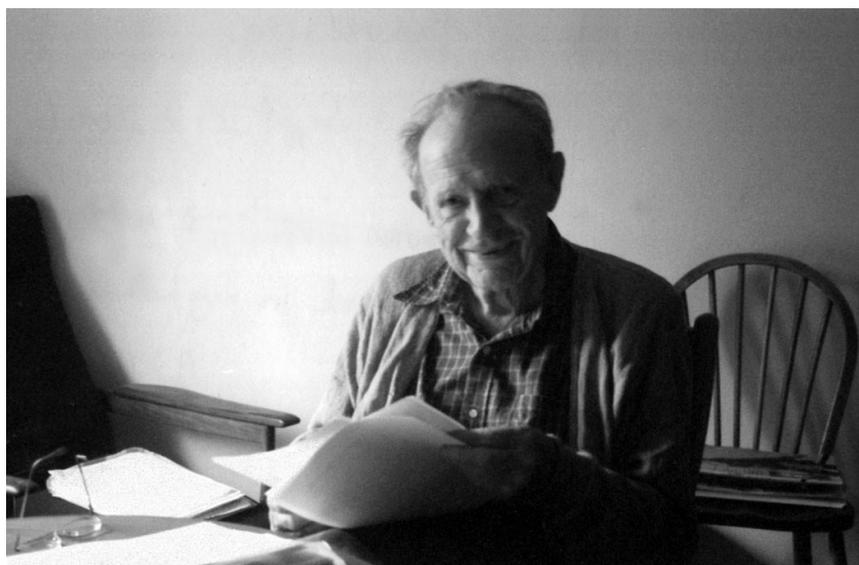

***BULLETIN OF THE
BURMA
STUDIES GROUP***



**Lionel Euan Bagshawe, 2006
Photo provided by Anna Allott**

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Next Issue

September 2010
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Introduction

It was with sadness that we learned of Euan Bagshawe's death last fall. But as Anna Allott's obituary in this issue makes clear, he had a richly rewarding life. He made very valuable contributions to the world's knowledge of Burmese history and ideas through his many impressive translation projects. He seems to have been tireless in his commitment to these undertakings, and for that we must all be grateful.

Maureen Aung-Thwin has been kind enough to permit us to reprint the interview with Euan that appeared in *Burma Debate* in 2002. This, in addition to Anna's contribution, gives us a good sense of the man and his legacy. In reading through these pieces, it's hard not to think that he was one of the last representatives of a particular kind of scholar: someone who worked many years in colonial administration before turning his energy to academic pursuits. How many younger scholars have the desire—or privilege—of spending so many years in places far from their homes before setting about making pronouncements about the area they claim to know?

As it happens, Lilian Handlin provides evidence of the relevance of Euan's work, since his name appears more than once in the footnotes to her fascinating essay in this issue. That essay, a deeply intriguing analysis of how the Jataka tale of Vidhura has been represented in Burmese pictorial and other media, shows how applying the techniques of redaction criticism to visual evidence illuminates many issues in the history of ideas—and the history of a society in which how stories get told really matters. Lilian's essay diverges from most of the

articles that have appeared in the *Bulletin* by virtue of its complexity, not to mention the elaborate scholarly apparatus accompanying the main text. But it seems only fitting tribute to include it in this issue, dedicated as it is to the memory of Euan Bagshawe, since Lilian's work shows what important and path-breaking work is being done in Burmese history, and how many provocative questions remain.

At the end of this issue, we draw attention once again to the Burma Studies Conference to be held in Marseille in July, an event that promises to gather a remarkable number of Burma specialists. We also include a call for submissions for The Burma / Myanmar Reader that U Saw Tun, Juliane Schober, and Jason Carbine are preparing for publication. —The Editor

**Lionel Euan Bagshawe,
April 27th 1918- Jan. 12th 2009**

With the death of Euan Bagshawe at the age of 90 in January of this year, students of Burmese history lost a scholar who had invested endless hours into translating Burmese historical material into English; and the Burma Studies Group lost a well-loved contributor to its regular proceedings at Northern Illinois University, in De Kalb.

One can glean little about Euan's life from the modest notes accompanying his earlier publications. The footnote under his 1998 article in volume 3 of the *Journal of Burma Studies* states "L.E. Bagshawe was born in 1918 at Nikosia. He was educated in England and received his B.A. at Oxford and M. Phil. in London at SOAS, in Burma Studies." From an earlier 1981 publication we learn that he had read classics at Wadham College (Oxford) and had entered

the Indian Civil Service (I.C.S.) in 1941. But in 2002, in Vol. IX, no.1 of *Burma Debate*, there is a long and informative interview with him [reproduced in this issue of the *Bulletin*] about his career and his recently published translation of Pagan Wundauk U Tin's *Royal Administration of Burma (Myanma-min Okchok-pon Sa-dan)*, a lengthy 5-volume compilation of all surviving documents rescued by the British from the Burmese court and published in 1931. The literal meaning of the Burmese title is 'treatise on the way Myanma kings ruled'.

To start at the beginning, Euan happened to be born in Nikosia because his father was in the British army and stationed in Alexandria, and his mother went across to Cyprus for the birth. Sadly, his father died when Euan was about 5 years old so his mother was left with three young children to bring up. They were not well off and it seems that Euan did not go to school until he was eight. Later, with the help of a scholarship he was able to attend Wellington School and then Oxford University.

He joined the Indian Civil Service in 1941 and served as an Assistant Collector in its Bombay province till 1948, when he joined I.C.I. (India) Ltd. He continued working in Bombay until 1952, when he was transferred to the company's office in Rangoon, where he worked until 1964. At this point I.C.I. was taken over by the Burmese government and Euan then joined the British Embassy in Rangoon as commercial secretary. He met his wife Sally in Burma - she was working at the American Embassy. "I was involved in the Rangoon Amateur Dramatic Society and was cast in a play- so was Sally. They introduced us and said 'You're engaged'. And it worked out that way." They married in Burma and their son Nicholas was born there in 1960. So Euan spent from 1952 to

1969 in Burma, and from 1964 to 1969 at the British Embassy there. The family returned to England in 1969 and settled in Hampshire. In January 1973 he came, as a part-time student, to take up Burmese studies at SOAS which is when I first met him; it seems that he must have been in Burma during my first 9 month visit there in 1953-4 though I cannot recall meeting him.

In 1976, at age 58, he gained the M.Phil. degree at SOAS, University of London, with a thesis on the introduction of western education into Burma in the 1860s. Entitled *A literature of school books: a study of the Burmese books approved for use in schools by the education department in 1885, and of their place in the developing educational system in British Burma*, "his thesis concentrates on the problems of grafting a Western-style secular education onto an existing indigenous monastic system, and has much information on 19th century printing activities in Burma" (Patricia Herbert, entry no. 639 in *Burma World Bibliographical Series*, vol. 132).

The family moved to live in America after 1976, and from then on Euan began a continuous programme of translating and of writing papers on historical themes for conferences of the Burma Studies Group of the Association for Asian Studies. When questioned in the interview for *Burma Debate* about how he came to start on the translation of Burmese historical material, he said "I came across U Tin's book back in the 70s when I was studying at SOAS in London. My supervisor Anna Allott suggested that I find some subject from U Tin's book. I had a look at it and decided it was too difficult so I wrote on the introduction of Western education to Burma instead. But I was intrigued by the book and I started working on the translation in a desultory manner."

A less determined scholar could well have been deterred from such a major undertaking; I have a letter from him dated July 1991 that reports his progress:

Reached the end of M.M.O.S. at last!
Decided to skip a long section on Burmese language studies where his language gets more complicated than I could cope with and I didn't know what he was talking about anyway. Maybe I'll feel strong enough later but I don't think it's really very interesting. ...now I have to get down to putting a revised U Tin on to the computer.

However, at the same time as he was starting on *The Royal Administration of Burma*, Euan also decided to make a translation of an earlier historical work on Burmese statecraft, a collection of precedents 'precious as jewels', the *Mani-yadana-bon*, compiled in 1781 by the monk Shin Sandalinka, from the submissions and decisions of the Minister Min Yaza, who was advisor to the kings of Ava in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. "This work illustrates statecraft as understood in pre-colonial Burma and is full of reflections on kingship, on the qualities of a king, on the importance of right attitudes and pleasant speech, on the restraints on a king, on the virtues and disposition to be expected from ministers and counselors" (Patricia Herbert, entry no. 646 in *Burma World Bibliographical Series*, vol. 132). This translation was published in 1981 as Cornell University's Data Paper no. 115, and serves as a sort of taster for the later 1931 compilation by Pagan U Tin, *The Royal Administration of Burma*, based on the records that had been collected from the palace after the fall of Mandalay and had eventually been brought to Rangoon.

Euan explains the importance and the utility of the translation of this work in his introduction (see the interview in *Burma Debate*) thus: "U Tin was a highly educated Burmese scholar who had worked for both the King's government and for the British and he knew both well from the inside. The *M.M.O.S. (Royal Administration of Burma)* is an account, therefore, complete with documentation, written by one who knew the virtues and faults of both the indigenous and foreign governments of an Indo-Chinese kingdom that has few if any parallels. He could write of either system, knowing that something different was possible. It is also an intimate picture of the scholarship, with all its faults of pedantry and longeurs, but its virtues too, of a vanished world....I feel that a good deal of the utility of the work may be to people who are not Burmese specialists but have an interest in analyzing systems of government and society in various countries."

1994 was a difficult year for Euan; his wife Sally died early in the year, and while he was away on a visit to England their (wooden) house burnt down and many of his papers were destroyed. After his wife's death in 1994, he used to come over every year from USA to visit a favorite niece in England who happened to live quite near my home in Oxfordshire. Since we had known each other since 1973 when he first came to SOAS, he would come to see me on these visits to England.

The complete translation of the *M.M.O.S.* was finally published in 2001 by Ava House in Bangkok - a massive work 695 pages long. U Tin had been commissioned by the British Government to compile the volume and this had taken him from 1921 to 1931; Euan had completed the first draft of his translation in 1991, it had taken ten years to

see it published, and he had begun to work on it as long ago as 1976. In 1998, before its final publication, Euan had published a paper based upon it, in vol.3 of the *Journal of Burma Studies*, entitled 'Kingship in Pagan Wundauk U Tin's "*Myanma-min Okchok-pon Sa-dan*" in which he analyzes U Tin's attitudes towards kingship. The article considers four perspectives on Burmese kingship that appear in the work: 1) the king as judge; 2) the king as guarantor of regularity; 3) the king as descendant of the Sun (and of Mahasammata, originator of civil society); and 4) the king as Buddha-to-be.

A footnote to the 1998 article mentions that the author is at present finishing a translation of the Kin-wun Mingyi's London Diary, so we learn that Euan had already embarked on yet another major project, namely to translate the diary of U Kaung, the account of the first mission of a Burmese minister to Britain in 1872. This was published in an exceedingly handsome illustrated edition, with a useful introduction and other material by the Orchid Press, Bangkok (434 pages) in late 2005. We learn from the interview with Euan in *Burma Debate* about the Kinwun Mingyi, his efforts to persuade King Mindon to introduce reforms and the part he played in the accession to the throne of King Thibaw. Of three separate appreciative reviews of this translation, I quote here from the one by Patricia Herbert (available on the Britain-Burma Society website).

