew by U Tin Tun (Retired Ambassador)

Readers of this newsletter may recall a paragraph toward the end of Anna Allott's contribution to our last issue, concerning Burmese writing in English translation, in which she wrote:

Last, but by no means least, the student of contemporary Burmese society should read *On the Road to Mandalay* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1996), an excellent translation by Ohnmar Khin (a pen-name) and Sein Kyaw Hlaing of a book of "portraits of ordinary people" by Mya Than Tint, a leading writer and intellectual, and translator of western writing. The 35 portraits here translated are based on interviews with people that the author met as he traveled around the country, which he then published in *Kalya* monthly magazine, and subsequently in two volumes in 1993. Better than any guide book, these tales of ordinary folk paint a vivid picture of life in Burma between 1987 and 1991.

On my way to Burma last year, I happened on a copy of On the Road to Mandalay in a bookstore in Bangkok. As a collection of interviews with Burmese people of various

sorts, it looked like it might be useful in courses I teach on Southeast Asia. Thinking, further, that it could be a good language-learning strategy to compare the Burmese original and an English version, I was disappointed when I later asked around at bookshops in Mandalay and learned that no copy of the original was to be found. I did find a copy of a later collection of interviews by Mya Than Tint, however, and was immediately enthralled. I then learned more about the author's remarkable achievements in a great many different fields. And I was startled to learn that one of the translators of On the Road to Mandalay, Vicky Bowman, was not only a good friend of an old friend of mine in Mandalay but also about to become the British Ambassador to Burma. Vicky Bowman has now passed along the following delightful reminiscence of Mya Than Tint, written by a long-time friend after the author's death in 1998. –The Editor

I first came to know Mya Than Tint in 1948 when he joined the University of Yangon as a freshman aged 19, two years after I had become a University student. In those days he was not the famous writer the people of Myanmar and many others later came to know: he was just plain Mya Than. But there were a few too many students by that name at the University and four or five of them, Mya Than included, came from the Pakokku District (his home town was Myaing). Perhaps having such a common name was the reason that compelled him to add his father's last name, Tint, in 1960 when he wrote his story "Water Lily in the Mud". To this day, however, friends, myself included, tend to remember him as Ko Mya Than rather than Mya Than Tint.

Mya Than Tint, though not particularly short by Myanmar standards, could nevertheless be regarded as a small-made man with little

spare flesh about him. In fact he looked every inch a bookworm with his thick horn-rimmed glasses and ever-frowning forehead. Even as he walked his expression suggested a man in deep in thought.

We became quite close after a year or so, and rapidly developed a friendship of warmth and understanding. We not only had common interests like reading, watching movies and exchanging views and ideas on politics, history, economics, literature, philosophy, arts, etc. Our common friends like Ko Than Tin and Ko Kyi Lin, and writers Aung Lin and Kyaw Aung who hailed from the same town of Pakokku and had similar backgrounds were catalysts for our friendship. Although I did my schooling together with most of them at Pakokku Wesley High School, I was not a native of Pakokku and arrived there from Nyaung Oo simply for my education. Out of them all I liked Mya Than Tint the best because of his simple manner, his honest and frank way of speaking and most importantly because of his sincerity. With the passage of time our bond of friendship gradually strengthened until we could confide in each other a good deal of our personal problems.

At that time Mya Than Tint was very much in love with a famous Myanmar movie actress. She was a woman of slender build, fair with quiet charm and dignity. Though no great beauty she was certainly very attractive with her rather sad eyes, which were capable of filling a beholder's heart with sympathy and love. She was also an able actress whose acting could easily move the emotions of the audience in any direction she chose, whether to sadness or happiness, love or hate, humor or pathos, anger or apathy. So it was not surprising that a simple and inexperienced man like Mya Than Tint came under her spell and fell head over heels in love with her.

His rival was a fairly handsome actor who was far more experienced and was known to have a way with women. But all of us – all Mya Than Tint's friends – rooted for Mya Than Tint and backed him to the hilt. One day, however, one of us who was a little aggressive and impatient misled Mya Than Tint into believing that the girl was asking after him, and that he should go and visit her. He very naively followed our friend's suggestion and paid a visit to her. The result appeared to have been quite disappointing, if not disastrous. The evening after the visit, I saw Mya Than Tint looking quite miserable and not at all communicative. But he kept on visiting her, though not too frequently, just sufficiently to show his continued interest. We did not really know how the girl was reacting to his approach. So shy was Mya Than Tint that he would not confide in any one of us completely nor to the extent that we could measure his progress. But we all noticed that he was generally passing through varying moods of listlessness, frustration and misery.

His courtship thus lasted for more than a year or so until one day, to my great surprise, he mentioned rather casually that his rival had won the affection of the girl, and he would no longer be a prisoner of love. He said it quite calmly and composedly as though nothing really serious had happened. Knowing Mya Than Tint as I did I could imagine what a blow it would have been to him. But his understanding of human nature and his ability to appreciate the realities of life must have given him enough courage and strength to get over this bitter experience without showing any disdain or rancor against any one, neither against his rival who had taken away his love, nor against the girl who had rather shabbily let him down. In other words Mya

Than Tint had taken this bitter experience in his stride.

Mya Than Tint and I shared a room in North Hall [now known as Shwebo Hall] for a few months during our university days. Our room was on the first floor of the Hall, quite close to the shower rooms and toilets. More often than not we could hear our fellow students singing in the showers. Both Mya Than Tint and I were not shower room vocalists but we both were quite fond of songs and music, particularly Mya Than Tint, who could sing fairly well, accompanied by a violin or harp or xylophone, especially one played by Aung Lin. Mya Than Tint also could play violin and xylophone to some extent.

Although we were room-mates we were in many ways the antithesis of each other. For instance I liked sports and took part in activities such as tennis, rowing and boxing whereas this did not interest Mya Than Tint. In the evening when I went out for my sporting activities, he would be taking a walk on the embankment of Inya Lake along Pyay Road or strolling on the university campus. At times he would visit Sanchaung and Myenigon where most of our friends from Pakokku stayed. Or else he would shut himself up in his room, either reading or writing his articles and stories.

