Recursion, Remembering and Re-telling Time in the Stupas of Pagan

ပုဂံဘုရားပုထိုးများအကြောင်း ထပ်တလဲလဲ အဓိပ္ပါယ်ဖွင့်ဆိုခြင်း၊ အမှတ်ရခြင်း နှင့် အချိန်အား ပြန်ပြောင်းပြောဆိုခြင်း

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Abstract: This article examines how time is recursively presented and structured by the stupas of Pagan to form a chronological narrative, and to what purpose. Recursion — the reproduction of something within itself in a potentially infinite pattern — is seen in the stupas' provision of temporal closure that returns to a beginning. Stupas' recursive treatment of time can be seen through their reproduction of the past to provide meaning to the present, their restating of the present to contribute to ritual continuity and finally how their function as a syntactic end simultaneously creates the possibility of a future. The reproduction of time and timelessness prompts a reconsideration of the periodical notion of historical time. Periodisation is the idea that time progresses in a linear fashion according to periods marked by a beginning or end. In Pagan, the recursive treatment of time confounds these beginnings and ends, structuring and presenting time in a unique fashion for its ideological goals. This essay explores how the recursive manner of organising time provides narratives of significance to events, art, and architecture in Pagan's history.

Keywords: recursion, stupas, cyclical time, Jātaka, death, merit, memory.

အကျဉ်းချုပ် — ပုဂံဘုရား ပုထိုးများတွင် အစီအစဉ်တကျ ဇာတ်လမ်း ဇာတ်ကွက်များ ပုံဖော်ရန်နှင့် ဘယ်ရည်ရွယ် ချက်ဖြင့် အချိန်ကို (အတိတ်၊ ပစ္စုပ္ပန်၊ အနာဂတ်) မည်သို့ ပြန်လည် ခွဲခြမ်းစိတ်ဖြာပီး၊ တင်ပြထားသည်ကို ယခု စာတမ်းတွင် လေ့လာသွား ပါမည်။ Recursion ဆိုသည်မှာ တစ်စုံတစ်ခုအား ၎င်းအတွင်း၌ အသေချ၍ ရှိသည့်ပုံစံ ပြန်လည် ပွါးယူနိုင်စွမ်းရှိခြင်း ဖြစ်သည်။ ၎င်းအား ဘုရားပုထိုးများအား တစ်နေ့တာ ဖူးမျှော်ခွင့်ပိတ်ခြင်းနောက် ပြန်လည်ဖွင့်လှစ်ရန် အစပျိုးသည် သံသရာလည်ခြင်း (သို့) ပြန်ကြွေးခြင်း[1] အနေဖြင့်မြင်နိုင်၏။ ဘုရားစေတီ ပုထိုးများတွင် အချိန်အား ထပ်ဖန်တလဲပြန်လည် တင်ပြပုံ ဆွေးနွေးပုံ များကို အောက်ပါတို့တွင်မြင်တွေ့နိုင်သည်။ အတိတ်ကိုပြန်လည် ဖော်ထုတ်ခြင်းဖြင့် လက်ရှိ အဓိပ္ပါယ်အား သိနိုင်ခြင်း (ဥပမာ အတိတ်ကာလ အချိန်သဘောကို ပေါ်လွင်ရန် ဗုဒ္ဓဝင်ဇာတ်တော်များကို ဘုရားပုထိုးများတွင်ထပ်တလဲလဲ သရုပ်ဖော်ခြင်း)၊ ၎င်း တို့၏ ပစ္စုပ္ပန်ကို ပြန်လည်သုံးသပ်ခြင်းဖြင့် စဉ်ဆက်မပြတ် ထုံးတမ်းဓလေ့များ ရေရှည်တည်တံ့နိုင်ခြင်း၊ နောက်ဆုံးအနေဖြင့် ၎င်း တို့အား ကိုးကွယ်မှုသည် နိဗ္ဗာန်အား ရည်စူးသကဲ့သို့ အနာဂတ် ဖြစ်နိုင်ချေတစ်ခုကို ဘယ်လိုဖန်တီးပေးမလဲ ဆိုသည်တို့

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[1] ဘာသာပြန်သူ၏ရှင်းလင်းချက် — အချိန်ပြန်ကြွေးခြင်းဆိုသည်မှာ ဥပမာအနေဖြင့် ဗုဒ္ဓမြတ်စွာဘုရားသည် ၎င်း၏အတိတ်ဇာတ်တော်များအကြောင်း ပြန်လည် ဟောပြောရာတွင် ဇာတ်တော်များအဆုံး၌ မည်သည့်အတိတ်ဇာတ်ကောင်မှာ ယခုမည်သူဖြစ်သည်ဟူသည့် အတိတ်နှင့် ပစ္စုပ္ပန်အချိန်ကို နှိုင်းယှဉ်ပြောဆိုခြင်း ဖြင့် အကြောင်းအကျိုးဆက်စပ်နေသည် သဘောကိုဆိုလိုသည်။

Miriam Yᴇᴏ Sze En

ဖြစ်သည်။ အချိန် နှင့် ထာဝရမြဲခြင်းသဘောအား ပြန်လည် တင်ပြရခြင်းသည် အတိတ်ကာလအား အချိန်အပိုင်း အခြားများ ခွဲ၍မြင် သည့်အယူအဆကို ပြန်လည်စဉ်းစားသုံးသပ်ရန် စေ့ဆော်ပေးသည်။ ခေတ်ခွဲခြားခြင်း ဟူသည် အစ (သို့) အဆုံးသတ် အနေဖြင့် မှတ်သားထားသည့်ခေတ်ကာလအပိုင်းအခြားများအရ အစဉ်အတိုင်း အချိန် ပြောင်းလဲမှု ဖြစ်စဉ် သဘောသဘာဝကို ဆိုလိုသည်။ ပုဂံတွင် အချိန်ပြန်ကြေ ာသည့် ပုံစံဖြင့် တင်ပြသည့်သဘောသည် စံတစ်ခု အနေဖြင့် ခေတ်ခွဲခြားရန် သတ်မှတ်ထား သော အဆိုပါ အစ (သို့) အဆုံးရှိခြင်း သဘောအား မှားကြောင်း သက်သေ ပြနေသည်။ ယခု စာတမ်းသည် ပြန်ကြေ ာသည့်ပုံစံ ဖြင့် အချိန်အား စနစ်တကျ စီမံပိုင်းခြား ခြင်း သည် ပုဂံသမိုင်း ဖြစ်ရပ်များ၊ အနုပညာနှင့် ဗိသုကာလက်ရာများ၏ အရေးပါသော ဇာတ်လမ်းများအား မည်သို့ ဖြည့်စွက်ပေးသည်ကို လေ့လာ တင်ပြသွားပါမည်။

အဓိက စကားလုံးများ — ထပ်တလဲလဲ အဓိပ္ပါယ်ဖွင့်ဆိုခြင်း၊ ဘုရားပုထိုး၊ အချိန် သံသရာလည်ခြင်း၊ ဇာတ်တော်၊ သေဆုံးခြင်း၊ ကောင်းမှု ကုသိုလ်၊ အမှတ်ရခြင်း