Bagshawe's latest translation makes accessible the meticulous, detailed diary of illustrious Burmese statesman and scholar U Kaung, the Kinwun Mingyi (1822-1908), head of Burma's first diplomatic mission to Britain in 1872. The mission was undertaken at a turbulent time in

Burma's history when, following the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852-3) the British occupied and annexed Lower Burma. To read the Kinwun Mingyi's diary in Bagshawe's fresh translation is to enter a fascinating nineteenth century world where, for once, roles are reversed, and an astute Burmese envoy puts Western society under the spotlight, recording impressions of British towns and cities, technology and mores while at the same time zealously representing Burma's culture and cause. The major portion of the diary describes a very full six month tour of Britain (from June to September 1872): the mission's audience with Queen Victoria, reception by the Prince of Wales, high society events, and banquets hosted by chambers of commerce in numerous towns. Contemporary newspaper reports, like the Kinwun Mingyi's own narrative, reflect the strong emphasis on commerce and modern technology and an interest in fostering trade with Burma, but they also convey the very favourable impression made by the members of the Burmese mission for their courteousness, intelligence and keen interest in all they were shown.

The *Burma Debate* interview gives us a clue to the next important historical text that Euan had decided to tackle while waiting for the slow wheels of academic publishing to turn. He was a tireless worker and seemed to want always to have a project on the go. In translating Pagan U Tin's work Euan had encountered ideas for reform in Burma that had been put forward in a work, *Rajadhammasangaha-kyan (Compendium of the duties of a monarch)* written in the 1870s by U Hpo Hlaing, a member of King

Mindon's household. U Tin says that this work was written as an admonishment to the young King Thibaw, and it was presented to him just six weeks after he came to the throne. Soon after this U Hpo Hlaing was dismissed from office. This collection of thoughts on "how the monarchical government of Burma should be exercised" clearly did not meet with royal favour, but its independent-minded author was thinking along similar lines to U Kaung, and Euan thought this work should also be made available in English.

By 2004 an English version was ready and this time Euan decided to publish it electronically. The translation together with an introduction and a life of its Burmese editor, U Htin Fatt, can be accessed in David Arnott's Online Burma/Myanmar Library. David Arnott writes "Over a few months in 2004 I worked with Euan on his translation of the *Rajadhamma-sangaha* – a delightful and amusing collaboration in which we managed to overcome numerous computer and software problems." It was also published online in the *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research, Vol. 2, No. 2, Autumn 2004, ISSN 1479-8484*. In his conclusion to the introduction, Euan writes "It seems appropriate that this account of an earlier attempt to provide a satisfactory system of government for Burma should be made available at this time when at last a new constitution is under discussion, and I hope that it may be helpful in the deliberations." One wishes it could be so.

Having thus avoided further publishing delay, when he and I met at the Burma Studies Group Conference in October 2004, Euan was without an on-going project. "What shall I translate, Anna?" he asked me. Thus it was at my suggestion that he started at once on the first draft of a translation of the private diary that U Sein Tin – one of

Burma's best loved authors, better known by his pseudonym Theippan Maung Wa – had kept for the first six months of 1942. The diary, begun after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and covering the invasion of Burma up to June 1942, is a moving account of the dilemmas faced by the author and his family as the Japanese advanced towards Rangoon. At the time of the invasion U Sein Tin was deputy secretary in the Ministry of Home and Defence Affairs. An Oxford-trained member of the Indian Civil Service working for the British administration, living in Rangoon, he had to decide what to do and where to go with his wife and three very young children.

The diary that the author managed to keep up through bombing raids, flight by car north to Mandalay and then to a remote forest rest house ends abruptly on June 5th, his forty-second birthday; U Sein Tin was murdered on June 6th by a gang of Burmese dacoits. The diary pages, scattered on the floor of the rest house, were rescued by his wife and eventually published in Burma in 1966.

As this translation was to be a joint effort, I needed to make sure that the draft English version was as accurate as possible. So during 2005, 2006 and into 2007 pages of corrections and suggestions flew by snail mail across the Atlantic. In October 2005 and again in September 2006, Euan managed to make his regular visits to England and we spent enjoyable days sorting out final details of the text. He paid his former Sayama the compliment of writing in my Visitors' Book – "a most instructive visit – I was beginning to think I knew something about Burmese." He was a real English gentleman, always courteous and charming and humble in presenting his scholarly work to the academic establishment.

Wartime in Burma: a diary, January to June 1942 (Sit-atwin Nei-zin Hmat-tan) was eventually published in August 2009, by Ohio University/Swallow Press, sadly not in time for Euan to see in print his last contribution to our better understanding of Burma and its history. His dedication as a translator is surely unmatched to date by anyone else in the field of Burma Studies.

List of published works, articles and reviews of L.E. Bagshawe.

Monographs

1976 – *A literature of school books: A study of the Burmese books approved for use in schools by the Education Department in 1885, and of their place in the developing educational system in British Burma.* M.Phil thesis, University of London.

1981 – *The Maniyadana-bon of Shin Sandalinka* (with introduction and translation from the Burmese – 132 pages), Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Data paper, no.115.

2001 – *The Royal Administration of Burma* by Pagan Wundauk U Tin (with introduction and translation from the Burmese – 695 pages) Ava House, Bangkok.

2004 – *Rajadhamma-sangaha-kyan* by U Hpo Hlaing (with introduction and translation from the Burmese) published in the Online Burma Library.

2006 – *The Kinwun Mingyi's London Diary: The First Mission of a Burmese Minister to Britain, 1872* (with introduction and translation from the Burmese – 434 pages).

2009 – *Wartime in Burma: a diary. January to June 1942* (with introduction and translation from the Burmese-260 pages),

jointly with Anna Allott, Ohio University/Swallow Press.

Articles

1998 – ‘Kingship in Pagan Wundauk U Tin’s *Myanma-min Ok-chok-pon sa-dan*’ in *The Journal of Burma Studies*, Vol. 3, pp. 77-91.

2002 – ‘In his own words: Interview with L.E. Bagshawe’ in *Burma Debate*, Vol. IX, no.1 Spring, pp.12-18; also ‘A Historical Look: The Royal Administration of Burma by U Tin’ pp. 4-11.

Also other articles, some only in manuscript.

Reviews of *The Kinwun Mingyi's London Diary*

i) by Michael W. Charney in *Journal of the Siam Society*, 2007 vol. 95

ii) by Michael Smithies in *The Nation*, Sunday 03 June 2007

iii) by Patricia Herbert on the Britain-Burma Society website, <http://Shwepla.net/>.

Anna Allott

An Interview with L.E. Bagshawe

Reprinted with permission from *Burma Debate* 12 Spring 2002.

Having spent over 20 years in Burma, L.E. (Euan) Bagshawe has contributed greatly to the field of Burmese history, first through his earlier translation of The Maniyadandbon of Shin Sandalinka, which chronicles the early part of the first Ava Dynasty, and now with his most recent effort, U Tin's The

Royal Administration of Burma. *Here he talks about his life and his latest work.*

BURMA DEBATE • *Your connection to Asia—particularly India and Burma—goes back several generations. Can you tell us about your ties to that part of the world?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • My paternal grandfather ran a tea estate in Cachar, in Assam, near the Lushai Hills and the Burma border—my Uncle George was an army engineer, mostly in Burma, and another uncle died of malaria contracted working on the Gokteik bridge. My mother's family [was] West Indian—originally settlers in Barbados, who later moved to Guiana. We had quite a connection in India. As I said, my grandfather planted tea in Assam. He was married in 1865 and took his wife out to the tea estate and that, of course was in the days before the Suez Canal and you took a sailing ship round Africa. It took them four months from London to Calcutta on the ship—no land at all for four months, no interaction with the outside world. Even when they got to Calcutta, it was another three weeks journey to the estate. The river was too low to get their boats up and they finished on an elephant and a horse. My grandmother's family was very heavily involved with India—she had four brothers there. Her grandfather, at the age of eighteen, went out to join the Company's army and a few months later got involved in a badly mismanaged campaign against Haider Ali. He was wounded and spent two days lying out on the battlefield before Haider's French allies picked him up. He then spent four years as a prisoner in Bangalore.

BD • *Didn't you also serve in India?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Yes, for 12 years,

before I went to Burma. I was in the Indian civil service as Assistant Collector, First Division, Dharwar, which was then in the old Bombay Province; now it's in Karnataka. Then I got stuck with the horrible job of being Assistant Secretary to the Governor. Very dull.

BD • *You later spent several years in Burma. What were you doing there?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • I went to Burma in 1952 to work at ICI [Imperial Chemical Industries]. When that was nationalized under Ne Win and taken over by the (BEDC), Burma Economic Development Corporation, I found myself working under Captain Barber of the Navy, a very nice man. Then Aung Gyi fell from Ne Win's favor in 1964 and Tin Pe took over such matters. Everything became the People's Stores Corporation and we were out. After that I served as the commercial secretary in the British Embassy until 1969. An appointment in Burma had one big advantage—it was difficult to move you away if you didn't want to be moved. An application for an entry visa for a replacement could so easily go astray. Plus, I was very comfortable there. I met my wife Sallie in Rangoon in 1958. She was working at the American Embassy at that time. I was involved in the Rangoon Amateur Dramatic Society and was cast in a play—so was Sallie. They introduced us and said "You're engaged". And it worked out that way.

BD • *When did you begin working on translations?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • I started translating years ago... 1976 maybe.

BD • *You recently translated The Royal Administration of Burma by Pagan Wundauk U Tin from the original Burmese*

to English. Could you tell us about the book?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • I came across the book back in the 1970s when I was studying at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. My supervisor was Anna Allott and we were deciding what I was going to write my thesis on. She suggested that I find some subject from U Tin's book. I had a look at it and decided that it was too difficult, so I wrote on the introduction of Western education to Burma instead. But I was intrigued by the book, and I started working on the translation in a desultory manner. Pagan Wundauk U Tin started life as a civil servant sometime around the mid 1870s under the patronage of the Kinwun Min-gyi during the reign of King Min-don. After the British took over in 1885 and sent King Thi-baw (Mindon's son) away, the Min-gyi acted as a sort of officiating Prime Minister while the British made up their minds about what on earth they were going to do with the place. U Tin worked with the Min-gyi during this period. Finally, when the British decided to annex Burma, U Tin joined the British civil service. So he knew both administrations, the British and that of the Burmese kings.

U Tin retired in 1929 or thereabouts and was commissioned by the government to put together a collection of documents about the Burmese administration that would serve as a plan of action to guide the British administration. Bit late in the day, but still. He got down and wrote it out in five volumes producing *The Royal Administration of Burma*. There really isn't any parallel to such a detailed work on the administration of a Southeast Asian kingdom written by somebody who knew it from the inside and who also knew alternatives.

BD • What was U Tin's purpose in writing the book?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • He was interested in the surviving records of the court because one of his first jobs under the British administration had been to gather all the surviving documents of the palace. The court had been destroyed and the King had been deported. Some of the documents had been looted, some of them burned. U Tin collected all that he could find and took them down to Rangoon where they were stored. After he retired he was given the task of making a coherent book of it. He had volumes of information, but he was a great scholar and he couldn't bear to leave anything out. The book was meant to be a collection of documents that could be used as precedents by British magistrates, under the British Burma government.