Those days I was crazy about Western dances like the foxtrot, cha cha cha and waltz, and made some efforts to learn and practice them. I often urged Mya Than Tint to do likewise. Being very shy and not so keen on Western practices he never gave in to my suasion. He was quite steady in his habits as well as in his studies. Unlike most writers or literary bohemians he was fairly meticulous in his manner of dressing and in keeping his room clean and tidy.

On the other hand I was a different kettle of fish. Unsteady in many ways perhaps, I did not keep up with my studies or attend classes regularly. I scarcely sat at the study table most nights, being almost always occupied with either sports or social activities. So most evenings I usually came back to our room at an ungodly hour, more often than not quite drunk. Instead of knocking at the door I would kick it with my foot to wake him up. Without any angry reaction or word of complaint Mya Than Tint would open the door and let me in. In the morning when I woke up, I found a cup of coffee already waiting for me, quite cold, of course, because Mya Than Tint had prepared it some time ago before he left for his morning classes and his appointments. At that time I did not really appreciate the extent of his patience, understanding, and good-heartedness, and took it for granted. Only when he was dead and gone did I realise how much I owed him for his indulgence: a debt of gratitude, which it was too late for me to repay.

In a contemplative mood, I often remember how good an influence he was on me. Those days I was like a boat without a rudder, trying to go in all sorts of directions, and not knowing which one in particular. In fact, his steadiness, his steadfastness towards his aim and object, his having a purpose in life aroused my envy and gave me strength to redeem myself from being an aimless person to being a more serious and steadier individual. Furthermore Mya Than Tint, with his good collection of books and willingness to share with his friends whatever knowledge he gained from reading, inspired me to read far more widely than I had intended to.

Although I often dreamt of joining the Myanmar Foreign Service during the earlier part of my University days it was just that, a

dream. After my graduation, however, it became a firmer ambition. When I sat for the Foreign Service examination my practice of reading books, especially books in English, stood me in good stead. There again I owed Mya Than Tint a good deal. Amongst some of the favorite books we read were Nehru's *Glimpses of World History*, *Discovery of India*, *Letters from a Father to a Daughter* and his autobiography; *Freedom at Midnight* by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre; Bertrand Russell's works such as *Conquest of Happiness*, *Marriage and Morals*, *An Un-Armed Victory* and his autobiography. Our reading also covered lots of novels, both classic and modern including the work of such authors as Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells, W. Somerset Maugham, James Joyce, Jane Austen, D.H. Lawrence, Oscar Wilde and many others. We also read Maurice Collis's books such as *Trials in Burma*, *She was a Queen* and *First and Last in Burma*, as well as George Orwell's books such as *Animal Farm*, *Nineteen Eighty Four* and *Burmese Days*. In fact, we read them repeatedly. Also included in our choice of our favourites were English translations of Russian and French authors, for instance Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and *Anna Karenina*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, and some of the plays by Chekhov. (But some of the books mentioned here were not necessarily books of the time. Just as my friendship with Mya Than Tint lasted for many years until his death our habit or practice of sharing our books and reading materials with each other continued until the last few months of his life. So some of the books could be what we had read in the 70s, 80s or 90s.)

I will never forget Mya Than Tint's high moral standards. One day we found out that one of our group who was rather unscrupulous with few or no principles was

having an affair with the wife of another of us. Everyone was shocked to learn of it. But Mya Than Tint was furious beyond measure especially because the husband, our friend, was a saintly man whose acts of kindness and generosity had benefited us all. Our unscrupulous friend's ungrateful deed and weakness repelled and disgusted us. In Mya Than Tint's book, our friend was a despicable character, no longer worthy of our friendship.

Although Mya Than Tint could show emotion and get angry at times, he certainly hated any act of cruelty. One afternoon when we were living at Shwebo Hall we caught a small-time thief, a young man in his twenties who sneaked into the Hall and tried to grab things like watches, gold chains or pens from some of the students' rooms, whose doors and windows were forgetfully left open when students went to shower rooms or toilets. Some of our fellow students tied the thief against one of the posts on the volleyball court, which lay right in front of our room, and took turns beating him up. When we saw it, Mya Than Tint and I went running down to the volleyball court. The thief's face was bleeding as well as his legs, and it was a rather cruel and miserable sight. Mya Than Tint urged them to stop the beatings and give the thief up to the police, as did I. Finally they gave in and sent the thief to the police station. Evidently it was against Mya Than Tint's nature to resort to any act of violence or cruelty. His behavior and actions were almost always guided by his sense of fairness and justice.

The year 1957 saw Mya Than Tint's marriage to Khin Ma Ma (Baby). I got married and went away to Washington D.C. that same year to begin my Foreign Service career as Third Secretary in the Myanmar Embassy. For about a year, from 1954 to 1955, Mya Than Tint and I had worked as

teachers in a private school called Daw Ma Ma's Private Anglo-vernacular High School. (Writer Kyaw Aung was also a teacher in the school.) It was at that school that Mya Than Tint met Khin Ma Ma who later became his wife. She was one of the students preparing to sit for the Matriculation Examination. She was quite tall by Myanmar standards, fair and attractive with her large innocent eyes. True to her nickname Baby, when she spoke she spoke like a baby, with a disarming frankness that made her seem even more attractive. Strangely enough, she resembled someone whom Mya Than Tint had once admired. At first Mya Than Tint did not show any interest or liking for her. He was just her schoolteacher, whose only concern was for her progress in her studies and finally for her success in the matriculation examination. But in no time I found him to be losing control of his feelings for her, and before too long their romance began, resulting eventually in a union that led to many years of happily wedded life.

As a foreign service man I served abroad most of the time, and I met Mya Than Tint only occasionally, when I was posted back to the Foreign Ministry in Yangon, first in 1962 after my Washington posting, then again in 1974 after my Canberra posting, followed by 1985 after my first posting to London (1980-1985) and finally in 1989 when I came back to Yangon after my retirement in London where I had served again for the second time from 1985 to 1989. Every time we were in Yangon we always made sure we met each other as often as possible. We went about together, visiting our common friends, we drank together, we ate together, we sang together, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves catching up on old times. The greatest pleasure we had out of these meetings was in comparing notes on the different experiences we had

had during the years we did not see each other, sharing our thoughts on our common problems and current events.

