

Chapter 19

Pagoda Desecration and Myanmar Archaeology, 1853–86

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The 1853 British Occupation of the Shwedagon

A letter from J.S. Banks with the Governor General in India to Major Fraser on board the “Sulley” the river Irrawaddy, dated 19 December 1853, opens as follows:

Sir,

As certain subsidiary questions connected with the Military occupation of Rangoon hinge upon the decision that may be come to regarding the continued occupation of the ‘Shwe Dagon’ or great Pagoda as a fortified position, I am directed to convey to you the following observations by the Most Noble the Governor General.

2. His lordship is of opinion that in every ground, political and military, the great pagoda ought to be retained as a fortified position.
3. ... Within the last four weeks His Lordship remarks an extensive conspiracy has been detected having for its object the sudden seizure of the pagoda, the station, and the city and the murder of all British subjects within them. The design was reckless — insane so far as any lasting results are concerned — a repetition of such a conspiracy since the first was discerned is improbable... But if there were in the Pagoda a fortified military position, prepared against surprise, impregnable (as it would be) against native attack... (NAD 1AO-000003 1853)

Occupation was nothing new: during the 15th to 16th century battles between Mon and Burmese (Bamar), for example, the victor often marked his success by placing his crown on the pagoda terraces (Moore 2000/1). In 1853, however, the occupiers were Europeans with little knowledge of the pagoda’s antiquity or the Buddhist practice they encountered. The interregnum character of the 1852–85, when the British controlled Lower Myanmar and Arakan (Rakhine), but not the capital at Mandalay, epitomizes the contradictions and changes instigated by the colonial presence in relation to glebe lands. New approaches to the past were introduced and new institutional structures for art history and archaeology established but confronted by British control of sacred lands, Buddhist patronage burgeoned and pagoda arts flourished. The disparate perspectives and agendas of this era are highlighted in correspondence such as the one cited above and the actions leading up to the taking of the Shwedagon (NAD 1AO-000003 1853).

The letters were written at a time when Myanmar security forces were posted by the king along the borderline above the occupied towns of Prome (Pyay) and Toungoo in Pegu (Bago) Division (Aung Myo 2007: 36).¹ An example of the local ramifications within pagoda lands is seen in the 1852 plea of Mon officer Sitke Maung Taw Lay to the British governor of Rangoon (Yangon). He proposed the sentencing of Indian workers ordered by British soldiers to dig into the Shwedagon *stūpa* to one to two years of imprisonment (Ku-tha 1976: 73). It was not until 1868 that attention is drawn to the country’s antiquities, however, with orders sent from Calcutta to draw up a list of ancient structures for worthy of protection.

The correspondence and events of the 19th century exemplify a wider process of change as a new modernity emerged within the British occupied “borderlands” of the Shwedagon and other glebe lands. The sovereignty of an “other” epitomized by the Shwedagon seizure notably strengthened local identity and arts. This episode and many others took place against a background of prior British experience in India where art history and archaeology focused on ancient Buddhist remains. These factors greatly

affected the nascent formation of art historical and archaeological disciplines in the very different context of Burma's long Buddhist heritage. As discussed below, all these aspects are illustrated in the history of the Shwedagon: continuity and change in patronage and arts, British appropriation of religious objects and construction materials, the contrasts between the religious spaces of India and Burma, and the 19th-century use of archaeology in nationalist agendas. It is however, particularly important to be aware of the close correlation of Buddhist art and Buddhist archaeology during this period for it illustrates well the many disparate perceptions held of the same corpus of art, architecture and landscape.

Local Donations and Perspectives

Throughout the colonial period (1826–1948), merit continued to flow in to the Shwedagon. The pagoda platform and hill provide countless ways to donate, from the monasteries on the middle levels, to upkeep of the covered staircases and the numerous *tazaung* or pavilions on the platform. The platform and main *stūpa* were constantly in need of refurbishment as well, with the surface of the *stūpa* covered in tiles. While those of the uppermost levels are gold, silver or plated, thousands of copper plates are fixed to the surface of the lower levels (Fig. 19.1). Through periodic earthquakes and repairs, some in the course of installing a new *hti* or umbrella, hundreds of the thousands of tiles have been collected by the Shwedagon Trustees.