Introduction

The Pagan kingdom was a powerful kingdom that flourished in the 11th to 13th centuries in what is now known as Myanmar.[2] By the mid-11th century, the Pagan kingdom centralised its control of several city states, facilitated by the consolidation of their plural 'Buddhisms' into a prescribed religio-social order which was structured by the king and his "ideational architects": courtiers, artists, scribes, monks, and more.[3] They used canonical, commentarial and post-commentarial sources to legitimise the king, integrate the kingdom, and dampen any tensions that arose from societal adjustments during that time.[4] By the 13th century, Pagan's control radiated to the borders of present-day Myanmar.[5]

Between the 11th and 13th centuries over five hundred stupas were built in Pagan's capital city, acts of accumulating merit as well as consolidating

and displaying political and socio-economic power.[6] Stupas are a funerary monument which contain the Buddha's relics. They are both commemorative and symbolic in nature, monuments to the event of his death and sites for continual worship made conducive for ritual because of their ontological and symbolic connection to the Buddha.[7] Existing scholarship regarding the historical and stylistic development of Pagan's stupas adopts a chronological approach. For instance, Gordon Hannington Luce studied Pagan's history, architecture and art sequentially.[8] Paul Strachan's work divides Pagan's monuments into 'early', 'middle' and 'late' periods, while Donald Stadtner selects thirty-three monuments to illustrate key points in Pagan's history.[9] These studies examine the stupa's monumental form developing through time, but ignore its unique relationship with time as a commemorative monument and a pivot around which past and future intertwine.

This article explores the stupas of Pagan not as events in time but as events *about* time. Drawing on Steven Collins' conception that nirvana or *nibbāna* creates a syntactic "sense of an ending" for the "imaginative world constituted by [Pali] texts" which provides closure and discursive unity, I argue that the stupa employs visual means to create a sense of temporal closure in the narrative of the Buddha's life.[10] However, this closure radically departs from Western concepts of linear temporality since Buddhism espouses a different concept of time: that of continuing cycles of arising and cessation. The belief in cyclic time is expressed in the temple décor and inscriptions from the early kings of Pagan, which stressed that their domain and

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[2] Pagan has since colonial times been used to refer to the ancient city now known as Bagan in the Mandalay region of Myanmar. In 1989, the military government enforced name changes throughout the country; Burma was replaced with the old name Myanmar and the transliteration of place names was changed to reflect Burmese pronunciation, for example, Pagan became Bagan. As such, I use 'Pagan' to refer to the ancient period, and 'Bagan' to refer to the area today.

[3] Hᴀɴᴅʟɪɴ, "The King and his Bhagavā," 156.

[4] The attention to and use of textual sources in this agenda has led to the Buddhism advertised in Pagan in the 11th–14th centuries to be termed 'Theravāda', however, scholars including Lillian Hᴀɴᴅʟɪɴ and Michael Aᴜɴɢ-Tʜᴡɪɴ have highlighted the insufficiency and simplicity of this term to describe the state religion which changed according to the sociological context and royal agenda. Indeed, the word 'Theravāda' is absent from Burmese inscriptions.

[5] Hᴜᴅsᴏɴ, "The Origins of Bagan," 183–87.

[6] Lᴇᴍᴀɴ, "The Relevance of the Founders' Cults," 27–28; and Wɪᴄᴋs, *Money, Markets, and Trade*, 121–155.

[7] I use the words 'stupa', 'pagoda' and 'temple' interchangeably. Pagoda as used in Myanmar refers to both stupas and temples. G.H. Lᴜᴄᴇ's definition of the word *'kū'* (temple) refers to the vaulted or hollow pagodas of Pagan. Lᴜᴄᴇ, *Old Burma-Early Pagán*, vol.1, 243.

[8] Lᴜᴄᴇ, *Old Burma-Early Pagán,* vol.1.

[9] Sᴛᴀᴅᴛɴᴇʀ, *Ancient Pagan*; Strachan, *Pagan*, 23.

[10] Cᴏʟʟɪɴs, *Nirvana*, 4,17.

"the Dhamma… had been ravaged, contaminated and obscured" by their predecessors whereas they would revitalise the *dhamma* for everyone's welfare, ushering in renovation and purification.[11] Such cycles of decay and renovation are repeatable, which is seen in narrative and scholastic treatments regarding the infinite cyclic nature of the cosmos as well as narratives about the Buddha's lineage.[12] The latter highlights the repeatable narrative of the coming and Enlightenment of a Buddha which corresponds to a zenith of the *dhamma*, before and after which the *dhamma* exists in a state of decay. This narrative includes a future-oriented prophecy that extends the pattern of Buddhas of the past to anticipate the coming of Metteyya, the future Buddha.[13] Stupas are events about time in that they are embedded within and correspond to this cyclic view of time which moves through cycles of decay and restoration. Each appearance of closure speaks of the beginning of another cycle, a future to come — a pattern I call recursion.

Recursion occurs in literature when "stories or characters generate copies of themselves in potentially infinite cycles of narrative."[14] Each end creates a new beginning: "a circuit with a twist to it, like a Möbius strip."[15] As a result, recursion creates a temporal paradox, enabling "infinite cycles of…reproduction" by repeating events while progressing the narrative.[16] The potential for infinity which undermines any attempt to count or measure time, coupled with the paradoxical sense of an ending, enables the stupa to hold time and timelessness in balance. Using this critical lens, I argue that in their artistic and discursive schemes stupas reproduce formulas not to return to the past but, in a Möbius strip-like twist, to enable continuity into the future.

I use the stupa's unique treatment of time to illustrate that those composing the history of Pagan — in its architecture, art, and literature — did so in ways that depart from the Western understanding of history as a disinterested record. Instead, I highlight how ideological and philosophical influences intersect with representations of history and time in the stupas of Pagan. Through exploring these influences, this article discusses why such conceptions of time so vex the Western reader of Pagan's history, as Michael Aung-Thwin has depicted in his correction of multiple misinterpretations of Pagan's history by EuroAmerican scholarship. More broadly, this article refers to the influences which scholars past and present bring with them to the reading and writing of history.

Beginning at the End

Stupas are funerary monuments which symbolise the Buddha's enlightened state and departure from infinite cyclical time by referring to his *parinibbāna* and by containing his relics. As such, they serve as syntactic ends to the Buddha's life cycles of arising and cessation and syntactic gestures toward the timeless state of *nibbāna*. These past life cycles are presented on, around and within stupas. The syntactic end of the stupa is an aspirational one, manifesting the final, most favourable rebirth which is precisely not rebirth. By following the examples of the Buddha's past lives represented at the stupa and reproducing them as acts of virtue in the present, an individual and society were able to secure their own favourable rebirth. In this way, the stupa as narrative ending is part of a recursive pattern of historical continuity modelled on the past.