In the introduction to *On The Road To Mandalay*, a translation of Mya Than Tint's *Tales of Ordinary People* (*Anyatara youq-poun-hlwa-mya*), Mya Than Tint, describing his life in his own words, claims that he was no politician, despite at one point early in his life being not only involved in the resistance movement but also a member of the Communist Party. He stresses that by the time the Caretaker Government took over he was no longer a member of the Communist Party.

Perhaps his employer of the time, the Soviet Embassy, suspected as much. In Aleksandr Kaznacheev's account of his defection in 1959, *Inside a Soviet Embassy: Experiences of a Russian Diplomat in Burma*, he recalls: "Attempts had been made to engage a Burmese to report on the local press. For about five years, the Embassy employed Mya Than – a knowledgeable and pleasant man with thick glasses – for this purpose. In spite of the fact that he was a member of the Central Committee of the Burma People's Party and the General Secretary of the All-Burma Peace Committee – two Communist Front Organizations – Embassy diplomats, and the Ambassador particularly, still considered him unreliable. He was paid 500 kyats a month, but his obligation in the two organizations at the time for work and the translation of Lenin and Gorky in which he was also engaged, left him little time for work in the Embassy; therefore his reports were not very useful. He was finally dismissed in 1958, and after that for a long time our Embassy had no translator."

The government of the time clearly thought, however, that he was pro-communist. He was arrested for the first time in 1958 and sent to Insein jail, and in 1959 sent to Coco

Island. He was detained under Section 5 (e) Public Order Preservation Act for about two years and released only at the end of 1960 when U Nu's Government came to power.

In 1963, after the Military Government had taken over, Mya Than Tint was arrested again and detained until 1966 without trial at Insein Jail where he was in continuous solitary confinement. This was not like his first two years of prison life from 1958 to 1960, which were spent partly at Insein Jail and partly at Coco Island, about which Mya Than Tint remarked as follows; "Insein Jail then was a so-called Model Jail: life there was as good as in a hotel." His second time in jail was a real hardship, totally bereft of human dignity and freedom.

Then in 1968 he, together with a lot of other inmates who were with him earlier at Insein Jail, was sent to Coco Island. Coco Island was an open jail with no barbed wire around it, but surrounded by a sea infested with sharks. Mya Than Tint stayed there for four years. He could go wherever he liked on the island, and claimed that he knew every stone on it. The authorities told him that he was free to go if he could swim across the sea. Mya Than Tint never did try but three people did: their story was the inspiration for Mya Than Tint's novel *Climb the Mountain of Swords and Cross the Sea of Fire*.

Mya Than Tint endured those years of imprisonment and hardship with a rare courage and fortitude found only in an exceptional few. He survived those years not only with grace but also with an enriched mind and a better understanding of the realities of life, which led him to great success in his career as a writer.

My last encounter with Mya Than Tint was after my retirement in 1989 when I was

living in U Wisara Housing Estate in Dagon Township. We had then a group of retired personnel as well as some interesting people who were still holding important posts in the Government departments or in some private organizations. We had a morning walk together for about 4 or 5 miles along U Wisara Rd every morning. Both Mya Than Tint and I were members of that group. Different members started this morning walk from different places. For example I started from U Wisara Housing Estate whereas Mya Than Tint started from Pyapon Street in Sanchaung. No matter where we started from, we all met together before returning home. Our practice was, if possible, to meet one another at the U Wisara Monument or on U Wisara Road between the monument and Hanthawady roundabout. Then we would walk back along U Wisara Road towards the city in the direction of Bogyoke Aung San Rd. Our final rendezvous was at a teashop near the Medical Research Centre on a road called Ziwaka Rd. (formerly Zapashar Rd), adjoining Shwedagon Pagoda Road and U Wisara Road. If all the members of the group turned up we could be as many as ten to fifteen.

As the teashop was just a roadside stall, rather too small for all of us to sit together, we took all the stools from the shop to a little park across the road in front of the shop and sat under the shade of some trees. In our group we had, amongst others, a former Professor of History, U Tin Ohn, who had later also served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and High Court Judge, each for a couple of years; U Tun Shwe, a retired major who was then working for U Nu as his Secretary; Mya Than Tint; and some doctors like urologist Dr Mya Thong, Consultant Surgeon Dr Aung Khin, Ear, Nose And Throat Specialist Dr Thein Maung, Neurosurgeon Dr Aung Kyaw and

some retired civil servants like U Tin Hla, U Soe Hlaing, U Toe Hlaing, U Kyi Win, U Ko Gyi and myself. In addition there were some businessmen who also would join our group from time to time, though not regularly. It was such a mixed bag of people with quite different experiences. But most of them had done something for the country and its people, each in his own way, either in small measure or large, depending on his opportunities and degree of competence.

While enjoying tea or coffee with *Nanpya and Pepyoke* we gradually entered into our usual conversation – or perhaps one could call it our morning debate – touching on subjects like our country's economy, health-care, education, politics, gardening, movies, novels and writing including those of our national authors and writers: in fact, almost anything under the sun. Mya Than Tint was one of the most eloquent participants and an invaluable contributor to some discussions of a serious nature. Although some of the news and information we mulled over was interesting and useful, some was quite dangerous and even harmful. It could affect someone's credibility, one's character, human dignity and rights, especially where unfounded gossip was concerned. I noticed that Mya Than Tint steered clear of such remarks or comments. He rarely talked ill of other people unless compelled by circumstances. He was almost always objective in his views and comments.

With this narrative I have tried as well as possible to confine myself to recollections of my personal experiences with Mya Than Tint, hoping this will throw more light on his human qualities. For instance I would rather leave the appreciation of his literary work to the experts, as I do not consider myself sufficiently competent for this. On the other hand it would be quite out of order when talking about Mya Than Tint, a man

whose name and fame had gone far beyond our shores, not to mention anything about his writings.

To many of his foreign admirers Mya Than Tint was known as the Solzhenitsyn of Myanmar, both for his prison experience and for the breadth of imagination and strong sense of realism in his prolific writings. He also drew inspiration from the other side of the Iron Curtain, from Chicago-based journalist Studs Terkel. This led him to chronicle the lives of the ordinary people – the *anyatara* – whom he met in the course of his travels on lecture tours (*sa-pe haw-pyaw-bweh*) the length and breadth of Myanmar. He demonstrated that behind any life lies a story worth reading.