Each copper plaque (c. 12.5 x 7 x 1 cm) bears an inscription. These have been classified according to season, day of the week, full moon days, familial and social status and other details of the donors that highlight the network of donors are individuals within Yangon and Bago Division on pilgrimage to the Shwedagon. The information provides details of day and familial relation of the donors from the various villages, whether offerings of many or few tiles. Thus for example, two donors from Ka-ma-ka-loat village gave three tiles on the first day of Second Waso in 1231 ME (c. 1869 AD) (Daw Kyan and Doctor Yi Yi 1995: 205). Two of the tiles were from a husband and wife and one by another couple. One tile in 1869 was given by Ko Nyo, Ma Leh Pyu and their son and daughter, with another offering of a single tile on the second day of Second Waso by Ma Kha noting that her mother had offered a tile on the previous day.



Figure 19.1: Copper plate donated to the Shwedagon inscribed in 1869 (1231 Myanmar Era) by “Pagoda patrons Ko Nyo, Ma Leh Pyu and their son and daughter with the good act of donating one tile” (Courtesy of Shwedagon Pagoda Museum).

The varied patronage connections mapped out by the tile inscriptions, and the organization of the pagoda trustees implicit in their preservation, conserve in prosaic yet vivid detail a multitude of individual social and spiritual narratives drawn into the Shwedagon sphere. Donation and new styles are found, however, throughout the country. In Upper Myanmar, at Pakhangyi, for instance, the ink inscription in the Taw Tar Pan (*sotapan*) pagoda lists one of the dwelling places of the donor in a former existence as an *auk chin hgnat* (hornbill). The Taw Tar Pan central image of the Buddha dates to 1840–75 AD, with artistic innovation seen in the wide and prominent *thin-kyit-taw* or front piece covering the forehead (Tint Lwin 2007: 124).

Other new trends in the sculpture included small and often quite simple images of the major scenes in the *Life of the Buddha* and ephemeral arts such as elaborate *pongyi pyan* or funeral pyres. A similar tradition existed in Thailand where wood and bamboo structures (*meru*) reached heights of 102 m in the 18th century CE and gradually were reduced so that the *meru* erected in 1852 CE for Rama II was 80 m and that for Rama IV in 1869 was 40 m high. The timber needing to be transported to the capital was considerable: the 80 m pyre and 8 accompanying 40 m pyres for Rama II required 896 large teak tree trunks, 5,500 other tree trunks, 2,800 sheets of bamboo slats, and 400,000 or more bamboo poles (Jumsai 1988/97: 127–8, Fig. 138).²

The expense of these lowered the frequency of their construction in Myanmar after the dethronement of Thibaw in 1885 and the cessation of royal patronage, but the tradition of vernacular wooden architecture seen for instance in the use of traditional forms such as the *duyin* or peacock chest finial and *sein oh* or diamond pot decorations in the long wooden covered staircases of the Shwedagon has continued along with the highly specific vocabulary of roof styles.



Figure 19.2: Northeast Sector of the Shwedagon in the late 19th century showing the Naundawgyi *stūpa* (British Library Archive; Courtesy of River Books).

In Lower Myanmar, Sitke Maung Htaw Lay of Moulmein (Mawlamyaing) rebuilt numerous pagodas and coordinated 1,853 repairs after British troops ordered Indian workers to make a 1.8 m wide, 45 cm long and 60 m deep penetrations into the Shwedagon *stūpa*, ostensibly to assess its utility as an arsenal (Nyunt Weh 1989: 59). An 1875 inscription on four stones (95 x 75 cm) donated by Maung Htaw Lay's daughters and husband to Naungdawgyi *stūpa* (Fig. 19.2) installed on the northeast corner of the Shwedagon platform commemorates their gift, including 25 *viss*, 63 *ticals*, and 14 *annas* of gold.³ A new *hti* was commissioned in 1853 by King Mindon but it was returned to the court when British officials denied permission to convey the umbrella down river to the Shwedagon. The Mandalay-made *hti* was large, made of iron, its seven tiers were 9.5 m high with a 4.5 m long vane. After long negotiations, almost two decades later a *hti* was transported on a royal barge that arrived in Rangoon — but not until 22 October 1871 (Singer 1995: 91).