This recursive pattern is visually conveyed by the Jātaka plaques decorating the stupa terraces. The Jātaka are tales told by the Buddha regarding his past lives. The tales are generally formatted such that the Buddha in the 'present' recalls a story of his past and then after the story's conclusion, draws parallels between the story to the present, giving a recursive or "déjà vu quality to the narrative."[17] These stories are often used to impart ethical teachings. However, viewed on the architectural structures of the stupa, the Jātaka plaques also perform another role: creating a soteriological narrative in which the worshipper actively participates, where their present devotional actions create a favourable future.

This soteriological narrative is modelled on the Buddha's tales of rebirth which culminate in his Enlightenment, as visualised on stupas in Pagan. Robert Brown, analysing Indian and Southeast Asian architecture, argues that Jātaka stories "historicise and manifest the presence of the Buddha."[18] How the Jātaka plaques do this can be seen by examining Pagan's Mingalazedi, the last major stupa built by King Narathihapade between 1274 and 1284. The Jātaka plaques of the Mingalazedi begin on the lowest terrace and ascend the stupa (Figure 1). The worshipper who walks up the terraces experiences a version of the Buddha's life story that approaches the Buddha's Enlightenment with each ascending terrace. The way that the Jātaka are presented is recursive; each past life generates the next. Its culmination is

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[11] Handlin, "The King and his Bhagavā," 168.

[12] Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*, 7–8

[13] Nattier, 21–22.

[14] Singer, "Recursion, Supplementarity, and the Limits of Subjectivity in John Barth's 'Menelaiad'", 36.

[15] Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse*, vii.

[16] Singer, "Recursion, Supplementarity, and the Limits of Subjectivity in John Barth's 'Menelaiad'", 36.

[17] Strong, *The Buddha*, 21.

[18] Brown, 73, 74.

Figure 1. Jātaka plaques, Mingalazedi Pagoda, Bagan, Myanmar. Photograph by Miriam Yeo, July 2019, (CC BY-NC 4.0).

visualised by the stupa, the commemorative symbol of the liberated Buddha.[19] The Jātaka visually represents the biography of the Buddha, which contributes to the sense of the presence of the enlightened Buddha, manifested in the stupa. Conversely, contextualised by the stupa, the Buddha's past lives are understood as a movement towards Enlightenment.

This narrative arc of an unenlightened being reaching soteriological resolution could just as well apply to worshippers as to the Buddha. The Jātaka text in the *Sutta Piṭaka* is considered one of the "primary source[s] for examples of merit-making" and by exhibiting it visually on the stupas, Pagan's laity were encouraged toward merit-making behaviour that would result in a more prosperous rebirth.[20] These plaques were likely recognisable as the narrative of the Buddha's past lives since Jātaka were frequently included in village sermons.[21] In Bagan now this also appears to be the

case.[22] In 2019, at Payathonzu Temple, a sandpainting seller pointed out the temple decoration to me. While he admitted he did not know which Jātaka corresponded to each image, he certainly knew them collectively as Jātaka. Merit-making through big or small acts was a key part of Pagan's societal ideology. Pagan's laity "were provided role models in the form of occupants of splendid *vimānas* (heavenly abodes) whose attainments, though mostly in the hereafter, stemmed from tiny acts of goodness everyone could do."[23] This was crucial to ease social tensions between the influential and the poor by suggesting to those in poverty that their social and financial limitations did not lessen their chances of securing a favourable future, since even the smallest act had eternal weight. In this ideological scheme, "poverty was no barrier to good rebirth" if one practiced the right actions espoused by Pagan's ideological scheme and the Buddha's teaching in the present.[24] Pagan's stupas

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[19] SKORUPSKI, "Buddha's Stūpa and Image," 187.

[20] GALLOWAY, "Buddhist Narrative Imagery during the 11th century at Pagan, Burma," 161.

[21] MAUNG HTIN AUNG, *Burmese Folk Tales*, xii.

[22] As stated earlier, Pagan became Bagan following a name change in 1989 under the military government.

[23] HANDLIN, "The King and his Bhagavā," 210.

[24] HANDLIN, 208.

Figure 2. Votive tablet depicting innumerable Buddhas, Archaeological Museum, Bagan, Myanmar. Photograph by Miriam Yeo, July 2019, (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Figure 3. Votive tablet depicting the Twenty-eight Buddhas, Archaeological Museum, Bagan, Myanmar. Photograph by Miriam Yeo, July 2019, (CC BY-NC 4.0).

and the Jātaka plaques depicting favourable actions and rebirth were a striking visual reminder that their daily actions of veneration and good conduct were ultimately sowing the seeds of a better future.

The crucial function of the Jātaka narratives presented in Pagan is for the worshipper to understand that the plaques represent the Buddha's past lives, leading to his life as Gotama in which he achieved Enlightenment.[25] This means they do not primarily tell a story of events chronologically through time. Instead, they tell a recursive story *about* time, in which the actions of each life are implicated in the next in a causational manner.[26]

The importance of this pattern of causation in the Jātaka tales can be seen in how they are relayed in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, a volume in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. While this text itself is unlikely to have been widely read beyond the *sangha*, it appears in an inscription of 1241 from the eastern wall of the Shwegugyi Pagoda, indicating that the story was known in Pagan. The recursive nature of the Buddha's memory in the *Majjhima Nikāya* provides insight into how and why the Jātakas on the stupa may have been 'read'. The

Buddha recollects: "one birth, two births…a thousand births, a hundred thousand births… Passing away from there, [he] reappeared here."[27] In the Buddha's 'remembering' his past lives are not spoken about in detail, instead they are narrated to highlight how each birth repeats the previous birth. His memories are more like what David Lopez calls a "representation of the past" which eventually manifest the Buddha's presence 'here'.[28] This tale is told just before the Buddha achieves Enlightenment, after which there is no rebirth. Likewise, the Jātaka tales on the Mingalazedi stupa re-present the Buddha's biography to manifest his presence in a monument that commemorates his departure from the continuous cycles of rebirth through his *parinibbāna*. They also persuade the worshipper towards a life lived in the manner of the Buddha — a life of virtue best equipped to enable the soteriological resolution he has modelled. To do this, they recursively gesture beyond their individual narratives to reproduce and re-tell a coherent narrative of the path to enlightenment.

Causation is also conveyed by the Buddhas of the past, another recursive theme that surfaces in Pagan's

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[25] GALLOWAY, "Buddhist Narrative Imagery during the 11th century at Pagan, Burma," 164.

[26] BROWN, 74.

[27] Ñāṇamoli and BODHI, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 105.

[28] LOPEZ, "Memories of the Buddha," 36

Figure 4. Ceiling mural depicting innumerable Buddhas, Le-myet-hna Pagoda, Bagan, Myanmar. Photograph by Miriam Yeo, July 2019, (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Figure 5. Four of the Twenty-eight gilded buddhas surrounding the Shwezigon Pagoda, Shwezigon Pagoda, Bagan, Myanmar. Photograph by Miriam Yeo, July 2019, (CC BY-NC 4.0).