These writings are the first of Mya Than Tint's works to be translated into English (and subsequently French and Thai), and published as *On the Road to Mandalay: Tales of Ordinary People* (White Orchid Press, Bangkok). Translator Ohnmar Khin, better known as Vicky Bowman, current UK Ambassador to Myanmar, says:

I chose these works to translate because by making Mya Than Tint's interviews available to those who cannot read Burmese, I hoped to break down the language barrier that exists when foreigners come to Burma, and which prevents them from understanding how the people here really live.

Two other authors have commented on Mya Than Tint's ability as a writer. Anna Allott, former associate professor of Burmese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, wrote in the introductory note on the first page of Mya Than Tint's book "On the Road to Mandalay".

Mya Than Tint is probably Burma's most prolific contemporary writer. His original fiction, translations and essays, appear in numerous magazines each month. As a young man he read everything he could lay his hands on, from classical poetry to modern fiction, through love stories to thrillers before realising that his heart lay with realism. In his non-fiction writing he has always drawn both on his experiences and those of others. *Portraits of Ordinary People*, his first series of profiles, takes this one step further and records real lives.

In an "Author's Note," Amitav Ghosh, the author of *The Glass Palace* (HarperCollins), wrote in appreciation of Mya Than Tint's courage, determination and ability as follows:

Sadly circumstances permit me to acknowledge only one of my most salient debts in Yangon: to the late writer Mya Than Tint who has been removed by his untimely death from the reach of the regime whose oppression he had so long and so heroically endured. Mya Than Tint was for me, a living symbol of the inextinguishable fortitude of the human spirit: although I knew him briefly, I felt myself to be profoundly changed and deeply instructed by his vision of literature. Everyone who knows him will recognize at once, the pervasiveness of his influence on this book.

Mya Than Tint's death was a great loss not only to Myanmar's literary world but also to our society, our people and our country. He is greatly missed by people who know his

writings and by many who had had some sort of association with him, either as friends or business clients. He was not only a leading writer but also a beacon for the young budding talents of the next generation. No matter which ideology he claimed he had subscribed to, I would call him a social rebel who had tried with his numerous writings to change or improve our society by awakening our people to the realities of life and the truths about our society. His passing brought me deep sorrow and a true feeling of loss. In him I lost not only a good and trusted friend but also a wise and dependable philosopher and guide. Much as I appreciated his writing ability, I admired him more for his very human qualities. Many years of friendship and association with him inevitably evoked deep affection, respect and trust. It could not be otherwise, because his indomitable courage, his simplicity and directness, his sense of fairness, his sincerity, his abundant patience, his care and concern for the causes of our country and people made him both loved and respected. We cherish our memory of him.

What the soul is few of us can know or tell, and each of us can interpret it in different ways. However, if the soul could be defined along the line of the teachings of an old Sanskrit verse as a spirit of willingness or desire to cooperate or sacrifice for the common or larger good, Mya Than Tint definitely was a man with a soul. He truly was a decent gentleman, a great writer and a great Myanmar whose love for his country, his people and freedom was both profound and genuine.

(Mya Than Tint, born 1929, died in 1998 after a fall, which led to a brain hemorrhage. U Tin Tun served as Myanmar Ambassador to London from 1985-1989.)

Just as this issue was going to press, we received the following note from Vicky Bowman. –The Editor

Former Ambassador to London U Tin Tun passed away early on Sunday morning, September 14, of heart failure. He was out at his 'country retreat' near Bago when it happened. It is very sad - he was enjoying life, developing his estate, planting his orchards, and we were collaborating on translations together. And of course, he was playing a lot of golf. Like Mya Than Tint, he died before his time.

**Diary Excerpts
from Julian Wheatley**

*Julian Wheatley has kindly consented once again to provide excerpts from his travel diaries for inclusion in the Bulletin. With any luck, we can hope eventually to see a collection of Julian's charming and insightful accounts of his travels in the Golden Land gathered in one volume. In the meantime, remember that you saw it first in the Bulletin of the Burma Studies Group.
–The Editor*

Excerpts from a log written for family, July to August, 1997

Day 3, Rangoon

At the rest house, it has been raining all night, and ghostly figures have been running around the garden with torches, checking the expensive Mercedes Benzes that are stored in a garage at the end of the garden. The perks of being a colonel in the army, presumably. Today I plan to track down a Chinese contact, Mr. Su, who manages a Chinese clan hall somewhere in Rangoon's

Chinatown. I begin at one of the two main Chinatown temples, the Ch'ingfu Kung (Qingfu Gong) on Strand Road, asking directions from some old whiskered gents who are playing Chinese 'chess' in the courtyard. They know Mr. Su, and direct me northwards a few blocks, a route that takes me through a food market spread out along the 'five foot way' that separates the shop houses from the street. I step around buckets full of live crabs, and piles of thorny durian fruit and hard-skinned mangosteens. I pass below apartments, ducking by strings with clips attached, which people use to raise up mail, newspapers or baskets of food.

Eventually, at a smart looking Chinese shop selling bathroom fixtures, I am directed to a three or four story narrow building right on the edge of an area that has been demolished to make way for the Nyaung Pinle Market. This is the Law-San Tong Saw-clan Society (or, in Mandarin, Lushan Tang Su-clan Society), an organization formed by Chinese with the surname Saw (or Su). I climb a steep, dark staircase and knock on the metal grate halfway up. A man appears, and looks curiously down at me, but when I identify myself as an acquaintance of his brother in China, he pulls a cord that unbolts the gate and lets me climb the rest of the way. His name is, of course, Saw, but I address him in Mandarin as 'Su hsiensheng' – Mr. Su. The spelling 'Saw' reflects the Hokkien pronunciation.

Mr. Su is an elderly man, tall, slender with gray hair, dignified. I explain my presence in Burmese, and we shift to Mandarin, and then to Mandarin mixed with Amoy. I rely on guesswork. Su brings me into a long room, rather narrow, with an open window at one end, and a shrine enclosed in perspex at the other. The walls are lined with aging photographs, plaques, and testimonials in various shapes and colors.