As these brief examples highlight, innovation flourished during the colonial period, with repairs, donations, new foundations and the convening of the Fifth Buddhist Council in Mandalay. At the Shwedagon, centre point of the newly-occupied territories spanning Lower Myanmar, this increased with the loss of the pagoda's control by the British. As seen with the following example, the British presence also brought change within other glebe lands in the south.

Frontier Mentality: Pagoda Laterite for Road-building

Burma was Britain's last frontier in "Greater India". This sense of periphery is significant in understanding the liberty taken in appropriating pagoda lands to house troops, treasures to dispose of in Calcutta or England, and removal of the bricks from pagodas to construct new roads. In the southern Myanmar territories taken after the first Anglo-Burmese war, one of the mostly valued materials was laterite or *ga-wun*, an iron-rich precipitate that is easy to work into blocks when first removed from the ground but with exposure to air, hardens into a highly durable rock-like blocks known to last for centuries. It thus makes an ideal road base even in the high rainfall coastal regions of Lower Myanmar.

As documented by San Win, of the roads constructed along the coast, for instance, eight miles from Amherst (Kyaikkami) to Mawlamyaing were paved with *ga-wun* (San Win 2008).⁴ As the golden-coloured *ga-wun* pagoda bricks and sculpture at the many ancient sites of the early centuries CE in this "Suvannabhumi" region were the most obvious source, local *ga-wun* brick sellers irretrievably denuded many of the ancient pagodas within the present Mon State. In addition, with the work committees of District Councils carrying out construction implemented by the Public Works Department (PWD), there was far more interest to complete jobs within the contracted time than to protect the ancient culture. Road constructions were commonly controlled by *Pan-kya-bi* road officers, Indian workers or "coolies", who carted away the *ga-wun* from many ancient cities. This has directly contributed to the difficulty in verifying the domain of ancient "Suvannabhumi" in the present day Bago Division and the Mon State (Moore 2007; Moore and San Win 2007: 205–7, 214).

While paid workers complied, the actions also prompted local protection, one example being at old Bago (Pegu) where *ga-wun* bricks from the *Shwe-tha-lyaung* (reclining Buddha) pagoda were protected by local people. In Zothoke, Bilin Township, although Indian workers bought *ga-wun* bricks for road construction, the village headman U Shwe Neh prohibited removal of bricks from the rare *Hsin-tat-myin-tat* wall sculpted with Aśokan-style animals of the first millennium AD (Fig. 19.3). Another example is seen in the Yangon to Kyaikto connecting railroad and construction of a bridge over the Sittaung. In order to keep clear of the water, *ga-wun* bricks were brought from the walled site of Kyaikkatha at the mouth of the Sittaung. Little of these efforts are present in colonial accounts, with the Kyaikkatha undertaking an oral history passed on by some of the elder citizens of Kyaikkatha (San Win 2008).⁵

This "frontier" mentality had practical and conceptual ramifications that contributed to the dearth of any appreciable British intellectual encounter with the Buddhist society they met. Having little knowledge of the culture they governed and the example of India behind them, pagodas were commonly seen as remains of the past rather than the religious places of the present. A conceptual disinterest and single-minded rationale was of course not exclusive to British Burma, but seen in all past and present colonial mentalities.