BD • So these are the actual laws and regulations—it is not an interpretation. U Tin just recorded how they ruled?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Right. It sets out both the scriptural and traditional basis of the royal government and the actual procedure for how submissions went from the *Hludaw*, the traditional court of four senior ministers who advised the King and executed his orders, to the palace and came back with the King's orders to be put into proper form and final approval at the palace and promulgated.

BD • You mentioned that U Tin worked under the Kinwun Min-gyi. What is revealed in U Tin's book about Kinwun Min-gyi's role during this critical period of Burma's history?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • We think of the Kinwun Min-gyi as King Min-don's chief minister, which he was later, but earlier he

had been a junior minister, a Wundauk, in charge of border posts down the river, along the frontier of the annexed territory and the kingdom. So he presumably had some contact with British officials down there. Then in 1872 King Min-don promoted him to the rank of Wungyi, a full member of the *Hlutdaw*, and sent him to England to convey a letter and gifts to Queen Victoria. The gifts were a massive gold and ruby girdle and bracelets. I don't know what became of them maybe Prince Edward's creditors got them. According to the records of the time—newspapers and so on—they were valued at around eighty thousand pounds, which was real money in those days—a few million now. He also brought a gold and ruby *salwe* for Prince Edward. I think that must have gone straight to the creditors. Anyway, the mission was in trouble at the time because the British Governor General and his staff ruling in Calcutta could never reconcile themselves to the fact that the Burmese kingdom owed them no duty whatsoever. It had never been a tributary to the Mogul Emperor in Delhi, like the Indian princely states. And Calcutta hated the idea of any contact between the Burmese kingdom and London. They were totally in the wrong all the time, but the India Office in London never had the courage to overrule them. Consequently, when the Kinwun Min-gyi's mission reached Rangoon, the Chief Commissioner, Ashley Eden, made every possible difficulty that he could think up. The Burmese had bought a special ship for the mission to travel on, but Eden refused to let it leave. Eventually they had to slip quietly on board a Henderson Line ship, the "Tenasserim" and sail on that.

BD • *How common was it for people of the rank of the Kinwun Min-gyi to make a trip of this kind and later to write a book about it?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • This was the first

diplomatically accredited mission and the first published journal. I don't know whether the mission was Min-don's own idea, or who might have given it to him. It could have been originally from the Kanaung Prince, Min-don's brother and murdered heir, or from U Hpo Hlaing, his protégé, or even perhaps from Edmond Jones, the King's English agent in Rangoon. The essential thing was to set up relationships with the outside world, bypassing Calcutta, with which the kingdom's treaties were established. This was the necessary first step in getting Burma recognized as a proper modern state. It would also help in getting ideas for reforming the administration along modern lines, with modern ministries, instead of making the four ministers of the *Hlutdaw* jointly responsible for everything.

BD • *What years are we talking about in here?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Shortly before the British took over, around 1873. This is the account of the mission and the changes that took place.

BD • *You said Kinwun Min-gyi was influenced by the West. Was that a result of what he saw while in England?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • It's written in the mission diary, where he gives accounts of visiting the [British] Parliament in session and so on. He was definitely very interested both in Western administration—including the part played by journalists in opening up government—and in Western industry. He was in England and France for over a year. He was reckoning that the whole system should somehow be transplanted to Burma.

BD • *There is another book written by U Hpo Hlaing that also discusses ideas on*

government reform. Can you tell us about that?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • U Hpo Hlaing's *Rajadhammasangaha* written in the 1870s gives some of these ideas The table of contents shows its scope—"seven rules for increasing the prosperity of the country"—"the power of a monarch as against the power of a community—the benefit of ruling by consensus...". U Hpo Hlaing became a prominent but refractory member of Min-don's entourage during his youth, long before Min-don became king. He was a son of the Yindaw Wungyi whom King Tharrawaddy killed in a fit of bad temper. After that, Min-don protected U Hpo Hlaing. U Hpo Hlaing must have been considering his book for some time and finished it in a hurry for presentation to Thi-baw only six weeks after Thi-baw ascended the throne. It is only indirectly concerned with Western forms of government. Rather, it focuses on setting out the principles of government as laid down in the Pali scriptures and showing how the Burmese administration had departed from them while the West prospered from being much closer—the main difference lying between the rule of a single sovereign and the joint responsibility of a group. U Hpo Hlaing was thinking of a sort of constitutional monarchy, but I don't find much thought about the selection or election of ministers. Of course, the form of government that was working in England at that time was not all that democratic by modern standards.

BD • *Are the ideas presented by U Hpo Hlaing and the Kinwun Min-gyi concerning systems of governing similar?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • I think there may have been a rivalry between two points of view—Hpo Hlaing's was based on the Pali scriptures and the Kinwun Min-gyi's was

based on his experience in the West. U Tin's 1930 book reproduces much of U Hpo Hlaing's *Rajadhammasangaha*, but in shorter form.

BD • *Did U Hpo Hlaing travel with the Kinwun Min-gyi?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • No—he wasn't on the mission; he was in prison, for daring to say that beer might be useful if not used to excess!

BD • *Did King Min-don or King Thi-baw try to institute these democratic reforms presented by Kinwun Min-gyi and U Hpo Hlaing prior to the British annexing Burma?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Min-don introduced many reforms during his reign—money salaries instead of appanages, a currency and a formal system of taxation—but I doubt if he ever had the slightest idea of giving up any of his personal power. He probably couldn't even imagine a king with less than absolute power.

BD • *Was Min-don aware that the Kinwun Min-gyi was promoting these reforms?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • I imagine that great care was taken not to let Min-don know about what was being prepared for his successor—but it would not have been easy to escape his spy network. The ministers must have started working on their ideas for reform before King Min-don died, but they had to wait for him to die before they could try to put them into effect. It was after his death and the accession of King Thibaw, who was essentially the choice of the Kinwun Min-gyi, that the ministers of the *Hlutdaw* tried to assume the administration. I doubt if, at first, the new king had any idea that they were trying to limit his powers. The Mingyi picked Thi-baw out as a very

young, weak and useless king, over whom he thought he would be able to pull anything and get his reforms into practice. But it didn't work. Whether that was because they tried too much at once, or whether it was because they didn't have the infrastructure necessary—I don't know.

BD • *Who was the driving force behind the reforms?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • The Kinwun Mingyi. U Hpo Hlaing was dismissed from office very soon after presenting his book to the King [Thi-baw]. Whether that was Thi-baw's own idea or, if not, whose it was, I don't know.

BD • *What is interesting is that they even tried these reforms. Would you say that it was the civil service trying to drive through the reforms, assisted by the monarchy?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • It wasn't really the civil service. The civil service and its obstruction would have been half the trouble. Basically it was just some ministers trying to push it through. The Kinwun Mingyi was the most prominent minister—the most influential of the four ministers of the *Hlutdaw*—but his position depended almost entirely on the King's grace. I don't know how far these reforms were brought by the court and the bureaucracy, but there was a sort of basic democracy in Burma's tradition. For instance both military and civil appointments had to be accepted by the group over which they would be in charge before they could be confirmed, but this of course was mostly a matter of personalities, not policies.

BD • *And how long-lived were these ministries?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Well, they started

setting them up within six weeks of Mindon's death—notably on “orders from the *Hlutdaw*,” not “orders from the King” so they must have gotten the whole scheme ready.

BD • *Why was Kinwun Min-gyi so progressive?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE .. Perhaps because of his contacts with the British. On his mission, he saw what was happening in the Industrial Revolution in Britain, and he decided that that's the way that Burma would have to go.

BD • *Did he think that it would save the monarchy in the long run?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • He hoped it would, I suppose, as a constitutional monarchy. And it didn't work—unlike in Siam.

BD • *In The Royal Administration of Burma, does U Tin give any analysis of these reforms?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • No, he just gives his account of the new ministries that were set up, but it is noticeable early in [his book's] account of the general principles of government that he is very close to Hpo Hlaing's book.

BD • *What influence did the British have?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • At this time, very little. After Thi-baw got rid of all the Princes, the British residency pulled out and they didn't have any representation at court at all.

BD • *Was Thi-baw in favor of these reforms?*

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Queen Supayalat [Thi-baw's wife] certainly wasn't and she

counted!

BD • *Many people outside Burma believe that the Burmese have no history of democratic ideals and that there is no reason to feel that democracy would take hold in Burma. Yet there have been these writings.*

EVAN BAGSHAWE • It is very interesting, the kinds of precedents on which decisions were made. The first translation that I did was *Shin Sandalinka*. It was an account that was written in 1770 by a monk named Shin Sandalinka about Min Yaza, who was chief minister to three successive kings of Ava in the 13th and 14th centuries. It's an account of various crises that arose and the advice that he gave, based on scriptures and precedents, which might be legends and stories from the past.

BD • *Are you implying that Burmese laws evolved and are based on precedents?*

EVAN BAGSHAWE • At that time, yes. Then, of course, the Maw Shans came in and things rather collapsed for a while, until the Pegu kingdom, which was partly Mon, moved north. If the kingdom had stayed down there, it would have been different, but in 1635 King Thalun decided to take his capital back to Ava, remote from the world. Why he did it I don't know. I suspect it might have been a great mistake. He was a bit of a control freak. It is a lot easier to keep control of an agricultural population depending on a system of irrigated land rather than a rain-fed country in the south. Things might have been very different if the capital had remained in Hanthawaddy.

BD • *How so?*

EVAN BAGSHAWE • Ava was not a trading city that had many contacts with the

outside world. A government in Hanthawaddy or Syriam, on the other hand, would have learned the sophistication to deal with the outside world, which the Siamese kingdom learned and Ava never did. And by the time Min-don started trying to, it was too late, they were too set in their ways.

BD • *Are U Tin's writings considered a useful document by the Burmese?*

EVAN BAGSHAWE • Oh yes, *The Royal Administration of Burma* has been reprinted by the government press over and over. It's a basic historical source.

BD • *There are some interesting topics in this book, such as women in the government of towns and villages. Women don't play a prominent role under the current regime—what about during this period?*

EVAN BAGSHAWE • U Tin was specifically instructed by the British Burma government to write on the position of women. That was one of the points he was supposed to bring out.

BD • *Were parts of Burma ruled by women at one time?*

EVAN BAGSHAWE • Yes. The most notable women rulers were Shin Sawnit and Shin Sawbu in the sixteenth century. They were the daughters of a Talaing king, Binnyaparan, and in the mid-1600s Shin Sawbu was given as a wife/ hostage to King Thihathu in Ava, where she was kept for some time after the death of her husband. Meanwhile Binnyaparan died and was succeeded by Mawdaw, who was married to Sawnit. He died quite soon and Sawnit took over. A year later again Shin Sawbu got away from Ava and deciding to reclaim her rights as elder sister, got an army together

and advanced on Pegu. Sawnit's advisers suggested that she had better give way and she left the city as her formidable sister entered it. Sawbu then proceeded to reign for seventeen years, during which she gave the Shwe Dagon most of its present shape. There were other legendary queens too, almost all, I think in the south.

BD • *There is also a section entitled, "Kings whose rules brought about their own and their country's destruction." Do you see any parallels to Burma's modern administrations?*

EVAN BAGSHAWE • The chief thing is how closely the present arrangement is to the administration under the kings. Among the orders of King Bodaw-hpaya, for instance, there are two striking parallels: Bodaw-hpaya says the army is the basic structure of the country, on which everything depends. Another interesting point is that he reports that Taw Sein Hko, the Director of Archaeology in Burma, who was Chinese and a highly respected scholar in his time, maintained, somewhere or other, that the king and his *asugyi*, who were the hereditary military families, looked to him just like an army of occupation in a conquered country. The kings, particularly Min-don-min, also depended very strongly on their intelligence services, which is another parallel with today.