Mr. Su sits at his desk, while I look round the clan hall, taking photographs and inspecting the material on the walls. From his desk drawer, he produces a pamphlet, written by a clan member from Taiwan, about the most famous of the Su clan, Su Lang. Su Lang was born in 1020 (at the time of the Northern Sung dynasty) in Tong-An province, Fukien. He invented an astronomical clock of some importance in the history of science. Letters from the Needham Foundation in Cambridge acknowledge the contribution of the author to the history of science. Plaques on the wall attest to the academic success of other Su's. One did a degree in computer science at Staten Island University in New York; another has a degree from Princeton.

Mr. Su explains that members of the Su clan emigrated from Tong-an County in Fukien – the same place that Su Lang, the inventor, was born. They had sailed first to Singapore, then quite soon afterwards, to Penang and eventually to Moulmein. Some of the clan remain in Moulmein, but about 100 years ago, others migrated west, to Rangoon. Other Fukienese 'clans,' with names like Lin, Chen, and Li, also settled in Rangoon around the same time. The Lin clan building, in fact, is only a block away, its ornamental roof of glazed tiles visible from the upper windows of the Su hall.

All together, twenty four surname-clans from Fukien settled in Rangoon. These Hokkien speakers distinguish themselves from the Cantonese, who also have clan associations. Soon after they arrived in Rangoon, the Fukienese founded the Ch'ingfu Kung (temple) on Strand Road – the temple where I had asked directions. Ch'ingfu was originally dedicated to Matsu, a goddess associated with fishermen and maritime people, but later it was rededicated to the Bodhisattva, Kuanyin, 'the Goddess

of Mercy.’ The Cantonese temple inland, on the north side of Chinatown, is also dedicated to Kuanyin. It is said to be a few years older than the Ch’ingfu, but people at Ch’ingfu claim that their temple is more efficacious, and that Cantonese often come there to worship.

Mr. Su was happy to let me look around and take notes while he carried on with his accounts. The clan association, he told me, doesn’t provide monetary assistance to members; rather it provides services for weddings, funerals and for people who are ill. It also runs a young men’s club (meeting on the second floor), which in the past performed lion dances for festivals. But membership was declining, as the young emigrated (officially or unofficially), and the successful moved away from the city center to the suburbs. Presumably, a good number of Chinese simply assimilate completely and though they may still worship at the Chinese temples (along with Burmese ones), they may be less likely to participate in purely Chinese activities, such as lion dancing.

In the 10th lunar month, the Association celebrates the birthday of Duke Chengchien, surnamed Su, a prime minister in the Sung dynasty, who is regarded as the founding ancestor of the line. Recently, his 976th birthday was celebrated. A small statue of the Duke sits on the left hand side of the altar. He is depicted as a high official, with long whiskers and a tall hat with stiff black tendrils stretching out on either side. The rest of the shrine could be the minor altar in a temple. A Buddha image – Burmese rather than Chinese – stands in the central position. In front of the Buddha, set on a red box, stands the Jade Emperor (*Yuhuang Tati*), the ruler of Heaven, head of the heavenly bureaucracy – the Chinese version of *Th’gya-min*. The right side of the shrine is occupied by an image of *Paosheng*

Tati ‘The Great Protector’, and *Ch’ingshui Tsushih*, a Taoist deity who is popular in Fukien and Taiwan; both of the right-side deities were probably important to the Tong’an region of Fukien where the clan originated. The deities are all encased in plastic, and lit from two electric lights and three electric candles placed before the altar.

After getting a woman (named Su) from the shop downstairs to take a photograph of Mr. Su and myself sitting at his desk, I walk down to Strand Road again and find a pedicab driver to take me to one of the embassies, where my former Burmese teacher works. We agree on K60 (25 cents). Strand Road is crowded with rough looking laborers and food vendors, all operating, it seems, below the level of abject poverty. At one point, a woman, wearing a worn-out longyi but not looking particularly un nourished, is walking along with her longyi lifted up, naked below the waist. She is shouting across to the crowd on the other side. The pedicab driver doesn’t say anything, so I don’t ask. I guess it is an act of defiance, her outrageous behavior shaming those who have been harassing her. Or she may just be insane.

The embassy is closed, so it is back along the same stretch of road on another pedicab. This time, my driver is a cagier middle-aged man, who gets K150 from me, and who keeps pressing me to stop at tourist sights along the way. He says he rents his bike for K100 a day, so he needs to make K500 to stay alive (\$2). He lives in his *saiqka*, so the bike rent is also his house rent.

Day 8, Pagan

Breakfast the next day is served in a large, newly-built room containing only two small tables and four chairs. Three waiters stand at one side while I eat, answering my questions in barely perceptible voices which echo

through the empty room and cause them to speak even more quietly. Western breakfast in Burma is the same everywhere (at least in middle-level hotels): weak coffee sweetened with condensed milk; toast with a small portion of rancid butter, and jam; an egg, cooked to choice, but always drenched in oil; and fruit, usually a banana, sometimes a mango or papaya.

I arrange to hire a car and driver for the day to take me to Mt. Popa. The cost is US \$15, with kyats accepted at the black market rate. The car comes with two people, the hotel manager, and a tall, wiry, dark-complexioned, betel-chewing driver. They are pleasant company. I sit in the middle of the back seat to get a view out of both windows, but in return, I get hours of hot, dry wind in my face. My hosts want to play the radio, but I manage to persuade them to talk to me instead.

The day is ideal: not unbearably hot, with light clouds. We set off across the dry plain, its landscape softened by rows of toddy palms, scattered vegetation, and occasionally, by cultivated plots. The road is paved, but rough, and not quite wide enough for two cars to pass. Because the shoulders are so treacherous, drivers coming both ways prefer to stay on the macadam and either pass within inches of each other (most cars here don't have side mirrors), or wait until the last second and swerve around each other.

Half an hour out of Pagan, we pull to the side of the road and walk to the small, thatched, windowless hut of a toddy palm farmer, one of dozens scattered over the landscape. In the gloom of the hut, a woman is working over pans of viscous liquids at different stages in the production of toddy sugar. At each stage of the process, the juice becomes thicker until eventually it congeals

into a form like marzipan, known as jaggery (an Indian term), that can be rolled into strips, cut into small slices, then made into little balls that are sold as sweets. Flies like jaggery sugar too; they swarm over the fresh containers, forming a coruscating layer that one must dig through to get to the sweets. Much of the jaggery goes into the production of toddy, a crude alcoholic drink that tastes something like rum.