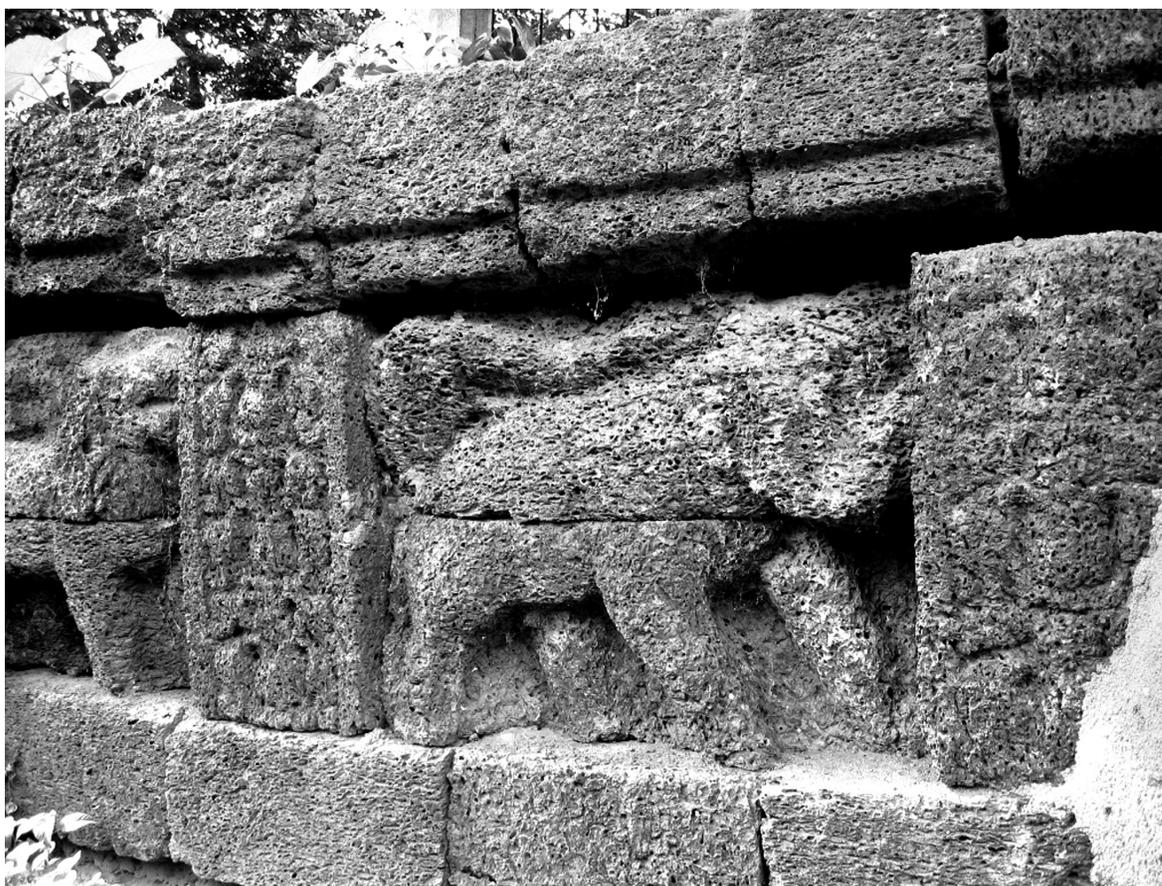


Figure 19.3: Zothoke carved laterite wall dated to the early first millennium CE, Bilin Township, Mon State (Photograph: Elizabeth Howard Moore).

19th-century Archaeology in British India

Many of the approaches used in structuring a “modern” art history and archaeology in Burma had been developed in India by James Fergusson (1808–86) and Alexander Cunningham (1814–93). Fergusson made extensive use of drawings, lithographs, engravings, plaster casts and as they became more readily available, especially photographs, to assemble a history of Indian architecture. Cunningham was guided by the recently published accounts of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims Fa Hsien (Faxian) travelling from the Indus to the Ganges between 399–413 CE and Hsuan Tsang (Xuanzang) whose journey from 629–745 CE followed the venerated Buddhist sites of India. With these in hand, Cunningham enthusiastically followed their diaries in topographic survey, description and excavation of Buddhist structures (Guha-Thakurta 2004: 313). He noted, for instance that “... all attempts to fathom the mysteries of Buddhist antiquities were but mere conjectures” (Imam 1966: 53).⁶

The European literature on Buddhism came after translations of Sanskrit texts related to Hinduism, ones that shaped a “typically orientalist textual object” (Guha-Thakurta 2004: 35).⁷ Two of the earliest accounts of Buddhism in Burma were the 1801 report of Buchanan and that of Sangermano in 1833 (Buchanan 1801; Sangermano 1995).⁸ By the second half of the 19th century, however, European scholars had “discovered” Buddhism; art historical and archaeological exploration of India was well underway. The growing interest in Buddhism, as noted above, brought exclusion of Hindu and Islamic monuments particularly in the explorations of Cunningham. In pressing for an inventory of all Buddhist remains in India for example, Cunningham noted,

A work of this kind would be of more real value for the ancient history of India than the most critical and elaborate edition of the eighteen Puranas (Imam 1966: 43).⁹

While others such as James Prinsep had avidly collected antiquities from the earlier decades of the 18th century, Cunningham's work laid the foundations for archaeology coupling architectural remains with epigraphic and other written data. In 1861, Cunningham pushed for institutional involvement in archaeology to ensure "... a careful and systematic investigation of all the existing monuments of ancient India" (Imam 1966: 54–5).