The Many Vidhura(s) in Myanmar's Past

Lilian Handlin, after a distinguished career in American history, has taken up the study of Pagan, where she has now had several stays. She was kind enough to respond to my request for an account of her work there with the following essay on the subject of how one Jataka tale, that of Widura, has been rendered at various points in Burmese

history. It is a privilege to be granted early reflections on her work, which promises to be truly innovative and illuminating. —The Editor

A recent issue of *Critical Inquiry* examined the state of the humanities and the social sciences in a postmodern world and noted how innovative knowledge-making scenarios have dissolved traditional disciplinary taxonomies. One of the issue's authors urged post-disciplinary liaisons, liberating the humanities from constraining conceptualizations, in order to generate deeper engagements with humanistic concerns.¹ Such theoretical and methodological suggestions can illuminate Myanmar's past. The following effort to trace one thread running through its centuries offers an instance of the possibilities such inquiries provide. That thread is the reception of the story of the Buddha's life as Vidhura, a story whose earliest extant manifestations in Myanmar date to the 11th century.

The Vidhura Jataka opens with four superior beings disputing the meanings of *silā*,² a dispute that Vidhura, a king's minister, adjudicates. A Naga king's wife longs for his heart. The heart was a metaphor for the

¹ Mario Biagioli, "Postdisciplinary liaisons: social studies and the humanities," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Summer 2009), 816 – 833.

² *Silā* in Burmese by the 18th century was often accompanied by the term *thadhin* (*dhadin* in the Myanmar-English Dictionary, (Rangoon 1993) 496), as in "thadin silā," often also used in *upthadin* and *uposatha thadin*. The term also appears in later Myanmar temples, but apparently not in Pagan times, to refer to a precept observer. For the heart as the thinking organ, see also Tun Aung Chain, trans., and ed., *A Chronicle of the Mons* (Unpublished, 2009), 29, where the daughter of a wealthy merchant reacts to a king's unjust action by thinking with her heart.

Dhamma (*taya* in Burmese), in a culture that regarded the heart as the body's thinking organ. The queen's daughter offers herself to whoever brings it, whereupon a Yakksha volunteers. The Yakksha then goes to the court of Vidhura's king, and wins him in a dice game. But Vidhura persuades the Yakksha to abandon his murderous quest, brings the *taya* to the Nagas and, after returning to the human world, gains his just rewards.

The following experimental essay attempts to answer such questions as how and why the Myanmar told the story as they did, what strategies influenced their choices, where their supplementary materials came from, what their auditors brought to the setting when the story was told, and what aspects of the Pali narrative facilitated reading into the Vidhura tale elements its auditors found resonant.³ Evidence providing at best a faint outline for answers to such questions comes from various sources: early and later visual versions of the Jataka, an 18th century Burmese prose translation,⁴ the first extant

³ For a brilliant example of such an analysis that asked similar questions in a different context, see Jonathan A. Silk, *Riven by Lust* (Honolulu, 2009). For a model study of the interactions between images and their multiple worlds see Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle and London, 2005).

⁴ U Obatha, *Vidhura ZaqDawGyi* (Rangoon 1955). This and my other materials originated in profoundly differing historical circumstances, and a thorough reading of their Vidhuras would link their interpretation to their settings, which is more than can be done at this stage of our familiarity with Burma's social history. A *pyo* written in the shadow of British imperialism, a Vidhura compiled on the cusp of the encounter with Europeans, and a veiled regime critique written by a 20th century poet harbored traces of their time, as did a 2005 celebration of Vidhura,

Burmese historical chronicle, a Mon version of the story,⁵ a Burmese *pyo*,⁶ and other Burmese sources.

This preliminary study also shows how visual materials can overcome what has been decried as a bias in favor of written evidence.⁷ The earliest Mon and Burmese versions are extant only as images. Ideally, we would compare these images with their written sources. But from the 12th century, we have none. Nonetheless, differences among these visual renderings of the tale indicate profound divergences for which written evidence no longer survives.

By the late 11th century, inscribed images were popular in one Myanmar setting where literacies different from ours shaped encounters with revered materials. In Myanmar until recently, the written word almost always took second place to its spoken counterpart. An oral universe frames reception skills differently than do settings privileging literate knowledge. Reading

the subject of a government-sponsored cultural festival.

⁵ Nai Pan Hla, *Widhura Jataka (Mon Version)* (Rangoon 1959); see also Nai Pan Hla, "Five hundred and fifty Jataka tales in Mon," *Union Culture Pamphlet* vol. 4 (July 1963), in Burmese. This version proved substantially different from its Myanmar counterparts, so as to merit a separate treatment. I retain the reference in case anyone is interested in its existence.

⁶ The published Twinthin Mingyi, *Vidhura Pyo*, (Rangoon, n.d.) is dated to 1841 and was finished in Mingun. For a splendid example of what can be learned from a *pyo*, see John Okell, "'Translations' and 'embellishments' in an early Burmese Jataka poem," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1966), 123ff.

⁷ Daniel Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest and the Formation of the Mahayana* (Honolulu 2008) 20ff.

knowledge processings, a move away from orality, would in the future recast such skills into potentially subversive analytical instruments. In Myanmar this process took centuries to mature, shifting the meanings of revered texts and their utility in everyday lives.

The anthropologist Alfred Gell defined “art” as a technology to secure the acquiescence of individuals in the network of intentionalities in which they are enmeshed.⁸ He reminded us that seeing is not context-neutral but rather a skill informed by fields of expectations and understandings, enabling people to see what their cultures make visible.⁹ Intentionalities express sponsors’ strategies to entrap viewers on behalf of societal goals. Vidhura images from across the centuries enable us to explore what this meant.

The earliest visual evidence for my exercise comes from Pagan temple images that served as non-discursive communicative modes whose use was intended to address a society’s most profound concerns. These images were visual signifiers designed to impact viewers by intervening in their world and providing contemporary definitions of agency. In the 11th century, elite activities mobilized the Buddha’s earlier lives in the context of their Dhamma gloss, to stimulate

⁸ Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Thomas, eds., Beyond Aesthetics: Art and Technologies of Enchantment (Oxford 2001). See also, A. N. Doane and Carol Braun Pasternack, Vox Intexta: Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages (University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), and Philip Cohen, ed., Texts and Textuality: Textual Instability, Theory and Interpretation (New York 1997).

⁹ Sally Price, Primitive Art in Civilized Places (Chicago, 1989); Michael Baxandall, Painting and Experience in 15th century Italy (Oxford 1972), Alfred Gell, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory (Oxford 1998).

cognitive responses. My assumption that this was the images’ task is substantiated by the care with which temple programs linked these lives to other aspects of the Buddha Vacana (the Word of the Buddha) and its vast commentarial corpus, to authorize their veracity, and empower their agency. Such linkages informed the significance of images and three-dimensional objects, enabling revered materials to constitute new social contexts, in this instance, by redefining the Buddha’s pasts for current needs.¹⁰

¹⁰ For the general use of Jatakas, see Peter Skilling, “Jataka and Pannasa-jataka in South-East Asia,” Journal of the Pali Text Society, 28 (2006), 113 - 168; Peter Skilling et al, eds., Past Lives of the Buddha (Bangkok, 2007). Articles dealing with Vidhura include Ratan Parimoo, “Vidhura Pandita Jataka,” in Gouriswar Bhattacharya, ed., Aksayavini (Delhi, 1991), 177-189; Maurice Bloomfield, “The dohada or craving of pregnant women, a motif of Hindu fiction,” Journal of the American Oriental Society, 40 (1920), 1-24; C.W. Dunn, “Dice in the Vidhura Jataka,” Journal of the Burma Research Society, 33(1950) 8 – 26. For a non-Pali version of the story, see Mark J., Dresden, “The Jatakastava or Praise of the Buddha’s Former Births – Indo Scythian, Khotanese Text,” Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 45 (1955), 397 – 508. For another scholarly use of some of the materials this paper also engages, though reaching different conclusions, see Tun Aung Chain, “Narrative in the Mahanipata plaques of the Ananda,” Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Myanmar Historical Commission (2005), 1-21. G. H. Luce, “The 550 Jatakas in old Burma,” Artibus Asiae XIX (1986), 291 – 307. On the significance and misconceptions that have marred this and other subjects of Pagan history, see Michael A. Aung Thwin, The Mists of Ramanna, The Legend that was Lower Burma (Honolulu, 2005). On the power of visual prompts, see Tun Aung Chain, A Mons Chronicle, 30ff., which narrates the story of Buddha images that a king mistreats, the marvels they perform, and the clinching argument, that “images which are

Gell¹¹ reminds us of the truism that visualized narratives were created as catalysts. But whereas the art he deconstructed may harbor a deliberate cognitive indecipherability,¹² Burmese images were different. They were user-friendly, so as to assure the accomplishment of their tasks. This is evident in an early Sutasoma image when compared for example with Ajanta Sutasoma's immense complexity, or with the worlds the Lotus Sutra's imaginers created to subvert the text supposedly being illustrated. Pagan's visual Sutasoma interpretation mimicked a pre-Ajanta gloss, to make the story's message accessible. Pagan's and later décor settings presented the "unimaginable virtuosity"¹³ not of the images' creators but of their subject, the bodhisatta. This was done to allow blind beings, a common Buddhist metaphor, to take advantage of his teachings. This consistent objective prevailed even though cultures of perception changed over time, often but not always retaining ancient iconic forms. Some later Vidhura images would have been recognizable across millennia, but each setting read them in specific ways, and Pagan was no exception.

Christopher Pinney has identified four types of visual culture,¹⁴ of which one is applicable to Pagan and later Myanmar settings. This is the visual as a translatable language that makes images readable, which in the Pagan context insured that pictorial interpretations remained inextricably wedded to their textual source. To facilitate

representations (of the Buddha) lead beings to the good."

¹¹ Christopher Tilley, et al. eds., Handbook of Material Culture (London 2006), 75.

¹² Alfred Gell, Art and Agency (Oxford, 1998), 95.

¹³ *Ibid*, 68.

¹⁴ Tilley, et al, eds., 31ff.

such readability, 12th century images and most of their successors also had captions – which, as Walter Benjamin famously argued,¹⁵ were the images' most important part. This influential reminder of the problematics of images' readability also concerned Pagan's kings' advisors in their quest to endow the message pictures with the transformative powers, harbored by the Buddha's Word, that pictures visualized.

This quest reflected the Dhamma's concern with householders' duties, a complex trope that received localized expression all over the world where interpretations of the Buddha's Word obtained. Householder's obligations are protean constructs reflecting contemporary socialization practices. The localized Myanmar Dhamma – the *taya*, the moral law, in its infinite multiplicity of meanings – encouraged people to live their lives in light of its instructions. The *Gihivinaya*, as rules for householders were called, was in its Pagan version an important component of what the *taya* offered in this regard.¹⁶ An early Sinhalese text, *Daham Sarana*, explicated refuge by recourse to the Buddha's earlier lives,¹⁷ and several of Vidhura's most resonant *taya* speeches detailed householders' obligations. A later prose *Vidhura* and a *pyo* urged lives informed by *metta* and *khanty*, patience,

¹⁵ Tilley, et al. eds., 133. See also Christopher Tilley, Material Culture and Text: The Art of Ambiguity (London 1991).