The husband appears, and shows us how they climb the palms by means of narrow ladders, and how they slice the nuts and let the syrup ooze into black pots, like rubber tapped from the trunks of rubber trees. At mid-morning, the pots have only a few inches of liquid in them, together with some black ants. By nightfall they will be full. *Ac'o sha down, t'anyeq o-deh hmauq-yeq-leh* 'be looking for something sweet, and unexpectedly fall face down in a jaggery pot,' say the Burmese when you 'get more than you ask for.'

Having observed the husband's climb carefully, I volunteer to climb a palm and check a few pots for them. The cultivated trees have a ladder affixed only to the top part of the trunk; the bottom 20 feet has to be covered by a second ladder that is carried from tree to tree. To be safe, I lock my hands around the tree as I climb. Going up is fairly easy, even in a sarong; I pose at the top, holding a large knife. Coming down hugging the tree is harder, and by the time I reach the ground, the inside of my arms are cut and quite raw from the sharp, rough bark.

Like many of the people I meet in the Burmese countryside, this family has at least three or four children. Quite a contrast to China, where only the minority people have more than one. Some weeks before, in Yunnan in southwest China, I sat next to a

journalist on a bus, who, in the course of conversation, identified himself (in Chinese) as a *ding-ke* – a ‘dink.’ He had to explain: ‘double income, no children.’ He and his wife decided that it would be too difficult in the China of the future to get a good education and find employment for their children. I met a lot of dinks in China. Rural life in Upper Burma is not easy, but it may still be better in some ways than life in many parts of China.

As we barrel across the shimmering plains, Mt. Popa looms out of the clouds in the south. Popa is a dormant volcano about 5000 feet high (1500 meters), and 3000 feet above the surrounding plains. It is the highest and most northern peak of a range of mountains that parallels the Irrawaddy River all the way up from Rangoon. North of Popa lies an unobstructed view towards Pagan, and on to the confluence of the Irrawaddy and Chindwin Rivers beyond.

Popa is the sacred mountain of Burma, the original domain of Min Mahagiri nat (whose name is Pali for ‘Lord of the Great Mountain’). From the earliest times, Burmese kings sought the patronage of Min Mahagiri, and eventually his domain expanded to cover the whole nation. Curiously, Min Mahagiri is also the house nat. In traditional dwellings, a coconut wrapped in a red ‘head’ cloth is hung from a beam in an inner room to represent Min Mahagiri. The nat is partial to coconuts; their milk soothes his burns. Maung Tin Aung in his book, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism* (1959), felt that the two aspects of Min Mahagiri, Lord of the Mountain and Guardian of the House, represented a conflation, a confusion of two originally different spirits who had both had shrines in the house.

Our road circles the mountain to the west, climbing the foothills until, across the green expanse of trees, we see a volcanic outcrop on the southern side that thrusts abruptly up for several hundred feet before ending in a level top, encrusted with whitewashed buildings and golden spires. This is Popa Kalaq, ‘Popa the Tray’ (named for its shape, like a traditional Burmese tray). Popa is associated with powerful nat spirits, but a tourist might be excused for assuming it was only a Buddhist pilgrimage site. For on the hill, it is the Buddha that dominates the shrines, not Min Mahagiri or other nat spirits. The nat shrines, it turns out, are mostly below the base of the hill, or low on the ascent. This is as it should be. The nats are subordinate to Buddha.

The Buddha inspires the highest goals of religious life, escape from endless rebirths in the world of suffering. Enlightenment. Extinction. Inspired by the lofty golden spires of temples that draw the eye heavenwards. But ordinary men let their eyes be drawn horizontally, across the clutter of elaborately decorated buildings that stand on the marble platform at the base of a temple. A heavenly city on earth. Still in the realms of suffering, but a more realistic aspiration for those who are not religious virtuosos. Good works, collecting karmic credit. Being reborn in higher and higher realms of spirituality. Supporting monasteries, sponsoring ordination ceremonies for young men. Showing selflessness. Buying, and then releasing fish into the ponds on temple precincts; or birds into the sky. Success in this life demonstrates the successful accrual of karma in earlier lives, but only continued good deeds can ensure success and happiness in future lives. But all is suffering: *douqk’a, douqk’a*.

Anawrahta, King of Pagan in the 12th century, demonstrated to his people the power of the Buddha over the nats by bringing statues from the nat shrines across his realm and placing them around the base of the Shwezigoun Pagoda in Nyaung U. Later, they were removed to the rear of the pagoda terrace, where some remain to this day. The nats are part of the world of rebirth; in fact, their plane of existence is only slightly higher than our own. They may live much longer than mankind, but they still have very mundane needs. Their proximity to our world allows them to interfere, to cause illness or misfortune; it also allows us to make supplication to them in times of hardship. They can be quick to anger, but they can also be propitiated with an offering of rice or fruit and a gesture of submission. Nats are often represented in Buddhist shrines as servants or protectors, occupying little niches by the altar. But they are on a much lower spiritual plane than the other celestials; that is why their shrines are at the base of Popa Kalaq.

Nat spirits may have domain over trees or rocks or other natural objects. But many of the well-known nats – those with names – are historical or legendary figures who died violently, and whose mystique and power persist in the form of spirits. The Mahagiri nats, it is said, were a blacksmith, Nga Tin Deh (sometimes he is given the more respectful title of U Tin Deh), and his sister, Shwe Myeq-hna ('golden face'). Nga Tin Deh performed such legendary feats of strength that the ruler of Tagaung (a kingdom far to the north of Pagan) came to view him as a rival. That didn't stop him from marrying Nga Tin Deh's beautiful sister, though, the 'girl with the golden face.' Later, using her as a ruse, he captured Nga Tin Deh, tied him to a *sala* tree, and set him on fire. The sister, seeing her brother in the flames, ran from her entourage and

threw herself into the fire. She too, was immolated, all except for her face. In death the pair became nat spirits, and eventually, so the story goes, King Thinlikyaung, a king who ruled in the Pagan region some 1500 years ago, offered them an abode at Mount Popa. They became the tutelary gods of Pagan and other Burmese kingdoms, and later kings would seek their blessing as part of their coronation ceremony.