At first glance, it appears that these prophecies temporally predate their events — the past predicts the present. However, this pattern can also be viewed retrospectively, as one of "infinite regress" rather than chronological progression.[30] Richard Gombrich illustrates this by analysing the Buddha's sermon in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* in which the Buddha uses the example of a past Buddha to teach that each Buddha's life follows an unchangeable pattern, "to which his own life has conformed."[31] However, the reverse is also true, as in fact "the account of his six predecessors is patterned on the story of Gotama's own life."[32] Seen from the end, the past Buddhas are a reproduction of the present Buddha and are given significance by his recollections. This reveals the recursive nature of this motif: the present and past Buddhas reproduce and mutually legitimise each other.

A group of bronze figures depicting the Buddha's of the past was found in the relic chamber of the 11th-century encased stupa, Pawdawmu.[33] The group includes four Buddha figures seated on a dais with smaller figures kneeling before them with hands in *añjali mudrā*, a gesture of prayer and respect (Figure 6). Luce posits that the figures "show Gotama in his earlier existences paying homage to preceding Buddhas."[34] Each meeting between Gotama in an earlier existence and a former Buddha predicts his realisation as a Buddha. However, in the physical representation of this group, there is no 'preceding' Buddha — all are present simultaneously in a collapsing of sequential time.

Time is nevertheless indicated as each of the Pawdawmu Buddha figures' aureoles is topped by a stupa which acts as a discursive marker that the Buddha has passed

stupas. These included the innumerable Buddhas (Figure 2), the 24 previous Buddhas, and the 28 previous Buddhas (Figure 3). These Buddhas are described in the *Buddhavaṃsa*, the *Khuddaka-Nikāya* and the *Nidānakathā*. They appear on votive tablets and temple murals (Figure 4), and within and without stupas in Pagan. The *Glass Palace Chronicle* suggests that the Mingalazedi stupa contains gold images of the Twenty-Eight Buddhas.[29] A shrine at the Shwezigon stupa, built between the 11th and 12th century, contains 28 small gilded Buddhas in niches (Figure 5). Their story is this: each future Buddha meets a past Buddha who prophesies his final rebirth as a Buddha.

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[29] Pe Maung Tin and Luce, *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, 171.

[30] Gombrich, "The Significance of Former Buddhas in the Theravadin Tradition," 69.

[31] Gombrich, 65.

[32] Gombrich, 65.

[33] The stupa is sometimes called 'Scovell's Pawdawmu', after Mr C.E. Scovell, a British Executive Engineer, who 'discovered' and opened the stupa in the 1920s.

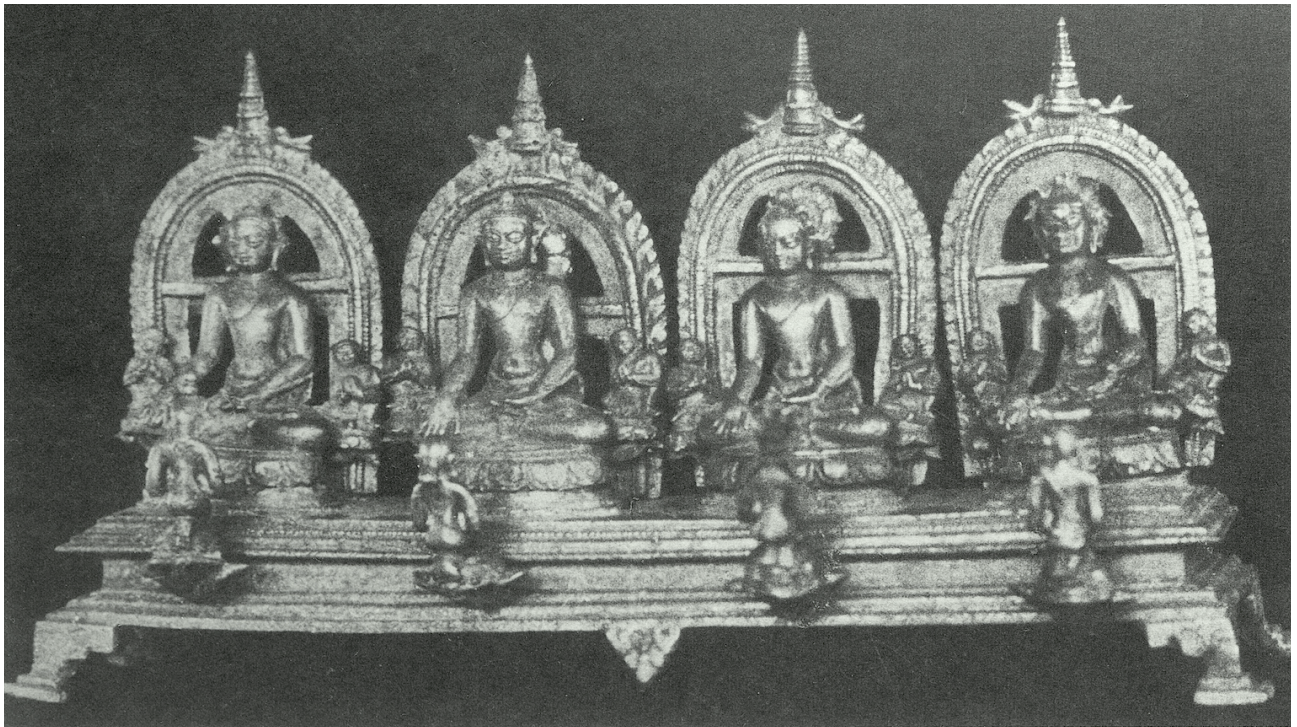[34] Luce, *Old Burma-Early Pagán*, vol. 2,197.

Figure 6. Four previous Buddhas and worshippers found in the relic chamber of Pawdawmu, Pagan, Burma. Photograph by G. H. Luce, 1969 © National Library of Australia, P436.

away. This motif can also be seen in other depictions of the Buddha; used like punctuation signalling the end of one Buddha and the beginning of the next (Figure 3).This materialises the use of the stupa in the *Buddhavaṃsa*, in which the transition from one Buddha to the next is seen in the conclusion of each chapter with "a mention of the shrine [stupa]."[35] This makes each Buddha a chronological "event in time" progressing one after another.[36] The past Buddhas are imbued with a sense of 'pastness' which contributes to the continuing flow of time. Thus, the narrative progresses despite the recursive paradigm, by delineating a 'before' and 'after' pivoting around the stupa.

The Jātaka and motif of the past Buddhas all serve to create a sense of the past which the narrative of the Buddha is rooted in and derives meaning from. The worshipper, modelling their life on the virtuous life of the Buddha presented to them as a means to a favourable rebirth, also acts out a societal role — avoiding disarray and performing small actions of goodness which on a spiritual level accumulates merit, and on a societal level nurtures social cohesion. By implicating the worshipper's individual moment of devotion into a wider soteriological movement through a representation of their place in history, Pagan's ideational architects created a complex recursive narrative even as they entrenched a stable society for the king.