Lord Canning supported the proposal to highlight an Indian tradition of religious change that would open the door to Christian conversion. This could also be set against the "monstrous" Hindu gods, with the figure of Buddha as opponent and reformer of Brahmanism (Guha-Thakurta 2004: 36–7).¹⁰ Particularly in the mood after the 1857 CE Mutiny in British India, it also demonstrated that the most prosperous times in Indian history had been those controlled by a single ruler, implying the advantages of British sovereignty (Imam 1966: 40–1, 55).

With this combination of religious and historical reasons, and in large part due to the extensive work and enthusiasm of Cunningham, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was founded in 1861 CE. While both Fergusson and Cunningham rightfully prided themselves on their efforts to establish norms of scientific objectivity and recording, they nonetheless retained many of the perspectives and styles established by the less than factual modes which can be seen in 18th-century CE British picturesque landscape painting (Guha-Thakurta 2004: xxii, 3, 4, 7).

Archaeology in British Burma

While Cunningham was surveying Sanchi, the Shwedagon was occupied. Why the disparate attitudes towards these two Buddhist structures? The most obvious answer lies in the growing European interest in the ancient past during the 19th century: Sanchi was a ruin while the Shwedagon was a strategic location and an active site of veneration and resistance to British rule. King Bodawpaya (r. 1782–1819) commissioned his Minister Twinthin Thaik Wun Maha Sithu U Htun Nyo to collect stone inscriptions from around the country (Khin Maung Nyunt 1992a: 15). This epigraphic heritage influenced the compilation of the 1829 *Hmannan maha-yazawin-dawgyi* (*The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*) compiled for King Bagyidaw.

A number of studies were carried out by Europeans in the 19th century, including Emile Forchammer, Taw Sein Ko and Charles Duroiselle (Myint Aung 2002: 11; Luce 1948).¹¹ As in India, many of these men came from a literature and language background rather than the object-centred focus of art and archaeology. For example, in 1881, then a Pali professor at Yangon College, Forchammer was appointed as Research Officer in epigraphy. In 1902, after the deportment of King Thibaw, this became a branch office of the Archaeological Survey of India headquartered in Mandalay. Taw Sein Ko, a Chinese Myanmar-born citizen able to cope with Burmese, Pali, Chinese and English texts was appointed as the first Director (Edwards 2004; Khin Maung Nyunt 1992a: 17–8).

In the earlier 1868 instructions from Calcutta to list and photograph all antique monuments worthy of being preserved, the descriptions were mostly done by Henry Burney who had been attached to the court of King Bagyidaw. Arthur Phayre's embassy to the court recorded by Henry Yule had provided another valuable source of information on extant buildings and customs (Yule 1858/1968). These and other encounters of Western emissaries with local scholars and officials spawned some amicable interchanges on a number of subjects often little noted in the formal correspondence between Calcutta and Bago. One illustrative description includes not only Phayre (1812–85) but Father Abbona who often figured in 1852–68 correspondence between India and British Burma. The account relates a disagreement on the nature of the solar system between the Sir Arthur Phayre and U Baw, Magwe chief minister at the Mandalay court. The dispute was on whether the sun or Mount Myinmo was the centre of the solar system; Phayre cited Copernicus while the Magwe chief minister argued that Pali texts should be the final authority in such matters. U Baw finally turned to a Catholic priest, Father Abbona, who Charney concludes "confirmed Phayre's views" (Charney 2006: 172–3).

The 19th century interest in science was not limited to broad queries such as this but included other types of conceptual and empirical knowledge, from different modes of historiography to local ores and construction materials. There was curiosity in cosmology and constellations, seen for example in the 1801

account of Buchanan noted earlier who also recorded extensive detail and often illustrations of even the local norms of Buddhist architecture:

Pyathat is a kind of spire, permitted only to be used in buildings or boards dedicated to the personal use of god, the king, and of the Zarado (Buchanan 1801: 197).