As we begin to ascend the foothills of the volcano, Popa Kalaq disappears from view, until we round a long bend in the road and drop down steeply to the village at the foot of the outcrop. My guides have climbed the hill many times before, so this time they prefer to remain below, resting in a shaded teashop. I begin my ascent along the covered stairway alone, but soon, a couple of teenaged boys fall in with me, and before I know it, I am being conducted on an unsolicited tour. The route upwards is littered with people looking for money. I donate K90 to an elderly man who, in return for donations, sweeps the smooth, stone stairs and passageways. Another K200 goes to a young man who offers to run down to the base of the hill and bring a bucket of water to put in the cistern on the terrace at the top. At a cold-drinks stand about half way up – run by the sister of one of my guides as it turns out – I order cold cans of coke and Sunkist orangeade for myself and the guides. Since all but mine will be returned unopened to sell again, it seems like a fair contribution. Still further up, we encounter two young women carrying water and looking for sponsors. My price has stiffened, but they accept and fall in with the entourage.

Though the view is spectacular, the buildings on the top are rather crude and uninteresting. My first water carrier, who has run down to the foot of the hill and

rushed past us with two buckets on his yoke to gain the top first, awaits his K200, and I dutifully pour the two heavy buckets into the earthenware drinking pots to gain some karma for myself. I do the same for the women, removing the buckets from the yokes two at a time.

Looking towards Pagan from the summit, my guides point eastwards, far across the foothills of Popa, where in the distance, one can just perceive the outline of a dry lake. In the Pagan era, they explained, King Anawrahta (for reasons unknown to my guides) sent a servant from Pagan to determine the size of this lake and to see how close it was to Mt. Popa. The servant rode so hard to carry out his task, that on returning, he fell down dead, and became the nat, Myinbyushin 'Lord of the White Horse,' which is how he is depicted on nat shrines.

On the summit, I am spotted making my rounds by an abbot, who beckons me to join him. He is seated on a mat in a small Buddhist shrine; by his side is a (Buddhist) nun who is reciting from a notebook. They are from Sagaing, he explains (a monastic center near Mandalay), but he spends summers here to get away from the heat. She has come to continue her study of English. Speaking to a monk in Burmese requires a special etiquette: performing the *shiko* – bowing the head three times to the ground; sitting in a deferential position, lower than the monk, soles of the feet facing backwards, and so on. It also requires the use of a special language that substitutes expressions such as 'your pupil' for 'I' and 'your holiness' for 'you' and 'I submit' for 'yes.' I manage to address the monk with more or less correct usage, having had plenty of chances to practice; but I can not remember how to address nuns.

It is often noted that women in Burma have traditionally had a social and legal status comparable to that of men, and until recently, much higher than women in the West. But spiritually, they are still at a lower level than men, for they cannot enter the monkhood, cannot ascend above the lowest platforms of pagodas, and have certain taboos associated with their clothing and bodies. A monk is called *hpounji* in Burmese, 'one of great spiritual power,' but a nun is only a *thila-shin* 'one who adheres to the precepts.'

I ask the monk for assistance so we can proceed; he tells me not to bother with polite language, just to talk normally. So I mix monk-language in with normal. The nun, naturally, wants to practice English with me. Not ordinary conversation, but a Buddhist catechism that has been awkwardly translated – possibly by the abbot himself. As the nun reads, I correct her stress and intonation – the usual problems; and we correct the text as we go. After a page or two, I can see the project extending into the evening and possibly through the night, so I excuse myself with three bows, wish them well, and depart, my guides prancing behind me. Going down, I resist requests to make more donations, even from the young girls who badger me to buy peanuts for the monkeys. "The monkeys are a nuisance," say I; "they steal everything." They should have caught me on my way up.

Back at the base of the rock, I find driver and guide resting under the shade of a tree. We set off in the direction of Kyaukpadaung, a trading town south of Popa that was the terminus of the railway line before the recent extension to Mandalay was built. On the same trip that took us to Pagan, Marjorie and I had traveled by truck to Kyaukpadaung in order to catch the train back to Rangoon. At the station, when the

train pulled into the platform, passengers threw their luggage and themselves through the windows, so that by the time we got aboard all the seats had been claimed and most of the floor space as well. We did eventually get a seat, but spent the 18 hour journey – including a night without any illumination – with our feet propped directly over the heads of a family who had encamped under the seat. Feet above the head, the profane above the most sacred part of the body. Bad manners, but unavoidable in this case.

The road to Kyaukpadaung descends the scarp of the Pegu Range and provides the best views of Popa Kalaq, with the volcano, shrouded in cloud, forming an ominous backdrop. On the way to the town, we stop at a plant nursery to buy potted flowering plants and trees for the hotel in Nyaung U. The place is run by a very capable woman, and for about 20 minutes, it could have been a summer day in the English countryside. Except that the proprietor was wearing sandals rather than wellies. The hotel manager collected up more plants than he had money for, and to save him making another trip, I lent him a few thousand kyats.

In Kyaukpadaung, I hoped to find another member of the Su clan. After a few stops for instructions, we found our way down a maze of broad but unpaved lanes to a simple shop by the side of the road. A new Mr. Su welcomed me with quite extraordinary enthusiasm, his Mandarin failing into Hokkien and his English failing into Burmese – even before I could explain who I was and how I found him. He was chewing a betel quid and apologized to me for it, as he expectorated great gobs of red liquid. He asked if I wanted to shower (Burmese style, that is, ladling water from a tank in the yard), and insisted I stay with him on my next trip. After about 30 minutes, my guides,

who had stayed in the kitchen talking to the wife and daughter, came out to hurry me on for the long drive home. Su and I only spent half an hour together, and failed to settle on a language, but we parted best of friends.

We drive back to Pagan and Nyaung U in the gentle light of the late afternoon, watching the shadows of the toddy palms lengthen across the fields and the setting sun etching out the features of the landscape. On the way, we stop at the new railway station to buy a ticket to Mandalay. For some reason, the station has been built about 7 kilometers out of Nyaung U; I thought how difficult it would be to get there in the morning. We find a clerk on duty, in a large, dim office (the electricity is off). He takes my \$9 FEC and after 20 minutes of filling out forms, issues me a ticket. While I wait, I chat with the station vendors and laborers, who seem to live on the platform. The vendors had little to do, for the next train – mine – wouldn't arrive till the morning.