Reproductive Records

Having established that stupa material follows a recursive pattern in which the past is reproduced in the present and vice versa, I now turn to the inscriptions that accompany the stupas. These appear to inscribe the present, recording an event in a historical manner, but as Jan Nattier argues, the Buddhist's idea of history is never a disinterested record.[37] Likewise, the inscriptions at the stupas do not simply record an event; instead, they are integrated such that their creation is part of the merit-making ritual. Furthermore, they extend that ritual into the future by framing the merit as a written aspiration. Inscriptions in Pagan appear to record a synchronic moment by recording the events of a specific time. This includes stupa construction and upkeep, donations, and patrons.[38] However, the inscriptions also participate in the events, playing what A.L. Austin describes as both constative and performative roles. Besides merely describing reality (constative utterances), language also *creates* reality through performative utterance when in the right context.[39]

While not dating to the time of the Kingdom of Pagan, a productive example of how inscriptions are both

[35] Collins, *Nirvana*, 140.

[36] Collins, 144.

[37] Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*, 140.

[38] Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 18.

[39] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.

constative and performative is an inscription of 1727 in a shrine at the Shwezigon Pagoda. A combination of a written and diagrammatic dedication of a new *hti* (umbrella spire) for the stupa begins with a diagram of a *hti* comprised of letters (Figure 7). The inscription describes and formally generates a *hti*, beginning from the letter at the base of the inscribed *hti*, to the top and then to the right and left, generating the shape of the *hti* as it is read. The resultant word-image describes and preserves the *hti* as synchronic moment in history and performatively re-produces it both physically and mentally. The inscription is not simply documentation in words but manifestation through words.[40]

This is not an anomaly in Buddhist practice. Edward S. Casey notes a similar process in *dhāraṇī* chants, which include *paritta*, or texts chanted for various purposes including protection and blessing by present-day Burmese Buddhists. Casey argues that these chants do not only refer to the *dhamma* but "concretely remind their practitioners of it."[41] This 'reminding' is achieved through the rhythmic, repetitive incantation of words, which recursively reproduces in the worshipper the ideal state of mind.[42] This has precedent in the story of Vakkali in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. The Buddha, reprimanding an overly zealous monk who doggedly follows the Buddha to be in his presence, says: "He who sees the dhamma … he sees me; he who sees me, he sees the dhamma."[43] The meditational acts of chanting and dwelling on the *dhamma*, as in the *paritta, dhāraṇī* and *buddhānusmṛti* (mindful recollection of the Buddha), also mediates the Buddha's presence by recollecting or stating his qualities, as well as recreating or performing his qualities, by creating a state of mind conducive for the development of the Buddha's virtues. Thus, the chant performs what it proclaims.

The dual action of recollection and re-creation in the donative inscriptions of Pagan is evident in an inscription of 1165 within the Dhammayangyi. The inscription records the slaves, cows and land dedicated to the temple, and begins: "I adore the excellent Buddha! On Monday, the first waning of Pyatho, 527 Sakkarāj, this inscription was sculptured [sic]."[44] The inscription describes the event in constative language, documenting what has been done in a specific moment to accrue merit. At the same time, it is a self-referential performance of the event. With reference to comparable Middle Khmer Buddhist inscriptions, Ashley Thompson writes that although epigraphy is a recording of an event, "the event is insepara-
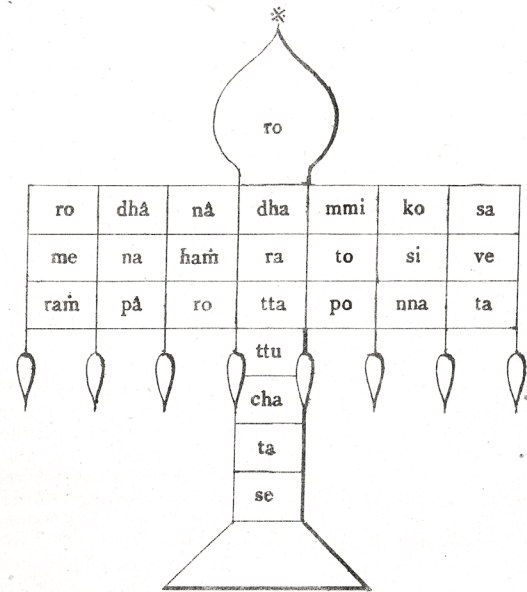

Figure 7. Inscription for the dedication of a *hti*, Shwezigon Pagoda, Pagan, Burma. Drawing published by Tᴜɴ Nʏᴇɪɴ 1899,13. Copyright status undertermined; reproduced under fair use principles.

ble from its trace."[45] The inscription's performativity makes it "constitute an act of devotion" serving as both event and trace.[46] History takes place as it is being documented such that there is diachronic movement of ritual through the synchronic moment of its recording.

Inscriptions balance the paradoxical ability to be both trace and event through the performative possibility of writing. Inscribed words gesture beyond themselves, using material reality to surpass material reality such that words disappear in light of their referent. Thus, inscribed words are both material and immaterial, and in being so they act in a recursive manner. Yet, this materiality remains the means through which that disappearance is achieved. Buddhist merit-making requires that the act of merit be accompanied by record, an "oral or written statement that describes the merits performed, enumerates to whom they should be dedicated, and presents the vow or prayer of the one who performs such merits."[47] This gives narrative significance to the act, discursively framing it as a ritual action and directing the merit accrued towards the worshipper's path to enlightenment. This intentional framing is apparent in the well-known 12th-century Myazedi inscription:

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[40] Tᴜɴ Nʏᴇɪɴ, *Inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava*, 13.

[41] Cᴀsᴇʏ, "Remembering Resumed," 279

[42] Gʀᴇᴇɴᴇ, "The Dhamma as Sonic Praxis," 53.

[43] Quoted in Kɪɴɴᴀʀᴅ, "The Field of the Buddha's Presence," 124 .

[44] Tᴜɴ Nʏᴇɪɴ, *Inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava*, 66.

[45] Tʜᴏᴍᴘsᴏɴ, "In the Absence of the Buddha," 402

[46] Tʜᴏᴍᴘsᴏɴ, 402.

[47] Wᴀʟᴋᴇʀ, "Unfolding Buddhism," 546.

"Honour to the Buddha!…[King Kyansittha's] son named Rajakumar…made an image of the Buddha all in gold, and when satisfied spoke thus: 'I, your slave, made this golden Buddha for my Lord, the three villages of slaves which my Lord gave me, I give to this golden Buddha.'…Rajakumar…thus said: 'Let this deed of mine be the cause of my obtaining omniscience! After me, whether my son or grandson or relative or any other person, if he oppresses the slaves I have offered to this shrine, may he not behold the Buddha Arimittiya."[48]

The inscription's two proclamations signposted with the words "spoke thus" and "thus said" are both descriptive utterance and performative ritual action. The first declaration is an expression of Rajakumar's deeds: Rajakumar "made" and "g[a]ve" his father a Buddha. The "spoke thus" of the inscription is a recursive re-declaration and re-performance of an honourable action. Furthermore, Rajakumar's deed is framed as ritualistic by virtue of the inscription. The inscription's dedication ("Honour to the Buddha!"), elevates the creation of the Buddha figure from filial show to worshipful event. This interplay of word and action, trace and event, is a symbiotic continuum of ritual — neither can be separate from the other.