¹⁶ For the broader significance of householders' obligations, see Richard H. Robinson, "The ethic of the householder bodhisattva," Bharati 9 (1965), 25 – 55.

¹⁷ John Ross Carter, "Dhamma as a religious concept, a brief investigation of its history in the western academic tradition and its centrality within the Sinhalese Theravada tradition," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 44 (December, 1976), 671

deemed superior to *dana*,¹⁸ behaviors defining the *lu kaun*, the “good people,”¹⁹ a concept present in Pagan early on.

In later centuries the Myanmar called such directives *mei'swei sangaha*, dealings among friends, or in 18th century terms,²⁰ *sangaha taya lei ba*. The four social dealings, encapsulated as “do unto others as you would unto yourself,” adjusted conduct, the five precepts and the uposatha vow in line with the *taya saga*,²¹ the dhamma as spoken and to be acted upon. Vidhura had useful things to say, or “instruct,” as an early inscription had it,²² about *eindaungkhan* – the state of married life and proper sociability – insuring his popularity for

¹⁸R.F. St Andrew St John, “Vidhura Jataka,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (July 1896) 471ff; U Obatha, Vidhura ZaqDawGyi (Rangoon 1955) 136ff.. The JRAS translation used U Obatha as its source, but the translator took numerous liberties with the text. The privileging of *metta* over *dana* also occurs in Twinthin Mingyi's *pyo*, 192 ff., justified by the interpreters of the Pali sources' resolution of the problem of how to lead proper lives in the netherworld, where the sangha is absent: see E.B. Cowell, et al. transl., The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births, 6 vols. (Wiltshire, Great Britain, 1990) VI, 151. For an informative and greatly suggestive reading of these loaded terms' historicity, likewise contending with several of the central concepts mentioned in this article, see Dietrich Christian Lammerts, “Buddhism and written law: Dhammasattha manuscripts and texts in premodern Burma” (Cornell PhD dissertation, 2010).

¹⁹Aye Kyaw, Ngaya Ngahsee Thi Hma Pwe, (Rangoon 1988) (What you should know about the 550 Jatakas, in Burmese), 183ff.

²⁰ U Obatha 70; Twinthin Mingyi, Vidhura Pyo, 108.

²¹ U Obatha, 159

²² Ba Shin, Lokahteikpan, (Rangoon 1962) 64. U Kala's Mahayazawingyi also sustained the hierarchical, top down, sense of the term.

centuries. This attention to the *lu kaun* was the 18th century variant²³ of Pagan's *sadhujan*, the good people who already then were encouraged to “*taya na*” – listen to the *taya*.²⁴ In the 18th century the result ideally would be lives governed by the *saddhunara taya le ba*, another name for a concept whose multiple meanings were related to daily lives.²⁵ Such listenings recalling the Buddha's earlier lives made them relevant to explicating what being good people meant. The 12th century, much like the 18th, grounded householders' conduct in the *Sigalovada* sutta. In Pagan this informed a king's use of the five precepts to turn his subjects into *upasakas* and *upasikas*, an almost permanent ambition in Burma's subsequent history,²⁶ often in association with the Jatakas.²⁷ The *eindaungkhan*, the

²³ U Obatha, 141ff; St. John, 474.

²⁴ The injunction to “listen” is ubiquitous in King Kyanzittha's inscriptions. A 13th century Vidhura interpretation in temple 1460, inscription 5, used the term to describe what the Naga queen did when Vidhura spoke. In the Ananda and the Mingalazedi, that is what Punnaka, the Naga royal couple, and Dhanannjaya also do.

²⁵ It appears as such in U Obatha. See also Ma Hnin Yu Maw Shwe, The Research of the Ten Mahanipata Jatakas from Pagan Mingalazedi, (Myanmar Literature, MA 1994). In Burmese.

²⁶ See for example, U Tin, The Royal Administration of Burma, trans. Euan Bagshawe, (Bangkok 2001), 106. For numerous references to such ambitions see U Than Tun, ed., Royal Orders of Burma, 10 vols, especially later royal directives. For a current interpretation of such attempts in the context of the 19th century, see Michael Charney, Powerful Learning: Buddhist Literati and the Throne in Burma's Last Dynasty (Ann Arbor, 2006).

²⁷ The preferred metaphor was the appropriately inserted linchpins in a moving cart, to underscore the mutuality of duties and obligations, making one's definition of the self only possible within relational webs. The Pali source for this metaphor was the Digha Nikaya,

chapter on married life, linked these precepts to duties and obligations, of parents and children, husbands and wives, servants and masters, rulers and subjects. In a Mon language version, for example, wives were released from making merit if they treated their husbands as household devas.²⁸

The overarching metaphor for such socializing concerns was the interaction between the sangha and the laity. But though precepts were primarily definitions of self-subjection, that is, consciousness of one's identity and its obligations - and thus were concerned with personal behavior - they were rarely in the Myanmar context divorced from their dogmatic origins and a sense of relationality and hierarchy.²⁹ This meant that they never became, in Myanmar social thought, empowerments of individuation and personal freedom, but rather promoted a quiescent acceptance of life's burdens as givens to be endured rather than challenged. The inability to create a profound and competing explanation for life's travails independent of its Buddhist context had problematic implications for the country's future. Myanmar devotion to

iii, 180 -193, echoing the Anguttara Nikaya 4.32, also incorporated in the Sigalovada sutta, (DPPN, II, 1133 - 1134, Sigalovada), and present in the Vidhura Jataka's opening segment regarding the meaning of sila.

²⁸ Tun Aung Chain, A Chronicle of the Mons, 89,108. The text is dated to the end of the 18th century.

²⁹ A vivid example of this sensibility is a giant mural in the Sulamani temple in Pagan, painted at the end of the 18th century, representing a world graced by a Buddha's presence. The inscriptions that detailed the "accomplishments" of the various components of this hierarchically organized world underscored the image's central message: the mutual interdependence of its multiple components, an organic vision that at the same time was static and rigid.

Jatakas like Vidhura was more part of a problem than a solution.

Life as explicated by recourse to taya terms³⁰ interpreted human nature in light of genetic technologies facilitating the taya's work. Definitions of what informed good people's actions incorporated two Pali concepts with a long shelf life in Myanmar social history. These were *hiri* and *ottapa*, shame and fear.³¹ They reveal a sliver of the mechanisms utilized to inculcate approved behavior. These ancient concepts, already present in the Anguttara Nikaya's Ariya sutta, a text available in Pagan as the Mon-inscribed Alawpyie temple³² attests, were

³⁰ U Hpo Hlaing, Rajadhammasangaha, (ed., and translated by Euan Bagshawe 2004), 109ff.

³¹ The two Pali terms are part of the Burmese language. On their significance, see Maria Heim "Shame and apprehension: Notes on the moral value of Hiri and Ottapa," in Carol Anderson, et al., eds., Embedded Religions: Essays in Honor of W.S. Karunatilake (Colombo, forthcoming). For their current resonance, see The Myanmar Times, October 30, 2006, reprinting the address by General Thein Sein, in which hiri and ottapa are regarded as precursors to the Western concern with human rights, antedating the latter, and "flourishing among the Myanmar people" well before the West discovered human rights. See also New Light of Myanmar, October 19, 2005, in which hiri and ottapa are also linked to "sadhunara teaching" defined as a "way to progress," and the Jataka is cited as an argument against gambling. See also Khin Maung Nyunt, "Honouring 13th performing arts competition's dramatic performance of Vidhura Jataka" in The Golden Land Article, October 15, 2005. Also Myanmar Alin, October 18, 2005, where understanding Vidhura is a way of withstanding the influx of bad ideas via the internet.

³² For Alawpyie Mon inscriptions see G. H. Luce, "Pali and old Mon ink glosses in Pagan temples," Journal of the Burma Research Society, LVIII, part II (December 1975), 183ff. See also Luce, Old Burma, Early Pagan, 3 vols. (New York 1969), vol. I, 388ff.

called two world guardians averting its destruction by anti-social behavior, their cultivation meant to prevent doing wrong to begin with.³³ Hiri was like the shame felt when one's waistcloth was about to fall off, while ottapa was like fearing hell after committing an evil deed.

Life demanded discipline, another common trope in the history of Myanmar social thought,³⁴ the core of *puggala desana*, instructions aimed at individuals' subjectivity, as opposed to the *dhamma desana*, the Law in its pure form.³⁵ The significance of Jatakas like Vidhura stemmed from servicing both. Vidhura's gloss on "wisdom"³⁶ linked subjectivity and interiority to the outer world. Vidhura conquered his enemies' base propensities by subduing what by the 18th century was called *manmanataya*, pride and self-conceit.³⁷ The story's opening segment showed how learned behavior created self-restraint, how the bodhisatta's power, the Myanmar *anubhaw*, insured success in life³⁸ for which wisdom was the shield, against,

³³Hpo Hlaing, 110. One of the sources of the idea was Buddhaghosa, and in the Myanmar context certainly the Abhidhamma.

³⁴ See Myanmar Information Sheet, November 2, 2005, where Vidhura is a model of self-control, discipline, truthfulness, wisdom and fearlessness, the qualities Myanmar citizens need in order to withstand imperialist designs.

³⁵For the significance of these distinctions, see Hpo Hlaing, 110ff; U Obatha, 159.

³⁶ When later generations developed different forms of Jataka classifications, "wise man" or *sukhamin* was found to be a subject of 40 of the bodhisatta's lives. Such listings appear in later temples – see for example Ywa Nge village temple.

³⁷ Ma Hnin Yu Maw Shwe, 135.

³⁸ The term appears in U Obatha's Vidhura, 107. *Anubhaw* or *a nu bo* as in the Myanmar English dictionary, 604, after the Pali.

among other matters, "wrong views" that deceived and ensnared.³⁹

Such transformations were informed by what was called *akjou taya*⁴⁰ that, loosely translated, generated "a reformed character," the beneficiary of favorable consequences, free of doubt, whose wisdom reflected a new interiority that in turn resulted in what were called "accomplishments," the Myanmar variant of the Pali *etadagga(s)*.⁴¹ Vidhura's great flexibility allowed the story to service different historical spins on such accomplishments, insuring its resonance for the 12th as for later centuries.⁴² This was possible because all Myanmar settings remained wedded to multiple interpretation of the Dhamma matrix; what differed was how the matrix was stretched to accommodate the central sense of "refuge" for current needs.⁴³

Such elasticities reflected culture-specific scripturalities with their own notions of what could be done with the Buddha's Word. Though kings since the 11th century prided themselves on Tipitaka purifications, literary evidence from the 16th century onwards shows that what one hand took away, the other added. Purifications normally disposed of "accretions" or unwarranted "additions," but Burmese glosses on revered texts often

³⁹ U Obatha, Vidhura, 113. See Myat Kyaw and San Lwin, A Pali- Myanmar-English Dictionary of the Noble Words of the Lord Buddha (Rangoon 2002), 236.

⁴⁰ The term also appears in late 18th century temple inscriptions. For the Myanmar meanings, see "akjou" in the Myanmar-English Dictionary, 538.

⁴¹ The term is common in the 18th century Sulamani mural that stresses the "accomplishments" that result from such convictions.

⁴² U Obatha, 160.