By the time I have eaten another fine meal of vegetable curry, and been once again, regaled by the Shan couple, retelling the Mt. Popa legends from the Shan perspective, it is quite dark, but not too late to make a visit to the Shwezigoun Pagoda – where Anawrahta had supposedly placed all the nat images back in the 12th century. On the previous evening, from the hotel, I had seen the golden stupa in the distance, and so I set off along the pitch black dirt roads in the general direction, dodging dark shapes of cyclists and groups of chattering pedestrians on the way. It turned out to be much farther away than it looked, and I wondered how I would ever find my way back to the hotel.

The Shwezigoun, begun by Anawrahta, was not completed until the reign of his successor, King Kyanzittha. Its site was supposedly chosen by letting a white elephant wander until it rested. Within its

walls are thought to be housed several Buddha relics, as well as the valuable emerald Buddha obtained from Yunnan on an expedition that looms large in the history of the nat spirits.

This late in the evening, the pagoda is nearly deserted, and the only noise is the tinkling of the bells below the gold ‘umbrella’ that crowns the spire of the stupa. I soon gain a guide – a student, whose sister owns a stall on the covered walkway that leads up to the pagoda. She had failed to sell me ‘authentic’ antique bells. The stupa is burnished gold under the floodlights. We circumambulate in the proper direction, clockwise, passing the shrines for each day of the week. We stop at the Saturday shrine. In Burma, days of the week count for more than dates, and personal names are chosen according to classes of letters assigned to particular days. Saturday: t, th, d, dh, n. My name is Nanda. My guide was also Saturday born.

On completing our circum-ambulation of the golden stupa, I part from my companion, and approach a cluster of people seated on chairs on the broad, immaculately swept marble terrace. Among them, a woman whose job it is to extract two dollars in FEC from tourists who take photographs. I owned up to taking some at the back of the shrine, but she said she hadn’t seen me, so it didn’t count. I wondered where the money she collected went; presumably, not to her. A boy in the group ran off to get me boiled water, and after swilling a small chipped cup with it to disinfect, served me a drink. The photo-tax woman was amused to discover that I had only daughters while she had only sons. The others tried to arrange for an introduction. But when asked about my monthly salary, I dissembled saying it was complicated, but that I lived quite well. It is always hard to rationalize a salary that is larger than most people’s lifetime income.

My return to the hotel is aided by the appearance of a pedicab driver who offers – after due consideration – to take me back for *tahseiq* – K25 (\$0.10). I feel bad, and give him a K45 bill – one of the old bills. Not many years ago, Burmese bills had very unconventional values: K1, 5, 10 but then only 15, 45, 90 and 200; people said it was something to do with Ne Win’s numerological fixations. The unusual values also promoted mathematical skills, particularly for those who dealt on the black market and had to count out large quantities of money rapidly.

When I arrive at the hotel, a package awaits me at the front desk: a lacquer box from Mr. Su in Kyaukpadaung. He must have arranged for the driver to buy it and wrap it up for me. I telephone him immediately, and following him from language to language, try to convey suitable thanks, while the hotel staff giggle in the background.

A Couple of Bibliographical Hints

It seems clear that Burma, as it draws more international attention of all sorts, is also attracting increasing scholarly attention, resulting in many new publications. The internet makes keeping track of what has been and is being published on Burma much easier. But it helps to know how to make efficient use of the net. Here are some bibliographical tips that might prove useful to readers. –The Editor

Beth Bjorneby provides the following simple directions on how to find out what’s new on Burma at the NIU library:

Go to website
www.niulib.niu.edu/books.cfm

Choose Worldcat

In the left hand column under Searching
choose "advanced"
Search in: Worldcat

Search for: choose "Subject"
Enter keyword "Burma"

Limit to: Year – 2002 (for example)
Limit type to: choose Book
Limit availability to: choose NIU
Rank by: Date

The National Library of Australia is another valuable resource. Here is their web address for things Burmese:

www.nla.gov.au/asian/lang/burmhp.html

This page provides a guide to the holdings of Burmese-language publications in the National Library of Australia, including the collection of Gordon Hannington Luce, one of the foremost European scholars on Burma.

New Burmese Language Materials from John Okell

John Okell, who has done so much to help many of us learn Burmese, has published yet another set of materials for the prospective Burmese language learner. Entitled *Burmese by Ear or Essential Myanmar*, it consists of a text plus six cassettes. As the publisher's flyer explains, "It aims to give you a confident and enjoyable start in speaking Burmese, focusing on what you are most

likely to need when you visit Burma: 'survival language' for cafés, taxis, shops, and so on, and 'social language' for getting to know people and making friends." It is published by Sussex Publications, London. Ordering information can be obtained from:

Audio-Forum, Microworld House
4 Fosco Mews
London W9 2HH, UK
Phone: 020 7266 2202
Fax: 020 7266 2314
Email: microworld@ndirect.co.uk
Website: www.microworld.ndirect.co.uk

Bibliography of German Literature on Burma

It is a sign only of my own provincialism that I never wondered what sorts of materials there might be about Burma written in German. Hans-Bernd Zoellner has provided the answer to the question I hadn't thought to ask with the following note, alerting readers to the actually quite substantial number of items he has gathered and is good enough to make available to us all. –The Editor

In the winter term 2002, I offered a seminar entitled "Burma mirrored in German literature" to the students of Hamburg University's Asian-Africa-Institute. The course was intended to focus on the impact of the observer's perspective in describing and interpreting a culture other than his or her own. Clifford Geertz's concept of "thick description" was used as a theoretical frame. To equip the students with a wide choice of more or less "thin" descriptions of Burma in German, I put together the relevant material I had so far come across. This small

bibliography has since been enlarged through internet inquiries of libraries and second-hand bookshops. I soon discovered that some interesting reading material was not easily available. That made me start my own private collection of books and articles, originals as well as reproductions. At the moment, my own collection includes some 400 items of all kinds of literature and subjects related to Burma from the 17th century up to the year 2000, out of a total of 550 entries in a bibliography that continues to grow by the day.

The material is classified under 44 headings, from “administration” to “women.” Not surprisingly, “travelogues,” with 124 entries, far outnumbers all other types, followed by writings on politics (54), novels and stories (29), contributions on geography (27), ethnology (26) and history (25).

I would like to make the bibliography as well as the collection accessible to the public. People who read German can order photocopies. Non-German readers may request information about topics they are interested in.

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