The second declaration of the Myazedi inscription is one of actionable intent: obtaining omniscience and cursing those who dishonour his offering. This suggests that the document is not simply a synchronic record but holds performative power. A similar version of this aspiration is Queen Asaw's inscription at the Shwezigon Pagoda (1281), which ends thus:

"May he who injures my pagoda, lands or slaves be burnt at the bottom of the nethermost hell, and may he be preceded from adoring the successive buddhas to come. But whoever appreciates my good deed, may he share equally with me the merit that has accrued to me."[49]

These aspirations and curses are material records of a moment of donation but are also clearly believed to affect what unfolds in the future. How might inscribed words prove so effective?

Gregory Schopen, writing of donative inscriptions within stupas, argues that many early Buddhist donative inscriptions were not intended for perusal, given they were at times obstructed from view.[50] Instead, he argues that their proximity to the stupa, and therefore, the ontological remains of the Buddha himself, lent them an efficacy that activated the vows, prayers and curses on them.[51] Although inscriptions are often visible in Pagan, the vitalising effect of the stupa on them still applies, directing aspiration into reality. Thus, Rajakumar's desire to 'obtain omniscience' is facilitated by his inscription; the merit accrued by his sponsoring of an inscription propels him towards *nibbāna* over the course of future rebirths. The performative act of recording the event in an inscription impacts the direction of Rajakumar's future narrative. The inscriptions which appear to conclude the event are in fact participative elements in ritual. Failing to consider the performative capacity of words overlooks their function and value in Buddhist ritual. Inscriptions forge ritual continuity between the past, present, and future by serving as both synchronic trace and diachronic event.

The End is a Beginning

Continuity is also created by the stupa's tendency to implicate endings with beginnings through its recursive pattern. Whilst stupas are associated with endings, they continually create possibilities for reproduction which challenges the very notions of a beginning and an end.

Beginnings and endings meet in two key aspirations of Buddhists, which centre on the idea that death is not the end: to attain a favourable rebirth at the time of the future Buddha Metteyya or to attain Buddhahood. These aspirations are inscribed upon the stupa — a structural 'end' — and reinforce the sense of an ending whilst subverting it. The aspiration to meet Metteyya is seen elsewhere in Buddhist practice, including the epilogues of Buddhist texts.[52] This aspiration plays a concluding role, yet is the recursive description of a new beginning. An inscription of 1241 close to the western wall of the Shwegugyi Pagoda records that "by virtue of this…offering [the stupa], [King Alaungsithu might] have the opportunity of hearing the sermons to be preached by the coming Buddha Metteyya."[53] The aspiration for rebirth is discursively tied to the stupa, a syntactic end. These aspirations are believed to be realised through merit accumulated by building the stupa: hearing the sermons of Metteyya is a reward for Alaungsithu's offering.

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[48] *The Myazedi Inscription*, Bagan Archaeological Museum exhibit label. Fieldwork observation, July 2019.

[49] TUN NYEIN, *Inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava*, 4.

[50] SCHOPEN, "What's in a Name," 63.

[51] SCHOPEN, 66.

[52] COLLINS, *Nirvana*, 123.

[53] King Alaungsithu reigned 1113–1169/70; TUN NYEIN, *Inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava*, 78.

The aspiration for rebirth in the time of Metteyya subverts the finality of death and allows possibility to flourish. The advent of Metteyya lies in the undetermined future and therefore this aspiration is structured within an infinite temporal frame. It is akin to a mythology of the future, not in the sense of a false idea, but in the same way the Jātaka tales create a mythology of the past. That is, it is a constructed narrative used to comprehend death within a Buddhist framework by creating a future consciousness and linking the present with that constructed future. Building the stupa has the structural effect of organising lived experience into a chronological narrative involving the present acquisition of merit for the purposes of rebirth in the presence of Metteyya in the future. Despite its associations with death, it generates a myth of the future — a beginning found within an end.

These aspirations also provide hope that one is not helpless in the face of death, as even seemingly minor meritorious actions were part of a person's right to carve out a better estate after death.[54] In an inscription in the porch of the Sawlawlun Pagoda (1291), a woman named Pwa Saw describes how she built a pagoda in memory of her grandson. There she wishes "on the advent of Metteyya, may I be enabled to make the greatest charitable offering. May I ultimately reach the same state as Metteyya Buddha and be thus able to lead men and *nats* [spirits] from samsara to Nirvana."[55] The wish to encounter Metteyya here is, aside from a pious aspiration, also part of the social ritual of dealing with death. Pwa Saw was a grandmother who had lost her grandchild — a loss even more unfathomable for violating the temporal assumption that the old die before the young. Her aspiration provides structural closure as a conventional phrase for a situation where words fail to explain or comfort. The aspiration to meet Metteyya takes the abstraction and uncertainty of death and places it into the meaningful structure of merit and transmigration through a ritual expression.

The aspiration to Buddhahood is more unusual than the aspiration to encounter Metteyya. Unlike Mahāyāna Buddhists, Theravāda Buddhists are generally described as seeking *nibbāna* as *arahants* — those who have achieved *nibbāna* but not Buddhahood.[56] However, scholars such as Peter Skilling, Jeffrey Samuels and Trent Walker have called into question the strict division between so-called Theravāda and Mahāyāna praxis.[57] Walker highlights

how "[m]any Theravāda Buddhists in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia have prayed to become fully awakened Buddhas," emphasising that aspirations to Buddhahood are consistent throughout Southeast Asian Buddhist practice.[58]

An aspiration to Buddhahood is an aspiration to an enlightened state of being, in which conventional categories of beginnings and endings are deconstructed. An inscription of 1241 close to the eastern wall of the Shwegugyi Pagoda porch records the building of the pagoda and Alaungsithu's "intense desire to become a Buddha."[59] This desire is articulated in the inscription following the Jātaka tale of King Vessantara who "became, on his demise, an inhabitant of the highest abode of *nats*."[60] The *nats* ask that he assume Buddhahood, and the "embryo Buddha looked ahead with the five kinds of vision, and on his next birth became a member of the Sakya family."[61] In this rebirth he achieves Enlightenment. The perception of 'before' or 'after', 'beginning' and 'ending' is blurred — the Buddha is already the Buddha, even as he looks ahead to the life in which he becomes the Buddha. Death, often perceived as the ultimate ending, must occur before Alaungsithu's wish to become a Buddha can be actualised. In this narration, death is a doorway which gestures ultimately to the cessation of cessation, the end of 'endings'.