⁴³ For how this and other Jatakas served definitions of "refuge," see Aye Kyaw, 173ff.

added to that Word. Though much has been made of the sacrality of the Buddha's Word, Burmese attitudes to what in the West is called canonicity apparently differed. In Jataka treatments, often by learned monks, it was not the commentarial nesting in which the Buddha's Word, in the form of gathas, enabled free elaboration, but the gathas themselves, that is, the part of the Jataka we today take to be "canonical" and thus least open to tinkering.⁴⁴ It may also have been the case that these verses were unlike their current Pali versions, that Pagan to begin with operated with different materials. For whatever reason, later Myanmar assimilations elaborated significantly on precisely that part of the Jatakas we would have thought were tamper-proof. The legitimacy of such elaborations explains the Jatakas' plasticity.

Myanmar's Jataka imagery flowered in Pagan where public manifestations of elite piety inadvertently laid the foundation for a new ideational universe. It was new because earlier engagements with dogmatic materials were apparently – given the surviving evidence – circumscribed. Centuries were needed for such changes to mature, but they were subversive because proximity made such materials tangibly relational when exposed to the popular gaze, meant to be internalized and acted upon. Such images also articulated an oral universe challenged by written materials, since they show an oral tradition's strategies when contending with initial textualizations.

This process also redefined the bodhisatta path for broader societal concerns. A new agenda visible in its results privileged the meanings of refuge and user-friendly ethicizing practices for better lives in the

⁴⁴ This is stressed in Okell's examination of how the Pali version of the Hatthipala story becomes an early 16th century Burmese pyo.

here and hereafter. This led in Pagan and also in later centuries to the popularization of the Vimanavathu stories.⁴⁵ The bodhisatta became a more accessible figure, later called "Our Bodhisatta" in some temple decors,⁴⁶ a purveyor of folk wisdom⁴⁷ and an often ambiguous exemplar of Buddhist virtues.⁴⁸ The Jatakas here served functions different from their role in some Mahayana materials and provide a glimpse of the unique features defining Myanmar's Dhamma, a term more in tune with the historical evidence than the commonly misused "Buddhism" or "religion," terms whose applicability to earlier centuries is highly problematic.⁴⁹ Such functions made the Jatakas core components of Myanmar culture⁵⁰ for centuries, their flexible templates loyal to Pali sources but not identical with them. The result, as the astonished Fausboll discovered when encountering local versions of the

⁴⁵ On the significance of this text in the early Myanmar context, see Lilian Handlin, "The Vimanavathu(s) of Pagan," (Unpublished conference paper delivered at Northern Illinois University, 2004). Vidhura's status as the personification of "refuge" is inherent to the story and survives in all later versions, of course.

⁴⁶ As in Chanthagyi temple in Yesagyo.

⁴⁷ Peter Skilling, "Jataka and Pannasa-jataka in South-East Asia," *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 160.

⁴⁸ That such ambiguities occasioned lively debates is evident in numerous contexts. For a Mon language one, see Tun Aung Chain, trans. and ed., *A Chronicle of the Mons*, 71.

⁴⁹ Boucher, 20ff.

⁵⁰ Htin Aung, *Burmese Drama: A Study with Translations of Burmese Plays* (Westport, Conn., 1978); U San Shwe, "Bagan's traditions from Bagan's ink inscriptions and paintings," (Unpublished paper 2008). In Burmese. See also Daw Ohn, *History of Pali Literature* (Rangoon n.d.), 364, 368, in Burmese, indicating that Myanmar scholars take the Jatakas in all their parts to be much older than do Western scholars, who usually trace the compilation to the 5th century.

Mahanipata in 1878, were numerous differences indicating Myanmar takes on what their interpretation of the Buddha's Word meant. Already in the 13th century, Jataka slivers were freed from their original content, becoming independent elements illustrating – for example – what Gombrich has called the ethic of intent. The story of the Garuda's dilemma, a sliver in the Buridhatta Jataka, survives in another structure as a free-standing component, perhaps an echo of homilies delivered on the topic of which no other evidence is extant.⁵¹ The Garuda, in its quest for food, inadvertently killed a tree and felt guilty about it. This happened when a naga, the Garuda's intended meal, brought about the tree's uprooting when captured by the bird. No offense was committed, the Garuda was informed, because it was a natural need for nourishment that made the tree an unintended victim.

Vidhura was an ancient tale that, as Luders⁵² showed long ago, became a Buddha's life through numerous adjustments.⁵³ The story had multiple names and localized versions, the current Pali variant reflecting what Von

⁵¹ Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 3rd edition (London 2006). The story appears in a separate plaque on the 13th century stupa, the Dhammayazika.

⁵² Heinrich Luders, "Das Vidhurapanditajataka," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, 99 (1945-1949): 103-130; J.C. Wright and Ludwig Alsdorf, "Kleine Schriften: a review article," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 62 (1999): 529 – 542.

⁵³ That U Obatha was alert to such problematics is evident in one of his side remarks as to how to reconcile the fact that, as he knew, Rajagriha was in Magadha country and not, as his text too, like the current Pali version had it, in Anga country. He reconciled the discrepancy by claiming that at that time the king of Anga ruled Magadha. St. Andrew St. John, 448.

Hinuber calls Buddhism's literary inclusiveness.⁵⁴ The 18th century Myanmar prose version, different from its Sinhalese and Thai counterparts, reflects, scholars think, earlier compositional strata.⁵⁵ The availability in visual formats of early 12th century renderings (inscribed in Mon in the Ananda temple and in Burmese in the Lokahteikpan temple) and their departures from the current Pali version based on later Sinhalese sources, provides a rare opportunity to recover the story's different versions. This shows that already at that time Mon and Myanmar worked with most likely different core texts, whether Pali, or, in the case of the Mon, also Sanskrit, whose written sources are lost.

Vidhura's multiple plots included discourses likely originating as separate stories.⁵⁶ These talks challenged image-makers because visualization cannot replicate speech. The Mons and the Myanmar resolved the problem by imaging the "settings" where talks materialized. Such practices confirm what has long been assumed – namely, that images were incomprehensible without prior knowledge. But this conundrum also enabled Myanmar spin masters to insure correct reception by monopolizing interpretation.⁵⁷ What changed was how

⁵⁴ Oskar Von Hinuber, *Entstehung und Aufbau der Jataka Sammlung* (Mainz, 1988), 191.

⁵⁵ That this indeed is the case is also evident from my very close readings of the Vessantara and Mahosadha visual narratives in the Lokahteikpan that contain sub-episodes absent from the current Pali version of both, but echoed in U Obatha's compositions.

⁵⁶ Ludwig Alsdorf, *Kleine Schriften*; Albrecht Wezler, ed., (Wiesbaden 1974), "Das Jataka vom weisen Vidhura," 23 -56.

⁵⁷ The interest in Jatakas in Myanmar history is voluminous, buttressed by the belief that their content was part of the historical record, and their protagonists on a par with more recent historical figures. King Dhamacetti in 15th

these spins were generated and who their masters were.⁵⁸

Like Naypyidaw, the current Myanmar capital, Pagan was a ceremonial center of an extended domain. Elites then as now invested real and symbolic capital in order to publicize their piety: first the king and later also leading aristocrats financed structures endowed with income-generating properties and a labor force to insure their survival. Space for ideational manipulations materialized in the form of painted decors that communicate Pagan's spin on the tale of Vidhura.

Pagan's two simultaneous translation enterprises articulated this spin: the visual translation of revered texts into images, and their re-interpretation in local vernaculars, both complex undertakings informed by Pagan's assimilation and development of a

century Pegu was interested in gathering records about the forests of Wingaba where Vessantara and Madi resided. The famous scholar and poet Saya Zawgyee, who in Ne Win's time used the story to write *Vidhura Dukha*, made Vidhura a veiled critic of authorities (personal communication from Professor U Myint Kye, January 19, 2009). The poet here drew on U Obatha, Twinthin Mingyi, and other sources for what was a sub-theme of Vidhura's multiple talks and which in Saya Zawgyee's day was glossed in light of what "rationality" or "reason" meant in his day. The Rajavasati served numerous monks and ministers when rewriting the story on behalf of precise historical needs: see U Tin 97ff., and the numerous references to such subjects in Aye Kyaw, 176 ff. General Thein Sein listed the Rajavasati components as relevant to current state bureaucrats (see below).

⁵⁸ If in late 11th century Pagan, King Kyanzitttha presented himself as the master interpreter of the taya, in later centuries the role was filled by monks, as it is currently by generals. See general Thein Sein's 2005 interpretation of the Rajavasati, in the *New Light of Myanmar*, October 19, 2005.

commentarial tradition. By the 11th century, two spoken languages, now called Burmese and Mon, acquired written formats, evident in temple inscriptions and donative stones. In Sri Lanka, somewhat similar trends generated a rich lay vernacular literature expressing altering devotional practices. In Pagan apparently they did not. Pagan's images, however, instantiate similar ideational shifts. Knowledge transmission was made more secure and revered texts more accessible on behalf of assimilation practices that seemed not to have mattered earlier. Both were part of the general concern with what the Buddha could do for devotees, a concern that altered the taya's relevance for societal tasks.⁵⁹

In this trickle down process, lesser beings were empowered by the five precepts and their effects on present and future lives. This required some familiarity with such precepts and the uposatha vow. Not accidentally, Vidhura's opening segment discusses their meanings and it is this segment, as the evidence indicates, that initially encapsulated the entire story for several decades.

In Pagan, concern with the precepts' meanings foreshadowed shifts that sprouted a new sense of selfhood. Donative stone inscriptions, legal documents and forms of self-aggrandizement and commemoration, instantiate this development, as well as the public use of writing. Wider population circles, hitherto outside the loop, were apparently meant to become more informed members of the sasana, and individual behavior, at least theoretically, came to be judged in light of the taya.

⁵⁹Charles Hallisey, "Devotion in the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Sri Lanka," 2 vols. (Ph.d dissertation, 1988, University of Chicago).

Pagan's earliest surviving stupas from the mid 11th century featured the entire set of Jatakas, and numerous subsequent structures did likewise. Their presence in differing formats attests to this Pali text's significance when intertwined with other revered materials brought to public attention. Their publicity is only the tip of an iceberg of which no records survive; the intention was to socialize the king's subjects less by formal knowledge than by participation in public and private rites.⁶⁰ The fact that such instruction was about to acquire a more formulaic and stable content in the form of inscribed images indicates major ideational shifts only dimly visible otherwise.

Not accidentally, I think, the first Pagan Vidhura, from mid 11th century is entirely concerned with meanings of conduct and behavior. The West Hpetleik's surviving image ignored other issues Vidhura tackled to underscore the opening segment about sila, incorporating a horse and buffalo in the image to represent the kings' gifts to Vidhura. This greatly compressed interpretation endures in the 1112 AD Myinkaba Kubyaygyi temple, evidencing one interpretative strategy. Other strategies, however, would shortly generate somewhat different spins.

An extended Vidhura narrative survives on the Ananda stupa's sikharra dated circa 1100, inscribed in the Mon vernacular. By comparing this Ananda narrative with another Vidhura featured in the Lokahteikpan, inscribed in Burmese, we can see how visual narratives express ideational shifts. Such comparisons become more

⁶⁰ The term for practicing piety by the 18th century was *thadintou lei* – see U Kala, *Mahayazawingyi*, where the term defines what Sanghamitta, here the eldest of seven daughters of the king of Vesali in Majjhima country, is said to be doing together with some bhikkunis.

substantive in later centuries from which written versions of the story are extant.