The many valuable details, however, were couched in sentiments such as the following:

However absurd the tenets of this religion may be, yet, as influencing the conduct of so large a proportion of mankind, it becomes an object of great important in the *history* [italics added] of the human race (Buchanan 1801: 163).

Some colonial servants, notably Sir Arthur Phayre, consulted local scholars to learn of the country's early history. Phayre was held "... in high regard from King Mindon downwards ... [for his] exceptional knowledge of Burmese traditions, legends, and institutions which he brought to the study of the Burmese chronicles and to his own view of Burmese history" (Tinker 1961: 270). However, there is little evidence of engagement with the Buddhist doctrines until the early 1900s (Bode 1909/65: 90–5, 98–9). Many of the views which reached publication in Burmese during the 19th century were not available for English readers.¹² As a result, colonial biases such as Symes' note that Myanmar officials boarding his ship had "an attitude and manner very much resembling baboons" imposed not only a partiality but an authority to decide who and what to include and exclude.

While the text primacy of archaeology in British India (and Europe) was replicated, in Burma this included the active local scholarship and chronicle tradition. In addition, Burmese archaeology was started some 50 years after India by which time the use of photography was not only well established but commercial photography was supplanting earlier amateur and government photographers. While Burney and Phayre made substantial contributions, the principal assignment of both men was in other fields of government service, and as noted by Edwards, while Phayre appears to have been personally indignant at British, American and Indian disrespect for pagodas and in the late 1850s, drafted a memorandum for their protection, little of this was implemented and colonial responsibilities dominated his official actions (Edwards 2004: 289).¹³ In short, the social and religious context of Burma was significantly different from that which the British had encountered in India, yet the methodologies developed by Fergusson and Cunningham were retained in this easternmost part of "Greater India".

Nationalism and Archaeology

As discussed above, in the unsettled period just after the Second Anglo-Burmese war (1850–2), parallel communities and knowledge emerged between the colonial attitude to the ancient religious monuments and the living Buddhist practice. A further relevant aspect of the 19th century was a self-conscious use of the past to construct a controlled perception of that past. This aspect is most apparent in 1901 after the Third Anglo-Burmese War when Curzon moved the British troops and club out of Mandalay Palace, highlighting it as a bygone rather than present era. Even then, however, Keck notes the irony in Curzon's appreciation of the political implications in British control of the Palace, describing him as "indifferent (and probably largely ignorant) of the ways in which Buddhist doctrines defined the heritage of the site" (Keck 2004: 13).

In an article addressing the national and political uses of prehistoric archaeology in Southeast Asia, Glover has underlined the use of similar discourses to legitimate and strengthen the state dating back to the historians and playwrights of Tudor England. He mentions in particular the "deliberate invention of antique rituals and symbols of power", noting Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The invention of tradition* (1983) and Anderson's *Imagined communities* (1991) where colonial resources deployed for clearing, excavating and restoring ancient monuments was common to India, Burma, the Netherlands Indies and Indochina. He also describes the lack of relevance to the majority of the populace of prehistoric excavations, something seen in Myanmar until in the later decades of the 20th century (Glover 2003: 16, 24, 26–7).

Indeed, prehistory was not the priority in either the early 20th-century reports of archaeologist Taw Sein Ko or the first excavations undertaken after Independence which focused on Buddhist sites recorded

in royal chronicles and epigraphy (Moore 2007). The co-existence of temporal and chronicle history implicit in this site selection is significant, one sustained in present approaches to the past within the country today with which this paper concludes. This duality is however, often by-passed in accounts where a nation-building focus is prioritized. Edwards, for example, effectively profiles Taw Sein Ko as “interlocutor” between British, Burmese and Chinese communities, although still placing archaeology within a local-foreign imperial dominated context rather than indigenous constructs of time and sacred lands.