The end of 'endings' is visualised in a sculpture situated in the west hall of the Dhammayangyi (Figure 8). Two identical Buddha images are seated beneath three stupa finials. An inscription in the west hall records King Narapatisithu's request to his teacher Mahāpaṇita in 1205 to "build a *kū* (temple) on this West face of Dhammâraṁ…[where he] enshrined this *phurhā* (Buddha image?)."[62] The Buddhas' identities are contentious. Local legend reiterated to me by a painting seller in 2019, connects them to Narapatisithu's father and brother whom he murdered, asserting that they were built to expiate his sin. Luce suggests that the images could represent: "when the Buddha meets future Buddha and prophecy is made" or "when two Buddhas, the old and new, sit for one brief moment together on one throne: symbols at once of change and the continuity of the Dharma," which he categorises as a Theravāda and Mahāyāna moment respectively.[63] Regardless of sectarian categorisation, both moments represent a critical juncture — the becoming of a Buddha. This

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[54] Hᴀɴᴅʟɪɴ, "The King and his Bhagavā," 208, 210.

[55] Tᴜɴ Nʏᴇɪɴ, *Inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava*, 126.

[56] Wᴀʟᴋᴇʀ, "Unfolding Buddhism," 543.

[57] Sᴋɪʟʟɪɴɢ, *How Theravāda is Theravāda?*; Sᴀᴍᴜᴇʟs, "Bodhisattva Ideal in Theravāda Buddhist Theory and Practice,"; Wᴀʟᴋᴇʀ, "Unfolding Buddhism".

[58] Wᴀʟᴋᴇʀ, 593.

[59] Tᴜɴ Nʏᴇɪɴ, *Inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava*, 75.

[60] Tᴜɴ Nʏᴇɪɴ, 75.

[61] King Narapatisithu reigned 1173–1210; Tᴜɴ Nʏᴇɪɴ, 75.

[62] Lᴜᴄᴇ, *Old Burma-Early Pagán*, vol.1, 421.

[63] Lᴜᴄᴇ, 422.

Figure 8. Two Buddhas, Dhammayangyi Temple, Bagan, Myanmar. Photograph by Miriam Yeo, July 2019, (CC BY-NC 4.0).

moment is inextricably, and artistically, connected to an end. On the reverse side of the sculpture is a *parinibbāna* scene of the Buddha's death.[64] The 'birth' of a new Buddha is visually juxtaposed with death — and the two are connected by the central stupa above the two seated Buddhas which extends down towards the Buddha in *parinibbāna*. Like its function as a discursive marker between chapters in the *Buddhavaṃsa*, here the stupa is a 'door' between the Buddha's ending and the Buddha's beginning, creating a recursive paradigm of infinite reproduction.

The deconstruction of endings and beginnings is also seen in epigraphy, implicating past, present and future in an inextricable manner. This is particularly evident in the way that the kingdom was described. An ex post facto prophecy regarding King Kyanzittha's reign on the Mon section of "the Great Inscription" from the Shwezigon reads:

"The whole realm…shall be altogether free from robbers…[he] shall give boiled rice [and] bread

to all the people…[he] shall give ornaments [and] wearing apparel to all men. …All men who are harsh, King Śrī Tribhuwanādityadhammarāja [Kyanzittha] shall make gentle… All the people shall be steadfast…All those who dwell in the city…shall delight worthily in the precious gems."[65]

The inscription, contemporaneous with Kyanzittha's rule, uses the future tense such that it appears to be composed in an unspecified past about a utopian future. While the inscription describes the present kingdom, it also describes a kingdom in the unconditioned temporal space of the future. The effect of composing in future tense is one of endlessness: the realm of Kyanzittha exists 'now' and ever 'shall be'. The king would also style himself using the conflation of present and future authority. The king was called *purhā* (lord) but would also call himself *purhā lon* (future *purhā*).[66] Conflating the now and not yet in pseudo-past prophecy, with the

[64] Luce, 421.

[65] King Kyanzittha reigned 1084–1111; Duroiselle, *Epigraphia Birmanica, Being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Burma*, vol.1, pt. 2, 116–117.

[66] Than Tun, *Essays on the History and Buddhism of Burma*, 29.

Figure 9. Disapramok's inscription, Bagan Archaeological Museum, Bagan, Myanmar. Photograph by Miriam Yeo, July 2019 (CC BY-NC 4.0).

contextual backdrop of the merit-making stupa which facilitates continuity, means that the suggestion and performance of endlessness underpins much of Pagan's art and epigraphy.

However, this continuum is not reflected in the historical scholarship on Pagan. Michael Aung-Thwin has re-read 19th and 20th century historical accounts of Pagan and Ava, focusing on five events which have been misrepresented by historians. Two of the five are particularly relevant to this essay — the myth of King Narathihapade who "fled the Mongols" and the Mongol invasion of 1287. Together, these events have been presented as the 'end' of Pagan and conceptualised as a momentous break in Burmese history.[67]

Scholars have assumed that Narathihapade fled the capital when the Mongols reached Tagaung (160–180 miles north of Pagan's capital) between 1283 and 1284, as recorded in the Burmese chronicles, and never returned. This has skewed historical interpretation, as seen in the reading of Disapramok's inscription (Figure 9). The inscription records the reward Disapramok, Narathihapade's minister and envoy, received for a successful diplomatic mission to China, and his subsequent donation to the *sangha*.[68] Luce, assuming that Narathihapade had fled permanently, concludes that Disapramok gave a donation to the *sangha* without the king in the city, thus undermining the king's legitimacy, an interpretation which Aung-Thwin argues "reinforc[ed] British views of Burmese cowardice and inferiority in battle."[69] Narathihapade's apparent cowardice allowed scholars to rearrange time into the neat narrative of rise and fall within a defined historical period, ignoring evidence that suggests a more complex series of events. For instance, Luce and Pe Maung Tin's translation of the *Glass Palace Chronicle* omits Narathihapade's successors and concludes with Narathihapade's death, which narratively and syntactically suggests a simultaneous end of the kingdom's history.[70] Instead, Aung-Thwin notes a donation in the king's name would rarely be carried out without the king present in the city. Indeed, no other donations are carried out between 1285 and 1290, after King Klawcwa was crowned in 1289.[71] Aung-Thwin draws on linguistic and geographical evidence to reason that Narathihapade was in the capital in 1285 when the inscription was recorded, leaving only later that year or in 1286.[72]

20th-century scholars of Burmese history including G.E. Harvey and Luce posit the Mongol invasion of 1287 as the definitive end of Pagan, failing to realise that "Burmese religious and cultural traditions survived well beyond the event into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries."[73] Luce translates a Chinese source, the *Yuan Shi*, thus: "the Prince [of the Mongols]…advanced and invaded as far as Pu'kan."[74] Aung-Thwin, however, highlights a semantic misunderstanding in that translation. The word translated as "invaded" simply means "reached", without connotations of defeat or conquest.[75] Furthermore, Luce assumes "Pu'kan" refers to the capital city of Pagan, whereas in Chinese records it typically refers to the whole Kingdom of Pagan, or to a city north of the capital which matches accounts of distance, travel time and geographical configuration in sources regarding the Mongol incursion.[76] In contrast, Burmese chronicles do not record the 1287 invasion of the Mongols, perhaps because the court scribes would have likely followed the object of their writing — the king — down to Lower Burma.[77] The omission of this invasion also explains why Narathihapade's egress was tied to the earlier 1284 invasion in the chronicles.[78] Taken together, two conclusions emerge. First, that the chronicles rationalised the kingdom's decline by creating a mythology which discredited the king and, as we shall see, provided prophetic justification for the kingdom's decline.[79] Second, that the Burmese did not consider the 1287 invasion a decisive end to the kingdom, and continued to chronicle the royal line, ending with Go Mwan Nac in 1368. The popularity of the Mongol invasion as the cataclysmic end to Pagan is telling of the tendency to seek an end point from which to structure and unite the narrative of a period of time. The Pagan narrative, closed by the myth of the Mongol invasion, becomes easily encapsulated as the rise and tragic fall of a great empire, without taking into account the continuity of Burmese rule.[80]