The Myanmar in the 12th and later centuries, like Dhamma adherents elsewhere, often featured in their temples iconic images similar to those extant at the much earlier central Indian Bharhut stupa, said to feature the earliest surviving images of the Buddha's previous lives. Irandati tempting Punnaka on the mountain top, the dice game, Vidhura dangling at the end of Punnaka's horse's tail, and Punnaka holding Vidhura upside down, encapsulate for two millennia this story's most resonant moments: these are this Jataka's symbols, in Paul Ricoeur's ⁶¹ sense of the term. This stability, however, masks profound interpretative differences facilitated by these images' symbolic status.

By definition symbols resist exhaustive treatment and are a venue to access concepts and meanings. They provide disclosure and are meant to enable action. Symbols, pivotal for religious communities, are constantly rethought, resisting simplistic interpretations because of their multivalent opacity. Symbols rarely provide knowledge themselves but only disclose its possibilities. In the space of these possibilities, Vidhura's symbols enabled viewers to assimilate their version of such images' disclosures.

The most profound disclosure concerned wisdom, whose acquisition was a signpost on the road to Buddhahood. Pagan's obsession with the Buddha biography privileged the *paramis*, one typology among others to handle that biography's complexities. The *paramis* encouraged engagements with other stories like

⁶¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil* (New York 1969).

Sattubhastha Jataka, related to Vidhura,⁶² and texts like the Anagatavamsa, the Buddhavamsa, the Cariyapitaka, the Mahavamsa and much else. The paramis' linkage to the Jatakas would have been the primary dogmatic reason for the Jatakas' significance.

If the authorizing importance of the perfections was a central imperative for the Jatakas' publicity, bodily signs denoting Gautama's Buddhahood, a paramis subcomponent, were another.⁶³ In the Pali world morality had physical manifestations,⁶⁴ and bodily marks and smells distinguished ethical beings from less meritorious counterparts. Pagan's most likely invention of the 108 signs on the Buddha's Footprint, acquired in the course of his previous existences, made such signs emblems, among many other issues, of the wisdom Vidhura's life represented.

Finally, the Jatakas for centuries played a crucial role in devotional activities. An echo of this is the devas' rehearsal of them at the most solemn moment in the Tipitaka, the Buddha's imminent demise. In Buddhaghosa's fantastic narrative, the entire

rim of the universe is populated by dancing devas, singing, their arms around each others' neck, concluding the recital, among other matters, of the Jatakas, with the refrain "O, our helper," turning the Jatakas into another emblem of the refuge offered by the Triple Gem.

But as the reformulated bodhisatta path was being tamed for popular consumption, different needs nested enveloping dogmatics in new ideational layers. Vidhura's willingness to "give his own life as a gift"⁶⁵ was unlikely to be of daily use for lesser mortals. For them a new space materialized, facilitating adaptations to shifting concerns. Vidhura came to represent attainable objectives like resistance to feminine wiles, suppression of base propensities, parental solicitude, kindness and hospitality, and acceptance of one's place in the world.⁶⁶ Wisdom also meant not sweating the small stuff and realizing that most concerns were small stuff, as the parrot Jambuka informed Brahmadhatta in another gloss on wisdom.⁶⁷ Though bodhisattas who privileged wisdom above other paramis traversed a shorter route to Enlightenment, for mere mortals, less august manifestations of wisdom sufficed.⁶⁸

This reception of Vidhura occurred initially in settings where notions of texts as objects of comprehension⁶⁹ were latecomers. For Pagan, the story accessed the Buddha's will and augmented people's confidence –

⁶² Stephen C. Berkwitz, The History of the Buddha's Relic Shrine (Oxford, 2007), 76.

⁶³ Peter Skilling, Past Lives of the Buddha. The voluminous literature on the Footprint in the Burmese contexts begins with U Mya, "A note on the Buddha's Footprint in Burma," Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India, (1930 – 1934) pp. 320 – 331; see also Virginia McKeen Di Crocco, Footprints of the Buddhas of this Era in Thailand (Bangkok 2004).

⁶⁴ Susanne Mroczek, Virtuous Bodies: The Physical Dimensions of Morality in Buddhist Ethics (Oxford, 2007) The Mahayazawingyi indicated that proper behavior filled one with "aura", that is, altered one's personality for all to see – the result of taking refuge in the Three Gems, keeping the five precepts every day and always being truthful.

⁶⁵ E.B. Cowell, The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births, Translated from Pali by Various Hands, VI, 126

⁶⁶ Twinthin Mingyi's 1841 gloss here added numerous details: see Vidhura Pyo, 106 – 110.

⁶⁷ Sattubhastha Jataka, 402.

⁶⁸ See U Tin 52ff. for later versions of a similar approach.

⁶⁹ W. C. Smith, What Is Scripture: A Comparative Approach (Minneapolis, 1993).

*saddha*⁷⁰ – in his claim to an insight into reality unlike any one else’s. In Pagan *saddha* was linked to wisdom not only for potential bodhisattas,⁷¹ but for taya-adhering “good people,” socialized through life skills Vidhura endorsed on the basis of his reliability and authority. Pagan and later temples that identified the Buddha’s disciples by their *etadagga* (accomplishments) also incorporated paradigmatic lay men and women to further instantiate proper behavior.⁷² Such uses of canonical materials supplemented Vidhura’s soteriological significance by making him a “Dear Abby”⁷³ for the needy.

The changing Dear Abby messages defined Vidhura’s fate, of which the two extended initial samples, inscribed in Mon and

⁷⁰ This is another one of these loaded terms in Myanmar social history that badly needs attention. The Burmese language incorporated the Pali term and by U Kala’s time, in the *Mahayazawingyi*, was glossed as immovable, unshakeable faith, applied to what happens to King Anawratha when the paradigmatic monk Shin Arahan persuades him of the veracity of the claims the Buddha made.

⁷¹ Giuliano Guistarini, “Faith and renunciation in early Buddhism: *saddha* and *nekkhamma*,” *Rivista di Studi Sudasiatici*, vol. I (2006) pp. 161 – 179. On the Myanmar sense of “reliability” added to the meaning of the term for worship and reverence, see *Myanmar-English Dictionary* for “kou:gwe,” 13.

⁷² The 80 disciples, though unnamed, appear already in the late 11th century Abeyadana. For Myanmar meanings of *etadagga*, see Myat Kyaw and San Lwin, *A Pali Myanmar English Dictionary of The Noble Words of the Lord Buddha* (Yangon, 2002), 292. In the great Sulamani temple in Pagan that dates to the 13th century, the 18th century image of a world blessed by a Buddha’s presence, the disciples’ accomplishments are balanced by those of 11 nuns, beginning with Gotami.

⁷³ Aye Kyaw cites numerous examples of the Jatakas’ resonance in relation to shifting needs.

Burmese, are early versions. In more textual times, learned sayadaws, blaming predecessors for “impurities,” also adjusted Vidhura to their needs, as did poets, playwrights, ministers and generals.⁷⁴ Dogmatic or paramis-based concerns took second place to Vidhura as a role model: a symbol of hard work, risk taking and seizing the moment.⁷⁵ The tension between these two realms that Vidhura inhabited, the dogmatic and the mundane, made the story perennially unstable. That instability allowed the Myanmar to incorporate interpolations, such as making Irandati, Kissagotami’s ancestor, the Naga queen Vimala, the future Khema, wife of Bimbisara who also became a distinguished nun, and Punnaka the future Angulimala.⁷⁶ But this also explains the story’s durability. The early extended versions of such Dear Abbys, like their later counterparts, showed how settings tamed the story’s multiplicity of meanings to contend with such instabilities.⁷⁷ Variable tamings defined approved interpretations grounded in a more stable content with set boundaries to structure devotees’ encounter with the story. Vidhura the pandit often became Myanmar’s *sukhamin*.⁷⁸

The Ananda Mon-inscribed Vidhura was situated in an inaccessible setting which is

⁷⁴ Aye Kyaw, 170, 254. For the purposes of this article I looked at only one Vidhura Pyo, out of the four that exist, from 1841.

⁷⁵ Aye Kyaw, 170.

⁷⁶ U Obatha, 160ff. St. Andrew St. John, 475.

⁷⁷ Charles Hallisey, “The surprise of scripture’s advice,” in Judith Frishman, et al. eds., *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation*, (Leiden 2004), 41, for other examples of such concerns.

⁷⁸ Luce et. al (1975), 277; U Obatha, 149; Aye Kyaw. The name or title Vidhura enjoyed in his multiple images across a millennium are also revealing about how contemporaries conceptualized his significance.

why its interpreters dispensed with numerous subsidiary elements. Thus the first plaque “Answers the question”⁷⁹ showed undifferentiated kings facing the bodhisatta, the image that in other structures encapsulated the story’s entire significance. The Burmese-illuminated Lokahteikpan here imaged multiple subsidiary segments. Another extended interpretation, on the 13th century’s Mingalazedi’s exterior, compressed the Ananda’s but preserved a Mon component absent from Pali versions, the bodhisatta’s birth, inscribed in this case in Burmese: Vidhura is born.⁸⁰ Such textual instability was Vidhura’s fate for millennia, its most obvious manifestations being names - a 13th century Pagan temple had a different geographical term for one of the mountains where one action occurs, and later Manomaya (“wish fulfilling”) named magic jewels and Punnaka’s horse.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Charles Duroiselle, “The Talaing Plaques on the Ananda,” *Epigraphia Birmanica*, II, (Rangoon 1921), 90 – all references to the Ananda Mon inscriptions refer to this source.

⁸⁰ Ma Hnin Yu Maw Shwe, *The research of the Ten Mahanipata Jatakas from the Pagan Mingalazedi*. See also Tun Aung Chain, “Narrative in the Mahanipata plaques of the Ananda” 11ff.

⁸¹ Pagan temple 1460, Vidhura inscription 8, regarding the hill that Irandati decorates, which in the Pali is glossed as being in the Himavanta, is here called Nyassari Hill. A famous Ajanta segment of the Vidhura story has Irandati in a tempting pose on a swing, another element absent from the Pali and Burmese versions. Manomaya is named in Khin Moun Village temple Vidhura images, also in U Obatha - St. Andrew St. John, 445, and the 1841 pyo. For the resonance of the “jewel” subchapter, see *The Mons Chronicle*, 16ff. The literary Myanmar versions emphasized that Irandati had been Punnaka’s wife in previous lives, where the Pali text only had him recalling her voice from past encounters. Cowell, VI, 131.

In general, subsequent centuries simplified the Lokahteikpan’s textual precision but they, too, sometimes reproduced all the story’s complex subplots.⁸² In the 12th century, the Lokahteikpan, however, was unique. An episode that in the Ananda read, “The king and Punnaka the Yakksha ask,” was detailed in the Lokahteikpan to include the king’s conversation with his daughter, the daughter’s decision to embark on a mission to find the volunteer to get Vidhura’s heart, and Punnaka’s decision to do so.