Preservation of a single past era in Edwards’ model was part of a wider state (colonial) control, bringing edicts such as Taw Sein Ko’s 1901 note of the ban on using temple maintenance funds for gilding or pagoda festivals (Edwards 2004: 324–5). Ray addresses related issues of conflict such as “monuments of reverence” at Bodh Gaya in British India and the French placement of the living ancestral veneration at Angkor within past history. This colonial restructuring of “abodes of spiritual power to objects of artistic and aesthetic appreciation” usefully highlights the effects of the colonial period but leaves aside retention of the ancestral focus in Cambodia today (Ray 2008: 432, 443, 417). In the case of Myanmar, although many religious and archaeological events are absent in chronicles and tales of popular heroes of the past, as McKay has noted in the context of Tibet,

While we cannot ever fully recreate the ethos of a past era, we can use these sources to understand a great deal about how the Tibet cadre thought, why they did so, and what effect their thinking and consequent actions had (McKay 1997: 3).

Conclusion

When British troops took control of the Shwedagon in 1853 CE, no physical blockade was set up. Nonetheless, the insertion of alien sovereignty into the pagoda’s complex spatial and religious environment created a “borderland” wherein race marked rank and access. This effectively coupled strategic and geographic frontiers but the free circulation at the core of the site’s spatial and devotional existence was severely hindered (Banerjee forthcoming). With all this implies about the stifling of religious practice, the stress of occupation nonetheless strengthened and invigorated local patronage and artistic creativity.

In 1868, 15 years after the Shwedagon occupation, orders were issued from Calcutta to document Burma’s ancient monuments. While repair of religious structures had long been a part of royal patronage and King Bodawpaya (r. 1782–1819 CE) assigned one of his ministers to collect all stone inscriptions and collate a record of glebe lands, local custom did not include archaeological documentation (Khin Maung Nyunt 1992a: 15–6; Luce 1948).¹⁴ In 1881, 20 years after the founding of the Archaeological Survey of India, Emil Forchhammer was appointed as Research Officer of the newly-formed Epigraphic Office. Today’s Department of Archaeology emerged from this office, retaining a focus on texts and strongly empirical recording.

As with the parallel British and Burmese worlds created during the occupation of the Shwedagon, the text focus of early Myanmar archaeology was often at the expense of comparative interpretation of the material culture and landscape. With a few exceptions, excavation up until recent decades was the unearthing of above ground monuments from earthen mounds (Moore 2007). Since 1998 excavation of Nyaunggan, however, prehistoric documentation has received fresh impetus. This has continued with a rescue excavation at Tagaung in 2003, work at a large number of Bronze-Iron and Iron Age cemetery sites in the Samon valley cultural sphere and 2004 excavation southeast of the Halin city wall where HL25 documented the below-ground cultural deposits of 2.4–9.75 m. The Halin excavations provide significant *in situ* data for assessing the Bronze-Iron chiefdom to Buddhist royal transition. The continuation of such excavations is illustrated by 2008 finds of iron and pottery typical of the late Bronze-Iron Samon cultures at the early Buddhist walled site of Waddi midway between Mandalay and Bagan (Kyemon 2008).¹⁵

Perhaps due to the continuity of active spiritual practice, Myanmar archaeology has also generally excluded consideration of local traditions of great antiquity, from the allusions embedded in chronicles to veneration of local tutelary guardians and popular belief. Recent archaeological work and literature is abundant, however, and in need of greater national and international reference. Within the country, rigorous citation is now becoming part of academic custom although younger scholars often favor earlier

English sources of the colonial period over recent work of their peers. In addition, literature published in Myanmar is not widely circulated outside the country and with the majority of work in Myanmar language without English abstracts international scholars do not regularly cite current Myanmar articles and books.

The colonial occupation and disruption of sacred spaces, the formation of archaeology from the British experience in India, and the lack of international circulation and English translation of Myanmar scholars have disadvantaged Myanmar archaeology. Despite ongoing archaeological exploration and documentation, old paradigms are frequently reiterated. Western interpretations often ignore, attempt to use as an empirical chronology or note as “myth” the rich chronicle histories and oral traditions of sacred sites. Given the country’s heritage of not simply site location but lineage, relics and place, excluding the present sacred landscape from interpretation of the past does not reflect the full scope of the country’s cultural legacy.