These misinterpretations are also a result of the failure to realise the literary nature of the myths interlaced into the chronicles.[81] These myths do not intend to recollect the past but create a representation of the past that offers an ontological explanation of the present. In other words, history is recursively reproduced as an

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[67] King Narathihapade reigned 1254–1287; BENNET, "The 'Fall of Pagan'", 3.

[68] AUNG-THWIN, *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma*, 35. [69] AUNG-THWIN, 152.

[69] AUNG-THWIN, 152.

[70] AUNG-THWIN, 62.

[71] King Klawcwa reigned 1287–1300; AUNG-THWIN, 60.

[72] AUNG-THWIN, 60.

[73] AUNG-THWIN, 90.

[74] AUNG-THWIN, 65.

[75] AUNG-THWIN, 66.

[76] AUNG-THWIN, 66.

[77] AUNG-THWIN, 87.

[78] AUNG-THWIN, 87.

[79] AUNG-THWIN, 87.

[80] BENNET, "The 'Fall of Pagan'", 3.

[81] BENNET, 150.

arranged chronological narrative with ideological underpinnings that drive forward certain intentions. It is crucial to recognise these myths as devices used to understand history through a creative re-telling, rather than mirrors of historical events. Stadtner describes the *Glass Palace Chronicle* as a volume that "holds the myths of its time," reflecting the 19th century desire of King Bagyidaw (who ordered its compilation) to establish legitimacy and authority for his rule.[82] However, it also holds myths *of* time. The *Glass Palace Chronicle* presages Narathihapade's egress and the Mongol's incursion with a prophecy regarding the Mingalazedi, using the stupa as a structural device to create closure. The building process is said to have been halted due to a prophecy that "When this *zedi* is finished the Kingdom of Pagan will be shattered into dust!"[83] After six years the king was persuaded to continue building following the realisation that: "I must be long sunk and drowned in *samsara*…I am a king who hath received a prophecy."[84] Written centuries later, the *Glass Palace Chronicle* uses the ex post facto prophecy as a recursive mechanism, reproducing the past in a narrative manner that provides explanation. In this retelling, with the retrospective knowledge of the events that occur, the decline of the kingdom is explained by Buddhist prophecy and philosophy, drawing on the law of impermanence. Given the stupa's role as a structural or syntactic motif signifying the end, here it is used as a literary device as part of the chronicler's retelling of history to signify the impending decline of the kingdom.

Simultaneously, using the stupa as a literary device allows for historical continuum despite narrative closure in a manner radically different from Western scholarship. The stupa places Narathihapade in the narrative continuum that has patterned the kings before him. The *Glass Palace Chronicle* documents fifty-one pure silver statuettes of kings inside the Mingalazedi.[85] These represent kings of the past, a fading flow of cessation and rebirth that Narathihapade derives legitimacy from. Like them, he is also subject to impermanence. This incorporates him into the narrative of the chronicle, which is based on the lineage of the king.[86] It also assumes that his cessation will be followed by the next king, as the pattern continues with "the kings who come hereafter."[87]

The Burmese chronicles create a mythology of the past through prophecy, like the recursive motif of the past Buddhas. Representing an event as the fulfilment of prophecy is a meta-chronological re-presentation of the semiotically organised chronology of history.[88] A recursive telling of history allows for the coexistence of myth and reality just as it conflates past, present, and future in prophecy. Unlike the periodisation of Western literature, history as represented in the chronicles and on the stupa is a pattern of timeless moments, each re-presenting each other.

From their place *in* time, stupas can be re-read as places *about* time, through their recursive representation of temporality. Recursion leads to the conflation and cessation of beginnings and endings, which are exposed as temporal representations for the purposes of comprehending and giving meaning to history. This participates in a wider discussion of how time is (or is not) questioned in historical scholarship. Periods of history are given beginnings, middles and endings in a way that provide narrative unity, but periodisation itself is not recognised as a narrative mechanism.[89] These structures of time are a product of historians and the historical times they write in and must be understood as such. Time is re-presented by the historian to make sense of it and re-experienced by the reader of history in a way that is not neutral.

If the representation of time is read as a narrative or fictional device in the telling of history, it can then itself become a subject of study and scrutiny. Fictionality is not, however, falsity. By re-reading the historical representation of time as fiction, we are led to a greater understanding of how the sense of the historical is creatively expressed as a feature of lived experience. Like stupas, historical writing does not simply present events in time, but weaves together a narrative about time. Each synchronic element and each structure can be pieced together to form a diachronic history, and simultaneously within each element, a structural relationship across diachronic time can be read.[90]

A riddle in the Jātaka collection goes: "Time eats all beings, along with itself, but the one who eats time cooks the cooker of beings."[91] The historian's pursuit is to be an eater of time, to stand at the end of time to examine past moments. However, no historian can claim to be "one who eats time" (an enlightened person) — that, perhaps, will only be possible when time ceases to be. For the present moment, we must

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[82] Sᴛᴀᴅɴᴇʀ, *Ancient Pagan*, 20.

[83] Pᴇ Mᴀᴜɴɢ Tɪɴ and Lᴜᴄᴇ, *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, 171.

[84] Pᴇ Mᴀᴜɴɢ Tɪɴ and Lᴜᴄᴇ, 171.

[85] Pᴇ Mᴀᴜɴɢ Tɪɴ and Lᴜᴄᴇ, 172.

[86] The Burmese word for history, *yazawin*, is from the Pali *rajavamsa*, or 'lineage of the king'. See Hᴜᴅsᴏɴ, "The Origins of Bagan," 23.

[87] Pᴇ Mᴀᴜɴɢ Tɪɴ and Lᴜᴄᴇ, *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, 172.

[88] Cᴀʀᴛᴇʀ "Telling Times," 7.

[89] Hᴀʏᴏᴛ, "Against Periodisation," 745.

[90] Jᴏʀᴅʜᴇɪᴍ, "Against Periodization," 169.

[91] Cᴏʟʟɪɴs, *Nirvana*, 36.

be conscious of how time eats us (and our writing) in order to reclaim historicity. Like a stupa, the work of a historian is recursive: a moment of time in the movement of time, reproducing the movement of time in a moment of time.

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