Differences among the Ananda, the Lokahteikpan, and other 13th century interpretations were governed by spatial constraints, donors’ wishes, and local rules of decorum, but also by different textual sources. The Ananda Mon-inscribed omission of the famous dice game, a staple into modern times, is one example. The sikharra instead featured only the result: Vidhura’s acknowledgement that the king could dispose of him as he wished. The early *visual* absence of the king’s helping deity, his mother in an earlier life, popular in later images, suggests that her subsequent Myanmar images and Mon literary presence is a later interpolation. Interpolating her explains Dhananjaya’s wily arrogance and dishonesty, adding further depth to the episode. Vidhura’s inherent plasticity, grounded in a different slant on canonicity, legitimized such additions.

⁸² Though this particular episode was not imaged in the early 12th century Lokahteikpan, a clause in inscription 13b alluded to Punnaka’s demolition of the mountain to recover the magic gem. Ba Shin, *Lokahteikpan*, 64. The episode was important enough to be imaged in temple number 1460, although others from the 13th century omitted such sub plots. The jewel story is also featured in the Shwezigon zayat built in 1903 indicating the importance of these sub components throughout the millennium.

Some action episodes were symbolic. Hence the Ananda plaque showed “Punnayakkha carries away Vidhura,” the Jataka’s most famous installment and often a stand-in for the entire narrative. Its resemblance to another hugely popular one, Siddhartha’s departure on his horse with his charioteer holding the horse’s tail, helped viewers link these episodes as subcomponents of the Buddha’s immensely complex overall biography. This suggests that images, much like their written sources, practiced a visual form of intertextuality, whereby visual elements from one context illuminated another. To clinch the connection, an 18th century Myanmar prose version made Manomaya an earlier incarnation of Siddhartha’s horse, Channaka.⁸³

The Ananda plaques recounting the “trials” remained popular for centuries, echoing other Jataka and “folk tale” elements, another analytic category Vidhura illuminates. The all-important taya talk to Punnaka required three plaques, surviving likewise in later Myanmar versions because of its centrality to lesser mortals’ concerns. The emphasis on “taya na” featured in Pagan’s 13th century and later Vidhura inscriptions⁸⁴ because oral practices survived well into more textually oriented times.

The Ananda favored discrete images connected like separated pearls on a string, unlike Lokahteikpan’s continuities, which presented the story in real life, actions

informed by the “before” and “after.”⁸⁵ Such contrasts indicate interpretative strategies to facilitate comprehension. The Ananda and Mingalazedi plaques signify a mindset different from the Lokahteikpan’s. The latter’s nuanced reading suggests that the Lokahteikpan anticipated worshippers’ engagement with this material. All visualizations are forced to segment stories into numerous components, but the Lokahteikpan’s replications also instantiate oral transmission mechanisms engaging with textuality, writing and visual reading, a glimpse of how this oral universe handled written materials. Not accidentally, images were meant to be read from left to right, like Myanmar writing. The Lokahteikpan’s interlinked narrative was how the story was *told*. Such tellings were informed by oral contentions with early textuality, seeping into visual frames. The Lokahteikpan’s visual translation combined orality and literacy to make a visual narrative speak by recourse to images evoking the story’s continuum of developments.

Encouraging closer engagement with revered materials also explains the image of the “story of the present,” in the Lokahteikpan, ignored by the Ananda, the Mingalazedi and later visualizations.⁸⁶ In the early 12th century Burmese-inscribed temple, the entire Mahanipata was introduced by an image of the Buddha surrounded by disciples, to represent the setting that initially evoked the stories’ narration and a clue to the z’story of the

⁸³ U Obatha, 160.

⁸⁴ For Pagan temple 1460 “taya na” in the Vidhura interpretation, see inscription 5. For an examination of the “folk” elements in similar tales, see Susan Niditch and Robert Doran, “The success story of the wise courtier; a formal approach,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 96 (June 1977): 179- 193.

⁸⁵ See Douglas Newton “Seeing words and talking pictures,” in Dan Eban et al., eds., *Art as a Means of Communication in Pre Literate Societies* (Jerusalem 1990).

⁸⁶ Ma Hnin Yu Maw Shwe thinks that a stupa like Mingalazedi dispensed with imagings of this central component because people were familiar with its significance. But I think something more profound is at work here.

present,” to identify one of the complex time-lines the Jatakas incorporated. The Lokahteikpan’s Vidhura was embedded in a dogmatically precise context. Its Vidhura was not a free-standing story but a marker along an immense time span that in all Pagan temples and later was anchored in the Buddhavamsa and the giant commentarial corpus on the Buddha’s Word, because in Pagan later distinctions between canon and commentaries were greatly attenuated, evident in temple decors where various texts intertwined.

The Lokahteikpan’s occasional Vidhura as Brahma, glossed as “Brahma preaching the law to the four kings of the devas,”⁸⁷ departed from other Pagan readings always showing a human bodhisatta, as in the Ananda, the Hpetleik, the Myinkaba Kubyauggyi and elsewhere.⁸⁸ Vidhura as Brahma also differed from the Sinhalese Pali version where Vidhura was invariably the bodhisatta or the “Great Being,” again suggesting a textual difference between Pali, the Mon and the later Myanmar versions. For the Ananda, Vidhura’s hospitality mattered; for the Lokahteikpan it did not. The latter also showed the pathos of Vidhura’s departure from his family, a staple in all later embellishments because of its emotional overtones, but one that the Ananda ignored. Likewise the Lokahteikpan conclusion showing the bodhisatta under a luxuriant tree, alluding to the king’s earlier dream and the Awakening episode, differs from the prosaic Ananda Mon and Mingalazedi’s “Widhir at home receiving presents.” For the Lokahteikpan, like later Myanmar readings, the tree symbolized the

⁸⁷ Ba Shin, *The Lokahteikpan*, 102, 133.

⁸⁸ The Lokahteikpan clause, as well as the image which confirms this reading, suggests that this subplot of Vidhura, that in the current Pali form occurs in the world of men, in an earlier version may have been situated in the Brahma loka.

refuge that the taya, or the bodhisatta, offered. Later generations added other images, like an 18th century Salingyi image of the happy couple, Punnaka and Irandati, and images of women looking into mirrors, a gloss on one of the story’s misogynist slants, lusting after women resembling “making friends with snakes and fire” in the pyo.⁸⁹

In general, the Ananda Mon treatment was precise, simplified and “public” – unlike the contemporary and later Myanmar manipulations for emotional engagements with content. But other differences were more suggestive. The Rajavasati talk popular later in Myanmar literature and propaganda⁹⁰ was glossed in Mon “*tos Rajavasati*,”⁹¹ (tos: to proclaim, Rajavasati: court service).⁹² Where the Mon used “*tos*” or “*kinkal*” (to declare),⁹³ early and later Burmese used “*haw*” (to preach), which has

⁸⁹ Irandati became the personification, one among many others, of the 40 “subterfuges” or feminine wiles people were warned against. Aye Kyaw, on the Vidhura context, 183ff.; Twinthin Mingyi, *Vidhura pyo*, 164.

⁹⁰ See numerous treatments mentioned in Aye Kyaw, 176ff. General Thein Sein transformed Vidhura’s Rajavasati address to his courtier sons into advice for state bureaucrats, and Vidhura’s wisdom into an example of what it takes to withstand international harassment, imperialist designs, and other hostile forces threatening the country.

⁹¹ Duroiselle, *Epigraphia Birmanica*, 92

⁹² H.L. Shorto, *A Dictionary of Mon Inscriptions from the Sixth to the Sixteenth Centuries* (London 1971) 165, 315. The fact that Burmese developed its own term for the dhamma, taya, whose problematics badly deserve in depth investigation, also suggests departures between these two often intertwined civilizations. See also Tun Aung Chaing, “Narrative in the Mahanipata plaques of the Ananda,” 15, 20, quoting Duroiselle also translating *tos* as “expounds.”

⁹³ Shorto 37

an entirely different sense of what transmitting the taya represented.⁹⁴ The Lokahteikpan also often called the story's protagonist a "future Buddha" (*hpaya laung*),⁹⁵ unlike the Mon whose protagonist's name was often omitted or rendered simply as "Widhir," as in "*Widhir tos dhar*"⁹⁶ ("Vidhura proclaims the dhamma"). The Burmese "*hpaya laung taya haw*" (bodhisatta preaches the law)⁹⁷ suggests emphasizing his status rather than title or name, thereby slanting interpretation toward paramis and Buddhahood.

These contrasts indicate different devotional engagements: a more authoritarian, top down one, in the case of the Ananda inscribed Mon, and a more wily and manipulative one in the case of the terms used in Burmese. The latter employed a more relational terminology to engage with feelings and interiority. The Lokahteikpan is closer to our sense of what transmitting revered information requires and what assimilating its content is conceived as, likened by the 18th century to *yaye aye* – cool water for the needy, a Pali metaphor hugely popular in its Myanmar form.⁹⁸

What can such an exercise in tracing a story's reception across centuries teach us? The simplest lesson is to show how closer looks at superficially similar images reveal profound differences in their significance. A more complex message comes from tracing

⁹⁴ For a recent examination of what "to preach" means in other contexts, see Mahinda Deegalle, Popularizing Buddhism: Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka (Albany, N.Y. 2006) and review by Jason Carbine, H-Buddhism, Buddhist Scholars Information Network, March 2009.

⁹⁵ Ba Shin, Lokahteikpan - Burmese inscription, 64, translation and transliteration, 102,133.

⁹⁶ Duroiselle, Epigraphia Birmanica, plaque 789, 96.

⁹⁷ Ba Shin, The Lokahteikpan, 64, 102, 133.

⁹⁸ U Obatha, 160ff.

images' trajectories, instantiating multiple Vidhuras, showing how historical contingencies altered the story's significance. Learned sayadaws justified embellishments as "purifications" because this was the legitimized stratagem to embed the Buddha's Word in the lived world, the one in which the Buddha's devotees made Vidhura their own. In that world it was legitimate to show the Buddha's personal physician, Jivaka, holding a Burmese medical formula, like in the 18th century Sulamani image, and to interpolate Vimala's suspicions of her husband's philandering and upgrading her status as a sila practitioner.⁹⁹ Such interpolations indicate what happens when the extraordinary becomes ordinary while yet retaining its supranormal associations. Such is the fate of dogmatic materials in the world outside monastic compounds, where local epistemologies impart meaning to the story in settings with literary cultures all their own.

Finally, Vidhura's fate shows the ever-changing taya of Myanmar royal subjects and its later influence in republican citizens' lives. Theravada Buddhism is deemed "conservative" but this is only one misconception among others distorting our understanding of Myanmar's past, a past in which until very recently terms like Theravada, Buddhism and religion are inapplicable. Contemporaries' gloss on the Pali articulated Word of the Buddha was always a work in progress. Its great flexibility insured the survival for more than a thousand years of a living Pali imaginaire, different from the one mostly constructed from revered texts by modern scholars. Ultimately, I would argue, that imaginaire made it difficult for its adherents to confront encroaching modernities. Perhaps Vidhura

⁹⁹ Twinthin Mingyi, 11, 25ff., 88.

as Dear Abby may not have been such a good idea after all.

Lilian Handlin

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For preliminary consideration, submissions should be made to the co-editors by September 2010.

Submissions should consist of a copy of the original source material and an English translation; these should be sent via electronic copy to jcarbine@whittier.edu.

The total length of the translation should be between 3-6 pages each, or between 750-1500 words. Below is an initial outline of topics, which give a sense of the range of submissions that we are seeking.

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Many thanks for considering a submission.

Saw Tun
Juliane Schober
Jason Carbine