It is not realistic and would be simplistic to lay fault for any of these issues at the foot of the colonial practices epitomized in the 1853 CE occupation of the Shwedagon. Nonetheless, application of India-developed norms in British Burma created parallel worlds of empirical archaeology and religious sustenance underpinning perceptions that continue to discourage multidisciplinary and critical studies of the country’s complex archaeological heritage. The same caveat applies to the lack of British engagement with the conceptual significance of the pagodas nonetheless considered worthy of art historical and archaeological documentation by scholars such as Arthur Phayre. While as mentioned above, the introduction of Western approaches to the past developed somewhat differently in Burma than had been the case in India, policies from the last decades of the 19th century did begin to halt enthusiastic collection of antiquities from countless pagodas and monasteries by British officers and civilians (Guha-Thakurta 2004: 3). Such events are not lying dormant in the past, for the most essential part of our understanding of earlier periods lies in the present. As noted by Guha-Thakurta,

Pasts become meaningful and usable only when they are activated by the contemporary desires of individuals and communities, and, most powerfully, by the will of nations (2004: xvii).

Similar sentiments of the present often reiterate this legacy, from the utterance of the Buddha that Shwedagon’s Singutarra Hill was to shelter the Sacred Hairs to the replication of the Shwedagon at other locales. Uppatasanti pagoda at Nay Pyi Taw, for example, is built with the same form and but officially one foot lower (325 rather than 326 feet) than the Shwedagon. The legacy of royal place and capitals is also reified at Nay Pyi Taw in a row of imposing statues of Anawrahta, Bayintnaung and Alaungphaya. The unbroken lineage of Buddhist kingship from 11th-century Bagan to 16th-century Bago (Hanthawaddy) and 18th- to 19th-century Inwa (Ava)-Mandalay is recalled in these royal images, with their silhouettes projected against a floodlit sky and emblazoned on a golden outline of the country for commemorative postal stamps on the 59th Independence Day, 4 January 2007 (New Light of Myanmar 2008) (Fig. 19.4). These are two of many current innovations, notable for their effective use of portrait sculptures and graphics, to draw the country’s royal and territorial history into the present. As illustrated by the complex circumstances set out in this paper, the 1853 occupation of the Shwedagon was a significant catalyst in a time of conflict and absorption for the cognisant use of the past and intertwining of archaeological and religious objectives now coming to fruition.



Figure 19.4: Stamp for 2007 Independence Day with rulers of 11–18th century Myanmar on a golden outline of the country (Photograph: Elizabeth Howard Moore).

Notes

1. Pyay 18°48'N, 95°13'E, Toungoo 18°56'N, 96°27'E.
2. The 1866 structure was erected for the Second King of Siam, Somdet Phra Pinklao.
3. Line 43, stone three; one *tical* of gold was worth 25 *kyat* at this time, with the gold costing approximately 600,000 *kyat* or c. US\$600 today. I thank U San Win and Ashin Pyinna Sara for their help (June 2008).

4. Kyaikkami 16°04' N, 97°34'E, Mawlamyaing 16°28'N, 97°37'E.
5. Kyaikkatha 17°21'N, 96°56'E.
6. Footnote 3 citing Cunningham's Report II, pp. 84–5.
7. Citing Almond 1988: 24–8.
8. Published posthumously following Sangermano's departure from Burma to Rome in 1808.
9. Citing Cunningham's 1854 work *The Bhilsa Topes*, Report 1, pp. x–xi; and noting Cunningham's "Opening of the Topes or Buddhist Monuments of Central India", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (JRAS)*, 1852.
10. Citing Almond 1988: 70–4.
11. The Burma Research Society was formed by J.S. Furnivall in 1910, with its journal appearing the following year. From 1928 to 1956, five portfolios of inscriptions were published, providing a fundamental reference of the epigraphic record. The Ministry of Culture's Department of Archaeology was founded in 1902 as the Epigraphy Office under the Archaeological Survey of India.
12. For example, Remusat, Abel, *Foe Koue Ki ou Relation Des Royaumes Bouddhiques* (Paris, 1836); Stanislas Julien *Memoires sur Les Contress Occidentales*. Paris, Tome I 1857, Tome II 1858.
13. Citing 1868 documentation in the National Archives, Yangon.
14. As noted in the text, King Bodawpaya (Badon) assigned Minister Twinthin Taik Wun Maha Sithu U Htun Nyo to this task. The records were then used in the reign of King Bagyidaw (Sagaing Min) by an 11-member team of scholars to compile a new standard chronicle commonly known as the *Glass Palace Chronicle*.
15. Natogyi 21°25'N, 95°39'E.

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